

Adult Teaching Resources

December 2, 2018



Advent: Someone's Coming (December 2-23)

Luke 21:25-36 – “Coming to Reign”

Malachi 3:1-4 – “Coming to Judge”

Isaiah 12:1-6 (RCL 12:2-6) – “Coming to Save”

Hebrews 10:1-10 (RCL 10:5-10) – “Coming to Sanctify”

Christmas (December 30)

Colossians 3:1-17 – “All in the Name of Jesus”

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Coming to Reign

Luke 21:25-36

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly ...” Luke 21:34

It's December! Christmas is coming! Today, we begin our Advent journey.

As we begin the last month of the calendar year, it seems that everything around us begins to focus on the birth of Jesus and the celebration of Christmas. Everywhere we look, we see the world telling their individual version of the story of Christmas.

We have a story of Christmas to tell, as well. Actually, our story, is the story of Christmas. Instead of starting with the birth of a baby, which is where so many of the Christmas stories begin, we begin Advent with Jesus, not as a baby, but as a glorious king.

Let's begin our Advent journey!

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask the group to share the things they look forward to during this month.

What are the traditions you grew up with, or your family continues to do, that help celebrate this Advent/Christmas season?

Are there any special trips or visits you need to make in order for this season to be full?

In what ways do you celebrate Christmas with co-workers, friends, and family?

How do your events and celebrations of Christmas help prepare you for THE celebration of Christmas?

Spend some time sharing with each other before moving to the passage.

Reading the Bible

According to Luke, where will there be signs of the coming of the Son of Man? (in the sun, moon, stars, and on the earth) How will the signs disrupt the world? (nations will be confused by the roaring of the sea and waves)

How will the people react? (they will faint with fear and foreboding of what is coming into the world)

What will the people see? (the Son of Man coming in a cloud)

What are they to do when these things take place? (stand up and raise your heads) Why do this? (because your redemption is drawing near)

What parable did Jesus tell them? (parable of the Fig Tree)

What does a sprouting fig tree signify? (summer is near, and the kingdom of God is near)

What will not pass away? (this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place, Jesus' words will not pass away)

Why should we be on guard? (so that our hearts are not weighed down, and the day does not catch us unexpectedly like a trap)

What is the prayer? (that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man)

Making Connections

What does our Lesson Writer say about the "Little Apocalypse?" What does that mean for us, today?

Jesus gives us his list of things that will happen before the second advent. What is on your list of things that will happen before the second coming of Christ? How do you think the church will respond to your list?

With no clear timetable for the second advent, what can we do to be ready at all times?

How do you envision Jesus' second coming?

Do you think the second advent of Christ is near? Why do you say that?

Do you think Jesus will return during your generation? Why do you say that?

What might distract you, or get in your way, of being prepared for Christ's return?

So What?

Remind the group what our Lesson Writer said:

“Jesus called believers to see past the cares and pleasures of this world and to be alert, praying daily for the strength to escape temptation and be able to take one’s stand without fear when Christ returns (v. 36).

How do we respond to a text like this? Some give it too much attention, anticipating a literal fulfillment of every warning metaphor. Others give it too little heed, seeing the apocalyptic nature of the text as too bizarre for serious consideration by moderns.

Perhaps we could best choose a middle road, not expecting the heavens to collapse upon us, but still holding to a belief that Christ will one day bring earthly history to a conclusion. If that is the case, we need to be ready, keeping our heads up (v. 28) and remaining alert (v. 36), prepared to stand before Christ without shame. “

In the large group, think about what needs to be done to make sure we’re in the right space of being ready, keeping our heads up, and remaining alert. Make a list of actions that will keep us on track.

How will living out this list transform the relationship you have with God?

How will living out this list transform the relationship you have with others?

How will living out this list transform the way you share the gospel?

Spend time talking with each other and listening to each other share about the possible transformation we can experience because of Christ.

The Challenge

This week, every day, pray for help to be ready, keep your head up, and remain alert. Notice what happens in your day when you pray that prayer. Thank God for the transformation.

Prayer

Loving God, as we enter this season of Advent, open our hearts to the possibilities; help us keep our heads up; and keep us alert so that we might experience your movement in our lives. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Jesus as Messiah—The gospels preserve a story about the baby Jesus being presented at the temple, where an old man named Simeon took the child in his arms and declared that he had seen in a vision that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah (Luke 2:29-32).

Together, and not—Even a surface reading shows that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are quite similar at many points. For this reason they are called the “synoptic gospels” (“synoptic” is from a Greek word that means “seen together”). The Fourth Gospel is obviously quite different from the first three.

A few scholars have argued that Matthew was written first, and that Mark and Luke abbreviated what was found there. Most scholars, however, agree that Mark, the shortest of the gospels, was written first. Part of the evidence for this is that when Matthew and Luke include stories that follow the same order, it is those sections that they have in common with Mark.

A tradition holds that the gospel of Mark reflects the memories of the Apostle Peter, with whom Mark worked. The author of Matthew might possibly have been the apostle, but was more likely someone writing in his name. We know Luke as the author of both Luke and Acts. He was a Gentile physician who had come to know Christ and sought to gain as much information as he could before writing his books, which were addressed to “Theophilus,” which means “lover of God.”

It seems evident that the authors of both Matthew and Luke, probably written during the late 80s CE, had access to Mark’s gospel, which was probably written during the 60s. They included much of Mark’s material in their books, often in a slightly abbreviated form, or shaped to emphasize their personal interests. Some believe Matthew was writing mainly to a Jewish audience, while Luke wrote with attention to other Gentiles. Luke’s gospel also gives extra attention to the role of women and to those who are sick or poor.

Matthew and Luke also have in common a number of Jesus’ teachings that are not in Mark. This material is often attributed to an otherwise unknown collection of Jesus’ “sayings” that scholars call “Q” (from “Quelle,” a German word meaning “source”).

In addition, both Matthew and Luke incorporate unique materials not included elsewhere, notably their separate narratives about the birth and infancy of Jesus: Matthew has more to say about Joseph’s place in the story, while Luke focuses more on Mary. Both Matthew and Luke sometimes mix and match their various materials in different ways.

Thus, Matthew is thought to consist mainly of material from Mark, Q, and Matthew’s distinctive source, while Luke consists of material from Mark, Q, and Luke’s separate source.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Falling stars—Mark’s version of the “Little Apocalypse,” in which he has Jesus say the sun and moon would be darkened and the stars fall from the sky, is a reminder that this story is told from the ancient perspective of the universe in which the sun, moon, and stars were small bodies that inhabited a dome-like heaven above the earth.

We now know that each of the stars are actually suns, most much bigger than ours. Stars may collide or explode near the end of their life cycles, but they don’t fall from the sky. The writer’s perspective imagines that the stars would fall from the sky onto the earth. A planet might conceivably be drawn by gravity into a star, but a star could hardly fall onto a planet.

Fruiting fig trees—The reader may note a peculiarity of the parable about the fig tree: we would expect a metaphor related to *harvest* fruit, but the leafing of the fig tree takes place long before the harvest. Interpreters often point to Amos 8:1-2 as a possible background for the parable. There God showed Amos a basket of summer fruit and asked what he saw. Through a play on words, God replied that the summer fruit (*qayit*) was a harbinger of the end (*qēts*). The parable of the fig tree also points to the summer time, when the signs are clear that the end is near.

Things to avoid—Luke warns that we are to be on guard against three things: dissipation, drunkenness, and the worries of this life. The word translated “dissipation” was used by Greek medical writers to describe the nausea that results from eating or drinking too much. Drunkenness is not only a waste of time and money, but also a source of much pain and suffering. The Bible includes several warnings against it (Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18). The warning about the “worries of life” recalls Luke 10:41 and 12:22-31, as well as the parable of the sower and the seed, where the seed falling among thorns is choked out by the cares and pleasures of life (Luke 8:14).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Was Jesus born on December 25?

Matthew and Luke tell stories about Jesus birth, but neither gives any real clues as to the date. Some have argued that the reference to flocks of sheep being in the field suggests a date in springtime, but there's no reason sheep could not have been grazing in fields near Bethlehem.

It has often been said that December 25 was chosen for celebrating Jesus' birthday in an attempt to displace the ribald Roman feast of Saturnalia, held on the same day, but there is no direct evidence of this.

As early as 236 BCE, a commentary on Daniel by the church father Hippolytus of Rome put Jesus' birthdate at December 25, 2 BCE. The actual year was more likely 4 BCE, but his choice of December 25 is intriguing, and a number of other church fathers accepted it, especially in the western tradition.

The Armenian church, along with some other Orthodox churches, believe Jesus' birthdate was January 6, the date observed in Roman Catholic tradition as Epiphany.

Whether the date of December 25 was chosen to try and overshadow Saturnalia is unclear. The earliest known date of Christmas being celebrated in Rome on December 25 is 336, the year before Emperor Constantine's death. (For more on this, among others see Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2006], 59).