



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO LEADING

Advent

WITH YOUR FAMILY

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 back 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.



*What * is Advent?*



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 for years to come.

The Advent Wreath: a Simple Tradition

A popular tradition is marking 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.





How it works:

- Each week, a new candle is lit in anticipation of the coming of Jesus.
- The four outer candles represent Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.
- The fifth candle in the center, called the Christ candle, is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to represent Christ's first advent—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.

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How to Lead Your Family Through Advent

You don't need to be a Bible scholar or feel perfectly prepared. Your willingness to guide your children toward Jesus is what matters most. Here are some practical tips:

1. Keep It Simple

- Don't feel pressured to make each devotional time elaborate or lengthy
- With younger children, 10 minutes is plenty
- It's okay if some weeks go more smoothly than others

2. Create a Special Atmosphere

- Dim the lights when you light the candles
- Make it cozy—use blankets, sit on the floor together, or gather around the dining table
- Consider lighting the candles during dinner on Sunday evenings

3. Make It Interactive

- Let children take turns lighting the candles (with supervision)
- Encourage everyone to participate in reading, even if younger children just read one verse
- Ask the discussion questions and really listen to their answers—there are no wrong responses
- Let kids act out the Christmas story with toys or costumes

4. Adjust for Your Family's Ages

- **Young children (ages 3-7):** Focus on the activities, keep reflections very brief, use simple language
- **Elementary age (ages 8-12):** Read the full devotionals, encourage questions, let them help lead
- **Teenagers:** Invite them to read Scripture aloud, share their own insights, or even lead a week
- **Mixed ages:** Let older children help younger ones with activities; everyone can participate at their level

5. Be Flexible

- If you miss a Sunday, just pick up the next week—no guilt!
- If Sunday doesn't work for your family, choose another consistent day each week
- Adapt the activities to fit your family's interests and schedule



6. Extend the Tradition

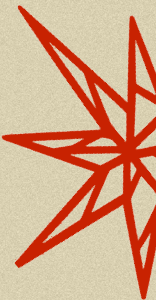
- Consider reading one additional Scripture or lighting the candles briefly on other days during the week
- Use dinnertime to ask: "How did you see God with you today?"
- Play Christmas music that focuses on Jesus throughout the season

7. Handle Distractions with Grace

- Wiggly kids, interrupted prayers, and silly moments are all part of family devotions
- If someone's having a hard day, keep it shorter
- The goal is to point hearts toward Jesus, not to have a "perfect" devotional time

8. Connect to Daily Life

- Throughout the week, remind children: "Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel—God WITH you—even at school, even when you're scared, even when I'm not there"
- When challenges arise, pray together: "Jesus, thank You that You're with us right now"





What You'll Need

- **An Advent wreath** (You can buy one or make your own with five candles arranged in a circle—four around the outside, one in the center)
 - **Candle colors** (Traditional: three purple/blue, one pink/rose, one white in the center; or use all white—what matters is the meaning, not perfection!)
 - **A Bible** (any translation your family can understand)
 - **This devotional guide**
 - **Optional:** matches/lighter, paper and crayons for activities, a nativity set
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The Heart Behind It All

Remember, the purpose of Advent isn't to add more stress to an already busy season. It's to create intentional moments to slow down and remember together that God loved us so much, He came to be with us.

You're not just teaching facts about Jesus—you're helping your children develop a lifelong understanding that they are never alone. Emmanuel means God is with them in every moment: in their joys and fears, their ordinary days and special celebrations, now and forever.

Your faithfulness in leading your family, even imperfectly, matters more than you know. These moments of lighting candles, reading Scripture, and praying together are planting seeds that will grow throughout your children's lives.

May this Advent season draw your family closer to Jesus and to each other as you celebrate Emmanuel—God with us.



God With Us Brings Hope

Light the first candle on your Advent wreath.

- Ask: Why do we light candles for Advent?
- Respond: The candles shine brightly, lighting even the darkest places. Reminding us that Jesus came as THE light into our dark world.

Read:

"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)

Reflect:

The season of Advent would never have been needed if sin hadn't entered the world through Adam and Eve. There wouldn't have been any destruction and death; no separation from God. But that is not the story of this world. Sin came because Adam and Eve decided their way was better than God's way. They were separated from God, with no way of being good enough to cover their sin. Sin brought darkness into the world. God could have abandoned His creation to the darkness. But He is full of mercy and love. Instead of turning His back on us, God set into motion a plan to restore His relationship with people, giving us a hope that can only come from Him. It is only found in God and His promise to love and save us. Those prophecies and promises gave hope to the children of God in the Old Testament just like they can for us now. The "great light" did come. Jesus made a way for us to have a relationship with God and live daily with the hope of eternity.

Why did God send Jesus to the world?

How does Jesus give us hope?

How can we let the light of Jesus shine through us this Advent season?

Pray:

Have a family member say a prayer to thank God for His goodness and faithfulness in sending Jesus so we can have hope.

Family Activities:

- Take time to read some of the promises God has given us:
 - God sent Jesus to save us- John 3:16
 - God will never leave us- Deuteronomy 31:8
 - God holds us- Psalm 37:23-24
 - God will always love us, no matter what- Isaiah 54:10
 - God hears us- 2Chronicles 7:14
 - God is with us, wherever we go-Joshua 1:9
 - God takes care of us-Philippians 4:19
 - God leads us-Proverbs 3:5-6
 - God gives us peace-Isaiah 26:3
 - God helps us rest-Matthew 11:28-29
- Create or set up a nativity scene to use throughout the Advent season. Consider setting up just the stable and animals this first week. Add pieces each week to continue teaching the story of Christmas throughout the season.
- Create or set up an Advent wreath to use each week.

God with Us Brings Peace

Light the First and Second Candles

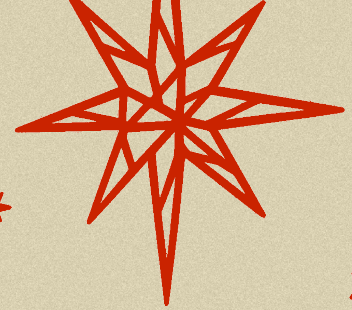
- Ask: What do the first two candles represent?
- Respond: The first candle reminds us of the hope Jesus brings.
The second candle reminds us of the peace that comes from Emmanuel—God with us.

Read:

“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

Reflect:

This world can be filled with things that make us feel anxious and uncertain. The Advent season reminds us that we need God for our peace and it only comes from His presence. The name Emmanuel means “God with us,” and these three simple words contain the heart of the gospel—God’s good news. God does not remain far away from us. He enters into our ordinary lives. The peace He brings is not because there’s no trouble, but the promise of His presence in the middle of it all. When the angels announced Jesus’ birth to the shepherds, they proclaimed peace on earth. 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 can have peace because of the presence of God, which means we can always live in that peace. The apostle Paul wrote that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). This is the peace that might not make sense to us, but we can trust it because it comes from God. Because we know God is with us, will never leave us, and is taking care of us, we can have peace.



Discuss:

- When have you felt God's peace in a difficult situation?
- How is God's peace different from what the world tells us will make us feel better?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus is called the "Prince of Peace"?
- How can we share the peace of Emmanuel with others this week?

Prayer:

Have a family member pray, thanking Jesus for being with us, and being our peace no matter what..

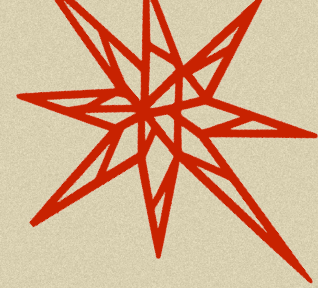


Family Activities:

- **Peace Ornament:** Create ornaments with the word "Emmanuel" or "Peace" to hang on your tree as reminders of God's presence.
- **Acts of Peace:** As a family, choose one way to bring peace to someone this week—write an encouraging note, reconcile a disagreement, or help someone in need.
- **Memory Verse:** Work together to memorize Isaiah 9:6 this week.
- **Peaceful Music:** Listen to Christmas hymns that celebrate Jesus as our peace, such as "Silent Night" or "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."
- Continue making or setting up your nativity scene.
- Take time to pray for people around our world that are impacted by war. Pray that God would bring peace to their hearts and bring peace to their land.

God with Us Brings Joy

Light the First, Second, and Third Candles



- Ask: What do the three candles represent?
- Respond: The first candle reminds us of hope. The second candle reminds us of peace. The third candle reminds us of the joy that comes when God draws near to us.

Read:

“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

Reflect:

In the darkness, 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.

Think about the amazing truth hidden in the 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. And joy comes with His presence. Joy is not happiness that depends on circumstances. True joy springs from the promise of God's presence. David understood this when he wrote, "In your presence there is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). The shepherds experienced this joy—not in a palace but in a stable, because they saw the living God who had drawn near. We look for joy in temporary things: stuff we want, people, experiences. These can bring happiness, but they cannot give 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. 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.** This is why the angels called it "good news of great joy for all the people." Emmanuel means joy is available to everyone—not just the religious, not just the put-together, but all who will receive Him.

Discuss:

- What is the difference between happiness and joy?
- When have you experienced joy even in a difficult time?
- How does knowing that God is always with us bring joy?
- What are some ways we can find joy in God's presence this week?



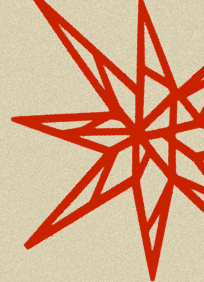
Pray:

Have a family member say a prayer to thank God for giving us joy by sending Jesus. Ask for His help to remember that we can have joy, even when things are hard, because we know God loves us and is always with us.

Family Activities:

- Joy Journal: Each day this week, have family members write or draw one thing that brings them joy and one way they saw God's presence that day.
 - Spread Joy: Bake cookies or make cards together to deliver to neighbors, friends, or someone who might be lonely this season.
 - Joy Playlist: Create a family playlist of favorite Christmas songs that celebrate the joy of Jesus' birth. Listen together and talk about why these songs are meaningful.
 - Scripture Hunt: Search together for verses about joy in the Bible. How many can you find? Write them on paper ornaments to hang on your tree.
 - Acts of Kindness: Do random acts of kindness as a family this week, remembering that God's joy overflows into generosity toward others.
 - Continue setting up your nativity scene. Spend time talking about the stable and how God chose to send His Son to such a simple place
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God With Us Brings Love



Light the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Candles

- Ask: What do all four candles represent?
- Respond: The first candle reminds us of hope. The second candle reminds us of peace. The third candle reminds us of joy. The fourth candle reminds us of love—the greatest gift of all. God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to be Emmanuel, God with us

Read:

“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

Reflect:

God didn't show His love by writing a message in the sky or shouting from heaven. Instead, He showed His love in the most surprising way—as a tiny baby, wrapped in cloths, sleeping in a manger where animals eat their food. God's love was always there—you can see it in the beautiful world He created, in the way He cared for His people. But when Jesus was born, God's love became something everyone could see, hear, and touch. Love had a face. Love had a name: Jesus. God sent His Son “so that we might live through Him.” From the moment Jesus was born in that stable, He was on a mission. He came to rescue us and give us real life—not just life where we breathe and eat and play, but life that is full of joy and never ends. He came to take the punishment for all the wrong things we do, so we could be close to God forever. Emmanuel—God with us—shows us what real love looks like. God didn't stay far away in heaven. He came down to earth. Jesus walked on dusty roads, played

as a child, felt hungry and tired, laughed with friends, and understood what it's like to be human. He lived with us, and then He gave His life to save us. That's love—not that we loved God first, but that He loved us so much He chose to be with us forever. As we get ready to celebrate Christmas, remember that God's love isn't just a warm, fuzzy feeling. It's powerful and it cost Jesus everything. He gave up His life so we could have forgiveness, a new beginning, and God's love forever. That's the greatest gift of all.

Discuss:

- How does it change your perspective to know that God loved you first, before you ever loved Him?
- What does it mean that God's love was shown in Jesus?
- How can we show God's love to others this Christmas season?
- Why is Emmanuel—God with us—the greatest gift we could ever receive?

Pray:

Have a family member say a prayer to thank God for the love that He showed us by sending Jesus. Ask God to help us show His love to others and to share the good news of His great love to others.

Family Activities:

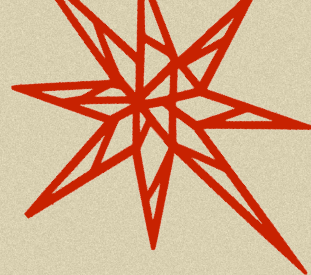


- Love Letters to Jesus: Have each family member write or draw a letter to Jesus, thanking Him for coming to be Emmanuel and expressing what His love means to them.
- Acts of Love: Choose specific ways to show love to others this week—serve a neighbor, donate to those in need, invite someone lonely to share a meal, or write encouraging notes to people who have impacted your family.
- The Gift of Presence: Spend intentional time together as a family without distractions. Play games, read the Christmas story together, or simply enjoy being present with one another—reflecting Emmanuel, God who chose to be with us.
- Love Ornament: Create an ornament with “1 John 4:9-10” or “God’s Love = Emmanuel” written on it to hang on your tree.
- Share Your Story: At dinner this week, have each family member share a time when they experienced God’s love in a powerful way.
- Continue to add to your nativity set



Jesus-God With Us

Light All Five Candles



- Ask: Why do we light all five candles today?
- Respond: The four candles reminded us to wait with hope, peace, joy, and love. Today we light the center Christ candle because our waiting is over—Jesus is here! Emmanuel, God with us, has come!

Read:

Luke 2:1-20

Reflect:

“God with us” isn’t just a fancy idea—it’s real! Jesus didn’t stay in heaven giving orders from far away. He came here and lived a real life, just like us. He walked on dusty roads and got tired. He felt hungry. He laughed with His friends. He cried when people He loved were sad. He went to weddings and celebrations. Jesus experienced everything that makes us human—but He never did anything wrong. He never sinned. By living a real human life, Jesus showed us that God cares about every part of our lives. Nothing is too small or too ordinary for God. Whether you’re playing with friends, doing homework, feeling sad, or celebrating something wonderful—God is right there with you in all of it. This Christmas, as we light the Christ candle, we celebrate that God is not just watching us from far away. He came to be truly WITH us—in our happy times and sad times, in our regular days and our special moments. In Jesus, heaven came down to earth, and everything changed forever!



- What did the angel proclaim to the shepherds?
- What did the shepherds do after they met baby Jesus?
- Why is the news of Jesus' birth such good news?
- How did He show His love for us?



Family Activities:

- Complete the nativity scene by adding baby Jesus.
- Birthday Party for Jesus: Make a birthday cake, sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, and blow out the candles together!
- Emmanuel Treasure Hunt: Hide cards around the house with ways God is with us (examples: "God is with you when you're scared," "God is with you at school," "God is with you when you play"). Find them together and read them aloud.
- Make Emmanuel Ornaments: Create ornaments that say "God With Us" to remember this Christmas.
- Thank You Cards: Draw pictures or write letters to Jesus saying thank you for coming to be with us.
- Call Someone Special: Call a grandparent, friend, or neighbor to say "Merry Christmas! God is with us!"
- Light Your Candles All Day: Keep your Advent wreath candles burning throughout the day (safely!) as a reminder that Jesus, the Light of the World, is here!

