



2022

ADVENT

DEVOTIONAL



Of all the holidays we celebrate, Christmas seems to have the most traditions. We have those family recipes we make, special ornaments we hang, and activities, like looking at Christmas lights, that we do every year. Traditions are the customs or beliefs we pass on from generation to generation. When it comes to the church calendar, the celebration of Advent is likely to be a familiar Christmas tradition, even if we don't understand its significance. Maybe you opened Advent calendars with little windows full of treats, or you had a wreath in your house with purple and pink candles that was just another holiday decoration.

Advent is meant to be more than another thing to add to the already crazy holiday season. It is a way for us to remember the first coming of Jesus, and rejoice over the truth that He will come again. Formed from a Latin word that means "coming" or "arrival", Advent is a celebration of the coming of Jesus, and proclamation of the promise that we will wait with expectation until He comes again. Through the tradition of Advent, we spend four weeks preparing for Christmas, but that preparation is not just a daily celebration. Advent calls us to step into the story of the Israelites as they longed for the Messiah, whose coming would make all things right. It is looking at our hurting world, and finding hope in looking forward to a second Advent that will be even more amazing than the first.

As we spend time in Scripture, remembering the promises and plans of God, we are able to embrace the full story of Christmas, and the way it is meant to change our lives. We acknowledge the sin and pains of our world instead of glossing over them. As we light the candles of Advent, we are encouraged by the truth that God alone is our source of hope, peace, joy, and love. Advent is our time to reflect on God's perfect plan to send the One who would overcome sin and death forever. God promised a Savior, and He kept that promise perfectly.

May the practice of Advent over these four weeks become a tradition that anchors you and your family to the real reason we celebrate Christmas. The King has come and is coming again!

A NOTE FOR FAMILIES

Advent is an opportunity to reflect on the coming of Jesus. But for families, this time of year can be filled with activities and obligations. Before the calendar gets crazy, take some time to plan what Advent will look like for your family. The Family Moments written for each day were created to help families have conversations about what they learned about Jesus from Scripture.





THE STORY OF HOPE

“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in HOPE of the glory of God.” Romans 5:5

The season of Advent would never have been needed, if sin hadn't entered the world through Adam and Eve. There would have been no destruction and death; no separation from God. But that is not the story of this world. Sin did come through one man, and with the coming of sin, came the loss of the presence of God. There in the Garden of Eden, sin could have had the final word. God could have abandoned His creation. But He is a God rich in mercy and love. Instead of turning His back on us, God set into motion a plan to restore His relationship with mankind, anchoring us to a hope only He can provide.

LIGHT THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE

“...and again Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.’ May the God of hope fill you with all joy, and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:12-13

It all begins with hope. Our anchor is hope. The advent of joy and peace rely on the persistent presence of hope. It isn't a hope based on humanity's actions and strength. Hope has life only in God and His promises. Those prophecies and promises were life to the children of God in the Old Testament, and they are life now to all who believe. The root of Jesse did come. He restored the relationship between God and man, and made a way for His people to live daily with the hope of eternity. Because of the first coming of Christ, what was lost in the garden to sin has been restored in part now, as we live between the two advents. And we hold to the promise that there will be a day when it will be restored completely in the kingdom of God.

REFLECT AND PRAY

How do you define hope? What are things you put your hope in now? What is the story of hope God has given you through salvation? Take time to praise God for the anchor of hope He gave us in the person Christ. Our hope is meant to be in Him alone.

HOPE IS A PERSON

For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Psalm 71:5

READ: Psalm 71:1-5

Hope: To trust in, wait for, look for....In our modern use, the word HOPE becomes more of a mention of wants. We hope for certain things to happen. Think of a farmer staring across a dry field. When he says, "I hope it rains", he is stating his desire and need, knowing the cloudless sky holds no reason for him to believe in rain. Biblical hope is more than desire. It is a confident belief and expectation in the truths and promises of God. The author of Psalm 71 says God "is" his hope. His hope was anchored in the very character and person of God. It was not based on circumstances or feelings. It was not affected by needs or desires. His trust in the person of God led him to cry out to God in need, and wait for the movement of God in his life. Our trust in God will affect our ability to put our hope in Him. Do you believe He truly is all powerful? Is He loving? Will He actually provide for His children? Our hope can never rest in God if we can't trust Him to be who He says He is.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Who do you believe God really is? Do you believe He still is the same God you read about in the Bible? Have there been circumstances in your life that have caused you to doubt the character of God? We can hope in God only when we remember who He is, and what He has done for us. Take time today to remember ways God has proven His character to you. Praise Him for the ways He has been faithful and trustworthy.

FAMILY MOMENT

Read Psalm 71:5 together. The character and promises of God give us the trust we need to have hope. List together different characteristics of God (faithful, mighty, loving, provider, creator, etc). Share stories of how you have seen God live these out in your life. Make a list of the attributes and characteristics of God to hang up. Because of WHO God is we can put our hope in Him.





HOPE FOR ALL

*And we have seen, and testify that the Father has sent his Son
to be the Savior of the world. 1 John 4:14*

READ: Romans 15:8-13, Isaiah 11:1-5, 10, 1 John 4:14

For generations, the Jews had been waiting and watching for the Messiah God had promised. When God cursed the snake in Genesis 3, He had given the promise of one who would destroy sin (Genesis 3:14-15). To the Israelites, God promised a Messiah, a king who would come to save them. Then through the prophet Isaiah, the promise of hope was extended to the Gentiles. The “Root of Jesse” was promised to the “children of the patriarchs”, and to all who chose to believe. Jesus was that hope realized. He came as a Jewish boy who grew to become a rabbi, spreading the teachings of God to Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus became the sacrifice for many, so that all who believe would have the hope of glory. God’s plan has always been for the nations. He has no regard for nationalities, power, pedigree, or resources. Christ brought the kingdom of God to earth for all who will choose to believe.

ADVENT REFLECTION

What was once just a hope for Israel, became the hope for all mankind. Not because of our worth, but because of God’s great love. The message of the gospel is not meant for just one people group, but for all people. How should this truth affect the way we share the message of the hope of Christ? Take time to pray for our local, regional, and global communities, who are sharing the love of God to all people.

FAMILY MOMENT

READ 1 John 4:14, NIV together. *“The Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. We have seen it, and are witnesses to it.” 1 John 4:14*

Jesus didn’t come just for certain people groups. He came to give hope to the people of the world. There is no one God doesn’t love, and no one who doesn’t need Jesus to save them. Draw a picture of the world, or get a map of the world. Take time to pray for people in other countries, that they would hear the good news of Jesus, and the hope we have in Him.

THE PROMISED HOPE

“He 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1:32-33

READ: Luke 1:26-33, 2 Samuel 7:11-13

When Gabriel announced to Mary that she would have a son, he was declaring a promise that had echoed throughout the Old Testament. Being the “Son of the Most High,” and ruling from a promised eternal throne of David would have called to mind prophecies given as promises to a sinful and rebellious people. These promises became cherished hope during the generations of repression and struggle the Israelites faced. Disobedience had left them with a nonexistent kingdom, an empty throne, and a scattered people. Nothing in their current world would have justified hope for the people of Israel. And yet, they clung to the promise of a coming king. God had given David that promise in 2 Samuel 7:11-13. The greatest beauty of the promise is that God carried the full weight of its execution. God placed no conditions on this coming reality. He says, “I will raise up...” and “I will establish...”. The throne of David and the kingdom of God would be made a reality, not based on the action of anyone, but the choice of the reigning King of glory. Through this Davidic covenant, God not only gave His people the unshakable promise of a coming kingdom, but also a promised heritage for the One who was coming. The Messiah would come from the line of David, and His Kingdom would reign forever and ever. Imagine the hope this covenant would have given to the Israelites, as they lived under the oppressive of the powers of this world. No matter who was currently in power over them, God had promised a kingdom to come, a kingdom that would never end. We wait for that kingdom. Our hope is not tied to this world, and its empty promises, and limited power. We wait for the return of our King, who will establish His kingdom on earth, and reign forever and ever.

FAMILY MOMENT

Read together Luke 1:26-33. Jesus was the king God had promised to His people so long ago. God made a covenant or promise to David, and God always keeps His promises. The people of God waited a long time for the Messiah, but God sent Jesus at the perfect time. Jesus came to save His people, and He will come again to be our perfect King. Revelation 1:5 calls Jesus the king who loves us, and has freed us from our sins. Draw a picture of King Jesus. Make a crown to put at the nativity scene to remind you that Jesus came as a baby, but He is our King.





AN ABIDING HOPE

"The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in him." Lamentations 3:24

READ: Lamentations 3:21-26, John 15:4-5

Hope seems so appropriate in the joyful season of Christmas, but it can be so hard to muster hope when life has made us weary. Weariness and grief don't always come on suddenly and tragically. Our world makes us weary, worn down by daily struggles and disappointments. Feeling hopeful can seem next to impossible. That is why the words of the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations 3 are so powerful. Jeremiah was carrying the weight of the knowledge of the pain and suffering of the children of Israel. The book of Lamentations is the evidence of his weariness and grief. But in the midst of his suffering, Jeremiah declares a song of hope, a hope that is rising. His hope is set, not in changing circumstances, but in the reality of God's unfailing, steadfast love, and His mercies that are new every morning. Jeremiah chose to abide in hope. Abide means to stay in or remain in. It is a verb that calls us to move closer to the presence of God. Jeremiah would remain anchored to hope, because he chose to abide with God. To the disciples, Jesus issued an invitation to abide with Him. He was preparing them for the trials they would face in the coming days, and the weariness of the journey they would walk. Instead of pushing them away, Jesus invited them to come closer, to be connected to Him, like a vine is to a branch. He knew that apart from Him, there was nothing they could do, but with Him, through the Holy Spirit, there would be life and hope. The only way for us to have hope that survives this world is to draw near to God. To know His character, and remember His goodness. Jeremiah knew that hope could only be found in God. Jesus knew that remaining in Him would give His people life and abundance in any circumstance. In this advent season, we have the opportunity to abide in the hope of God. It is a hope that survives and thrives in this broken world, and it can only be found in drawing near to the God of all hope.

ADVENT REFLECTION

In the greatest joy and the deepest grief, hope can only truly exist in the presence of God. Everything else we put our hope in can be lost or destroyed. The greatest strength of this earth will fail. The words of Jeremiah remind us of why God is our hope.

“But for this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” - Lamentations 3:21-23.

Take time to praise God today for being the source of hope. Draw near Him through prayer. Pour out your heart to Him, and rest in the promise of His mercies.

FAMILY MOMENT

Jeremiah was a prophet to God’s people, the Israelites. They had rejected his messages, and refused to obey God, so they faced hard consequences. Jeremiah was so sad for all they had done, and the hard times they faced. But he didn’t lose hope in God’s love for His people. He stayed close to God, praying to Him, and remembering how faithful He had been to His people. He put his hope in God alone. Take time together to look at the morning sun. Read Lamentations 3:21-23. Talk about how God has new mercy for us each day. His love is so great for us that it never stops. Thank God for His mercy and love.





FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2

HOPE IN THE WAITING

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.
Psalm 130:5

READ: Luke 2:25-38, Psalm 130:5-7

Waiting feels familiar in this season. We wait for family, for gifts, and Christmas morning. Waiting feels familiar in this life. We wait for an opportunity, family, love, healing, and relief. Sometimes the waiting is brief, and sometimes the waiting is long, causing hope to grow dim. We begin to view God through the lens of our waiting and wanting, causing us to doubt His promises and character. All of humanity can find community in waiting.

We wait, and we hope. But our hope can not be anchored in what we wait for, because that may not come to pass. Not everyone waiting for a test result will get good news. Not all infertility journeys end with a baby. Not all singleness ends with a spouse. When hope does not produce the results we desire, we waiver.

Do you think Simeon ever waived, as he waited at the temple for the Savior? Day after day, he served and watched, waiting for the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham, David, and the children of Israel. Day after day, year after year, there was no Messiah, no coming king. All of Israel knew about waiting; for generations, their hope was anchored to stories of a deliverer who would come. They lived and died holding to stories, and clinging to hope. What sustained Simeon and Anna all those years? They were waiting on the Lord, not an outcome. They weren't counting on freedom from their current situation, set on getting something they wanted. Simeon and Anna just wanted the Lord. They wanted His presence, and salvation. What are you waiting for this season? Is it for healing, for a person, or for relief in your current struggle? The things we wait on may not happen. But if we hope in the One, the person of God, who is fully good, always for us, whose Word is sure and unchanging, and whose ways are perfect, then that hope will never disappoint.

ADVENT REFLECTION

What are you waiting for this season? Lift those things up to the Lord. He cares for you. Then pray to have your waiting reshaped, so you look at all of your needs through the lens of His character and faithfulness.

FAMILY MOMENT

Read together the story of Simeon and Anna. What would it have been like to wait for years and years to see the Savior? What would it have been like for them that day Mary and Joseph walked into the temple with baby Jesus? Waiting is hard, and we all have to wait. Sometimes we wait and wait, and still things don't turn out the way we want. Simeon and Anna looked to God while they waited. They prayed, worshipped, and trusted in Him. Plan something fun to do together as a family, and let them know they will have to wait. They can trust it will happen, because they trust you. The same is true for God. We can trust God while we wait, because He is faithful and trustworthy.





REFLECT & REJOICE

As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more, and more. My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long— though I know not how to relate them all. I will come, and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign Lord; I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone. Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come. Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, you who have done great things. Who is like you, God? Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor, and comfort me once more. I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, my God; I will sing praise to you with the lyre, Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you— I whom you have delivered. My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion.

PSALM 71:14-24, NIV

THE STORY OF PEACE

“For 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.” Isaiah 9:6

This declaration by the prophet of Isaiah was given to a people who had never known peace. It was only during the reign of Solomon that the nation of Israel had not been at war, but even then, there was no true peace. There was always an enemy to fight, a threat to deal with. For all those who desire peace, there is nothing better than the promise of a “Prince of Peace”.

LIGHT THE FIRST AND SECOND CANDLES.

For 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. Of 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. Isaiah 9:6-7(ESV)

In Genesis 1, we are told the story of the creation. God created the world, and declared it to be good. TOV is the Hebrew word used for good in this passage. It doesn't describe something that is right. It tells us that the world was in harmony, with God and with itself. For that season, there was true peace on earth. Sin replaced that peace with chaos. The curse of sin was conflict and strife. There would be conflict between people, conflict between man and the earth, and conflict between God and man. Shalom was traded for chaos, and no human power could ever restore peace. Then Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. On a star filled night in Bethlehem, the prince of peace was born. But He did not come to make people happy with each other. He came the first time to restore peace between God and man. Harmony between God and man allows believers to pursue harmony with others. And in the midst of turmoil, we find peace that Christ will come again, and bring complete peace and harmony to earth. There will be a day when all things will be restored to TOV, complete goodness. As we wait again for the Prince of Peace, we are called to be agents of peace in this world.

REFLECT AND PRAY

The holiday season can be full of tension and frustration. Pray for peace to be in your house, within your family, and in your community. Pray by name for those with whom you are not at peace. If you are an enemy of peace by your words and actions, confess these areas to God. Thank God that, because of Jesus, we no longer have to strive to be at peace with Him. Ask for His strength to live at peace with those around you.





MONDAY, DECEMBER 5

THE GIFT OF PEACE

"The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace." Psalm 29:11

READ: Psalm 29, John 14:27

"The King over the Storm" is what Psalm 29 is often called. David lifts up this song of praise to the God whose voice is like thunder, powerful and full of majesty. Too often we want God to be the king who stops the storm. We measure His power by His ability to keep our lives calm. The truth is we can always count on the storms. Jesus Himself told us that in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33). The storms are promised, because sin stripped away peace here and now. But we are not without hope. Our God is king over the storms. He is mighty in power and splendid in His holiness, even in the midst of the storm. Our current situations do not alter His character or define His worth. God is enthroned over the floods when they come. In the midst of the storm, He is with His people, giving strength and peace. Peace doesn't require the storm to pass first. It is present in the storm, because God is present in the storm. It was because of His sovereign power that Jesus could proclaim peace over His disciples in John 14:27. Their world would be full of trouble, but nothing they would face could ever take the presence of God from them, and He is the source of peace.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Our God is king over the storms in our lives. He is present in the midst of the struggle, and reigning over all. David took time to acknowledge the sheer might and majesty of our holy God. This act of praise is a good reminder that our circumstances don't change God's power or His love for His people. In the midst of our storms, He brings peace. Take time to praise Him today for being the King over the storms. Acknowledge His mighty works, and thank Him for the gift of peace He gives to all who believe.

FAMILY MOMENT

Talk about what the voice of God might sound like. What would a voice louder than thunder sound like? David said God's voice could break trees, and make the earth shake. The same mighty God, whose voice can shake the earth, loves us so much that He wants us to have peace during hard times. He gives strength and peace to His people. Peace means we are free from worry. It doesn't come because the hard times go away. Peace comes when we remember that our mighty God is in control, and we can trust Him no matter what storm we face.

UNFAILING PEACE

"For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

Isaiah 54:10

READ: Isaiah 54:9-14

A false sense of stability, that is what the people of Israel had. They had heard the prophecies of the judgment that was coming to them because of their great sin, but they had built strongholds that gave them a false sense of peace. Surely their kings and kingdoms were mighty enough to stand. The messages of the false prophets were promising peace. They had built alliances with their neighbors. They could withstand anything. But all of their human security would crumble like the mountains and hills. Their kings were taken captive. The prophets lied, and their allies all abandoned them. The things they trusted for peace all failed. We trust in our own mountains and hills, believing we can arrange things to keep peace. What are the mountains and hills in your life? What are you trusting to bring you peace? Is it money and possessions? Do you put your trust in relationships and family? Maybe it is politicians and political parties, or medicine and science. All of these things can be good until we try to make them god. It is only the steadfast love of God and His covenant of peace that can not be removed. They are unfailing and unshakeable. This promise would have been priceless to the Children of Israel, as they lived out years of punishment, because of their great sin. He promised He would restore them. He promised He would sustain them, and He promised them peace. Nothing would separate them from His love. Jesus was that promise in flesh. He came and made a way, so that His people would never be separated from the peace of God. While we wait for peace on earth, we can live fully believing that the mountains and hills of this world may crumble, but the steadfast love and peace of God will never fail.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Too often we trust the things of this world for our peace. It can be easier to put our faith in finances, politics, and our own power. But everything is under the power and authority of God. He alone is unfailing. Spend time in prayer, confessing the things of this world that you have put your trust in, and praising God for His steadfast love and promise of peace.

FAMILY MOMENT

Isaiah 54:10 says the mountains and hills may crumble, but God's love and promise of peace never change. Use legos or blocks to build a mountain. While you build, talk about how God was giving this verse to the Israelites when things were going badly. They would face war and lose everything. God was reminding them that no matter how bad things looked, He was still with them, loving them, and giving them peace. Everything could go wrong, and His love and peace would not fail. God gives that steadfast love and peace to everyone that follows Him. Take time to pray for those in our world who are suffering because of war. Pray they would experience the unfailing love and peace of God.





WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7

PEACE FROM TRUST

"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." Isaiah 26:3

READ: Isaiah 26:3-4, Proverbs 3:5-6

The story of the first Advent is a story of trust. For generations, the Children of Israel had chosen to believe there would be a Messiah that would come to save them. Mary had to trust the message of Gabriel. Joseph had to trust a dream. It would have been easy for the advent of the Messiah to bring anything but peace. And yet, in the midst of changed plans, difficult travel, and uncomfortable settings, peace was with them. The prophet Isaiah helps us understand what it takes to have that kind of peace. It is all about trust. Isaiah 26:3 says that perfect peace is available to those whose mind is "stayed" on God. Stayed means to sustain, to stand fast on, to be established. What does your mind stand fast on? What sustains your thoughts? What direction of focus have you established? To have perfect peace, your mind and thoughts can not focus on God occasionally. They have to rest and stand fast on God. Peace is only found when we set our full trust in Him. A good point to remember is that our mind is "stayed" on whatever we truly trust. If our minds focus on what we must do to fix or deal with a situation, then we can know our mind is stayed on our own ability. Proverbs 3:5-6 teach us the same lesson. When we are told to "lean not", that is the same root word for stayed. When we trust in the Lord, we are choosing NOT to lean on our own understanding. Perfect peace can never be found apart from standing firm in our trust of God and perfect peace is not a one time thing. To stay in peace, we must stay close to God daily. We must choose to resist relying on our own understanding, and set our eyes on Him. That is the only way Mary could have peace in the midst of the unknown. It is the only way Joseph could have had peace, even when it seemed like he had been done wrong. It is the only way we can live daily in peace, despite our circumstances.

ADVENT REFLECTIONS

Reflect on the story of Christmas. How could Mary and Joseph have peace in the midst of the unknown? Because they trusted God. They took Him at His word and believed. How much do you trust God? Do you know enough about His character to believe in Him? Examine your heart and mind to see areas where you don't fully trust Him. Examine your actions. If we trust the Lord with our heart and minds, it will always show in our actions.

FAMILY MOMENT

List out things that we trust. Feel free to get silly. (We trust soap to get us clean. We trust cars to get us where we need to go. We trust our buttons to keep our clothes on.) There are so many things we trust. We know we trust them, because we don't walk around worrying about whether our clothes are going to fall off, or if the tires are going to fly off the car. We trust the people who love us, because they have shown they love us in so many ways. It is the same way with God. We can trust Him, because He has shown His love for us in so many ways, big and small. Mary and Joseph had to trust God. They had to remember the ways God had been faithful in the past, and that helped them believe He would be faithful again. God gave Mary and Joseph perfect peace even though what He was asking them to do was hard. Take time to make a list of the reasons you have to trust God. Pray, and thank Him for being trustworthy even when things are hard.

A PEACE THAT RULES

*"...and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful." Colossians 3:15*

READ: Colossians 3:11-17, 2 Thessalonians 3:16

What rules in your heart? Is it anger? Anxiety? Bitterness? Whatever rules in our heart takes over how we live our lives. Just like a king rules a land dictating and directing, our hearts are ruled. They were made to be ruled by God. We were designed to be under the authority of the One who is worthy of ruling. But too often, sin opens us to be under the rule of our own untrustworthy emotions and opinions. In sharing with the church of Colossae, Paul reminded believers that because they were God's chosen ones, loved by God, they were to be ruled by God's peace. God is peace. He has peace, and He gives peace. God Almighty lives in perfect peace. There is never a time He is worried or fretting. When Jesus came to earth as an infant, God did not worry over the details, or wonder if things really were going to turn out okay. He didn't have a back up plan for Mary and Joseph. No, the Lord of peace sent the Prince of Peace, so that the peace of God could rule over the hearts of all those who believe in Him. But God will not force this peace on us. Paul says, "Let the peace of Christ rule." To have a peace that rules over our hearts and minds requires that we surrender our own agenda. When Mary's response to the angel was, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), she was displaying who ruled over her heart. It was not her own understanding or fears. God's will had been allowed to rule.

ADVENT REFLECTION

We were not made to rule our own lives. God has always been the most worthy King. So often we allow other things to take authority over our mind and heart. What rules your heart and mind? Does that ruler bring you peace, or rob you of peace? Jesus came to establish peace between us and God, but also so we can live in peace while we are on earth. We let peace rule through prayer. We let peace rule by knowing God through His Word. We let peace rule by kicking out all thoughts that destroy peace or distort how we see God's plan, and we let peace rule when we choose to be thankful, even in the midst of the unknown. Without these steps, it is hard to live day in and day out under the rule of the peace of God. Today, thank God for His peace that is meant to rule in our lives.

FAMILY MOMENT

Talk about what it means to rule. How does a king rule a country? God wants our hearts to be ruled by the peace of Jesus. He wants us to be able to rest and trust Him, no matter what is going on. Use construction paper or cardstock to make a crown. Jesus was called the Prince of Peace, because He was coming to bring peace to rule over the hearts of everyone who believes in Him. But God won't force us to have peace. He lets us choose. We choose peace by praying, and learning about God through His Word. We choose peace when we take time to be thankful no matter what. We choose peace by pushing out the doubt and fear, and remembering how much we can trust God. At bedtime, take time to be thankful for God, and how He gives us peace.





COSTLY PEACE

"For he himself is our peace.." Ephesians 2:14

READ: Ephesians 2:13-17, Romans 3:21-26

Have you ever felt like you have earned a little peace, an easier path in life? We all want the days of struggle to be few and fast, and the days of joy and ease to be long and constant. Maybe that is the trace of heaven still left in our hearts. We were made to live in peace and harmony. That peace came with a price, a price we could never pay. The story of Jesus coming as a baby is full of joy and celebration. Yet, if we look close enough, we can see the price even from the manger. The Son of God sacrificed all of heaven's glory to come as a Son of Man, growing into the man who would be the Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world. There was not a part of His coming that wasn't a sacrifice. It was only through Him that peace on this earth is possible. It is only by His coming that we can draw near to God. We may feel like we have earned peace, but peace is a gift that has come at a high price. The baby in Bethlehem became the Savior in Jerusalem, standing in our place, taking on our sin and shame, so that peace could be made between God and man. None of us deserve peace, and none of us can create complete peace by our actions. But by His grace, He has become our peace.

ADVENT REFLECTION

The cost of peace was the life of the Son of God. That peace is meant to change our lives, because if God didn't withhold His only Son, then we can know there is nothing our God will not do to care for His people. If He can orchestrate kings and kingdoms so Jesus would fulfill all prophecies, then there is nothing He doesn't control. If God demonstrated His love for us through the life and death of Jesus, then there is nothing that should make us doubt His love. Praise His holy name for the story of peace God wrote through the birth and death of Jesus.

FAMILY MOMENT

Talk through what Jesus gave up to be our perfect peace. He traded heaven to be here on earth, so He could make a way for us to be with Him forever. Jesus knew there would be people who would reject Him, and He still chose to come. What does it mean for us to give up something costly for someone else? We can't bring perfect peace like Jesus can, but we can bring comfort and joy to others this season. As a family, decide on some ways to serve others, and give to others.

REFLECT AND REJOICE

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven, and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy, and true." 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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children."

REVELATIONS 21:1-7





SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11

THE STORY OF JOY

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2:10

Mankind has first-hand knowledge of the hardships of life. The knowledge of all good and evil robbed the world of the joy that comes only through God. But through the coming Savior, joy was restored to His people!

LIGHT THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD CANDLE

Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad, and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. Zephaniah 3:14-15, 17

The hope of joy is most needed in long, dreary seasons of life. The light of joy is best seen and welcomed in the dark. Zephaniah spoke over the Jews a psalm of joy in the midst of his prophecy for coming judgment. The story of Israel is sin and separation. Separation from their temple, from their land, and from their way of life. But they held on to hope, waiting for the King of Israel to come, and once again be in their midst. God with them would restore their joy. On that night in Bethlehem, Christ came into their midst. The restoration of joy began in that moment, and continues even now for all who believe. The joy of our salvation is in our midst. Because of Him, we can have joy now, and await His coming with gladness.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Make a list of the things that are bringing you joy in this season. What is robbing you of joy? Lift those things to God in prayer. Fear and worry can be thieves of joy. Ask Him to help you trust Him. Take time to praise God for His goodness and the joy He restores to us.

JOY IN HIS MERCY

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength, and my song, and he has become my salvation." Isaiah 12:2-3

READ: Psalm 51:1-12

The stories of our life can be the very things that rob us of joy. When the sin of our actions yields the suffering of consequence, we struggle to feel the joy of our salvation. Satan uses our own stories against us, reminding us of failures, and causing us to doubt God's love. King David knew what it was like to live without joy in a time of sin. His choice to take another man's wife had led to one bad choice after the other and like us, David believed he could cover it up and fix it himself. But God intends for His people to live in communion with Him, so He didn't leave David alone. He brought David's sin to light, so joy could be restored. We all know what it is like to live with hidden sin. Peace and joy with God withers under the weight of secrecy. But the mercy of God offered at true repentance restores joy, the joy of our salvation. The joy of salvation is the gladness and freedom that comes with belonging to God. It is the safety and security of knowing we belong to God, and that He loves us. It is a joy anchored to the reality that He has saved us, and nothing we can do can separate us from God, and this joy is all because of God's mercy. He is merciful to forgive us. He is merciful to restore what we destroy, the joy of our salvation.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Are there parts of your story that have robbed you of the joy of your salvation? Are you weary from trying to keep your actions hidden from others? Our God is full of mercy. He sent His Son, so we would have the hope of salvation, and through the blood of Jesus, our sins are covered. Spend time lifting up the story of your life to God, the things you try to hide. Confess the things that are robbing you of your joy, and embrace His mercy and joy.

FAMILY MOMENT

The story of King David reminds us we can't hide anything from God, and that is a good thing! He loves us, and wants us to live in joy. Sin will always rob us of joy. Jesus came to this earth, so He could deal with our sin, and give us the gift of salvation. It is possible for us to have joy, because God showed mercy, and sent His son. Talk as a family about what it means to have someone show you mercy. God showed us mercy by sending Jesus, who took on our punishment for sin. He is proof of God's great mercy. Finding joy in His mercy comes when we confess our sins to God like King David did. Pray together as a family, asking God's forgiveness for the things you have done wrong, and thanking Him for His mercy and forgiveness that brings joy.





STRENGTHENED BY JOY

"... the joy of the Lord is your strength."- Nehemiah 8:10b

READ: Nehemiah 8:10-12, Luke 1:26-38

We have seen the words on this verse on coffee mugs and bookmarks. We have sung these words, and we have even quoted them to others. The joy of the Lord is our strength. But do we live like this is true? When life is going smoothly, it is easy to say this. But the joy of the Lord is not the joy of our circumstances. And often our circumstances alter our joy. More often, we find strength in our finances, our abilities, and families. Those same strengths are things we find joy in. But all of those things can be lost. They can change, because we aren't in full control. But the strength that comes from joy is only "in the Lord". If we are going to have joy no matter what, then our joy is going to have to be because of God and who He is to us. That was how Mary was able to have joy when the message from Gabriel changed her plans and future. She surrendered her plan for life, and chose to embrace God's plan. That plan would involve a questionable pregnancy, a doubting fiancé, a birth far from home, and a long season spent on the run from the threat of Herod. And yet, she praised God. She sang of His might and His past faithfulness. Mary found the strength to be joyful, because of God and despite her circumstances.

ADVENT RESOURCES

Joy truly gives us strength. It fills us with hope no matter our current setting. Yet, we often seek things in our own power to give us strength. We look to things like money, possessions, and relationships for our joy. What are you finding your strength in? Does your relationship with God give you joy? He is meant to be our unchanging source of joy, because of His love and faithfulness. No matter what comes our way, we can have a relationship with God, who is limitless in His power and understanding. If our joy is in God then nothing will change that joy, because nothing in this world will change Him and His promises.

FAMILY MOMENT

Read together Luke 1:26-38. Talk about what it could have been like for Mary to hear the message of Gabriel. Mary had joy and could worship God, even when she didn't really understand. Her joy was in God, not in what was going on in her life. She trusted God, and believed His message. We can have a joy that gives us strength when we make God the most important thing in our lives. When we believe He is on our side and will take care of us, we can be strengthened in God's strength. Say Nehemiah 8:10b together. When you say "strength", flex your arm muscles to help your kids remember that joy in God gives us strength.

SING FOR JOY

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name. Psalm 96:12

READ: Psalm 96, Deuteronomy 4:9

Advent is meant to mark our waiting, but we are not a people waiting without joy. One timeless practice of joy is singing. There are at least 50 times in Scripture when God commands His people to sing. Moses, Miriam, Hannah, David, and Mary set the example of worship through song. Reading through those songs and the Psalms reminds us there is no better way to remember truth than to put it to melody. Songs of praise call to mind the faithfulness of God. Songs proclaim the character of God, and they share the stories of God to countless generations. The people of Israel had songs for all parts of life: songs for ascending to the temple, songs for battle, songs for grief, and songs for remembering. Paul and Silas sang in the middle of the prison. Jesus and the disciples worshipped together, and there will be a day when we gather to sing praise to God forever. Worship must be a part of our waiting. Our joy is renewed when we lift up praise to God. In fact, worship is a God-designed pathway to joy. The psalms are full of praise that leads to joy, and joy that leads to praise. They are bound together as an almost defiant determination to worship no matter what, because worship leads to joy, and joy in the Lord leads to worship.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Our songs of worship are meant to tell of the work and character of God. Joy tethered to God is a joy that will never fail us. It is a legacy of praise that will never run out, because the great works of God will never end. We can truly praise His name forever, and pass that message of praise down for generations. Today, lift up carols of praise like Silent Night, O Holy Night, and Joy to the World. Listen to the timeless message of the work of our Savior, and find joy as you praise Him.

FAMILY MOMENT

Deuteronomy 4:9 tells us that we are to make known the mighty works of God for generations to come. A great way to do that is through music. Read through Psalm 96 looking for the specific things God did for His people. Our joy should always lead to worship, and our worship of God should bring us joy. They are tied together, joy and worship. Play and sing some Christmas carols together. What do they teach us about God? How do they help us know God better? Sing together in joy over the wonder of His love.





THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15

TRIALS WRAPPED IN JOY

*Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way,
consider it an opportunity for great joy. James 1:2, NLT*

READ: Habakkuk 3:17-19, James 2:1-4

This is the season for happiness and fun, but the reality of life between the two advents is that life is full of trials too. Often, we feel like we have to fake happiness, in order to fit in during the Christmas season. Thankfully, as we face trials, we can wrap them in joy. Consider the joy of Mary upon receiving the news that she would give birth to the Messiah, or the joyful message of the angels to the shepherds. Their joy must have been mixed with fear, and yet they saw their experience through joy. Do you think Mary's joy wrapped her fear over Jesus' calling? How can one child save the world? How did Joseph find joy caring for a woman carrying someone else's child? Did joy cover the unknown? Too often we look at the story of Christ's birth, and forget that Mary, Joseph, the shepherd, no one knew the end of the story. They didn't know what would happen next or when it would happen. But they chose to view everything through joy, the joy of the Lord. It is the same joy the prophet Habakkuk spoke of when he said that all of the securities of this world could fail, and yet, there would still be joy. He could still rejoice over the Lord. How? Because all of the troubles faced would be covered in the reality that God was still in control. He would still be the God who had always kept His promises. He is the God who makes all things new, and is working things together for our good. The joy of the reality of the mightiness of God can cover the struggles we are facing, giving us the opportunity to live in joy no matter what. The story of the nativity doesn't have to be an easy one to be a joyful one. The same is true for our lives. We aren't reliant on things going our way to have joy. Every trial we face can be wrapped in the joy that only comes from God.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Joy can be found in the midst of any suffering. Joy can be in God's provision in the middle of struggle. There is joy when we believe God will use the bad for a greater purpose. Joy is there when we know we are not alone, and the greatest joy comes when we remember that there will be another advent. Christ will come again. The pain of this world will not be forever, and the world to come will be more than we can ever imagine. Spend time recalling how God has brought joy in the midst of struggle. How has He been faithful? Praise Him for His faithfulness now, and ask for the strength to see opportunities for joy as you walk through hard seasons.

FAMILY MOMENT

Talk through the story of Mary and Joseph. What are some trials they faced (Mary's pregnancy, confusion by Joseph, long travel for census, threat from Herod after Jesus' birth)? They had to face trials, but they still were able to have joy. They obeyed God, and chose to see joy throughout this time. They saw joy when they looked for God's faithfulness. They saw joy when they remembered the promises God had kept to send them a Messiah. Share your stories of joy when things have been hard. How has God taken care of you and your family? Who in your family has lived with joy no matter what? Sharing your own stories of ups and downs will help your child connect God's care in a personal way.

JOY IN THE WAITING

"It 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.'" Isaiah 25:9

READ: Isaiah 25:6-9, Hebrews 11: 8-13, 9:28

Advent is a call to waiting, embracing the long pause of the season in recognition of the "yes, and not yet" reality we live in. Yes, Jesus came to redeem His people, and it is not yet the day He will return. Everyone waits for redemption or destruction. But as God's people, how we wait is important. We can be passive in our waiting, not really looking or believing that God will bring about all He has promised. This person waits and hopes, but soon gives up when the wait gets long. The passive person won't believe the promise of God, until they see it lived out in front of them. The expectant person waits in full hope. They wait not because they are looking to get what they want, but wait to see what God does next. This person is actively hopeful, expectant on when, not if, something will happen. Abraham is counted with this type of expectant waiting. He never set his eyes on the city he was promised, yet he believed in its existence. He only saw Isaac, not offspring that number like the stars; yet, he still believed, and waited with expectation for the fulfillment of the promise. The people of Israel continued waiting. At the time of Jesus' birth, they had been waiting for centuries for the promised Messiah, the one who would free them from oppression, reestablish their people, and return God's presence to them. Each generation hoped to see the Messiah in their lifetime. They all lived with a spirit of waiting, because the One they were waiting for was their only hope. Then He came, the Savior of the World. He lived, died, and rose again to bear the sins of many. Now we are invited into an expectant waiting, eagerly looking for Jesus. He will come again to save us. Our hearts can be full of joy as we face each day, because we believe He will do what He has promised.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Spend time thinking about what it will be like when Jesus returns. Do you wait for the second advent passively, not really thinking about it, or do you wait with anticipation for the coming of Jesus? Does the expectation of His return bring you joy or fear? God means for His people to keep their eyes on Him, not to settle for the things of this world. There will be a day when all is made new. Pray for a heart that joyfully awaits to see what God will do.

FAMILY MOMENT

Talk about a time you eagerly waited for something, like Christmas morning or a family trip. We are able to get excited about these things, because we fully believe that they will happen, and they will be good. There will be joy. The day has already been set. This same fact is true for Jesus' return. Good things will happen, because we get to be with God. There will be a celebration, a feast for everyone who belongs to God, and the day has been set. We don't know the day, but God does. He is coming back. We will be together. Now all that is left is the waiting. We can wait with joy, because we believe that God keeps His promises. Plan a special meal together as a family. Talk about what you think it will be like when we are all together with God, feasting together, and celebrating Him.





REFLECT & REJOICE

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

ISAIAH 35

THE STORY OF LOVE

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16*

The greatest story of love can be found in Genesis 3, when God chose to continue His relationship with humanity after Adam and Eve had chosen to reject His way. His love for us was the motivation that led to the manger. Christ loved us so much that He took the form of humanity to ransom all who would believe.

LIGHT THE FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH CANDLE

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:9-11

God didn't have to save mankind. After Adam and Eve sinned, the almighty God could have wiped them out and started over. He didn't have to make a way for us to be restored to Him. God could have left us to our destruction, but He didn't. His unfailing love compelled Him to write His own Son into the story of history, sending Him to be the payment for our sins. The manger is proof of God's love, because He sent His Son to live with us and die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). He is not waiting for you to be good enough to love or to get your act together. His love for you is now and forever.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Ponder how God has shown you love. What mercy and grace have you seen displayed in your life? 1 John 4:11 reminds us that the love of God should flow through us as we love others. How are you showing the love of God to those around you? Thank God today for His great love for you, and pray for a heart willing to show love to others.





TRUE LOVE

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:7

READ: 1 Corinthians 13

The telling of the story of the birth of Jesus can't be properly told without focusing on the love of God. It was His love for people that made a way for redemption. The problem we have in embracing the magnitude of the coming of Jesus is our watered down, misguided view of love. It has diminished the “why” behind the nativity. Knowing the power of love, and how closely it is tied to God, the apostle Paul shared a true explanation of what agape love really is. And we see those elements displayed in Christ's story. God was patient, sending Christ at the proper time to change all of history. He has been abundantly patient with humanity throughout history, as we stumble in our walk with Him, choosing our own way over and over again. He was kind with Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, and Zachariah, speaking into their fear and doubt. Even though Jesus was God, He was never boastful, arrogant, or envious. He didn't insist on coming as a mighty ruler, but accepted the mantle of servant. He did not force people to follow His way, but offered His message of truth to all. He was not resentful of those who would reject Him, and He rejoiced with all those who heard and accepted truth. Jesus bore all things, believed in people, and never gave up hope in people, even as He endured the pain of the cross. The love of God never ends. Nothing will change it, and as the story of the first advent sees its completion in the second coming of Jesus, we will see the greatest proof of love, a new life together forever with God.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Go back, and read 1 Corinthians 13 again, but this time replace the word “love” for “God” or “Jesus”. God constantly displays this kind of counter culture love, and He has from the beginning. Love in action is who God really is. How do you love others? How do you view God's love? Sometimes the pain of this world can cause us to have a skewed view of what God's love is really like. Read through these verses again, and rest on the truth that no one loves us as well as God does.

FAMILY MOMENT

Read through 1 Corinthians 13, and talk about how the story of Jesus coming to earth gives proof of the way He loves us. God showed His love for us by sending Jesus. Jesus showed His love by loving others, and by choosing to come as our Savior. They are our model for what true love looks like. How can we love others like that? Cut out heart shapes, and put the words of 1 Corinthians 13:7 on them. Have your child work to arrange the hearts in order, and talk about how they teach us what true love looks like.

CALLED TO LOVE

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Matthew 22:37

READ: Matthew 22:35-40, 1 John 7-12

The story of Jesus from His birth to His resurrection is a reminder of God's love for us. Because He loved us, we are able to love others. Not only are we able, we are called to love others. We are able to pass on what we have received from God. When Jesus told the lawyer that the greatest commandment was to love God, He was passing down the teaching of Deuteronomy 6, one of the most important chapters in the books of the law. It was a calling to love God with every part of ourselves: heart, soul, and mind. It is a love that comes from the core of what is most important to us. Our love for God should be central in our lives, coming before everything else. From that love comes our ability to love others. In fact, John calls for us to love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever has believed in God is called to love Him and those loved by Him, which is everyone. Our celebration of this Christmas season should be marked by our love for God, and all He has done for us, and we should reflect His love for us by the way we love others. There is no one who isn't our neighbor, and we have no excuse to refuse showing love. Through God's grace, we are able to display His love to our world.

ADVENT REFLECTION

Receiving the love of God is good. Displaying God's love to others can be hard. We want to set limits on who that love is given to, and how it is displayed. Our own pain impacts our willingness to show love to certain people. This advent season reminds us that there is nothing God withheld from us, loving us when we weren't worthy of love. Now it is time to show love to others. As you reflect, and prepare your heart for the remembrance of Jesus' coming, ask God to put someone on your heart who you can love through an act of kindness. Maybe that means taking Christmas cookies to a grumpy neighbor, or reaching out to a family member who's hard to love. Remembering the depth of God's love for you gives you the security to act out of love to others.

FAMILY MOMENT

After reading Matthew 35-40, talk about how we can show God our love this Christmas season. We can praise Him, learn more about Him, and thank Him for sending Jesus. Another great way to love God is to show love to someone else. As a family, make a plan to show God's love to others in the days leading up to Christmas.





THE WONDERS OF HIS LOVE

Show me the wonders of your great love. - Psalm 17:7, NIV

READ: Psalm 17:6-8 NIV, Ephesians 3:17-18 NIV

Nearly 300 years ago, Isaac Watts penned the words to one of the most well-known Christmas hymns, Joy to the World. In the refrain, one verse is repeated “and wonders of His love”. Over and over we sing this phrase, often not realizing we are repeating the words of David from Psalm 17. David had cried out to God, in need of protection from the wicked who were trying to destroy him. Then he asks God to “show him the wonders of your great love”. The word “wonder” means a feeling of amazement and admiration, caused by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar. The greatest wonder of God’s love is that He loves us. It is something beautiful and remarkable. That He shared His very image with us at creation is amazing. There is wonder in the story of mankind being saved from the flood. We should wonder at the fact that we were made into a people of God. The law and His merciful justice is a wonder of the love of God. Restoration from punishment and God’s protection of His people are a wonder of His love. Then the greatest wonder of the love of God came to the town of Bethlehem on a starry night so many years ago. The wonder of the love of God is that it has no limit. It is wider, higher, deeper, and longer than anything we can imagine. The way God loves us should leave us in wonder.

ADVENT REFLECTION

What if we lifted this same request to God, and asked Him to show us the wonder of His love? Asked Him to give us eyes to see, and be amazed by the way God has loved us. To soften our hearts to realize there is nothing God hasn’t done to love us. Take time today to sit in wonder at the love of God. It is beyond our understanding, and more than we could ever deserve, still it is freely given to all who believe.

FAMILY MOMENT

Talk about some of the highest, deepest, and widest places on earth. God’s love for us is even bigger than any of those. There is nothing more wonderful and amazing than God’s love. Maybe that is why the whole sky filled with angels to proclaim the coming of Jesus. That act of love was so big that it had to be celebrated. Mary celebrated by thanking God. The shepherds celebrated by telling others. The angels celebrated by singing praises to God. How can you celebrate God’s love today? Thank God, sing praises to Him, dance, and make noise to celebrate the wonders of God’s love.

A LEGACY OF LOVE

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Matthew 1:1

READ: Matthew 1:1-17

The genealogy of Jesus listed in Matthew 1 can feel like an unnecessary part of the Christmas story. But when we look closer at the names recorded from Abraham to Jesus, we see a legacy of love the Father had for those who were His people. God made a promise to Abraham and the patriarchs, and kept that promise despite their sin and screw ups. We see Tamar, the widow treated wrongly whose story was redeemed into the line of Jesus. Ruth, the Moabite, displays God’s love for all the nations. King David is listed proving again that God is a promise keeper. David’s grievous sin didn’t disqualify him from the legacy. There are failed kings like Rehoboam, and exiled kings like Jechoniah. Mary, the teenage girl, pregnant before marriage is listed along with Joseph, who was her husband, but not the father of Jesus. Generation after generation are recorded, so that Matthew could prove Jesus was the Messiah, the One who had come to redeem His people. Each name shows that the line of Christ was full of flawed humans, not worthy to be in the line of royalty, yet chosen and loved by God. Their legacy is one of belonging to the God who lined up history to fulfill every prophecy, so there would be no doubt that Jesus was the Son of God, who came to save His people from their sins.

ADVENT REFLECTION

The genealogy of Jesus stands as a reminder that God is faithful even when we aren’t. The stories of each of these men and women didn’t disqualify them from God’s plan. From Adam to Abraham, David to Joseph, no one made the list because of their worth. God didn’t need any of them to fulfill His plan, but He brought them in anyways. They are a testament to His love, forgiveness, restoration, and redemption. Spend time today thanking God for keeping His promises. This genealogy is proof of His trustworthiness. Then praise God that you are included into the family of God. None of us are worthy, and yet because of God’s great love, we are a part of His family.

FAMILY MOMENT

Ask your children if they recognize any of the names listed in Matthew. What do they remember about the lives of these people? Share what you know about the people in Jesus’ family line. God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:18 that all the nations would be blessed. He made a promise to King David that the Messiah would come from his line (2 Samuel 7:12-16). This genealogy reminds us that God is faithful and trustworthy. We can believe His promises. So when Jesus promised that He could come again (John 14:3), we can know it will happen.





PROOF OF HIS LOVE

“...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

READ: John 3:16-18, Romans 5:7-10

There is no better way to prepare our hearts for Christmas than to remember why we celebrate to begin with. Man-made traditions can distract us during this season, causing us to put our focus on the gifts we give or the environments we create. While those things can be fun, they are not the reason we celebrate Christmas. The “why” of Christmas is because of God’s great love for people. God loves the people of this world so much that He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Jesus came so long ago to make a way for everyone who chooses to believe in Him to have eternal life. God chose us from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Life can make us doubt God’s love for us, His goodness, and even Christ’s deity. The story of Christmas is our proof. How can we doubt God’s love when He chose to love us while we were still the worst of sinners? He didn’t wait until we got our act together or were worthy enough. Into a world that would reject Him, God sent His one and only Son to be the Savior of those who believe. How can we doubt His goodness? His own Son didn’t have a life of ease. There was danger from the beginning. Poverty marked his upbringing. Jesus was rejected by His own siblings, betrayed by friends, and suffered all of the struggles of humanity. Yet, He stayed. He walked the hard path to a punishment He didn’t earn, so that we would never have to be without the goodness of God.

There is not a moment of struggle that is greater than the goodness He has for us. How can we doubt our Savior? Who else but Jesus fulfilled every prophecy? No one! Who else but Jesus came for unworthy people to make them righteous? No one! Who else freed us from the weight of the law, and gave us access to the very presence of God? No one but Jesus. We may not understand the virgin birth. We may not grasp how God could send His Son to suffer. We may reject God’s goodness because of our current circumstances, but nothing will change the proof of God’s love. We have been chosen by Him before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Our current reality doesn’t have to be a Hallmark moment for us to celebrate this Christmas season. Because Christ has come, and He has invited us into everlasting life through His great work. Glory to God in the highest!

ADVENT REFLECTION

The truth of God's love is overwhelming. There is no earthly love that would ever compare because He loved us when we were His enemy, and still, He chose us to be part of His family. God claims us as His sons and daughters, heirs to the kingdom of God. The manger and the cross are proof of the love of God. Spend time meditating on the love of God. The trees, lights, and gifts that mark Christmas could go away, and we would still have a reason to celebrate. Christ, the greatest proof of God's love, has come.

FAMILY MOMENT

Read John 3:16-17 together. God sent Jesus to save the world. That was the reason Christ came. That is why we celebrate Christmas. There is no other reason to have a Christmas celebration except for Jesus. Jesus came because of love. He didn't have to. No one made Him. He willingly came so He could live a sinless life, teach others about God, and die on the cross to be payment for our sins. Jesus didn't come when the world was good enough. He didn't only spend time with church people. God sent His Son at the right time to save everyone who would believe in Him. Christmas reminds us that God's love for us is greater than anything we can ever understand. But we can choose Jesus, and we can choose to believe in His love for us. Take time to thank God for His great love for us. Thank Him that Jesus is proof of that love, and when we believe in Jesus, we have eternal life with Him.





SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24

THE STORY OF JESUS

"For unto you has been born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11

On that night in Bethlehem, to an unlikely group of men, the angels proclaimed the royal birth. Christ had willingly come to do what no one else could do: save the world. At His coming, heaven rejoiced, and so should we.

LIGHT ALL FIVE CANDLES

READ: Luke 2:1-16

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:13-14

The eternal Son of God entered this world as a baby. This child called the Messiah fulfilled the promises given to Abraham, David, and Israel. Jesus is good news of great joy for all the people; the only one worthy to be called Lord of lords. He was welcomed to this earth by a host of heavenly warriors, singing and setting the sky on fire. This baby named Jesus grew to become Jesus the Christ, the only source of salvation to all who believe. Our stories have been rewritten and redeemed, death and despair giving way to life and light. All because the Son of God became the Son of Man, and willingly laid down His life, so that we may live through Him. This is our story, and in this advent season, we lift up a song of praise, the Lord has Come!

REFLECT AND PRAY

Today is a day for praise. On that day in Bethlehem, light came into the dark world, and it will never be extinguished. We set our eyes towards the day when the light in our world will come from the very presence of God, and we will praise His name forever.

"There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever." Revelations 22:5, NIV

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For 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. Of 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.

ISAIAH 9:2-7



