



good news
OF GREAT JOY

A guide through Advent & Christmastide



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OF GREAT JOY



Sunday

26 November

Introduction

The season of Advent has traditionally been observed by the church for two reasons: a time of preparation before celebrating Jesus' incarnation at Christmas and a time to remind ourselves that He is coming again. The weeks leading up to Christmas can be a very busy time of year. The annual observation of Advent helps to instill times of reflection and prayer during that busyness and focuses our hearts on the truly amazing miracle of the Incarnation—that God came to us!

The season of Advent always begins the 4th Sunday before Christmas—this year it falls on December 3rd. Traditionally, Advent is celebrated using a wreath and five candles—each candle representing a weekly theme. On the first Sunday of Advent one candle is lit and on each of the following Sundays an additional candle is lit until, on Christmas Eve, the fifth and final candle is lit celebrating the birth of Jesus. Lighting the candles during a family time of worship is a wonderful way to keep the real meaning of Christmas central in our lives and can be an important tool in keeping our children's hearts focused on what God has given to them in Jesus.

Following Advent comes Christmastide—the season that celebrates all that Jesus means to us! Christmastide begins on Christmas Day and continues eleven more days through January 5th. In other words, these are the true “Twelve Days of Christmas.”

Finally, Epiphany is celebrated on January 6th. This is the day, traditionally, that we remember the wise men arriving with their gifts for the young Jesus.

This daily devotional for Hope Church has been prepared to facilitate the observance of Advent, Christmastide and Epiphany at home with your family or in your private devotions. Each day includes a Scripture reading, a short devotional, sometimes a prayer or a song, and a family activity. Use all of it or any part as fits your need. On December 24th there are two separate devotionals, one for the “morning” to celebrate the 4th Sunday of Advent and a separate “evening” devotional to celebrate Christmas Eve. (If you want, use them both at the same time.)

May we keep our eyes focused on Jesus during this season! May we be reminded to keep watch, not only for Christmas morning, but for that amazing day when Jesus comes again.

To God be the glory! Joy to the world!

Note: Before Sunday, December 3, prepare five candles at home (with a wreath if you desire) to use in your family or private worship time.





Candle of
HOPE

“Behold, the days are coming,
declares the Lord, when I will
raise up for David a righteous
Branch, and he shall reign as king
and deal wisely, and shall execute
justice and righteousness in the
land. In his days Judah will be
saved, and Israel will dwell
securely. And this is the name by
which he will be called: ‘The Lord
is our righteousness.

Jeremiah 23:5-6





First Sunday of Advent

3 December

The prophets were God's spokespersons. They spoke out against the sin of the people and they warned them of coming judgment. But they also reminded the people of God's promise, that He would make all things right in the future through His Servant, the Messiah. The prophets reminded the people to hope in God.

Read Isaiah 9:1-2,6-7

¹...but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone... ⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Family Activity

Light the first candle of your family advent wreath. This is the candle of Hope reminding us to put our hope in the Messiah, who came once as a baby and who will come again to make all things right.

Prayer

O LORD, thank you for the hope of Jesus, that through Him our hearts are made right with You. Thank you for the hope of an eternity with You where all is made right. Thank you that our hope is in You.

Listen

Select one of the buttons below to watch or listen to *For Unto Us a Child is Born* from Handel's Messiah.

[Youtube](#)

[Spotify](#)

Monday

4 December

Light the first candle, the candle of Hope.

Read Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

The prophets spoke in a particular time and context. They also spoke ahead to the future. This word of God to King Ahaz of Judah was spoken around 734 BC through the prophet Isaiah in the context of the threat of the Assyrian invasion. But it also spoke of the future - of the coming of Messiah, Immanuel, 734 years later.

Immanuel. God with us. From Creation until Isaiah's time, God had been *with* His people. He watched over them. He intervened on their behalf. He led them. When Jesus was born, God came to live and walk alongside His people in human form. He was *with* them. Jesus was crucified and resurrected and sent His Spirit to us. He is now *with* each one of us who follow Him - He is in us. And there is coming a day when Jesus will come back again to make all things right, to be *with* us forever. God *with* us. That is what we celebrate in Advent. That is our hope.

Family Activity

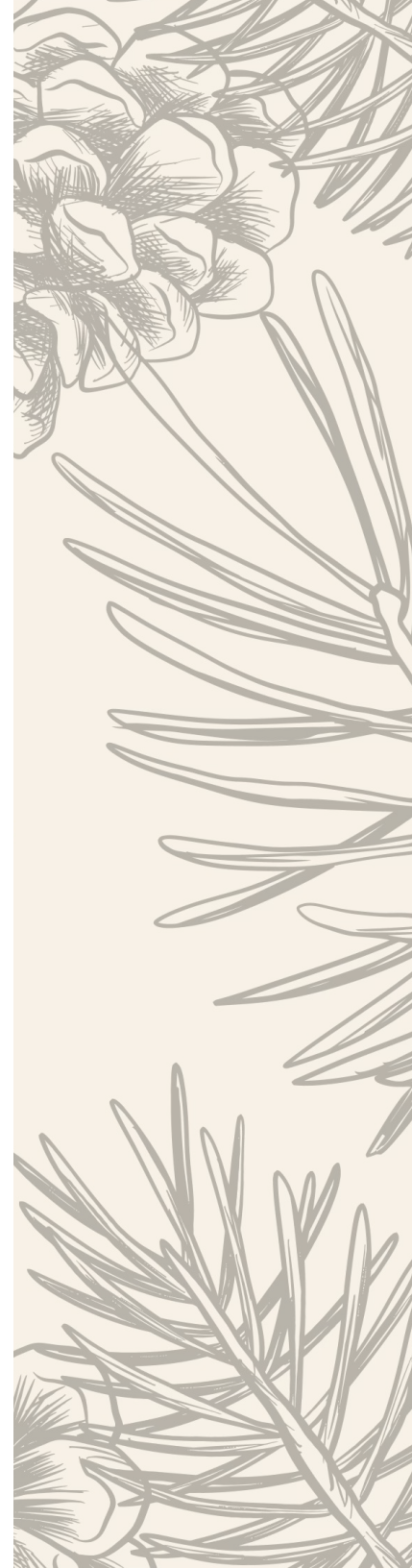
Sing or read together *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* remembering it is a prayer.

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel



Tuesday

5 December

Light the first candle, the candle of Hope.

Read Isaiah 11:1-5

¹There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ²And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Celebrating Advent reminds us to look ahead and be ready for the Messiah to come. In Isaiah's day, they didn't know *when* He would show up, but God, through Isaiah, told them *what He would be like*. Today, we know He showed up when Jesus was born 2000 years ago. And yet, we are also waiting for Jesus to come again. During Advent we remember those in the past who were *waiting* for the Messiah. We rejoice that Jesus, Messiah, *has come*. And we remind ourselves to wait expectantly for Jesus to *come again*!

Prayer

Lord, help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, with hearts ready for Him to come again.

Family Activity

Create your own "Jesse Tree". A Jesse Tree is so-named because Messiah is identified as coming from the line of Jesse, King David's father. A Jesse Tree is decorated with ornaments that represent events from creation to the birth of Jesus. It tells the story of how God's plan unfolded.

There are many ways to make and decorate a Jesse tree. You can do as little or as much as fits your family's needs. Scan the QR code below to access a resource that might help:



Wednesday

6 December

Light the first candle, the candle of Hope.

Read Jeremiah 23:5-6

⁵“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”

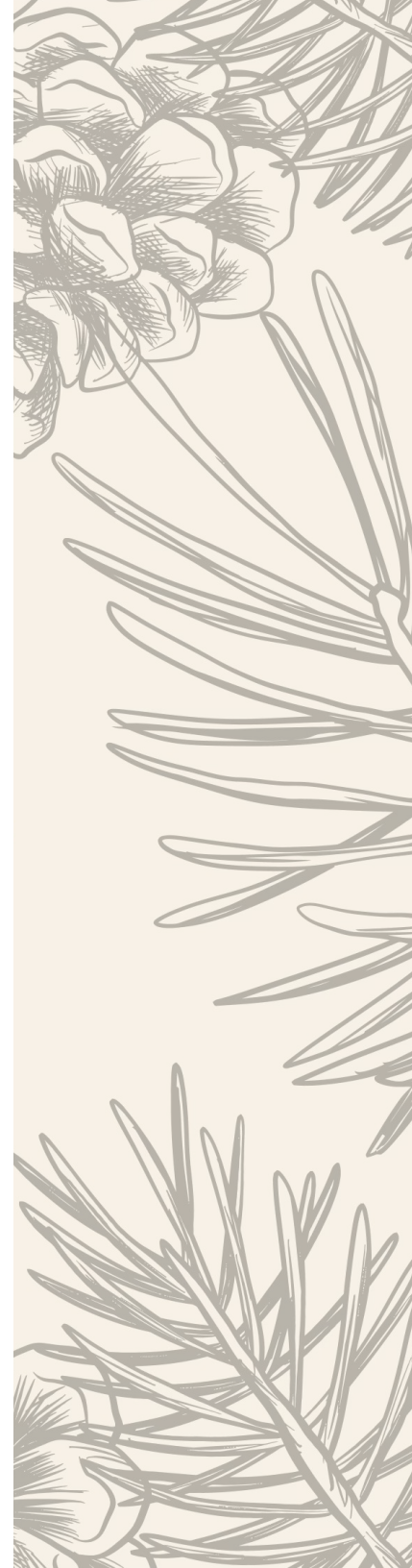
Like Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah pointed to the “righteous Branch” that would come from David’s line—the Messiah. Isn’t it amazing that not only would Messiah be righteous and do righteousness, He is also *our* righteousness!? We can’t be good enough by our own effort. Jesus is the only truly righteous one. With His death on the cross and His victory over sin and death, He offers us His own righteousness. That is our Hope. That is what we celebrate during Advent.

Prayer

O LORD, we can’t truly understand how Your righteousness becomes our own through your birth, death and resurrection. But we thank you! Help us to live this day in light of that truth. Help us to keep our hope in You alone.

Family Activity

Put another ornament on your Jesse tree. Or make a cross and put it on your Christmas tree to remind you that Jesus is our righteousness.





Thursday

7 December

Light the first candle, the candle of Hope.

Read Malachi 3:1

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

God gave the prophet Malachi these words approximately 400 years before Jesus was born. The prophet's name, Malachi, means "messenger." And he points to a messenger that will come and prepare the way before the Lord. That messenger is identified in the New Testament as John the Baptist. The book of Malachi was the last book of the Old Testament. After Malachi, God's prophets are silent...for 400 years. All that time the people of God were waiting, hoping and looking for the Messiah. Then in the perfect time—the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4)—the messenger came. He prepared the way and the Lord came!

God told His people, "Behold he is coming." Jesus came and He is coming again! "Behold he is coming!" That is the hope of Advent. That is the message of the prophets.

Family Activity

This evening, when it is dark, turn on all the lights. Then one by one turn them off until it is completely dark. As you turn off the last light, read Malachi 3:1. Wait in the darkness for 400 seconds (6 min. 40 secs), one second for each year that God's prophets were silent. Then light one candle. "Behold, he is coming!"

Prayer

*O come, o come, and be our God-with-us,
O long-sought with-ness for a world without,
O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.
Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name,
Come Root, and Key, and King, and holy Flame,
O quickened little wick so tightly curled,
Be folded with us into time and place,
Unfold for us the mystery of grace.*

*And make a womb of all this wounded world.
O heart of heaven breathing in the earth,
O tiny hope within our hopelessness,
Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,
To touch a dying world with new made hands
And make these rags of time our swaddling bands.*

Malcolm Guite

Friday

8 December

Light the first candle, the candle of Hope.

Read Zechariah 9:9-10

⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Once again, the prophet Zechariah reminds the people that the King is coming! Jesus, the King—God incarnate—came to earth as Mary’s child. Zechariah looked ahead to when Jesus, the King, came into Jerusalem one week before the crucifixion. And Jesus, the King, will come again! That is Advent—remembering that Jesus has come already and waiting for Him to come again! Rejoice greatly! Our King is coming!

Hymn

The King shall come when morning dawns
and light triumphant breaks;
When beauty gilds the eastern hills
and life to joy awakes.

Not, as of old, a little child,
to bear, and fight and die,
But crowned with glory like the sun
that lights the morning sky.

O brighter than the rising morn
When He, victorious, rose,
And left the lonesome place of death,
Despite the rage of foes.

O brighter than that glorious morn
Shall this fair morning be,
When Christ, our King, in beauty comes,
And we His face shall see.

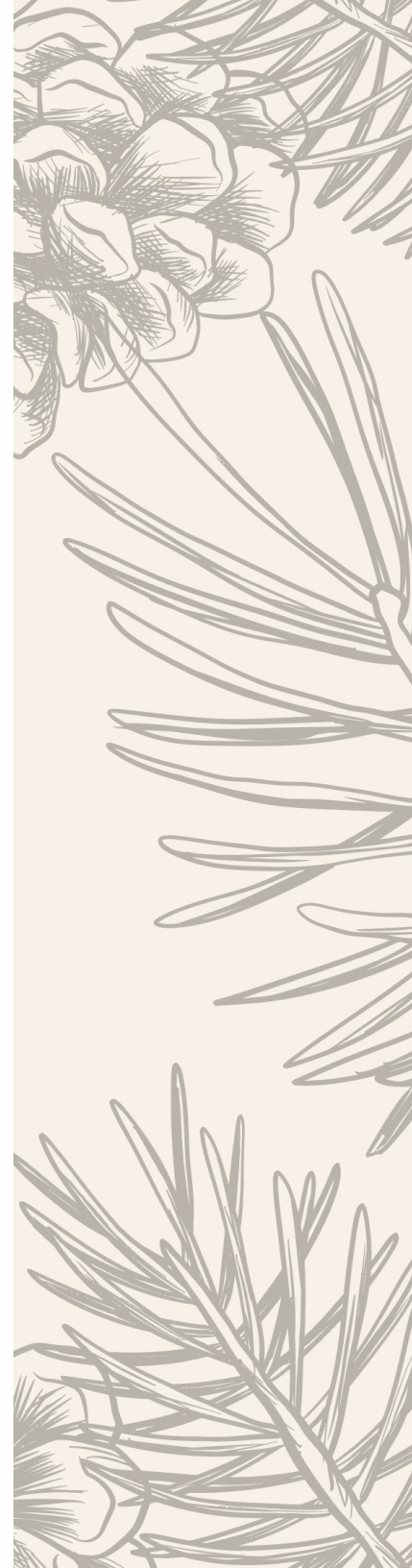
The King shall come when morning dawns
and earth’s dark night is past;
O haste the rising of that morn,
the day that shall ever last;

The King shall come when morning dawns
and light and beauty brings:
Hail, Christ the Lord! Your people pray,
Come quickly, King of Kings.

(Greek translated by John Brownlie)

Family Activity

Talk about your answers to these questions: 1) How does it make you feel that Jesus is coming again? 2) How can you prepare for His coming? 3) How can you use this time of Advent to be more intentional about being ready for Him to come again?





Saturday

9 December

Light the first candle, the candle of Hope.

Read Isaiah 1:18

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

God spoke these words through the prophet Isaiah 700 years before Jesus was born. They speak of “God with us” (let us reason **together**). They look forward to the cross and most importantly, they point ahead to our redemption. Immanuel came to save us from our sin problem. And He is coming again.

The reality is that we can go through the Advent season or celebrate Jesus’ birth without ever having really dealt with our sin problem. We will never be ready for Jesus to come again if we don’t let Him deal with our sin. We won’t look forward to Him coming again if we aren’t in a right relationship with Him. God gave us an amazing gift in Jesus. The best gift we can give in return is to give Him our lives completely, accepting His solution to our sin problem.

Family Activity

Take a few moments of quiet to remember what Jesus did for you on the cross. If you haven’t given your life completely to Him, now is a good time to do just that. If you haven’t asked Him to take care of your sin, do it now.

Praise God that He came as a baby so that we can be made completely clean through His death on the cross!

Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers, the prophets, to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Grant us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Candle of
FAITH



“And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’”

Luke 1:38

Sunday

10 December

The prophets spoke of the hope to come. They didn't know exactly how God would reveal His Messiah, but they spoke God's words in faith. Approximately 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Micah spoke forth God's plan that Messiah would come from Bethlehem. No one knew exactly when God would put His plan into action. But in the months and days leading up to Jesus' birth we see God's people, like the prophets before them, putting their faith in God into action. The theme of the second week of Advent is Faith. The prophets encouraged the people to hope in God's promise of the Messiah. This week we look at how the main characters of the Christmas drama acted on their faith in God's word and made their way to Bethlehem.

Read Micah 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Family Activity

Light two candles of your family advent wreath.

(1st candle) This is the candle of Hope reminding us to put our hope in the Messiah, who came once as a baby and who will come again to make all things right.

(2nd) This is the candle of Faith - because our hope is in Jesus we are able to walk by faith and obedience in whatever He asks of us.

Song

By Faith by Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, and Stuart Townend

By faith we see the hand of God
In the light of creation's grand design
In the lives of those who prove His faithfulness
Who walk by faith and not by sight

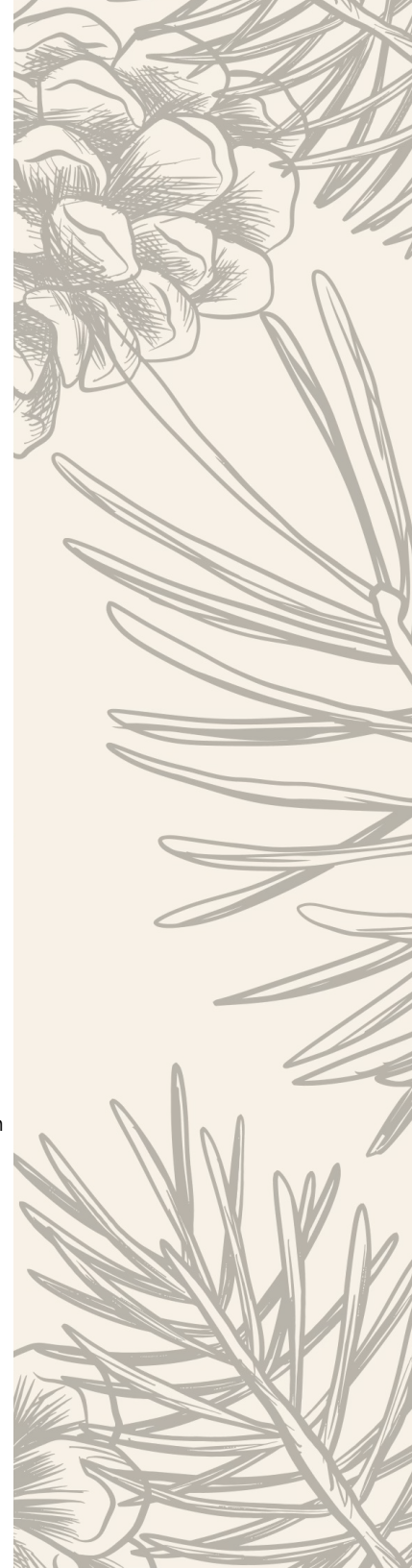
By faith our fathers roamed the earth
With the pow'r of His promise in their hearts
Of a holy city built by God's own hand
A place where peace and justice reign

We will stand as children of the promise
We will fix our eyes on Him our soul's reward
Till the race is finished and the work is done
We'll walk by faith and not by sight

By faith the prophets saw a day
When the longed-for Messiah would appear
With the pow'r to break the chains of sin and death
And rise triumphant from the grave

By faith the church was called to go
In the pow'r of the Spirit to the lost
To deliver captives and to preach good news
In ev'ry corner of the earth

By faith the mountain shall be moved
And the pow'r of the gospel shall prevail
For we know in Christ all things are possible
For all who call upon His name





Monday

11 December

Light two candles.

Setting: Sometime between 6 BC and 4 BC. Jerusalem has long been under the control of the Roman Empire. No direct word from God has been heard for 400 years and yet the priests have faithfully been taking their turn in the Temple offering prayers for the people. This time it is Zechariah's turn.

Read Luke 1:5-25

⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶and they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. ⁸Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." ¹⁸And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." ²¹And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²²and when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. ²⁴After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵"Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

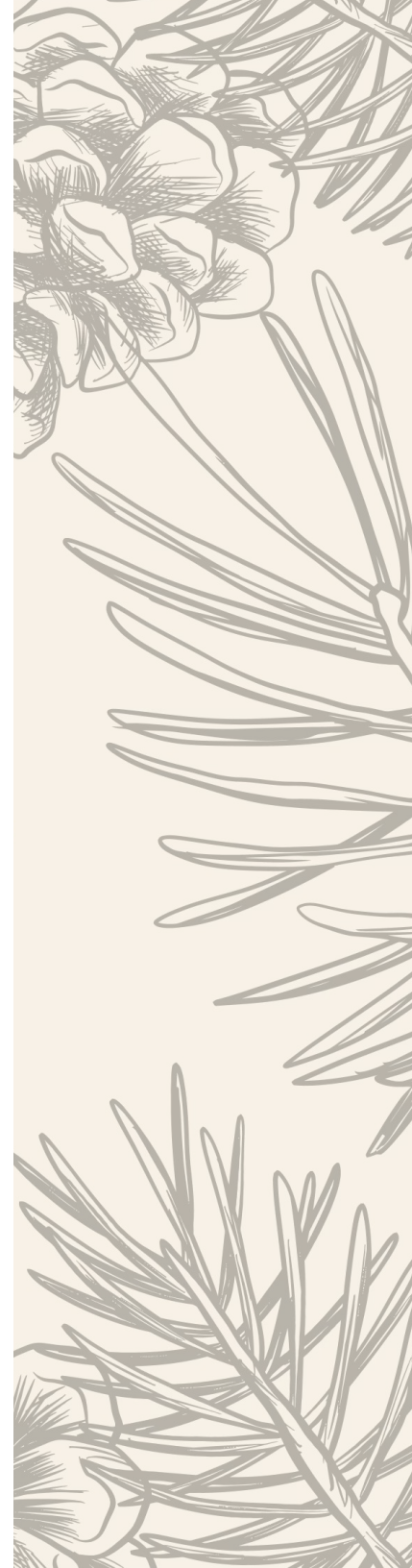
God is doing something new here. For 400 years He has been silent. Then out of nowhere, it seems, he speaks. No wonder Zechariah is unsure what is going on. Zechariah, a faithful priest, is told unbelievable news in an extraordinary way. We can criticize him for not recognizing the God he was serving, but isn't he just like us? We go along thinking we are following Jesus, but when He interrupts our lives and asks us to do something outside our comfort zone, how many of us get it the first time around? God was getting ready to enter our world and He was giving His people time to get used to it. In the days immediately preceding His arrival, God prepared the people by giving them signs and prophets. And remember, He is coming again. May He find us watching and waiting and prepared for His arrival.

Family Activity

When our kids were little, they always knew when guests were about to arrive because we would light a candle in the entryway to create a welcoming atmosphere. Place a candle near the front door in your house. This evening, light it as a reminder that Jesus is coming again. May that candle by the door remind you to keep your heart prepared for Jesus' return... no matter how long He takes.

Prayer

Purify my conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your son Jesus Christ, at His coming, may find in me a mansion prepared for himself, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.





Tuesday

12 December

Light two candles.

Read Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

The theme for this week of Advent is Faith – acting according to our hope in God. As familiar as this story is to us, let's not forget that when God interrupted Mary's ordinary life with extraordinary news, her reaction was to say, "Okay." She trusted Him. Mary wasn't a full-time minister of God. She was not a priest or even from a priestly line. She was an ordinary girl. She became extraordinary because God did something extraordinary in her, and through her, and she trusted Him.

We also are ordinary people. God wants to do something in us and through us for His glory. Are we going to trust Him?

Family Activity

Spend a minute quietly asking God if there is something He wants you to trust Him with. Share with each other as you feel led, then pray for each other.

Prayer

Almighty and eternal God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth: Mercifully accept my prayer, and strengthen me to do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday

13 December

Light two candles.

In these events leading up to Bethlehem, watch the characters in this drama live out their faith in God. We are so familiar with this story that we don't realize how crazy it all was. Mary had a heavenly messenger tell her *unbelievable* things about herself and her cousin Elizabeth. So what does Mary do? Does she wake up the next morning and ignore it? Shake it off? What she does is travel several days south to see her cousin. For us today, it would be like taking a cross-country trip in the car. It was a *significant* journey.

Read Luke 1:39-56

³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵**And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.**" ⁴⁶And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵²he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." ⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

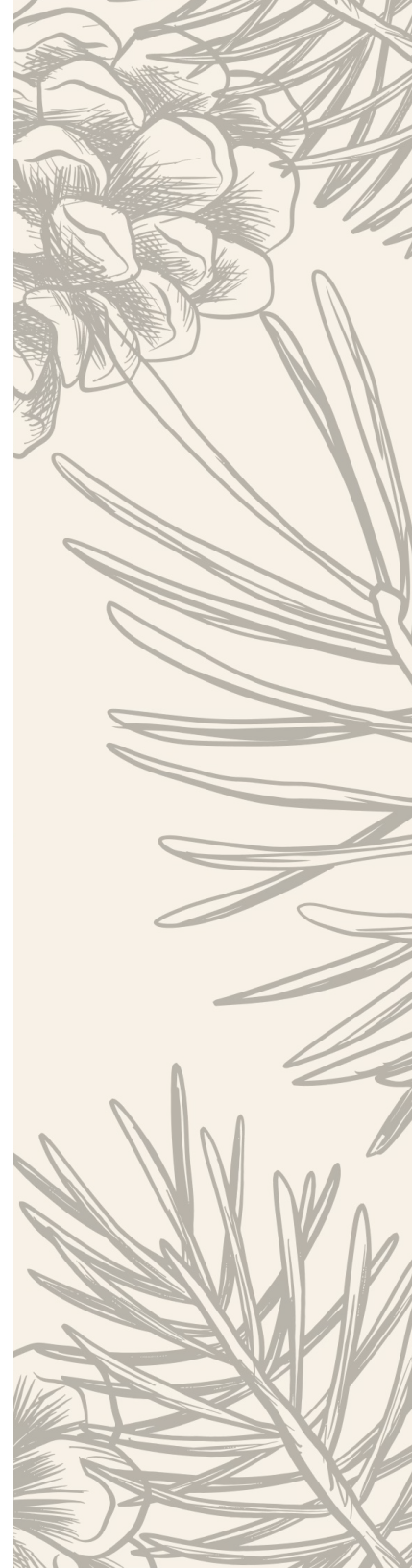
God was asking Mary to take a huge leap of faith. She took the first step (literally) by traveling to see Elizabeth. With every step she took, God kept confirming and encouraging her. When God asks us to trust Him and walk in faith, He is merciful and gracious to encourage us along the way. It might not be an easy road to walk, but He is Immanuel - God with us.

Family Activity

One way to keep a right focus during this busy season is by looking for ways to serve others. Mary's visit to Elisabeth was an encouragement and a great help to an "old" pregnant woman. Ask God to show you a way you could serve and encourage someone today or tomorrow... bring them a meal? Visit and pray with them? Make a plan to act on what He shows you.

Prayer

Lord, help us to hear You when You speak to us. Help us to walk in faith. Help us to encourage others along the way as we wait for You to come again.





Thursday

14 December

Light two candles.

Read Luke 1:57-70, 76-80

⁵⁷Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." ⁶²And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. ⁶⁴And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him. ⁶⁷And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, ⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old... ⁷⁶And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." ⁸⁰And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Our faith in God is worked out in obedience. Think about all the signs that God gave these people. Zechariah had a vision and he was made *mute* by God. Elizabeth became pregnant at an age way beyond childbearing. She is visited by her young cousin Mary who professes to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gives birth to a healthy child. They name him John and immediately Zechariah's mouth is opened. God gives Zechariah specific revelation of this child's purpose in life (to go before the Lord and prepare His way). Each of these characters stepped out in faith and had front row seats to see God work. God will do what He will do. When we obey in faith, we get the privilege of being participants in His amazing work. He even grants mercy when we stumble (Zechariah).

Prayer

Lord, may we respond in faith and obedience this season when You ask us to do what You will for Your purposes and Your glory.

Family Activity

Try having a family meal or an evening (or whenever you desire) during which everyone, like Zechariah, keeps silent for a set period of time (15 minutes? 1 hour?). No talking at all. If you have to communicate, write words on paper or use body language. At the end of the predetermined time, designate one person to read Luke 1:68-70 out loud. Then talk about what it must have been like for Zechariah to not speak for 9 months. How might being quiet help you to focus more on watching and waiting for God?

Friday

15 December

Light two candles.

Read Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

God's messengers have been busy. They have appeared to Zechariah in the Temple, to Mary in Nazareth, and now to Joseph. And Joseph, in faith, "did as the angel commanded him"—he obeyed. The simple truth is that God found in Mary and Joseph complete willingness to trust Him and obey.

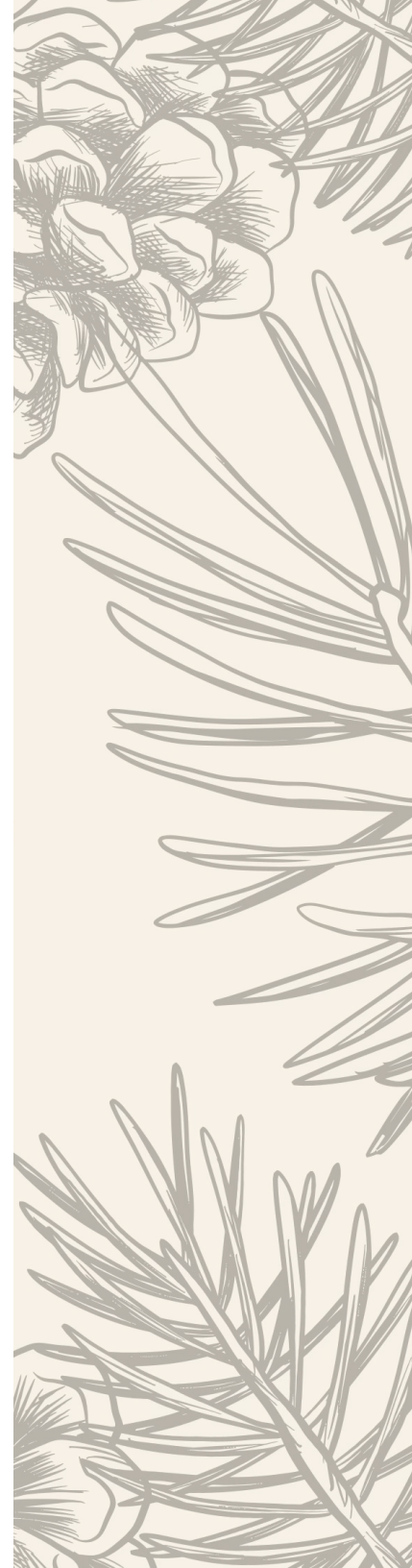
God didn't ask us to be the human father of Messiah, but He might ask you to forgive the seemingly unforgivable, or to step out of your comfort zone and speak words of grace to a stranger, or to stay faithful in a situation that requires great sacrifice. Faith to obey God at any cost is possible because God came and is with us—Immanuel. He doesn't ask us to do these things without Him. And faith able to obey (no matter what the consequence) is possible because He will come again and make all things right.

Prayer

O Lord, help us to have ears to hear You and hearts ready to obey no matter what "crazy" thing you are asking us to do.

Family Activity

One way to celebrate Advent with your kids is to have a moving Nativity. Place the "stable" in a central place in your home. Put Mary and Joseph together somewhere else. Put the shepherds watching the sheep in a separate place close by. Put the wise men "far away" to the east. Then each day move Mary & Joseph closer to "Bethlehem". You could do this for the whole month of December, or for the 4 weeks of Advent, or for just the last week before Christmas, however you see fit. On Christmas Eve, have Mary & Joseph arrive at the stable and on Christmas morning, baby Jesus joins them (and the shepherds, too).





Saturday

16 December

Light two candles.

Read Luke 2:1-5

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

So here we are in our Advent journey of hope and faith.

We have arrived in Bethlehem, a small town in Judah,

following in the footsteps of the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Malachi, Zechariah, and Micah;

and Zechariah and Elizabeth;

and Mary and Joseph;

all used by God to point the way to Immanuel, God with us, our Redeemer, who is coming!

Prayer

May I be saved by grace through faith,

live by faith,

feel the joy of faith,

do the work of faith.

- from Valley of Vision, "The Convicting Spirit"

Family Activity

Sing *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus* by Charles Wesley

Come, thou long expected Jesus,

born to set thy people free;

from our fears and sins release us,

let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,

hope of all the earth thou art;

dear desire of every nation,

joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,

born a child and yet a King,

born to reign in us forever,


now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit

rule in all our hearts alone;

by thine all sufficient merit,

raise us to thy glorious throne.



Candle of
JOY



“How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices, they shout joyfully together; For they will see with their own eyes when the **LORD** restores Zion. Break forth, shout joyfully together, you waste places of Jerusalem; For the **LORD** has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.

Isaiah 52:7-9

Sunday

17 December

We've listened to the prophets proclaim the hope of Messiah. We've watched the faith of His people as they made their way to Bethlehem. Now we see the shepherds, ordinary people living their ordinary lives, confronted with the news that Messiah has been born...Messiah, for whom they and their people had been waiting their entire lives.

Joy for the world!

Read Luke 2:6-20

⁶And while they were there (in Bethlehem), the time came for her (Mary) to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" ¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Family Activity

Light three candles on your family advent wreath.

(1st candle) This is the candle of Hope reminding us to put our hope in the Messiah, who came once as a baby and who will come again to make all things right.

(2nd) This is the candle of Faith - because our hope is in Jesus we are able to walk by faith and obedience in whatever He asks of us.

(3rd) This is the candle of Joy: Rejoice! Jesus, Messiah, has come. And Jesus will come again!

Prayer

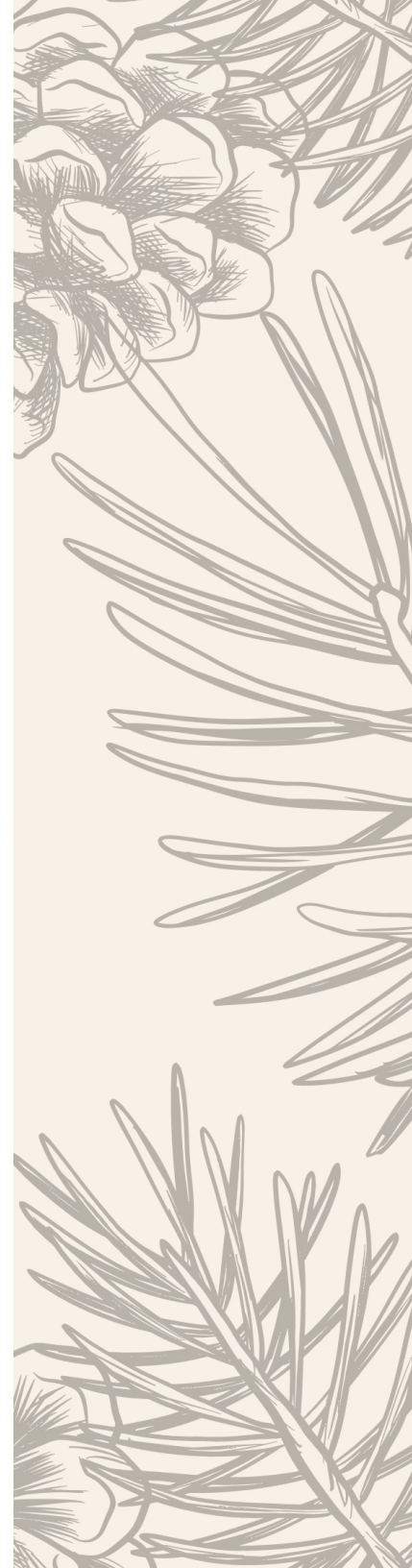
O God, thank you for coming for us!

Listen

Select one of the buttons to watch or listen to
Hope is Alive by Ellie Holcomb.

Youtube

Spotify





Monday

18 December

Light three candles.

Read Luke 2:10 & 21

¹⁰*Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people... ²¹And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

Good news.

Great joy.

For **all** the people.

The Messiah was here. The wait was over. The people could rejoice. And yet, nothing was clear yet. This was a *baby*. He was born in very humble circumstances. His life was threatened by the political powers around Him. The people still needed to wait to see how God would work it all out.

How would He protect His Son? How would Messiah make Himself known? How would God sort out the awfulness of the crucifixion for our good?

And we, here in 2023, are still waiting to see God's Kingdom come and Jesus come back.

Before that first Christmas, they were waiting.

Today, we wait *with joy*, because Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again.

And He is coming back.

It is good news and it is for everybody!

Prayer

O Source of All Good,

*What shall I render to thee for the gift of gifts,
thine own dear Son, begotten, not created...*

Herein is wonder of wonders:

*he came below to raise me above,
was born like me that I might become like him...*

O God, take me in spirit to the watchful shepherds, and enlarge my mind;

*let me hear good tidings of great joy,
and hearing, believe, rejoice, praise, adore,
my conscience bathed in an ocean of repose,
my eyes uplifted to a reconciled Father...*

- from Valley of Vision, "The Gift of Gifts"

Family Activity

Discuss: Is there any part of your circumstances right now in which you are waiting for God to work? How can you choose to rejoice in God's great gift this Advent, even while you wait—in other words, how can you wait with joy?

Tuesday

19 December

Light three candles.

Read Luke 2:22-35

²²And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him (Jesus) up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." ²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." ³³And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon embodies our three themes of Advent:

- God spoke to Simeon of the *hope* to come (v. 26), just as He had spoken through the Prophet Isaiah (v. 32).
- Simeon believed Him and waited in *faith* (v. 25).
- And when Jesus showed up in the arms of Mary, Simeon praised Him with *joy* (v. 28-32).

Since the very beginning God has been putting signposts along the way to point people to Jesus. We, like Simeon, are also signposts in our time pointing the way to Jesus. This Advent season, let's be listening to the Holy Spirit and looking for ways to turn hearts and minds to Him.

Family Activity

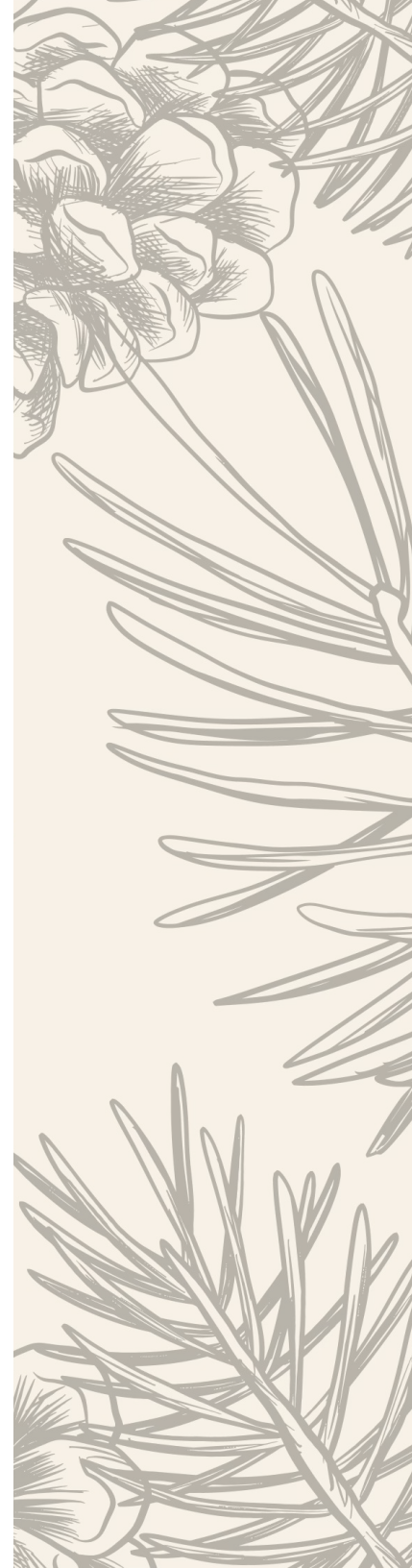
Discuss what you could do in your neighborhood to point people's hearts to Jesus. Invite friends to go caroling? Have a Christmas drop in and invite your neighbors? Bring cookies to elderly neighbors and just sit and visit with them for a while?

Prayer

*Let me with Simeon clasp the new-born child to my heart,
embrace him with undying faith,
exulting that he is mine and I am his.*

In him thou hast given me so much that heaven can give no more.

-from Valley of Vision, "The Gift of Gifts"





Wednesday

20 December

Light three candles.

Read Luke 2:36-38

³⁶And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Anna is an excellent example of Advent waiting and watching. Let's say she married at a typically young age. It isn't unreasonable to imagine that she had been worshiping (and waiting) in the Temple for over 60 years. Finally, at 84 years of age she witnesses her hope's desire—the Messiah in the Temple—Israel's (and her) redemption! God honored her faithfulness by bringing her to that place at that time to be a witness. Her testimony reaches out to us 2000 years later. She spent her lifetime watching and waiting for the Messiah to come. Are we watching for Jesus' return with that same fervor, with that same faithful perseverance?

In this time between Jesus' two "comings," we are called to watch and wait and *work* to help others watch and wait. Advent is a yearly reminder to keep the watching at the forefront. Anna watched and waited at the Temple. Simeon watched and waited in Jerusalem. The shepherds kept watch while they lived out their faithful work with the sheep. What is God calling you to work at as you watch and wait for His return?

Prayer

O God, may we, like Anna, keep our eyes fixed on You, worshiping You with our lives, helping others to keep their eyes fixed on You, watching and waiting for Your return.

Family Activity

Simeon and Anna were present when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to the Lord at the Temple. Talk to your children about how/when you dedicated them to the Lord or talk about the most recent baby dedication you have seen at church. Why do you think this is such a joyful time for parents and for the church? If you haven't already, add something to your Jesse tree or your Christmas tree to remember Simeon and Anna.

Thursday

21 December

Light three candles.

Read Psalm 98

- ¹*Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!
His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.*
- ²*The Lord has made known his salvation;
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.*
- ³*He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.*
- ⁴*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!*
- ⁵*Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody!*
- ⁶*With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!*
- ⁷*Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!*
- ⁸*Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together*
- ⁹*before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.*

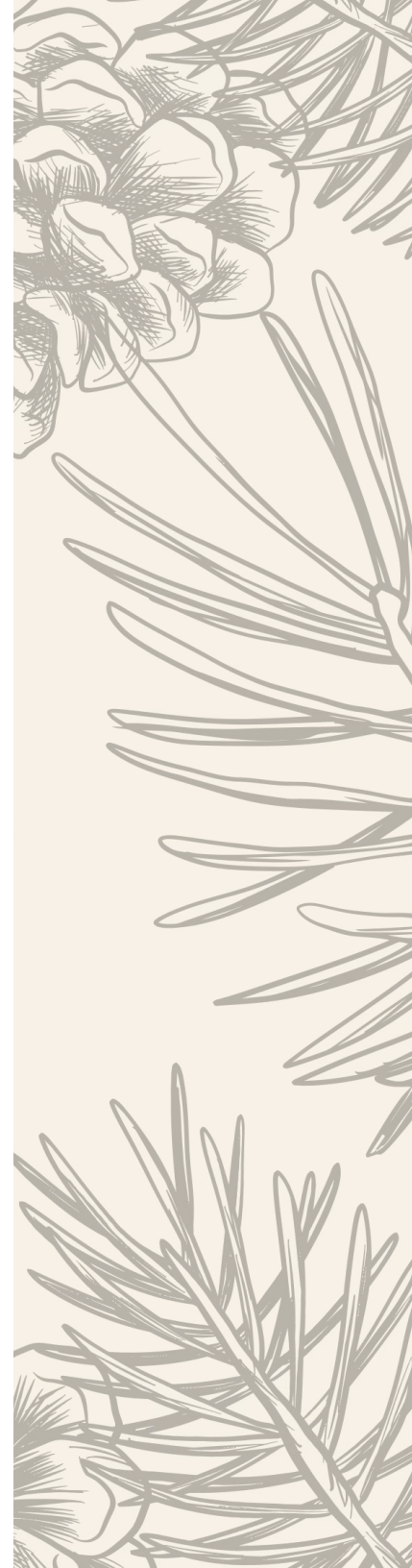
Like Simeon and Anna, we are watching and waiting for Messiah to come. But unlike them, we know the whole story. We know that Jesus came and brought true salvation. We know the end of the story. They rejoiced to see Messiah with their own eyes. We rejoice because we know Jesus, Messiah, in us through the Holy Spirit. It is good news for us! It is good news for all people. "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!"

Family Activity

In every corner of the world, there are believers celebrating the salvation found in Jesus. Some of these live in places where the people around them do not know or follow Jesus. You probably know someone like that either in another country or closer to home. Take a minute to praise God with joy for what He has done for you in Jesus. And then pray by name for those believers you know around the world who will be sharing the amazing good news of Jesus this Christmas season.

Prayer

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your word, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.





Friday

22 December

Light three candles.

Read Psalm 16:8-11

⁸I have set the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.
¹⁰For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.
¹¹You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

David rejoiced in his relationship with the Lord. He trusted Him. He hoped in Him. He knew God with him long before Immanuel was born. How much more should we rejoice in Jesus, Immanuel, knowing He came not only to be with us, but to save us!

Prayer

O God, may we find joy this season because each day we seek You in Your word and find You walking closely with us. Help us to obey in faith. Help us to rejoice in You!

Family Activity

Sing *What Child is This* by William Chatterhorn Dix

What child is this, who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.
Haste, haste to bring Him laud
The babe, the son of Mary!

Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.

Nails, spears shall pierce him through
The cross he bore for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh
The babe, the Son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh
Come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings
Let loving hearts enthrone him!
Raise, raise a song on high
The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born
The babe, the Son of Mary!

Saturday

23 December

Light three candles.

Read Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

“That is the greatest seriousness and the greatest blessedness of the Advent message. Christ stands at the door... Will you keep the door locked or open it to him? Christ is still knocking. It is not yet Christmas. But it is also not the great final Advent, the final coming of Christ. Through all the Advents of our life that we celebrate goes the longing for the final Advent, where it says: ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Revelation 21:5). Advent is a time of waiting. Our whole life, however, is Advent—that is, a time of waiting for the ultimate, for the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, when all people are brothers and sisters and one rejoices in the words of the angels: ‘On earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests.’ Learn to wait, because he has promised to come. ‘I stand at the door...’ We however call to him: ‘Yes, come soon, Lord Jesus!’ Amen.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christmas Sermons*

He is standing at our door... will we receive Him with joy?

Family Activity

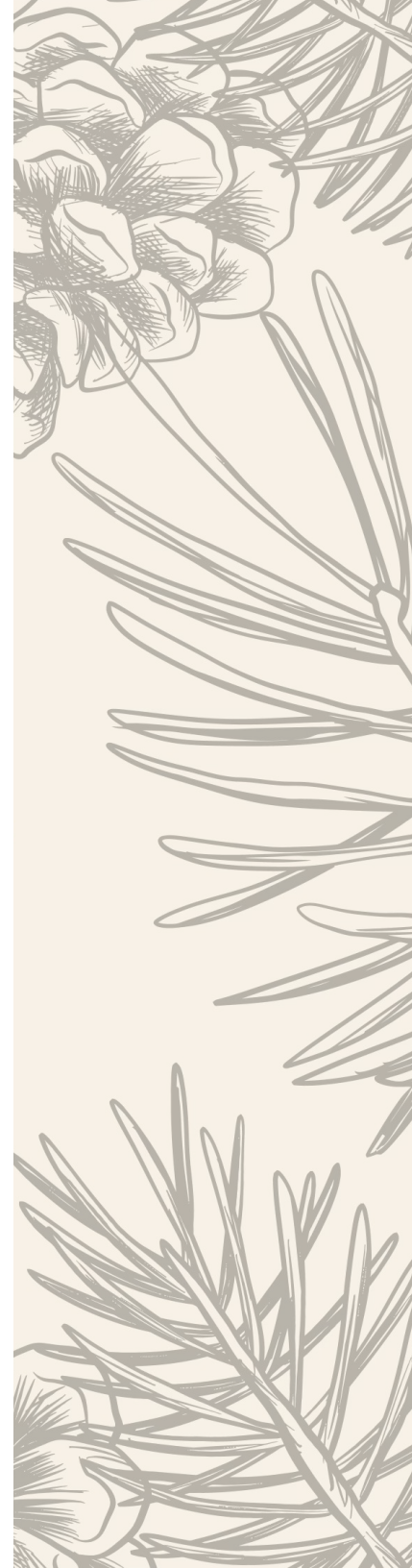
Light your candle at the door (activity from December 11th). If someone comes to visit, if the mailman delivers a package today...how about singing, *Joy to the World!* to welcome them in Jesus' name.

Prayer

The day of joy returns, Father in heaven, and crowns another year with peace and goodwill. Help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men. Close the doors of hate and open the doors of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil, by the blessing that Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clean hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our bed with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus sake.

Amen.

-Henry van Dyke





Candle of
LOVE

“Though you have not seen him,
you love him. Though you do not
now see him, you believe in him
and rejoice with joy that is
inexpressible and filled with
glory, obtaining the outcome of
your faith, the salvation of your
souls.

1 Peter 1:8-9





Sunday

24 December

Read 1 John 4:9-19 (NIV)

⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us.

Family Activity

Light four candles on your family advent wreath.

(1st candle) This is the candle of Hope reminding us to put our hope in the Messiah, who came once as a baby and who will come again to make all things right.

(2nd) This is the candle of Faith—because our hope is in Jesus we are able to walk by faith and obedience in whatever He asks of us.

(3rd) This is the candle of Joy: Rejoice! Jesus, Messiah, has come. And Jesus will come again!

(4th) This is the candle of Love: For this is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

Song

Select one of the buttons to listen to *Thou Who Wast Rich Beyond All Splendor* by Frank Houghton

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor
All for love's sake becamest poor;
Thrones for a manger didst surrender,
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor
All for love's sake becamest poor;

Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest Man;
Stooping so low, but sinners raising

Heavenwards by Thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest Man;

Thou who art love beyond all telling.
Savior and King, we worship Thee;
Immanuel within us dwelling,
Make us what Thou wouldst have us be.
Thou who art love beyond all telling.
Savior and King, we worship Thee.

Youtube

Spotify

Christmas Eve

Candle of LIGHT

Family Activity

Light all the candles on your Advent wreath

(1st candle) This is the candle of Hope reminding us to put our hope in the Messiah, who came once as a baby and who will come again to make all things right.

(2nd) This is the candle of Faith - because our hope is in Jesus we are able to walk by faith and obedience in whatever He asks of us.

(3rd) This is the candle of Joy: Rejoice! Jesus, Messiah, has come. And Jesus will come again!

(4th) This is the candle of Love: For this is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

(5th) This is the candle of Light. Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Read John 1:1-14 (NIV)

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus. Immanuel. God with us. Our hope. Our joy! Love incarnate. The Light of the World. The One who came. The One who is coming again! Hallelujah!

Prayer

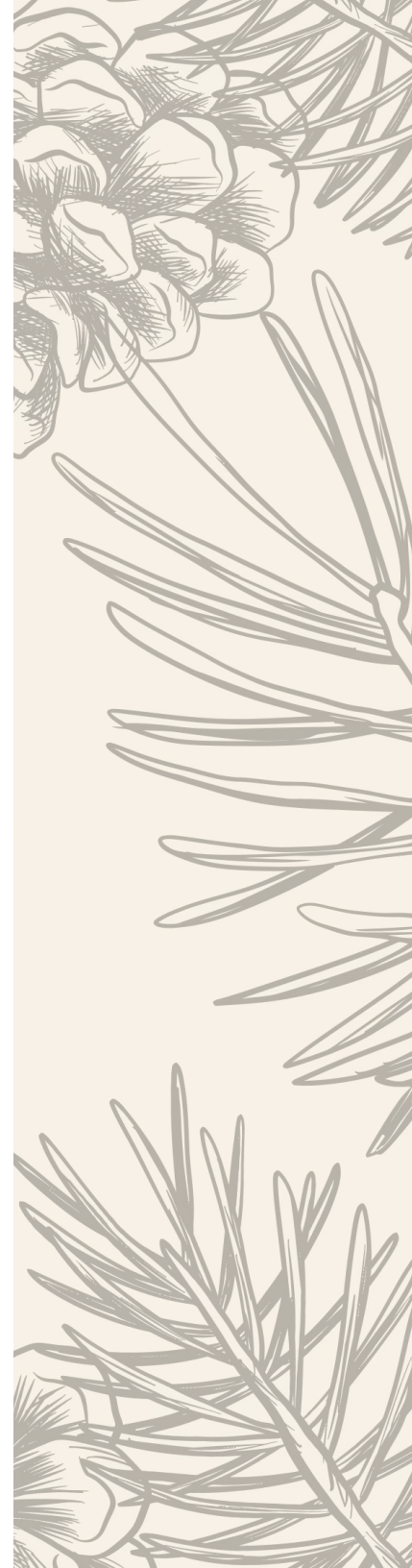
O God, the source of eternal light: Shed forth your unending day upon all of us who watch for you, that our lips may praise you, our lives may bless you, and our worship may give you glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Song

Select one of the buttons to listen to *Light of the World* by We the Kingdom.

Youtube

Spotify





Devotions
for
Christmastide



Christmas Day

25 December

Read Luke 2:1-20

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" ¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Prayer

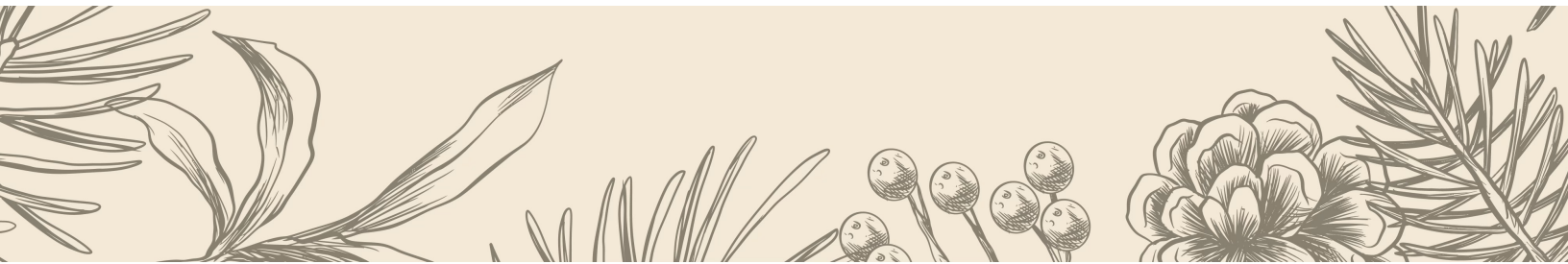
Today we celebrate the Gift of all gifts. May all that we do and say today bring honor and glory to You, Lord, with gratitude, with humbleness, with great joy!

"Unsought, thou hast given me
the greatest gift, the person of thy Son,
And in him thou wilt give me all I need."

-from Valley of Vision, "The Prayer of Love"

Song

Joy to the World



Second Day of Christmas

Tuesday | 26 December

Read Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Christmastide is a time of celebrating all that Jesus means to us!

We feast because we celebrate.

We celebrate that God came to us!

We celebrate that He died and was resurrected and made the way for us to be reconciled with Himself.

We celebrate each day all that God is and what He has done for us.

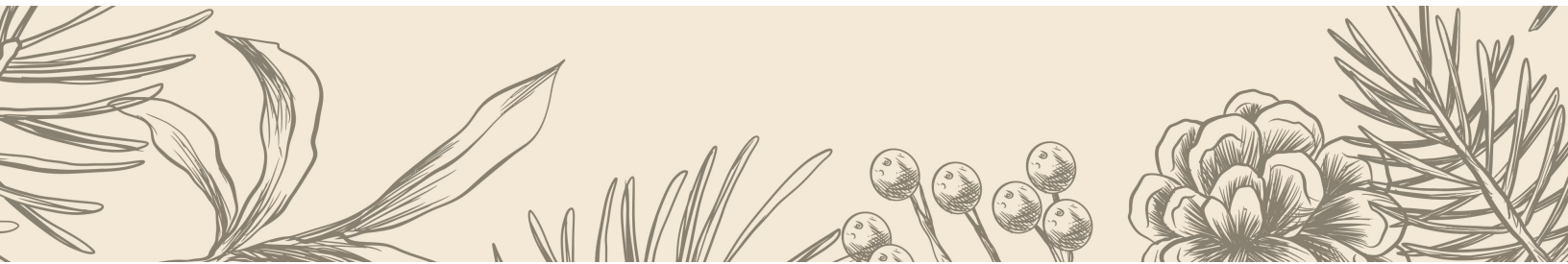
And we look forward to the great feast of the Kingdom when we will all celebrate together with Him.

Prayer

O LORD, during our feasting this season may we always be looking forward to that great feast with YOU!

Family Activity

Invite someone else to share a meal with you during this season. Read Isaiah 25:6-9 at the table in celebration of what we look forward to in the future. Encourage everyone to feast with joy! Also, if you have a moving nativity (activity from December 15), start moving the wise men each day towards the manger. They arrive on 6 January—Epiphany.



Third Day of Christmas

Wednesday | 27 December

Read Isaiah 40:9-11

⁹Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Christmas. Christ with us! We celebrate all who God is and all that He is for us. He is all-powerful. He is gentle. He makes things right. He leads us. The best part about Christmas is that the truth of "God with us" isn't just for December 25. It's for every day of the year. It's for every day of every year that God gives us. It is better than presents. It is better than family get-togethers. He is better than anything this world offers. And He offers Himself to us completely. Remember, that many people around you in your community will be starting to experience the let-down from the Christmas holidays. Let's be characterized by rejoicing in who Jesus is every day!

Prayer

O Lord, thank you for coming! Thank you for being with us! Thank you that you are gentle with us and yet all-powerful. Thank you that we can trust you completely with our lives. Help us to celebrate you with joy this season!

Family Activity

Sing *Go, Tell it on the Mountain* by John W. Work

Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born

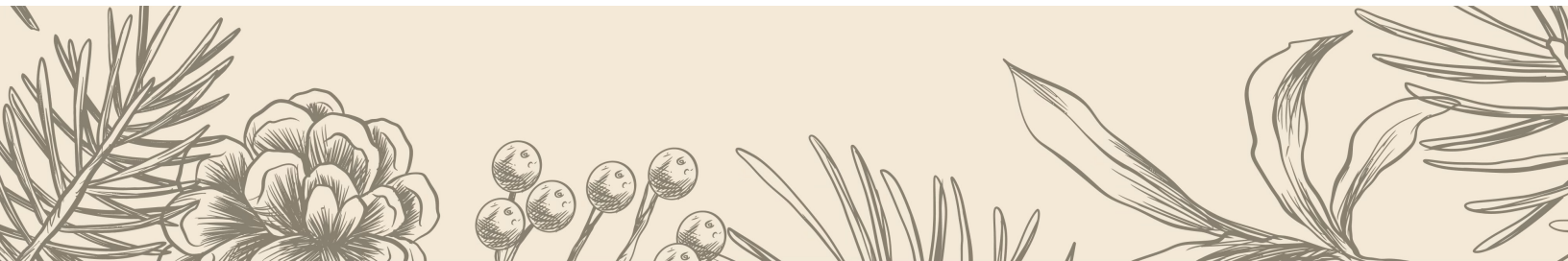
While shepherds kept their watching,
O'er silent flocks by night
Behold throughout the heavens,
There shone a Holy light

Go, tell it on the mountain...

The shepherds feared and trembled,
When, lo! Above the Earth
Rang out the angel chorus,
That hailed our Savior's birth

Go, tell it on the mountain...

Down in a lowly manger,
Our humble Christ was born
And brought us all salvation,
That blessed Christmas morn



Fourth Day of Christmas

Thursday | 28 December

Read Micah 4:1-2

¹It shall come to pass in the latter days the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, ²and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

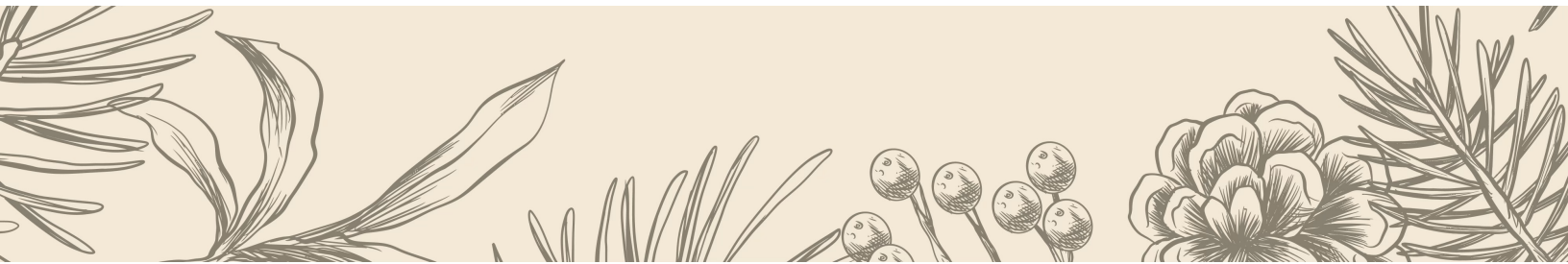
Christmas means that one day people from every tribe and nation will worship our God. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...* (John 3:16) We all have a part to play in making that happen. We all have the opportunity to help others by teaching them God's "ways", so that they can walk in His "path." Ask God how you can be a part of what He is doing around the world.

Family Activity

Invite an international student to your home this week for a meal or Christmas cookies and share with them why we celebrate Christmas. Remember, the Christmas season doesn't end on December 25!

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations. Preserve the work of your mercy, that your church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Fifth Day of Christmas

Friday | 29 December

Read Isaiah 60:1-4,18-20

¹Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ²For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. ³And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip...¹⁸Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. ¹⁹The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. ²⁰Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

No matter what our circumstances are this Christmas season, no matter what our financial situation is, what our family situation is, whether or not we are looking forward to what the next year brings, we can rejoice and celebrate in Jesus because we know what the future holds.

The Prophet Isaiah looked ahead with joy to the return of God's people from Babylon.
He looked ahead with joy to the birth of the Messiah, God with us.
He looked ahead with joy to Jesus' second coming and the new heaven and earth.

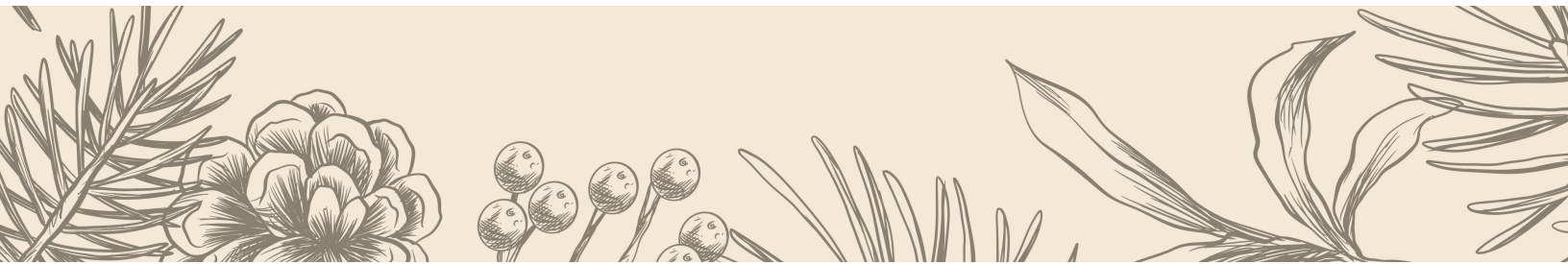
Everlasting Light. No more darkness. God has it all under control. That's a reason to celebrate!

Family Activity

Spend a few quiet moments thinking about those things you need God's everlasting light to shine upon. Or perhaps things that you are already celebrating in Jesus. Then go around your home turning on one light (or lighting one candle) at a time while naming a need or a praise. Then read the scripture passage aloud again.

Prayer

O Lord, thank you! You are the light of the world. Your light conquers any darkness now and for eternity. Help us keep our eyes on You.



Sixth Day of Christmas

Saturday | 30 December

Read John 14:3

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

"The first appearing of Jesus Christ was the central point in history, the hinge upon which the whole of history since has swung. It was the decisive moment. It was the date from which all other dating has come...In the New Testament, there are literally hundreds of references to the return of Jesus Christ. It has been estimated that one in twenty-five verses of the New Testament in some way relates to this doctrine...The range of references should leave us in no doubt whatsoever that the return of Jesus Christ is consistently and progressively pointed to throughout all the pages of Scripture...'

-Alistair Begg, "The Return of Jesus Christ"

God came as a baby over 2000 years ago. Jesus will come back again. He told us that over and over and over again. In the meantime we wait and watch for His coming. This is what we celebrate this season and what we should celebrate every day of the year.

He has come! He will come again! God with us. Immanuel.

Family Activity

Select one of the buttons below to Listen to Rich Mullins' song, *That Where I Am, There You May Also Be*.

Youtube

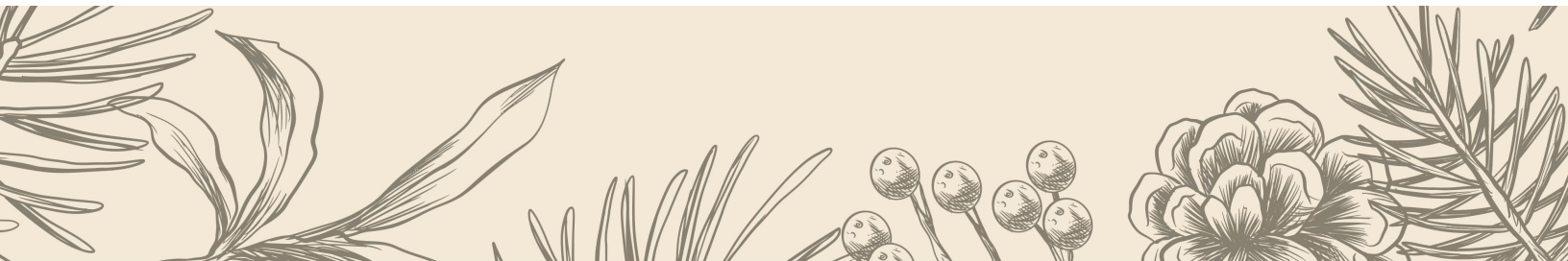
If I go prepare a place for you, I will come back again
If I go prepare a place for you, I will come back again
And you know I am the Way, the Truth, the Life, keep my command
That where I am, there you may also be

Spotify

That where I am, there you may also be
Up where the truth, the truth will set you free
In the world you will have trouble, but I leave you my peace
That where I am, there you may also be

Prayer

O Lord, thank you that all of history points to the time when You will return and make all things right! Help us to live today (and every day) in light of that.



New Years Eve Seventh Day of Christmas

Sunday | 31 December

Read Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴²Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The turning of the year marked by our calendar is rather arbitrary. Still, it is good to take account regularly in our lives of where we have been and where we are going, and our “New Year” is as good a time as any. The truth is that Jesus is coming back. We don’t know when. But He told us to keep watch and be ready. In fact, He gave us several parables with the same message: “Be ready. Be a good steward now of what you have been given and be ready!”

Prayer

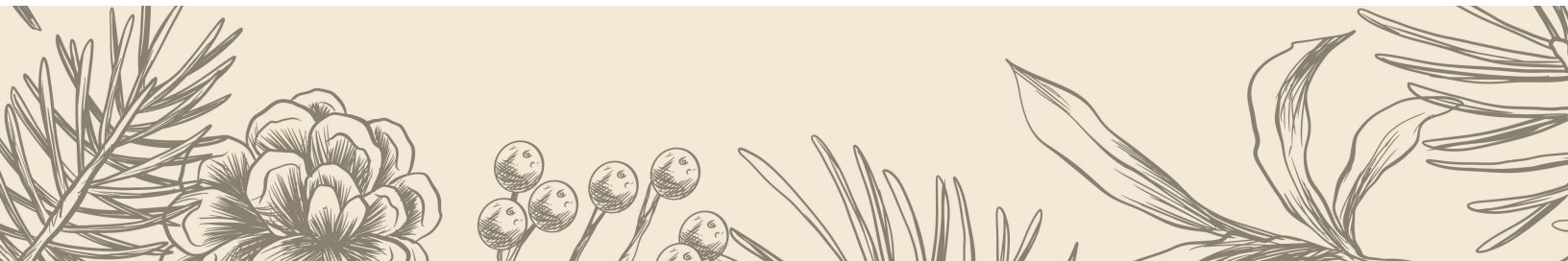
Almighty God, whose loving hand is giving me all that I possess; Grant me grace that I may honor you with my substance, and remembering the account which I must one day give, may be a faithful steward of your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Family Activity

“Toss Some Pine Cones into a Roaring Fire” (adapted from 52 Simple Ways to Make Christmas Special, Ch. 37)

Spend part of the evening with your family or friends tossing pine cones into a fire. Let each person toss in one pine cone to stand for sin. Let one pine cone tossed into the flame stand for your mistakes, hurts and resentments, or the sorrows of the past year. Let one pine cone represent your hope (not only for the coming year but that Jesus is coming again!)

At the end of the evening, take a pine cone to carry with you as a reminder, all through the coming year, that Jesus is coming again to make all things right!



New Years Day Eighth Day of Christmas

Monday | 1 January

Read Romans 13:11-12

¹¹Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Family Activity

Have one person read the following prayer out loud slowly, phrase by phrase, while those listening meditate and make it their own prayer. Note: this prayer is hundreds of years old.

O LORD,

Give me a grace that precedes, follows, guides,
sustains, sanctifies, aids every hour,
that I may not be one moment apart from thee,
but may rely on thy Spirit
to supply every thought,
speak in every word,
direct every step,
prosper every work,
build up every mote (tiny piece) of faith,
and give me a desire to show forth thy praise;
testify thy love,
advance thy kingdom.

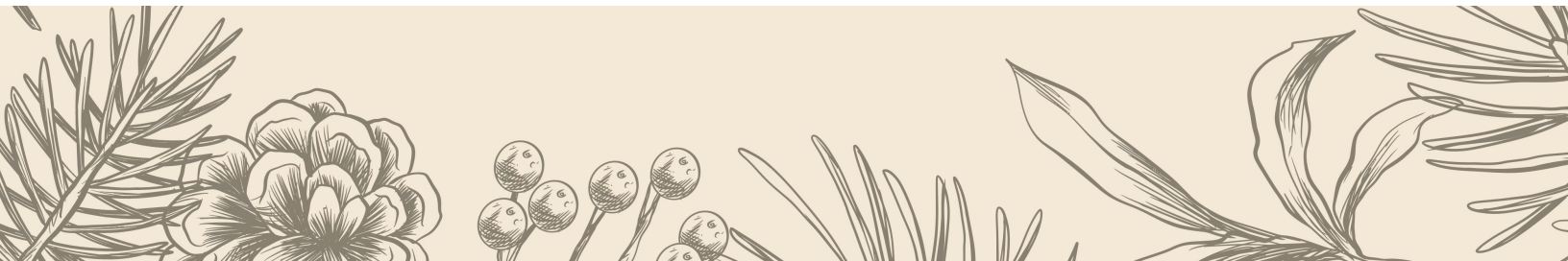
I launch my bark (ship)
on the unknown waters of this year,
with thee, O Father, as my harbour,
thee, O Son, at my helm,
thee, O Holy Spirit, filling my sails.

Guide me to heaven with ...
my lamp burning,
my ear open to thy calls,
my heart full of love,
my soul free.

Give me grace to sanctify me,
thy comforts to cheer,
thy wisdom to teach,
thy right hand to guide,
thy counsel to instruct,
thy law to judge,
thy presence to stabilize.

May thy fear be my awe,
thy triumphs my joy.

-adapted from *Valley of Vision*, "New Year"



Ninth Day of Christmas

Tuesday | 2 January

Read James 5:7a

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

He is coming! Be patient. *"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* (2 Peter 3:8-9)

He is coming! Rejoice! *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."* (2 Peter 3:18)

Prayer

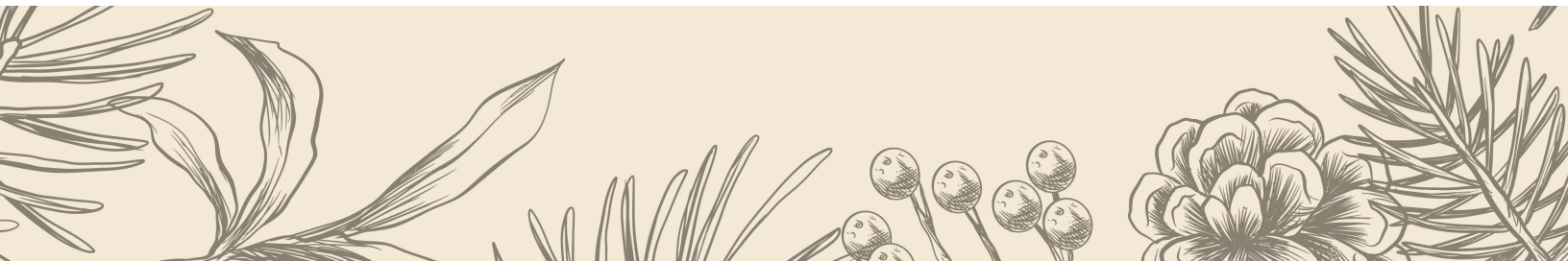
O Love Beyond Compare,
Thou art good when thou givest, when thou takest away,
when the sun shines upon me, when night gathers over me.
Thou hast loved me before the foundation of the world,
and in love didst redeem my soul;
Thou dost love me still in spite of my hard heart, ingratitude,
distrust.
Thy goodness has been with me another year,
leading me through a twisting wilderness,
in retreat helping me to advance,
when beaten back making sure headway.
Thy goodness will be with me in the year ahead;
I hoist sail and draw up anchor,
With thee as the blessed Pilot of my future as of my past.
I bless thee that thou hast veiled my eyes to the waters ahead.

If thou hast appointed storms of tribulation,
thou wilt be with me in them;
If I have to pass through tempests of persecution and
temptation, I shall not drown;
If I am to die, I shall see thy face the sooner;
If a painful end is to be my lot, grant me grace that my faith
fail not;
If I am to be cast aside from the service I love, I can make no
stipulation;
Only glorify thyself in me whether in comfort or trial,
as a chosen vessel meet (made to fit) always for thy use.

- from *Valley of Vision*, "Year's End"

Family Activity

Discuss what you would like to see God do in you in the year ahead. Pray for each other.



Tenth Day of Christmas

Wednesday | 3 January

Read Titus 2:11-14

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹²training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Here we see the relationship between Christmas (v.11), our life now (v.12), and the second coming of Jesus (v.13). We celebrate Christ's coming at Christmas. Knowing Immanuel leads us to honor Him with how we live our lives now, all the while keeping our eyes peeled for when He returns again to make all things right.

"We are not citizens of this world trying to make our way to heaven; we are citizens of heaven trying to make our way through this world. That radical insight can be life-changing. We are not to live so as to earn God's love, inherit heaven, and purchase our salvation. All those are given to us as gifts by God, a Loving Parent. We are to live as God's redeemed, as heirs to heaven, and as citizens of the Kingdom of God. We live as those who are on a journey home; a home we know will have the lights on, the door open and our Parent waiting for us when we arrive. That means in all adversity our worship of God is joyful, our life is hopeful, our future is secure. There is nothing we can lose on earth that can rob us of the treasures God has given us and will give us when we finally reach home."

-from "The Landisfarne", quoted in *Patches of Godlight* by Jan Karon

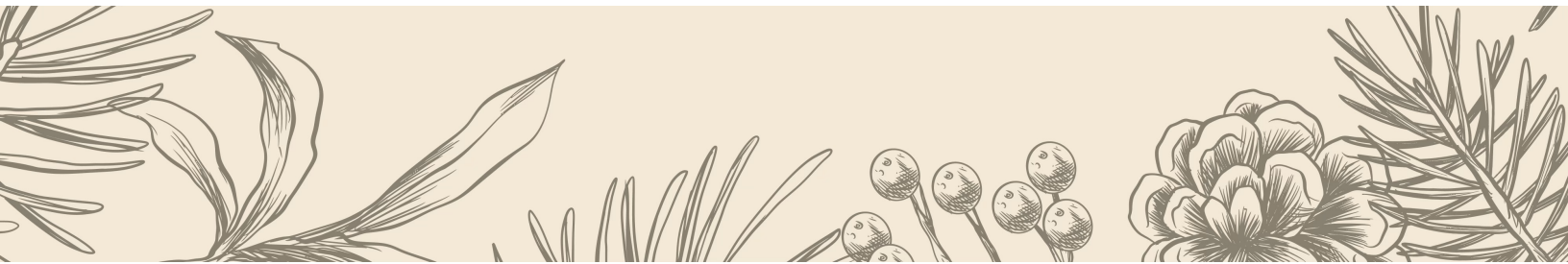
Prayer

*Grant me, O Lord my God,
A mind to know you,
A heart to seek you,
Wisdom to find you,
Conduct pleasing to you,
Faithful perseverance in waiting for you,
And a hope of finally embracing you.*

-Thomas Aquinas

Family Activity

Write a thank-you note to God. Include thanks for physical *and* non-physical things he has given you this season. Put your thank-you note somewhere where you can read it at Christmas next year to remember. Now write a thank-you note to someone who gave you a gift this year (grandparent, friend), include why the gift was so special to you.



Eleventh Day of Christmas

Thursday | 4 January

Read Hebrew 10:24-25

²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

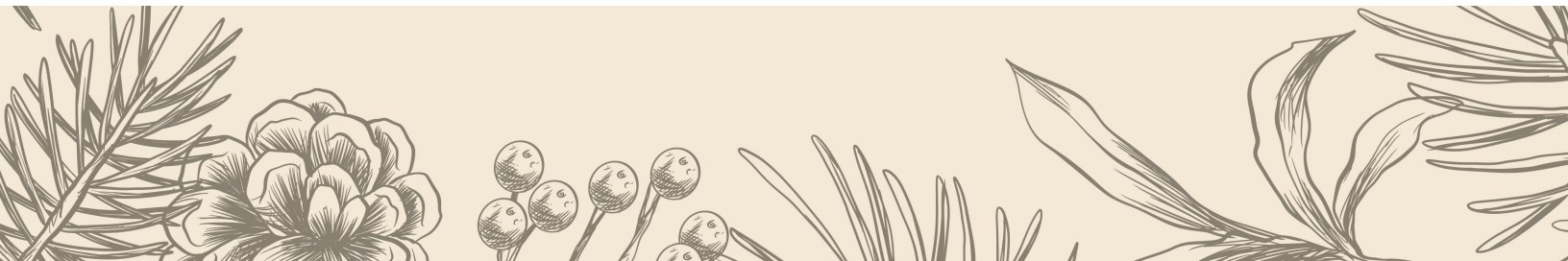
We are to keep watch and ready for Jesus' return. One way to do that is make sure we are gathering together and encouraging each other. It can be tough to remain faithful day in and day out, year in and year out. Having brothers and sisters in Christ to walk alongside you is so important. Sometimes you are the one who needs encouragement...and sometimes you are the one who can encourage another. As you head into this new year, make sure that meeting with other believers is a priority in your schedule. And be intentional in encouraging and stirring up each other to love and good works.

Family Activity

One good work you can do is to take time to thank and bless those who serve you regularly, especially during this busy season and in the darker days of winter. Make a special thank you sign for your postal worker, the package deliverer or your garbage man. Many people around you might be feeling let down after the Christmas holidays—take the time to say an encouraging word to them.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have surrounded me with a great cloud of witnesses. Grant that I, encouraged by the good example of those who have gone before me, may persevere in running the race that is set before me, until at last I attain to your eternal joy, through Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, our God, forever and ever. Amen.



Twelfth Day of Christmas

Friday | 5 January

Read Revelation 21:1-7

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

God with us. All things new. No more tears, death, mourning, pain. He is coming! Hallelujah!

Family Activity

Select one of the buttons below to listen to Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*.

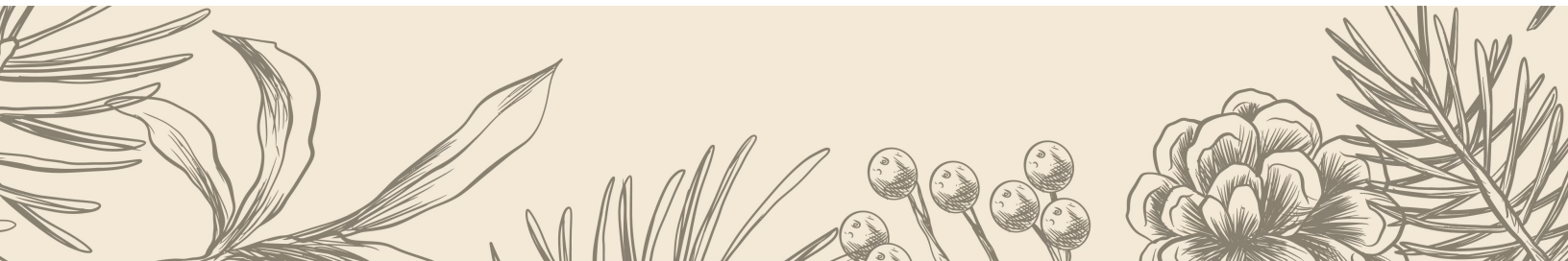
Youtube

Spotify

Prayer

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that having this hope, I may purify myself as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, I may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)



Epiphany

Saturday | 6 January

Read Matthew 2:1-12

¹Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶"'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" ⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

January 6th is the day we traditionally remember the wise men who arrived with their gifts to honor the young Jesus. We think about the wise men at Christmas, but we should be like the wise men every day of the year. They studied the Scriptures to learn all they could about God and the Messiah. They acted on what they learned. Their whole life was about following God's leading. And when they saw Him they rejoiced exceedingly.

Family Activity

Discuss: Do you read your Bible just to check it off on your to do list? Or do you actively seek to know all you can about who your God is? Are you following in obedience what you learn about Him? Are you characterized by joy in knowing Him? What do you need to change to be more like the wise men?

As we finish our celebrations of this season and look forward to what lies ahead, let's remember to keep watch. He is coming again!

Prayer

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know thee now by faith, to thy presence, where we may behold thy glory face to face, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

