

Unwrap the Season

Family Advent Guide 2021



What is Advent?

The word ‘advent’ means “arrival of something long awaited, especially something momentous.” In the Christian sense, Advent refers to the four weeks before Christmas-- a time we remember the long wait for a Messiah culminating in the birth of Jesus.

Traditionally it was a time of prayer, fasting, and penitence (sad and humble realization of and regret for one’s misdeeds). That doesn’t sound much like the Christmas season as we know it, does it? In fact, one could argue that rather than a time of somber prayer most of us are in “go” mode during the holidays, so much so that it becomes a detriment to our relationships with others and with God. And rather than it being a time of fasting and penitence, it’s a time of extreme excess, with a focus on consumerism that is becoming more pervasive each year. It doesn’t have to be that way. What if this Christmas season was different? What if it was a time to really slow down, focus on your loved ones, and journey together towards the birth of Jesus looking through a new lens?

When is Advent?

Advent starts on the 4th Sunday before Christmas. Because it always starts on a Sunday, it will vary when it starts from year to year. Because of the difference in starting dates, it is not a set number of days from year to year. This guide was written so that you can use it any year. Rather than assigning specific readings on specific dates, there’s simply a week number and day number listed. This means that most years you will not do all of the readings in week 4. Day 1 of a week is always on a Sunday.

What is an Advent log (or wreath)?

A traditional part of an Advent celebration is the use of an Advent log or wreath. You can use either-- they both serve the same purpose equally well. They are used to hold the 4 outer candles representing the four Sundays in Advent--Hope, Peace, Love and, Joy-- as well as a taller central candle, the Christ candle. During the first week of Advent you will light the first candle. During the second week of Advent you will light the first and second candles, and so on. The fifth candle (the middle candle) is the Christ candle and is lit on Christmas Eve.

How do we celebrate Advent as a family?

There is no right or wrong way to celebrate Advent. Different things are going to work for different families. Feel free to do as much or as little as makes sense to you. Here are some suggestions for Advent devotions with your family.

- Set aside a specific time when your whole family (or as many family members as possible) can be together. Shortly after dinner works well for many families. Try to do it as many days of the week as you can.
- Try to eliminate distractions. Turn off your phone, the TV, your iPod. Gather together as a family and turn down the lights so that it's dark and quiet. Keep your holiday lights on and light some candles so there is enough light to read.
- Open in prayer. Ask God to reveal Himself to you as you set aside time to quietly focus on him.
- Light the candle(s) for the appropriate week(s) on the Advent log (or wreath).
- Sing a Christmas song or two. Suggestions for each week are printed in this guide, but you can do whatever songs you want whenever you want - you don't have to have music - just your voices. Or if you don't like to sing, just listen to some Christmas music, soak on the words and practice just being still.
- Read the appropriate Bible passage for the day and discuss the reflection question. Each day is a stand-alone topic, so if you miss one, don't feel like you have to read multiple passages on the next day unless you want to. Day one of each week is related directly to the Christmas story, so try to hit day one each week, even if you don't have Advent devotions on that Sunday.

- You might want to make or purchase an “Advent calendar” that tells the Christmas story day by day. There are many kinds of Advent calendars, each with its own focus or approach. Making one as a family can be a fun project that helps make the calendar fit your approach. Each day in your devotions, open one of the windows on the Advent calendar and read the story piece by piece. (Advent calendars are available at many discount stores and stationery stores.)

- Purchase a child-friendly manger scene. Instead of setting it out and letting your kids play with it, put the empty barn somewhere where they can see it, and place Mary and Joseph on the other side of the room. Each evening during devotions have your children move Mary and Joseph a few feet closer to the barn (around the perimeter of the room.) Have them journey across your windowsills, piano, sofa table-- whatever is in their path. Plan for them to “arrive” at the barn on Christmas Eve. On Christmas morning, put baby Jesus in the manger.

- Read aloud the Christmas cards that you received from friends and family members in the mail that day.

- Extinguish the candles and close in prayer, being sure to pray for the families from whom you received cards.

Modification Idea:

Have Advent devotions weekly with your life group. Include the kids (if applicable) and do an entire week worth of readings/reflections during each meeting.

Activity Suggestions:

The suggestions we list for each week are just something to get you thinking. There are a ton of great things you can do with your family during this time. There's nothing special about the suggestions we list. The point isn't what you "accomplish" but rather the time you invest doing it. When you think about it, most long-standing family traditions are usually something silly, but they have meaning because of the people you do them with.

Movie Suggestions:

Like the activities, the movie suggestions are just that - suggestions. We chose these movies because we felt like some part of them illustrates the theme for the week. Pretty much anything can be turned into an object lesson for kids, so if you don't like these movies, pick others (or don't) that you would enjoy more. We would encourage you to preview the movies ahead of time or read reviews to make sure you approve of the content before showing them to your children. (This is a good idea all year long.)

Week 1: Hope

For hundreds of years God's people, Israel, achingly longed for a promised Messiah. That longing was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, but still we wait. We wait for peace on earth and good will to all men-- we long for the promise of a kingdom yet to be fulfilled. This week as you explore what it means to wait with hope, be always mindful that God designed us to long for the best life possible. Surrender yourself to His timing this week as you journey through the ache that waiting sometimes brings.

Songs: O Come O Come Emmanuel; Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Movies: Polar Express

Candles: This week, light the Hope candle.

Activities:

- Make soft pretzels from scratch. It's an easy and fun thing to do, but it requires patience as you wait for the dough to rise. Recipes can be found online by searching for "soft pretzel recipe." To make it a Christmas project shape your pretzels into wreaths, candy canes, Christmas trees, etc.
- Construct a gingerbread house. Draw up plans, go shopping for decorations, bake, cool, and build!

This Week Memorize Together:

Hebrews 11:1

*Faith is being sure of what we hope for
and certain of what we do not see.*

NOW
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HOPE FOR



AND CERTAIN OF WHAT WE
DO NOT SEE

HEBREWS 11:1

Week 2: Peace

Jesus came to bring peace. He entered into a world that is out of balance, with a huge disparity between the rich and the poor. Part of His Kingdom is to provide balance--everyone having what they need, no one hoarding resources at the expense of others who need them. God wants to use us as peacemakers. During your devotions this week, open your heart to the opportunities God brings to your mind to become instruments of peace.

Songs: Let There be Peace On Earth; It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Movie: How the Grinch Stole Christmas, A Muppet Christmas Carol

Candles: This week, light the Peace and Hope candles.

Activities:

- Write a letter or send a care package to a soldier overseas.
- Discuss some of your favorite Christmas treats. Buy or make them and donate them to a shelter.

This Week Memorize Together:

Psalm 34:14

*Turn from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.*



TURN FROM EVIL
AND DO GOOD;
SEEK PEACE AND
PURSUE IT.

PSALM 34:14



Week 3: Joy

As was mentioned earlier, the Advent season is a time for reflection and quiet moments with those you love as you ponder the birth of Christ. This week, however, is entirely different. This week is all about being rowdy! :) Remember, what we received at Christmas was GOOD news! The angels showed up as a choir, filling the sky and singing the good news of Jesus' birth. The shepherds couldn't help but share the good news. How about you? How will you revel in the joy of the good news this week?

Songs: Joy to the World; Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee

Movie: Alabaster's Song; Muppet Christmas Carol

Candles: This week, light the Joy, Peace, and Hope candles.

Activities:

- Load up the family in the car, turn on some Christmas tunes, and drive around looking at Christmas lights. Stop for hot cocoa on the way home.
- Gather a group of friends and do some good old-fashioned Christmas caroling. If that's kind of weird to you, do it in someone else's neighborhood.

This Week Memorize Together:

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again: Rejoice!

Rejoice

in the Lord always;
again I will say,
Rejoice.

Philippians 4:4



Week 4: Love

Jesus' gift to the world was Himself. Consumerism has taken over Christmas. There is nothing wrong with buying gifts for each other, but have we lost the point? How can we spend less, and give more? What would it look like if this year you gave gifts of yourself? This week we will focus on the shepherds who offered people what they had-- not anything of monetary value, but the good news they had seen and heard. As you celebrate Advent with your family this week, discuss what you have that you can offer to others.

Songs: Go Tell It on the Mountain; Hark the Herald, Angels Sing

Movie: Rudolf, the Red Nosed Reindeer, The Best Christmas Pageant Ever

Candles: This week, light the Love, Joy, Peace, and Hope candles.

Activities:

- Plan a family craft night and make or build homemade gifts for some of the people on your list. Are you a painter, can you sew? If so, great. If not, no problem! Some easy ideas-- stepping stones, a bird house, Christmas ornaments, a scrapbook. Visit your local craft store ahead of time and get some ideas and supplies.
- Spend some time giving someone the gift of time this week. Babysit their kids, clean their house, make them a meal--- whatever you can do and would work for them.

This Week Memorize Together:

John 3:16

*For God so loved the world that He gave
His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him
shall not perish but have eternal life.*



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JOHN 3:16



Christmas Week: Christ

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus gave Himself for the whole world. He could have clung to his status and rights as royalty-- the King of all Kings. But instead He emptied Himself and entered into our world in poverty and humility. Do we truly grasp the weight of this gift? Tonight as you light the Christ candle, remember that the night Jesus, the Savior of the world, was born there was no luxury. Instead there was no room at the inn. There was no privilege. Instead there was a manger.

Christmas Eve

Songs: Away in a Manger; O Holy Night

Reading: Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-6

Reflection: When you feel like God is asking you to do something difficult, how do you respond?

Movie: It's a Wonderful Life

Activity: Attend the Community Christmas Eve Dinner and Service at Maple Avenue Christian Church. See who in your family can invite the most people.

Christmas Day

"I bring you good news of great joy that shall be for all the people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Merry Christmas.

Songs: O Come All Ye Faithful

Reading: Luke 2:7-20, Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection: The birth of Christ was a time surrounded awe, wonder, and adoration. What kinds of things can you do today to bring those same feelings, attitudes and actions into your home and celebration?

Movie: The Nativity Story

Activity: Have a birthday party for Jesus. Make a cake, sing happy birthday - the whole works. Over cake, discuss this: Knowing that what God wants most from us is our hearts, what do you want change in your heart in the upcoming year as a gift to Jesus?

**Christmas is the end of Advent, but don't let it be
the end of your family devotions.**

**All year long as a family you can reflect on God's
Word, serve others, and share the Good News.**

**If you are looking for somewhere to start, try
reading the books of Luke and Acts together.
These two books cover Jesus' life and the life of
the early church.**



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