

“From the Cradle to the Cross”:
The First Advent of Christ
Sermon Notes

➤ **If you’re in need of a fresh word on the old, old story this Advent, look no further than John’s apocalypse**

**This Christmas, remember Jesus...*

1. The long-expected consolation of Israel (vv.1-2)

2. The greatest living threat to the devil (vv.3-4)

3. God’s Messiah-King for all peoples (vv5-6)

Next Sunday: Revelation 19:11-16 - “From the Cross to the Crown”:
The Second Advent of Christ

Community Group Study Guide
For the Week of December 19th-25th

This week, as has become our custom, we have the privilege to read and reflect on John Piper's classic poem, "The Innkeeper". Consider navigating, also, to <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-innkeeper> where you can watch and hear Piper read it, as well as listen to him share the story behind the poem: <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/whats-the-story-behind-your-poem-the-innkeeper>

"The Innkeeper"

By John Piper

1986

Jake's wife would have been fifty-eight
The day that Jesus passed the gate
Of Bethlehem, and slowly walked
Toward Jacob's Inn. The people talked
With friends, and children played along
The paths, and Jesus hummed a song,
And smiled at every child he saw.

He paused with one small lass to draw
A camel in the dirt, then said,
"What's this?" The girl bent down her head
To study what the Lord had made,
Then smiled, "A camel, sir!" and laid
Her finger on the bulging back,
"It's got a hump." "Indeed it does,
And who do you believe it was
Who made this camel with his hump?"
Without a thought that this would stump
The rabbi guild and be reviled,
She said, "God did." And Jesus smiled,
"Good eyes, my child. And would that all
Jerusalem within that wall
Of yonder stone could see the signs
Of peace!" He left the lass with lines
Of simple wonder in her face,
And slowly went to find the place
Where he was born.

Folks said the inn
Had never been a place for sin,
For Jacob was a holy man.

And he and Rachel had a plan
To marry, have a child or two,
And serve the folk who traveled through,
Especially the poor who brought
Their meal and turtle-doves, and sought
A place to stay near Zion's gate.

They'd rise up early, stay up late,
To help the pilgrims go and come,
And when the place was full, to some
Especially the poorest, they would say,
"We're sorry there's no room, but stay
Now if you like out back. There's lots
Of hay and we have extra cots
That you can use. There'll be no charge.
The stable isn't very large
But Noah keeps it safe." He was
A wedding gift to Jake because
The shepherds knew he loved the dog.
"There's nothing in the Decalogue,"
He used to joke, "that says a man
Can't love a dog!"

The children ran
Ahead of Jesus as he strode
Toward Jacob's Inn. The stony road
That led up to the inn was deep
With centuries of wear, and steep
At one point just before the door.
The Lord knocked once then twice before
He heard an old man's voice, "round back!"
It called. So Jesus took the track
That led around the inn. The old
Man leaned back in his chair and told
The dog to never mind. "Ain't had
No one to tend the door, my lad,
For thirty years. I'm sorry for
The inconvenience to your sore
Feet. The road to Jerusalem
Is hard ain't it? Don't mind old Shem.
He's harmless like his dad. Won't bite
A Roman soldier in the night.
Sit down." And Jacob waved the stump
Of his right arm.

“We’re in a slump
Right now. Got lots of time to think
And talk. Come, sit and have a drink.
From Jacob’s well!” he laughed. “You own
The inn?” the Lord inquired. “On loan,
You’d better say. God owns the inn.”
At that the Lord knew they were kin,
And ventured on: “Do you recall
The tax when Caesar said to all
The world that each must be enrolled?”
Old Jacob winced, “Are north winds cold?
Are deserts dry? Do fishes swim
And ravens fly? I do. A grim
And awful year it was for me
When God ordained that strange decree.

“How could I such a time forget?
Why do you ask?” “I have a debt
To pay, and I must see how much.
Why do you say that it was such
A grim and awful year?” He raised
The stump of his right arm, “So dazed,
Young man, I didn’t know I’d lost
My arm. Do you know what it cost
For me to house the Son of God?”

The old man took his cedar rod
And swept it ‘round the place: “Empty.
For thirty years alone, you see?
Old Jacob, poor old Jacob runs
It with one arm, a dog, and no sons.
But I had sons . . . once. Joseph was
My firstborn. He was small because
His mother was so sick. When he
Turned three the Lord was good to me
And Rachel, and our baby Ben
Was born, the very fortnight when
The blessed family arrived.
And Rachel’s gracious heart contrived
A way for them to stay — there in
That very stall.” The man was thin
And tired. “You look a lot like him.”

But Jesus said, "Why was it grim?"

"We got a reputation here
That night. Nothing at all to fear
In that we thought. It was of God.
But in one year the slaughter squad
From Herod came. And where do you
Suppose they started? Not a clue!
We didn't have a clue what they
Had come to do. No time to pray,
No time to run, no time to get
Poor Joseph off the street and let
Him say good-bye to Ben or me
Or Rachel. Only time to see
A lifted spear smash through his spine
And chest. He stumbled to the sign
That welcomed strangers to the place,
And looked with panic at my face,
As if to ask what he had done.
Young man, you ever lost a son?"

The tears streamed down the Savior's cheek,
He shook his head, but couldn't speak.

"Before I found the breath to scream
I heard the words, a horrid dream:
'Kill every child who's two or less.
Spare not for aught, nor make excess.
Let this one be the oldest here
And if you count your own life dear,
Let none escape.' I had no sword
No weapon in my house, but Lord,
I had my hands, and I would save
The son of my right hand . . . So brave,
O Rachel was so brave! Her hands
Were like a thousand iron bands
Around the boy. She wouldn't let
Him go and so her own back met
With every thrust and blow. I lost
My arm, my wife, my sons — the cost
Of housing the Messiah here.
Why would he simply disappear
And never come to help?"

They sat
In silence. Jacob wondered at
The stranger's tears.

"I am the boy
That Herod wanted to destroy.
You gave my parents room to give
Me life, and then God let me live,
And took your wife. Ask me not why
The one should live, another die.
God's ways are high, and you will know
In time. But I have come to show
You what the Lord prepared the night
You made a place for heaven's light.

"In two weeks they will crucify
My flesh. But mark this, Jacob, I
Will rise in three days from the dead,
And place my foot upon the head
Of him who has the power of death,
And I will raise with life and breath
Your wife and Ben and Joseph too
And give them, Jacob, back to you
With everything the world can store,
And you will reign for evermore."