



GOD WITH US

Advent

DEVOTIONAL
2025



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Christmas has become more than a Christian holiday. What began as a way to set the hearts and minds of believers to remember the story of the first coming of the Messiah, has become cluttered with busy calendars, presents, and celebrations that focus more on the here and now. Yet at the heart of this season stands a profound truth: Emmanuel - God with us (Matthew 1:23). Advent is the practice of looking behind at the birth of Christ, when God stepped into human history to dwell among us, so that we can look ahead, with confidence, for the return of Christ, the second advent, when He will be with us forever.

The word Advent comes from the Latin word *Adventus*, which means "arrival or coming." Just as the Israelites waited anxiously for the coming of their Savior, we wait with hearts full of celebration! We know our Savior came to redeem us so long ago. God Himself taking on flesh to be with us in our humanity, and He will come for us again, fulfilling His promise to never leave us nor forsake us.

The celebration of Advent traditionally begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, and continues until Christmas Day. There are many ways to celebrate throughout the Advent season, and it is the perfect time to develop traditions that your family will carry with them. A popular tradition is the marking of the Sundays of Advent through an Advent wreath containing five candles. This symbol brings emphasis to the truth that Jesus is the Light of the World (Matthew 4:16, John 1:4-9), the radiance of God's glory who came near to illuminate our darkness. Each week, a new candle is lit in anticipation of the coming of Jesus. The last candle, called the Christ candle, is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to represent Christ's first advent, or His first coming—the moment when God became Emmanuel, God with us. This candle reminds all who believe in Him that we celebrate the coming of our Savior who chose to be present with us in our world, and we wait, with hope, for the time He will come again for us, when God will dwell with His people for all eternity.



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30 | GOD WITH US BRINGS HOPE

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." - Isaiah 9:2 (NIV)

When Isaiah spoke these words, the people of Israel were living under the shadow of enemy nations, experiencing political turmoil, and facing spiritual emptiness. They had walked in darkness for so long that hope seemed like a distant memory. Yet into this darkness, God made a promise: a great light was coming. The world Jesus came into was marked by oppression, injustice, and spiritual darkness. Roman occupation, religious hypocrisy, poverty, and despair marked daily life. Yet it was precisely into this darkness that the Light came. God didn't wait for conditions to be perfect. He entered into the middle of our brokenness, and became our hope.

Light the First Advent Candle.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" - Psalm 27:1

Reflect and Pray:

Isaiah doesn't say the darkness will be removed before the light comes. The light dawns IN the darkness. This is the nature of our hope. It doesn't depend on our circumstances improving first. The light breaks through while we're still in the dark places. Because of the light of God, we don't have to walk in fear. What darkness are you walking through today? Perhaps it's the darkness of grief or fear of the future. It could be the darkness of loneliness, depression, broken relationships, or financial strain. Whatever your darkness, the promise of Emmanuel means you walk with hope. The Light has come, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Father, when darkness feels like it surrounds me, remind me that Your light has already broken through. Be my hope and my light in every shadow. Help me to trust that You are working, even when I cannot see. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1 | GOD WITH ADAM AND EVE

"The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day." - Genesis 3:8a

In the beginning, God walked with humanity. Picture the scene in Eden: the Creator strolling through His garden in the cool of the day, seeking fellowship with the ones He made in His image. This wasn't some distant deity issuing orders from heaven. It was God choosing proximity, choosing relationship, choosing to be with His children.

Read: Genesis 2:7-22, 3:1-10

The garden was a place of holy presence. Adam and Eve knew God's voice, His companionship, His nearness. They experienced what every human heart was designed for: unbroken communion with their Maker. But then came the hiding. The sound that once brought joy now brought fear. Sin created a chasm, and Adam and Eve hid themselves among the trees. Yet even in that moment of shame and separation, God came seeking. "Where are you?" He called—not because He didn't know, but because He wanted them to be found. And here's the wonder of Christmas: that same seeking God didn't abandon His plan to be with us. Though humanity was exiled from the intimacy of His presence, God set in motion a rescue plan that would bring Him back to us in the most intimate way imaginable. The Son of God becoming the Son of Man as a baby in a manger is God once again choosing proximity. Emmanuel—"God with us"—isn't just a title. It's the fulfillment of what Eden was always meant to be.

Advent Reflection:

What was lost in Eden—that beautiful intimacy of God dwelling with His people—is being restored through Christ. The One who sought Adam and Eve among the trees would one day hang on a cross to make a way for us to be in the presence of God forever. What a thrill of hope that we have been pursued by our God. He knows our brokenness and seeks us out. Today, ponder on the truth that God is still calling "Where are you?"—not to condemn, but to restore. He is seeking you today. Spend time in prayer confessing to Him, and thanking Him for His grace.

Father, thank You that from the very beginning, You have desired to be with us. Thank You for not abandoning Adam and Eve, and for not abandoning us. Thank You for sending Jesus—Emmanuel—to restore what was broken, to bridge the gap we created, and to bring us back into fellowship with You. May we remember that You are still the seeking God, the God who walks toward us, the God who longs to be near. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2 | GOD WITH ABRAHAM

"After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'" - Genesis 15:1

In times of waiting, we need the story of Abraham and his profound doubt. God had promised him descendants and an inheritance, yet Abraham remained childless. His wife was aging. Time was running out. The promise seemed impossible.

Read: Genesis 15:1-21

"Do not be afraid," God says to Abraham. These words are needed for all who wait in uncertainty. In Genesis 15, something remarkable happens. God doesn't scold Abraham for his doubt. Instead, He meets him in it. God takes Abraham outside under the vast night sky, and invites him to count the stars, an impossible task that illustrates an impossible promise. There, in that darkness, surrounded by countless points of light, Abraham believes. This Advent, we remember that the God who was with Abraham in his waiting is the same God who sent Jesus Christ—Emmanuel. Abraham couldn't see how God's promise would unfold, but he chose to trust the character of the Promise-Maker. He believed not because it made sense, but because God was faithful. And in that belief, God credited him with righteousness, not because of what Abraham could do, but because he trusted in what God would do. The child of promise, Isaac, would eventually come. And from his lineage would come another Child of Promise—Jesus, the true Light in our darkness, the fulfillment of all God's promises.

Advent Reflection:

Has a season of waiting strained your hope in the faithfulness of God? Tonight, go outside and look at the stars. Remember that the God who made them, who used them to give a visual to His promise to Abraham, and who used those stars to guide the wise men to Jesus, is the same God who is with you today. Let the vastness of the night sky remind you of the vastness of God's faithfulness.

Faithful God, like Abraham, we sometimes struggle to see how Your promises can come true. Our circumstances seem impossible, and our waiting feels too long. Still, we remember that You are the God who keeps Your word, who came to us in the person of Jesus, and who is with us even now through the Holy Spirit. Help us to trust You in the darkness, to believe in Your impossible promises, and to wait with hope for Your perfect timing. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3 | GOD WITH HAGAR

"So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, 'You are a God of seeing,' for she said, 'Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.'" - Genesis 16:13

Hagar's story unfolds in two powerful encounters with God in the wilderness. First, as a pregnant Egyptian slave fleeing Sarah's cruelty, she meets the angel of the Lord at a spring. Later, cast out with her son Ishmael into the desert with only bread and water, she experiences God's presence when all hope seems lost.

Read: Genesis 16:1-15, 21:1-19

In her deepest desperation, Hagar gives God a name that echoes through Scripture: El Roi—"The God Who Sees Me." *"You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."* (Genesis 16:13) Hagar teaches us that God sees us in our wilderness seasons. When we feel invisible, forgotten, or cast aside, God sees. When the waiting feels unbearable and our resources run out, God sees. God meets us where we are. He didn't wait for Hagar to find her way to a temple or holy place. He came to her beside a desert spring, in her moment of flight and fear. Then He stepped into her need by providing in unexpected ways. He opened Hagar's eyes to see the well of water that saved her son's life. Sometimes what we need is already present; we just need eyes to see it. The story of Hagar is our reminder that our story matters to God. He sees us in our joy and our pain. He hears us. He heard Ishmael's soft cries. He saw Hagar in the desert. He knew Hagar's distress. "God with us" means that we are seen and known by the Most High God. Because of this, we can have hope, because we are never truly alone in the desert. Advent reminds us that God has heard humanity's cries from the very beginning, and responded by sending His Son.

Advent Reflection:

What is the hardest part of trusting God? What do you run to in your season of waiting? Look up Proverbs 3:5-6. Pray this back to God as a commitment, and when you struggle the most, use prayer to fix your eyes back on our good and loving God.

El Roi - God Who Sees,

Help me remember that I am seen by You. When I feel alone in my wilderness, remind me that You are near. Open my eyes to see Your provision. Help me trust that You hear my cries, and the cries of those I love. Teach me to wait with hope, not because my circumstances are easy, but because You are faithful. Like Hagar, may I encounter You in unexpected places, and leave those encounters changed, knowing I have been truly seen. Amen.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4 | GOD WITH MOSES

“He said, ‘But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’” - Genesis

3:12

In the wilderness, on an ordinary day doing ordinary work, Moses encountered the extraordinary. God didn't summon Moses to Him. Instead, God descended. God came near. God spoke from a bush that blazed with holy fire, yet was not consumed. The wilderness became sacred because of the presence of God.

Read: Exodus 3:1-12

The burning bush shows us something profound about God's nature: He is the God who comes to where we are. Moses was tending sheep in exile, far from his people's suffering, perhaps wondering if God even remembered His promises. Yet there, in the wilderness, God appeared. The bush burned, but was not destroyed—a mystery that stopped Moses in his tracks. That strange fire reveals a truth about God's presence: it is powerful and holy, yet life-giving. In Christ, we know God's presence entered our world, not to consume us in judgment, but to dwell with us in mercy. God's presence transforms ordinary places into sacred space. A patch of desert became a sanctuary. Centuries later, a stable in Bethlehem, smelling of animals, filled with straw, became the birthplace of the King of Kings. God sanctifies the humble and ordinary. During Advent, we remember that no place is too common, no life too ordinary, for God to make holy by His presence. He comes to a fugitive through a burning bush, to shepherds in fields, and to everyone who will receive Him. The God of the burning bush sent His Son to be the baby of Bethlehem. I AM became Emmanuel—God with us.

Advent Reflection:

Whatever season you find yourself in—in exile, in waiting, in the ordinary routines of life—God draws near. His presence transforms our life. The ground you stand is holy when you live for the glory of God. Your home, your work, your daily routine can be full of holy purpose when you recognize God's presence with you and His authority over you. Pause in your busyness to notice the presence of God. Spend time praising Him for being present and active in your life.

Holy God, we thank You that You are not distant or silent. You draw near. You make Yourself known. You dwell with us. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, help us to turn aside from our hurried pace to notice Your presence. Make ordinary moments holy. Transform our wilderness into sacred ground. Thank You for sending Jesus—Your ultimate drawing near. Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5 | GOD WITH THE ISRAELITES

“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.” - Genesis 13:21

The journey through the wilderness must have felt endless to the Israelites. Behind them lay slavery in Egypt; ahead stretched an uncertain path through barren desert. Yet in those desolate places, God made His presence unmistakably visible. A pillar of cloud by day. A pillar of fire by night. Not hidden. Not distant. Not absent.

Read: Exodus 13:17-22, Deuteronomy 8:1-6

Before the baby in the manger, before the angels' announcement, before the star over Bethlehem, God had already been revealing this truth: I will be with you. In the desert, God's presence was on display. The cloud provided shade from the scorching sun. The fire gave warmth in the cold nights. His presence guided their steps, marked their resting places, and assured them they were not abandoned. When they were terrified, thirsty, or tempted to turn back, that visible reminder stood before them: I have not left you. I will provide for you. The wilderness journey of Israel mirrors our own lives sometimes. We experience times when the path ahead is unclear, when we feel far from comfort and security, when we wonder if God sees our struggles. Advent invites us to wait in the wilderness, and into our wilderness, God comes. Just as He descended to dwell among His people in cloud and fire, God descended again in the presence of Christ. The same God who guided Israel through the desert came to guide us through our darkness, not from a distance, but by becoming one of us through the person of Christ.

Advent Reflection:

This week, look for tangible signs of God's presence in your daily life. The Israelites could look up and see the pillar of cloud or fire. What "pillars" of God's faithfulness can you observe? Keep a list of moments when you have sensed His guidance, provision, or nearness. Let these become your own testimony: God is with us.

LORD, thank You that You do not leave us alone in our wilderness. You have come to us in Jesus Christ. Help us to recognize Your presence with us today—in our struggles, our waiting, and our ordinary days. As we prepare our hearts this Advent, awaken in us a deeper awareness that You are near, You are faithful. You are guiding us, and You are with us. Amen.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6 | READ AND REFLECT

*"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."
- Deuteronomy 31:8*

God Is With You

Not only does He go before you, but He walks alongside you in this present moment. In your current struggle, He is God with us. His presence transforms the ordinary into the sacred and turns our darkest valleys into places where we can proclaim His presence. God is not distant, observing from afar, but is close, like a Father who wants to be close.

God Will Never Leave or Forsake You

This is our eternal promise. Not "might not leave" or "probably won't forsake," but an absolute, unchanging commitment. When you feel most alone, when circumstances make you question everything, when even your own strength fails you—His faithfulness remains. His love is not based on your performance, but on His character. You may lose many things in this life, but you will never lose Him.

Therefore: Do Not Be Afraid, Do Not Be Discouraged

God is saying, *"Because of who I am and what I have promised,* you can release your grip on fear and discouragement." Hope is not wishful thinking or empty optimism. It is the confident expectation that God's promises are true and His presence is real.

This is the bedrock of our hope—not that life will be easy, but that we will never face it alone. Our God is the Guide ahead, the Protector behind, and the Companion beside us, faithful yesterday, faithful today, faithful forever.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7 | GOD WITH US BRING PEACE

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end." - Isaiah 9:6-7

In a world filled with anxiety, conflict, and uncertainty, the Advent season reminds us of God's most profound answer to our deepest need: not just a message, not just power, but His presence.

Light the First and Second Candle.

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)." - Matthew 1:21-23

The name Emmanuel means "God with us", and these three simple words contain the heart of the gospel. God does not remain distant from our struggles. He enters into our ordinary lives. The peace He brings is not the absence of trouble, but the assurance of His presence in the midst of it all. When the angels announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, they proclaimed: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14). This peace—shalom—is not merely the end of conflict, but the restoration of wholeness, the mending of what is broken, the healing of relationships between God and man. We have peace because of the presence of God, which means we can always live in that peace. The apostle Paul writes of "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). This is the peace that comes from knowing Emmanuel walks beside us. We cannot manufacture this peace through our own efforts. It is the fruit of God's presence, received through faith, prayer, and surrender to His authority.

Reflect and Pray:

As you light the candles, sit quietly for a few moments. Watch the flame, remember that Jesus is the Light of the World who has come to dwell among us. As you sit in silence, rest in the presence of God and remember times that He has sustained you, keeping you in a peace that made no sense. Remember the promise of Jesus, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." - John 14:27

Prince of Peace, thank You for not leaving us alone. You have come near. You are Emmanuel. Help us to carry Your peace into a hurting world, to be reflections of Your goodness wherever we go. Amen.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 8 | GOD WITH HIS PEOPLE

"The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up." - Exodus 19:20

When we think of "God with us", our minds naturally drift to the manger in Bethlehem. But long before that silent night, God revealed His desire to dwell with His people on another mountain, in a very different way. At Mount Sinai, the Israelites witnessed something both terrifying and magnificent. The mountain was wrapped in smoke and fire. Thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and the earth itself trembled. God descended in power, and the people stood at a distance, afraid to come near. Moses alone could approach the thick darkness where God was. This was "God with us," but not as they might have expected or wanted.

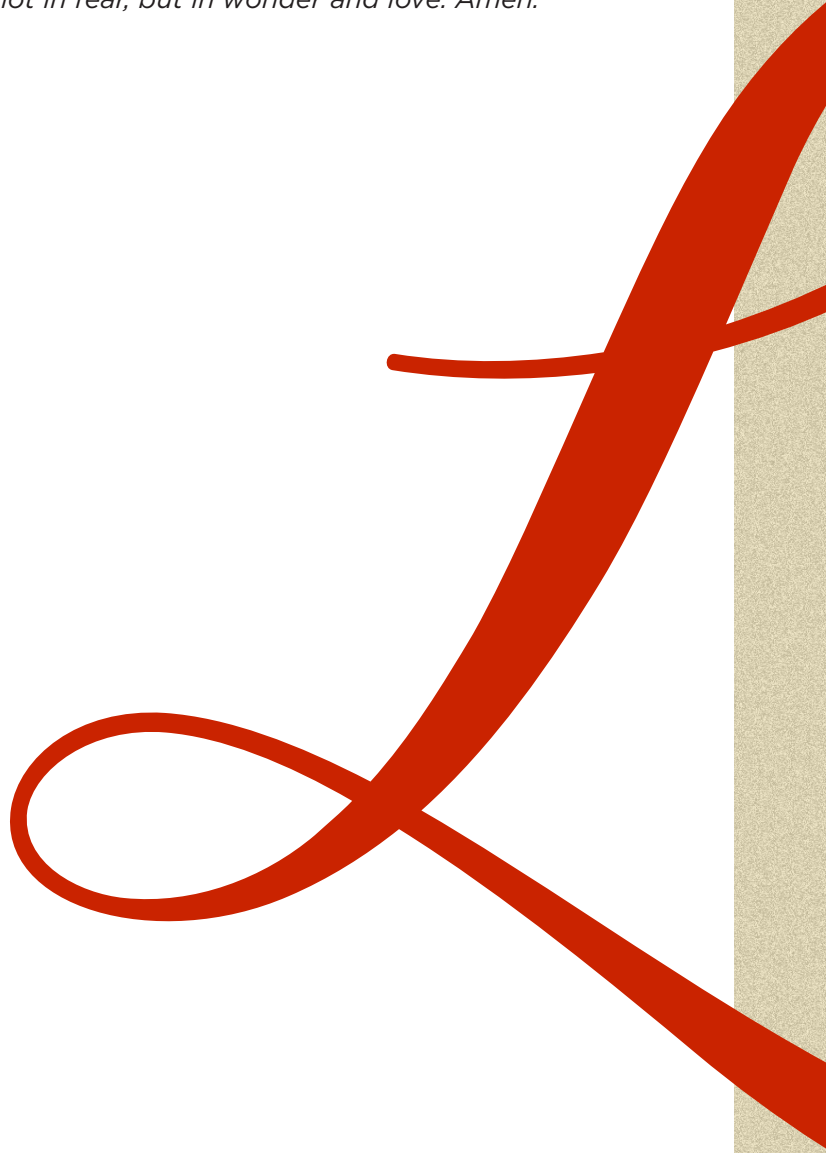
Read: Exodus 19:1-21

Here's the beautiful tension we see at Sinai: God wanted to be with His people, yet His holiness was so consuming that the mountain itself became dangerous ground. The people had to be warned not to touch it, lest they die. Even the priests had to consecrate themselves before approaching. God was with them, delivering them from Egypt, guiding them through the wilderness, now meeting them at this mountain. But there remained a terrifying distance because of sin. The very presence they needed was the presence they couldn't fully bear. During Advent, we recognize these two revelations: the mountain wrapped in fire and the manger holding a child. We remember that the gap between holy God and sinful humanity is real, unbridgeable by our own efforts. Yet even at Sinai, God's ultimate plan was already evident. Why did He come down to the mountain at all? To give the Law, yes, but also to give instructions for building the Tabernacle, a dwelling place where He could live among His people. "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst," He said. The fire and thunder were the announcement that something more was needed—a way for Holy God to be truly present with His beloved people. With Sinai, we remember that God is too holy, too powerful, too Other to simply coexist with our brokenness. We feel the weight of that distance. We acknowledge our need. And we wait for what we already know is coming: the shocking humility of Bethlehem. The Word becomes flesh. God with us—not in fire that consumes, but in a life that redeems. Not on a mountain we cannot touch, but in a form that could be held in a mother's arms. The presence that shook the mountain would one day take its first trembling breaths in human lungs. The glory that Moses saw only from behind would shine from an infant's face in the darkness of a stable.

Advent Reflection:

The mountain of fire reminds us of what Jesus truly traded to come save us. The power that shook the mountains and brought down fire was willingly surrendered to take on a human form. The manger shows us how much God was willing to do to be truly, finally, forever with us. The people had to stay away from God, but we have been invited into His presence. Spend time reflecting on the power and awesomeness of God. Then praise Jesus for willingly humbling Himself to be our Savior.

Lord, You came down to Sinai in power, and You came down to Bethlehem in humility. Thank You that You have always desired to be with Your people. As we wait this Advent season, prepare our hearts to receive You—not in fear, but in wonder and love. Amen.



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9 | GOD'S PRESENCE MORE THAN ANYTHING

"And he said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'" - Exodus 33:14

In the wilderness, standing at the threshold of the Promise Land, Moses faced a critical moment. God offered the Israelites the prosperity and the fulfillment of God's promises for Israel. But there was a catch—God would send an angel instead of going Himself because of their sin. Moses's response is stunning in its boldness: No deal.

Read: Exodus 33:7-23

"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." Moses essentially told God: I would rather stay in this barren wilderness with You than enter the land of milk and honey without You. Think about what Moses was refusing: security, abundance, the end of wandering, the culmination of everything they'd been working toward. He was willing to give it all up for one thing—God's presence. Moses understood something profound: God's presence is the promise. Without Him, the Promised Land would be just another place. The blessing wasn't the destination; it was the relationship. This is the heart of Advent and the gift of Emmanuel. God could have saved us from a distance. But instead, He came Himself. He wrapped Himself in human flesh and all of the struggles that come with it. Jesus didn't just show us the way to God; He became the way by being God-with-us. Like Moses, we live in a world full of promises and pursuits—success, comfort, achievement, security. But the message of Moses is that none of it matters without His presence. A successful life without God is still a wilderness. A comfortable existence without His nearness is still exile.

Advent Reflection:

As we open our hearts this Advent season, Moses' choice challenges us with a question: Would we choose God's presence over God's presents? Would we rather have His nearness over His blessings? Would we be content in hardship if He walked with us there? Or have we become more excited about what God can give us than about God Himself? Christmas reminds us that we don't have to choose. In Jesus, God gave us both—His presence is the gift. In Christ, God has promised, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Lord, we confess that we often want Your blessings more than Your presence. We get distracted by the promised lands of our own making—comfort, success, approval—and forget that You are the promise. This Advent give us eyes to see the emptiness of this life without You. Help us to say with Moses, "If You don't go with us, we won't go." May we treasure Your presence above all else. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10 | GOD WITH JOSHUA

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." - Joshua 1:9

In the wake of Moses' death, Joshua stood at a threshold moment. Before him stretched the Jordan River and beyond it, the Promised Land. Behind him lay forty years of wilderness wandering. And in his heart? Perhaps uncertainty and fear of the massive responsibility now resting on his shoulders. Into this moment of transition, God spoke words that would echo through centuries: "Don't be afraid. I'll be with you."

Read: Joshua 1:1-9

Three times in this passage, God repeats His promise: I will be with you. Not "I might be" or "I'll try to be" – but the unwavering commitment of the Almighty: I will be with you. And God was faithful to be with His people as long as they walked with Him. What God promised Joshua wasn't just for one leader or one generation. It was a preview of His ultimate plan: to dwell with His people not just in presence, but in person. In Jesus, God didn't just promise to be near us – He became one of us, entering into our joys and our sorrows, our triumphs and our trials. As we journey toward Christmas, we often face our own Jordan Rivers – situations that seem too big, callings that feel overwhelming, losses that leave us wondering how to move forward. Like Joshua, we may feel inadequate for what lies ahead. But the same God who walked with Joshua through the Jordan, who stood with him at Jericho's walls, who gave him wisdom to lead and never left his side – this same God has come even closer in Christ. He doesn't just accompany us from a distance; He carries our humanity. He knows our weakness. He has felt our pain. And His promise is the same: Don't be afraid; I'll be with you.

Advent Reflection:

Many of us need to be reminded of God's Jordan River promise. We don't have to fear the unknown. We don't have to have what it takes to do impossible things. Our God is with us. His presence is the reason we can be strong and courageous. Where do you need to be reminded of the promise of God's presence? Pray for a spirit of strength and courage based on the presence of God in your life.

Lord Jesus, thank You for not staying distant from our struggles but drew near in flesh and blood. Please help us to recognize Your presence with us today – in our uncertainties, in our challenges, in our daily journeys. Give us courage, born not from our own strength, but from the confidence that we never walk alone. Amen.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11 | GOD WITH HIS DISOBEDIENT PEOPLE

"The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors. I said, "I will never break my covenant with you."'" - Judges 2:1

The book of Judges tells a heartbreaking story. Again and again, Israel falls into disobedience. They worship idols, ignore God's commands, and chase after the gods of neighboring nations. They forget their Deliverer. And yet, the refrain echoes throughout the book: "Then the LORD raised up judges." As we prepare our hearts for Advent, the book of Judges offers a surprising gift. It reminds us that God's presence isn't contingent on our perfection. He doesn't wait for us to get our act together before He shows up.

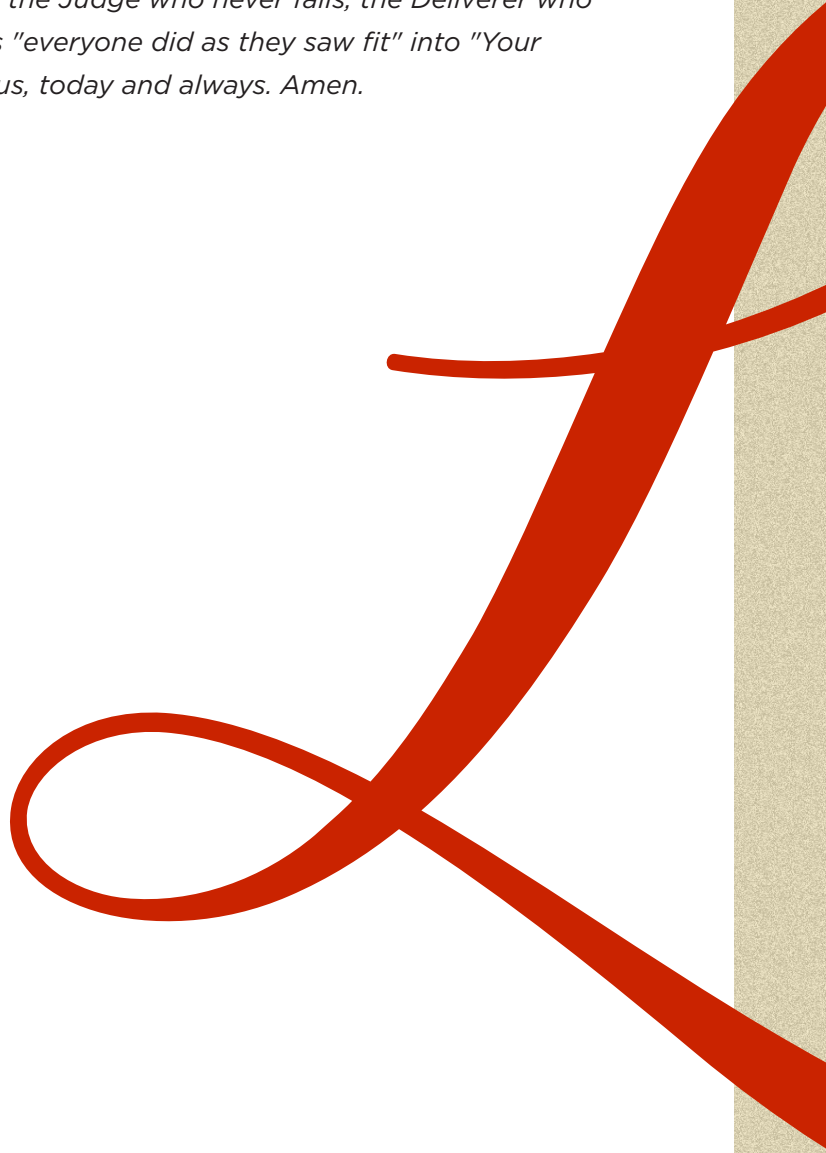
Read: Judges 2:16-18, 3:9, 6:7-10, 10:16

The cycle in Judges is relentless: Israel sins, God allows punishment, Israel cries out, and God sends a deliverer. What's remarkable isn't just that God responds, it's that He keeps responding. After the third rebellion, we might expect God to say, "Enough." After the seventh, surely He would abandon them. But He doesn't. God raised up Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and yes, even flawed Samson. Each judge became a vessel of God's presence with His people. "The Spirit of the LORD came upon them", Scripture tells us repeatedly. God didn't just make their problems go away. He inhabited these broken leaders, working through them despite their weaknesses. Perhaps the most stunning verse in Judges comes early: "I will never break my covenant with you" (Judges 2:1). This isn't a promise made to faithful Israel. It's spoken to a people who had *already* begun to break their vows to God. God declares His faithfulness before they've proven theirs. This is the heart of Emmanuel. God doesn't come to us because we've earned it. He comes because He promised. He comes because covenant love doesn't calculate deserving. Every judge in the book ultimately fails. Gideon makes an idol. Samson chases desires that destroy him. The book ends in chaos: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25). But in this failure, we glimpse the need for something more. Someone who wouldn't just deliver from external enemies but would transform hearts. Someone who would be God-with-us, not just in moments of crisis, but in every moment. The judges whisper the truth that a greater Deliverer is needed. And the promise embedded in Judges—"I will never break my covenant"—finds its fullest expression in the manger. Jesus is God keeping His promise to be with us, no matter how many times we've turned away.

Advent Reflection:

Let the truth of Judges remind you that God didn't wait for you to be perfect before He sent a Savior. Apart from Jesus, our sin separates us from God. Under the blood of Jesus, our sin reminds us that we will always be desperately in need of Him. If you are caught in a cycle of sin, God sees and is ready to forgive and restore. Praise Him for being near His people even when we are at our worst.

Faithful God, thank You that Your presence isn't earned by our obedience but secured by Your promise. Like Israel in the days of the judges, we often forget You and chase after things that are empty and worthless. Yet You keep coming. You keep calling. You keep Your covenant. Help us to see Jesus as the Judge who never fails, the Deliverer who breaks every cycle, the King who transforms "everyone did as they saw fit" into "Your kingdom come, Your will be done." Be with us, today and always. Amen.



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12 | GOD IS OUR SHEPHERD WITH US

*"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me."*

- Psalm 23:4

As we journey through the Advent season, we prepare our hearts to celebrate the coming of Emmanuel. While we often think of this promise fulfilled in the manger at Bethlehem, David knew this holy presence intimately centuries before, and he wrote a song to capture the heart of our Shepherd.

Read: Psalm 23

God is our Creator and King. He is all-mighty and sovereign over all. Yet David chose to use his words to paint the picture of God as our ever-present Shepherd. He is the God who sees and knows our needs. God calls us to rest in Him because we are safe and provided for. Then David reminds us God walks *with* us through the valleys that are full of darkness and shadows. God doesn't remain distant in our struggles but draws near. Just as a shepherd never abandons his flock in dangerous terrain, our Good Shepherd promises His presence. Not just His power from afar or His provisions delivered by proxy, but His personal, intimate presence. God doesn't wait for peace to fellowship with us. He sets a table of abundance right in the middle of our enemies, our anxieties, and our struggles. This Advent, we're reminded that Jesus came in the fullness of time, but that time wasn't peaceful, perfect. God with us means God in the mess. God in the uncertainty. God in the waiting. With His presence comes His goodness, which doesn't just accompany us—it *pursues* us. Like a shepherd who searches for one lost sheep, God's presence isn't passive. He actively chases us down with His love.

Advent Reflection:

We're not waiting for God to notice us. We're celebrating a God who has been shepherding us all along. Jesus came near in the most vulnerable way possible. That baby who would grow to be the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep.

Good Shepherd, thank You for not being distant. As I walk through this life, help me recognize Your presence in both the green pastures and dark valleys. You came to earth to be with us in our humanity, and You promise never to leave us. Restore my soul today. Lead me in Your paths. Let me feast at Your table, even in the middle of my struggles. I trust that Your goodness and love are pursuing me, all the days of my life. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13 | READ AND REFLECT

*"You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.
Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD, the LORD himself,
is the Rock eternal."
Isaiah 26:3-4*

In Hebrew, "perfect peace" is *shalom shalom*—peace doubled, peace upon peace, peace overflowing. This isn't fragile tranquility that shatters at the first sign of trouble. It's the deep, soul-settling peace that remains even when circumstances storm around us. It's the kind of peace that makes other people wonder how we can be so calm in the chaos. God doesn't offer us just enough peace to get by. He offers *perfect peace*—nothing missing, nothing broken, nothing insufficient. The key to God's perfect peace is a steadfast mind. A mind that chooses again and again where its thoughts are set. "Set your minds on things above," Paul would later write (Colossians 3:2). Isaiah shows us the result: God Himself keeps us in perfect peace.

When our thoughts are set on God, we will trust Him. It is a byproduct of knowing God and walking with Him. He is our Rock. This is Emmanuel revealed as our Rock. He is the solid ground beneath our feet, the shelter in our storm, the foundation that cannot be moved. When Isaiah promises that God will keep us in perfect peace, it's because this Rock of Ages has drawn near to us, surrounding us, supporting us, holding us firm. God with us, in the flesh, inviting us to build our entire lives on Him.

Spend time praising God for being the Rock we can put our trust in.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14 | GOD WITH US BRINGS JOY

"I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." - Luke 2:10-11

In the darkness of waiting, the angels proclaimed a message that would echo through eternity: good news of great joy. But what made this news so joyful? Not simply that a baby was born, but who this baby was—Emmanuel, God with us.

Light the First, Second, and Third Candles.

Consider the profound truth hidden in this name- Emmanuel. The God who spoke galaxies into existence, who holds the oceans in His hand, who dwells in unapproachable light—this God chose to be with us. Not distant. Not detached. Not watching from afar. Right with us.

"The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." - Psalm 16:5-11

Joy is not happiness dependent on circumstances. True joy springs from a deeper well, the assurance of God's presence. David understood this when he wrote, "You will fill me with joy in your presence" (Psalm 16:11). The shepherds experienced this joy, not in a palace but in a stable, not in comfort but in wonder, because they encountered the living God who had drawn near. We often search for joy in temporary things: accomplishments, relationships, experiences. These can bring happiness, but they cannot sustain joy when darkness comes. The joy of Emmanuel is different. It is rooted in presence, not perfection. God didn't wait for us to clean up our lives before coming to us. He entered our ordinary world. The good news proclaimed by the angels was that God had chosen to be with us—not because we earned it, but because He loves us beyond measure. The good news of Jesus is that He made a way for us to be in the presence of God, and the promise of the presence of God is joy forevermore.

Reflect and Pray:

God is with us, but we must choose to be with Him. This week, practice being present with Him. Notice how time spent in prayer and the Word begins to shift your perspective, your peace, and your joy.

Father, You are the source of joy that circumstances cannot steal. Help me to find my deepest joy not in what I have or what I accomplish, but in Your abiding presence. When I forget, awaken my heart again to the wonder that You—the Almighty God—chose to be with me. Deepen my joy in You as I spend time with you. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15 | GOD WHO STAYS NEAR

*"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?"
- Psalm 139:7*

We light candles and count down the days, preparing our hearts for Christmas—the celebration of God breaking into human history as a vulnerable infant. But Psalm 139 reminds us that God's presence with us began long before that holy night in Bethlehem. He has always been with us.

Read: Psalm 139

The psalmist marvels at a God who searches and knows. One who understands our thoughts from afar, who is familiar with all our ways. This is not surveillance but intimacy. This is not a distant observation from heaven's throne, but a Creator who knows the number of hairs on our heads, who bottles our tears, who knits us together before we take our first breath. And yet, humanity has always struggled to grasp this nearness. We've felt the separation caused by sin, the hiding that began in Eden's garden. We've cried out, "Where are you, God?" in our darkest moments. The God who sees us in the darkness, who knows when we sit and when we rise, chose to sit beside us. The hands that formed us in the womb became infant hands that grasped for His mother's finger. The God who is there in the heights of heaven and the depths of the sea lay in a feeding trough, squinting at starlight. Because He knows us so deeply, we can trust Him enough to echo David's prayer to "Search us and know our hearts. Try us and know our thoughts." That may feel too scary to pray, but the truth is there is nothing hidden from God. He delights in us and desires to lead us in His perfect way.

Advent Reflection:

In the Incarnation, God answered Psalm 139's question, "Where can I go from your Spirit?" with an astounding reversal: You cannot escape Me because I have come to you. Because He has come near, we can approach Him with boldness. We can open up with confidence in His love. What would it look like for you to truly open your heart to God? What peace would you have if you laid your sins and burdens on Him?

Father, You have searched us, and known us from the beginning. We acknowledge that there is no where we can escape you, and there is no place we can't find you. Remind us of this truth. We are never alone. You see us, know us, and love us. Help us to approach you with confidence. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16 | GOD WITH ELIJAH

"And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" - 1 Kings 19:12-13

Elijah sits alone in a cave, exhausted and afraid. Fresh from a victory over the prophets of Baal, he now runs for his life from Queen Jezebel's threats. In his despair, he feels utterly alone, abandoned even by the God he has served so faithfully. In the middle of Elijah's despair, God made Himself known.

Read: 1 Kings 19:1-15

How often do we find ourselves in our own caves? Busy seasons can leave us depleted. The holidays can bring out financial fear, family turmoil, and loneliness that leaves us weary. While others around us may be celebrating, we feel like Elijah, wondering where God is in all of this. God's response to Elijah reveals the profound truth of "God with us." The Lord doesn't rebuke Elijah for his fear or his cave-hiding. Instead, God comes to meet him exactly where he is. God asks a gentle question: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Then comes the magnificent display: wind that tears mountains, an earthquake that shakes the ground, fire that blazes, but God is in none of these. Instead, God comes in a still, small voice, a gentle whisper that draws Elijah out of his cave. This Advent, we await the celebration of the coming of Christ—not in power and spectacle as many expected, but as a vulnerable baby in a manger. But, in a greater way, we await the world Jesus will bring with Him when He comes again. This time of waiting for the second Advent can leave us frustrated, fearful, and discouraged. Just as God came to Elijah not in the earthquake but in the whisper, so God comes to us not in overwhelming force but in tender intimacy. The coming of Christ is God's ultimate declaration: "I am with you, even in your cave." God meets us where we are. The gentle whisper still speaks: "You are not alone. I am here."

Advent Reflection:

Where are you hiding this Christmas season? What has driven you to the caves? Your mind will tell you that you are alone. You might let shame drive you to sit in silence. But God loves us too much to leave us in our caves. Spend time in silence. Don't pray, don't read—just listen. Create space for God's gentle whisper in your life, trusting that Emmanuel is indeed with you.

Lord, thank You for meeting us in our caves. Help us to quiet our hearts enough to hear Your gentle whisper. As we wait to celebrate your coming this Christmas, may we know deeply that we are never alone—You are always with us. Give us courage to step out of our hiding places and into Your presence. Amen.



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17 | GOD WITH JONAH

"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, 'I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.'" - Jonah 2:1-2

We often think of Advent and "God with us" in terms of warmth and comfort, but the story of Jonah reveals a deeper, more challenging truth: God is with us even when we're running away. Even in the belly of our rebellion when His presence is the last thing we want.

Read: Jonah 1-2

Jonah fled from God's presence, boarding a ship heading the opposite direction from Nineveh. He thought he could escape. But when the storm came and Jonah was swallowed by the great fish, he discovered something remarkable: God was there too. In the darkest, most suffocating place imaginable, God was present. From the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed: "From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry" (Jonah 2:2). Christmas is a reminder that Jesus came not just to the shepherds' fields and temple courts, but to tables of sinners and courtyards full of sickness. Like Jonah, we often find ourselves in places of our own making—caught in the consequences of our disobedience, our fear, our attempts to control our own lives. The miracle isn't that God rescues us from these places. The miracle is that He meets us there first. Even after his rescue, Jonah obeyed grudgingly. He wanted God's judgment, not God's mercy—at least not for his enemies. Yet God pursued the Ninevites with the same relentless love He showed Jonah. God was with the pagan sailors. God was with the Ninevites. God was present, prepared to show mercy and rewrite the story of those who would surrender to Him.

Advent Reflection:

Through the story of Jonah we're reminded that Emmanuel came for all people. God "with us" includes those we'd rather exclude. Christmas celebrates a God who shows up in unexpected places, for unexpected people. As children of God, we know the life changing impact of God in our lives. Who will you share that good news with? Is there anyone you have decided doesn't deserve the mercy of God? God with us means God desires to be with all of us—in every circumstance, pursuing every heart, offering mercy beyond our imagination.

Lord, You are the God who pursues us into the depths. Your presence isn't contingent on our obedience or our willingness. You were with Jonah in rebellion and in his anger. As we prepare for Christmas, help us recognize that You come not just to comfort us, but to challenge us, to expand our understanding of Your mercy, and to send us out with Your message of hope. Give us courage to go where You send us, knowing You are always with us. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18 | GOD WITH SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO

"He answered and said, 'But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.'"

- Daniel 3:25

The truth of God's presence with His people echoes throughout the stories of Scripture. Through the lives of three young men facing a fiery furnace, we get a preview of this promise: when we walk through the flames of life, we do not walk alone.

Read: Daniel 3

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego reveals a life changing truth: God doesn't just promise to be with us in comfortable places. He enters our fiery trials, our most difficult circumstances. These three young men faced an impossible choice: bow to the golden statue or be thrown into a furnace heated to kill. They chose faithfulness, even without guarantees. Their words echo with courage: "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us... But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods." But even if he does not. This is faith that doesn't manipulate God or make demands. This is trust that says, "God's presence is enough, even in the fire." And what happened? A fourth figure appeared in the flames—one "like a son of the gods," as the pagan king described him. God didn't prevent the furnace. He entered it with them. This is the mystery of Advent and Christmas. God doesn't remove us from a broken world. Instead, He enters into it. Jesus was born under a leader that sought His death. He surrounded Himself with the struggles of a normal life. He touched lepers to heal them, fed hungry people, and calmed raging seas. His life is proof that the fires of this life were never too much for Him, and He steps into our fires with us.

Advent Reflection:

Preparing our hearts for Christmas, means we rejoice that God steps into our fires. When we face trials that seem unbearable, when circumstances feel heated beyond endurance, or when we're bound by fears we cannot name—God is there, walking with us in the flames. The furnace couldn't contain God's presence then, and darkness cannot contain it now. That's what we celebrate at Christmas: the infinite God contained in human flesh, making his dwelling among us, sharing our struggles, bearing our sorrows, walking through fire alongside us. Take time remembering the fires God has walked you through.

Lord, thank you for entering into our deepest trials. When I face the fires of life, help me to trust that you are there with me. Give me the courage to remain faithful, even when I cannot see the outcome. Deepen my understanding of what it means that you are truly God WITH us. Amen.



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19 | GOD WITH DANIEL

"Then Daniel said to the king, 'O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.'" - Daniel 6:21-22

In the darkness of that ancient den, surrounded by hungry lions, Daniel discovered what Advent teaches us to remember: God is with us. When King Darius sealed Daniel in the lions' den, the prophet faced his fear alone or so it seemed. The stone was rolled over the entrance. The king's signet pressed into the clay. No human could rescue him now. Yet Daniel wasn't alone. The God who created those lions was there in the darkness with him.

Read: Daniel 6:1-23

Notice what happened after Daniel was thrown into the den: the king couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, couldn't find comfort anywhere. But Daniel? Scripture tells us he was found unharmed, "because he had trusted in his God" (Daniel 6:23). The same stone that sealed Daniel in with danger could not separate God from Daniel. Our trials don't separate us from God's presence. Sometimes they become the very place where we encounter Him most profoundly. At first light, King Darius ran to the den and called out with an anguished voice, "Has your God been able to rescue you?" Daniel's response echoes with awe: "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths." The king didn't rescue Daniel. The stone didn't roll itself away. But God's presence transformed the den from a place of death into a testimony of life. The very next day, everyone in the kingdom heard about the God who is with His people. Centuries later, another stone would seal another tomb. The faithful Son of Man would spend time in darkness. But on the third day, God's presence would transform that tomb too, and death itself would lose its power forever.

Advent Reflection:

Do you feel sealed into the darkness this season? Let the story of Daniel be a constant reminder that God is everywhere and knows everything. He doesn't leave us alone to figure things out. God is present and working. We glorify Him when we can trust in the middle of the den-worshiping while things are still dark. In this season of early sun sets, spend some time praying in the dark tonight. Praise God for the reality of His presence, listing out times when you know God has been with you even when you couldn't see it.

God with us, You shut the mouths of lions and rolled away the stone. Please be present with me in my darkest places. Help me trust that where You send me, You accompany me. In this season of waiting and watching, give me faith to believe that dawn is coming, that You are near, and that no den is so dark that Your light cannot reach. Come, Emmanuel. Amen.

*"Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!"*

*The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil.*

*On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
"Fear not, O Zion;
let not your hands grow weak.*

*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 3:14-17

Rejoice! Sing aloud! Shout for victory! These aren't the measured, cautious words we might expect from ancient prophecy. This is an unbridled celebration. But why such joy? Because God Himself is coming to dwell among His people.

"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save." Zephaniah reminds us that God's presence isn't just a comfort; it's a power. He doesn't merely visit our struggles; He saves us from them. The same God who commands angel armies chooses to make His home in the midst of His people.

"He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you with his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

Read that again slowly. The God who spoke creation into being sings over you. With gladness. With exultation. The Creator of the universe finds such delight in you that He cannot contain His joy. We spend Advent preparing for God, lighting candles, singing carols, making our hearts ready. But God is already rejoicing. Over you. He's not waiting for you to become worthy, to fix yourself, to earn His affection. Right now, in this moment, He delights in you.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21 | GOD WITH US BRINGS LOVE

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

- John 3:16-17

In a world where we know the light of joy and experience darkness of living on this side of heaven, God chose to draw near. The very name Emmanuel declares the heart of the Christmas story: God's love brought Him near. It was love that led the Father to send His Son to be the Savior of the world. It is love that gives God a heart of compassion and patience to wait for all those who will follow Him. His love is so great that He came!

Light the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Candles.

"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." - 1 John 4:9-10

John's words pierce through any confusion we might have about the nature of God's love: it was "made manifest among us." Love became visible, tangible, real. In the manger at Bethlehem, divine love took on flesh and blood. This was not love expressed through grand declarations from heaven or written in the stars. It was love wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a feeding trough, vulnerable and dependent. The word "manifest" means to make clear, to reveal what was hidden, to bring into the light. God's love was always there, woven into the fabric of creation, but in the sending of His Son, that love became undeniable. We could see it with our eyes, hear it with our ears, and touch it with our hands. Love had a name: Jesus. God sent His Son "so that we might live through him." The manger and the cross are inseparable. The baby born in Bethlehem came with a mission: to give us life—not just biological existence, but abundant, eternal life. He came to be the payment for our sins, to stand in the gap between our rebellion and God's holiness, to absorb the judgment we deserved and offer us the grace we could never earn. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, we must not sentimentalize this love. It is fierce and costly. It required everything of Jesus, the laying down of His life. And it offers us everything—forgiveness, restoration, new life, eternal hope, and the unconditional love of our great God.

Reflect and Pray:

How does it change your perspective to know that God loved you first, before you ever loved Him? Spend time meditating on the phrase "not that we have loved God but that he loved us." As you gather with family and friends for Christmas, be intentional about speaking the truth of God's love into their lives. Share your own story of how God's love has been "made manifest" to you. Look for someone who needs to hear that they are loved—not because of what they've done or who they are, but simply because God loves them first and always.

God, thank You for loving us first, for loving us fully, for loving us sacrificially. Let the wonder of Your manifest love pierce through our busyness and distraction. May Your nearness fill us with love that overflows to those around us. Help us to live in the freedom and joy of being Your beloved children. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22 | GOD WITH JOSEPH

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." - Matthew 1:21

Joseph stands in the shadows of the Christmas story, yet his faithfulness illuminates the profound meaning of Advent. He is a man caught between heartbreak and divine mystery, between cultural shame and heavenly calling. The world around Joseph will judge and mock him, but he will know the honor of holding the very Son of God.

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

Imagine Joseph's world collapsing. His betrothed is pregnant, and he knows the child isn't his. The whispers, the shame, the pain of betrayal must have been overwhelming. Matthew tells us Joseph was a "righteous man" who didn't want to expose Mary to public disgrace, so he planned to divorce her quietly. Here was a man trying to do the right thing in an impossible situation. Then came the angel. "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife." In this moment, Joseph teaches us something essential about Advent waiting: God often comes to us in the middle of our confusion, not after we've figured everything out. The angel doesn't appear before Joseph's dilemma, but right in the midst of his wrestling. God meets us where we are. Notice what the angel tells Joseph about the child. His name will be Jesus, "because he will save his people from their sins." And then comes that precious word—Immanuel: God with us. Joseph's response is stunning in its simplicity: "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him." No recorded questions. No demands for more explanation. Just obedience born of trust in the faithfulness of God.

Joseph said yes to a calling that would:

- Make him the subject of gossip
- Require him to protect his family on the run
- Ask him to raise a child who wasn't biologically his
- Mean laying aside his own plans and dreams

He said yes because God was with him. And in saying yes, Joseph became part of the greatest story ever told—the story of God coming near.

Advent Reflection:

During this Advent season, we too wait for God with us. Perhaps you're in the middle of confusion like Joseph. Maybe your plans have been disrupted, your reputation questioned, and your faith tested. Joseph reminds us that God speaks into our uncertainty, offering guidance when we need it most. God invites us to participate in His redemptive work, and calls us to live in ordinary obedience every day.

Lord, speak into our uncertainty. Give us faith to trust You even when we don't understand. Help us to say yes to Your calling, knowing that Your presence is enough. Awaken us to the reality that You are truly with us—in our joys and sorrows, our questions and our fears. Make us faithful to follow wherever You lead. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23 | GOD WITH MARY

"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.'" - Luke 1:30-31

Mary's ordinary life in Nazareth became extraordinary when God showed up. A young woman, likely a teenager, engaged but not yet married, receives news that would change everything. The angel's greeting reveals that God was choosing to be with ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

Read: Luke 1:26-38

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he brought news that would change not just her life, but all of human history. Think about what this meant for Mary. She didn't receive a distant promise or a future hope. The angel didn't appear to her parents first, seeking their permission. He didn't assure her that everything would be comfortable or that her reputation would remain intact. Instead, she was told that God Himself would dwell *within* her, that the divine would take on human flesh in the most intimate way possible. Before Jesus would be Emmanuel to the world, He was first God-with-Mary. For nine months, she would carry the Creator of the universe beneath her heart. She would feel Him move, nourish Him with her body, experience the physical bond between mother and child with the One who knit her together in her own mother's womb. The intimacy of this arrangement is breathtaking. God could have appeared fully formed. He could have descended from heaven as a grown man. But He chose vulnerability and dependence. Mary's response reveals something beautiful and challenging about faith:

"I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38). Consider that her "yes" would cause uncertainty, shame, and rejection. Yet Mary said yes—not because she had all the answers, but because she knew the One asking. Mary's encounter with Gabriel establishes a pattern. God invites us into His purposes, purposes that often seem impossible, uncomfortable, or unclear. Like Mary, we may not understand how God will fulfill His promises. But we're called to the same posture of surrender: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

Advent Reflection:

Preparing our hearts for Christmas, means we rejoice that God steps into our fires. When we face trials that seem unbearable, when circumstances feel heated beyond endurance, or when we're bound by fears we cannot name—God is there, walking with us in the flames. The furnace couldn't contain God's presence then, and darkness cannot contain it now. That's what we celebrate at Christmas: the infinite God contained in human flesh, making his dwelling among us, sharing our struggles, bearing our sorrows, walking through fire alongside us. Take time remembering the fires God has walked you through.

LGracious God, thank You for not remaining distant but drawing near to us in Jesus. When I face uncertainty, remind me that You are Emmanuel—God with us. May I treasure Your words in my heart and say yes to Your leading, even when I don't understand the full picture. Be with me today in every moment. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24 | JESUS — GOD WITH US

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

- John 1:14

Today, the fifth candle will burn brightly, illuminating the profound mystery at the heart of our faith. God chose not to remain distant, but to dwell among us. In Jesus, the infinite became finite, the eternal entered time, and the Creator became part of His creation.

Light All Five Candles.

Read: Luke 2:1-20

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:11-12

"God with us" is not merely a theological concept. It is the lived reality of Jesus. He walked dusty roads, felt hunger and fatigue, wept at the tomb of a friend, and celebrated at weddings. He experienced the fullness of human life, yet without sin. In doing so, He sanctified our humanity and showed us that no moment of our lives is beyond God's presence or care. This Christmas, as we light the Christ candle, we celebrate that God is not merely *for* us or above us, but truly *with us*—in our joys and sorrows, in our ordinary days and our extraordinary moments. In Jesus, heaven touched earth, and nothing has been the same since.

Reflect and Pray:

Today, we praise our "God With Us". We are humbled by the love of God, and His presence with His people from the very beginning. There has never been a moment where God has not been, and there will never be a moment that God will not be. As we wait for the time of the second Advent, may we be people who live in the confidence of His presence now and hope of His presence for all eternity.

Father, we thank You for the gift of Emmanuel, Jesus Christ our Lord. You did not leave us alone in our darkness but came to dwell among us, sharing our humanity that we might share in Your divinity. Help us to recognize Your presence with us each day. As we celebrate the birth of Your Son, may we live as those who know we are never alone, for You are God with us, now and forevermore. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25 | MERRY CHRISTMAS

Read and reflect on the truth that Advent begins with hope and ends with Jesus. Just as Revelation promises God will dwell with us forever, Christmas celebrates the first time God came to dwell among us in human flesh — Emmanuel. The baby in the manger is the answer to God's promise to be with His people eternally.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'

And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' And he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.'"

- Revelation 21:1-7

Lord Jesus, we worship You today, and look forward to the day when we see Your face to face.



