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# ADVENT

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## Introduction

written by Andrew Axsom

## The First Reading of Advent: Hope

written by Jenn Stoltzfus

## The Second Reading of Advent: Peace

written by Andrew Axsom

## The Third Reading of Advent: Joy

written by Jenn Stoltzfus

## The Fourth Reading of Advent: Love

written by Andrew Axsom

## The Christmas Day Reading of Advent: Christ

written by Andrew Axsom

Kids Activities written by Lindsay Flemming

**A**dvent is my favorite time of the year. My earliest memories of the Advent/Christmas season revolve around my family reading Scripture, singing carols, eating cookies, and drinking wassail together around the lit candles of the Advent wreath. As a child, this tradition was fun (it involved fire!) and, as I've grown up, it has become increasingly meaningful.

Advent is a holiday season of preparation. It gets us ready to truly celebrate Christmas by putting the mysterious wonder of the incarnate Christ in front of us. The practice of reminding ourselves of the pure wonder of Christmas is no modern phenomenon. The earliest written record of Advent dates all the way back to the 4th century followers of Jesus. As those early Christians began to celebrate Christmas, they celebrated Advent so that they could better enjoy the wonder that Jesus “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Phil. 2:6-7).

Since its beginning, Advent has had a double focus. The Latin word *adventus* (which gives us our English “advent”) was a translation of the Greek word *parousia*, which we find in the Greek New Testament in reference to both Christ’s first coming in human flesh as a baby and His second coming to make all things new as a victorious king. Advent calls us to look back to Jesus’ first coming in the manger and to look forward to His second coming when He returns. This double focus of Advent helps us to not just sentimentally look back at the sweet baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloths but to respond to the risen Jesus who reigns on high and is coming again soon to bring His people back home.

This Advent guide will guide us through four themes — hope, peace, joy, and love. Each week, we will look at one theme through the lens of Jesus’ first and second coming, reflecting on what it means for us as we live in-between them.

This Advent guide is a tool. Jenn Stoltzfus and I wrote this to be a help to your spiritual growth (not a frustration), so adapt it to your context and be blessed with flexibility and freedom in celebrating Advent this year.

To start, you’ll need an Advent wreath. This can be as easy as arranging four candles in a circle with one in the middle (for Christmas Day) or as involved as buying an Advent wreath from the store. Every time you celebrate Advent, start by dimming the lights in your home and lighting candles (one for each week and the center candle on Christmas Day). The simple metaphor of light shining in the darkness will be powerful and beautiful for everyone gathered around the table, from the youngest to the oldest, as you celebrate Jesus, the true light who came into our dark world.

Each weekly reading is meant to be celebrated with a group of family and/or friends during the Sabbath. There is an Opening Question to start some conversation around the theme for the week. Afterwards, split up the Scripture Reading and Devotional to be read out-loud by a few people. Use the Reflective Question to facilitate conversation and response to the Scripture Reading and Devotional. You can close with a Carol-to-Sing (don’t be afraid to pull it up on Spotify and sing along) and/or the Kid’s Activity.

We’ve also included a few Scripture Readings for the Week that you can use for shorter Advent moments during the week. Whether it’s over dinner or when the evening starts to wind down, we encourage you to set apart a few days each week to light your Advent wreath, read one of the passages of Scripture, and pray in response to it.

My prayer for you is that this year’s Advent would be filled with wonder and fun. May God guide to set aside space you for fun, relational Advent moments with friends and family. May God draw you deeper into the wonder of Christmas as you worship our Jesus who has come and is coming again soon. May you walk in the Way of Jesus this Advent.

sola gratia.  
Andrew Axsom

P.S.  
If you’re looking for additional ways to engage in the wonder of Jesus’ coming this Advent, I recommend these resources:

Come, Let Us Adore Him: A Daily Advent Devotional (Paul Tripp)  
This is the Christmas Story (Kids Read Truth)  
The Biggest Story (Kevin DeYoung)

## *The First Reading of Advent: hope*

Light one Advent candle.

### OPENING QUESTION:

What is something you are waiting for right now?

SCRIPTURE READING: Romans 8:18-25

### DEVOTIONAL:

More than most years, 2020 has been a year of longing for things to be set right — waiting for the seemingly constant disruptions to finally cease and for life to return to 'normal.' As frustrating and disappointing as this season of waiting can be, it offers us an opportunity to savor a season of hope.

Children understand longing as they annually wait for the magic of Christmas morning. The beauty of this childlike wonder stays locked in our hearts and minds because they are embedded with hope. Hope is the fulfillment of things longed for, the arrival of things waited upon. As long as we are waiting for or anticipating something, we are hoping. But the moment that the Christmas gift is unwrapped or when masks and social distancing are no longer the norm, our experience is no longer one of hope. So this waiting, this resting in hope, is a gift, and one we won't always have.

This season of advent is a season of anticipation. For centuries, followers of Jesus across the world have turned their hearts toward Heaven in wonder and expectation. More than we long for this pandemic season to end, may we long for the appearance of our Savior! May we remember that the magic of Christmas is not in the piles of gifts under the tree but rather in the hope that Christ has come and will soon come again.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTION:

In a season of anticipating so many earthly things, how can you turn your hearts toward Heaven to anticipate the nearness of Christ?

### SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Isaiah 40:28-31

Psalms 130

Lamentations 3:21-24

Romans 5:1-5

CAROL-TO-SING: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

### KIDS ACTIVITY:

Grab (or make) some play-dough!

Assign one or two characters from the Christmas story to each family member to build with play-dough. Then act out the story using your play-dough creations and talk about the hope we have in Jesus.

### Homemade Play-dough Recipe:

In a large saucepan, mix 3c. flour, 1 1/2c. salt, 3 c. water, 1T vegetable oil, 1T. cream of tartar, and a few drops of food coloring. Cook over medium low heat, stirring until the dough pulls away from the edges. Remove from heat. Dump onto parchment paper and let cool. Knead it 3-4 times.

## *The Second Reading of Advent: peace*

Light two Advent candles.

### OPENING QUESTION:

When was the last time you felt relaxed and peaceful?

SCRIPTURE READING: Isaiah 52:7-10

### Devotional:

Everyone take a deep breath in...and let it out. Especially during this time of year, we tend to fill our lives so full of things to do, gifts to buy, places to be, and people to see that we don't even have the time to take a deep breath like the one that we just took. In the midst of busyness and stress, we all long for a couple moments of peace. But where can we find true, lasting peace?

The prophet Isaiah tells us that the true, lasting peace we all long for is not found in the absence of busyness or trouble or stress but in the presence of God. Peace is resting in truth "your God reigns." Peace is not something we create or achieve for ourselves but something we receive as we let go of the idea that we are in charge of our own lives and humbly draw near to our Creator God who reigns over all things with total authority, control, and presence.

This Christmas season, seek peace in the presence of God. In the busy moments, remember that your God reigns over the chaos and confusion you can't seem to control in your calendar, your work, and your family. In the still moments, look deeply into the holiday and family traditions to see the mystery and beauty of the God who took on flesh so that all the ends of the earth would see His salvation. In every moment, remember that Jesus is coming again to right every wrong by making a new heavens and a new earth where we will eternally dwell in perfect peace.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTION:

What do you need to surrender to God in order to receive His peace this Christmas season?

### SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Luke 1:26-38	Isaiah 9:1-7
Ephesians 2:11-18	Micah 5:2-5a

CAROL-TO-SING: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

### KIDS ACTIVITY:

Take a walk outside and search for animal footprints, dwellings, and sounds. Talk about the unique features of each animal. Then walk like these animals (strut like a crane, soar like an eagle, and scurry like a lizard)!

Discuss how God loves and provides for His creation and how we can have peace knowing that we have a good God who sees us and knows our needs.

## The Third Reading of Advent: *joy*

Light three Advent candles.

### OPENING QUESTION:

What has brought you joy this year?

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:8-20

### DEVOTIONAL:

It's been a weird year — hard, disappointing, frustrating, and full of loss. And yet, there are still opportunities to rejoice — moments to look back on over a tough, tough year and remember God's goodness. There is great joy in remembering!

The shepherds knew this too. When the angel appeared with good news of great joy, he invited the shepherds to remember the prophecies of old. This remembering served a new purpose because the Messiah had finally come! As you remember the joyful moments of this year, may you also remember that the joy of this Christmas season in remembering that Christ's coming changes everything. There is great joy in remembering!

The shepherds made haste with the anticipation that they would indeed find what the angels announced. Even though we already know that Christ has come, we also have something anticipate. Our anticipation is turned towards the promise that Christ will come again to make all things new. There is great joy in anticipation!

Looking back and looking ahead are such precious practices in this season. Relish the space you have to reflect on days gone by and on days to come...but don't let it be at the cost of being present to what is happening right now. Mary did this well as she treasured and pondered all that was happening around her. There is great joy to be had in the present, even in a year full of loss.

There is great joy in remembering, great joy in anticipation, and great joy even now as you treasure the present!

### REFLECTIVE QUESTION:

What do you need to remember, anticipate, or treasure this season?

### SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Philippians 4:4-8

Psalms 118:19-29

Psalms 96

Hebrews 12:1-2

CAROL-TO-SING: Joy to the World

### KIDS ACTIVITY:

Have a dance party! Turn on some Christmas tunes and dance together. Be sure to film your awesome moves to look back on in a few years.

## *The Fourth Reading of Advent: love*

Light four Advent candles.

### OPENING QUESTION:

What is one of the best Christmas gifts you've received?

SCRIPTURE READING: John 3:16-21

### DEVOTIONAL:

Gift-giving is so wonderful because it isn't merely exchanging items but sharing love. We give gifts to the people we love most, trying to give them what they want and need. At the first Christmas, God responded to what we most deeply wanted and needed — a new record of right standing with Him, a new heart that would love Him and others, and a new world that works in perfect justice and harmony. The gift God gave us to meet these wants and needs was Himself!

God shared the fullest expression of His love that first Christmas. He humbled Himself when Jesus took on a human nature as a baby, bringing divine light into our darkness so that we could believe and obey and follow Him into eternal life. God's love for us is generous beyond bounds, and He's not done yet. As we live between the first and second comings of Jesus, we eagerly wait for God to lavish His love upon us letting us see Him face to face, glorifying us so that we will perfectly love Him and others, and bringing us home to the new heavens and the new earth.

This Christmas, enjoy God's love. Look back and remember how He generously loved you by sending His Son to live, die, and resurrect on your behalf. Look forward and anticipate His return when He will love you to the full eternally.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTION:

How can you enjoy and respond to God's love in these last few days before Christmas?

### SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Isaiah 11:1-10                      John 1:1-18  
Ezekiel 34:11-16    Luke 1:46-55

CAROL-TO-SING: O Come All Ye Faithful

### KIDS ACTIVITY:

Choose a couple "acts of love" to implement this week as a family. Have fun spreading God's love!

Here are a few ideas:

- Make a Christmas card for an elderly neighbor.
- Surprise someone in your family by cleaning their room or doing their chores.
- Use sidewalk chalk to draw a message on a neighbor's sidewalk.
- Donate a toy to someone in need.

Write or draw your selections on post-it notes and put them somewhere you will see throughout the week as a reminder of God's love.

# *The Christmas Day* *Reading of Advent: Christ*

Light four Advent candles and the Christ Candle in the middle.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS:

Luke 2:1-20 + Matthew 2:1-12 + Revelation 21:1-5

## DEVOTIONAL:

Today we remember that Jesus has come and that Jesus is coming again soon. He is better than any gift we could get or give. He is the fulfillment of our greatest hope, the establisher of perfect peace, the Creator of life-giving joy, and the embodiment of divine love.

Pause for a moment to consider and to remember that God's light shines in the darkness...Jesus was, is, and will be victorious over our enemy.

Our God is generous beyond measure and kind beyond what we deserve. To Him be all praise and glory and honor and power forever. Amen.

CAROL-TO-SING: Angels We Have Heard On High

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