

# ADVENT

GUIDE



# — ADVENT —

G U I D E

Introduction

The First Reading of Advent: **Hope**

The Second Reading of Advent: **Peace**

The Third Reading of Advent: **Joy**

The Fourth Reading of Advent: **Love**

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

**A**dvent is my favorite time of the year. My earliest memories of the Christmas season revolve around my family reading Scripture, singing carols, and eating cookies 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 to me.

Advent is a holiday season which reminds us that, as followers of Jesus, we are a waiting people. When we celebrate Advent, we identify with the people of God in the Old Testament who spent their whole lives waiting for the prophecies of a Savior-King to be fulfilled. When we celebrate Advent, we align ourselves with the generations of Christians who have spent their lives waiting for Jesus to return. When we celebrate Advent, we remember the character of our God who is worth the wait.

When the Christmas season entices us with quickly fading instant gratification, Advent invites us into the enduring hope of Jesus. When the Christmas season stresses us out, Advent invites us into the satisfying peace of knowing that God is in control. When the Christmas season resurfaces memories we'd rather forget, Advent invites us into joy that has room for our grief. When the Christmas season calls us to speed up and do more, Advent invites us to slow down and wonder at the love of God.

Advent meets us right where we are and invites us to look both backward and forward to make sense of where we are. The Latin word *adventus* (which gives us our English *advent*) is 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 lead us to look at Jesus through four lenses: hope, peace, joy, and love. Each week, we will see how Jesus embodies these in both his first and second coming, reflecting on what this kind of Jesus means for us as we wait for Him to return.

This guide is a tool. It is meant to benefit your spiritual formation, not crush you underneath burdens or expectations. Feel free to adapt it to your context and be blessed with flexibility 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 space for one more in the middle or as involved as buying an Advent wreath from the store. Traditionally, there are three purple candles which remind us that Jesus is our

reigning King who will come again, along with one pink candle that represents the joy and celebration we have as the sons and daughters of the Most High King. On Christmas Day, you can place one white candle in the middle to represent the victory and holiness that Jesus brought when He first came into the world and that He will bring again when He returns. Each 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 each Sunday. 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 your time with a Carol-to-Sing (don't be afraid to pull it up on Spotify and sing along) and prayer. If you're celebrating Advent with Kids, the NonaKids team has prepared a Family Activity for you to incorporate into your time and will provide some of the supplies you'll need each week during Sunday service.

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, I 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 you would rediscover the beauty and benefit of waiting for Jesus. May God guide you to set aside space for fun, relational Advent moments with friends and family. May God draw you deeper into His worthiness 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

# *The First Reading of Advent: hope*

*Light one purple Advent candle.*

## **OPENING QUESTION**

What is something you are waiting for right now?

## **SCRIPTURE READING**

Romans 8:18-25

## **DEVOTIONAL**

Since the days of Adam and Eve, humanity has lived in a world and in a way that would seem to be hopeless. While there has always been beauty and truth and goodness in the story of humanity, there has also always been inescapable pain, suffering, difficulty, and loss. We all know what it feels like to be disappointed or damaged. It seems that to be human is to experience hurt.

Hope is not a wishy-washy wanting or a delusional daydream that somehow, someday, things will get better. Hope, as we see it in Romans 8, is confident waiting. Hope is the patient assurance that God's character is unchanging, God's promises are true, and God's love is more than enough, no matter what our circumstances, our enemies, or our own hearts tell us to the contrary.

Hope called ancient Israel to look beyond their mistakes and their sufferings to believe in what they could not yet see – a Savior-King who would fulfill all of God's promises and make right all that is wrong in this world. Hope calls the people of God today to live as citizens of a Heavenly Kingdom that we cannot yet see in full and to actively believe that God's best is better than what the world has to offer us.

No matter what difficulty or disappointment we face, we have hope because we have Jesus. Jesus was faithful to fulfill God's promises of salvation in His first coming and He will be faithful to fulfill God's promises of renewal in His second coming, too. Our hope is secure and our future is bright because Jesus will come again to make all things new.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTION

What tends to keep your heart from hoping for Jesus' return?

### 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

### \*FAMILY ACTIVITY\*

Using the sidewalk chalk provided, write a message of hope on your sidewalk or driveway.

You could draw pictures and write something like, "May peace, love, and joy be yours this Christmas season!" or "May your days be merry and bright!" or "May you walk (draw various footprints) in the blessing of hope as you remember how Jesus came to Earth as a baby!"

# *The Second Reading of Advent: peace*

*Light two purple 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 the truth that "your God reigns." Peace is what Jesus purchased for us through His life, death, and resurrection. 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 are you holding onto this Christmas season that you need to entrust to God so that you can receive His peace?

### 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

### \*FAMILY ACTIVITY\*

Sitting together, take a few deep, slow breaths. Then take turns wearing the sunglasses and have everyone share where they feel most at peace. Maybe for someone it's the beach, maybe for someone else it's their bed or snuggled up with their pet.

Take time in the next few weeks to go to each of the places shared as a family – whether physically if you are able to, or virtually – and spend time praising God for His peace that can reign in our hearts wherever we go.

# *The Third Reading of Advent: joy*

*Light one pink and two purple Advent candles.*

## OPENING QUESTION

What are some of your fondest and favorite Christmas memories?

## SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 2:8-20

## DEVOTIONAL

Kids at Christmas give us a glimpse of the depths of joy. Seeing a child's eyes light up in wonder at the magical sight of Christmas lights on a cool evening or hearing a kid's pure delight in receiving the perfect gift reminds us of the deeply satisfying excitement that is joy. While these sorts of experiences are wonderful, they only give us a small taste of the full flavor of joy.

Joy, in its fullness, is not dependent on the quality of our lives or the realization of our plans. Joy, as God defines and promises it, abides in all circumstances because it comes from the most thrilling, delightful, wonderful, satisfying reality: knowing and being known by God.

When the angels brought the good news of great joy about the birth of Jesus, they brought it to the shepherds, a group of people on the outskirts of society and culture. The joy of the arrival of the long-awaited Savior-King was available for them to experience and enjoy in the midst of their poverty, difficulty, and cultural non-acceptance.

This Christmas, whether we have much or little, ease or hardship, good memories or tragic memories, we can have joy because the God who made all things and rules over all things is the God who is with us, who delights to know us, and delights to be known by us. We can have joy in all circumstances because we have Jesus, the One who humbled himself to come to earth in the form of a servant to rescue us from our sin and reconcile us back to God. We can have joy in all circumstances because we know Jesus is coming back to fix all that is broken and bring us into the fullness of His justice and love.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTION

Where have you seen evidence of God's joy-producing work in your life?

### SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Philippians 4:4-8

Psalm 118:19-29

Psalm 96

Hebrews 12:1-3

### CAROL-TO-SING

Joy to the World

### \*FAMILY ACTIVITY\*

Nothing brings joy like a snowball fight! Gather as many pairs of socks (preferably clean!) as you can. Roll the pair of socks inside out to form a ball, divide them between people, turn on an upbeat Christmas playlist, and have at it! Isn't God so good to give us the gifts of joy and laughter?!

# *The Fourth Reading of Advent: love*

*Light one pink and three purple Advent candles.*

## **OPENING QUESTION**

What is one of the best Christmas gifts you've received? Why was it so significant to you?

## **SCRIPTURE READING**

John 3:16-21

## **DEVOTIONAL**

Gift-giving at Christmas 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

## \*FAMILY ACTIVITY\*

Stand in a circle holding hands. Slowly take small steps backwards to expand the circle. Go as far back as you can while still touching fingertips with the person next to you. Stay in this position and talk about who God has put in your lives to love (teachers, neighbors, each other, etc.). Drop your arms behind each other's backs and move in so you can huddle up together. Take time to pray for each of the people you mentioned. Ask the Lord to speak to you about how you can show them God's love.

Make a plan to show God's love to the people you've identified! Using the sticky notes provided, write down some ideas (bake cookies, call them, write a thank you note, etc.) and post them in a location where you will see them and remember to put these plans into action. Have fun loving your people this week!

# *The Christmas Day*

## *Reading of Advent: Christ*

*Light one pink and three purple Advent candles, along with 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

— ADVENT —  
GUIDE

