

Virtual Advent Study 2025
COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS
An Advent to Christmas Pilgrimage
Andy Langford & Ann Langford Duncan
December 3-17, Wednesdays, 6 pm – 7 pm
New Awakening UMC

SECTION 1 — Isaiah’s Prophetic Voice (Isaiah 1:2,4)

Paragraph:

In Jerusalem, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah listened to God, exhorted words of judgment, and offered hope. In a world suffused with sin, Isaiah envisioned God’s in-breaking grace through a Messiah named Immanuel. Isaiah calls out the rebellion and corruption of God’s people while simultaneously pointing to the hope of God’s redeeming presence.

Discussion Questions:

What part of Isaiah’s message of judgment and hope speaks most clearly to you today?

How have you experienced God calling you back when you’ve strayed?

SECTION 2 — Ancient Jerusalem & The First Temple

Paragraph:

Jerusalem, one of the world’s oldest cities, stands on a high plateau in the Judean Mountains. The Temple Mount—today crowned with the Dome of the Rock—marks the sacred place where generations of worshipers encountered God. Rebuilt, destroyed, and recaptured countless times, Jerusalem remains the holiest city for Jews and Christians.

Discussion Questions:

What makes Jerusalem a “thin place” where heaven and earth seem to meet?

How does the long history of the Temple deepen your understanding of Advent?

SECTION 3 — Pilgrimage

Paragraph:

A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey requiring us to step out of ourselves to encounter God. Scripture is filled with holy journeys, from Abraham and Sarah to Israel’s wanderings, to Mary and Joseph’s path, to the disciples who left everything to follow Jesus. Pilgrims through history have traveled unfamiliar paths, trusting that God leads them where they need to be.

Discussion Questions:

What journey, spiritual or personal—feels like a pilgrimage you are on right now?

Where do you sense God inviting you to “step out of yourself” this Advent?

SECTION 4 — Isaiah & His Two Messages

Paragraph:

Isaiah and the prophets who followed, spoke both words of judgment and words of hope. They lamented the unfaithfulness of God’s people while proclaiming the promise of a coming Messiah who would restore peace and justice. Isaiah’s voice continues to guide believers during Advent as we hold repentance and expectation in tension.

Discussion Questions:

Why do you think God uses both judgment and hope to speak to His people?

Which message do you need most in this season, correction or encouragement?

SECTION 5 — The Messiah (Isaiah 9:6–7)

Paragraph:

Isaiah anticipated a Messiah greater than Abraham, Moses, or David. This Messiah, Immanuel, would come as a vulnerable child yet carry divine authority. Isaiah foretells a kingdom of justice, righteousness, and endless peace. Early Christians recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of these promises.

Discussion Questions:

Which name for the Messiah (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, etc.) resonates most with your life today?

Why do you think God chose to enter the world as a child rather than a powerful king?

SECTION 6 — Prevenient Grace

Paragraph:

Prevenient grace is God’s grace that “goes before”—drawing us toward salvation before we are aware. God’s gentle nudges, unexpected moments of clarity, or surprising kindness are signs of God calling us closer. Advent heightens our awareness of this grace as we listen for God in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of life.

Discussion Questions:

Where have you seen evidence of God “going before you” recently?

How is God drawing you closer in this Advent season?

SECTION 7 — Advent as a Penitential Season

Paragraph:

Advent has long been understood as a “little Lent.” Its traditional color—purple—invites self-examination and repentance. In the darkness of the world and our own hearts, we confess our brokenness and turn to the Light of Christ. Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more.

Discussion Questions:

What is one area where God is inviting you to repent or realign?

How does seeing Advent as a “little Lent” change your approach to the season?

SECTION 8 — A Countercultural Advent

Paragraph:

Our culture begins celebrating Christmas months early with decorations, music, and commercialization. Isaiah invites us instead to slow down, resist conformity, and renew our minds. Advent encourages us to listen for God in songs, Scripture, and even simple acts of hospitality.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways do cultural Christmas habits distract you from spiritual preparation?
2. What practice could help you renew your mind (Romans 12:2) this Advent?

SECTION 9 — A *Christmas Carol* & Transformation

Paragraph:

Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* mirrors Isaiah’s prophetic call to transformation. Through the spirits of past, present, and future, Scrooge

confronts his brokenness and isolation. Grace interrupts his life, awakening compassion, generosity, and renewed relationship with others.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which part of Scrooge’s transformation speaks to where you are spiritually?
2. What might it look like for you to “keep Christmas well” beyond December?

SECTION 10 — Seasonal Loneliness & Emmanuel

Paragraph:

Loneliness often intensifies during the holidays. Like Israel in Isaiah’s time, many feel far from God or disconnected from community. Advent proclaims Emmanuel “God with us” who enters our deepest isolation to bring healing, presence, and hope.

Discussion Questions:

Why do you think loneliness increases during the holidays?

What does the name Emmanuel, God with us, mean to you right now?

SECTION 11 — Prophets Today

Paragraph:

Modern prophets—from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Mother Teresa to global leaders—continue Isaiah’s work of naming sin and offering hope. Their voices challenge injustice, materialism, and division while envisioning a world transformed by love and grace.

Discussion Questions:

What modern prophetic voices challenge or inspire you?

How might God be calling *you* to speak truth with hope?

SECTION 12 — Closing Reflection & Prayer

Paragraph:

Advent begins a spiritual pilgrimage shaped by repentance, hope, grace, and expectation. As we listen to Isaiah, we open ourselves to God’s coming light and prepare our hearts for Emmanuel.

Discussion Questions:

What is one insight you are taking from Chapter 1?

Where do you sense God inviting you to begin or continue a pilgrimage?

Prayer

Emmanuel, God With Us, thank You for coming near in Jesus, the child who was born and the Son who was given for my salvation and deliverance. Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God, speak wisdom into my confusion and strength into my weakness as I walk through this Advent season. Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace, rule in my heart, my home, the Church, and this world with Your justice and righteousness, and teach me to live as a hopeful witness of Your coming Kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Adapted by Rev. Monica Jefferson, For New Awakening UMC, Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, Andy Langford & Ann Langford Duncan, An Advent Study, Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition, with Permission 2025, for study and teaching purposes only.

NOTES

Adapted by Rev. Monica Jefferson, For New Awakening UMC, Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, Andy Langford & Ann Langford Duncan, An Advent Study, Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition, with Permission 2025, for study and teaching purposes only.