



Advent Hope

On the fourth Sunday before Christmas, Christians around the world will begin their celebration of Advent, a time of waiting and preparation for Christmas. This important season kicks off the annual Church calendar. Each Sunday of Advent focuses on a particular liturgical theme, which may vary from one Christian tradition to another. This series of articles focuses on the four most common Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Advent Hope

On the first Sunday of Advent, many churches will light a blue or purple candle as a symbol of **hope**. This tradition recalls the hope God's people clung to through the generations of anticipating the first coming of the Messiah, and the hope we have as we watch for Christ's second coming. Let's look more closely at the meaning behind our Advent hope.

Hope in the Coming Messiah

All the way back in the beginning, in the book of Genesis, God promised Adam and Eve that their descendent would crush the head of Satan ([Genesis 3:15](#)). This was the first of many prophecies from God about the Messiah who would come to save his people. Over the generations, God promised a Rescuer from the line of Abraham and David who would be born of a virgin, called Immanuel ("God with us," [Isaiah 7:14](#)), redeem God's people, make all things right again ([Isaiah 11](#)), and establish an everlasting kingdom ([2 Samuel 7:13](#)).

As God's people hoped in the Messiah's coming, theirs was not supposed to be a flimsy or wishful

hope, as we might hope for good weather on our wedding day. It was to be a hope deeply rooted in the certainty of their relationship with God and their experience of his faithfulness. In Psalm 89:1-4, the Psalmist gives words to this certain hope:

*I will sing of the Lord's great love forever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known
through all generations.
I will declare that your love stands firm forever,
that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant,
'I will establish your line forever
and make your throne firm through all generations.'"*

Israel's wait was not easy though. For hundreds of years, they suffered under the yoke of Egyptian slavery. Then they wandered for a generation in the wilderness. Again and again, they gave up hope and looked to other gods. Their history would be plagued by war and unfaithful rulers, grueling exiles, and arduous treks back to their homeland. While many turned away from God and forgot his promises, a faithful remnant continued to hope in God's providence. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him'" (Lamentations 3:21-24).

In the decades before Christ's birth, the people of Israel toiled under the occupation of the Roman Empire. It had been 400 years since the final words of the prophets, a period of seeming silence that tested the hope of even the most faithful. But for those who persevered and clung to God's promise of redemption, theirs was a hope forged in waiting.

Waiting in Hope

In today's world of immediacy, we can hardly wait weeks or even days for something, let alone generations or centuries. But the story of God's people shows us that waiting in hope isn't a "sit back and do nothing" kind of a waiting. Advent hope is active; it is always listening to God, always learning from God, always walking with God.

Very few immediately recognized the Messiah when he first came, a mere baby. Yet, those who did rejoiced in hope fulfilled. When Simeon beheld the babe, he cried, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations" (Luke 2:29-31). Today our hope comes from the fact that "Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Hebrews 2:28). So, as you prepare

for Christmas this year, and as we as the body of Christ prepare for the second Advent of Jesus Christ, how can we actively wait in hope? Maybe this Advent God is calling you to serve in a special way in your church or community. Or perhaps he is prompting you to spend extra time in his word, or in prayer. If you're looking for resources to help you actively wait in hope this Advent season, check out *Today's* free, Advent devotional series, ["Waiting in Expectation."](#)

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