

Unwrapping the Names of Jesus: Small Groups

Advent Week 1 (Meeting Nov 30-Dec 6)

Group Start:

- **Pray this prayer together:** “O Lord, this Advent we hear again the Baptist’s call to prepare our hearts for the coming of Your Son. So as we ponder the Names of Jesus together, do that work of preparation in our hearts. Bring us to a deeper experience of the *full* truth of who Jesus is. Where that truth calls for repentance, turn our hearts back to you. But above all, allow the beauty and goodness of who Jesus is to draw us more fully to You, and to each other. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”
- **Introductions:** Everyone give your name, when you first came to St. Peter, and one thing that makes you *you* (could be a hobby, your work, something your family does together, etc.).

Questions for Adults (prep ahead individually, then discuss at Small Group)

Read “Why Celebrate Advent?” (pp.9-15) and “A Prayer for You and Me” (pp.17-18)

1. On p.9, Ciuciu [“Choo choo”] says she did not grow up celebrating Advent. Did you? How has your celebration and understanding of Advent changed over your years as a Christian?
2. Ciuciu laments the social pressure in the lead up to Christmas to focus on busyness, parties, material things, and/or some ideal, “picture-perfect” experience for ourselves or our families. She talks about the anxiety this produces, as well as the letdown on Christmas itself (pp.9-10). However, in the prayer (p.17), she also suggests that *we* can sometimes be part of the problem: knowingly or not, we place our *identity* in those things—which means that we actually are looking to *them* to provide the core “joy” (emotional and mental payoff?) of Christmas, not the “Jesus side.” Do you wrestle with any of this?
3. Ciuciu points out that God promises to “draw near to those who draw near to You...[and to] reward those who diligently seek you with more of Yourself” (p.17; see Ja 4:8, Jer 29:13, and Hb 11:6). Is this a familiar promise? How might it change your approach to Advent – or Christian life more generally?
4. On p.13, Ciuciu talks about “soul amnesia”: “forgetting who God is and what He has done for us from one day to the next.” For her, the Names of Jesus became a cure for this amnesia. Importantly, however, this cure requires approaching the Names not simply as *information* to learn but as prompts *to worship*. What is the difference? *How* do we engage the Names for worship, not just information?

Opening Home Worship and Activities for Individual or Family [do Nov29-Dec 1]

5. Ciuciu notes that as creatures of habit, we also need to create an alternative *life rhythm* for the coming weeks. This involves our daily devotions but also prayer, worship, and *ritual* (pp.14-15). One anchor she provides is an opening home worship linked to the Advent wreath theme for that week [see the St. Peter announcements for Advent wreath ideas]. She also encourages us to get our bodies involved, for example: “bowing your face to the ground...lifting up your palms...dancing with songs of celebration.”

Start your week (Sun or Mon) with the worship on “hope” on p.20-1. Try out at least one bodily movement and think through or talk about the questions on p.21. Then answer the following:

5A. What was the biggest insight that stood out as you thought about the questions on Isa 9 (p.21)?

5B. How does bodily movement enhance worship and/or the reception of the Word it delivers?

6. The habit and worship of Advent are also strengthened by putting the Word into practice. Jump ahead to pp.38-39. Pick out a “practice of hope” to try out this week, either individually or as a family – or brainstorm your own! A question next week will help you reflect on how this went.

7. AS A FAMILY, THEN AS A SMALL GROUP: Each offer ONE thing you would ask everyone else to pray about. Please be concise and to the point. List everyone’s requests here so you can pray this week!

Then close with this prayer, together: “O Lord, we thank you for meeting here with us this day. You have heard the prayers we have offered; work in each as only you can. And may the things we have discussed today bear fruit in our lives, that we might receive all that Jesus is with all that we are. In His Name, Amen.”

Final Note: you will want to get the guide for Week 2 by Sun, Nov 30, so that you can answer the questions on each of the names you cover this week as you go. Available at slat wall, or download from annnc.