



# REDEEMER

## WINTER HAVEN

*To all who are weary and desire rest, to all who mourn and long for comfort, to all who sin and need a Savior, Redeemer opens wide her doors with a welcome from King Jesus the mighty Friend of sinners, the Ally of his enemies, the Defender of the indefensible.*



*December 21, 2025 – The Fourth Sunday of Advent*

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### **Season of the Cross:** Purple for Advent

The season of Advent, a season of waiting, is designed to cultivate our awareness of God's actions—past, present, and future. In Advent, we hear the prophecies of the Messiah's coming as addressed to us—people who wait for the second coming. In Advent, we heighten our anticipation for the ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament promises, when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, death will be swallowed up, and every tear will be wiped away. In this way Advent highlights for us the larger story of God's redemptive plan.

## Advent Introduction

Every year, for the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, we observe the season of Advent. The word Advent means "a coming or an arrival." It is a time for both honesty, and also hope. Honesty, because the world is broken. Hope, because the world is being redeemed. During Advent, we acknowledge the desolation that is an inevitable part of life in a sin-weary world, while, at the same time, turning our hearts, in joyful expectation, towards the consolation of Jesus' kingdom come! The truth is, the coming kingdom has already come. In the baby born in Bethlehem. Jesus Christ. Immanuel. God with us. Each Sunday during Advent, we will emphasize a different theme as we celebrate the heart of God to be relationally present with his people. He has come, in Jesus, to be with us in this mess of our own making. Jesus will soon come again, so that we might dwell with him, forever, in the world that he is remaking. In all the time in between, we wait, sustained by the life-changing truth of the Incarnation. Jesus is God running to us!

## Song of Ascent

*The first song we sing together guides us as we "go up" or approach the presence of God to worship Him. This song is meant to rouse us to worship and awaken our hearts.*

### Joy To The World

## Advent Theme: Joy

*While the law cannot justify us or make us righteous; it is a teacher given to lead us to Christ, the fulfiller of the law.*

Our Advent theme this week is **joy**. We live in a world saddened by sin. Pain, sorrow, sickness, death, loneliness... these, just to name a few, are the currency in which earthly kingdoms operate. They commit injustices and rob us of our joy. There is a King, however, whose currency is joy, instead of pain. Hope, instead of sorrow. Well-being, instead of sickness. Life, instead of death. He has come! And his name is Jesus! He is our Joy. He is the One our hearts have waited for. The comfort of his presence is enough to make all of the sad things come untrue. He is the true Elder Brother who goes out in search of the one who is lost. He does not scoff at our presence in the Father's house, but instead spared nothing, even his own life to ensure we could come back home. So, we don't have to be afraid!

## Advent Reading: Luke 1:46-55

*We read God's Word, the Bible, together. It reminds us of who God is and what He expects from us.*

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate...

...53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

*We pray together, praising God for who He really is (Adoration) and admitting our inability to live up to what He expects of us (Confession).*

## Song of Advent

*In this song of advent we acknowledge our need of a Savior and anticipate His return.*

O Come O Come Emmanuel

## Assurance of Pardon: Titus 3:4-7

*We read God's Word together and are reminded that grace and mercy are freely given to all who have faith in Jesus Christ.*

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

## Greeting

*In Jesus, we have not only been reconciled to God, we have also been reconciled to one another. Therefore, we greet one another as brothers and sisters.*

## Songs of Praise and Celebration

*Our response to God's free grace is celebratory worship. We express our praise to God for who He is and what He has done to save us.*

Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee  
This Is Jesus

## Worship Through Giving: Give Online at [redeemerwh.org/give](https://redeemerwh.org/give)

*We respond to the good news of God's mercy and grace for us in Jesus by giving generously to the work of this church and the kingdom of God.*

## Kids' Worship Dismissal

*Children **through fifth grade** are dismissed for kids' worship.*

## Prayer of Thanksgiving & Intercession

*We again express in prayer our gratitude to God for what he has done and ask him to continue to act for our good and the good of others in our community and the world.*

## Proclamation of God's Word

*A small portion of God's Word is explained to us and applied to our own lives.*

Luke 15:25-32

## **Confession of Faith: Nicene Creed**

*As an expression of our faith in Jesus Christ in solidarity with his people, we declare the substance of what we believe.*

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of one being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again, in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, with the Father and the Son He is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

## **Sacrament of Communion**

*The ritual meal of Communion is a sign and seal of the grace we have in Jesus. That is, it symbolizes the work Christ did for our salvation (sign) and communicates the grace and mercy we have been given (seal) as a result of His death and resurrection..*

Immanuel

## **Song of Response & Sending**

*We respond to the good news of God's mercy and grace by singing again of His goodness and greatness.*

Behold Him

## **Benediction**

*Because the hand of God's wrath was raised against Jesus, we now receive the hand of God's blessing as we are sent out to live our lives to the glory of God.*

May the LORD bless you and keep you;  
May the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
May the LORD turn His face toward you and give you His peace,  
Both now and forevermore. Amen.

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***There is a prayer team available following the worship service for anyone in need of prayer.***

## Proclamation of God's Word

*A small portion of God's Word is explained to us and applied to our own lives.*

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Pg. 874 (Luke 15:25-32)

## Resources

Kenneth Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal*

Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*

Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God*

Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

**Sermon Series:** Advent: God Running to Us

**Sermon Title:** The True Elder Brother

**Date:** December 21, 2025

**Hook:** *Which of the brothers do you most identify with?*

## **I. DIAGNOSIS**

*"The main thing between you and God is not your sins but your damnable good deeds."  
– John Gerstner*

## **II. DANGER**

*"Many have passed the rocks of gross sin – who have suffered shipwreck on the sands of self-righteousness." – William Secker*

## **III. DYNAMICS**

*"There is an entire psychological substructure that, due to the fall, is a near-constant manufacturing of relational leveraging, fear-stuffing, nervousness, score-keeping, neurotic controlling, anxiety-festering silliness that is not something we say or even think so much as something we exhale. ... And if you trace it, down to the root, you find gospel deficit. You find lack of felt awareness of Christ's heart. All the worry and dysfunction and resentment are the natural fruit of living in a mental universe of law."  
– Dane Ortlund*

## **IV. DEATH**

*"By putting a flawed elder brother in the story, Jesus is inviting us to imagine and yearn for a true one." – Tim Keller*

# ADVENT RESOURCES

## *Advent Activities*

*redeemerwh.org/advent-kids*

## *Advent Hymns & Songs*

*Spotify: redeemerwh.org/advent-hymns-spotify*

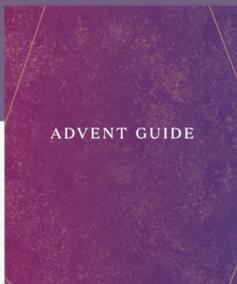
*Apple Music: redeemerwh.org/advent-hymns-apple*

## *Behold the Lamb of God (Andrew Peterson)*

*Spotify: redeemerwh.org/btlog-spotify*

*Apple Music: redeemerwh.org/btlog-apple*

## Available in the foyer



## Announcements

**Christmas Eve:** Make plans to join us **this Wednesday, December 24**, for Christmas Eve. We'll have identical candlelight services at **4 & 5:30pm**. Childcare will be provided for children up to three years old.

**One Service:** Beginning on **Sunday, December 28**, we will transition back into one service at 10am.

**Congregational Meeting:** The session has called a congregational meeting to be held on **Sunday, January 4**, immediately following the morning worship service for the purpose of electing elders and deacons.

**Year-End Giving:** All gifts must be received in the church office, made online or postmarked by **Wednesday, December 31** to be included on your 2025 Giving Statement. Please reach out to Joe Ragsdale ([joe@redeemerwinterhaven.org](mailto:joe@redeemerwinterhaven.org)) if you need to schedule a drop-off or to donate stock. If you're interested in making a year-end gift or pledge for our upcoming Growing Deep for Greater Reach Campaign (Building Fund) contact MattE Diaz at [campaign@redeemerwinterhaven.org](mailto:campaign@redeemerwinterhaven.org).

**Women's Bible Study:** Our Women's Bible Study is beginning **Thursday January 22 from 9:30-11 am**. We will be going through the *Person of Jesus, Unit 1: Compassion* book Thursday mornings until April 30.

**Women's Retreat:** Ladies, we'd love for you to join us at The Grove Resort in Orlando **January 30-Feb 1, 2026** as we practice and experience Deeper Rest in Christ Alone. To register, please visit [redeemerwh.org/womensretreat](http://redeemerwh.org/womensretreat). *Please note that the deadline to register has been extended but there are limited spaces still available.*

**Get Connected:** The best way to stay up-to-date with what's happening at Redeemer is through our online newsletter ([redeemerwh.org/newsletter](http://redeemerwh.org/newsletter)) and our mobile app ([redeemerwh.org/app](http://redeemerwh.org/app)).

**Worship Playlists:** Follow our weekly set list on Spotify and Apple Music so that you can become familiar with the songs that we'll be singing on Sundays. You can find the playlist on the "RedeemerWH" app (above) or at: ([redeemerwh.org/worship](http://redeemerwh.org/worship)).

### Our Mission

Our mission is to make Jesus' invisible kingdom visible in Winter Haven, Polk County, and the world.

### Church Planting

One of the ways we hope to accomplish our mission is by planting new churches throughout Polk County. We proudly partner with Renew Polk ([renewpolk.org](http://renewpolk.org)) and the Florida Church Planting Network ([flchurchplanting.org](http://flchurchplanting.org)).

### Community Groups

We also meet during the week in homes for what we call Community Groups. They are intended to be the primary "church" experience for all who are a part of Redeemer. If you are interested in visiting a community group, contact Ashley Bennett, [ashmbennett1013@gmail.com](mailto:ashmbennett1013@gmail.com).

MISSION  
FUND

**2025 GOAL:** \$50,000  
**RECEIVED:** \$14,003

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