

Christmas
at New Life

A D V E N T 2 0 2 3

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INTRODUCTION

Advent is a season filled with expectation. It's a time when we remember the world waiting for a coming Savior, and celebrate the way the world changed when Christ was born. It's a season filled with the light and love of Jesus, the King, born to save us.

But if we're being honest, it's also a season filled with madness. As Christmas approaches, the focus of Advent sometimes gets lost amidst the chaos and craziness that comes with the holiday season.

So to help you focus your attention on the heart behind this special season, we've created this four-week devotional guide to walk you through Advent. Each week focuses on a specific aspect reflected in the birth of King Jesus—hope, peace, joy, and love.

As you journey through this devotional, take time to think through the questions, spend time in prayer, and make time to participate in the activities that involve your family. Our prayer is that as you turn your eyes to the coming Savior this Christmas season, your hearts will be transformed as you remember the birth of the King who came to save us.



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WEEK ONE-HOPE

READ

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. (Isaiah 9:2 NIV)

UNDERSTAND

I don't know about you, but I've never been good at waiting. I've never been good at not knowing what's ahead. Looking forward to an unknown future with hope and excitement just doesn't come naturally to me. I doubt it does to most.

That's exactly what the people were facing before the birth of Christ. They'd been through so much—the good, the bad, and the unimaginably terrible—over the years. Floods and famine, war and wandering, slavery and suffering—these people endured it all, but always with the ever present hope of a Savior promised to come. They'd long been shrouded in darkness, waiting for a light to come.

But the darker the cloud, the brighter the sun that eventually shines through. And for them, that light to come was King Jesus. Though they waited in darkness, they did not wait without the hope of a Savior who was promised to come and shine an eternal light on their lives.

Waiting on God doesn't exactly look the same for us as it did for them. We have the privilege of knowing how their story ends. The Savior they hoped for did come, and not just for them but for the whole entire world as well. For us. The waiting is still daunting, but we can wait with a fresh hope because we know the King has come.

I don't know what kind of darkness you might be waiting under this Christmas season. I don't know how heavy the cloud feels over your heart. But I do know this: for those living in deep darkness, a light has dawned. As we begin this Advent journey and look forward to celebrating the birth of the Savior who changes lives, do so with a fresh hope that the

darkness will not win.

A light will break through.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

What does waiting look like in your life? How does the wait make you feel?

Do you struggle to look forward to the future with hope?

Why or why not?

How can you remember the hope of Christ and the promise of the light to come this Advent season?

PRAYER

God, thank you that we don't have to wait without hope in this life. We know that just as it was true for your people back then, the promise of a Savior is true for us today, too. Take the weight of darkness sitting heavy on our lives and replace it with the light of your hope this Advent season.

FAMILY TIME

At dinner one day this week, ask each member of your family to share one thing they're hoping for and waiting on this Christmas. Depending on the ages of your children and family members, answers could include anything from gifts they hope to see under the tree, prayers they hope to see answered, or an experience they hope to have.

After everyone has shared, read Luke 2:1-20 (what we know as the Christmas story in the Bible) and talk as a family about how those people were waiting for something bigger than anything we could imagine that first Christmas. They were waiting for Jesus! Just as we have hopes for what we want to happen this Christmas season, the people then did, too.

Then, pray together as a family, asking God to help you remember to have hope this Christmas season.

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WEEK TWO- PEACE

READ

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. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7 NIV)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. - (John 14:27 NIV)

UNDERSTAND

Is there anything crazier than the Christmas season? The hustle and bustle of holiday shopping, family gatherings, church services, work parties, Christmas performances, and the general busyness that comes with the season. There's just something about the Christmas season that seems to raise the collective blood pressure of the population, huh?

What's interesting is that this frantic feeling of frenzy is the exact opposite of what this season is meant to be. While the rest of the world is pulling us toward presents, parties, and planning, Jesus is simply leading us toward peace.

In a world marked by tragedy, division, and corruption

(sound familiar?), Jesus came to to bring His long promised peace to the people. His birth permanently turned the page from pandemonium to peace, letting all of us know that even when everything around us feels crazy, we can still have peace. Lasting, eternal, deep rooted peace.

When chaos swirls around you this Advent season, choose peace. When you feel the stress of family dynamics or the tug of tension threatening to break you, choose peace. When you feel rushed and spread thin, choose peace. When you feel the pull toward perfection, choose peace. And when you feel the weight of weariness in this world, choose peace.

So as this Advent season marches on and we move closer and closer to Christmas, no matter what's happening around you, cling to Jesus. Cling to the One who brings peace. Make His peace the banner over your Christmas season.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

What is one thing that really stresses you or your family out during the holiday season?

What does peace look like to you?

How can you make a choice to let the peace of Christ permeate your holiday season?

PRAYER

God, you are the bringer of peace. You are the One who can sustain us when life feels chaotic. As Christmas approaches, help me to choose peace. Fill me with your peace and focus my eyes on You.

FAMILY TIME

Grab some pens, small pieces of paper, and your family!

Have everyone in your family write down on pieces of paper some things that really stress them out about the Christmas season. Have each person fold their answers up and put them in the middle of the table.

Before you take a look at their answers, read John 14:27 with your family. Talk together about what peace means to each one of you and how peace is possible in our lives because of Jesus.

Then, start going over the things each of your family members wrote on the pieces of paper. As you talk about the things that each of you said might be stressful this season, brainstorm ways you can instead choose peace.

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WEEK THREE-JOY

READ

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. (Isaiah 65:18 NIV)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25 NIV)

UNDERSTAND

From the moment Thanksgiving ends, the countdown to Christmas officially begins. And the closer it gets to the actual day, the more and more we anticipate with excitement what Christmas morning will actually bring. In other words, our expectations for joy are high. And as the anticipation builds, so does the joy we look forward to feeling.

The people of God looked forward to that first Christmas with a similar anticipation, but what they were anticipating was much greater than any present we might be hoping to find awaiting us this year. They'd long been waiting for a Savior to come, and as news spread that He might have finally arrived, their anticipation grew to new heights. And when they knew that Jesus, the One whose arrival they'd anticipated for hundreds of years, was born that Christmas morning, their joy was endless.

While we can't imagine what it must have felt like for the people back then to know that the King they'd been promised had finally come, we can share in their joy this Advent season. For just as God filled their hearts with His joy, He can fill ours with the same. And His joy—a deep, unmatched, life-changing joy—is better than anything else we might be anticipating this Christmas season. Focus your anticipation on the celebration of His birth. And, ask Him to make your life a living testament of His joy this Christmas.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

What's one thing you're anticipating with excitement this holiday season?

What do you think real joy feels like? How is it different than happiness?

What's one way you can find the joy of Christ this Christmas? How can you help others experience that same joy?

PRAYER

Lord, you are the One we've all waited for, and we're so grateful that you came to Earth for us all those years ago. We're so grateful for the way you saved us and the joy you made possible for us. Help us to remember that what we have to be most excited about this holiday season is You. Give us your joy and help us to share it with others.

FAMILY TIME

The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear, right? Well, we think so!

Make a point to interject some joy into your family's holiday season by doing something fun and unexpected. One evening this week, tell your family to put on their best Christmas pajamas. Then, load everyone up in the car and take them to a local coffee shop for some hot chocolate. But in order to get their hot chocolate, your family has to sing a Christmas carol to the barista behind the counter!

Take your hot chocolates to go, and hit the road together to explore some of the best Christmas lights your neighborhood or town has to offer. Blast the Christmas music as you go, and sing along to some of your favorite holiday tunes together as a family.

It may sound silly, but we promise it will create some fun, joy-filled memories for your family this holiday season.

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WEEK FOUR-LOVE

READ

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners... (Deuteronomy 10:17-19a NIV)

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35 NIV)

UNDERSTAND

Advent is a season of waiting. While in the Bible, this season was marked by the waiting of a Savior, today we live in a world where the Savior has come. Now, we remember. We remember the way God loved His people then by sending them a King that first Christmas, and we remember the way God loves us now by sacrificing His Son so that we might have a full and free life in Him.

At Advent, we ultimately remember God’s love.

Because that’s what this season is truly about. Christmas is really about love, and primarily, the love God has for us. That love is so deep and profound that He sent His Son to Earth that first Christmas all those years ago. He sent Him knowing that He would eventually grow up to make a way for the rest of mankind to come close to God once again. That is real love, and it all started with Christmas.

As you’re in the holiday season this year, ask God to keep this picture of love on the forefront of your mind. Ask Him to show you ways to treat others with this spirit of unconditional love. Thank Him for the ultimate show of His love for us—the gift of us Son, Jesus.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

What’s one thing you love about Christmas?

How can you remember the love of God through His son Jesus this holiday season?

What can you do to help practice this unconditional spirit of love toward others this Christmas?

PRAYER

God, thank you for your Son, Jesus. There is no greater gift you could give us, no greater act of love, than that of sending Jesus to walk this Earth with us and make a way for us to once again be close to You. Thank you that even when we don’t deserve it, You love us. Help us to celebrate Your love this holiday season and be bold enough to share it with others.

FAMILY TIME

One of the best ways to teach your children about real love is to help them put it into practice. There are people all around you who could use some love this holiday season. Together as a family, look for ways to serve and love those in your community, your church, or your school who might be in need.

Write Christmas cards to the elderly, sick, or shut-in members of your congregation to let them know they’re seen and loved this holiday season. Ask your school if there’s a family who could use a little support, and shop for Christmas gifts for them as a family. Find a local charity your family can serve at together one day during this season.

No matter what you do, look for ways to show love to people around you as a family. And as you do, talk with your kids about why it’s important that we show the love of Christ to others not just at Christmas, but all year long.

