

ADVENT

FAMILY DEVOTIONALS & ACTIVITIES

NC BAPTISTS



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WEEK 1

Hope

DAY 1: GENESIS 3:15

Hope of a Promise to Man

Welcome to Advent, a season of waiting. Not out of boredom, but waiting with hope and promise, with expectation. During Advent we don't wait quietly and in vain; we wait in celebration of the fulfillment of a promise from a God who keeps all promises. His promise to us begins long before you might think.

The promise of Christmas begins far before a manger in a stable near a too-full inn. Bethlehem wasn't even a city on a map when the promise of Christmas was made. In fact, there were no cities at all, just one perfect garden.

In Eden, God's place of perfect harmony, man and woman walked with God and talked with Him and enjoyed a perfect relationship with their Creator. Can you imagine the peace as the garden buzzed with life, the scent of flowers in the breeze, and the feeling of completeness when the Creator walked with His creation?

That peace was shattered in the midst of one decision. Not the decision to eat a forbidden fruit, but the decision to reject how we were made to worship God and instead become like God. The choice to listen to temptation and to long for what was not made for us shattered our perfect relationship and harmony with God, our Creator. But, the promise of Christmas was there, even while our access to the garden was stripped away.

In Genesis 3:15, God makes a promise to a man and woman whose perfect harmony with Him has been broken. He says that there will one day be an offspring of a woman who crushes the serpent's head. Even as He delivers the just penalty for sin, He makes a promise of hope.

On that day, gates were closed, paths made narrow, and a chasm split wide the distance between God and man. We can rest in the knowledge that our God is a rescuing God, and while that distance was created, our heavenly Father gives us hope that one day, we will find our way back to Him; not of our doing, but of His.

KIDS' QUESTION

Our God is a promise-keeping God. How did God give hope to all when we disobeyed?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Using your favorite color Play-Doh, create a snake just like in the story. Practice saying God's promise, "He will crush your head," as you squish your snake.

ADULTS' QUESTION

Knowing that Christmas begins even at the start of the Bible, how can you view the creation story through the lens of a redeeming Savior?

Prayer

Lord, help us to see all that you have created for Your good and Your glory as we await the coming Christ in this Christmas season. Thank you for being a God who loves us when we disobey and gives a way to crush the sin of the serpent.



DAY 2: ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

A Light in the Darkness

One of the most scary experiences that you may have while going caving (having someone to lead you deep into a cave system) is when you reach the deepest part of your descent and they say, "OK everyone, it's time to turn off your headlights."

You enter into darkness like you have never experienced before. No light penetrates the darkness until the lights are turned back on. In the same way, the people of Israel are said to be "living in a land of darkness." They were without the light of God shining upon them. But then they "saw a great light" (Isa. 9:2).

Isaiah 9 is a beautiful picture into the future hope of Israel and especially the world as a future King is described. This promised King will come as a child into the world, and He will establish a forever kingdom upon His shoulders. This King is not only a ruler, but He will be Counselor to the needy, an eternal Father to the fatherless, a bringer of peace, and He will be God (Isa. 9:6-7). This King will be there for all the needs of His people because He truly understands what His people need.

Though the promised King would come from the line of David, a line established in 2 Samuel 7, Isaiah 9 reminds the people of God and us that God was waiting for the perfect time for Christ to arrive.

Jesus is our wonderful Counselor in a time of uncertainty. Jesus is God, who took on flesh, meaning He was actually born as a human baby! Jesus is the everlasting guide of our lives, like a father. Jesus is the one who truly can bring peace to our lives and our world. Let these names of Christ comfort you as you look to the world around you and celebrate the gift that Christ is to our world.

KIDS' QUESTION

Who is the promised King forever?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Gather your family together and make one of the rooms in your house as dark as possible. Gather close around a flashlight and have kids name the farthest object they can see with the flashlight on. Then, turn off the light so that your family is in darkness, and have kids try to name the farthest object they can see. Then turn on the light! Use this time to discuss how the light pushes back the darkness and that Christ pushes back the darkness in our lives.

ADULTS' QUESTION

What does being a part of an everlasting kingdom mean to you? How does this change how you live?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the King that we have in Christ. Thank you for the care, peace, love and joy that He brings to me. Help me to honor You as a citizen of your everlasting kingdom. Amen.



DAY 3: ISAIAH 11:1-5

Hope Can Grow From What Looks Dead

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Isaiah 11:1

Have you ever looked at a tree stump and thought, "Well, that's finished."? The tree is gone. The branches are gone. There are no leaves, no shade, no signs of life. From where we stand, the story seems over.

But sometimes, when you look closely, there it is: a tiny green shoot pushing its way out of what appears to be dead. That is the picture in Isaiah. It gives us hope.

God's people had experienced disappointment, brokenness and uncertainty. The family line of Jesse, the family from which King David came, would look like a tree that had been cut down. But God said, in essence, "I'm not finished."

From that stump would come a Branch. Jesus.

Hundreds of years before the manger in Bethlehem, God was already pointing His people toward the Savior. When circumstances looked hopeless, God's promise was still alive beneath the surface.

That is one of the beautiful truths of Advent: God is working even when we cannot see Him working.

Maybe this season doesn't look the way you hoped it would. Maybe something in your family, your work, your relationships or your future feels uncertain. You may be looking at something that feels more like a stump than a flourishing tree.

Waiting can be hard. We want to see new growth now. We want answers, resolution and evidence that everything will be OK. But biblical hope isn't based on what we can see today. It is rooted in who God is. His faithfulness in the past gives us confidence to trust Him with what we cannot yet see. Don't mistake what you can see for all that God is doing.

Christmas reminds us that hope didn't arrive with great fanfare. Hope came quietly: a baby born in Bethlehem, exactly as God had promised. Because Jesus came, we can trust that God is still faithful to His promises.

Even when we can't see what God is doing, we can have hope because God always keeps His promises.

KIDS' QUESTION

How can we trust God's promises while we wait for something we're excited about, just as God's people waited for Jesus?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Go outside together and find a small stick or branch. Place it in a cup or small container and make paper leaves to attach to it. On each leaf, write or draw one way God has been faithful to your family or one promise from Scripture. As you add the leaves, talk about how a bare branch can begin to look full of life. Keep your "Hope Branch" somewhere your family will see it throughout Advent. When someone is discouraged or tired of waiting, add another leaf. Each time you add one, say together, "God is working. God keeps His promises. Jesus is our hope!"

ADULTS' QUESTION

What situation in your life currently feels like a "stump," something where you see little evidence of growth or change? Instead of focusing only on what you can see, how could remembering God's past faithfulness change the way you wait and hope?

Prayer

God, thank You for sending Jesus, our hope. Help us trust You when we cannot see what You are doing. Remind us that You are faithful and that You are never finished with our story. Amen.



DAY 4: JEREMIAH 33:14-16

A Righteous Branch

I am always intrigued by the amaryllis bulbs I see in stores at Christmas. These bulbs, often dipped in bright red wax, with a brown and white textured stump coming out on top, hold the promise of massive, vibrant flowers, just in time for Christmas. But, staring at that bright red waxy ball, it looks unlikely at best, if not practically impossible for anything to grow, much less flourish. Nothing about it makes sense. The stump looks dead, the roots are covered in wax, and you don't even have to water it! But for those who have watched these stunning flowers bloom, they know that despite how it might look in the beginning, the vibrant flowers will come.

Those blooms are a great picture of what hope is all about. If you are willing to wait and trust, at the right time a green sprout will eventually burst forth, and soon the flower will follow. Hope is a confident expectation of future good based on God's promises. In Jeremiah 33, the Israelites are in an impossible situation of their own making. On the brink of being overtaken by the Babylonians, Jeremiah's message from the Lord is a promise of restoration.

The Israelites deserved what was about to happen to them. They had chosen to forsake their covenant with God to go their own way, ignoring their warnings of the prophets. Yet, with destruction imminent, literally closing in on them, Jeremiah dares them to hope. Through Jeremiah, God tells His people that He will again rescue and restore, promising that He would one day raise up a Righteous Branch, from the line of David, who would provide true safety and rule in justice and righteousness.

If we are honest, we all have found ourselves in a similar situation as the Israelites. We have sinned and found ourselves separated from God, a destruction of our own making. But thanks be to God, we do not have to stay stuck in our sin. Forgiveness and restoration are possible!

What we can only know this side of the cross, is that this promised Righteous Branch wasn't for another just king, but it was the promise of Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who would finally come to rescue His people from their sin for good! This is the hope of Christmas – the coming of the Savior of the world.

KIDS' QUESTION

What is sin, and how can Jesus forgive our sins and restore our relationship with God? Can our sins be forgiven? If so, how?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

In a clear cup, plant a quick growing seed (garden cress, green bean or sunflower) on the side of the cup with a wet paper towel. Check daily for any signs of growth. In the waiting, talk about:

What does it mean to hope?
Why do you think the Lord tells us not to lose hope?
What are you most hoping for this Christmas? Why?

As the sprouts emerge, remind each other that God always keeps His promises. Thank God for always working in our lives for our good and His glory.

ADULTS' QUESTION

What is hope? Who is your hope in? Even when we know that God keeps His promises, why do you think it is hard to have hope and trust that God works all things together for our good?

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, that You are the hope of Christmas — the Savior of the world.



DAY 5: MICAH 5:2-4

A King is Coming!

Think about the movies you've watched or stories you've heard about kingdoms. What usually comes to mind? Giant castles, brave knights, beautiful princesses, dragons and grand royal balls! Every kingdom has someone in charge, someone who rules over the people. That person is the king!

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God gave a prophet named Micah an incredible message to share with His people: A King was coming! But this wasn't just any king. This King would be greater than any king they had ever known, and His kingdom would last forever.

But how would God's people know when this King arrived? God gave them a clue through Micah: the King would be born in a little town called Bethlehem. Bethlehem wasn't exactly the kind of place you would expect a king to come from. It wasn't a big, important city filled with royal palaces. In fact, Bethlehem means "House of Bread." Not exactly a name that sounds fit for a king, right?

But Bethlehem had an important history. Remember King David? Before becoming one of Israel's greatest kings, David was a shepherd boy from Bethlehem. God was promising that another King would come from that same town. Only this King would be even greater than David. He wouldn't just rule for a few years; He would reign forever!

Who was this promised King? Jesus.

Micah described Jesus as both a King and a shepherd who would lovingly lead His people, care for them and bring them peace. This was incredible news because Micah was living during a time filled with trouble and destruction. Things probably looked pretty hopeless for God's people. But God wanted them to know their story wasn't over. They could have hope because He had promised to send a King who would bring them peace.

Guess what? God kept His promise!

Hundreds of years later, in that same little town of Bethlehem, a baby was born. He wasn't born in a grand palace or surrounded by royal guards. He was born in humble circumstances and laid in a manger.

That baby was no ordinary baby. He was Jesus—the promised King, the Good Shepherd, the One whose kingdom has no end. Because God always keeps His promises, we can have hope in Jesus, our Forever King!

KIDS' QUESTION

How does Micah describe Jesus?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Take paper or cardstock and make crowns together as a fun reminder that Jesus is our Forever King! Decorate your crowns with foil, stickers, jewels or other fun supplies you have at home. As you create the crowns, talk about how earthly kings and kingdoms don't last forever, but Jesus does. Remind your child that Jesus is the King who came to save us, lead us and reign forever.

ADULTS' QUESTION

Bethlehem was an unexpected place for a king to be born. How have you seen God work in unexpected ways in your life?

Prayer

Dear God, thank You for keeping Your promises and sending Jesus to be our Forever King. Thank You that Jesus is our Good Shepherd who loves us, leads us and gives us peace. Help us trust You when life feels uncertain and remember that we can always have hope in Jesus. May our family honor Jesus as King in all we do. In Jesus' name, amen!



DAY 6: ROMANS 15:4, 13

God of Hope

As we move through the Advent season, we remember there is hope coming in Christ. What does hope look like for you and your family? Imagine all who had been waiting and hoping for the coming of Christ. Take a look at the passage below and see how the hope the Lord gives is coming to us soon through the root of Jesse and will give even those of us who are Gentiles hope. Our hope in Christ comes every day, not just at Christmas. May you see the hope of Christ wherever you look.

Paul called God "the God of hope" and prayed that His friends would be filled up with joy and peace and hope — so much that it would overflow, like a cup filled past the top. Romans 15:13 says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

Paul's prayer here is worth praying over yourself: that the God of hope would fill you with joy and peace as you trust Him, so that you overflow with hope. Notice hope isn't something we manufacture through willpower or a positive attitude. It's something God fills us with, through His Spirit's power. As Week 1 of Advent closes, let this be your prayer whether you're gathering with a crowded table this year or a quiet one: not "help me feel hopeful," but "fill me with hope, God, because You are its source."

KIDS' QUESTION

Where does Paul say our hope comes from?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Think of God's promises and write them on strips of paper. Link the strips together to form a paper chain. As you build it, remember that every promise reminds us we can trust God in every season, even while we wait.

ADULTS' QUESTION

Paul speaks of a power that gives us hope. Where does that power come from? What is required of us to receive it?

Prayer

God of hope, fill me — not with a feeling I have to fake, but with real hope that comes from You. Let it overflow out of me into the lives of people around me this Advent. Amen.





WEEK 2

Peace

DAY 7: NUMBERS 6:24-26

Blessing in the Promised Land

As week 2 of Advent arrives, many are fully into the holiday season. Stores are fully decorated, and holiday parties have begun. However, for many, this week is also when stress levels begin to rise.

This week's advent theme is "Peace," but many feel far from actual peace during this time. Christmas gifts must be bought, school is wrapping up, travel plans need to be finalized, and every night seems to be another Christmas party or production. Everyone can use a little more peace in this season, and by God's grace, for followers of Christ, true peace has been promised.

As the Israelites are journeying in their exodus to the Promised Land, life proved to be difficult for them due to their sin. They were wandering the wilderness. However, God steps in and commands Moses to tell Aaron and his sons, the Levitical Priesthood, to bless the people with the following: "May the Lord bless you and protect you; may the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-26).

The Lord promises that He will be with the people of Israel. He will uphold His promises to His people. They will be blessed and they will have peace because of His face shining upon them. For followers of Christ, this blessing is meant to point us to a great blessing and peace that comes through Christ. This blessing points forward in two ways.

Firstly, this blessing comes through the Levitical priesthood, and Christians are to look toward the greater High Priest Christ (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:11-28). Christ is the Great High Priest who can truly bring salvation to the people because He understands what it is like to be human and forever goes before God on our behalf.

Secondly, Christ provides true peace to His people, both Jews and Gentiles. The blessing of the Lord shining His face upon His

people is now available to all people because of Christ's death and resurrection. This promised peace is forever secure in Christ. The Christmas carol, "Joy to the World" speaks to this well when it says, "He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found." Christ has come to bring the true peace of God to man.

KIDS' QUESTION

Who is the one who brings the promised peace of God?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Make a sunshine mask. Using a paper plate, construction paper and a craft stick, make a face mask in the shape of a sun. Use this as an opportunity to talk with your child about what it means for God's face to shine on you.

ADULTS' QUESTION

As you reflect on the blessings in your own life, how have you seen God at work in them?

Prayer

Lord, as I enter into the busyness of the holiday season, may I not lose sight of your blessings and promised peace in Christ. Thank you for the blessings you have given me in this season. Amen.



DAY 8: PSALM 85:8-13

Peace on Earth to All People

Take a few minutes as a family to read Psalm 85:8-13.

As we celebrate Advent, we remember that Jesus came into the world to bring us something we all need: peace. The world can be loud, busy and sometimes full of worry. Our homes can be busy too! We may have disagreements with our brothers or sisters, stress at school or work, or things that make us afraid. But biblical peace isn't simply having a quiet house or a day without problems. Peace means trusting God even when life isn't peaceful.

Psalm 85 reminds us that God speaks peace to His people. When Jesus was born, the angels announced His arrival with a message of peace: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!" (Luke 2:14)

Jesus is our source of true peace. Because of Him, we can bring our worries to God, forgive others and choose to be peacemakers wherever we are. This Christmas season, let's not just look for peaceful moments. Let's look for ways to bring the peace of Jesus to others.

KIDS' QUESTION

What is one thing that helps you feel peaceful when you're worried?

Remind them: We can always talk to Jesus when we're worried.

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Choose one person outside your family who could use a little encouragement this Christmas. As a family, decide on one way to bring peace to them: write an encouraging note; bake or deliver a treat; send them a message letting them know you're praying for them; help them with something they need.

Before you do so, ask, "How can our family show someone the peace of Jesus this week?" Then do it together!

ADULTS' QUESTION

Where do you feel the most pressure or stress right now, and what would it look like to trust God with it instead of carrying it alone? Peace doesn't mean everything is going perfectly. It means we can trust God in the middle of it.

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for coming to bring us peace. Help us trust You when we are worried, choose peace when we are angry, and show your love to others. Help our family be people who bring your peace wherever we go. Amen.



DAY 9: ISAIAH 26:3-4

Choosing Perfect Peace

Christmas is one of those seasons when there's a lot to think about. What do we wear to the Christmas party? How many cookies are too many in one sitting? Where will we find the perfect gift for everyone on the list? And how are we supposed to fit two school parties, the church Christmas program, and time with friends into the same weekend? Christmas can quickly begin to feel overwhelming and chaotic.

But Christmas can also be a season of peace when we choose to fix our thoughts on Jesus. Isaiah told God's people that those who trusted in the Lord and kept their minds focused on Him would experience perfect peace. This doesn't mean everything around us will suddenly become peaceful. Instead, it means we can have peace with God and peace within our hearts, even when life around us feels chaotic.

That kind of peace comes when we continually turn our thoughts toward who God is and choose to trust Him with what feels overwhelming.

Isaiah describes the Lord as the "Everlasting Rock." Everything else we look to for peace is temporary, but God never changes. We can depend on Him today, tomorrow and forever. When our thoughts begin to race and Christmas starts to feel more chaotic than joyful, we can lean on the One who is steady and allow His peace to sustain us.

Christmas reminds us that Jesus came to bring us the peace we could never find on our own. In the middle of all the parties, presents, cookies and celebrations, we can fix our minds on Him, the Everlasting Rock, and remember that true peace isn't found in a perfectly peaceful Christmas. True peace is found in Jesus.

KIDS' QUESTION

Who is the one who gives everlasting peace in the midst of a busy season?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Cut strips of Christmas colored paper. On each strip, write something that feels busy, stressful, scary, hard, or something you want to trust God with. Pray about each one, then connect the strips into a chain. Add to it throughout December.

ADULTS' QUESTION

What does it practically look like to "keep your mind" focused on God when this season feels busy or chaotic?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us to remember that You give us everlasting peace in a season that can seem busy and chaotic. Help us to find moments to slow down and enjoy Your presence as we await the hope of Jesus coming to earth. May we savor Your peace this Christmas Season.



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DAY 10: ISAIAH 52:7

A Weary World Rejoices

"O Holy Night" was commissioned by a local parish priest of a Catholic Church in France, in 1847, to celebrate the recent renovation of the church organ. The local parish priest asked Placide Cappeau, who was a wine commissioner and occasional poet, to write the holiday poem. After it was written, Cappeau asked Jewish composer, Adolphe Adam, to write the music for the poem, despite Adam not actually celebrating Christmas himself.

While the church immediately fell in love with the beautiful song, when they learned more about its creators, the song was eventually banned. Around 1855 John Sullivan Dwight, an American Unitarian minister, music critic and abolitionist, discovered the French carol. He translated it into English and published it in his magazine, Dwight's Journal of Music.

Isaiah 52 is written while the Israelites are stuck in Babylonian exile; a weary world no doubt. So, when you read verse 7, which says: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald, who proclaims peace, who brings good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" you cannot help but feel the relief and peace wash over the Israelites when they realize that although they had brought the oppression upon themselves, God had no intention of leaving them in their ruin but would restore them to their land.

However, in this passage, Isaiah isn't just talking about their immediate situation; he is also foreshadowing the coming of Jesus, the only one who would ever be able to bring eternal and everlasting good news.

At the thought of being freed from captivity, the Israelites were thankful for the one who shared the promise of peace and salvation. In Romans 10:15, Paul, who understood the person and work of Jesus, says, "As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those

who bring good news," in reference to those who were sharing the gospel of Jesus to a weary world.

By this point in December, it is easy to feel weary. We are only halfway through a wonderful season filled with activities and responsibilities, but the busyness of Christmas can distract us from the reason for the season. Between children's school and extracurricular performances, work parties, family gatherings, special church events, gifts to buy and food to prepare, our list of "have-tos" can become overwhelming — to the point that we would almost wish Christmas were over.

But, what if, in the midst of all of the celebration and responsibility, we took a moment to reflect on what is worth our rejoicing? What if, either literally or figuratively, we fell on our knees, thanking God that He fulfilled His promise of salvation in Isaiah 52, by sending Jesus so that we could experience forgiveness for our sin and have a personal relationship with the Savior of the world? And, together with Jesus, what if we asked Him to show us who we need to share the good news of Jesus? Perhaps then, there would be a thrill of hope, and a weary world would rejoice.

KIDS' QUESTION

How did it feel to share good news with someone, and how did they respond?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Today's passage reminds us how wonderful it is to receive good news, so let's brighten someone's day. Have each family member choose a favorite Christmas song to sing along to while making Christmas cards for family and friends. When the cards are finished, pray together for each person, asking that the card would encourage them.

ADULTS' QUESTION

What is the greatest news you have ever been told? What made it so great? As Christians, we know that the greatest news is the

good news of Jesus. Who is one person in your life that you need to share the good news with?

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for all who have shared the Good News of your salvation with me. Help me to share the Good News with others.



DAY 11: LUKE 1:5-25, 57-66

Zechariah's Silence

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were already old, and for so many years they had asked God for a baby that never came. Can you imagine waiting that long for something you wanted so much? Then, one completely ordinary day, while Zechariah was doing his job at the temple, something extraordinary happened — an angel appeared right in front of him!

The angel, named Gabriel, told him that he and Elizabeth would finally have a son, and that this son would grow up to tell everyone that Jesus was coming. Zechariah was so surprised he wasn't sure he could believe it, and because he doubted, he couldn't speak a single word—not "hello," not "thank you," nothing—until the baby was born! When baby John finally arrived and Zechariah wrote down the name God had chosen, his voice came back all at once, and he couldn't stop praising God.

Zechariah belonged to a specific priestly division (Abijah) that served in the Jerusalem temple only a couple of weeks a year, so being chosen to burn incense in the Holy Place that day was a once-in-a-lifetime honor — he may have waited his entire career for this single turn. His resulting silence wasn't just a punishment for doubt; it also protected the news of John's coming birth from being spread (or distorted) before God's timing, and gave Zechariah nine quiet months to let the promise sink in.

Luke doesn't rush past the ordinary ache sitting underneath this story. Zechariah and Elizabeth were, as Luke puts it plainly, "advanced in years," which means by the time Gabriel shows up, they had likely stopped actively hoping for a child decades earlier.

Picture the quiet grief that must have followed them for years: the neighbors' well-meaning questions that stung a little more each time, the wondering if God had simply passed them by, the private conversations between husband and wife that eventually gave way

to a kind of resigned peace. And then, in the middle of an utterly routine day — Zechariah was doing his job, taking his turn at the incense altar like he had many times before — God interrupts the ordinary with a promise too big to have hoped for anymore.

Zechariah's doubt, "How shall I know this?", is achingly human. He isn't being defiant; he's a man who had made peace with disappointment, now being asked to believe again. That kind of hope can feel dangerous. His months of silence weren't only a consequence; they may also have been a quiet gift: nine months to sit with a promise he couldn't yet explain to anyone, letting wonder slowly replace doubt, undisturbed by having to talk about it out loud. When his voice finally returns, the first thing out of his mouth is praise.

KIDS' QUESTION

If an angel told you something amazing was about to happen, but you weren't allowed to talk about it until it came true, what do you think would be the hardest part: not telling your best friend, or not being able to ask more questions?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Set a jar or small box in the middle of the table. Have each family member write down one thing they are hoping and praying for — big or small — on a slip of paper, fold it up, and drop it in the jar without saying it out loud, just like Zechariah had to keep his big news silently inside. Pray over the jar together, then keep it somewhere safe and open it together on Christmas Day to see how God worked.

ADULTS' QUESTION

Is there a promise or a hope you quietly stopped expecting God to fulfill, maybe years ago? What would it take for you to let yourself hope in that area again?

Prayer

Lord, I don't always understand Your timing, and waiting is hard. Like Zechariah, give me the faith to keep obeying You even in the waiting. Thank You for never forgetting Your promises. Amen.



DAY 12: JOHN 14:27

Peace When Life Isn't Peaceful

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." John 14:27

Have you ever wished for just five minutes of peace?

The kids are arguing, the dog is barking, somebody can't find their shoes, your phone keeps buzzing, and you're already running late. We tend to think peace will come when everything around us finally settles down. If everything would just go right, then I could have some peace.

But that isn't the kind of peace Jesus promises. When Jesus spoke the words in John 14:27, His disciples were about to walk through some really tough days. Jesus knew what was ahead. Their circumstances weren't going to suddenly get easier. Yet right in the middle of that uncertainty, Jesus promised them His peace.

That matters, especially at Christmas.

We sing about "peace on earth," but December doesn't always feel very peaceful. There are packed calendars, family expectations, financial pressures, grief, disappointments and worries that don't magically disappear because it's Christmas.

Jesus never promised us a life without hard days. He promised us something better. His presence and His peace are right in the middle of them. The baby born in Bethlehem is the same Savior who said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Maybe this Advent, peace isn't about getting everything done, making everything perfect, or finally having everyone happy at the same time. Maybe peace begins when we stop long enough to remember who is with us. When life gets loud, Jesus is there. When we're worried, Jesus is there. When things don't go according to plan, He is still there.

Real peace isn't found in perfect circumstances. It's found in Jesus.

KIDS' QUESTION

What makes you feel worried or afraid? When you feel that way, practice saying, "Jesus is with me."

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Fill a clear jar or bottle with water and add glitter or sequins. Shake it and watch everything swirl. Sometimes our lives and thoughts feel just like that. Set the jar down and watch everything slowly settle. Take a few slow breaths and say together, "Jesus is with me. Jesus gives me peace." Keep your Peace Jar nearby during Advent as a simple reminder to stop, pray and remember His promise.

ADULTS' QUESTION

How are you waiting for circumstances to change before you feel at peace? What would it look like to trust Jesus with that situation today?

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for giving us peace that doesn't depend on everything going our way. When life feels busy, uncertain or hard, remind us that You are with us. Quiet our hearts and help us trust You. Amen.



DAY 13: PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Peace of God in All Creation

As the Christmas season rolls on, do you find that you aren't quite as joyous as others? Do the sounds of sleigh bells incite an anxiousness inside? Are you worried about finding the perfect gift, creating the perfect card to send, or throwing the perfect get-together?

Anxiety is a real problem in our culture today. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, more than 31% of Americans will experience some sort of anxiety disorder at some point in their life. Holiday seasons can bring anxiety for many reasons. Maybe you're meeting potential family members for the first time, maybe you're hosting an event, or maybe you're just not sure about how to feel this season.

We hold ourselves to standards that are unattainable sometimes. Perfection is of God, not of man. Philippians 4:6-7 is a well-known passage about exactly what we should do during times of worry and uncertainty. We should be presenting our requests humbly before God so we can be empty of the things that take our eyes off of Him, and allow ourselves to be filled with Him instead. When it all comes down to the purpose of Christmas, so much of it isn't even about us. It's about God. It's about His goodness. It's about His mercy and grace. Above all, it's about His love.

When we focus on Him, we can grasp the peace He is so ready to give to us. This only comes through trust. Trust is the answer to anxiety. When we trust in the God of all creation, who is bigger and better than any of our circumstances, peace is present. Peace doesn't make sense either! It's the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. We don't have to explain it; it's from Him. And because it's from Him, we can rest in knowing that it is good.

This Advent season, rest in the peace of the God that is in Philippians 4, because that's what Advent is really all about. Did you catch that last part? It's the peace of God in Christ Jesus. Christmas might be a busy time, but Jesus brings peace. Rest in His peace today.

KIDS' QUESTION

Who can we bring all of our worries to that gives us peace when we trust Him?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Find an old jar or plastic container in your home. Decorate it with markers, stickers and whatever you have on hand. Write "My Prayers" on your container and cut some strips of paper. Each night, think about what you worried about that day, or what you're worried about for tomorrow. Write or draw it on your paper and pray over it. Put it inside your box as you give it to God.

ADULTS' QUESTION

If the Christmas season fills you more with anxiety than excitement, meditate on today's passage. As you breathe in, say out loud a prayer of thanksgiving for who God is and what He's done for you. As you breathe out, imagine releasing your worries. End by asking for peace in Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, give us peace as we present our requests to You daily and moment by moment. May we seek You more and more during this holiday season.





WEEK 3

Joy

DAY 14: PSALM 98:4-9

Good News of Great Joy

Read Psalm 98:4-9 as a family.

Advent is a season of waiting and excitement as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. One of the beautiful gifts Jesus brings is joy.

Psalm 98 gives us a picture of what joy looks like. The people are singing, shouting, playing instruments and celebrating because of who God is and what He has done. But biblical joy is more than simply being happy.

Happiness can change depending on what is happening around us. Joy comes from knowing God and trusting Him, even when things aren't going the way we hoped. At Christmas, we celebrate the greatest reason for joy: Jesus came into the world! The angel told the shepherds, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). The good news of Jesus is still our reason to rejoice today. Our circumstances may change. We may have good days and difficult days. But Jesus doesn't change. Our joy can be rooted in Him.

This Advent, let's slow down and remember what Christmas is really about—not the presents, decorations or busy schedules, but the incredible joy of knowing that God sent His Son for us.

KIDS' QUESTION

What is something that makes you really happy? Why does Jesus give us an even bigger reason to have joy? Help them understand that presents and fun can make us happy, but Jesus gives us lasting joy.

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Find a jar, bowl or container and decorate it together. Label it: "Reasons to Rejoice!" Throughout the week, have each family member write down things they are thankful for or ways they've seen God working.

Examples:

Someone who encouraged me
Something God answered
Something I'm thankful for
Something that made me smile
Something I'm thankful for about Jesus

On Christmas Eve or Christmas morning, gather together and read your notes. Then celebrate by playing a favorite Christmas worship song and sing, dance, clap or shout for joy together! Psalm 98 reminds us that celebrating God doesn't have to be quiet or boring. We have something worth celebrating!

ADULTS' QUESTION

What is the difference between being happy and having joy? Where do you tend to look for happiness instead of finding your joy in Jesus? Encourage honest conversation. Social media, friends, sports, grades, relationships and accomplishments can all bring temporary happiness, but they cannot be the foundation of lasting joy.

Prayer

Thank You for coming into the world and giving us a reason to have joy. Help us remember that our joy doesn't depend on having a perfect day or getting everything we want. Help us find our joy in You. When we are happy, help us remember to thank You. When we are sad or disappointed, help us remember that You are still with us. Help our family share Your joy with the people around us this Christmas. We love you, Jesus. Thank You for being our greatest reason to rejoice! Amen.



DAY 15: ISAIAH 35:1-2, 10

When Hope Blooms

Have you ever tried to describe a scene to someone who has never seen it before? Our family went on a road trip a few years ago, and we were having friendly conversation with the campers in the site next to us, who were from the other side of the United States. They told us about the first time their kids saw fireflies while on their trip, and they were mesmerized!

Growing up with jars and lids clapping across backyards in my childhood, I was flabbergasted that someone had never seen a firefly before. It seemed alien to me! Fast forward to another family trip to the Grand Canyon. As we watched the desert landscape around us in fascination—the colors of sand and rock, the hostility of the plant life and the extremes of the environment—I thought again about that firefly family. Here we were on their turf, amazed by creation! We got to talk with locals about how long it had been since a good rain, and how the desert looked after one. I can only describe it as a refreshment.

Consider Isaiah 35:1, "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and bloom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing." Rain is a refreshment in the desert — one that brings forth color, sound and an abundance of life. This passage in Isaiah is a reflection of creation itself joyfully proclaiming during the coming of the Messiah.

This means that the coming of Christ to God's people is as a refreshment of rain upon the desert. Even the lushness of this world's densest jungle is parched by the stain of sin. With Christ's coming, we come alive to the fullest in our relationship with our heavenly Father. God has promised to not abandon His people, and when we are restored at the final restoration, heaven and earth will rejoice once and for all. Verse 10 says we will "come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads."

Jesus is coming. We celebrate His first coming this Christmas and look with joy to His next arrival. Bring the rain, Lord Jesus. Refresh our souls. We await you with joy!

KIDS' QUESTION

How does Jesus bring hope and joy to our lives, and how can we share His joy with others?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Using a permanent marker, decorate a piece of paper with flowers and write the word "Joy" on the page. Color using washable markers on the outside of one side of a gallon ziploc bag. Now, bring the rain! Mist your bag with a spray bottle of water. Place your flower picture face down on the colored bag and peel to reveal the color on your paper!

ADULTS' QUESTION

How can you show the joy of Christmas to others this season?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank You for bringing hope, joy and new life to a world stained by sin. Just as rain refreshes the desert, You refresh our hearts with Your love. Help our family share Your joy with others as we celebrate Your first coming and look forward to Your return. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.



DAY 16: ZEPHANIAH 3:14-17

The God Who Sings Over Us

Christmas is filled with songs and carols that we love to sing! Some are silly and fun (who really wants a hippopotamus for Christmas?), while others bring back sweet memories of childhood and family traditions. But some of the most meaningful songs, especially those we sing in church, remind us of the true joy of Christmas—the coming of Jesus!

Zephaniah had a message for God's people: even in the middle of suffering and hardship, they had every reason to rejoice. Why? Because their King was coming. God was preparing His people to welcome and celebrate the one true King, Jesus.

But their joy didn't stop there. God promised to forgive their sins, remove their punishment and restore His relationship with them. Even though His people had sinned, God offered them forgiveness and a reason to rejoice. God also promised that He would rejoice over His people with singing! Imagine that: the God of the universe singing songs of joy over the people He loves!

Zephaniah reminds us that true joy isn't found in our circumstances, but in the presence of our King. This Christmas, we can rejoice because Jesus has come, our sins can be forgiven, and we are deeply loved by God.

KIDS' QUESTION

How does knowing that God loves you and rejoices over you help you find joy, even when things are difficult?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Create a playlist of your family's favorite Christmas songs that celebrate Jesus. Gather everyone for a family Christmas concert, taking turns choosing and singing your favorite songs. Not much of a singer? Turn it into a lip-sync battle instead. Have fun celebrating the joy we have because of Jesus!

ADULTS' QUESTION

How does knowing that God rejoices over His people with singing change the way you understand His love, and how can that truth help you find joy even when life is difficult?

Prayer

Dear God, thank You for loving us so much that You rejoice over Your people with singing. Thank You for sending Jesus to be our King and for making forgiveness possible through Him. Help our family find joy in You, even when life is hard, and celebrate the good news of Jesus this Christmas. In Jesus' name, amen.



DAY 17: LUKE 1:26-38

Nothing Is Impossible

Think about the Christmas season and the waiting that takes place for children and families as they await time together, and to see the surprise on the faces of those they love who the Lord has entrusted to them as families for the holidays. Imagine how Mary must have felt with the angel Gabriel coming to visit her with a special message. An angel told a young woman named Mary that she would have a very special baby — Jesus! Mary was surprised, but the angel told her, "Nothing is impossible with God." This week as we look toward the joy a living Savior brings, think about your own life and the moments of joy the Lord has given you, whether it's been a milestone met or something new and unexpected coming in your life.

Mary must have had joy but also a bit of uncertainty as the angel gave her a message and she answered, "I am your servant, Lord." How do you respond with unexpected blessings and messages from the Lord?

Mary's response to an overwhelming, world-altering announcement wasn't polished confidence. It was a genuine question ("How can this be?") followed by surrender: "I am the Lord's servant."

Joy, here, doesn't require having it all figured out first. It's possible to be confused and afraid and still say yes to God. Whatever God is asking of you in this season that feels too big, too uncertain, or simply too much—Mary's story says impossible is not a category that limits God. God is willing to use you in a mighty way, whether it's with your family, a friend, a coworker or even an acquaintance you meet in your everyday coming and going.

Are you willing to be a servant and say yes to the Lord with ultimate surrender as Mary was? Her life was about to be turned upside down in one of the most honorable ways as she surrendered to the Lord's request to carry the Son of God.

KIDS' QUESTION

Who came to give the message to Mary that she would carry God's Son?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

On a blank sheet of paper, draw Gabriel's visit to Mary, then practice saying, "Nothing is impossible with God" in a whisper, a normal voice and a shout.

ADULTS' QUESTION

Like Mary, when has God asked you to trust Him with something you didn't fully understand? How did you respond?

Prayer

Lord, like Mary, I don't always understand what You're doing in my life. Give me her courage to say yes anyway, trusting that nothing is impossible with You even as we approach such a season of celebration. Help me to surrender and say Yes to whatever story you want to write for me. Amen.



DAY 18: LUKE 1:39-56

A Song of Promised Joy

For many, the Christmas season is an exciting time because it is a time of generosity through the giving of gifts. An iconic memory for some is the memory of a grandparent coming to them with a toy magazine and a sharpie with the promise of, "Let me know what you want for Christmas." Then on Christmas Day, they see the fulfillment of that promise under the tree.

Mary's visit to Elizabeth and her song of praise in Luke 1:39-56 is a similar moment of promises being made and then being kept. When Mary visits Elizabeth, Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit and makes the first proclamation that the one in Mary's womb would be the Savior of the World. Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb, pointing toward his role as the proclaimer of Jesus. Mary then breaks out into song, praising God.

She first acknowledges the blessing God has given her in bearing the child and the mighty things God has done for her (Luke 1:46-49). Mary then proclaims promises that she trusts will be fulfilled in her son. These were promises of God extending His mercy to those who fear Him, scattering the proud, toppling the mighty and exalting the humble, satisfying the hungry with good things and sending away the rich (Luke 1:50-54). She ends by proclaiming that the covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants would see fulfillment in her son.

As we reflect upon this week of joy, Mary's song provides a firm foundation of where our joy is found. The covenant keeping God has fulfilled the promises that Mary proclaimed in Jesus. Jesus is the perfect son who establishes the true upside-down kingdom, the kingdom of God. The humble are exalted, the mighty have fallen from their thrones, those who hunger for righteousness are filled with good things, and the promised King rules over all. Our joy is found in Christ!

KIDS' QUESTION

How does knowing that Jesus is the promised Savior bring us joy and help us trust God?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Make a noisemaker. Use cups or plates filled with dry rice or beans; or create a fun jingle bell bracelet to celebrate the holidays and make a joyful noise as Mary does.

ADULTS' QUESTION

Which fulfilled promise of God in Christ brings you the most peace in this season?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the peace that can truly come through Christ. As Mary has praised You for the fulfilled promises You have made, please help me praise You in the same way this Christmas. Please help me reflect on Your promises and upon the Savior of my soul. Amen.



DAY 19: LUKE 2:8-20

The Joy We Have Been Waiting For

"I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Luke 2:10

We're getting close! Christmas is almost here, and you can feel it. Kids are counting how many sleeps are left. Presents are appearing under the tree. Kitchens smell like cookies. Plans are being made, and the excitement is building. There's something wonderful about waiting for something you know is almost here.

Did the shepherds feel anything like that on the night everything changed? They weren't at a Christmas party. They weren't surrounded by decorations. They were simply doing their jobs, watching sheep in a field, when suddenly an angel appeared with incredible news: The waiting was over. The Savior had been born!

This wasn't just good news. The angel called it "good news of great joy." I love what the shepherds did next. They didn't say, "We'll go tomorrow." They hurried to Bethlehem! After seeing Jesus, they couldn't keep the news to themselves. They told others what they had seen and heard, then returned praising God.

That's what real joy does. It moves us. It changes us. And eventually, it spills out of us. We simply cannot keep it in!

As Christmas gets closer, there's plenty to be excited about. But in all the wrapping, baking, traveling and celebrating, let's remember why we have joy in the first place.

Jesus came! The Savior the world had been waiting for was finally here. More than 2,000 years later, that is still very good news. Joyous news!

As you count down these last few days until Christmas, let the excitement build, but make sure Jesus is right in the middle of it. Presents are wonderful, traditions are special, and Christmas morning is exciting. But Jesus is our greatest joy!

Jesus is the best news ever, and His birth gives us a reason for great joy!

KIDS' QUESTION

The shepherds couldn't keep the good news to themselves. Who could you tell about Jesus or encourage this Christmas?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Turn on a favorite Christmas song and have a family Christmas dance party! When the music stops, everyone shouts, "Jesus is here! That's good news of great joy!" Then choose one simple way to spread some joy today. Take cookies to a neighbor, send an encouraging message, call someone who may be lonely, or do something kind without being asked. Just like the shepherds, don't keep the joy to yourself!

ADULTS' QUESTION

Christmas can become so busy that we miss the wonder of what we're celebrating. What can you do in these final days before Christmas to slow down and make room for the joy of Jesus?

Prayer

Jesus, Christmas is getting close, and we are excited! Help us remember that You are the greatest reason we celebrate. Fill our hearts with the same joy the shepherds felt and help us share that joy with others. Thank You for coming for us. Amen.





WEEK 4

Love

DAY 20: DEUTERONOMY 7:7-9

The Greatest Gift of Love

Read Deuteronomy 7:7-9 as a family.

At Christmas, we celebrate one of the greatest truths in the Bible: God loves us. Deuteronomy reminds God's people that His love wasn't based on how important, popular, successful or impressive they were. God chose to love them simply because He loved them. That same truth is something we can remember at Christmas. Jesus coming to earth was God's incredible expression of love for us. God didn't stay far away from us.

He sent His Son, Jesus, into the world so that we could know Him and have a relationship with Him. God's love isn't something we have to earn. It is a gift. Sometimes we might wonder, "Does God really love me?" When we look at the Christmas story, we can answer with confidence, "Yes!"

John 3:16 tells us that God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son. And because God has loved us so generously, He calls us to love others too. This Advent, let's remember that Christmas isn't just about receiving gifts. Christmas reminds us of the greatest gift of love ever given: Jesus.

KIDS' QUESTION

Why is it important to know that we don't have to earn God's love? Talk about how God's love isn't based on grades, popularity, behavior, accomplishments or being perfect.

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Throughout the week, try to catch each other showing love. When someone helps, encourages, forgives, shares or serves, say: "That's love in action!" At the end of the week, talk about how showing love affected your family and the people around you.

ADULTS' QUESTION

How does knowing that God loves you change the way you see yourself and the way you treat other people? Talk about how God's unconditional love gives us security and gives us a reason to extend love and grace to others—even when it's difficult.

Prayer

Thank You for loving us — not because we are perfect or because we have earned Your love, but simply because You love us. Thank You for sending Jesus into the world. Help us remember that the greatest gift of Christmas is not something wrapped under a tree. It is Your Son, Jesus. Help us receive Your love and share that love with others. Give us opportunities this week to encourage, serve, forgive and care for the people around us. Help our family show the love of Jesus wherever we go. Amen.



DAY 21: PSALM 136:1-9

His Love That Never Ends

Read Psalm 136:1-9 out loud as a family. Let the words of Scripture ring true as you read aloud.

This psalm is almost like a song with a chorus! Every time the writer says something good about God, everyone would sing back the same line: "His love never ends!"

God made the sun. His love never ends. God made the moon and stars. His love never ends. No matter what God does, His love for us never stops — not ever, not even for one single day.

Imagine how the shepherds and those waiting on Jesus felt as they were hearing and seeing that the chosen Messiah was on His way. In this Advent season, know that the Lord loves us and always has wanted the very best for us! His unending love lasts forever. Where have you seen the Lord working and loving you in the small things lately? Maybe you've seen a beautiful sunrise or sunset. Maybe you've watched a lovely friendship or relationship develop. Or have seen beautiful Christmas decorations and lights everywhere. The Lord can be in all of those things and make them beautiful in His time. His love is never ending and everlasting all at the same time!

Psalm 136 was likely sung responsively in temple worship — a worship leader would call out each line, and the gathered people would answer back together, "for His steadfast love endures forever." It's part of a small group of psalms Jewish tradition calls the "Great Hallel" (great praise), traditionally sung at Passover.

The Hebrew word behind "love" here, chesed, means a loyal, covenant love that keeps showing up no matter what — the same word used for God's love throughout the Old Testament. That same love appeared in human form when Jesus was born on earth as a baby and walked alongside us for 33 years. His life

fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies His people had waited on for generations. Through His coming, the Messiah accomplished everything needed for our present life and our eternal future.

Psalm 136 is built around a repeated refrain — 26 times in the full psalm, the writer lists something God has done and then says the same four words after every single one: His love endures forever. These verses focus on creation itself: the sun, the moon, the stars, the skies. The structure is the whole point.

No matter what God is doing — whether it's something as vast as hanging the stars in place or as ordinary as another ordinary day — the love underneath it never changes and never runs out. It's not a love that shows up occasionally; it's the steady drumbeat underneath everything.

KIDS' QUESTION

If you got to write your own verse for this song — "God made _____. His love never ends!" — what would you put in the blank?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Turn this psalm's refrain into a call-and-response at your dinner table tonight. One person names something true — "God made the sun," "God gave us this family," "God got us through this year" — and everyone else responds together, "His love endures forever!" Keep going around the table as many times as you'd like, and let younger kids lead a few rounds with the silliest, most kid-sized things they can think of.

ADULTS' QUESTION

The psalmist doesn't just say God loves. He ties that love to specific, visible things God has actually done, as proof it's real and not just a nice idea. Where in your own life, past or present, could you point to something specific and say, "That's where I saw His love endure"? What would it look like to build your own "His love endures forever" list this week?

Prayer

Lord, thank You that Your love doesn't depend on the day I'm having. From the sun in the sky to this very moment, I can see Your love all around me. Let my life become a response to You: Your love endures forever. Amen.



DAY 22: 1 JOHN 4:7-10

Love Came Looking For Us

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son..." — 1 John 4:10

Three more days! Christmas is so close you can feel the excitement. Presents are piling up under the tree. Cookies are disappearing faster than we can bake them. Kids are counting down the days, and somebody has probably already asked, "Can we open just one present early?"

There is so much we love about Christmas. But tucked inside all the lights, presents, music and traditions is a love story bigger than we could ever wrap our minds around.

God loved us first. Before we ever reached for Him, He reached for us. Before we ever knew how much we needed Him, He sent Jesus. That's Christmas. God didn't love us from a distance. His love came near. It stepped into our messy, hurting world as a tiny baby in Bethlehem. And He came for us. Not because we had earned it. Not because we had everything together. Not because we deserved the perfect gift. Simply because God loves us that much.

Maybe that's what we need to hear again as Christmas gets closer. In a season filled with giving, there is one gift we don't have to earn, repay or wonder if it really belongs to us. God's love is already ours through Jesus. And love like that changes us.

When we know we are deeply loved, we can love differently. We can notice the person everyone else overlooks. We can forgive when it would be easier to stay angry. We can sit with someone who is lonely. We can give without needing anything in return.

Christmas is almost here. So, when you look at the manger, don't just see a baby. See love that came looking for you. And then take that love into a world that desperately needs it.

God loved us first, and He showed us just how big His love is by sending Jesus.

KIDS' QUESTION

God didn't just say He loved us; He showed us. What is one way you can show God's love to someone this week?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Cut out three paper hearts, one for each day left until Christmas. Write one person's name on each heart. Then choose a way to bring love near that person. Deliver a treat. Make a phone call. Write a note. Invite someone in. Help without being asked. Each day, choose one heart and put love into action. Then say together, "God's love came near to us. Now we can bring His love near to someone else."

ADULTS' QUESTION

Who around you needs more than a Christmas greeting this year? Who needs to be noticed, forgiven, included, encouraged or reminded that they are loved?

Prayer

God, it is amazing to think that You loved us first. Thank You for not loving us from a distance, but for sending Jesus and coming near. As Christmas gets closer, help us slow down enough to see the people around us who need Your love. Let the love You have given us spill over into the way we love others. Thank You for loving us more than we could ever imagine. Amen.



DAY 23: LUKE 2:1-7

Love Came Down at Christmas

There is nothing quite like holding your child for the first time. Parents, in all different ways, can recall the first time they set eyes on their heart child. Maybe it was in a hospital room, maybe at home, perhaps at an orphanage or a child services office, but the knowledge and love is deep and abiding. When you look back over all of the circumstances that brought you and your child to that moment, you know it was all planned; you can trust in the planner that the hard times were worth the joy you are now experiencing.

Luke's account of Jesus' birth is very simple and unassuming. He's straight to the point and very basic in his storytelling. We know about why Mary and Joseph ended up in Bethlehem, we know they were betrothed, and we know that she wrapped him herself in what she had available. We know that there was no place for our baby Messiah, just a borrowed manger, just as there would be 33 years later, only a borrowed tomb. Luke's account tells us that Jesus' place here on earth was temporary, that He had work to complete and a higher purpose. God's promises were coming true, from the promise of a savior in the garden to the promise of redemption in the Old Testament.

When parents imagine what life holds for their children, they imagine activities, dream jobs, grandchildren and more; but no one ever imagines suffering, disdain and even a cross. God our Father knew all of these things when He sent His son to us that first Christmas night. That first Christmas, God showed love through a baby. Every parent knows that love is keeping your promises. Every parent knows that love is action. Every parent knows that love is sacrifice.

Jesus gave up heaven to be with us that Christmas. He gave up glory to wander this broken world with us. He chose death so we could live, all because His Father commanded in love.

KIDS' QUESTION

How does Jesus' birth show us God's great love for us?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Create an edible manger as you read through Luke's account of Jesus' birth. Use bread or graham crackers for the stable, held together with honey or peanut butter. Get creative with pretzels, potato straws or popcorn for the straw and manger. Stack marshmallows for people, or use grapes, and use animal crackers for the livestock.

ADULTS' QUESTION

In light of the Christmas story, what does love mean to you? Are there ways you are being called to love that feel uncomfortable? Take comfort in knowing that the ultimate love of Christmas, the Savior of the world, has loved you.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus as the greatest gift of Your love. Thank You that Jesus came to live among us and willingly gave His life so we could be forgiven and have a relationship with You. Help our family show love through our actions, keep our promises, and willingly serve others. May we remember the true meaning of Christmas and share Your love with those around us. In Jesus' name, amen.



DAY 24: LUKE 2:8-20

Go and Tell the Good News!

Handel's "Messiah" was written in 1741 as an oratorio that tells the story of Jesus the Messiah. The most well-known portion of this oratorio is the "Hallelujah Chorus." The oratorio as a whole is worthy of listening to, but when the choir breaks into the "Hallelujah Chorus," the audience shares a special moment. They get a glimpse, a mere drop in an ocean, of the glory that the shepherds experienced in small town Bethlehem on the day of the Messiah's birth.

In Luke 2:8-20, we are invited into a celebration of celebrations, the night of the Savior's birth. There are three key elements that help bring the glory of this celebration into full view. First, we must remember that shepherds were considered lower members of society. They were not men and boys of wealth or renown, but those who lived outside and smelled of sheep. God chose to invite lowly shepherds, not kings and priests, to the celebration of His Son's birth.

Second, we must look at the shepherd's immediate obedience. They probably just had the most terrifying experience of their lives, but when they were told to find this baby, they immediately went (Luke 2:9, 15).

Finally, these shepherds did not keep this gift to themselves but went to tell all and glorified God for His promises. Seeing the shepherds' responses to this celebration of celebrations should bring us to a moment of reflection. We have the benefit of seeing Christ's full majesty. The Son of God lived a perfect life and paid the penalty for our sin upon the cross. He also did not stay dead but rose again on the third day, truly defeating death.

How will you respond? We are the shepherds, the low, invited to be with the Almighty. We are called to respond in obedience, to accept His gift of salvation, and to go and tell the world about the Messiah.

KIDS' QUESTION

How can you share the good news about Jesus with someone else this Christmas?

KIDS' ACTIVITY

Gather your family and a nativity set. Read Luke 2:1-20 and have your children reenact the scene as you read. Spend time asking your children why they think each character is important. When you get to the shepherds, play the "Hallelujah Chorus," and ask, "How do you think you would have reacted if you were the shepherds in this story?"

ADULTS' QUESTION

How can you reflect the immediate obedience of the shepherds in your own life?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the way that You invite everyone to come and see your son Jesus Christ. Please help me share with those around me the wonders of You. Amen.



DAY 25: LUKE 2:21-35

Awe and Wonder

On Christmas Day, I never know whom to watch as children open presents: the parent or the child. Watching a child unwrap a gift brings so many emotions. Will they carefully tear away the paper one tiny piece at a time or attack the gift as if it will disappear unless they open it in 3.4 seconds? What will their face reveal—excitement, shock or joy?

Parents are just as fun to watch. They already know what each gift is and how much their child wanted it, so they wait eagerly for the moment their child realizes what they are opening. Suddenly, the child's joy makes every long day of work and every sacrifice worthwhile.

Because we know exactly when Christmas will arrive, anticipation for the perfect gift can build until we can hardly contain our excitement. So, when I read Luke 2:21-35, I find myself wondering what life was like for Simeon. Unlike Christmas, while Simeon had been promised by God, through the Holy Spirit, that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Messiah, he had no idea when that would be. While Scripture doesn't tell us exactly how long Simeon had been waiting, most scholars believe that Simeon had been awaiting this moment for quite some time.

Wouldn't you have many questions for Simeon? Did he wake each morning filled with anticipation? Had he imagined the moment he would finally see the Messiah or wondered what He would look like? Or did each day teach him to wait patiently and trust that everything would unfold at the right time?

Verse 27 tells us that when the law of Moses required Mary and Joseph to present Jesus at the temple, the Holy Spirit led Simeon there. Did Simeon know this would be the day he finally saw the Lord's Messiah? Was he expecting a grown man or a baby? Imagine his face when he saw Jesus and the Holy Spirit confirmed that this precious child was the promised Messiah. Simeon responded with

prophetic praise: “For my eyes have seen your salvation. You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples—a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.” His words convey unmistakable relief, wonder and joy.

Can you imagine what this scene must have been like for Mary and Joseph? Brand new parents. A childbirth that arguably came at a rather inconvenient time. Travel. And now, Mary and Joseph find themselves simply trying to fulfill the law of Moses only to be confronted by a man that knew exactly who Jesus was and what His life would mean for the rest of the world. Verse 33 tells us that Mary and Joseph were amazed at what was being said about him. If I could watch it all unfold with the benefit of what I know now, I wouldn’t know who to watch, but no doubt it was a priceless moment of awe and wonder for all.

Today, as we walk through this special day, may we hold fast to that same awe and wonder. May we not lose sight of what Christmas is all about—the day we remember and celebrate that love came down to bring us salvation—the greatest gift we could ever receive. Merry Christmas!

KIDS’ QUESTION

This month, as we have looked at the hope, peace, joy and love of Christmas, we have seen how we really needed a rescue from our sin. Today, we read how the Holy Spirit told Simeon that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world. Why do we need to be rescued from our sin? Why do you think Jesus was willing to come save us from our sin?

KIDS’ ACTIVITY

What child doesn’t love a good birthday party? As a family, bake and decorate a birthday cake for Jesus. As you make this cake together, talk about how you would have felt if you were Simeon meeting Jesus for the first time and realizing that the baby you were holding was the long-awaited Messiah! Share about how spending time together as a family these last 25 days studying the

hope, peace, joy and love of Christmas has encouraged or even challenged you in your relationship with God.

What is one thing that you learned about God? What is one thing you learned about His people? And, as you enjoy the birthday cake, take a few moments to pray and thank God.

ADULTS' QUESTION

What is the best gift you have ever been given? Why? Was it a gift that you had really wanted and had waited for a long time to get? Even if you knew you were going to get it, what was it like to finally get that gift? Sometimes it is easy to forget what a gift it is to have a relationship with God. What is one thing you can do to prioritize spending time with Jesus?

Prayer

Thank You for fulfilling your promise, by sending Jesus, to save us from our sin.



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