

Introduction

Advent—What is it?

Advent and celebrating Advent is not found in the Bible. However, Christians have observed Advent for a thousand years as a time of thoughtful preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth. The word "Advent" is from the Latin word which means "coming." It refers to the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. Advent is observed for about one month prior to Christmas. It is a time of preparation, anticipation, and celebration.

This guide has brief Advent devotions for each day. They are purposely devotional in nature. Family devotions are a great tradition for Christian families. Sadly, many families do not have regular devotions. What better time than at Christmas to have this special family time? Make it your goal to come together as a family as many days as you possibly can. Maybe Advent devotions can jump-start family devotions for the rest of the year.

Your Advent Wreath

Many families have Advent devotions around an Advent wreath. The wreath is a circle, often made of evergreen branches, but anything will do. The circle is a good picture of the fact that God has no beginning or end and that his love is without beginning or end! Around the circle place four red candles. In the center place a lone white candle. Each week of advent another of the candles is lit: one candle each day the first week, two candles the second week, three the third, and all four red candles during the fourth week. On Christmas Eve the white candle is lit. Each of the candles represents a different aspect of Advent and the Christmas story as follows:

The first candle is the Prophecy Candle. It reminds us that Jesus came into the world at the exact time and in the exact way God said He would through the many prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Jesus.

The second candle is the Bethlehem Candle. It reminds us that Jesus was born in the City of David and that He is the King of God's people, just as David was in the Old Testament.

The third candle is the Shepherd's Candle. It reminds us that the Lord Jesus came to common people like us. God's good news of salvation in Christ is for all men, no matter how rich or poor they are.

The fourth candle is the Angel's Candle. It reminds us that God sent His Holy Angels to announce that the Christ Child was born in Bethlehem.

The center candle is the Christ Candle. It represents the birth of Jesus, making it the most special of all!



What to do.

Each day when your family is gathered together, say, "Jesus said, *'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 ESV). Then light the appropriate candles saying their names as they are lit. Especially on Sunday evenings, when a new candle is lit for the first time, take a few moments to talk together about the significance of that candle.

Then read the scripture in the guide. After the scripture, read the devotional thought. Talk together as a family about what you have read. Incorporate some singing of favorite Christmas carols, as children usually love to sing. Then close in prayer. Include everyone in the prayer time. One way to do that is to pray for the people you received Christmas cards from that day.

Make it enjoyable!

This is a time for you to be together as a family — so, keep it fun! To find out whether you are succeeding, do your children look forward to it, or groan when you say it is time for Advent. Don't expect them to enjoy a long dry time when they are scolded for not paying attention. Allow the children, if they are old enough, to light and blow out the candles, to read the scriptures, and to participate in every way possible. They will love having a special part in your Advent family devotional time.

Make Christmas Eve the most special time of all. Don't let last minute shopping and wrapping of gifts crowd out this wonderful opportunity to spend time focusing on the birth of our Savior together as a family.

And don't forget to have your Advent devotion BEFORE you start tearing into presents on Christmas morning. After all, the most important gift of all is Jesus Christ, Son of God, King of Kings, and Lord of all!

A special word to families.

Christian family traditions are of great importance in the character formation of children. They will help develop Christian attitudes, habits, and values as your children grow and form their own families. Family traditions are strong ties that help to weave the family together. Gathering the family together each day during the Advent season to sing, pray, study God's Word, and share may be the most important gift you give your children this year. You may also find that your family enjoys it so much that you will want to continue daily (or at least regular) family worship after the Advent season is past.

Use a true translation of the Bible (NKJV, NASB, ESV) instead of a paraphrase. If anything is difficult to understand, explain it as you go. Have children who are able read, read aloud. Even very young children can learn the carols as you repeat them day after day. Take time to help them appreciate what is happening and to put themselves in the story.

Families with teenagers can profit much from additional scripture study, learning more about our Christmas heritage, and discussion. You might discuss reasons God sent Christ to earth, how Christ might have felt to leave Heaven, the things that may have gone through Joseph's mind before the angel set him straight, why we don't need special messages from angels today, and the many other things you may think of. Encourage children to recall and tell what they remember about past Christmases. As a family, you might enjoy evaluating: Good things about our Christmas—to keep! Bad things about our Christmas—to drop! Puzzling things about our Christmas—to think about!

Christmas toys will break and clothes will soon be outgrown, but the gift of your time together as a family, will be lasting.

Additional Suggestions.

Let the children look up the Scripture for each day to start family worship. If you have Christmas music, play it through Advent. Take time to learn the words to all the verses of the Christmas carols. They have a great message. Handel's Messiah is unequalled for scriptural content and majesty. If you don't have this music, why not purchase it as a gift to your family?

Here are still further ideas:

Buy or make gifts for the needy during the Advent Season.

Include friends and other family in Advent devotions.

Use or make an Advent calendar.

Give Christmas cards to your neighbors.

If your family is large or if you have several close friends, you might enjoy drawing names within the group and all during Advent do special things for that secret friend. The names can be revealed on Christmas Eve.

Special family recipes or a family cookie-baking session can be great fun and a meaningful memory-making tradition. If you don't have a family, invite friends or neighborhood children. As you bake, use the opportunity to share the joy of Christ's birth.

It is especially appropriate that in the Advent season we help those who don't have anything to eat. Consider setting aside extra dollars to provide relief for another family. What would happen if we dared match every dollar spent on gifts with a dollar for missions?

As you wrap the gifts and send Christmas cards, pray for the persons who will receive them. And again pray for those from whom you receive cards each day.

Most of all, remember what Christmas is all about. As you make material preparations, prepare your heart for the coming of the King!



The Prophecy Candle

First Sunday of Advent



Each day light the first candle, say its name (e.g., the Prophecy Candle) and say together: “Jesus said, *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 ESV)

The Prophecy Candle reminds us of the prophets who expected and predicted the coming of the Messiah who would bring peace and love and salvation to the world.

COME THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

*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.*

These words were written by Charles Wesley in 1744. As you learn them together, notice the things Christ came to do for His people. He came to set us free, to give us rest and joy, to deliver, to reign, to rule, to raise us to Himself. Haggai 2:7 says, “The desire of all nations shall come.” Let us desire Christ’s reign in our lives. (Another carol this week: *O COME, O COME EMMANUEL*)

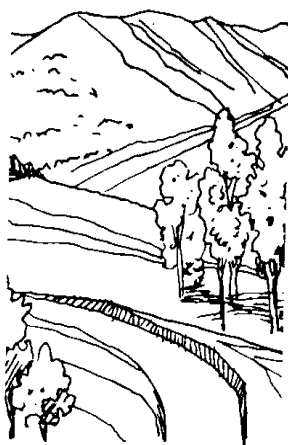
SUNDAY—Isaiah 9:2,6&7

Approximately 750 years before the birth of Christ, God gave the Prophet Isaiah these promises about the coming Messiah. There are several important things to think about in these verses. We are walking in darkness and death until we experience the light of God’s presence (9:2). Although Jesus was born as a baby, He is given several important names which show His divinity (that He is God), and His greatness. What are these names? What does each name mean? In what ways can Jesus make a difference in the way we live today? As we prepare to celebrate Christ’s birth, let us remember that He will come again as King over all. What a privilege to crown Him King in our lives right now!

MONDAY—Isaiah 11:1-6-7,10

In this passage, Christ is pictured as a rod and a branch of Jesse, who was David’s father. In the New Testament, Matthew begins his gospel by giving Christ’s genealogy, or family line. Luke gives it in chapter 3. Why is this so important? We live in a mobile age, where family ties are not so important; but we must understand the vast importance this had for the Jews. Jesus identified Himself with the human race and was born into a specific family. He is the fulfillment of all God’s promises in the Old Testament. God kept all His promises to the Jews, and He keeps His Word to us today.

Note again and discuss the characteristics of Christ listed in these verses: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, reverence, righteousness, etc. And yet, He was willing to be one of us. What a great Savior—“born a child and yet a King!”



TUESDAY—Isaiah 61:1-3

As we read in the New Testament, we see how Christ fulfilled the prophecy of these verses. God’s Spirit was on Him; He preached good news; He healed the broken-hearted, etc. But we must never say, “Well, that was O.K. for the people then.” Christ is still working in our world through the Holy Spirit to do these things in our lives. This is a good time to discuss and think about the changes Christ wants to make in our lives. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). As we understand who Christ is, we must receive Him; let Him heal our hearts and lives; be freed from the sins that bind us; receive His discipline and His love; be comforted; receive His beauty for our ugliness, His joy for our mourning, and His praise for our sadness, so that we can be like trees of righteousness, planted by the Lord for His glory. “By Thine all sufficient merit raise us to Thy glorious throne.” What do you need from God today? Ask Him.

WEDNESDAY—Isaiah 40:1-8

The scripture for today and tomorrow speaks of the comfort and good news that the Lord brings. Many know this passage from Handel's Messiah. This musical masterpiece was written in 1741, in just twenty-four days. It has made the passage in Isaiah familiar to many, who may not even know it is from the Bible. The Messiah opens with Isaiah 40. If you have the music, take time to listen to this section together. Some of the prophecy of this chapter is still to be fulfilled when Christ comes again. Verses 3-4 refer to preparation for a King. In those days before a King was crowned or came for a state visit, the entire country prepared for Him. Everything was cleaned, painted, and washed. Even crooked roads were made straight.

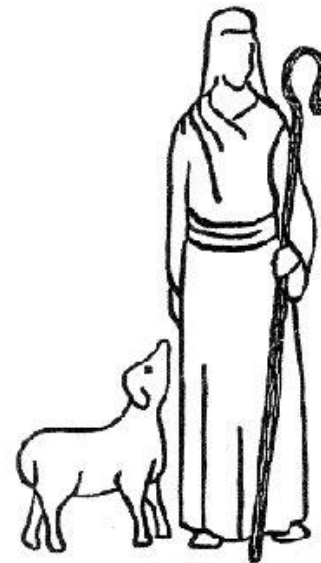
How fitting that we should prepare for the coming of the King of kings into our lives. The Advent season is preparation. What do you need to make straight in your life so that His glory can be revealed in you? Too often we do all the shopping but still fail to prepare our hearts for the King.

THURSDAY—Isaiah 40:9-11

Before Jesus came, He had always been God. When He came, He became a man, while never ceasing to be God. He came to establish His kingdom, over which He rules! It is essential that we worship Jesus as God and submit to Him as our King.

Many times Christ is pictured as our Shepherd. Look at the beautiful picture that is presented in verse 11. Christ is the One who feeds both our bodies and our spirits. He calls us to Himself and gently leads us. A sheep that doesn't follow its shepherd gets in a lot of trouble. It gives us great peace to know that our Lord cares for us and will provide for us, protect us, and lead us. We cannot make it on our own, and we do not have to.

Read the rest of Isaiah 40 for added appreciation of the greatness of our God. Again, listen to Handel's Messiah. Even those who are not musicians can notice and appreciate of this passage set to music.



FRIDAY--Isaiah 55:1-13

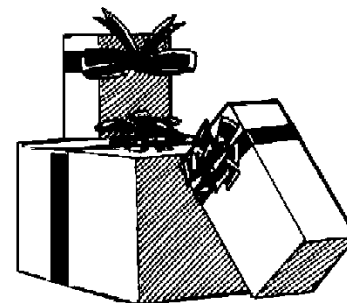
This beautiful chapter in Isaiah points out the satisfaction and joy that comes as we seek the Lord. The first part of verse 2 is a good warning about how we should spend as we work on our Christmas lists. Truly, we must evaluate how we spend our time, money, and labor. What a tragedy if we spend, spend, spend, and find that it was all for nothing; that we were in such a frenzy that we missed the real point and the great joy and contentment of Christmas. Verse 4 says that the Lord came as a leader and commander for us. Let's submit to His Word and work in our lives. Verses 12 and 13 refer to the future; but in a way, this can be true in our lives now as we acknowledge Christ's supremacy. We can go out with joy and be led forth with peace. Along with the mountains we too can break forth into singing, and we can find great joy. Especially during the Christmas season we can know joy and praise. Christmas comes and goes at such a frantic pace. How do you suppose the Lord feels about our sometimes begrudging attitudes? Have you ever thought: "Well, we'd better get them a gift because they gave us one last year."? Let us use Isaiah 55 as our motto today and in the days to come. Listen for His direction and leading and see what a difference this will make in your attitudes and actions.

SATURDAY—Ephesians 2:8-9

At Christmas, we think much about gifts: what we are going to give and what we will receive. Think about or discuss the best gift you ever received. How much did it cost? What made it special? Who gave it to you? Do you still have it?

Jesus Christ is God's gift to us. And He is the best gift any of us will ever receive. It cost God a great deal to send Christ to earth. He did this because He loves us so much. The only way we can have a gift is to reach out and take it. All those presents under the tree wouldn't do anyone any good if no one receives them. It is the same with God's gift of salvation. A Christian is one who has received this gift. When by God's grace we see God for who He is, we realize our great need for Him; we believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and then rose again. We receive Christ by confessing and repenting from our sin. If you haven't done so, receiving God's gift of salvation will make this the best Christmas ever. If you have, why not thank Him again for His great love for you!

And by the way, if you want to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, the desire that is in you is also a gift from God.



The Bethlehem Candle

Second Sunday of Advent



Each day light two candles, repeating their names, and say together: “Jesus said, ‘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 ESV) Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

The Bethlehem Candle reminds us that Christ was born as a human baby in a specific place and at a specific time in history. Let us never forget that He is also eternal God.

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie; Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light; The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

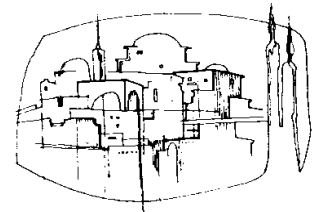
For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above; While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love. O morning stars, together, proclaim the holy birth; And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given: So God imparts to human hearts the blessing of His heaven.

No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel, Amen.



This is one of the few well-known Christmas carols by an American author. Phillip Brooks was the Pastor of a small church, and he composed the poem while sitting on a hillside overlooking Bethlehem. On his return home he wrote the poem down and then took it to his church organist, Lewis Redner, for the tune. Redner had a dream of the tune Christmas Eve night, 1868, and hurriedly arose from bed and wrote the melody which was presented in church the following day.

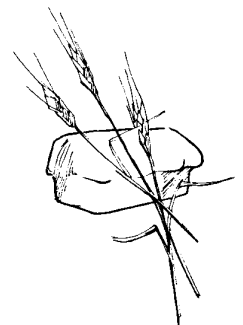
SUNDAY—Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1-6

Bethlehem was a very little town, yet it was from this small place that the King came forth. Sometimes God calls us to a small place or an insignificant (*we think*) task. Let us be faithful in whatever place God has given us.

Micah is a small book known as one of the Minor Prophets (called minor because of size, not because of its message). However, here plainly 700 years before Christ’s birth, is the specific prophecy about His birthplace. In Matthew 2:1-6 when the wise men went to Jerusalem seeking Christ’s birthplace, the scribes and chief priests knew that Bethlehem was where Christ was to be born. But they did not go to see Him there. They did not act on the knowledge they had. How tragic if we know of God’s Word and Christ’s salvation and do not act on these things. Simply knowing about Christ is not nearly so important as, “going to Bethlehem to worship Him.” How can we worship the Lord today? Let’s be “doers of the Word” and worship and serve Him. James 4:10 says, “To Him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

MONDAY—John 6:35, 47-51, & 58

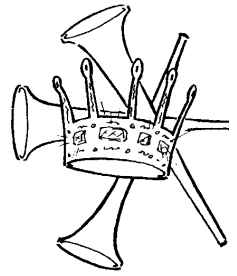
In Hebrew the word “Bethlehem” means “House of Bread.” The little town is set amid wheat fields, so this is a fitting name; but it is even more appropriate because Christ came to be the Bread of Life. What does it mean to know Christ as our Living Bread? It means He sustains, satisfies, and fills our lives. Just as we have to eat every day to maintain life and to function well, we also need to spend time every day in prayer and study of God’s Word. This is how our spirits are fed. It would be a tragedy to feed our bodies and not our souls (that inner part of us that makes us a person and able to know God). Think about how your body would feel if you only ate one meal a week. You would be mighty hungry in between, wouldn’t you? You wouldn’t have any energy or vitality. If we want to be alive in Christ and tell others about Him, we need to read the Bible and pray every day, so we don’t starve spiritually.



TUESDAY—1 Samuel 16:1-13

This is the beautiful passage of Samuel's anointing of David to be King of Israel after Saul. Let us notice that Bethlehem was the town to which Samuel went to find David's family. We noted from Jesus' family line that He was a direct descendant of David; so when Mary and Joseph went to be registered, they went to Bethlehem, which was David's home so many centuries before. One of the most important events in history, the birth of Jesus Christ, happened in Bethlehem. Samuel was obedient and went to Bethlehem to anoint David.

Mary and Joseph were obedient and went to Bethlehem to register. We must be obedient in going to whatever place or situation in life God has called us. Children, think about how you can be obedient in your school work or in cheerfully doing what your parents ask. Adults, how do you obey in your attitude toward your job, your church, your home and family? Let us remember that we obey by the grace of God and the power of His Spirit



WEDNESDAY—Luke 1:5-25

The Bethlehem Candle is a symbol of the preparation made for the birth of Christ. For the next four days we will talk about the preparation in the months leading up to Christ's birth. Today's passage records the announcement to Zacharias and Elizabeth that they would have a son named John (v.13) who would prepare the way for Christ. There are several interesting things to note about this passage. Elizabeth and Zacharias had no children at a time in history when not having children was thought to be a curse from God. Yet verse 6 says they both kept God's commands and were blameless. God had a special reason for the timing of John's birth. The angel of God appeared to Zacharias as he was going about his regular duties of serving God. What a reminder to us to be faithful in the tasks God gives us no matter what is going on in our lives. From the beginning, they knew John would have a special goal for his life. Verse 17 says he was to make the people ready for the Lord. To let Zacharias know that this was true, the Lord made him speechless for the nine months until John was born. Think of how the Lord speaks to us through His Word, and that His Word is true!

THURSDAY—Luke 1:26-38



After six months, God sent the angel, Gabriel, to Mary to announce that she would be the mother of Jesus. Note especially verses 30-35. Jesus is great, the Son of the Highest (God Himself), and He reigns over all. There will be no end to His Kingdom.

We don't know what's going to happen in the future. Many times we can't even understand what's happening to us right now. God knows and can see all of history at the same time. There was no way Mary could fully comprehend all that would be involved in being Jesus' mother; but she was willing to do whatever God commanded. Look at what she says in verse 38. "Behold Thy handmaiden. Be it to me as you have said."

Like Mary, let us accept God's Word and embrace His will for our lives. When we think about God's sovereignty and His love for us, surely we will learn to trust His will for us. (Discuss what sovereignty means.)

FRIDAY—Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:39-53

Mary was *betrothed* to be married to a man named Joseph. In Jesus' day, *betrothal* was much more serious than engagement is today. Once a person was *betrothed* , although they did not yet live together as husband and wife, the only way out was divorce. According to Jewish law, Joseph could have had Mary stoned when it was discovered that she was pregnant before they were married, since he knew the child in her womb was not his. Imagine how hurt and confused Joseph must have been. So, God sent the angel to comfort him and to explain what was going on. The angel told him that Mary had not been unfaithful, but that this was a very special event never to be repeated. How good the Lord was to help Joseph during this hard time. We must remember that the Bible has the answers we need today for the hard questions of life.

After the angel visited her, Mary went to see her cousin, Elizabeth, and stayed with her for three months. Luke records Mary's song of praise to God. She was not praising herself, nor should we praise her. She was praising God for what He had done. Do our souls magnify the Lord and our spirits rejoice in God, our Salvation? What are some practical ways we can show this attitude in our everyday lives? What difference does this attitude make as we prepare for Christmas?

SATURDAY—Luke 1:57-80

Finally, John was born. It was customary in those days to name a first born son after his father. Elizabeth and Zacharias did a very *un-Jewish* thing in naming him John rather than Zacharias. They were following the angel's instructions. When Zacharias was finally allowed to speak again after so many months of silence, notice his first words, (v.64) He praised God and then (v.76) gave a special word to his eight-day-old baby. Zacharias knew from the beginning that John was chosen to prepare for the Lord's coming by preaching repentance and to give light to those in darkness. How happy Zacharias and Elizabeth must have been to have a son whom they knew had a special place in God's plan. Think about how special all God's children are to Him, how much He loves us.

The Shepherds' Candle

Third Sunday of Advent



Each day light three candles, repeating their names and say together: “Jesus said, *‘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 ESV)

The third Advent Candle, the Shepherd’s Candle, represents joy and celebration. The shepherds shared the joy of Christ’s birth. We can share with others the joy of His presence.

WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS

*While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone around, And glory shone around.*

*“Fear not,” said he—for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind—
“Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind, To you and all mankind.”*

*“To you, in David’s town this day, is born of David’s line, the Savior, who is Christ, the Lord,
and this shall be the sign: And this shall be the sign.”*

*“The heavenly Babe you there shall find to human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands, And in a manger laid, And in a manger laid.”*

*Thus spoke the seraph, and forthwith appeared a shining throng
Of angels praising God, who thus addressed their joyful song: Addressed their joyful song:*

*“All glory be to God on high, and to the earth be peace:
Good will henceforth, from heaven to men, Begin and never cease! Begin and never cease!”*



This is a very old carol. The words were written by Nahum Tate in 1700. In 1728, George Handel wrote the tune we sing. Verse 1 sets the stage. Verses 2 through 4 tell of the angel’s message to the shepherds. In verse 5 the throng of angels appear, and verse 6 has the rest of their message. Take time to learn the words, especially so that children can understand the phrases. We want them to know that the shepherds were *watching their flocks*—not *washing their socks*! (Other appropriate carols at this point would be “O Come, All Ye Faithful” and “Good Christian Men, Rejoice.”)

SUNDAY—Luke 2:8-20

What do you think the shepherds were doing; what were they talking about when the angel of the Lord appeared to them on the Galilean hill? The angel gave them the good news that Jesus was born; then all the choirs of Heaven praised God as they hailed the birth of the One they knew was God Himself! We can only wonder how they looked and sounded?

When the angel first appeared, the shepherds were very frightened; however, after receiving the message they went immediately to Bethlehem to see Jesus. They believed and went out telling everyone about Him. This is a picture of what our response should be. The Lord’s name and presence should inspire in us a deep reverence. After we meet the Savior, we should eagerly tell what has happened to us. The shepherds told the things they had heard and seen. They were eye-witnesses, and they were so excited about what had happened to them that they didn’t stop talking about it and praising God for Christ’s birth even though people were puzzled and may have thought they had imagined the whole thing. In the same way, as we receive Jesus and learn more and more about Him through the Bible. And we will share what we know to be true about our Lord because we know Him. Is there someone you should share the good news of Jesus Christ with today?

MONDAY—Psalm 100

There are so many Psalms that are praises to the Lord. During the next few days as we study a few of these Psalms of praise, let’s practice praising God both for who He is and for what He does for us. All of us, young children through adults, need to learn more about voicing our praise to God through prayer, through song, and through our attitudes towards Him and towards each other. Praising God is the greatest cure for a troubled mind and a hectic lifestyle. It helps us put our lives in order. As we think of Jesus coming as a baby, let us also praise Him as our Lord. He made us, and we are His. We are to thank Him, and praise Him, and bless His name. Talk about or make a list of all the things we know (from scripture) about who God is. What are God’s characteristics? If it were not for His everlasting mercy, Jesus would never have come to this earth to die for us. What should our response to this be? Worship God for who He is. Psalms 90-92 fit this same theme.

TUESDAY—Psalm 103

This is another of the songs of praise to God. Verse 1 says “let all that is within me bless His holy name.” He forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, satisfies, and takes care of all our needs. He is so patient with us, and because of Christ’s death He has removed all our sins from us. What a cause for rejoicing! We must all bless the Lord. Read Psalms 144-146 to see other things God does for us. Yesterday we concentrated on *Who God is*. Today let’s list as many specific things as we can that God does for us.

WEDNESDAY—Psalm 150

This is a vivid, exciting song of praise to God. This is a good one to learn by doing. How can we praise God in all the ways mentioned? Why does He want us to do this? What are some of the great things He has done in our lives? We should praise God with our whole lives for His greatness. How can we do that? Read Psalms 147-149. These also speak of praise to our God. Our praise is what we give back to God for who He is and what He does. Notice that praising God isn’t *just* something we do when we pray or go to church. Praise to God is to be a part of every area of our lives. We are to face every part of life with this attitude. We can’t praise God and be ungrateful at the same time. Which attitude do you choose?

THURSDAY—Matthew 5:1-12

Christ began His public ministry with what is commonly called “The Sermon on the Mount.” If you can, read through Matthew, chapters 5-7. In this first section, Jesus talks about true blessedness or joy. These are “Be-attitudes.” They tell us what our **attitudes** should **be**. The person who is truly blessed, and has real joy, is one who sees his real need of God, who is truly sorry for his sin, who doesn’t demand his own way, and who is hungry to be like God. Then, because God meets his inner needs, that person is able to be merciful, to be humble and gentle, to be a peacemaker, and even to be persecuted for being righteous. Remember that we cannot drum up all this goodness on our own. We must first see our desperate need for God and receive Christ; then He will begin to change our lives. Think about specific ways to meet God’s conditions for being truly blessed and full of His joy, then thank God for the way He will meet your needs. Ask Him specifically to supply your needs.

FRIDAY—Galatians 5:22-25

This is the passage which tells us about the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Please note that this word “fruit” is singular, not plural. It is not fruits of the spirit where we can pick and choose the characteristics we want. We cannot decide that we will choose some of these characteristics and not others. If we have received Christ, we have the Holy Spirit’s presence in us. As we cooperate with Him, He will work out this fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

Talk about the opposite of each of these and pray for the Holy Spirit to make changes in our lives. As we trust Him and surrender our lives to Him, then we will have His fruit. Because of this fruit, we have every reason to be joyful.



SATURDAY—Hebrews 12:1-2 and Mark 10:43-45

Do these Scriptures seem out of place during the week of Advent when we are talking about joy? There is another side of joy, a costly side, which we also need to think about. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus, for the joy set before Him *endured* the cross. Notice that it does not say He *enjoyed* the cross. In Mark 10:45 Jesus says He came to serve and give His life as ransom for many. The cross of Jesus Christ is the focal point of history. When He died, Jesus paid the death penalty for you and me. The cross was a place of pain and suffering, but Jesus endured it in obedience to God the Father. He was the only perfect sacrifice. The second person of the Trinity—God Himself—became man and lived a life of total obedience so He could die for you and me. What is your response to His costly demonstration of His love?

When we receive Christ’s gift of salvation, we know joy that is so great we cannot explain it. As we walk with the Lord, we will also know times of pain and suffering. We must trust and obey God just as Jesus did by going to the cross. Jesus gained victory over death and sin by rising from the dead. As we go through life’s hard experiences in obedience to the Lord, we will know His resurrection power in our lives. What our response will be. Will we trust and obey Him even when it is painful to do so?

The Angels' Candle

Fourth Sunday of Advent



Each day light four candles, repeating their names, and say together: “Jesus said, *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 ESV)

The Angel’s Candle tells us that just as the angels were messengers proclaiming Christ’s birth to the shepherds, we are God’s messengers proclaiming Christ’s presence in our world.

HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

*Hark the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies,
With the angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”*

*Christ, by highest heaven adored: Christ the Everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, to the earth from heaven’s home;
Veiled in flesh the God-head see; hail the incarnate Deity;
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”*

*Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail, the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.
Hark the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.” Amen.*



Charles Wesley wrote over 6,000 of our hymns. He was inspired to write this carol when he heard the ringing of the church bells as he walked to church on Christmas morning in 1793. In 1856, an organist named William Cummings set Wesley’s words to music that Felix Mendelssohn composed in 1840. This is a familiar song—but look again at the words. Jesus Christ is King. He came to reconcile us to God. He is adored in heaven and certainly should be adored in our lives. He laid aside His glory to come to live as man in order to give us new life. What a King! (Other appropriate carols for this week are: “Angels We Have Heard on High;” “Angels From the Realms of Glory;” “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.”)

SUNDAY—Luke 2:8-14

Throughout this Advent study, we have seen the angels doing many important tasks. The Herald Angel, Gabriel, was God’s messenger to Zacharias to tell him of the birth of John, to Mary to announce Christ’s birth, and to Joseph to let him know of God’s plan. Then the angel came to tell the shepherds to go to Bethlehem to see the Savior. When the multitude of angels appeared, they were praising God and giving Him glory for Jesus’ birth. In a similar way, we are to be God’s messengers, telling the people of our needy world that the Savior has the power to forgive our sins. People tend to be more open to hearing about Christ during Christmas. Who can you tell about Jesus this week? Let us say as the angels did that the Savior, Christ the Lord, is born in our lives—“Glory to God in the highest.”

MONDAY—Luke 2:7

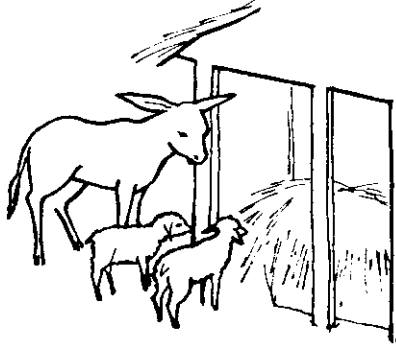
No Vacancy

Jesus was born in a stable, which was probably a cave “because there was no room for them in the Inn.” Bethlehem was crowded. King David had many descendants, and they were all there for the census. Because Mary was pregnant, she and Joseph probably had to travel slowly so that by the time they arrived, there was a “No Vacancy” sign on the Inn. This is the way many people go through life. Their lives are so crowded with things that there is no room for Christ the King. If the innkeeper had known who Jesus was, you can be sure he would have made room for Him. Yet, today, years later, when people *do* know who Christ is, they still crowd Him out. Let us be sure not to “crowd Jesus out” of our lives”

*“O come to my heart, Lord Jesus! There is room in my heart for Thee.
My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus! When Thou comest and callest for me.”*

TUESDAY—Luke 2:1-7

Do you believe that God’s timing and God’s planning are always perfect? Remember that Micah prophesied 700 years before the Messiah was born that He was to be born in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, but they had to travel to Bethlehem to pay taxes right at the time Jesus was to be born. “That’s tough,” we say, “to have to walk (or ride a donkey) those long hundred miles when you’re about to have a baby.” But it was part of God’s perfect plan. He made sure that all the pieces fit together. “And surely a



stable is no place to have a baby. A modern hospital, yes . . . but a dirty stable—and for the Son of God?”

The Jewish sacrificial system required worshipers to sacrifice a lamb as a reminder of their sin. Those lambs could never actually take people’s sins away. The point of all those lambs was to point to Jesus, of whom John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God Who *takes away* the sins of the world.” So as it turns out, a stable is a perfect place for the Son of God, who is the Lamb of God, to be born.

God’s place and timing were perfect; and today, over two thousand years later, they are still perfect. Even when things don’t go as we might plan them, we can know that God is completely trustworthy. Can you think of anything that God has done in your life that wasn’t what you wanted, but that turned out better than you hoped for?

WEDNESDAY—John 1:1-14

Here Jesus is called The Word and The Light. Today, let’s think about Christ The Word. What characteristics of the Word do we find here? Jesus is the Living Word, one with God, equal with God, Creator of all that is, Source of light, and Giver of salvation. Have you thanked the Lord for each of these aspects of His character? This Word (Jesus) willingly became a man and came to earth as a human baby to grow up in an actual home with brothers and sisters. After 33 years He took upon Himself the sins of those He came to save. Let God stretch your mind to comprehend as much of this incredible love for you as you can. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus Christ is the Word? Let’s thank and praise Him for who He is.

THURSDAY—John 1:1-14

Yesterday we talked about Jesus being the perfect Word of God. In verses 4-9 He is called The Light. If you turn off the lights for a few minutes you will see how much light the Advent candles give. They give a lot, but they are easily blown out. Christ is The Light. He is able to bring light to our entire life, and all the powers of evil have never been nor will ever be able to put Him out of business. Jesus has promised (John 8:12): “Jesus said, *‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’*” Jesus is The Word and The Light in our lives when we receive Him as Savior and submit our lives to Him as Lord. What areas of your life need the light of The Light? John 1:12 says that those who receive Jesus by trusting in Him for salvation are given the power to become the children of God. Are you one of His children?

FRIDAY—Matthew 2:1-10

There is much folklore and speculation regarding these wise men who came from the east to worship the Christ child. For us today, the important thing is not how many there were, where they came from, or how old Christ was when they got there. Let us concentrate on what Scripture says about these wise men. They followed the light which they had. They did so at great cost to themselves. They did it because they wanted to find Jesus. How much more should we who have God’s special, revealed Word—the Bible—faithfully and expectantly follow what we read there! The wise men followed a star and asked questions until they found Christ Himself. It has been said, “Wise Men today still seek Him.” They came to worship Christ and brought Him costly gifts. We also, as we see who Christ is, will worship Him and will bring Him our gifts. These gifts are ourselves, our time, talent, money, prayer, and worship. Verse 10 says, “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” As we come to Jesus, we too, can know exceeding joy. Let us all be Wise Men.



(To families with children: this is a great day to act out the Scripture passage. It will help the children remember more clearly exactly what happens.)

(Please Note: During years when Christmas Day comes earlier in the week, plan to combine and condense the study for this fourth week of Advent.)

The Christ Candle

Advent



On Christmas Eve, light the four Advent Candles, repeating their names; then light the center Christ Candle, as you say together: “Jesus said, *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 ESV)

The Christ Candle symbolizes Christ’s presence in our world. Now all the candles are burning. Christ is born! What cause for rejoicing!

SILENT NIGHT! HOLY NIGHT!

*Silent night! Holy night! All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child! Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night! Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar, Heavenly hosts sing: “Alleluia:
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.”*

*Silent night! Holy night! Son of God, love’s pure Light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace.
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.*

*Silent night! Holy night! Wondrous Star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing, Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.*

The words of this beautiful carol were written by Joseph Mohr, the parish priest of Arnsdorf, Austria, December 23, 1818. He took the poem to the church organist, Franz Gruber, who wrote the music that night. Mice had eaten out the church organ, so the carol was sung in the church the following evening to guitar accompaniment. (Other carols for Christmas Eve: may include: “Away in a Manger,” “Joy to the World,” “O Come All Ye Faithful,” and “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.”)

CHRISTMAS EVE—Luke 2:1-20

(See the note in the introduction regarding Christmas Eve. Make this a very special day for yourself and your family and friends. Plan a special time using drama, song, or whatever will help you concentrate on and capture the awe of this special day.)

During Advent we have studied, learned, and thought about many aspects of Christ’s birth. As we read Luke’s account again now, let’s prayerfully think about what happened when Christ the Messiah was born as a real, human baby. Remember, this is not a made-up story. It is all true. All that we’ve read is what really happened. What is the most exciting part for you? Just as there are gifts under the tree, there are many aspects to God’s gift of His Son to us. Rejoice and praise God for as many of these as you can think of.

Let us praise and worship Christ the Lord, the newborn King. What a special privilege to celebrate the coming of the Messiah!

CHRISTMAS DAY

Christ came in humility as a real, human baby at His first coming. When He comes again it will be as a victorious conquering Ruler, King, and Lord over all. Is He your King now?

After the last present is unwrapped, the tinsel put away, the last cookie eaten, what are we left with? A feeling of emptiness and sad that Christmas is over? Or a heart full of thankful praise to God for sending His Son to be our King—*now and forever?*

Thank the Lord for Christmas, and all that it means for us.

And do not forget that God the Father sent His only begotten Son to be laid in a manger (reminding us of His humility), so that He could be nailed to a cross “*to save His people from their sins.*” (Matthew 1:21)

