

# EXPECTING:

A WAITING THE BIRTH OF JESUS



 highrock

SERMON SERIES  
COMPANION



# INTRODUCTION

Waiting is hard, it's uncomfortable and most of us don't particularly enjoy it. It's why so much of our modern life is built to make things go faster and be more comfortable. Faster internet, heated seats, same-day delivery, instant messaging, drive-thrus, the list goes on and on. However, what if in all of our attempts to make things faster and easier, we're missing something important? This Advent season we're taking time to intentionally sit in a posture of waiting, but not idle waiting, *expectant* waiting, the type of waiting where we know and trust that what we're waiting for is one hundred percent worth it!

In the season of Advent, as we eagerly await the birth of Jesus we step into a posture of solidarity with those who went before us and waited for Jesus' birth over 2000 years ago. We do this because we too are waiting for Jesus. By remembering that Jesus has kept his promises in the past we are encouraged to wait with expectant hope as we eagerly anticipate his final return to make all things new. We hope you join us for this season of remembering God's faithfulness and leaning into hope!

## RESOURCE OVERVIEW

Here we provide space to take notes on the sermon and Scripture text and answer reflection questions that you can discuss with others. When considering the reflection questions, remember that the goal is not to have all the "right" answers—instead, let these questions serve as a starting point for curiosity in your conversation with God and others. See the Appendix of this guide for more resources and opportunities to engage with this study.

Please note this discussion guide is created before the series begins. Discussion questions are prepared before the sermons are written and based on the theme and text for the week. Thank you for your understanding that the topic and focus of the sermon as the pastor writes it may differ from what is written in the discussion questions.

## APPENDIX (page 15)

Offers a deeper dive into the topic as well as resources for Bible study, leading small groups, and links for further support.

- Additional Resources
- Online Bibles
- Prayer Tools
- "Icebreaker" Questions
- Tips for Guiding Conversations
- General Resources for Individual Support

## SERMON SCHEDULE & SCRIPTURE READING

*\*Subject to change at the discretion of the pastors.*

Sermon	Topic & Scripture Passage
*Week 1/2	Waiting: Isaiah 64:1-9
Week 1/2	Comfort: Isaiah 40:1-8
*Week 3/4	Liberation: Isaiah 61:1-4; Luke

	4:16-21
Week 3/4	Rejoicing: Luke 1:46-55

\*The live in-person preachers for this series will alternate locations for weeks 1 and 2 and for weeks 3 and 4. Check to see which theme/passage was covered in the sermon from your Highrock congregation on Sunday. The other theme/passage will be covered the following week.

# WEEKLY FORMAT

## SERMON DISCUSSION

**(PRE-WORK) REFLECT:** Listen to the sermon, read weekly selections/view video links (if provided), read scripture passages, and answer reflection questions. (30-40 mins)

**RELATE:** Discuss reflection questions with your small group. (50 mins)

**PRAY:** Use the suggested prayer prompt to conclude your time (5-10 mins)

# CONVERSATION COVENANT

We hope all small group discussions are lively and enriching, but sometimes tough topics will be discussed. The Conversation Covenant\* is an agreement to hold respect and grace toward all participants within a small group, no matter the conversation. Please adhere to the Conversation Covenant or consider creating one that fits your context.

\*Adapted from <https://conversational-leadership.net/conversation-covenant/>

I pledge:

**To act in good faith, with curiosity.** I will assume the best about my conversation partners when entering into our groups. I will give the benefit of the doubt, recognizing that they may know something I don't.

**To show respect.** I will show respect. I will be polite and give due regard to the feelings and traditions of others. I understand that I do not have to agree with someone to show them respect.

**To speak the truth.** I won't use rhetorical tricks to try to win an argument. I will speak what I genuinely believe is the nuanced truth.

**To aim to discover the truth.** I will not enter into a conversation with the purpose of changing the mind of anyone to my way of thinking.

**To focus on what we can change.** I will focus on what we can do differently in the future since we cannot change what we did in the past.

**To take responsibility for the conversation.** I will take responsibility for the quality of the conversation and the abidance of the rules both in principle and in spirit.

**To follow the covenant even when others fail to do so.** I will abide by the rules regardless of whether another person breaks them.

**To respect the confidentiality of the group.** I will not share the stories of group members verbally or in written form (including on social media and online outlets).

**To lighten up and approach the conversation in good humor.** I recognize that humor is a hallmark of a constructive, generative conversation and take the conversation in good humor.

# PREPARE

The following questions are jumping-off points for personal reflection. Engage with them to awaken your awareness of themes in this sermon series. Pay attention to the questions that stand out to you and look back on them throughout the series to see how God might be speaking to you.

## CONSIDER

- Advent is a season for waiting and *active* expectation. What are you bringing into this sermon series? What are some of the concerns, questions, and joys in your life right now?
- Reflecting on these concerns, questions, and joys, how might you begin to bring them to God – in prayer, worship, and your devotional life and practices? Is there something you feel nudged to bring up in the group conversations for this series?
- In the spirit of active expectation, what's something you want to ask God to do in your life and in this world at the moment?

# \*WEEK 1/2: Waiting

## Isaiah 64:1–9

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**(PRE-WORK) REFLECT** | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Isaiah 64:1–9

**RELATE** | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. How do you usually handle times of waiting? What makes waiting challenging for you (or when your expectations go unmet)? Where have you seen something good come from waiting?
3. (Look at questions 3 and 4 together.) Consider times when you've felt disappointed or isolated in your faith. What was this like? How was it hard? What, if anything, did you learn from this?
4. Differently, consider times of unexpected provision. How have both – disappointment and fulfillment – shaped you/your faith?
5. What's something that's hard to wait on in your life right now? Is there an instance where God has shown up for you in the past, or where you've found encouragement from a Christian friend, that you can draw on to help you now?
6. P. Taylor discussed the three tenses of salvation. How might this help you connect parts of your own story with the story of God?

**PRAY** | Begin your prayer by acknowledging that we are intentionally and actively waiting during this Advent season. Ask God to make this waiting a way that God meets us, surprises us, and brings hope into our lives and those around us.

## Isaiah 64: 1-9

1 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,  
that the mountains would tremble before you!

2 As when fire sets twigs ablaze  
and causes water to boil,  
come down to make your name known to your enemies  
and cause the nations to quake before you!

3 For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,  
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

4 Since ancient times no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right,  
who remember your ways.

But when we continued to sin against them,  
you were angry.  
How then can we be saved?

6 All of us have become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;  
we all shrivel up like a leaf,  
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

7 No one calls on your name  
or strives to lay hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us  
and have given us over to our sins.

8 Yet you, LORD, are our Father.  
We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.

9 Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD;  
do not remember our sins forever.  
Oh, look on us, we pray,  
for we are all your people.



# \*WEEK 1/2: Comfort

## Isaiah 40:1–8

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**(PRE-WORK) REFLECT** | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Isaiah 40:1–8

**RELATE** | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. What has felt like a “wilderness” area in your life recently (a period of dryness, a challenging situation that won't seem to relent)?
3. How do you usually respond to situations like this? How do they tend to impact your spiritual life?
4. Does this sermon give you insight or hope that God can still work amidst the challenges of our lives, and if so, how?
5. Consider who you might reach out to this week, to offer a note of encouragement or perhaps affirm how they're showing God's love to others. Who could this be?
6. Reflecting on Advent, what can help remind you of God's faithful and transformative presence amidst uncertainties and challenges?

**PRAY** | Pray for faith to know that God is present in the challenging and trying moments of life, in our lives, the lives of our neighbors, and the church.

## Isaiah 40:1-8

1 “Comfort, comfort my people,”  
says your God.

2 “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.  
Tell her that her sad days are gone  
and her sins are pardoned.  
Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over  
for all her sins.”

3 Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting,  
“Clear the way through the wilderness  
for the LORD!  
Make a straight highway through the wasteland  
for our God!”

4 Fill in the valleys,  
and level the mountains and hills.  
Straighten the curves,  
and smooth out the rough places.

5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,  
and all people will see it together.  
The LORD has spoken!"

6 A voice said, "Shout!"  
I asked, "What should I shout?"

"Shout that people are like the grass.  
Their beauty fades as quickly  
as the flowers in a field.

7 The grass withers and the flowers fade  
beneath the breath of the LORD.  
And so it is with people.

8 The grass withers and the flowers fade,  
but the word of our God stands forever."

# \*WEEK 3/4: Liberation

## Isaiah 61:1–4; Luke 4:16–21

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**(PRE-WORK) REFLECT** | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Isaiah 61:1–4; Luke 4:16–21

**RELATE** | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. What comes to mind for you when you hear the word, freedom?
3. How does the notion of freedom from the Scripture passage/s compare to other ideas of freedom? What, if anything, is different about the idea of freedom as described in the passage/s and the sermon?
4. Think about a few things you value in your life, things you may desire or want. How might Jesus' invitation to freedom connect to these values and desires? How does it challenge, transform, or offer a new direction to what you want for yourself and others?
5. How might you begin thinking about freedom differently as a Christ-follower? What's a takeaway or practical step for you at the end of this conversation?

**PRAY** | Galatians 5:1 reads, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." Pray for a Christ-like understanding of freedom, which frees us to love God and others wholeheartedly, and be loved by God more than we can imagine.

### Isaiah 61:1-4

1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,

2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,

3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy

instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the LORD  
for the display of his splendor.

4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and restore the places long devastated;  
they will renew the ruined cities  
that have been devastated for generations.

## Luke 4:16-21

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

# \*WEEK 3/4: Rejoicing

## Luke 1:46–55

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**(PRE-WORK) REFLECT** | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Luke 1:46–55

**RELATE** | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. Where are you experiencing joy in your life right now? Where might you hope to experience more joy in your life at the moment?
3. Reflect on how your faith offers you a helpful, secure context to experience joy. What does (or could) that look like in your life?
4. What's one way you can add a practice of celebration to your life? Likewise, how can you help one person (or people) discover joy (how can joy become more contagious in our lives)?

**PRAY** | Ask to be reminded of God's faithfulness and provision. Pray that this memory comes to mind at different points this week, creating a context for joy to emerge.

## Luke 1:46–55

46 And Mary said:  
"My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.”

# APPENDIX

Below are resources to look into if you are interested in diving deeper into some of the topics covered in this series. If you need resources that more specifically address your own experience, demographic, or faith journey, please reach out to a Highrock pastor or to [smallgroups@highrock.org](mailto:smallgroups@highrock.org) and we will be happy to help!

## ONLINE BIBLES

- [Blue Letter Bible](#)
- [Bible Gateway](#)

## PRAYER TOOLS

- [The Prayer of Examen: Tracking Our Moods](#)
- [Breath Prayer/Prayer of the Heart](#)
- [Divine/Fixed Hour Prayer](#)
- [SoulCare guide to Imaginative Prayer Spiritual Practice](#)
- [Imaginative Prayer/Ignatian Contemplation](#)
- [SoulCare guide to Recall & Paraphrase Spiritual Practice](#)
- [Lament](#)
- [Laughter and Prayer](#)
- [Palms Up, Palms Down](#)
- [Pray a Psalm in a Nature Setting](#)
- [Praying with your Body](#)
- [Welcoming Prayer](#)

## “ICEBREAKER” QUESTIONS

- What was a small win from your week?
- Share a High/Low from your day or week.
- On a scale of 1-10, how are you doing coming into this meeting?
- If you were to describe yourself as a weather forecast today, what would you be? Example: sunny, partly cloudy, rainy with a chance of snow, etc.
- What song would be the theme track for the day you had?

## GENERAL RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

- [Spiritual Practices](#)
- [Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Parenting & Kids—Understanding each other through Milestones](#)

## TIPS FOR GUIDING CONVERSATION

- Allow everyone space to share. It's ok to ask what people are thinking even if they don't volunteer to share right away. But always give people the option to decline to share. Example: "Hey, Fred, you've been a little quiet and I'm curious to know what you think. Would you like to share anything?"
- Remember there aren't necessarily "right" answers. Encourage participants to simply be curious about what came up for them or others without the pressure of feeling like they "should" have thought or felt anything in particular. Example: Instead of asking "What is this story supposed to be communicating?" ask "What did you notice?"
- Embrace the differences. Affirm that different people can come to different conclusions regarding the same thing. Example: "Interestingly, the text reminded Susie of ABC, while it reminded José of XYZ. Both can be present and true."
- Adapt to suit your group's needs. Sometimes conversation is free-flowing and sometimes it's easier to move through discussion questions one at a time. Do what feels suitable for your group, but don't feel pressured to answer/discuss every single question.

- Encourage curiosity by modeling curiosity. Asking someone “Tell me more about XYZ” can be a really simple but effective tool to go deeper in conversation.
- Don't be afraid of silence. It's natural to want to fill silences or pauses in a conversation. But don't be afraid to sit in silence with your group members. Sometimes thoughts just need time to percolate, so don't feel like you have to rush to another question if no one shares immediately.
- Refer back to the Conversation Covenant. This is the posture that we as Highrock hold as we gather in groups. When the conversation gets tough, you can always refer back to the Conversation Covenant to remind the group that everyone has agreed to abide by this covenant in small group meetings.