

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

November 30, 2008



Anticipate: Anticipating the Messiah

“Next year will be different!”. Year after year it seems this is our commentary at the end of December. Yet somehow, somehow year after year we find ourselves at the mercy of the holiday season. We anticipate the Rockwell experience but somehow it ends up looking like Christmas Vacation giving proof to the adage that the space between expectation and reality is disappointment. We long for more reflection, less spending, and greater meaning. Will this ever be possible or is it simply a pipe-dream? More importantly how do we recalibrate our whole approach to more fully appreciate Christ as Messiah?

Both Micah’s book and historical context open our eyes to the attitudes commonly held as we move into the Advent season.

First, in Micah’s day we find the people of God resigned to an inordinate focus on wealth and materialism which consumed their heart leaving little room for God. By our own admission, we too struggle to find a focused spirituality amidst a climate of commercialism. Just as in Micah’s setting our context is additionally characterized by attitude of domination. Assyria, the war machine of the Ancient Near East, sought to subjugate neighboring peoples for the glory of the empire. Israel could not escape the threat of domination and oddly enough we cannot either. During Christmas we find ourselves either out to dominate or caught up in a system that dominates. Avoiding both follies, Micah leads us toward an attitude of anticipation for a coming Messiah.

Who would have ever expected the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem, and yet what better place to launch the mission of Christ? This alone clues us in to the nature of the Messiah’s mission. The birth of Christ began a long-awaited insurrection that rejects spiritual resignation and political domination in favor of redemption.

It is the mission of redemption, directed and empower by Christ, that we participate in today. The spirit of Christmas then is not about wish-lists so much as it is about changing the world around us for the glory of God. Looking for ideas along these lines? Check out Advent Conspiracy (www.adventconspiracy.com). As we begin to think redemption how will this year be different?

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions Micah 5:1-6

1. What do you find to be your favorite holiday memory and why?
2. What do you find to be difficult or challenging about the holiday season?
3. Personally speaking where do you usually find you heart during the Christmas season? What do you like or dislike about your typical focus? If you could make a change this year what would it be?
4. Why is it not sufficient to simply root out sinful tendencies in the heart? What must take the place of those tendencies and why? How can our affections be truly transformed during Christmas?
5. Do you find yourself trying to dominate others or being dominated during the holidays? How can we change the vicious cycle? Where does change begin?
6. How does Christ's birth & work navigate the waters between attitudes of resignation and domination? How does redemption contrast with these two approaches?
7. If we think 'Redemption' this Christmas season, how will things be different? What are some redemptive ideas that you've considered?

"Its desire for one particular object may be conquered; but as to its desire for having some one object or another, this is unconquerable."

Thomas Chalmers
Speaking about the heart in *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*.

Intersect-Thoughts on Life & Faith

Understanding Advent & Christmas

If you've ever been around the church during Christmas you'll know that some of the terminology and symbolism is rather confusing. The wreaths, candles, Advent where's all this going? Advent is the period of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth, which of course is Christmas day. Advent originates from the Latin word *adventus* meaning "coming". The season serves to reflect Israel's waiting for the Messiah and at the same time considers our longing for Christ's return. Historically accoutrements such as ribbons have been used in worship sanctuaries to symbolize both an attitude of penitence and fasting as well as the royalty of the Messiah king. This same color purple also appears around Easter, symbolizing the suffering of Christ. Christmas and Easter then are connected symbolically just as they are historically and theologically. Additionally, candles are generally used to symbolize Christ as the light of the world, but also communicates specific weekly messages regarding the Advent season. These candles are placed in an evergreen wreath which symbolizes the new and everlasting life that Jesus secured for the spiritually exiled.

This week the first candle is the candle of expectation, and hope. This candle was connected with a reading from Isaiah 11 and the sermon text of Micah 5. This week's candle encourages us to consider the tension Israel felt as a nation longing for the Messiah in the Old Testament. Generally, Israel longed for a true king that would set her free from evil pagan empires, but would also lead them in faithfulness to God. While Christ has now come, we feel much the same way today longing for his return. We dream of a day where justice will prevail, sin will be eradicated, and the presence of God will be enjoyed in full. In the weeks to come this section will be reserved to lead us in worship during this Advent season. Blessings to you and your family!



Media Resource List

The following were used this week and recommended.

- Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*.
- N.T. Wright, *Paul*