

BRIDGEWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

introduction

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." **1 Peter 1:8-13**

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21

Our King is coming. Jesus Christ has come and he is coming again. This is the hope that is celebrated during the Advent season. Advent, from the Latin word meaning "arrival" or "coming" is all about Jesus. It is a time for His Church around the world to remember his first coming as a humble child in Bethlehem as we also eagerly await his second coming in glory.

This is a season of watching and waiting. It is a season for celebrating the faithfulness of our God, who 2000 years ago made good on his promise to send a Savior. It is a time for reflection, for the renewing of our minds, for setting aside the busyness and consumerism that so often overwhelm us during this season so that our souls might be stirred up with affection for our great King.

history and traditions

Advent officially begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and goes through Christmas Eve or Day. It originated as a period of fasting in preparation for the Feast of the Nativity (Christmas) in what is now France. While the pre-Christmas fast was observed as early as the fifth vcentury, it was during the sixth century that the reading of particular prayers and Scripture passages began to be associated with Advent. While Advent comes at the end of the calendar year, it actually marks the beginning of the church year, and is thus an especially appropriate time for reflection, repentance and refreshment.

Advent has always been a time of remembrance, a time to look back and remember Christ's first coming. It has also had a forward-looking dimension, as it is a time to prepare for Christ's second coming at the end of history.

This season has been celebrated in a variety of ways by a variety of theological traditions through the centuries. One common tradition is the use of an Advent calendar during the month of December. Modern Advent calendars usually contain 24 "windows" that are opened in the days leading up to Christmas. Each window contains a poem, portion of Scripture, story, picture, or gift. As more windows are opened and Christmas day draws near, expectation increases. This is meant to remind us of a period of anxious yet hopeful waiting God's people experienced in the time leading up to Christ's first advent.

Candles are another popular Advent symbol. This symbol emphasizes the Scriptural teaching that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9, 8:12). Traditionally, a new candle is lit each week in anticipation of Christmas Eve. The last candle, called the Christ Candle, is lit on Christmas Eve and represents Christ's first advent. The increasing light from the candles is meant to be a picture of the gospel, as we see this light penetrate the darkness.

The Advent season also often includes an emphasis on particular colors. Purple is the color first associated with Advent, as it is known as the color of repentance, and Advent was originally a time of repentance. More recently, some churches have begun to use blue, the color of hope. This is meant to remind us of the promise Christ made in his first coming that he would in fact come again, and it is a reminder that this season is not simply one of waiting for Christmas, but it is one where we are awaiting Christ's second coming.

As we enter into this season of Advent together as a faith family, it is a time for us to reflect on the reality of Christ's coming. We have the opportunity to rescue this season from commercialism and stress. The hidden treasure is allowing ourselves to assume a posture of expectant waiting as we prepare for Christmas, the celebration of our King.

using this quide

This guide contains four weeks of material, with brief devotional readings, reflections questions for you to complete individually or with a small group, daily Bible readings and resources for helping families discuss Advent together. The guide also includes a Christmas Eve experience for families. You will also find appendices with additional resources for your Advent preparation.

Traditionally there have been four "watchwords" associated with the four weeks of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Each week's reading centers around one of those concepts. While the material is not especially extensive, we want to encourage you to delve into it deeply. Linger on the Scripture passages, pray through them, take time to journal your answers to the response questions, and ask God what he might be wanting to say to you through this time of reflection. Finally, there are additional Scripture Reading passage for Monday-Friday of each week to enrich your focus and devotion to Jesus during the Advent season

We know that there are always seemingly endless demands on our time, and that is never more true than during this season. However, we believe that God's gracious invitation during this Advent season is to slow down, and be fully present to Him and to others. God with us! We pray this might be a season where you are able to behold with fresh eyes the wonder of what God has done for us through the birth of His Son.

appendices

Appendix A: Additional Activities for Families during the Advent Season Appendix B: Additional Scriptures for study and reflection

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"There is hope in the promise of the cross." – Hillsong United, Anchor

"Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love." - Psalm 33:18

"Hope is called the anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:19), because it gives stability to the Christian life. But hope is not simply a 'wish' (I wish that such-and-such would take place); rather, it is that which latches on to the certainty of the promises of the future that God has made."

- R.C. Sproul

Think about the last time you used the word "hope". If you're like most people, it was probably in a sentence like one of these:

- I hope the weather is good on Thursday.
- I hope the kids behave themselves with the babysitter.
- I *hope* we're able to make it to the party.
- I hope the test comes back negative.

There is nothing wrong with any of those sentences. They reflect the way the word is most often used in our culture. "Hope" is basically a synonym for "wish". And there is nothing wrong with that definition. However, if we take a closer look at the "hope" expressed in those sentences, we see another emotion present: fear.

• I *hope* the weather is good on Thursday (because I fear the event is going to get rained out).

- I hope the kids behave themselves with the babysitter (because I fear I'll get called out of my meeting, and that will be embarrassing.)
- I *hope* we're able to make it to the party (because I fear the consequences of not following through on social obligations).

• I hope the test comes back negative (because I fear sickness). We hope for certain outcomes because we fear what will happen if things don't go our way. Christian hope is an entirely different kind of hope. It is not synonym for "wish" and it is not motivated by fear. Christian hope is motivated by a trust that God is present with us and in us, and that he is walking with us in the midst of our circumstances.

When we live with Christian hope we need not be haunted by our past nor nervous about the future. Instead, we can live each day with the realization that God is doing something wonderful in the world, and he has invited us to be a part of it.

If ever there was someone who had reason to lack hope, it was Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was a poor teenager who had become pregnant out of wedlock. She had every reason to fear condemnation and rejection. And yet, her hope remained firmly rooted in the Lord. Consider her words from Luke 1:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." – Luke 1:46-55

Those words are dripping with hope. In the midst of what could have been overwhelming uncertainty, Mary didn't wish for a change in her circumstances. She expresses a hope that was the product of faith, not fear.

What are you hoping for? And is your hope motivated by fear or faith?

Are you hoping (wishing) for certain outcomes because you are afraid of what will happen if things do not go your way? Or are you living with settled hope in the goodness of God, confident He is at work in your circumstances?

In this Christmas season, we have the opportunity to be people of hope. We need not be ruled by the anxiety and hurriedness that captures so many this time of year. Instead, we can focus on the hope that is available to us. It is a hope that comes from faith, and it is a hope that can be ours regardless of what is happening around us.

reflection questions

• If you were to ask those closest to you, would they say you are motivated more by faith or fear?

• How, specifically, can you live with hope during this Christmas season?

scripture readings

Monday: Romans 15:4-13 Tuesday: Isaiah 40:1-11 Wednesday: Mark 13:33-37 Thursday: James 5:7-9 Friday: Revelation 7:9-17



Set aside 15-20 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible. Optional material is a copy of the Jesus Storybook Bible.

lighting of the advent candle

Have one member of the family light the first candle.

scripture reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

A little baby will be born. A Royal Son. His mommy will be a young girl who doesn't have a husband. His name will be Emmanuel, which means, "God has come to live with us." He is one of King David's children's children's children. The Prince of Peace. Yes, someone is coming to rescue you! But he won't be who anyone expects. He will be a King! But, he won't live in a palace. And he won't have lots of money. He will be poor. And he will be a Servant. But this King will heal the whole world. **The Jesus Storybook Bible (Operation "No More Tears!")**

scripture reading

Have an adult read the commentary below.

In the very beginning, God created a perfect world. In this perfect world God created, He made the sky and the land, the plants and all the animals. Then, God made Adam and Eve to care for His creation, to bear His image, and to be in relationship with Him. The world was full of peace and joy. Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect harmony with God.

Ask: What is the most perfect thing you can think of?

But, the perfect harmony that existed in the Garden, did not last long. Adam and Eve disobeyed the one instruction that God had given them and sin entered the world. As a consequence for their sin, the relationship between Adam and Eve and God was broken. God is perfect and Holy and He cannot be in the presence of sin. From that time, all humanity bears the consequence of their sin. But, God made Adam and Eve a promise before He sent them from the Garden. He would send a Redeemer, a Savior, who would save them and us, from the punishment of sin. He would not allow His beloved creation to wander in darkness, but instead, would send Emmanuel, Jesus to live amongst us and take our punishment as His own.

Ask: What emotions do you think Adam and Eve felt when they realized what they had done? How do you feel when you are given a consequence for a bad choice?

After the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden, God's people tried to repair their relationship with God and often failed miserably. For thousands of years, God's people waited for their Redeemer to come and they began to have ideas of how God would rescue them. God would speak through His prophets over the years, giving clues to who the Savior would be and to remind His people that He would deliver them from sin. We see these prophecies throughout all of the Old Testament.

Ask: What are some ways Isaiah 9:6 describes the coming Savior?

God, through the Old Testament, revealed over 350 prophecies about Jesus, and He fulfilled every single one. Waiting was not always easy for God's people and they often cried out to God to deliver them, to save them, and to keep His promise to them. They often waited impatiently, with little faith that their Savior was coming. They doubted. They pleaded. They asked again and again. And then one day, their waiting was over and their Savior was born. Our HOPE had come.

prayer

Ask one family member to pray and give thanks to God for his promise to send Jesus to rescue us from our sins.

kamily activity

As a family, discuss your favorite Christmas traditions. Make a list of favorite activities, such as going to look at Christmas lights, decorating the Christmas tree or decorating cookies that make the holiday season special. Using a calendar, make a schedule of activities you will do as a family and mark it on the calendar. Hang the calendar where your family can see it. Throughout the week build up the excitement and anticipation for each activity. Use those moments as a way to remind them about how the Israelites felt as they waited for their Savior.

NEEK 2 PEACEE NOVEMBER 5TH - DECEMBER 11TH

"Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth... I believe Jesus was before all time, yet the way this happened I have learned to marvel at in silence...so what am I going to say? How shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with amazement. The Ancient of Days has become an infant... Come, then, let us observe. It is a strange manner of celebrating a festival; but truly wondrous is the whole story of the Nativity. For on this day, ancient slavery is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error is driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness spread out on every side, a heavenly way of life has been implanted on earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels. Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things mix!" – St. John Chrysostom

"I have held many things in my hands, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." – Martin Luther King

"God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing." – C.S. Lewis

When you think of peace what comes to mind? A day at the spa? A week away from kids? An inner state of mind? Hippies? All of those things are peaceful, but can they bring us lasting peace? In our day and age, we muddy up so many of our terms, and often we confuse the terms "peaceful" and "peace". The truth is, temporary peacefulness and lasting peace are very different. Sometimes our striving for peacefulness works – temporarily. But, inevitably life gets crazy and challenges return. How can we go about having real peace as we face the ordinary demands of life?

Advent reminds us that Jesus came bringing peace (you know, peace on earth, goodwill to men), but honestly what does that mean for us? What does peace look like in our everyday life? What does peace feel like as we close out this year and look forward to a new one? How can we experience the transformative peace that Jesus offers?

First, we need to understand what "peace" means in Scripture. Jesus

proclaims in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled or afraid." In the Old Testament, the word for peace is "shalom". Shalom is not just the absence of conflict. It means wholeness, completeness, and well-being. This sort of peace is like a present God gives us; bringing physical, emotional and spiritual wholeness. God offers us this kind of peace, and it can last for the <u>entire</u> season ahead. What's even greater, God's Word adds a wonderful bonus into the small print – God's peace means we are no longer tainted and are able to draw near to Him. That's more than wonderful!

If we are at peace with God, we no longer are set to experience the final judgment. All of that was thrown upon Jesus and so we have the peace that comes from a restored relationship with God. No amount of human work for peace and no number of political treaties can bring such a peace. Jesus gives us a peace that the world can never give – access to His Father by the blood of cross.

This is why we can toss out our troubles and fears (like wrapping paper), why we can re-rack our lives daily by living into the promise of God's peace. Philippians 4:6-7 promises us that if we give our anxiety over to God, He will give us the "peace of God that surpasses all understanding," and this peace will "guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." And if that is not a strong enough image, Colossians 3:15 reminds us that the peace of Jesus can overcome our anxious, selfish, and wayward thoughts as it says, "Let the peace of God rule your hearts..." (emphasis added)

When Jesus came, fulfilling the identity of Isaiah's prophesied Prince of Peace – He displayed Himself as the one with the authority to remove all conflict as a mighty warrior. He showed an even greater power—the power to remove the stain of sin—by paying the penalty for our sin on the cross.

Once we encounter Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, will we still fear the things of the world? Yes... but now we can immediately take our focus off our worldly fear and look again and again to Him who is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). We "cast our cares upon Him" (1 Peter 5:7) and we can live knowing who rules, who guards our peace and who compels us to live peacefully among others. We can display this peace like a beautiful arrangement of Christmas lights set to music!

When we live by this spirit of peace, we will be attractive to a world that is constantly over-worked, over-stressed, and over-worried, so may you demonstrate this peace this Christmas season!

reflection questions

• How easy or hard is it for you to keep everything at peace in your life (at home, work, friendships, etc.)?

• If you are at peace with God because of Jesus, what difference can that make in how you think and act this week?

• How, specifically, can you be a vessel of God's peace to others this Advent season?

scripcure readings

Monday: Colossians 1 Tuesday: John 14 Wednesday: Ephesians 2 Thursday: Philippians 4:4-9, Colossians 3:12-17 Friday: Luke 2



Set aside 15-20 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible. Optional material is a copy of the Jesus Storybook Bible.

lighting of the advent candle

Have one member of the family light the first and second candles.

scripture reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

"And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:3-7

And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world his wonderful gift. The baby that would change the world was born. His baby son. Mary and Joseph wrapped him up to keep him warm. They made a soft bed of straw and used the animals feeding rough as his cradle. And they gazed in wonder at God's Great Gift, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Mary and Joseph named him Jesus, "Emmanuel" which means, "God has come to live with us." Because of course, he had. Jesus Storybook Bible (He's Here!)

scripture reading

Have an adult read the commentary below.

Last week we talked about God's promise to send a Redeemer. He promised to send a Savior to save His people.. There was never any doubt that God would keep His promise!

The waiting was finally over and God fulfilled the promise He had made in the Garden.

Ask: When is the last time you had to wait for something? On a scale of 1-10, how hard was it to wait?

Print the lyrics to the song O Holy Night and play your favorite version. As it is playing, spend time as a family reflecting on the night Jesus was born and why God sent His only Son. Refer to John 3:16

reflection

We just heard a song about the night Jesus was born and how it was holy. Holy means to be set apart or sacred. These are two words that show how incredibly different this night was in the history of the world. As we anticipate Christmas, it is important to remember that without the birth of Christ, we would have nothing to celebrate. God broke into a cold, starry night, to an unsuspecting group of people, in a stable full of animals. Let's think about what that night might have felt like...

Read Luke 2:3-7 again.

Ask: Have you ever been camping or slept outside? What were some of the sounds you remember?

Joseph and Mary had traveled a long way to be counted for the census. They were from Nazareth and had to travel to Bethlehem to be counted. Yet, when they arrived there was no comfy room in a hotel to lay their heads. The best they could find was with the animals. Even though they were set apart from those in the inn, Jesus' birth was just as God had planned. God had told His people that the Savior would be through King David's lineage and that He would be born in Bethlehem. On a cold, starry night, in a stable full of animals, the Son of God, the Savior, was born. We often think of where Jesus was born, but we don't usually think of what He left to be born to His creation. Jesus left the majesty of Heaven, ceaseless angelic praise, setting aside His rights to Divine Glory and joyfully submitting Himself to His Father's authority and commands. He willingly took off His impressive robes and put on the flesh of a helpless baby. He left the Glory of Heaven to be born amongst dirty, smelly animals because of His love for you and for me.

Ask: When you hear about the night that Jesus was born, does it sound like the birth of a King?

The people had other ideas of how they thought their Savior would come even though, God had been giving them hints. They were looking for a mighty, warrior King to come and rescue them from all their enemies. Yet, God had another plan, a better plan, to rescue them from themselves. God fulfilled His promise and Emmanuel, God with us, was born. And changed the world forever. prayer

Say a prayer thanking God for having a better plan and for sending Jesus to save us from our sin.

Ramily activity

DIY Wooden Nativity

Wooden Peg People found at your local craft supply store or online Round Wooden Ball (Optional for animals) Acrylic Paints and assortment of paintbrushes Black Permanent Marker.

Tonight you are going to create a one of a kind family Nativity set which includes Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, the three Wise Men, a Shepherd and an Angel. You can also use round wooden balls to create a sheep and a donkey, which is optional. Depending on the size of your family, you can either create one or have each child make their own. These can be very simple or as elaborate as you want them to be!

Have each person paint the base of each peg person. After it dries, add additional layers or paint accordingly. Use permanent markers to draw on faces. For the optional animals, paint the round ball white and draw on a sheep face. Paint another wooden ball grey and draw on the face.

As you are painting talk about each of the individuals and what they say and how they felt on the night Jesus was born.



"It is said that the blessed rejoice with the joy of Christ, for the stuff in which He rejoices gives us joy as well. He rejoices in Himself, so it follows that those who are able to share in His joy will enjoy the same degree of pleasure." - St. Nicholas Cabasilas

"Happiness is like a thermometer that changes based on the environment around it. Joy is a thermostat we can set that will affect the environment around it. Hold tight to your joy." – Joseph S. Chukwujekwu

> "God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him." – John Piper

No matter where you were raised or how you celebrate the holidays, the season from Thanksgiving to Christmas shares a common denominator: food. Whether it's grandma's epic dessert, your auntie's casserole, spiced lattes, straight chocolate, or other Pinterest creations – when the calendar hits November our palettes anticipate the tastes of the season. We all know that a recipe is only as good as it's ingredients. If our gingerbread men and peppermint lattés are going to taste just right, they've got to be made with the right ingredients.

The theme of the third week of Advent is joy. What would you say are the necessary ingredients for you to experience full joy? As you have sought to find joy this year, what "recipes" have you used? A tablespoon of success, a pinch of extended vacation; two heaping cups of wealth, a dash of approval, a pain free glaze – ten servings of freedom? We spend most of our year designing, testing and creating a recipe for joy, but Advent unleashes us at the end of the year to encounter the one and only unparalleled joy of Jesus.

God desires all of us to have joy. Whether or not we have happiness, God wants us to have joy. Joy is not about simply avoiding depression, or boredom, or sadness. It is something far deeper, far more filling. Joy infuses our lives with meaning, no matter our circumstances. Consider the awesome reality that Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us. When we dwell on this truth, we see there is something greater than these recipes we have cooked up for life – there is something purposeful and worthwhile beyond our current circumstances. We realize lasting joy has less to do with our own recipes and more to do with the one we can encounter at Christmas. Our Savior King.

This is why the angel of Luke 2:10 can speak to the shepherds of the "good news of great joy that will be for all people." He is declaring they will have a fantastic and extensive reason to celebrate and be merry (rejoice). This "great joy" did not come from a dramatic change to their circumstances. They would not have freedom from Rome, their flocks were not tripling, and they were not being recognized by the National Shepherds Association of Israel. No, joy was possible because the anointed Davidic ruler who was prophesied to come was finally here! And that meant all people could have full access to God and His kingdom.

Advent is a time to find joy in Jesus' coming. We can stop fretting over the last year's imperfect recipes and realize that a fullness of life is experienced primarily through our unity with Jesus and his Kingdom. No other recipe of our own invention can match the supreme greatness and blessing of Jesus.

Jesus says in John 15:10 that He desires "My joy to be in you, and that your joy may be full." This is not an isolated promise, for right before this He says: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love." (15:9) Jesus came and desires to fill you up with his joy, but he tells us the recipe is to abide; to dwell in him and his sacrificial love.

Brothers and Sisters, friends and family – no matter how this last year has been, no matter how crazy busy or routine or accomplished it may feel, step back and see full joy comes as we daily surrender into formational encounters with Jesus. As we celebrate his coming, we remember He is the one who give us reason to celebrate. The cooking, preparing, eating, and laughing can all be infused with joy when we remember that the true recipe for joy calls for us to remember this season is a gift from him.

reflection questions

• What causes happiness? If you were to create a "recipe" for your own happiness, what would the ingredients be?

• How, practically, can you allow joy to be your "thermostat" this Christmas season?

• What, specifically, is stealing joy from you? How can focusing on Jesus help you re-capture joy?

scripture read

Monday: Psalm 21 Tuesday: John 15:1-11 Wednesday: Psalm 28 Thursday: Hebrews 12 Friday: Isaiah 12



Set aside 15-20 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible. Optional material is a copy of the Jesus Storybook Bible.

lighting of the advent candle

Have one member of the family light the first, second, and third candles.

scripture reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Luke 2:8-14

Standing in front of them was a huge warrior of light, blazing in the darkness. "Don't be afraid of me!" the bright shining man said. "I haven't come to hurt you. I've come to bring you happy news for everyone everywhere. Today, in David's town, in Bethlehem, God's Son has been born! You can go and see him. He is sleeping in a manger."

Behind the angel they saw a strange glowing cloud-except it wasn't a cloud, it was angels... troops and troops of angels, armed with light! And they were singing a beautiful song: "Glory to God! To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays!"

Jesus Storybook Bible (The Light of the World)

scripture reading

Have an adult read the commentary below.

The overflowing feeling the angels expressed to the shepherds was pure JOY! Those inside joys can't help but come out with smiles, shouts, or

even hoorays! Joy is meant to be shared and is never intended to be contained because we want others to experience joy, as well.

Ask: Can you remember a time when you were so full of joy that you wanted to shout about it? What are some things that bring you joy?

When God sent His son to earth, the angels could not contain their awe for God. They were simply amazed at the birth of Jesus and they responded in praise and adoration. Their joy was so full that the only thing they could do was sing, "Glory to God! May He be Honored!" The angels filled the night sky and chose to declare the birth of the Savior to shepherds tending their flock. At that time, shepherds were not well thought of and people often mocked them, but they are who God chose to receive the first birth announcement of His Son.

Ask: What are some ways you have seen God act that make you want to sing for joy and share it with others?

God cares deeply for us and He created us to be joyful. Joy is how we think, an attitude or a mindset that we choose in all circumstances. We can have joy because we believe the truth of God's Word and that He is for us and with us. Even on hard days, we can still have joy because of our relationship with Jesus. We can be joyful because Jesus died for our sins and offers us the gift of forgiveness! We are forgiven and can have a growing relationship with Jesus. That brings us great joy that we can choose to set our minds on each day. Our joy starts in the person of Jesus, knowing about him, living the way He did and choosing to follow Him always!

Seek Jesus. Love Jesus. Give all your days to Jesus. Show and tell Jesus. This is the journey to joy. YAY!

prayer

Have a family member offer a prayer of joy for all God has done for your family.

Ramily activity

As a family, you will create a family JOY jar. Discuss with your kids that one way to be full of joy is to remember your blessings. Have each person write things they love or enjoy about other family members, ways they see God provide for them, and ways they see Him at work. Place them in the jar. These can be added to and read when you need to be reminded of God's faithfulness and great blessings toward your family throughout the year.



"O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure— The saints' and angels' song." - Frederick M. Lehman, The Love of God is Greater For

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." – 1 John 3:1a

"My deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn it or deserve it." – Brennan Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel

At Christmastime, the extraordinary is hidden in plain sight among the ordinary. You may sit in a coffee shop and sip hot chocolate with a dozen seemingly ordinary conversations happening around you. One of those conversations is an estranged parent and adult child reconciling after months, or even years of discord. That's extraordinary.

You may visit the snow and see a hundred other people participating in ordinary snow activities like sledding, building snowmen, and throwing snowballs. Amidst all of that is a young child seeing and touching snow for the first time. That's extraordinary.

You may gather with extended family and friends to share an ordinary meal. As you do that, relational wounds may be healed and old wrongs may be forgiven. That's extraordinary.

The extraordinary was found among the ordinary at the first Christmas.

There is nothing exceptional about a young man and his wife traveling for a census. There is nothing noteworthy about the young couple finding shelter in a small town along the way. There is nothing earthshattering about a young woman giving birth. But when the one she births in the King of the Universe, that is extraordinary. It's possible that perhaps the story has become ordinary to you. After all, we remember the birth of Jesus every year at this time. You hear about it at church, see it depicted in Christmas specials and school plays, and you are reminded of it in the decorations that fill your home.

But perhaps this year you can see the Christmas story with fresh eyes. Perhaps you can see the story for what it is: a staggering display of God's love for you. That's extraordinary.

The final weekly theme of the Advent season is love, and it comes last for good reason. It is the truth that holds the whole season together. On that night in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, the greatest mission of love the world has ever known commenced. Heaven visited Earth in the person of Jesus Christ, and the Earth has never been the same since. So, whether you have been a believer for decades or you are encountering this story for the first time, we invite you to pause in the midst of the ordinary—the lights, the presents, the shopping, and the parties and consider the extraordinary: 2000 years ago the One who put the stars in their place came to Earth as a baby. And He came to bring the unmistakable message that God loves us, He is with us, and He is for us.

It's a message that is needed today as desperately as it was needed then. Time and technology may change, but the human need for love remains the same. So as we prepare to celebrate Christmas later this week, we invite you to pause are remember what this season means: You are loved by God.



Has familiarity with the Christmas story caused you to no longer see it as extraordinary? What would it look like for you to encounter this story in a fresh way this year?

Spend a few moments today reflecting on God's love for you. Spend some time in prayer thanking Him for His great love infuses our lives with meaning, no matter our circumstances.



Set aside 15-20 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

lighting of the advent candle

Have one member of the family light all four candles.

scripture reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Matthew 2:1-2

They found the baby King. The three men knelt before the little King. They took off their rich royal turbans and gleaming golden crowns. They bowed their noble heads to the ground and gave him their sparkling treasures. The journey that had begun so many centuries before had led three wise men here. To a little town. To a little house. To a little child. To the king God had promised David all those years before. But this child was a new kind of king. Though he was the Prince of Heaven, he had become poor. Though he was the Mighty God, he had become a helpless baby. This King hadn't come to be the boss. He had come to be a servant.

Jesus Storybook Bible (The King of All Kings)

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

Matthew 2:9-11

fection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

First shepherds, then, the Wise Men from a far land! God continues to reveal that the Savior He was sending, His son, Jesus, was not what the Israelites were expecting! The warrior King they were looking for to rescue them from all their enemies came as a baby to a poor, teenage girl, in a stable full of stinky animals, whose first visitors were shepherds, the outcasts of society. On the same night that God unleashed His angel army to declare the birth of His son, He also put a bright star in the sky to do the same. The Wise Men, who spent their nights studying the stars from far away in the land to the east, knew this star was different, just like the Savior whose birth it was declaring. The Israelites, thought their Savior would come and rescue them, but God had bigger plans. His plan all along was to offer His presence and salvation to every tribe and nation. His appearance to the Shepherds and the lengths He went to draw the Magi to Jesus, reveal the heart of God and His amazing mercy and grace to all people.

Ask: When have you expected one thing, but got something totally different?

The Wise Men first went to the palace of Herod to find the new King they had traveled two years to reach. Where else would a new King be? Yet, they did not find Jesus in the palace, or in the stable where he was born so they kept following the star that had brought them so far. They found the toddler King, living with Mary and Joseph, in a small house outside of Bethlehem. What did they do when they saw Jesus? They fell to their knees and in a sacred moment, they worshipped him. The wise men were not Jewish men, but they were led by a star, by God, to find the Messiah. God's desire is that all would know Him, His saving love and His unending grace and forgiveness. And just like the Wise Men, one day, every knee will bow and worship Him.

orayer

Have one family member say a prayer to praise God and pray for the nations to know Him and come to Him for salvation and forgiveness.

Kamily activity

Spend time this week looking at a map or globe. Have each child choose a country. Talk about what life looks like for children in that country or in that specific culture. As a family, take time to pray for the countries your children chose and that many would come to know Jesus for salvation.



Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

lighting of the advent candle

Have one person light the candles from the first four weeks, remembering together what you've learned about God's faithfulness during Advent. After reading Luke 2:1-20, have another person light the fifth candle—the Christ candle.

scripture reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." Luke 1:1-20

prayer

Have one person pray, thanking God for His incredible faithfulness in sending Jesus to save His people from their sins.



The hope and goal for believing parents in raising their children is to point them to the gospel of Jesus continually in hopes that God will save them. This can seem like an overwhelming task at times. Where do we start? What do we do? How do we point our children to Jesus in the everyday rhythm of life?

To help answer these questions, we ask parents to consider three areas of life as they think about family discipleship: time, moments and milestones.

TIME – Create intentional time in the rhythm of your family's life to think about, talk about and live out the gospel.

MOMENTS – Capture and leverage moments in the course of everyday life for the purpose of gospel-centered conversations.

MILESTONES – Recognize and remember significant spiritual milestones of God's work in the life of your family.

In an effort to help families focus on time, moments, and milestones during the Advent season, we have given additional activities in each of these areas.

Activities to help you create intentional time:

- Make a set of Christmas ornaments to remind you of the prophecies of Jesus' birth and their fulfillments.
- Spend time imagining what the "glory of the Lord" shining down on the shepherds was like. Draw what you think it looked like. Or turn off the lights and recreate it with flashlights, candles, props, and loud singing.
- Make a Christmas card for someone who does not love and trust Jesus. Wish them a merry Christmas and tell them that Jesus came to save sinners!
- Consider a way your family can serve in the community during the Advent season. Here are a few ideas:
 - Adopting an angel and shopping for them together.
 - Visiting an elderly care center and singing carols for the residents.
 - Serving a meal at a homeless assistance shelter.
 - Taking dinner to someone you know who is lonely or in need.

- Create luminaries for your front yard, sidewalk or porch to remind your family of the star God put in the sky to tell the Magi of Jesus' birth. Take paper lunch bags and draw or punch out a star on each bag. Fill the bottom of the bags with sand to keep them from blowing away. Place a battery-operated candle inside.
- Play hide-and-seek and talk about how Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Thank God for sending Jesus.

Ideas for capturing teachable moments:

- Give hints about Christmas gifts that your children will be receiving to build anticipation in their hearts. Remind them of the "hints" God gives us in Scripture of what Jesus' birth and second coming will be like. There is no greater gift than loving and trusting Jesus!
- Have a kid-friendly nativity set for your children to play with. As they play, retell the Christmas narrative.
- As you're out shopping, look for opportunities to remind your children that all material things are temporary and will ultimately never satisfy them. The only lasting hope is Jesus.
- When you see Christmas lights, talk about which lights and houses are your favorites and why. We are attracted to lights because we are made for the light. Talk with your children about how these lights remind us of Jesus, the best and perfect Light of the World.
- If carolers come to your house, remind your children of the angels who appeared to the shepherds proclaiming the Good News of Jesus' birth.

Ways to recognize and remember milestones:

Milestones are significant moments in the life of a family. Not every family will have a milestone to remember this Advent season. If your family does, take time to recognize the work that God is doing in your family and worship Him.

> • Celebrating a new family member – If another person joined your family this year, there is much to celebrate. Families grow through the birth or adoption of a child, marriage or taking in a person who needs love and support. Often, when a new person joins a family, they do not have many Christmas ornaments to add to the family tree. Make or purchase a special ornament

for your new family member to recognize and remember God's goodness to bring you together.

• First Christmas without a family member – Celebrating can be hard when your family is grieving the loss of a loved one. Take time to help your child remember and talk about that special person if they need to. Help them to remember the good times and memories they have about that person. If your loved one was a believer, talk about the beautiful reality that they are now with Jesus. Hang an ornament or put out a special decoration that reminds your family of that person. Be honest with God about your sadness and ask Him to make your hearts joyful again.

APPENDIX B additional scriptures for study and reflection

Advent is about Christ and His two comings—the first in humiliation, the second in glory; the first in condescension, the second in exaltation; the first for forgiveness, the second for judgment. The passages below speak to the person and work of Jesus in His first coming and the promise of His second. May the Lord strengthen, encourage, awaken and restore us as we behold Him in His Word.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. Isaiah 11:1-5

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. Matthew 1:18-25

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-5; 14

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. **Colossians 1:15–22**

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1–11

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. **Hebrews 1:1–4**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:1-5

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Revelation 22:17

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! **Revelation 22:20**

