

# **FAMILY** **DEVOTIONAL**



## **Advent Year A**

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## **ADVENT – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?:**

The four weeks before Christmas mark the season of Advent, from a Latin word for “coming” or “arrival.” We are preparing to celebrate the arrival of God himself, who became man in the form of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The church has observed a season of preparation before Christmas since the time of Bishop Perpetuus of Tours in 490 C.E.

The themes of Advent include hope, darkness/light, repentance, watchfulness, preparation, expectation of Christ’s birth at Christmas, & the anticipation of his coming again.

The colors of the season is blue or in some instances, purple. Blue suggests hope. Purple is an older tradition that represents royalty and the coming of a king.

## **ADVENT AT HOME:**

The month of December is a busy time. These four weeks are filled with church services, concerts, parties, cleaning, decorating, etc. It can be exhausting and frustrating, but it’s exciting too!

I encourage you all to spend time as a family, in Advent, reflecting and preparing. This devotional resource is intended to give you tools to have family devotions around an Advent Wreath. If you don’t have an Advent wreath, 5 pillar candles (one for each week and one for Christmas) will work as well.

Although there is a devotion for each day, don’t worry if you are unable to come together as a family every single day of Advent. Even once a week is a wonderful recognition of the season and will help prepare your family. The Sunday devotions are slightly longer so this would be a good option for weekly rather than nightly devotions. The weekly devotion is the same each night. As we steep in the Word, through repetition we often hear new things and the stories are written differently and more deeply on our hearts.

Devotions are one way to reinforce Advent at home. Some additional ways to incorporate Advent into your home life are:

- \* **Caring Conversations:** While decorating your house and tree, discuss that decorating is part of our preparation and anticipation of Christ’s coming.
- \* **Service:** Find time to serve others and discuss Christ’s service to us. (Ring bells for Salvation Army; volunteer at a food bank or soup kitchen; donate old toys to Goodwill or a Domestic Violence Shelter.)
- \* **Rituals & Traditions:** We all have rituals and traditions surrounding the season. (Baking goodies; decorating; Christmas Caroling; etc...) Keep doing what you have always done! Discuss WHY you do it... where it came from... who started it.

## **THE ORIGINS OF THE ADVENT WREATH:**

The origins of the Advent wreath are found in the folk practices of the pre-Christian Germanic peoples who, during the cold December darkness of Eastern Europe, gathered wreaths of evergreen and lighted fires as signs of hope in a coming spring and renewed light.

Christians kept these popular traditions alive, and by the 16th century Catholics and Protestants throughout Germany used these symbols to celebrate their Advent hope in Christ, the everlasting Light. From Germany, the use of the Advent wreath spread to other parts of the Christian world. Traditionally, the wreath is made of four candles in a circle of evergreens. Three candles are violet or blue and the fourth is rose or purple, but four white candles or four violet candles can also be used. Each day at home, the candles are lighted, perhaps before the evening meal-- one candle the first week, and then another each succeeding week until December 25th.

## **FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Gracious God, as our nights grow longer and our days grow short, we look on these earthly signs – light and green branches—and remember God’s promise to our world: Christ, our Light and our Hope, will come bringing peace and spreading love. We know not when he will come; give us strength to wait and hope, knowing that the time is near. Keep us alert and vigilant. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

### **Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:**

In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth instructions and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

*Families with small children – Instead of the words above, read “God will Bring Peace” (Pg. 164) in the Spark Story Bible OR in your favorite story Bible.*

### **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first candle:*

O God, rejoicing, we remember the promise of your Son. As the light from this candle, may the blessing of Christ come upon us, brightening our way and guiding us by his truth. May Christ our Savior bring life into the darkness of our world, and to us, as we wait for his coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel Reading:**

Read Matthew 24: 36-44 OR “Noah’s Ark” in the Spark Story Bible (or a similar story in your favorite story Bible) *Families with smaller children – you may want to reference the Matthew 24 passage in regards to not knowing when Christ will return.*

### **Discuss:**

- Who knows when Christ will return? Do Angels? Do People? Does Jesus?
- The Gospel talks about Noah and his family listening and following God’s instructions. Is it sometimes hard to focus and listen to God? Why?
- How can we prepare ourselves for Christ’s coming?

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, we cling to the promise of Christ’s return with joy and anticipation. We know not when that day will be. Guide us as we listen to your call, empower us to share your love with others, and nurture us as we prepare the way for his return. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, the time is drawing near, spread peace throughout the world, be patient and wait.

# **ADVENT WEEK 1:**

## **Opening Prayer:**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection save us from the threatening dangers of our sins, and enlighten our walk in the way of your salvation. We light one candle and pray for peace and patience as we anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ, born to set us free. Shine your light upon us with the promise of everlasting life. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

## **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first candle:*

O Emmanuel, Jesus Christ, desire of every nation, Savior of all peoples, come and dwell among us. Amen.

## **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

## **Gospel Reading:**

Read Matthew 24: 36-44 OR "Noah's Ark" in the Spark Story Bible (or a similar story in your favorite story Bible) *Families with smaller children – you may want to reference the Matthew 24 passage in regards to not knowing when Christ will return.*

## **Activity:**

Create a Bible Verse Advent Chain. (See Appendix A for instructions and templates.) Tear off one link each day and read the Bible verse for the day.

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, you provide good and gracious gifts to us as signs of your redeeming love and of your imminent coming. Help us to share these gifts with others and to receive them with a grateful heart. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, the time is drawing near, spread peace throughout the world, be patient and wait.



## **SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Gracious God, as our journey continues, we look to these greens and candles as signs to us that life and light are coming. We listen for the voice crying out from the wilderness. We look to prepare the way of the Lord. Give us patience and fill us with peace as we prepare for your coming. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

### **Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:**

“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; 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 around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, the child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples the nations shall inquire of him and his dwelling shall be glorious.”

*Families with small children – Instead of the words above, read “God’s Peaceful World” (Pg. 172) in the Spark Story Bible OR in your favorite story Bible.*

### **Candle Lighting:**

Speak these words while lighting the first & second candles:

O God, rejoicing, we remember the promise of your Son. As we light these candles, may we become blessings to one another. Make us your messengers and peacemakers. Use our voices. Guide our way. Let us be the ones crying out as we prepare the way of the Lord. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel:**

Matthew 3: 1-12 OR “John the Baptist” in the Spark Story Bible (or in your favorite story Bible)

### **Discuss:**

- How did John the Baptist “prepare the way” for Jesus?
- In the Gospel, John tells people to repent and quit sinning. What sins do we commit? Is it easy or hard to not sin? Why?
- How can we help prepare the way for Christ’s coming? How can we be God’s messengers?

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, help us to repent. Bless those in our lives who are some of your messengers to us: our Bishops, Pastors, and Youth Leaders. Make us your messengers also. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, listen for his message, hear the voice crying out, prepare the way of the Lord.

## **ADVENT WEEK 2:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming nurture our growth as people of repentance and peace. We light two candles and as their flames flicker, so too our souls tremble with the good news that has been foretold by your messengers. Open our ears to hear your word. Give us a voice to share what we hear. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

### **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first & second candles:*

O King of all nations, Jesus Christ, only joy of every heart, come and save your people. Amen.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel:**

Matthew 3:1-12 OR “John the Baptist” in the Spark Story Bible (or in your favorite story Bible)

### **Activity:**

Option 1: Send a message or prayer to a family member or friend telling them of Christ’s coming. Write a letter or card, send an email, a text message, etc...

Option 2: Make handmade Christmas Cards and send them to an elderly or “home-bound” member of your congregation.

**Don’t forget to remove a link each day from your advent chain!**

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, help us to repent. Bless those in our lives who are your messengers to us: our Bishops, Pastors, and Youth Leaders. Make us your messengers also. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, listen for his message, hear the voice crying out, prepare the way of the Lord.



## **THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Gracious God, as we draw closer and closer to your coming, these candles and branches remind us of the frailty of life. The branches grow dry and brittle. Strengthen our will to act as your messengers and peacemakers. Inspire our faith, and transform us through your grace. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

### **Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:**

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. “A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

*Families with small children – Instead of the words above, read “A Good Ruler” (Pg. 178) in the Spark Story Bible OR in your favorite story Bible.*

### **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first, second, & third candles:*

O God, rejoicing, we remember the promise of your Son. As we light these candles, we are reminded of the constant renewal of our faith. You came to teach, to heal, to spread peace, and to inspire. You are the potter, we are the clay. Make us vessels of your loving grace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel:**

Matthew 11:2-11 OR “Jesus Heals” in the Spark Story Bible (or in your favorite story Bible)

### **Discuss:**

- John wanted to know for sure, without a doubt, that Jesus was in fact The Messiah. Jesus reminded John of all the miracles he had performed, therefore fulfilling scripture as it was foretold by Isaiah, bringing about the kingdom of God. Would someone performing miracles make it easy or hard for you to believe in God’s kingdom? Why?
- If you could bring one person to Jesus to receive a miracle who would you bring? Why?
- What do you find most challenging when it comes to faith?

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, help us to rejoice in the knowledge that you are loving and caring. Thank you for your healing presence in the world. Strengthen and empower us to reach out a caring and healing hand to others. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, faithful believer, anticipate Christ’s coming. He is near!



## **ADVENT WEEK 3:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Stir up the wills of all who look to you, Lord God, and strengthen our faith in your coming, that transformed by grace, we may walk in your ways. We light three candles knowing that your son's birth is near. Inspire our faith with your healing presence, that we may become blessings to others. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

### **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first, second, & third candle:*

O Key of David, Jesus Christ, the gates of heaven open at your command, come and show us your mercy.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel:**

Matthew 11:2-11 OR "Jesus Heals" in the Spark Story Bible (or in your favorite story Bible)

### **Activity:**

Play Holiday "Would You Rather" as a family. (See Appendix B)

Don't forget to remove a link each day from your advent chain!

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, help us to rejoice in the knowledge that you are loving and caring. Thank you for your healing presence in the world. Strengthen and empower us to reach out a caring and healing hand to others. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, faithful believer, anticipate Christ's coming. He is near!



## **FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Gracious God, as we feel your imminent presence, the light and greens encourage us and excite us. We give thanks for all of the Angels and Messengers in our lives. Help us serve others this season and to always be humble and grateful. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

### **Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:**

“Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.”

*Families with small children – Instead of the words above, read “A Child Called Immanuel” (Pg. 168) in the Spark Story Bible OR in your favorite story Bible.*

### **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first, second, third, & fourth candles:*

O God, rejoicing, we remember the promise of your Son. As we light these candles, we magnify and praise your name. Our spirits rejoice in knowing that you are near. You send forth your Angels, Messengers, and Servants. Make us your servants and strengthen us to reach out to those in need. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel:**

Matthew 1: 18-25 OR “Angels Visit” in the Spark Story Bible (or in your favorite story Bible)

### **Discuss:**

- How would you feel if an Angel visited you? Why?
- Mary and Joseph were both servants of the Lord. How are we called to be God’s servants?
- In what ways can we be servants or angels to others?

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, we, like your angels and servants, honor and magnify your holy name. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, equip us, and make us your servants. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, holy servant, little angel, go out and show the world that his coming is upon us.

## **ADVENT WEEK 4:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith. As we light four candles we eagerly anticipate receiving your promises, of peace, mercy, and grace. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

### **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first, second, third, & fourth candles:*

O Key of David, Jesus Christ, the gates of heaven open at your command, come and show us your mercy.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel:**

Matthew 1: 18-25 OR “Angels Visit” in the Spark Story Bible (or in your favorite story Bible)

### **Activity:**

Option 1: Bake Christmas goodies and take them to a friend, relative, or church member who could use a visit from an Angel (aka – YOU!)

Option 2: If you live where there is snow, go outside and make snow angels. Take pictures and share them with friends and family.

**Don't forget to remove a link each day from your advent chain!**

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, we, like your angels and servants, honor and magnify your holy name. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, equip us, and make us your servants. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, holy servant, little angel, go out and show the world that his coming is upon us.



## **CHRISTMAS EVE:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Gracious God, as our journey reaches its culmination, the beauty of these lighted candles surrounded by greens reminds us that there is always light to be found in darkness. Christ our light and our hope, has come! Let our lights shine bright, always in honor of you. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

### **Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

### **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first, second, third, & fourth candles:*

O Wisdom, holy Word of God, Jesus Christ, all things are in your hands, come and show us the way to salvation.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel:**

Luke 2: 1-20 OR “Jesus is Born” in the Spark Story Bible (or a similar story in your favorite story Bible)

### **Activity:**

Enjoy Christmas Eve with your family and friends!

Don't forget to remove a link each day from your advent chain!

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, you came into the world, not to condemn the world, but to redeem the world. We celebrate your coming just as the Angels, Shepherds, and townspeople of Bethlehem celebrated your coming so long ago. Glory to you in the highest and peace to our brothers and sisters on earth! Show us the way to proclaim your birth! In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, Christ is with us, go proclaim his birth!

## **CHRISTMAS DAY:**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Gracious God, as we gaze upon this light, we are reminded that you sent your son on this day to bring light to all peoples. You are the light in the darkness. The beauty of these lighted candles surrounded by greens reminds us that there is always light to be found in darkness. Christ, our light and our hope, has come. Let our lights shine bright, always in honor of you. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

### **Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:**

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, **who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”** Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

### **Candle Lighting:**

*Speak these words while lighting the first, second, third, & fourth candles:*

O Wisdom, holy Word of God, Jesus Christ, all things are in your hands, come and show us the way to salvation.

### **Highs & Lows:**

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

### **Gospel:**

John 1: 1-14 OR “Jesus the Word” in the Spark Story Bible (or a similar story in your favorite story Bible)

### **Activity:**

Enjoy Christmas Day with your family and friends!

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, you came into the world, were made human in flesh and bones. You lived among us and showed us your glory, full of grace and truth. Today we celebrate your birth and rejoice in your coming. We look forward to your return with grateful anticipation. Protect us, guide us, give us patience, and hope. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

**Bless:** Child of God, Christ is with us, proclaim his birth and spread his word!

# **APPENDIX A:**

## **ADVENT CHAIN**

Print the sheets below on colored paper. Cut out each Bible verse and create an interlocking chain with the Bible verse strips. Make sure the dates are in ascending order.



Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> — John 1: 1-5

Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup> — Isaiah 11: 1-10

Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> — Luke 1: 5-10

Dec. 7<sup>th</sup> — Luke 1: 18-25

Dec. 9<sup>th</sup> – Matthew 1: 18–21

Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> – Luke 1: 39–45

Dec. 13<sup>th</sup> – Luke 2: 1–5

Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> – Luke 2: 8–12



Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> – Luke 2: 15–18

Dec. 19<sup>th</sup> – Micah 5: 2–5

Dec. 21<sup>st</sup> – Matthew 2: 3–6

Dec. 23<sup>rd</sup> – Matthew 2: 9–12

Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup> – Isaiah 9: 2–7

Dec. 4<sup>th</sup> – Jeremiah 33: 14–16

Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> – Luke 1: 11–17

Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> – Luke 1: 26–38

Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> — Matthew 1: 18 — 21

Dec. 12<sup>th</sup> — Luke 1: 46—56

Dec. 14<sup>th</sup> — Luke 2: 6—7

Dec. 16<sup>th</sup> — Luke 2: 13—14

Dec. 18<sup>th</sup> – Luke 2: 19–20

Dec. 20<sup>th</sup> – Matthew 2: 1–2

Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup> – Matthew 2: 7–8

Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> – John 1: 14

# **APPENDIX B:**

## **WOULD YOU RATHER...**

have to loudly sing the chorus of Jingle Bells every time you walk into a room for a week	or have to wear a Santa suit to school every day for a week
be present for Jesus' birth	or be present for Jesus' ministry
make presents for your family instead of buying them	or make ornaments for your Christmas tree instead of buying them
be visited by an angel	or be visited by shepherds
have a snowy Christmas	or have Christmas on the beach
have a live Christmas Tree	or an artificial Christmas Tree
give	or receive
spend Christmas at home	or travel to be with family
have no one be homeless	or have no one go hungry again
ride in a one horse sleigh	or a bobsled
see no more disease	or no more poverty
be a Wise Man	or a Shepherd
visit the North Pole	or visit Bethlehem
receive socks for Christmas	or receive a dictionary for Christmas
be given \$100 for Christmas to buy things for yourself	or be given \$1000 before Christmas to use to buy gifts for other people
go caroling	or put up Christmas decorations
be Mary	or Elizabeth
see <i>the Nut Cracker</i>	or dance in <i>the Nut Cracker</i>
spend a day watching Christmas videos	or spend a day Christmas shopping at the mall
give someone something they really want	or something they really need
be God's messenger	or God's witness