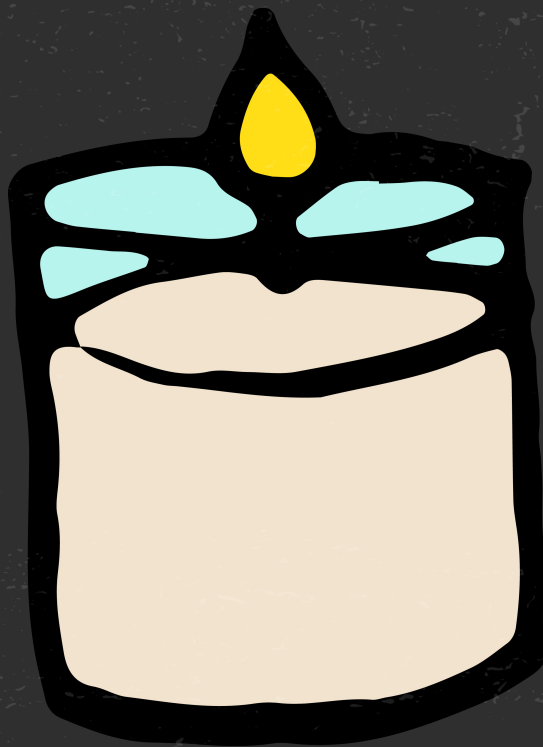


Advent Guide



WAITING IN WONDER

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ad·vent

/ˈædˌvent/

noun

The arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.

The first season of the Christian church year, leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays.

synonyms

arrival, appearance, emergence, materialization, occurrence, dawn,
birth, rise, development

WHY SHOULD WE CELEBRATE ADVENT?

In a season that is busy with shopping, family, meals, decorating, and traveling, we often forget what all the busyness is about—or at least what it should be about. Observing the season of Advent is a way to interrupt the busyness and re-orient our hearts and minds toward the arrival of Jesus. Advent expands the Christmas celebration to include the four weeks prior to it. In doing so, our observance becomes a practice that can help aim our wandering hearts and quiet our busy souls as we reflect on the Christmas story.

Advent helps us remember and dwell on what God has done for us in sending Christ. It's also a way for us to link arms with the generations that have gone before us, and experience their same anticipation as they eagerly awaited the coming Messiah who would take away the sin of the world. Lastly, it helps us to long and pray for the return of Jesus and his establishment of the New Heaven and the New Earth. This will be our eternal dwelling place, filled with peace and light beyond imagination.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Our hope is that this guide will be a tool that helps you carve out some intentional time with God, friends, and family throughout the Christmas season. Each week includes a passage of scripture, a devotional, reflection questions, a prayer, songs, and activities. Before you get too busy, pick a day, time, and place that you can carve out 30 to 60 minutes to engage with the content each week leading up to Christmas. Invite a friend or neighbor to join you and talk through what you are learning. If you have children, consider making this a special weekly activity to build anticipation toward Christmas.

ADVENT WREATH HOW-TO GUIDE:

- 1) Gather four candles of your choice (any kind will do).
- 2) Place them in a line or circle on a surface that won't be damaged by wax.
- 3) Optional: Spruce it up with some holly, ribbon, or winter greenery.

Light a candle each week during your time of reflection. Each week is meant to build toward the next, until all four candles are lit during your Advent reflection time. Parents, kids love lighting the candles! Help them understand anticipation, excitement, joy, and longing as they light each candle.



Week 1

Light the First Candle
Read Isaiah 11:1-10
Read the Devotional
Reflect

Imagine living in a divided country, once united under godly leadership but now fractured by greed, pride, and violence. The threat of war ever present, and a fearful people cry out to God for help. What does God have that these people need most? Hope.

This was the situation in Judah around 721 B.C. when the northern kingdom of Israel had just been conquered by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah had an evil king named Ahaz, who betrayed his fellow Jews by aligning with Assyria. In desperation, he desecrated the temple and worshipped other gods, attempting to maintain his power at any cost.

In the midst of this turmoil, God's people cried out for help—and God heard them. Isaiah 7-11 interweaves the depiction of Ahaz's abomination with God's promises of deliverance, culminating in this famous verse:

"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." - Isaiah 9:6

Have you ever noticed how grass sometimes grows in unexpected places? Through cracks in sidewalks or in the ruins of old buildings: life emerges from God's nature. When Isaiah wrote, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse," the people were facing dark times. The once-mighty family tree of David had been cut down to a stump. Their kingdom was failing, their future uncertain. But God saw something different—He saw a future with abundant life where others saw death.

This is where hope takes root. Isaiah paints a picture of new life emerging from what appears lifeless—a tender shoot from an old stump. This wasn't just poetic imagery; it was a prophecy that would find its fulfillment in Jesus, a descendant of Jesse born in humility. Where both Assyria and King

Ahaz ruled with cruelty and lust for power, Jesus would rule with wisdom and understanding. Here, the LORD promises to "give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited." Jesus is promised to be "a banner of salvation to all the world."

Think about your own life for a moment. Where are the "stumps" – those places that seem lifeless—perhaps relationships that feel beyond repair? The beauty of Advent is that it reminds us: God specializes in bringing life from death, hope from despair, beginnings from endings.

The prophecy culminates in an extraordinary vision of peace: wolves living with lambs, leopards lying down with goats, a little child leading them all. This isn't just a peaceful nature scene – it's a radical picture of God's restorative plans for the earth. This hope is made possible because God came as one of us, understanding our pain and loss, taking on our sin in His own body on the cross, even dying for us.

For those who've heard this story countless times before, pause and let this message of hope freshly sink in: God chose to enter our world not as a mighty tree, but as a tender shoot. Not in a palace, but in a manger. Not through power, but through servanthood.

This season, pause to marvel at God's unstoppable plan of redemption. What looked like a dead stump to the world became the very place God chose to bring forth our Savior. As we commune with Him in prayer and worship, we participate in His unfolding story of hope. What began as a tender shoot has become our mighty Hope. And in Christ, hope is still unfolding.

REFLECT

What practices do you need to pause or stop in this season that lead you to feelings of hopelessness and despair? What practices do you need to begin in order to cultivate your hope in Christ?

What initially drew you to embrace the truth of the gospel for yourself? Who do you know in your life who needs the hope of Christ this Christmas? How can you share the hope you have with them?

PRAYER

God of all Hope, help me to lift my gaze, my attention, my affections from all that draws me away from you and to see with new eyes the hope and life found in Jesus. Holy Spirit, help me place my trust, hope, and security in Christ above all else. As I receive your hope, help me to share it with those who have none.

ACTIVITY

Plan to go look at Christmas lights or see a Christmas performance one evening this week with your friends, your spouse, or your family. Use that time to consider what hopes you have for this Christmas season. Ask your friends or family the same question.

Luminance

Mitch Park, 1501 W Covell Rd, Edmond, OK 73003

5pm - 10pm Daily

Christmas in the Park

Chisholm Trail Park, 2200 S Holly Ave, Yukon, OK 73099

6pm - 11pm Daily

Waiting in hope-filled wonder.

SONGS FOR ADVENT

This list of songs has been curated specifically to help you reflect on the story of the birth of Christ. The QR code below links to a playlist of the songs on Spotify. As you listen, reflect on the words and the story being told. You may even find yourself singing along.

Angels We Have Heard on High

Joy to the World

A Light

John 1:14

Away in a Manger

Little Drummer Boy

Come and Stand Amazed

O Come O Come Emmanuel

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Oh Light

Come to Us O Lord

Silent Night

Go Tell it on a Mountain

The Earth Stood Still

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

The First Noel

Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring

Who Kept the Sheep

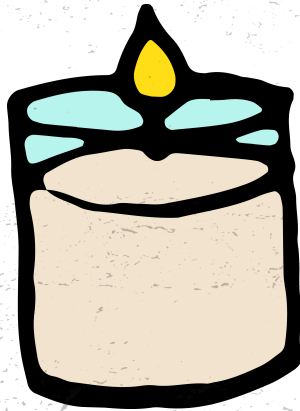


REFLECT

How do you make Christmas music a part of your weekly or daily worship?

When and where do you listen, reflect, sing?

Peace



Week 2

Light the Second Candle
Read Luke 2:1-20
Read the Devotional
Reflect

Have you ever considered the significance of the news of Jesus' birth coming in the watch of night? Most of us are familiar with the story of Jesus' birth. We learned about it in Sunday school or through our various Christmas traditions. We have that version of the manger scene scribed into our minds. You know the one. The barn-like shelter, animals, hay, and all figures huddled around a baby in a makeshift crib. Whatever your experience and memories are around the story of the birth of Christ, let's take a fresh look at this one aspect: his birth came in the watch of the night, and the news first spread in the darkest part of the night.

Joseph and a pregnant Mary are journeying back to their downtrodden hometown to be counted in a local census. They didn't have a home or a hospital waiting for them. There was no cozy Airbnb booked for their stay. As they arrive, Mary goes into labor! We must imagine this was not how Joseph and Mary planned their birth. It's hard enough to travel such distance on foot and donkey, not to have a place secured when they arrive, but then to go into labor? Can you even imagine? I don't know about you, but this sounds so far from "peace on earth" to my ducks-in-a-row approach to travel, much less bringing a baby into the world.

This story mentions another group: a rag-tag group of shepherds who scratched together a living doing the worst work of their day. We aren't told whether they enjoy their work as shepherds, but we know that in 1st-century Jewish culture, there weren't many other jobs this low on the totem pole.

They are likely just getting by the best way they can... and thank God, there is a group to share the night watches with so that no one person has to stay up all night making sure one of the flock didn't get picked off by thieves. During one of these night shifts, the cosmos broke loose with the news.

The angles appeared and thunderously spoke:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" - Luke 2:14

This passage describes two indescribably intense and personal encounters. Jesus was born into this world, and his first cry pierced the peace of night. The angels cried, "Glory to God in the highest," proclaiming peace in the darkness to a group of camping shepherds.

Peace came into the world, crying as an infant in a stable and thundering through angelic proclamation in the shepherd's fields. These two scenes are a bit chaotic. They are messy. They happen when everyone should be asleep and resting in the peace of night.

But doesn't this sound just like God?—to break into lives when least expected? To offer encouragement in the midst of the impossible? To spark joy in the lowest of places? To bring peace to all mankind? Yes, this is the heart of God! To bring peace on earth and not just to those well off in their stature, but to the lowest, the loneliest, the burdened, and the outcast.

This, this, is Christ the King
Whom shepherds watch, and Angels sing.

Hark the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled"

REFLECT

How do less-than-ideal circumstances of Jesus' birth story give you hope for internal peace even in a world of external chaos?

What present circumstances are causing you to feel anxious, distracted, or like life is out of control? What would it look like to bring these things before God in prayer and to trust that he is with you in the midst of your circumstances?

PRAYER

God of perfect peace, help me to trust you in the middle of the chaos. Give me ears to hear and eyes to see your provision in every circumstance. Father, I lay my fears, anxieties, distractedness before you and ask that you would help me to trust you in any and every circumstance and that your perfect peace would abound in my life now and evermore.

ACTIVITY

Set aside some time to sing Christmas carols with family and/or friends! This can be as simple as putting on a Christmas record or pulling up the Spotify playlist in this guide. Or you can gather family and friends and go caroling in your neighborhood or attend a Christmas concert together. If you're able, you can make plans to join us for our Main Street Carol Sing on Friday, December 13th at 6:30 at Redemption Church, 117 W Main St, in Downtown Edmond.

Waiting in peace-filled wonder.



Week 3

Light the Third Candle
Read Luke 1:39-56
Read the Devotional
Reflect

C.S. Lewis said of joy that it “is distinct not only from pleasure in general but even from aesthetic pleasure. It must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing.” Highest joys contain those inconsolable longings that burrow down deep in our souls and point us to the truest truths. They remind us that we are part of a world drenched with purpose. They echo in our hearts that we were made for more. Moments of true joy have an edge. We know they can’t last forever and yet we relive the snapshots of joy we experience countless times, letting their remembered goodness give meaning and fullness to our days.

What would it be like to live in an eternal moment of joy? What would it be like to be the One who brings joy to lost and confused souls weary of brokenness? What would it be like to be part of the story of such a One who could? We need only to look to the scared young mother-to-be awaiting a promise and a Person she’s yet to experience. Mary feels the deep humility that comes when you realize that God is using you in his story. In her song of joy, she cries out:

My soul exalts the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God
my Savior. For He has had regard for my
humble state...” - Luke 1.46b - 48a

In this Advent season, we give time to reflecting, like Mary, on the joy of inhabiting the same place as God himself. He came, he dwelled among us, and he created a space for us within his great story. In His story, there is the kind of longing that intermingles with grace and truth to create deep and abiding joy. In His story, loneliness loses its sting—replaced by a Person and a people reflecting that Person. In His story worry and anxiety are replaced with promise and peace. These aren’t byproducts of a well-worded sales pitch, but pillars of truth borne out in the lives of the faithful women and men before us and around us.

Joy does amazing work. It was the power of joy that caused the life within Elizabeth to leap at the presence of the coming Messiah. It’s joy that

teaches our hearts to sing when a child is born or a man is re-born. And joy isn't a feeling we conjure up because we get what we want or we had an especially good day. That's a fun but fleeting happiness. Joy abides. Joy brings tears and laughter and abundance. And God's kind of joy is IN a person. What Mary felt, what she sang as a prayer to God was an expression of fervent belief in a coming King.

This particular season needs a King whose gift is joy. More than a new car or wardrobe or toy, we need joy. We need it to so overwhelm us—the people of God—that we can't help but give it away. We need the kind of abiding abundance that gives life to the dying, hope to the weary, and excesses to those in want. We need the One whose presence causes our hearts to leap within us and whose promise of future glory gives us joy in our present circumstances. For those in Christ, this is not a future hope, but a present reality. Emmanuel has come and in him is life. In the person of Christ, we find all that we could ever desire—that inconsolable longing that can only be measured and labeled as joy.

REFLECT

How might our understanding of joy change if we saw it not just as a fleeting emotion, but as something deeply connected to the presence and promises of God? In what ways can joy transform our everyday lives and challenges?

How can we, like Mary, cultivate a joy that is rooted in faith and anticipation of God's promises?

PRAYER

Gracious God, thank you for bringing good news of great Joy all those centuries ago through Mary to us. Thank you for sending your Son to rescue us from the grip of sin and death. Help me to find joy right where you have placed me. Help me to declare as Mary did, "Behold, I am a servant of the Lord..." and to find joy in serving you in every circumstance.

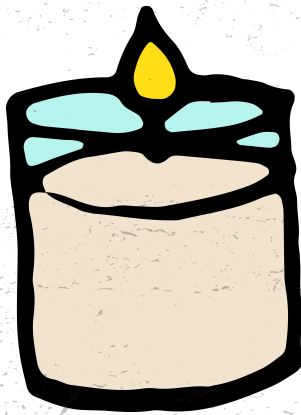
ACTIVITY

Spend some time in silent reflection, clearing your mind of all anxiety and resting in the reality of God. If you are doing this activity with kids you might start with one minute and then try two or three. If you're doing this activity without kids, try doing ten minutes.

To begin, set a timer for the length of time you choose. Once you start the timer, try to clear your mind and focus on the reality that God is with us. Other thoughts will come into your mind and that's okay. When those thoughts come, refocus your mind on God and, if it's helpful, you can quickly pray about the thoughts that come up before refocusing your mind silently back on God.

Waiting in joy-filled wonder.

Love



Week Four

Light the Fourth Candle
Read John 3:16-17
Read the Devotional
Reflect

"For God so loved the world..." So starts John 3:16, the most well-known verse in the Bible. The words are so simple-simple enough that I've been able to quote them since childhood when someone would ask me my favorite verse in the Bible (and it was the only one I could remember!). And yet, if I'm honest, these words are so hard to understand and to really believe.

"For God so loved the world that he sent
his only Son." - John 3:16

The problem is that when I read these famous words I typically do so through the lens of how I use the word love and experience love in my life. What I mean is that when I read "For God so loved the world...", I read it similarly to how I might say, "I love chocolate chip cookies!"

I really enjoy a good, slightly underdone chocolate chip cookie with a glass of milk, but there are a lot of things in life I love more than chocolate chip cookies and I wouldn't give up much to get to eat one. Is that how God feels about us? One preference among many and something worth having if it's easy, but not something worth sacrificing for?

Or I read "For God so loved the world..", and I think of God's love towards me in the same way as my love towards the people I care about. Sometimes I love those I care about really well, putting their needs ahead of mine, listening, caring, present. And other times I'm selfish, I put my needs first, I don't listen, I don't care, and I'm not present. Sometimes I hurt and wound those I care about most. My love is hardly that impressive. Is that how God loves us? Fully present and sacrificial at times, distant and even harmful at others.

Of course, if I stop and think about it I know God's love is not like my love for chocolate chip cookies or my love for those I care about. But when I come to John 3:16 it's impossible not to import those ideas of love onto

God's love. It's hard to imagine what God's love is actually like when the examples of love around me and inside me are so unimpressive.

And so I come to John 3:16, I read "For God so loved the world," and I think "That's cool," and move on. But remember how Jesus finishes this famous sentence. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Jesus doesn't provide a rational explanation or theological dissertation to try and get us to grasp God's love. He shows us what God's love is like.

And what is God's love like? God's love is sending his Son from the glory of heaven to the brokenness of earth to live homeless and in poverty, to be rejected by those whom he created, and to die a brutal and shameful death *for me*. That's what it means that God so loved the world. Not that God sort of likes us. Not that God is good and present at times, but distant and uncaring at others.

Friend, God loves you. He loves you whether you feel it this Christmas season or not. He loves you whether you've loved him and others well this year or not. When I slow down and really consider God's love it moves me to wonder: How can God love me so fully when I love so poorly? I don't know. But he does.

Jesus only asks one thing in response to his love: believe that it's true. Believe that the One who created you also died for you. That's Christmas in a nutshell: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Do you believe?

REFLECT

In what areas of your life do you struggle to believe that God's love is constant and unconditional, regardless of your feelings or actions? What would it look like to believe in God's love for you?

How can the knowledge of God's unwavering love for you influence the way you love others, especially those who may be difficult to love or who do not know God's love?

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you love me even though I don't deserve your love. Thank you for demonstrating your love by sending Jesus into our world and to his death for us. God of love, help me receive and believe your love, and extend love to others.

ACTIVITY

Plan a night to eat dinner with your family or friends. Over dinner, share about how you have experienced love from them. Tell a story of a time when their actions communicated love to you.

Then discuss some ways you could together love a neighbor, family member, or stranger, this Christmas season. This could be something as simple as baking cookies and delivering them with a note, making a handmade gift or ornament for someone, buying someone else dinner, or purchasing a gift for someone. Be creative. It doesn't have to be big or complicated.

As you love others this week, consider first how much God has shown his love for you through Jesus. Afterward, discuss how loving others affected you. Did it help you reflect upon how God loves you? Did it stir your heart more for Jesus? Was it difficult or challenging?

Waiting in love-filled wonder.

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