Arrival Time

Advent Group Discussion Guide
“Come, Lord Jesus,” the Advent mantra, means that all of Christian history has to live out of a kind of deliberate emptiness, a kind of chosen non-fulfillment. Perfect fullness is always to come, and we do not need to demand it now.

Richard Rohr
Preparing for Christmas
Introduction

Buckhead Station is right beneath our church building, a convenience for our staff team for those meetings and appointments that are up and down the main line. And there’s no greater feeling than rushing through the turnstile and down the stairs to the platform just as the train is pulling in. **Timing** is that thing that stands between enjoying public transit and being completely frustrated by it. Back in the day before MARTA released their smartphone app, complete with arrival times, delay reports, and station updates, frustration was norm. It was all a guessing game. You never really knew when, or if, the train would show up. It was hard to feel prepared and on top of things.

This was the teaching of John the Baptizer in Luke 3, that we must be prepared for God’s arrival. Luke quotes Isaiah, saying, **Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.** In other words, do not be caught off guard. Live expectantly and with anticipation of God’s coming, of His presence. This is **Advent.** The season of preparation for the Lord’s arrival and presence in our lives.

Derek Sweatman
Advent 2012
Group Leader Notes

This discussion guide is a companion to the Advent season, and its focus is on the call to live a life of readiness for the Lord’s arrival, and presence, in our lives. With December being a busy month for everyone, we have held this series to three sessions, with an optional community gathering included as well.

Small Group Sessions

WEEK ONE: Luke 1:13-17; Psalm 145:4
Session Details: God had chosen John to be the forerunner of Jesus, announcing his coming to Israel. He was a relayer of the message to those who would listen. Who are the people in your life who continually remind of you of God?

WEEK TWO: Luke 3:1-4; Psalm 122:1
Session Details: John’s primary message was the live a life prepared for God's presence. Luke quoted Isaiah, saying, **Prepare the way of the Lord, making his paths straight.** Be awake to God’s presence, and to His work in the world! What things do you do to stay awake and prepared for God’s work in your life?

Session Details: Preparing the way of the Lord is not a one-time thing, but a life-long gig. Everyday we must work to remain focused on God’s work in our lives. What are the struggles you encounter when it comes to staying focused in your faith?

Community Gathering [Optional]

If your group is open to it, throw a Christmas party and invite your neighbors. Nothing stressful, just food and drinks and Charlie Brown!
THE FUNCTION OF ADVENT IS TO REMIND US WHAT WE’RE WAITING FOR AS WE GO THROUGH LIFE TOO BUSY WITH THINGS THAT DO NOT MATTER TO REMEMBER THE THINGS THAT DO.

Joan Chittister

Session One

Luke 1:13-17; Psalm 145:4

Discussion Questions

1. What are the things that bring on stress for you during this holiday season? Is it the obligations? The gift buying? The family commitments? Finances? And at what point, for you, does the central message of Christmas get muddied up in the busyness of everything?

2. Read Luke 1:13-17. This is the announcement of John the Baptist’s coming birth. What do you know about John? And what does this passage say specifically about John’s purpose in life?

3. John was a forerunner to Jesus. He told Israel of his coming, reminding them of God’s faithfulness to his promise. When do you remember first learning about Jesus? Where was it? Who was the “messenger” of that story? Who was it that first guided you to Jesus?

4. What things in life distract you from your focus on God?

5. Who are the people in your life right now who continually remind you of God’s presence in your life? Who do you look to in order to stay awake in your faith?

Scriptural Connection

Read: “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your might acts.” [Psalm 145:4]

Closing Prayer

Pray as a group for the coming season, that the message of Christmas will not lose it’s strength in the hurriedness of this time of year.
WE MUST DO MORE THAN SIMPLY GO THROUGH THE ADVENT CALENDAR; WE MUST DEVELOP IN US AN ADVENT HEART.

Joan Chittister

Session Two

Luke 3:1-4; Psalm 122:1

Discussion Questions
1. It seems as though all of us eventually run out of time to get everything done during this time of year, and in the end, feeling unprepared in some way. What are some examples of this being true in your life?
2. Read Luke 3:1-4. John is described in verse 4 as the one who came to prepare the way for the Lord’s arrival, to make straight His paths. What did it mean to “prepare the way of the Lord?” What was John doing?
3. The message in this story is of a life of readiness and preparedness for the Lord’s work in us. How do we ignore or miss what God is wanting to do in our lives? How has this been true in your life?
4. What life experiences were you unprepared for, and as a result, turned to God very quickly?
5. What sorts of things do you do on a consistent basis to stay alert and prepared for God’s work in your life?

Scriptural Connection
Read: “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’” [Psalm 122:1]

Closing Prayer
Divide up into pairs or trios for prayer. Have each group simply pray for one another’s faith and walk with God, that it would remain intact. Pray for a life of readiness.
THE QUESTION OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR CONFRONTS US AT THE BEGINNING
OF THE SEASON, THEN, IS A DIRECT ONE: WHAT DOES THE LIFE OF JESUS
NOW MEAN TO US? HOW IS THIS LIFE AFFECTING OUR OWN? ARE WE
OURSSELVES LIVING BOTH THE PROMISE AND THE POTENTIAL?

Joan Chittister

Session Three

Philippians 2:12-16; Luke 21:36

Discussion Questions
1. In his book Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell talks about how it takes a minimum of
   10,000 hours to be truly proficient at anything. What’s something that took
   you years to become good at, something you may not have enjoyed doing at
   first, but love now?
2. Read Philippians 2:12-16. Paul says we must continue to work out our
   salvation. Lauren Winner said, “I think I’m always in the process of becoming
   a Christian.” Share your thoughts on these statements.
3. What does it mean for you to work out your relationship with God?
4. In a real sense, “preparing the way of the Lord” in our lives is not a one-time
   thing, but a daily discipline. What spiritual behaviors does our passage remind
   us to do? What are some others that aren’t mentioned?
5. Verse 16 is about the second coming of Jesus, the second Advent, and how
   we are to hold fast and be prepared for that day, too. What role does
   community and church play in this?

Scriptural Connection
Read: “But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have the strength to
escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son
of Man.” [Luke 21:36]

Closing Prayer
Spend time in prayer for strength of faith for each group member.
I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 14:3
ESV