



Introduction to Advent Worship

I certainly didn't mean to do it, but it happened. I lost my young son at a comic book convention. Yes, it's true. In 2013, I took my two boys, Michael and David (ages 8 and 6 at the time, respectively), to their first comic book convention. It was fantastic! There were stormtroopers, superheroes, and TV characters everywhere. The costumes were great, and the atmosphere was nerd heaven. I was home. We met a few of our favorite actors and were having a great time. There must have been a few thousand people there.

I had two rules for my boys:

Rule #1: Don't ask for everything you see. I told them I'd buy them a toy or two but not everything. "Choose wisely."

Rule #2: Don't leave my side for a second. There were 3,000 people in attendance, plus a few aliens. "Stay next to me."

Pretty simple, and things were going great until David asked for a drink of water. There was a drinking fountain close by, and we walked over to it. While he was getting a drink, I walked 3 feet away to a craft booth. Three feet (*maybe 4*). A second later (*maybe a few seconds later*), I turned back toward the drinking fountain, and David was gone. I looked up and down the hall but could only see the heads of hundreds of other people. I told Michael to stay right there, just in case David came back that way, while I looked around. I made a loop around the massive room and came back to Michael only to discover that David was still not there. I had one thought racing through my mind: "My wife is going to kill me."

I took another walk around the room and examined the adjoining room. No sign of him. At this point, I was getting very nervous and started thinking the worst: someone had grabbed him. I began praying. I ran to the convention entrance, but David wasn't there, either. The seconds began to crawl by as

I thought about what to do next. David was dressed up as Batman; maybe, I should start asking around if people had seen a little Batman?

As I headed back to Michael, I received a phone call from a friend I knew from church, who was also at the convention.

Me: "Hello?"

Friend: "Hey man, do you know that security has your son?"

Me: "Thank God!"

Apparently, the security lady, dressed up as a fairy, saw David crying and walking by himself down the hall. She asked him who he was with and got my name. Then she took him by the hand and began walking around yelling, "Kenneth, we have your son! Kenneth, we found Batman!"

My friend from church heard this and thought, "That can't be Pastor Kenneth." But sure enough, it was. He phoned me up to let me know, and I found security to retrieve my son. The fairy-costumed security guard was very nice and mentioned that this was the sixth case of a lost child that day. I didn't ask, but she also informed me that all the lost children were in the care of their fathers. Crisis averted. I had my son back, and I noticed that for the rest of the convention, David stayed closer to me than usual.

Through the grip of sin, God lost humanity; more accurately, humanity walked away from God. We chose sin and self-rule over the will and way of God, and the results have been devastating. Advent is the time of year during which we celebrate God stepping into human history to bring humanity back home. Through the incarnation, God became human, lived, died, resurrected, and ascended in great power and glory. Salvation is now offered to all. The lost, the broken, the hurting, the dying, the guilty, the prideful, and the sinful (all of us) can



now come home. And it all began with a baby in a manger. That's the power of Advent; that's why we celebrate!

As you use this material, keep a few things in mind:

First, feel free to make this material your own. You may choose to keep many of the elements listed, or you may decide to pull and replace various elements. That's great! You know your congregation, what they respond to, and what you feel God is trying to communicate to your church. So create a service that works for you.

Second, plan with the themes in mind. Each Sunday in Advent is built around a certain topic (hope, love, joy, or peace). Capitalize on these themes. Put your creativity and prayers into helping people experience them in fresh ways. How can you help people experience hope? How can they know peace? You, as the leader, have a unique opportunity to help those you lead to draw closer to the incarnate Christ and, in the process, to help them encounter hope, love, joy, and peace.

Third, consider what you want people to experience. This applies to any time of the year, but specifically, during this season, what are you hoping to accomplish? When I plan services at my church, I keep in mind three things that I want: I want folks to *know* something, to *feel* something, and to *do* something. Put another way, I want them to think, to laugh/cry, and to act. Why? Is it so that people can be entertained? No. It's so that they can go love God and love people deeply.

Lastly, connect this season in your church to the larger Church. Thousands of churches will be celebrating the birth of a baby this Advent season. Thousands of churches will sing "Silent Night,"

dedicate themselves afresh to the mission of Jesus, read the Christmas story in Matthew and Luke, serve in special ministry projects, help the poor, and worship this God who became a baby. Help your congregation to see that. There are not many churches; there is only one Church, and Jesus is the Head.

I LOVE this time of year and what it means. I hope you enjoy it while you celebrate the most meaningful act in human history: God coming to us to live with us, die for us, and defeat death to give us life! Absolutely amazing!

Let me ask you something. What gift are you giving Jesus this year? Sometimes we forget that it's *His* birthday, not ours. How are you going to touch those whom He loves? How can you bless the "least of these" this season? I challenge you to do something beyond yourself: make a child smile; visit a lonely person; forgive someone who caused an old hurt; touch someone who can never repay you; take part of your bonus and give it away (anonymously) ... do something to make God smile. Dale Evans said, "Christmas, my child, is love in action." Go put love into action this season!

Merry Christmas!

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P.S. If I can serve or help you this Advent season, please don't hesitate to let me know (kspiller@parkgate.org; 281.487.4283).



Things to Think About

Advent Candles

The lighting of the Advent candles can be a special time of reflection. Consider inviting several families or single individuals who are new to your church to take turns lighting the candles each week. This is a great way for you to introduce the congregation at large to some of the people who have joined your fellowship over the past year. Keep in mind that although people often feel honored to be asked to light an Advent candle, many newer folks do shy away from speaking or reading, so don't ask them to do anything more than to simply light their assigned Advent candles.

This year, the order of the lighting of the Advent candles is Hope, Love, Joy, Peace, and (if you have a Christmas Eve service) Christ. Different traditions assign various colors and meanings to the Advent candles; our church typically uses three purple candles (for Hope, Love, and Joy), a pink candle (for Peace), and a larger, white candle (for Christ). If you follow this tradition, you'll light one candle for each Sunday during Advent (first the purple candles and then the pink) and finally, if you have a Christmas Eve service, you will light the white candle on Christmas Eve. Candles from preceding Advent Sundays should already be burning when the current candle is lighted. For example, if it's the third Sunday in Advent, the purple candles of Hope and Love should be lighted before lighting the candle of Joy.

Here's a simple, step-by-step approach to the lighting of the Advent candles:

1. Have a strong reader (pastor, leader, etc.) to read the Advent reading provided in the Resource Guide.
2. During the reading, direct the individual or family that is going to light the Advent candle to come up and wait near the Advent wreath.
3. When the reading is over, signal the individual or family to light their candle by saying something like: "Today, in celebration of the birth of Christ, we light the Advent candle of _____ (Hope, Love, etc.)." Make sure to place a lighter near the Advent wreath.
4. End with prayer or jump into the next song.

Video

Video is the medium of our age. It's amazing how people (especially younger people) tune in to videos. Videos have a way of making connections and helping folks engage. We have provided some powerful video testimonies in your package for free. You can purchase the rest of the suggested videos (if you choose to use them). As you think through your services, we've placed a video suggestion at the beginning of the service and at the beginning of the message. This is intentionally designed to set up worship and the congregation for the Word of God. Please note, however, that while videos can help engage people, too many videos can have the opposite effect. One or two well-placed videos can serve you well.

Scripture

The public reading of scripture can and should be interesting and meaningful. One way to do this is by having



children or students to read. They may be nervous, but when young people read, their peers pay attention, and asking young people to participate also communicates that they (and their peers) are welcome in the services. And let's be honest, the cuteness factor goes through the roof when a little boy or girl who's missing a front tooth reads scripture publicly.

Skits

Much like videos, a well-done skit has a way of opening the mind and grabbing (and keeping) attention, and a skit can illustrate truth in a way that makes it interesting and relatable. The suggested skits are short monologues (about 2 to 3 minutes long) of what Biblical characters may have felt as their stories were getting wrapped up in the greatest story of all time.

Carols

Whether you're traditional or contemporary or somewhere in the middle (or none of the above), make good use of Christmas carols. My dad is an atheist who has attended two out of my church's last three Christmas Eve services. Imagine my surprise when last year he told me that he wanted to hear more Christmas carols. I nearly fell out of my chair. I learned something during that conversation: many people who don't know Christ still enjoy hearing "O Holy Night" or "Silent Night" or other well-known Christmas carols. Christmas carols can be a great expression of worship and a vehicle for connecting the audience to what's happening in the moment.

"Rejoice and Sing"

"Rejoice and Sing" is a song I wrote for Christmas a couple of years ago. I noticed that while we have many songs that highlight the birth of Christ and many songs that deal with the death of Christ, we don't have too many that address both themes in the same song. "Rejoice and Sing" does just that: it is an upbeat song that connects the *birth* of Christ to the *cross* of Christ and his victory over death. Your package includes sheet music and a chord chart for the music, and you can listen to the song at the following link: <https://youtu.be/aRy8iLvSmj8>. (Warning: We were getting our video system up and running, so the quality isn't the greatest. But you'll get an idea of how the song goes.) Enjoy!

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Rejoice and Sing

Kenneth J. Spiller, 11/17/17

Intro: G | D | G | D | G | C | G D | G

Verse 1:

G C G D | C D |
 Let the news fill the heavens, tell the people in every tongue
 G C G D G
 Creation joins in expect - ation, at the birth, of Christ the Son

Verse 2:

G C G D | C D |
 He has come, to free the nations to take away all sin and shame
 G C G D G
 What was lost, back in the garden Shall be re - stored once again

Chorus:

C G C D
 Re - joice and sing, the praises of the new born King
 C G C D | D | G | C | G D | G
 Cele - brate what's done, Em - manuel has come!

Verse 3:

G C G D | C D |
 In a manger, came divinity Lived this life, pure and holy
 G C G D G
 The King of Kings, long foretold Would face the cross of Calvary

Pre-chorus:

Em D C Em C D | C D |
 There He died, alongside sinners forsaken by the ones He loved
 G C
 But in three days, the grave was empty
 G D G
 He rose alive, victorious - ly!

Bridge:

G D
 O Come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him
 C D C G D G
 O come let us a - dore H - im Chr---ist the Lord

Lead: B: 8 12 | 10 | 8 12 | 10 | 8 12 | 13 | 12, 12, ^{10, 12,} 10 | 8

