

group Bible Study – November 28, 2007

Read Luke 1 and Revelation 22

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Well friends, we've come to the end of Fall Quarter. Two weeks ago we finished our study of the book of Exodus—thank you for being part of this.

Now we transition. This is the last week of group before winter break, which means this is also the last week of group before the season of Advent and Christmas. We will all go our separate ways for a little while, and when we come back together on January 9 we will begin our new study of the book of Hosea. But that comes later. For now, Advent...

Patrick, the group coordinator, recently sent the group staff an email describing the season of Advent (the four weeks leading up to Christmas). This is what he said:

The season of Advent is the beginning of the Church Year, and it starts on Dec 2 this year. The word 'Advent' refers to the coming of Jesus into the world, the Incarnation. In most Western church traditions, the season of Advent is characterized by hope and anticipation. As we celebrate Advent, we celebrate the revelation of God through Christ, God being a part of history in the person of Jesus Christ. We also look forward in anticipation to Christ's second coming, and the time when all creation will be renewed and reconciled to God.

This anticipation is not entirely joyful, for it echoes the cry of captive Israel in Egypt. We live in a world where "all is not yet well," and there is injustice, oppression, and pain throughout the universe. Nevertheless, we have hope that God will make things right, in the fullest sense of the word 'right.' During Advent, we are aware of the pain and evil in our universe, but we celebrate God's revelation through Jesus Christ that all creation will be restored. Advent is marked by prayer and hope for God's final redemption.

In a sense, Advent summarizes both the beginning and the end of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the celebration of "the beginning of the Good News": the birth of Jesus into our world (read Luke 1). And Advent also helps us live in anticipation of the end of the story—the completion of the Good News. As Revelation 22 describes it, the future that we look forward to is the time when "there is no longer any curse." At the end of Revelation we hear the words of the risen Jesus saying "Look, I am coming soon!" This too is the meaning of Advent.

With all the believers down through the ages, we say together in the words of the ancient "Christmas Antiphons":

***O Emmanuel**, our king and our lawgiver,
the hope of the nations and their savior:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.*

Have a blessed Advent season.