

Family Advent

DEVOTIONS



Family Advent Devotions

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Family Advent Devotions

Hello families! It's time to journey through the season of Advent! I always love this time of year with my own family as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Before our journey begins, you may have some questions about Advent, and I also want to share some ways you can use these devotions.

WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent is the first season of the Christian church year that begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve (**for 2021 the dates are Nov. 28- Dec. 24**). Advent means "coming." During this season, Christians are preparing for the coming of Christ. We take this season to remember how the Israelites were looking forward to the coming of the Savior, a promise from God. As we celebrate the first coming of Jesus, as a baby born in a manger, we can also look forward to the second coming of Jesus, which is what He promised to us while He was here on the earth (John 14:3).

WHY DO WE USE AN ADVENT WREATH?

The Advent wreath is a tradition in the Christian church that has been around for a long time. It originated in Germany and Scandinavia and was used in homes for families to mark time. They would light a candle each night during Advent until Christmas Day. The light in their homes would greatly increase each day when they lit the candles, which symbolizes the light of Christ.

Today, we only light five candles (marking weeks instead of days). However, we still use the candles to mark time and increase the light. Each Sunday that we light a candle, the light increases and we grow closer to the day of Christ's birth.

As Christians, we are awaiting the day written about in Revelation 21:23: "The city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." One day Christ will return and His light will be all we need. But until then, we should strive each day to shine His light in this world.*

*The information on the history of the Advent wreath was taken from:
<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-do-the-candles-in-our-advent-wreath-mean>

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WHAT ARE THE PARTS OF AN ADVENT WREATH?

The Advent wreath contains several parts and each has a meaning:

1. The wreath is in the shape of a circle which represents God's never-ending love for us.
2. The evergreen around the base of the wreath represents ever new life.
3. The five candles represent the light of Christ that came into the world. These five candles are different colors: three purple, one pink, and one big white for the center of the wreath. The three purple candles represent hope, love, and peace. The pink candle represents joy. The white candle represents the coming of Christ.

In my own home, I use pillar candles that can stand on their own without needing a candle holder. I use a large charger plate to sit the candles on. Then I use Christmas garland to wrap around the bottom of the charger plate and candles.

Another idea (if you don't want to make one), is to buy a magnetic Advent wreath. The [Living Grace website](#) has one that I have used before. They work great to hang on the fridge!

HOW DO I USE THIS DEVOTIONAL?

This devotional includes 5 family devotions that can be done each Sunday in Advent and one to be done on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Each devotion focuses on the Advent wreath and what each candle on the wreath represents.

First, open your Bible and read the Scripture together. Next, read the devotion and light one of the candles. Then, discuss the question for the week. At the end, close in prayer. Each candle represents the following:

Week One - Hope

Week Two - Love

Week Three - Joy

Week Four - Peace

Christmas Eve or Christmas Day - Coming of Christ

I pray your family will have a meaningful Advent season as you journey together towards the birth of Jesus. May the light of Christ increase in your heart, and may you take His light into the world so others may know about Him.

Week One - Hope

Read Isaiah 40:1-5

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Have you ever waited a long time for something to happen? Maybe you are waiting to find out a grade on a test, or waiting for that day when you will finally understand how to do that math problem, or waiting for your brother or sister to be nice to you (that might take a while, right?).

What about waiting for a dream to come true? And I'm not talking about a dream you have at night while you sleep. I'm talking about a dream of the future. Maybe you have a dream to make the football team, a dream to get the lead in a play, a dream to learn how to ride a bike, or a dream to become an astronaut. Waiting takes time, and it is so hard to do!

This kind of waiting, though, is what we call hope. When we have hope, we are expecting or desiring for something to happen. In my life, I have hoped to make the basketball team, to get accepted into the college of my choice, to find a job, to find the right man to marry, to have children, to write a book that makes the New York Times Bestseller list, and even have hoped to have all my prayers answered by God. Some of these hopes happened sooner than others, and some I am still waiting on!

But the hopes I have for my own life pale in comparison to the hope the Israelites had. These people had been through the wringer: slaves in Egypt, rescued by Moses only to be in the wilderness for forty years, wars with other nations, kings wanting to kill them, and even listening to prophets (like Isaiah) tell them that they would be exiled out of their own land. These people desperately needed some hope. Their hope was all but gone. And God provided that hope.

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies about the coming of a Savior. I love the Scripture above from Isaiah 40:1-5. God is comforting His people. He is giving them hope, letting them know their sins have been paid for. A Savior is coming, one they must

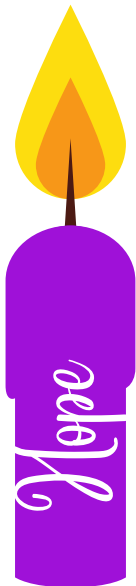
Week One - Hope

prepare for. They must not give up hope, for God has promised to send them a Savior. A king. One who will reign over the earth. One who will reveal the glory of the Lord. One who will take away all their sins and remember them no more.

Maybe you are like the Israelites and have lost hope. Maybe you have given up on those dreams. Maybe you don't think you will ever understand math, make good grades, get along with your sibling, or have that dream come true for your life. My prayer for you is that you will remember the hope God provided for the Israelites and know He provides that same hope for you, too. Jesus is our Hope. He is our Savior. He is the one who is there for you. And we can trust in Him because His Word is true. Today, let the light of hope shine in your life.

Light the Candle

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Have one person in your family take a lighter and light the candle of Hope.



Discuss

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What is a way you can share the hope of Jesus with someone this week?

Closing prayer

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*Heavenly Father, thank You for the hope you have given us in Jesus Christ. Thank You for sending Him to be born on this earth so that we might be saved. Forgive me for the times when I lose my faith and my hope in You. I ask that You renew my hope in You this Advent season.
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Week Two - Love

Read John 3:16

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Do you love your family? Yes, I know you do (even if sometimes they get on your nerves!). So what do you love about your family? Take a moment to go around to each person in your family and share something you love about them.

John 3:16 is probably one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. And it speaks directly of the love God has for us. The love you have for your family does not even come close to the love God has for you.

God had promised the Israelites that a Savior was coming (remember our devotion on hope last week?). He had prophets (like Isaiah) tell everyone that He would send someone for all people. This person would be a King. And most importantly, our Savior.

But the Israelites version of a king was different than what God was sending. They believed the king God would send would be born in a royal palace. They believed the Savior of the world would be royalty. They kept careful watch and expectation of this Savior, but they were looking in the wrong places.

This King wasn't born in a royal palace. In fact, He was born in the most unexpected place. But He was born just like God said he would be...in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes (Luke 2:7). So those first cries of Jesus didn't come from the king's palace. Those cries came from one of the lowliest places. But those cries were the sound of love. A love that we can never fully give to someone else. A love only the Almighty God can give to us.

God gave to us because He loved us. He gave to us because He wants us to live forever with Him. Jesus was sent down from heaven to be born on this earth to be the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. God gave us the best gift we can ever receive, the gift of a Savior.

Week Two - Love

John 3:16 is a verse that is so powerful and life-changing that often times when I truly read and digest this verse, I am moved to tears. How could someone love me so much? I will never fully understand, but I am eternally grateful for God's decision to send Jesus to be born on this earth. Because of God's great love for us, I will be able to live forever with Him. Today, let the light of Christ's love shine in your life.

Light the Candle

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Have one person in your family take a lighter and light the first candle of Hope. Then light a second candle, which represents Love.



Discuss

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It's easy to say what we love about others, but not as easy to say what we love about ourselves. What do you love about how God created you?

Closing prayer

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Glorious God, words cannot describe how truly grateful we are for the birth of Jesus Christ. Thank You for sacrificing Your own Son for each of us. May we all remember the amazing Love You sent to this earth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Three - Joy

Read Luke 2:10-11

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Whenever I hear the word "joy", I start singing *Joy to the World*. Do you do the same thing? (Just me? Ok...). I love to sing the Go Fish Guys version of this song with my church kids. The first part of the song says, "I've got the J-O-Y." And when you sing that part, you also have to use your arms to spell it out. So right now in my mind, I am singing this song and doing the motions! Take a minute right now and sing the first verse of *Joy to the World* with your family.

Do you have joy? No, I'm not talking about happiness. Happiness comes from the world. I am talking about true joy. The joy that comes from the One who brings Joy to us and who brought Joy into this world. I'm talking about the joy of the Lord.

On the night that Jesus was born, the angels appeared to the shepherds and said: "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).

The angels came to deliver the most wonderful news. They let the shepherds know that Joy had come into the world. He was here! He had been born! And that was definitely a joyful thing!

There is one keyword that I want to focus on in this passage from Luke 2. The angels said this Joy was for ALL people. They didn't tell the shepherds this news so they could keep it quiet. They didn't tell the shepherds not to tell anyone else. They said it was good news of great joy for all people.

When you have the true joy of Jesus, which means you know Him as your Savior and you walk closely with Him, then you cannot help but spread His joy to others. His joy will be so visible in you and others will see it. It will spill from your mouth. It will be heard through

Week Three - Joy

the words you speak. It will be seen in your actions. It will be seen all over your face. It is hard to contain the joy of the Lord. Our job as Christians is to spread this joy. We are to share the name of Jesus with others. We aren't to bottle up His joy and save it for ourselves. We are to go out and make His name known. Shout it from the mountaintops. Sing it from the rooftops. Write about it. Go...and tell others the good news of Jesus Christ! Today, let the light of Joy shine in your life.

Light the Candle

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Have one person in your family take a lighter and light the two purple candles of Hope and Love. Then light the pink candle, which represents Joy.



Discuss

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What is something that brings you joy?

Closing prayer

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Giver of Joy, help us to share Your joy with others. Make Your joy so visible in our lives that others will come to know You through us. Remind us continually that Your joy is for everyone and give us the courage to share Your name.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Four - Peace

Read Luke 2:14

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Do you hear it? Everyone in your house needs to be very quiet in order to hear this sound. Take a second, be still and listen...

What did you hear?

You may have said I hear nothing! But you did hear something! It was the sound of peace. No loud noises, no laughing, no tv or music playing in the background, no one talking. Just stillness, silence, and peace. Don't you love the sound of peace?

When do we usually hear the sound of peace? If you wake up in the middle of the night, you will hear it. No one is moving. Everyone is sleeping and is still. You might hear it in the mountains when you are camping. You might hear it at the beach at night when no one is playing. But this kind of peace usually has an end. Eventually, the sun will rise and everyone will wake up. They will run around the house trying to get ready for school or work. If you're camping, you will hear campers preparing breakfast. If you're at the beach you will hear the sounds of joy as people set up their tents and get their spots for a sunny, relaxing day in the sand. The peace will eventually come to an end.

But I know of a peace that will never end. And that peace comes from Jesus Christ, who is the Prince of Peace.

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet shares with the Israelites that a child will be born and will be given to us. This child will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6b). This child is Jesus and Isaiah is letting the Israelites know that Peace is coming! And the best part...this Peace will have no end. We won't go to sleep and wake up the next morning to find that the peace of Jesus is gone. We can be sure of this because of what Isaiah 9:7 says:

Week Four - Peace

"Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end."

Our life here on this earth may not always be filled with peace. But when we know Jesus and accept Him as our Savior, we know that one day (when we go to heaven) that peace will be ours forever. And what a day of rejoicing that will be! Today, let the light of Christ's peace shine brightly in your life.

Light the Candle

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Have one person in your family take a lighter and light the first three candles of Hope, Love, and Joy (pink). Then light the purple candle of Peace.



Discuss

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What are some ways you can help bring peace on earth?

Closing prayer

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Prince of Peace, sometimes we let the evil and chaos in this world take over. We forget to look for the peace that surrounds us. Help us to be still and listen and look for Your peace on this earth. Remind us that Your peace is here with us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Christmas Eve or Day

Read Luke 2:1-20

Over the past four weeks, we have been preparing for this day. We have lit candles and learned about hope, love, joy, and peace. We have waited to celebrate the day when Jesus was born. And it's here! Happy Birthday, Jesus!

But let's go back to the night of His birth. Let's think about something maybe you have never thought about when it comes to the night that Jesus was born. Let's think about what might have been happening in the town of Bethlehem that night.

Mary and Joseph journeyed to Bethlehem from Nazareth in order to be counted in the census (which is a counting of the people who live in a town). They returned to Bethlehem because that was where Joseph was from. But they had a difficult time finding a place to stay. The only place available was a cave (what we call a stable). This was a place where the animals were kept. So think about how it might have smelled!

On the night Jesus was born, what do you think the people of Bethlehem were doing? Did they know that God's Son was getting ready to be born in their town? Were they prepared to welcome this little bundle of joy, who would be their Savior? Did they have any clue as to what was going on?

Absolutely not.

I love the lyrics to *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, as I feel it portrays what was going on that night in that town...

"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in the dark streets shineth, the everlasting Light. The hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight."

Bethlehem was not busily preparing for the birth of Jesus. No parties were being thrown. No fireworks exploded. No one was running in the streets shouting His arrival. All was quiet. The streets were silent. People were sleeping.

But no one even probably gave a second thought to the brightness of the star in the sky that night. No one (except the shepherds) knew what that big, glowing star in the sky was pointing to.

Christmas Eve or Day

But in that town on the night of Jesus' birth, all the hopes and fears the Israelites had had over the many years were met. Jesus was born. God's promise to His people came to be. The wait was over. The Savior had come.

I wish I could say that I would have recognized the arrival of Jesus that night if I lived in Bethlehem. But sadly, I probably would not have. I would have been like every other person in Bethlehem...not paying attention (and most likely asleep).

Let's wake up! Let's pay attention to God. Let's be alert and ready to do whatever God calls us to do. Let's do all we can to walk closely with Jesus. Let's be ready with our eyes and ears open to see Jesus. Today, may the light of Christ shine brightly in your life.

Light the Candle

.....
Have one person in your family take a lighter and light the first four candles of Hope, Love, Peace, and Joy. Then light the white candle, which represents the coming of Christ.



Discuss

.....
What can we do together as a family to help us pay more attention to Jesus?

Closing prayer

.....
Light of the World, You are here! And for that we are grateful. Help us do a better job of watching for You, for listening to You, and for obeying what You ask of us. In Jesus' name, Amen.