

FAMILY

DEVOTIONAL



Advent Year B

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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 Godself, who became human 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:

Holy 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 with great power and glory. We know not when he will come; give us strength to keep awake and hope as we wait, knowing that the time is near. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence. When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence, from ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. ... O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter.

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:

Rejoicing we remember your promise, O Christ. Like the light from this candle, may your blessing come upon us, brightening our way and guiding us by your truth. Christ our Savior bring life into the darkness of our world, and to us, as we wait for your coming.

Highs & Lows:

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

Gospel Reading:

Read Mark 13: 24 – 37 OR “Be Ready” Pg. 346 in the Spark Story Bible (or a similar story in your favorite story Bible).

Discuss:

- Who knows when Christ will return?
- What does it mean when the Gospel tells us to ‘Keep Awake?’
- How can we prepare ourselves for Christ’s coming?

Pray: Gracious Redeemer, we cling to the promise of Christ’s return with joy and anticipation. We know not when that day will be. Help us to keep awake. Guide us as we listen to your call. Empower us to share your love with others. 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, keep awake, be patient and wait.

ADVENT WEEK 1:

Opening Prayer:

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection waken us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of your new day. 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.

Highs & Lows:

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

Gospel Reading:

Read Mark 13: 24 – 37 OR “Be Ready” Pg. 346 in the Spark Story Bible (or a similar story in your favorite story Bible).

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: Gracious Redeemer, you strengthen us with good and gracious gifts and with your redeeming love. Help us to keep awake as we await your imminent coming. Help us to share these gifts with others and to receive them with a grateful heart. Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Bless: Child of God, the time is drawing near, keep awake, be patient and wait.



SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT:

Opening Prayer:

Holy 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 as we keep awake and as we prepare for your coming. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’ A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of Good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’ See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

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 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 to the world. Use our voices. Guide our way. Let us be the ones crying out as we prepare the way of the Lord.

Highs & Lows:

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

Gospel:

Mark 1: 1-8 OR “John the Baptist” (Pg. 234) 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 proclaims that “one who is more powerful than I is coming after me.” Who is John talking about?
- How can we help prepare the way for Christ’s coming? How can we be God’s messengers?

Pray: Gracious Redeemer, help us to repent and prepare for Christ’s coming. Bless those in our lives who your messengers to us: our Bishops, Pastors, Youth Ministers, & Church Leaders. Make us your messengers also. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Bless: Child of God, listen for God’s message, hear the voice crying out, and 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 strengthen us to serve you with purified lives. 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.

Highs & Lows:

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

Gospel:

Mark 1: 1-8 OR “John the Baptist” (Pg. 234) 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 your Pastor, Youth Minister, or other Church Leader thanking them for being a “Messenger” in your life.

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

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

Bless: Child of God, listen for God’s message, hear the voice crying out, and prepare the way of the Lord.



THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT:

Opening Prayer:

Holy 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 remain vigilant. Grant us patience and guidance as we keep awake and await your coming. Inspire our faith, and transform us through your grace. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their decedents shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Families with small children – Instead of the words above, read “Isaiah’s Call” (Pg. 166) 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.

Highs & Lows:

Share the best and worst parts of your day.

Gospel:

John 1: 6-8; 19-28 OR “John the Baptist” (Pg. 234) in the Spark Story Bible (or in your favorite story Bible) – No, that’s not a mistake. We get two weeks of John the Baptist this Liturgical Year!

Discuss:

- The Gospel tells us that John came to testify to the light, but he himself was not the light. What or who is the light?
- Would you have wanted John to baptize you? Why or why not?
- Both the reading from Isaiah and the Gospel speak of delivering God’s messages. What message do you think God is calling you to deliver? How can you do this?

Pray: Gracious Redeemer, you enable and equip all of your messengers. Thank you for sending them to us. Strengthen and empower us to listen and spread the message to others. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Bless: Child of God, deliver God’s message, anticipate Christ’s coming. He is near!

ADVENT WEEK 3:

Opening Prayer:

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light. We light three candles knowing that your son's birth is near. Empower our voices that we may become your messengers proclaiming your good news. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Candle Lighting:

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

○ 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:

John 1: 6-8; 19-28 OR "John the Baptist" (Pg. 234) in the Spark Story Bible (or in your favorite story Bible) – No, that's not a mistake. We get two weeks of John the Baptist this Liturgical Year!

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: Gracious Redeemer, you enable and equip all of your messengers. Thank you for sending them to us. Strengthen and empower us to listen and spread the message to others. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Bless: Child of God, deliver God's message, anticipate Christ's coming. He is near!



FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT:

Opening Prayer:

Holy 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 2nd Samuel:

Read 2nd Samuel Chapter 7 verses 1-11; 16

Families with small children – Instead of 2nd Samuel, 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, & 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:

Luke 1: 26-38 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: Gracious Redeemer, 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 Christ’s 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 would obstruct your mercy, that willing we may bear your redeeming love to all the world. 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:

Luke 1: 26-38 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: Gracious Redeemer, 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 Christ's coming is upon us.



CHRISTMAS EVE:

Opening Prayer:

Holy 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: Gracious Redeemer, 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:

Holy 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: Gracious Redeemer, 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 God’s 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. 1st - John 1: 1-5

Dec. 3rd - Isaiah 11: 1-10

Dec. 5th - Luke 1: 5-10

Dec. 7th - Luke 1: 18-25

Dec. 9th - Matthew 1: 18-21

Dec. 11th - Luke 1: 39-45

Dec. 13th - Luke 2: 1-5

Dec. 15th - Luke 2: 8-12

Dec. 17th - Luke 2: 15-18

Dec. 19th - Micah 5: 2-5

Dec. 21st - Matthew 2: 3-6

Dec. 23rd - Matthew 2: 9-12

Dec. 2nd – Isaiah 9: 2-7

Dec. 4th-Jeremiah 33: 14-16

Dec. 6th - Luke 1: 11-17

Dec. 8th - Luke 1: 26-38

Dec. 10th – Matthew 1: 18 - 21

Dec. 12th – Luke 1: 46-56

Dec. 14th - Luke 2: 6-7

Dec. 16th - Luke 2: 13-14

Dec. 18th - Luke 2: 19-20

Dec. 20th - Matthew 2: 1-2

Dec. 22nd - Matthew 2: 7-8

Dec. 24th - 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 *the Nut Cracker* or dance in *the Nut Cracker*

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

- **Weekly and Daily Texts based on the Revised Common Lectionary.**
- **Included scripture taken from the New Revised Standard Translation of the Bible.**
- **Portions of the weekday opening prayers were taken from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's worship resources website.**