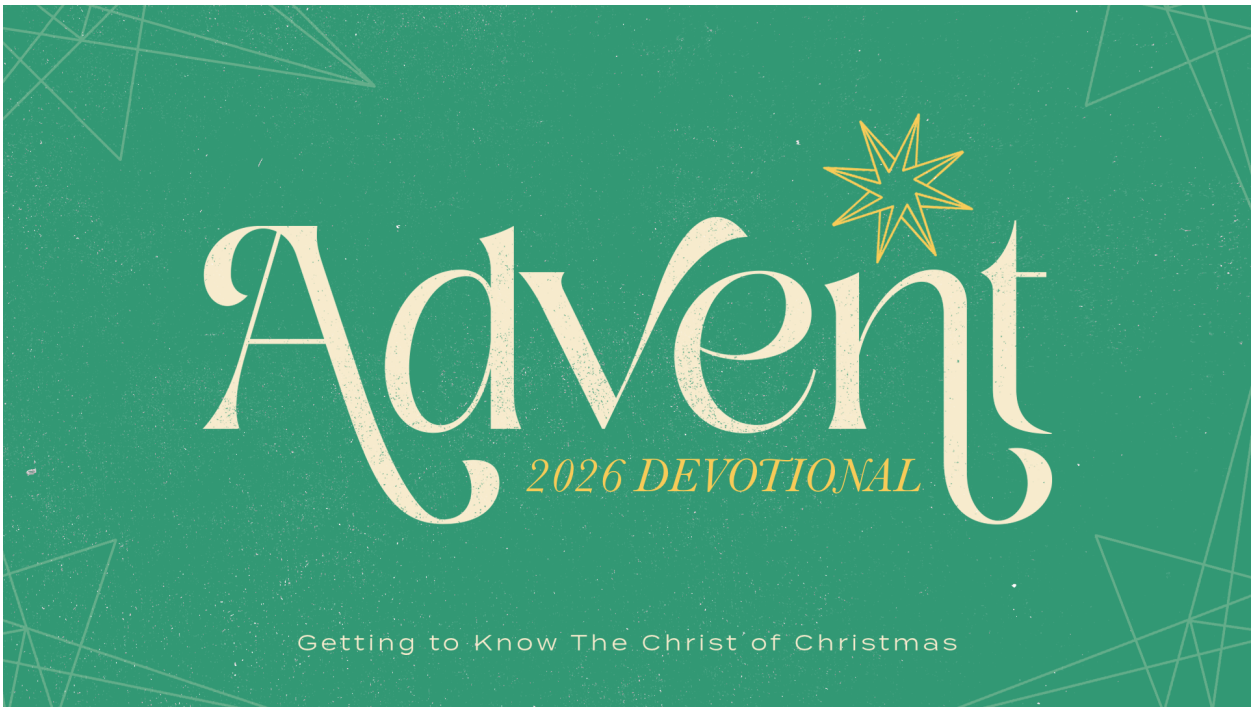


Welcome

Advent 2026 runs 27 days, from Sunday, **November 29** through **Christmas Day**, with one theme per week: Joy, Peace, Hope, then Love.

Advent is a season of holy waiting. It begins four Sundays before Christmas and invites us to slow down and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ: not just the remembrance of His birth, but the promise of His return. While the world rushes to decorate, purchase, and perform, Advent whispers a quieter call: Wait. Watch. Wonder.

How to use

Set aside a few quiet moments each day. Read the passage first, then the devotional, then sit with the Reflect questions. Each Sunday opens the week with a short candle-lighting moment for your Advent wreath at home.

Bonus: activities

Each day also suggests one activity for kids and one for adults: baking, writing, serving, praying, or simply noticing. Pick whichever fits your day.

**Some Kids activities require basic supplies - there is a supply list attached on the last page*

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Sunday, November 29: From Thanks to Joy

Read: Psalm 100; Philippians 4:4-7

A few days ago, many of us sat around a table and named what we're thankful for. Maybe it was family, health, a job, or simply a good meal. Thanksgiving is a holy habit. It trains our eyes to see God's fingerprints on our lives.

> *"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name." (Psalm 100:4)*

Notice where thanksgiving leads in Psalm 100. It's a gate. It's the way in, not the destination. Gratitude walks us through the gate and into the courts, where we find God Himself. And in His presence there is joy.

That's why Advent begins here. Thanksgiving looks back and says, "Look what God has done." Joy looks ahead and says, "Look who is coming." Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always," from a prison cell (Philippians 4:4). His joy didn't come from his circumstances. It came from a Person who was near.

This week, let the gratitude of Thanksgiving carry you forward. The God who has been faithful in the past is the God who came to us in Jesus, and the God who will come again.

Light the candle (optional): Light the first candle of your Advent wreath. Pray: "Lord, thank You for all You have done. Fill us with joy as we wait for You."

Reflect

- What were you most thankful for this Thanksgiving?
- What is the difference between being thankful and being joyful?
- Where do you need God's joy to meet you this season?

For kids: Make a "thankful chain." Write one thing you're thankful for on a strip of paper each day and link them together until Christmas.

For adults: Text or call one person who made your Thanksgiving list and tell them why you're grateful for them.

Monday, November 30: Joy Worth Waiting For

Read: Luke 1:5-17

Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child for years. They were faithful people who served God, but their prayer seemed to go unanswered until they were too old to hope anymore.

Then, while Zechariah was serving in the temple, an angel appeared with news: their prayer had been heard.

> *“He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth.” (Luke 1:14)*

God had not forgotten them. His answer simply came on His timeline, not theirs. And the joy He gave was bigger than they had asked for. Their son, John, would prepare the way for the Messiah. Their private joy would become joy for “many.”

Waiting is hard. Some of us are carrying prayers we've prayed for so long we've stopped saying them out loud. Zechariah's story reminds us that delay is not the same as denial. God hears. God remembers. And when He moves, His joy often reaches further than we imagined.

Advent is a season of waiting with expectation. We don't wait like people staring at a clock. We wait like people watching for a friend's car to pull into the driveway.

Reflect

- What prayer have you been waiting on for a long time?
- How does Zechariah's story change the way you think about God's timing?
- How might God's answer to your prayer bless more people than just you?

For kids: Plant a seed in a cup and water it this week. Talk about how good things often take time to grow.

For adults: Write down a long-held prayer and put it somewhere you'll see it each day this Advent. Pray it again, with expectation.

Tuesday, December 1: Joy in the Hidden Places

Read: Luke 1:18-25

When Elizabeth learned she was pregnant, she didn't throw a party. She went into seclusion for five months. In that quiet, hidden season, she said something beautiful:

> *"The Lord has done this for me... In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." (Luke 1:25)*

For years Elizabeth had carried shame. In her culture, being unable to have children was often seen as a sign of God's disfavor. People talked. She had likely felt overlooked, by her neighbors and maybe by God.

But God saw her. Before anyone else knew, before the baby showed, before the town found out, God was already at work. Elizabeth's joy started in a hidden place, between her and the Lord.

Some of the best things God does in us happen where no one else can see. Joy is not always loud. Sometimes it is a quiet confidence that God has noticed you, that He knows your name and your story, and that He is working even when nothing looks different yet.

If you feel unseen this season, take heart. The God who saw Elizabeth sees you.

Reflect

- Where in your life do you feel overlooked or unseen?
- What might God be doing in you that others can't see yet?
- How can you make space for quiet with God this week?

For kids: Play hide-and-seek. Afterward, talk about how God always knows exactly where we are.

For adults: Spend 10 minutes in silence today, with no phone and no music. Simply say, "Lord, You see me," and listen.

Wednesday, December 2: Joy That Leaps

Read: Luke 1:39-45

Mary had just received the most shocking news of her life. She was going to carry the Son of God. So she did what many of us would do: she went to see someone who would understand.

When Mary walked into Elizabeth's home and said hello, something remarkable happened.

> *"As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:44)*

Before John could walk or talk, he recognized Jesus and responded with joy. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, blessed Mary and celebrated what God was doing.

There is a kind of joy that only happens together. Mary needed Elizabeth's encouragement, and Elizabeth needed Mary's visit. Their shared joy strengthened both of their faith.

We were not meant to wait alone. God gives us church family so we can celebrate His goodness together, remind one another of His promises, and carry each other when joy feels far away.

Who in your life needs a visit, a call, or a word of encouragement this week? Your presence might be the very thing that makes someone else's heart leap.

Reflect

- Who has been an "Elizabeth" to you, someone who encouraged your faith?
- Why do you think God designed joy to be shared?
- Who could you encourage this week?

For kids: Have a jumping contest and see who can "leap for joy" the highest. Then thank God for something that makes you happy.

For adults: Reach out to someone who's going through a hard season and offer to get together, even just for coffee.

Thursday, December 3: A Song of Joy

Read: Luke 1:46-55

When joy fills a heart, it often comes out as a song. After Elizabeth's blessing, Mary responded with one of the most beautiful prayers in Scripture.

> *"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47)*

Mary's song is full of God's character. He is mighty. He is holy. He is merciful. He lifts up the humble and fills the hungry with good things. He keeps His promises to His people.

Notice what Mary's joy is built on. It isn't built on her comfort. Her situation was complicated. She was young, unmarried, and pregnant in a small town. Her joy was built on who God is and what He was doing.

That's the kind of joy we can have, too. Circumstances shift every day, but God's character doesn't. When we remember who He is, we have a reason to sing even when life is messy.

Christmas music fills stores and radios this time of year. Let some of those songs become prayers. Sing about who God is, and let your spirit rejoice in Him.

Reflect

- Which part of God's character in Mary's song stands out to you most?
- What is your joy usually built on?
- How can worship shift your perspective in a hard moment?

For kids: Pick a favorite Christmas song and sing it together as a family. Talk about what it says about Jesus.

For adults: Write your own short "song" or prayer listing five things that are true about God, then read it aloud.

Friday, December 4: Joy Breaks the Silence

Read: Luke 1:57-66

Because he doubted the angel's message, Zechariah couldn't speak for nine months. Imagine watching the miracle unfold in your own home and being unable to say a word about it.

When the baby was born, the neighbors assumed he would be named after his father. But Zechariah wrote on a tablet, “His name is John,” just as the angel had said.

> *“Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.” (Luke 1:64)*

His very first words were praise. Nine months of silence had changed him. Zechariah went from doubting God to declaring God's faithfulness to everyone who would listen.

God is patient with our doubts. He didn't cancel the promise because Zechariah struggled to believe. Instead, He used the waiting to grow Zechariah's faith. When the moment came, Zechariah obeyed, and joy broke the silence.

Maybe you've been quiet about your faith. Maybe doubt or disappointment has muted your voice. God is not finished with you. Obedience often opens the door to joy, and joy is meant to be spoken.

Reflect

- Has doubt ever made you go quiet about your faith?
- What did Zechariah learn in his season of silence?
- What step of obedience might God be asking of you right now?

For kids: Play a “silent game” for five minutes, then shout “Praise God!” together and talk about how good it feels to share good news.

For adults: Tell one person a specific way God has been faithful to you this year.

Saturday, December 5: Joy Anyway

Read: Habakkuk 3:17-19

The prophet Habakkuk lived in a hard time. Injustice was everywhere, and an enemy army was coming. He wrote one of the most honest declarations of faith in the Bible.

> *"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior." (Habakkuk 3:17-18)*

That little word "yet" changes everything. Habakkuk looked at a long list of losses and chose joy anyway. Not because things were fine, but because God was still God.

The holidays can be hard. For some of us, there's an empty chair at the table this year. Finances are tight, relationships are strained, or health is fragile. Advent doesn't ask us to pretend everything is okay. It invites us to be honest about the empty fields and still say, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord."

This is the joy Jesus came to bring. It's not the absence of trouble. It's the presence of God in the middle of it.

Reflect

- What would your own "though" list look like right now?
- What does it look like to choose joy without pretending?
- How has God been your strength in a hard season?

For kids: Draw a picture of something that makes you sad on one side of a paper and something about God that makes you glad on the other side.

For adults: Write your own Habakkuk-style prayer: "Though ___, yet I will rejoice in the Lord." Keep it with you this week.

Sunday, December 6: The Prince of Peace

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7

Isaiah spoke to people walking in darkness. Their nation was threatened, their leaders had failed them, and the future looked grim. Into that darkness, God made a promise.

> *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)*

Of all the titles Isaiah could have chosen, he ended with this one: Prince of Peace. Not a peace treaty. Not a peaceful season. A Prince, a ruler whose kingdom is peace itself.

Isaiah adds, "Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7). Every other kind of peace we know eventually ends. Vacations end. Calm weeks end. Even the quiet of a Christmas morning gives way to cleanup. But the peace Jesus brings has no expiration date.

Notice, too, that the government is on His shoulders, not ours. Much of our anxiety comes from carrying what was never ours to carry. Advent invites us to set it down and let the Prince of Peace rule.

Light the candle: Light the first two candles of your Advent wreath. Pray: "Prince of Peace, rule in our hearts and in our home. We give You what we were never meant to carry."

Reflect

- Which of Isaiah's four names for Jesus means the most to you right now?
- What are you carrying that belongs on His shoulders?
- Where do you most need lasting peace?

For kids: Make a paper crown and write "Prince of Peace" on it. Talk about what a good king does for his people.

For adults: Write down the three things causing you the most stress right now. Pray over each one, and then physically cross it out as a sign of handing it to Jesus.

Monday, December 7: Peace When Plans Fall Apart

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph had a plan. He was engaged to Mary, preparing a home, and looking forward to a simple life. Then he learned she was pregnant, and the child wasn't his.

Joseph was a good man, so he decided to end the engagement quietly. But before he could act, God spoke to him in a dream.

> *"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20)*

"Do not be afraid." Those words show up again and again in the Christmas story. God didn't give Joseph a detailed explanation of how everything would work out. He gave him a promise and a name: Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Joseph's peace didn't come from understanding everything. It came from trusting the God who was with him. He woke up and did exactly what the angel told him to do.

Maybe your plans have fallen apart this year. Maybe life looks nothing like you expected. Peace doesn't always mean getting your old plan back. Sometimes it means trusting that God is with you in the new one.

Reflect

- What plans in your life haven't turned out the way you expected?
- How does the name "Immanuel" speak to your situation?
- What would trusting God look like in your next step?

For kids: Build something with blocks, then knock it down and build something new together. Talk about how God can make something good even when plans change.

For adults: Write down one plan that fell apart this year. Next to it, write one way you've seen God present with you since.

Tuesday, December 8: The Path of Peace

Read: Luke 1:67-79

When Zechariah's voice came back, he didn't just speak. He prophesied. His song looks past his own son to the One his son would announce.

> *"Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." (Luke 1:78-79)*

Zechariah describes Jesus as a sunrise. If you've ever been awake before dawn, you know how slowly the light comes, and how it changes everything once it does. You can finally see where you're walking.

That's what Jesus does. He doesn't just give us peaceful feelings. He guides our feet. He shows us the path, one step at a time, out of darkness and into peace.

And notice where it all comes from: "the tender mercy of our God." We don't find the path of peace by being good enough or smart enough. God, in tender mercy, came to us.

If you feel like you're walking in the dark this season, look for the light. Open the Scriptures, pray honestly, and take the next step He shows you.

Reflect

- Where do you feel like you're walking in the dark?
- What does it mean to you that God's mercy is "tender"?
- What is one next step on the path of peace you could take this week?

For kids: Turn off the lights and use a flashlight to walk from one room to another. Talk about how Jesus is like a light that shows us the way.

For adults: Wake up early enough this week to watch the sunrise. As the light grows, pray Luke 1:78-79 back to God.

Wednesday, December 9: Peace With God

Read: Romans 5:1-11

Before we can have the peace of God, we need peace with God.

That's a hard truth, but it's good news. The Bible tells us that our sin separates us from God. We weren't just a little off course. Paul says we were God's enemies (Romans 5:10). No amount of holiday cheer can fix that.

> *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)*

This is why Jesus came. The baby in the manger grew up to die on a cross, taking the penalty for our sin. Because of Him, the war is over. The distance is closed. We are no longer enemies. We are children of God.

Notice how Paul says it: we have peace with God. Not "might have" or "will have if you try harder." It's a done deal for everyone who trusts in Jesus.

Paul adds that God demonstrated His love for us "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). He didn't wait for us to get our lives together. He came first. That's what Christmas is: God making the first move toward us.

Reflect

- What's the difference between the peace of God and peace with God?
- How does it feel to know God made the first move toward you?
- Is there anything keeping you from resting in the peace Jesus has already won?

For kids: Use two paper cutouts of people and a paper cross. Show how the cross bridges the gap between us and God.

For adults: Read Romans 5:1-11 slowly twice. Underline every phrase that describes what God has done for you, and thank Him for each one.

Thursday, December 10: Peace in an Anxious World

Read: Philippians 4:4-9

The weeks before Christmas can be some of the most anxious of the year. Calendars fill up, budgets stretch thin, and expectations run high. It's easy to celebrate the Prince of Peace while feeling anything but peaceful.

Paul offers a better way.

> *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)*

Paul doesn't say, "Don't feel anxious, just ignore it." He says, "Bring it to God." Every situation. Every request. And don't miss the little phrase "with thanksgiving." The gratitude we practiced at the start of Advent is part of the path to peace.

When we pray this way, God's peace stands guard over our hearts and minds like a soldier at a gate. It doesn't always change our circumstances right away, but it changes us. We can be at peace even when everything around us is not.

Then Paul tells us what to think about: whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (Philippians 4:8). What we dwell on shapes how we feel.

Reflect

- What is making you most anxious this Christmas season?
- Why do you think Paul connects thanksgiving with peace?
- What "true and lovely" things could you focus on today?

For kids: Make a "worry box." Write or draw your worries, put them in the box, and pray together, giving them to God.

For adults: Take one anxious thought you're carrying and pray through it using Paul's pattern: tell God the situation, ask for what you need, and thank Him for one thing.

Friday, December 11: Peace on Earth

Read: Luke 2:8-14

The first people to hear about Jesus' birth weren't kings or priests. They were shepherds working the night shift. These were ordinary, overlooked people, and heaven broke open over their field.

After the angel announced the birth of a Savior, a great company of angels appeared, praising God.

> *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14)*

"Peace on earth" shows up on Christmas cards everywhere, but the angels meant something deeper than the absence of conflict. They were announcing that heaven had come down to earth, and that God's favor now rested on ordinary people like shepherds, and like us.

The shepherds didn't do anything to earn that announcement. They were just there, doing their jobs. God chose to bring His peace to them anyway.

The world is still full of conflict. Wars, divisions, and broken families are real. But the angels' song is still true. Peace has come to earth in the person of Jesus, and one day He will make all things new.

Reflect

- Why do you think God announced Jesus' birth to shepherds first?
- What does it mean to you that God's favor rests on ordinary people?
- Where do you long to see God's peace on earth?

For kids: Make paper angels and write "Peace on Earth" on their wings. Give them to neighbors.

For adults: Pray for one place in the world, one place in Phoenix, and one relationship in your own life that needs God's peace.

Saturday, December 12: Peacemakers

Read: Ephesians 2:13-18; Matthew 5:9

Jesus doesn't just bring us peace with God. He brings us peace with each other.

In Paul's day, there was a deep divide between Jews and Gentiles. They didn't eat together, worship together, or trust each other. But Jesus changed that.

> *"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:14)*

Jesus Himself is our peace. Through the cross, He tore down walls that people thought would never come down. Now those who follow Him become one family.

That means peace is not only something we receive. It's something we carry. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Children of God look like their Father. They make peace.

The holidays often bring us face to face with broken relationships. A family member we avoid. A friend we stopped talking to. A neighbor we just don't like. The Prince of Peace came to tear down dividing walls, and He invites us to join Him.

Peacemaking isn't pretending nothing happened. It's taking the first step toward reconciliation, just as God took the first step toward us.

Reflect

- What "dividing walls" do you see in your family, church, or community?
- Is there a relationship where God is asking you to take the first step?
- What does it look like to be a peacemaker this Christmas?

For kids: Make a "peace pact" with a sibling or friend: shake hands, say sorry for anything you need to, and pray for each other.

For adults: Reach out to someone you've had distance or conflict with. A simple "I've been thinking about you, Merry Christmas" can be a first step.

Sunday, December 13: A Shoot from a Stump

Read: Isaiah 11:1-10

Picture a tree cut down to a stump. It looks dead. Nothing about it suggests life is coming back. That's how Israel felt. The great line of King David had been cut off, and the kingdom was in ruins.

But Isaiah saw something no one else could see.

> *"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." (Isaiah 11:1)*

Jesse was King David's father. Isaiah was saying that out of the stump of David's family, God would raise up a new King. Seven hundred years later, a baby was born in David's hometown, from David's line. The shoot had come up.

Isaiah describes this King with the Spirit of the Lord resting on Him, ruling with wisdom and justice, defending the poor, and bringing a peace so complete that wolves lie down with lambs.

That's what hope looks like. It's not pretending the stump isn't a stump. It's trusting that God can bring life from what looks dead. Whatever feels cut off in your life, a dream, a relationship, a season of faith, God specializes in new growth.

Light the candle: Light the first three candles of your Advent wreath. Pray: "God of hope, bring new life to what feels cut off. We trust You to keep Your promises."

Reflect

- What feels like a "stump" in your life right now?
- How does the story of Jesse's line encourage you about God's faithfulness?
- What would it look like to hope in God for new growth this season?

For kids: Put the bottom of a celery stalk or a carrot top in a shallow dish of water and watch for new green shoots over the next week.

For adults: Think of something in your life that feels finished or dead. Write a one-sentence prayer asking God to bring new life to it.

Monday, December 14: Comfort My People

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11, 28-31

After decades of warnings, Isaiah's message turns. The first words of chapter 40 are tender: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1).

God's people were tired. They had suffered the consequences of their sin, and they wondered if God still cared. Isaiah reminded them that God had not grown weary of them, and that He gives strength to the weary.

> *“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)*

Notice what this hope does. It doesn't just make us feel better. It renews our strength. When we put our hope in the Lord, rather than in our circumstances, our own effort, or other people, we find energy we didn't have before.

Isaiah also speaks of a voice in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3). Centuries later, John the Baptist would be that voice, pointing to Jesus.

By mid-December, many of us are running on empty. If you're tired, God's word to you is the same: Comfort. He is not tired of you. Put your hope in Him and let Him renew your strength.

Reflect

- Where are you feeling weary right now?
- What have you been hoping in besides the Lord?
- How does it feel to hear God say “comfort” to you?

For kids: Make paper eagles and “fly” them around the house while you say Isaiah 40:31 together.

For adults: Take a real rest today. Turn off your phone for an hour, take a nap or a walk, and invite God into that rest.

Tuesday, December 15: Small Town, Big Hope

Read: Micah 5:2-5

Bethlehem wasn't much to look at. It was a small village a few miles from Jerusalem, easily overlooked. But the prophet Micah said the hope of the world would come from there.

> *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2)*

God loves to work through small things. He chose a small town, a young couple, a stable, and a feeding trough. He chose shepherds instead of nobles. The ruler "whose origins are from of old" stepped into the smallest of places.

Micah goes on to say that this ruler will shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, and "he will be our peace" (Micah 5:5).

Maybe you feel small. Your life, your influence, or your faith seems too ordinary to matter. Bethlehem is God's answer to that fear. He doesn't need us to be impressive. He delights to do great things through small places and humble people.

Wherever you are this Christmas, God can bring hope there too, even in Phoenix, even in your neighborhood, even in your home.

Reflect

- Where do you feel small or overlooked?
- Why do you think God chose Bethlehem?
- How might God want to use your "small" life for something big?

For kids: Find the smallest thing in your house and the biggest thing. Talk about how God used a small town to bring the biggest gift ever.

For adults: Do one small, unnoticed act of kindness today and ask God to use it in a way you may never see.

Wednesday, December 16: Hope That Waits

Read: Luke 2:25-35

Simeon had been waiting his whole life. God had promised him that he would not die before he saw the Messiah. Year after year, he kept watching.

Then one day, the Spirit moved him to go to the temple. A young couple walked in with their baby, and Simeon knew. He took Jesus in his arms and praised God.

> *"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)*

Simeon's hope wasn't passive. He stayed close to God, stayed sensitive to the Spirit, and stayed in the place where God was likely to show up. When the moment came, he recognized it.

Waiting well is part of hope. Some promises take a long time. In the waiting, we can grow bitter or we can grow closer to God. Simeon chose closeness.

And look at the size of his hope. Jesus wasn't just for Israel. He was "a light for revelation to the Gentiles," for every nation, for every one of us.

Reflect

- What are you waiting on God for right now?
- How can you "wait well" instead of growing discouraged?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus is a light for all nations?

For kids: Practice waiting: set a timer for one minute and sit quietly together. Then talk about how Simeon waited for many years.

For adults: Pray for someone who is waiting on something hard this Christmas, such as a diagnosis, a job, a reconciliation, or a child. Send them a note to say you're praying.

Thursday, December 17: Hope That Speaks

Read: Luke 2:36-38

Anna's life had not gone as she planned. She was widowed after only seven years of marriage and spent decades alone. But instead of turning away from God, she turned toward Him. She never left the temple, worshiping night and day with fasting and prayer.

When she saw Jesus, she couldn't stay quiet.

> *“Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” (Luke 2:38)*

Anna's hope became a message. She didn't keep the good news to herself. She told everyone who was waiting, everyone who needed to hear that God's promise had arrived.

There are people all around us who are looking for hope this time of year. Some are grieving. Some are lonely. Some are just tired. The hope we've found in Jesus isn't meant to be kept quiet.

You don't need to be a preacher to share hope. Anna simply gave thanks and talked about Jesus. Sometimes the most powerful thing we can say is, “Let me tell you what Jesus has done for me.”

Reflect

- How did Anna's hard story shape her faith?
- Who in your life is “looking forward” to hope right now?
- What part of your story could you share with someone this week?

For kids: Make a Christmas card for a neighbor or grandparent and write, “Jesus is our hope!” inside.

For adults: Invite someone to join you at Renovation this Sunday or on Christmas Eve.

Friday, December 18: Hope in the Morning

Read: Lamentations 3:19-26

The book of Lamentations was written after Jerusalem was destroyed. It's full of grief. The writer doesn't hide his pain. He remembers his affliction and says his soul is downcast.

And then, in the middle of the sorrow, comes a turn.

> *"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:21-23)*

Hope didn't come because circumstances changed. It came because the writer chose to call something to mind. He remembered who God is. God's love is great. His compassion never fails. His mercies are new every morning.

Christmas can intensify grief. Songs, traditions, and empty chairs remind us of who and what we've lost. If that's you this year, you're not alone, and you don't have to pretend. Lamentations gives us permission to grieve and a path to hope.

Tomorrow morning, God's mercies will be new again. Not recycled. Not leftover. New. That's a promise you can hold onto.

Reflect

- What do you need to "call to mind" about God today?
- How can grief and hope exist together?
- Who do you know who might be grieving this Christmas?

For kids: Each morning this week, say "Good morning, God! Thank you for new mercies!" as soon as you wake up.

For adults: Write Lamentations 3:22-23 on a sticky note and put it on your bathroom mirror. Read it out loud every morning until Christmas.

Saturday, December 19: The Blessed Hope

Read: Titus 2:11-14

Advent looks two directions. We look back to the first coming of Jesus, the baby in Bethlehem. And we look forward to His second coming, when He will return to make all things new.

Paul puts both in the same sentence.

> *"...while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13)*

The grace of God has already appeared in Jesus (Titus 2:11). And one day, Jesus will appear again in glory. That is our blessed hope. Every promise that hasn't been fully kept yet will be kept then. Every tear will be wiped away. Every wrong will be made right.

This hope changes how we live now. Paul says it teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives while we wait. People who know the King is coming live like it.

As Christmas gets closer, remember that we aren't just celebrating something that happened. We're waiting for something that will happen. The story isn't over. The best is yet to come.

Reflect

- How often do you think about Jesus' return?
- How does the hope of His return change the way you live today?
- What are you most looking forward to when Jesus makes all things new?

For kids: Talk about the best thing you're excited for this Christmas. Then talk about how even better it will be when Jesus comes back.

For adults: Write a short prayer completing the sentence, "When You return, Jesus, I look forward to..." and pray it each night this week.

Sunday, December 20: For God So Loved

Read: John 3:16-21

It may be the most famous verse in the Bible. You've seen it on signs at football games and on the bottom of fast-food cups. But don't let familiarity steal its wonder.

> *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)*

Read it slowly. God loved. Not because the world was lovely, but because He is love. God loved the world. Not just the good people or the religious people, but all of it, every nation and every neighborhood. God gave. Love isn't just a feeling for God. It acts. It costs. He gave His one and only Son.

And the very next verse tells us why: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17).

Christmas is God's love with skin on. Every gift under the tree is a small echo of the greatest gift ever given. This week, let that love sink in deeper than ever before. You are loved by God, fully and freely, not because of what you've done, but because of who He is.

Light the candle: Light all four candles of your Advent wreath. Pray: "Father, thank You for loving us enough to give us Jesus. Help us receive Your love and share it."

Reflect

- Which word in John 3:16 stands out to you most today?
- Is it easy or hard for you to believe that God loves you personally?
- How does John 3:17 change the way you see God?

For kids: Write John 3:16 on a paper heart, putting your own name in place of "the world." Hang it on your fridge.

For adults: Read John 3:16 aloud with your own name in place of "the world" and "whoever." Sit for a minute with what it means.

Monday, December 21: Love Came Down

Read: Philippians 2:5-11

When we love someone, we move toward them. We show up. We get down on their level. That's exactly what Jesus did.

> *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Philippians 2:6-7)*

Think about the distance Jesus traveled. From the throne of heaven to a feeding trough. From being worshiped by angels to being wrapped in cloths. From all power to the helplessness of a newborn. And He didn't stop there. He humbled Himself all the way to the cross.

That's what love does. It comes down. It serves. It sets aside its own rights for the good of another.

Paul begins this passage with an invitation: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). The love that came down at Christmas is the love we're called to show each other.

This week is often full of family time, which can be wonderful and complicated. What would it look like to "come down" in love? To serve instead of being served? To put others first, even when it costs you something?

Reflect

- What strikes you most about how far Jesus came for you?
- Where is it hardest for you to put others first?
- How could you serve someone in your family this week?

For kids: Secretly do one chore for someone else in your family today without being asked.

For adults: Pick the least glamorous task at your holiday gathering, such as dishes, cleanup, or watching the kids, and do it gladly as an act of worship.

Tuesday, December 22: Love Made Flesh

Read: John 1:1-14

John's Gospel doesn't start with shepherds or a manger. It starts at the beginning of time. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

The Word is Jesus. He was there before the world began. Everything was made through Him. And then John tells us the most amazing thing.

> *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)*

The phrase “made his dwelling” literally means “pitched His tent.” God didn't love us from a distance. He moved into the neighborhood. He had a hometown, a family, a trade. He got tired, hungry, and sad. He laughed at weddings and wept at funerals.

This is the love of Christmas. God is not far away, watching us struggle. He came close enough to touch. He knows what it's like to be human, because He became one.

Whatever you're facing this Christmas, Jesus understands. He has dwelt where you dwell. And He is full of grace and truth, the grace you need and the truth you can trust.

Reflect

- What does it mean to you that God “pitched His tent” among us?
- How does knowing Jesus was fully human change how you pray?
- Where do you need His grace and truth today?

For kids: Build a blanket fort or tent and read John 1:14 inside it. Talk about how Jesus came to live with us.

For adults: Think of a neighbor you don't know well. Find a simple way to “dwell among” them this week, such as cookies, a wave, or a conversation.

Wednesday, December 23: Love That Makes Room

Read: Luke 2:1-7

After a long journey from Nazareth, Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. The town was crowded for the census. There was no space for them.

> *"And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them." (Luke 2:7)*

The Savior of the world was born in a place meant for animals. There was no room for Him in the guest room. It's a picture of how Jesus is often received, even today. Our lives get so full that there's no room left for Him.

The days before Christmas are some of the busiest of the year. Shopping, cooking, wrapping, traveling. It's possible to celebrate Christmas and still have no room for Christ.

But the manger also tells us something beautiful. Jesus is willing to come into humble, messy places. He doesn't wait for a perfect palace. He'll come into a stable. He'll come into your heart, just as it is.

Love makes room. Today, clear a little space for Jesus. And look around for others who need room made for them, the lonely, the stranger, the person with nowhere to go this Christmas.

Reflect

- What is crowding out room for Jesus in your life right now?
- What does the manger tell you about the kind of King Jesus is?
- Who might need you to "make room" for them this Christmas?

For kids: Set up a nativity scene together. Leave the manger empty until Christmas morning and talk about making room for Jesus.

For adults: Invite someone who might be alone this Christmas to join your table, or reach out to them with a call or visit.

Thursday, December 24: Come and See

Read: Luke 2:15-20

Christmas Eve. After the angels left, the shepherds didn't sit around wondering if it was real. They said, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see” (Luke 2:15). And they hurried.

They found Mary, Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger, just as the angel had said. Then they told everyone what they had heard. And then they went back to their fields, but they went back changed.

> *“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.” (Luke 2:20)*

Meanwhile, Mary did something quieter: “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).

Tonight, there's room for both responses. Like the shepherds, we can celebrate loudly, sing with joy, and tell others what God has done. Like Mary, we can be still and treasure the wonder of it all.

For four weeks, we've waited. We've talked about joy, peace, hope, and love. Tonight, we come and see that they all have a name: Jesus. Whatever this Advent has stirred in you, bring it to the manger. Come and see.

Light the candle: Light all four candles of your Advent wreath, and then the center Christ candle. Pray: “Jesus, You are our joy, our peace, our hope, and our love. Welcome.”

Reflect

- Are you more like the shepherds or like Mary in how you respond to Jesus?
- What has God shown you this Advent season?
- What do you want to treasure in your heart from this Christmas?

For kids: Before bed, place baby Jesus in the manger of your nativity scene and sing “Away in a Manger” together.

For adults: Take five quiet minutes tonight, after the busyness, to sit in silence by your tree or wreath and “ponder these things” with Mary.

Friday, December 25: Good News of Great Joy

Read: Luke 2:10-11; 1 John 4:9-12

Merry Christmas! We started Advent with joy, and we end it there, too.

> *"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'" (Luke 2:10-11)*

Good news. Great joy. For all the people. That includes you. No matter what kind of year you've had, what's under the tree, or who's around the table, the best gift of Christmas is already yours: a Savior has been born to you.

The apostle John explains what it all means: "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). Christmas is God's love made visible, so that we could have life.

And John adds: "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). The love we've received is meant to overflow. The joy of Christmas doesn't end when the wrapping paper is cleaned up. It carries into every ordinary day ahead.

So celebrate today! Open gifts, eat good food, laugh with people you love. And remember why. The Savior has come. Joy to the world.

Reflect

- What has been the most meaningful part of this Advent season for you?
- How can you carry the joy of Christmas into the new year?
- Who do you want to share this good news with?

For kids: Bake a birthday cake for Jesus and sing "Happy Birthday" together to celebrate His coming!

For adults: Before the day ends, write a short note of thanks to God for the gift of Jesus. Keep it somewhere you'll find it next Advent.

Kids' Activity Supply Lists

Most kids' activities use basic craft supplies. Gather the season basics once, then check the short list for each week. Days not listed need nothing beyond what's already in your home.

Season basics (keep on hand all Advent)

- ☐ Construction paper or cardstock, including white, red, and pink
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Markers or crayons
- ☐ Tape and a stapler
- ☐ A timer (a phone works)

Week 1: Joy (Nov 29 – Dec 5)

- ☐ Paper strips for a thankful chain, about 30 (Sun, Nov 29; you'll add one a day through Christmas)
- ☐ A small cup, potting soil, and a few seeds; beans sprout fastest (Mon, Nov 30)

Week 2: Peace (Dec 6 – Dec 12)

- ☐ Stickers or glitter to decorate a paper crown, optional (Sun, Dec 6)
- ☐ Building blocks or LEGO (Mon, Dec 7)
- ☐ A flashlight (Tue, Dec 8)
- ☐ A small box with a lid, such as a shoebox or tissue box, for a worry box (Thu, Dec 10)

Week 3: Hope (Dec 13 – Dec 19)

- ☐ A bunch of celery or a carrot with its top, plus a shallow dish (Sun, Dec 13)
- ☐ An envelope, and a stamp if you're mailing the card (Thu, Dec 17)

Week 4: Love and Christmas (Dec 20 – Dec 25)

- ☐ A fridge magnet for the paper heart (Sun, Dec 20)
- ☐ Blankets, pillows, and chairs for a fort, plus the flashlight from Week 2 (Tue, Dec 22)
- ☐ A nativity set; set aside the baby Jesus until Christmas Eve (Wed, Dec 23 – Thu, Dec 24)
- ☐ Cake mix or ingredients, frosting, and birthday candles for Jesus' birthday cake (Fri, Dec 25)