



# Behold the Lamb of God

A Reading Guide

2017



**TRINITY**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

-John 1:29

### **What is Advent?**

The celebration of Advent may be new to you—in fact, it may even be a new word! Advent simply means “coming” or “arrival.” It is a four-week period in which the church looks back to Jesus’ first coming in the Incarnation, and looks forward with hopeful anticipation to his second coming when he will establish the New Heavens and the New Earth.

For this reason, Advent is a season of waiting. The world is broken, and so we long for Jesus to come back and complete his work of making all things new. The cry of Advent is a cry for those who know something about suffering and longing. It is a time to grieve your own losses. It is also a time to join with all creation, which is, as Paul wrote, “groaning as it awaits the coming redemption.” Advent reminds us that this world is not the way that it is supposed to be, but it does so by pointing us to the hope that the second coming of Jesus holds.

One of the great themes of Advent is the Grand Redemptive Story of the Bible (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration). Russ Ramsey’s book, *Behold the Lamb of God*<sup>1</sup>, is a wonderful collection of daily meditations that walk us through that Grand Story.

### **How to Use this Guide**

The following questions are all adapted from the author’s own website ([russramsey.com](http://russramsey.com)). We suggest reading the meditation for that particular day and then either discussing the questions with your roommates or family or reflecting on and/or journaling about them if you’re reading it privately.

Our goal is not to load you down with more tasks in an already busy life, but rather to provide you with materials to let you experience God’s goodness and grace more fully. So use the guide as just that: a guide. Our hope is that this guide will be an aid to your worship during Advent and Christmas this year!

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsey, Russ. *Behold the Lamb of God: An Advent Narrative* (Nashville: Rabbit Room Press, 2011).

### **December 1 – Behold the Lamb of God**

Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you wondered if God might be through with you? What circumstances led you to think that? Do you think that still?

What would you say is your own understanding of the scope of the Christmas story? Is this season merely a time to remember the birth of Jesus, or does the story of the birth of Jesus call you to remember more?

What do you hope to be true of your anticipation of celebrating and remembering the birth of Christ in the weeks leading up to Christmas?

### **December 2 – Hear**

It can be easy to practice ceremony without our hearts being in it. Is your celebration of Christmas marked by your worship of Jesus, or is it more along the lines of a cultural routine? What are some ways you can build intentionality into your celebration of Christmas?

What do you think it means to love the Lord with all your heart? With all your soul? With all your might? Are you someone who practices these things? If so, how? If not, why not?

### **December 3 – Redemption Against the Wreckage**

The effects of sin in our lives go far beyond the wrong things we do and the problems those wrong actions cause. Sin is first and foremost a relational problem. We were made for a right relationship with the one who made us. Make a list of what was broken by our first parent's sin in the Garden of Eden.

List areas in your life affected by relational brokenness. What parts of that brokenness were caused by you, what parts were caused by others? Do you think of yourself as someone who owns your own culpability in broken relationships honestly? Where do you think you might deal more graciously with yourself than you do with others?

What are some areas of brokenness in your own life that make you particularly aware that you need help or rescue if you want your life to be healthy?

#### **December 4 – Number the Stars of Heaven**

God used the glory of a starlit desert sky to serve as a visual for what He intended to do with Abraham's descendants. Has God ever used a glorious image or experience to strengthen your faith? If so, what was it?

The promise God made to Abraham was one God himself would have to keep. Abraham had no control over seeing God's promises come to pass. Are there any promises from God that you are personally trying to keep for Him—promises of provision, future security, etc? What are they? Why are you trying to control the outcomes?

#### **December 5 – God Will Provide a Lamb**

What is the most difficult test of faith you have ever experienced? What made it difficult?

In what way does the story of the sacrifice of Isaac mirror the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus?

The story of salvation begins with the story of a supernatural birth (Isaac) and culminates in another supernatural birth (Jesus). What are some impossible or improbable obstacles you see facing your life right now, and how does Isaac's story train your faith?

#### **December 6 – Jacob and Two Women**

Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." Much of Abraham's story deals with promises God made to him that would actually be fulfilled for his descendants later. To what extent do you see Abraham as a man who needed God to act in his life more quickly? What shapes your answer?

Where in your life are you wishing or even demanding that God act more quickly than He seems to be? Is your heart sick because of a hope deferred

right now? What is it? What would fulfillment of that desire look like for you?

### **December 7 – Walking With a Limp**

Where are you wrestling with God right now? What is it you want or feel you need? Why do you think this struggle feels like a fight?

What do you make of the fact that God seems to declare Jacob the winner of the fight, but Jacob walked with a limp from that day forward? Is there a parallel of this in your own life—a place where you came away from a struggle with God changed?

### **December 8 – Four Hundred Years**

The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt, as the Lord foretold to Abraham, for 400 years. What would it take to hold on to faith in a promise made four hundred years ago? How familiar would you say most people are today with events that happened four hundred years ago? What challenges do you think the passage of that much time presented to God's people as they sought to believe in Him?

Do you think God failed his people by permitting them to become Pharaoh's slaves? What does God owe his people?

We read the story of the Israelites' slavery in Egypt knowing how the story would turn out. How do you think you would see the story of your own life if you knew what would come of it one hundred years from now. What would you trust in? What would you dismiss that you give weight to now?

### **December 9 – Pass Over Us**

The story of the first Passover in Egypt is a sad story, full of grief and loss. What does it look like to accept the story God is telling us about his wrath—about the wage of sin being death—and still mourn the tragedies involved?

What does it look like to grieve well over the brokenness of our world? What does it look like to pray for its healing?

The story of the coming of Christ is not only the story of being delivered from a broken world, but delivered to one that is healed and whole. What do you imagine that whole and healed world to be like?

### **December 10 – The War Within**

What do you think Joshua meant when he told the Israelites, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God?” What do they need to have happen in their lives if they are to be faithful?

Does God give us help so that we might serve Him in truth? If so, what is the help He provides? Who receives this help? Have you received it? If so, what does that mean for your life right now?

### **December 11 – Twelve Tribes and No Crown**

In what ways have you noticed your heart coming to resemble the things you most adore?

What is God’s continual response to His covenant people when they reject Him as their God? Does He abandon them for a more faithful people, or does He respond in a different way?

### **December 12 – A King on a Throne**

In your own words, why do you think the people of Israel really wanted a human king to rule over them? What would that figurehead provide for them?

What are some areas in your life where God had promised to take care of you, but you would still prefer a more tangible form of provision?

What do you think the people of Israel felt God was withholding from them by not giving them a king?

### **December 13 – The Boy-King of Bethlehem**

One of the primary reasons Saul despised David so much was because he knew his position would soon be handed over to this new king. It is a classic story of ambition and pride turning into resentment and hate. Are there places in your life where pride has led you to resentment? Are any of those unresolved? If so, what would it look like to seek peace?

It is not David's power that guarantees that he will become king. It is the will of God. Where in your life are you cooperating with the will of God most faithfully right now? Where are you fighting it?

### **December 14 – Don't Give Up on Me**

Solomon had it all, and yet no amount of accomplishment or wealth could settle his heart to trust God's leading. So he turned to his own way. What do you think it would take for your heart to be permanently settled in the matter of trusting God? What tempts you to turn away from God?

How does God respond to His people when they turn away from Him? When He leads them into hardship, why do you think He does that? When He delivers them from trouble, why do you think He does that?

Does the fickleness of Solomon's heart strike you as a mystery, or something you completely understand? Explain why.

### **December 15 – The Edge of Ruin**

Much of the story of the people of God is filled with sorrow and struggle. How much of that comes from God's hand, and why do you think God allows His people to struggle in this life?

Can you think of a time when you struggled but now, looking back upon that struggle, you discover you would not do thing differently, given the chance?

What are some ways God has worked in the struggles of your own life? What are some ways God has delivered you out of struggles in your own life?

### **December 16 – I Have Loved You**

The book of Malachi opens with God’s people asking God how He has loved them, as though they cannot remember. The rest of the book is God’s answer. He chose them. He did not abandon them when they abandoned Him. He has kept a remnant of hope alive, a promised Messiah. Still, when the people of God asked, “How have you loved us?” they asked it rhetorically, as though they were not interested in the answer. But God answered them anyway. Where in your life are you asking God rhetorical questions, like “How are You good to me?” or “Where were You when...” What would it look like to wait on the Lord for an actual answer to your otherwise rhetorical questions?

By what criteria do you assess whether or not God is being kind to you?

Do you receive the discipline of God as a manifestation of His love or His anger? Why?

### **December 17 – Herod the Great, King of the Jews**

Are you like Herod? When you are troubled, is everyone around you troubled too? If so, why?

What all do you think the people of Israel would have had to address in their own hearts in order to return to a healthy place, both spiritually and as a nation?

What are some “anchors” in your story that hold you close to the Lord—experiences, events, seasons of transition or struggle, or seasons of joy?

### **December 18 – The Silence of the Priest**

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth is about two people who are not exactly in the middle of the Nativity story, but are nevertheless deeply involved. Luke gives us a beautiful narrative thread where we see how the coming of Christ worked its way into their home and lives. But Luke only gives us a fraction of what there is to say about these two. What are some parts of your own life story where you have seen God work that others may never have occasions to know about?

What are the deepest cries of your heart you long to see the Lord answer?  
In what ways are those desires already fulfilled in the first coming of Christ?  
In what ways do you feel you are still waiting?

### **December 19 – The Ordinary Overshadowed**

What do you think the angel means when he tells Mary she has found favor with God?

In what ways is the Christmas story globally epic? In what ways is it deeply personal? Are you drawn to one of those poles more than the other? Which one? Why?

Where are some places in your life where you need the help of a God who governs the cosmos? Where are some places in your life where you need a God who can cut into the deeply personal details of your heart?

### **December 20 – When Joseph Woke From His Dream**

Joseph had to trust the Lord not only with his wife's pregnancy, but with her reputation as well as his own. To the world, she appeared to have been unfaithful. And had it not been for the angel's visit, Joseph would not have known what happened with any certainty. But God spoke to Joseph, and His word shaped the way Joseph responded to Mary's pregnancy. Where in your life do you feel you lack counsel or understanding?

Where do you most readily look for answers or direction for the difficult decisions you must make? Money? Station in life? God's Word? The counsel of experts or friends? What is your process for deciding to trust a source of wisdom and counsel?

The name "Immanuel" means "God with us." In what sense is He with us? How is He with us?

### **December 21 – It Was Not a Silent Night**

Take some time to imagine Jesus as a newborn baby. Imagine you were in that stable. What would you have seen?

What are some of your own vulnerabilities Jesus has personally related to? If his strength is made perfect in our weakness, what are some of your own weaknesses that leave you feeling a need for his strength?

Joseph and Mary would have likely felt that their baby was fragile, but if Psalm 139 is correct—if the Lord has numbered our days before a single one of them has come to be—then how fragile was Jesus in the manger? Applying that same truth to yourself, how fragile is your own life, really?

### **December 22 – Where the Lambs are Kept**

What is your greatest poverty—physically? Spiritually? Relationally?

What are some of the greatest sacrifices you can think of that others have made for your good? Why do you think those people made those sacrifices for you? What do you think they hoped for you? What are some ways you help meet the needs of others? Why do you do this caring work?

When the angels tell the shepherds that a savior has been born, he tells them Christ has been born *unto them*. Do you believe Christ was born for your sake?

### **December 23 – One Star Lit for Them**

It was a radical idea to the people of Jesus's time that the Messiah would come for nations beyond the boundaries of Israel, but this was God's promise to Abraham from the beginning—that his descendants would be a blessing to the world. What path did God trace to make His way into your story? How far back can you trace that story?

In what ways is God working His way into the lives of others through you? Through the generations to follow? Through people in your life now?

**December 24 – The Hearts of Many Revealed**

What are some of the sorrows you have experienced in your life as a result of knowing Jesus?

What are some of the unique joys you have experienced as a result of knowing Jesus?

How would you tie together the stories of Easter and Christmas? Are there any connections you are making now between the two that are new to you?

**December 25 – The Theme of My Song**

What are some key ideas and thoughts you have gleaned as a result of this study series? How are those concepts or ideas working their way into your life?

## Christmas: The 12 Days of Christmas

*Though Behold the Lamb of God concludes on December 25, we encourage you to continue to celebrate the Christmas season with the following prayers & readings.*

### Opening Prayer

Shout for joy all the earth, and everything within! Rejoice! For Light has come into the world! The mountains sing, the seas resound to the praise of Your name. Salvation once promised is here on earth! The angels' song rings in the air, a child has been born. Hallelujah! The Savior of the world is here! **Amen!**

### Prayer of Thanksgiving for Christmas

*Spend a few moments reflecting on the many ways you've experienced God's goodness this season and this past year and give thanks to God. If you're with others, share your thanksgivings and pray together.*

### Readings for Christmas

Christmas Day: *Zech. 2:10-13; (1 John 4:7-16); Luke 2:1-7*

Tuesday after Christmas: *Luke 2:8-21*

Wednesday after Christmas: *Luke 2:22-40*

Thursday after Christmas: *Heb. 2:10-18*

Friday after Christmas: *Isa. 12:1-6*

Saturday after Christmas: *Isa. 25:1-9*

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas: *Isa. 26:1-9*

2<sup>nd</sup> Monday after Christmas: *Isa 65:17-25*

2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday after Christmas: *John 6:35-51*

2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday after Christmas: *John 10:7-17*

2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday after Christmas: *1 John 2:12-17*

2<sup>nd</sup> Friday after Christmas: *Matthew 2:1-12*

### Closing Prayer

Almighty God, You have given your only begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made Your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by Your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with You and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever.

**Amen.**