

In my childhood, one of the greatest moments of anticipation was Christmas. I couldn't wait for the chance to decorate, eat Christmas cookies, and, of course, open presents on Christmas Day. Every Christmas Eve I struggled to go to bed, and was usually the first one up to see what was waiting under the tree. The anticipation and wonder were like adrenaline coursing through my body.

As we grow older, most of us lose some of our wonder. The novelty of Christmas starts to wear off, at least a little bit. Along with that, our anticipation gets trampled down under the weight of responsibilities, the rush of preparations, and, at times, the heaviness that comes on some of us around the holidays.

There is a remedy for lost wonder and trampled anticipation. In case you were wondering, the remedy is not getting more expensive presents, having flashier decorations, or inviting the right people to your parties. The remedy is stepping back enough to realize what you've lost, and then going through a journey of recovery. Like a relationship that has lost its spark or a hobby that we've lost interest in, we need to take time and effort to see what's right in front of us with fresh eyes.

The church has a recovery program for lost wonder and trampled anticipation leading toward Christmas. That recovery program is called Advent, which comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means 'appearing.' Advent looks back with wonder at Jesus' birth over 2,000 years ago, while also looking forward with anticipation to His future return at the end of human history.

Advent is a four-week season of heart-preparation and thoughtful recalibration as we draw near to Christmas. First, we enter into the longing of God's people, Israel, as they await the Savior who was promised. Second, we enter into anticipatory waiting for Jesus' second coming with a renewed focus on what matters most. This slow, reflective attention of the Advent season helps us recover the anticipation and wonder appropriate to a fully-engaged celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas.

In your hands is a devotional intended as a tool for the Advent recovery of anticipation and wonder. Each day in this devotional, you will find a Scripture reading, a reflection question or two, and on some days, an activity for children. This devotional can be used individually, but is also intended for use in groups, such as housemates or families.

May God restore us to wonder and anticipation this Advent as we embark on a journey together toward Christmas.

Pastor Matt Erickson



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Using this Devotional

Each week of this devotional contains one longer Sunday devotional reading written by Pastor Matt Erickson and one Family Talk devotional written by our NextGen Pastor Laure Herlinger, intended for families with young children. During the week, you will find daily Scripture readings, reflection questions, and occasionally a Nativity building activity for your family to do together (look for this star \bigstar). There are also hymns included for each week for your reflection and worship. Although it is not necessary, this devotional is intended to be paired with an Advent Wreath. Each day when you open this devotional, light the candle of your Advent Wreath. Every Sunday, include another candle.

You can also follow along online with this devotional on the Eastbrook App (*eastbrook.org/app*) or at *eastbrook.org/advent2018*.

WEEK 1 OF ADVENT



* **DAY 1: FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT** Finding Peace: Isaiah



"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." (Isaiah 9:6)

There was a telling headline in a newspaper not that long ago: "Are We More Divided Than Ever? Yes!" The number of divisions and levels of distrust feel stronger than ever in the public square, and we're feeling it in our lives. A recent study from a psychological journal traced a marked increase over the last thirty years in individual's anxiety levels corresponding to indicators such as trouble sleeping, inability to remember, poor appetite, and more. Divided on the outside and anxious on the inside...we need peace.

The prophet Isaiah spoke a word from God at a time that is more like our own than we might realize. In his day, the 8th century B.C., turmoil at the national and international level had reached a fever pitch, eventually leading to the exile of the Jewish people from their homeland. People felt conflicted and confused, and people were even described as *"the people walking in darkness"* (Isaiah 9:2). In the midst of this reality, God inspired Isaiah to bring a word about peace that was on its way from God Himself. There was a miracle child coming, and in the midst of the might and wonder coming with that child, He would ultimately be called *"Prince of Peace"* (9:6). For the fear-filled people lost in the dark clouds of divisions and distrust, Isaiah's word pierced through the dark clouds like a shaft of heavenly light.

In the gospel of Matthew we are told that Jesus' birth fulfilled the promise of God given through Isaiah (Matthew 1:22). In describing Jesus in one of his letters, the Apostle Paul wrote: *"he himself is our peace"* (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus brings both inner peace and relational peace, both peace with God and peace amongst humanity. This is very good news for those of us living in a world tortured by anxiety, conflict, and chaos.

Near the end of His earthly ministry, after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus said to His disciples: "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). This Advent, let us join Isaiah as one of the people of Advent, turning toward God for the gift that only He can give in Jesus, who is our peace.

REFLECT:

Why do you think Prince of Peace is one of the key titles given to Jesus? As you consider this season in front of you, in what ways do you need to experience more of the peace Jesus brings?

A PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (FROM THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY):

God of justice and peace, from the heavens you rain down mercy and kindness, that all on earth may stand in awe and wonder before your marvelous deeds. Raise our heads in expectation, that we may yearn for the coming day of the Lord and stand without blame before your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

* **FAMILY TALK*** * TIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: PEACE * *

Have you ever been playing outside, maybe riding your bike or swimming at the beach, when suddenly the sunshine disappears? Clouds gather and grow darker. In the distance you hear a rumble of thunder or see a flash of light. *Oh no! Run for cover!*

You find shelter, but you're just waiting for the sun to return. And, when the sun finally comes back out, everything feels okay again.

That feeling is called *peace*. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born on earth, God's people were in a "stormy" time. They had stopped living to please God. They were forced from their homes and taken to a faraway land where life was hard. They were worried and wondered if God had forgotten them.

God had not forgotten His people. He gave special messages to a man named Isaiah, who spread God's messages to the people. Many of these messages were words of comfort and peace, including the message about a special baby. God was sending a baby who would grow up to be our Rescuer. This was Jesus—the one who would make peace between God and people. In fact, one of Jesus' special names is "the Prince of Peace".

This week, when you light the first Advent candle, think about how the sun breaks through the dark clouds and remember the feeling of peace. As a family, talk about the peace that we have because of Jesus.

USE THESE "FAMILY TALK" SECTIONS EACH WEEK WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

Neek 1 Readings on Peace: MONDAY, DECEMBER 3: DAY 2

READ: Romans 5:12, Colossians 1:19-22

REFLECT: The peace Jesus brings into the world begins with establishing peace between us and God. Have you moved from being His enemy to making peace with God? If so when and how? Thank God for the Grace He has shown you through Jesus.

ATIVITY BUILDING: Set up the stable, but leave it empty for now. Long before Jesus was born on earth, God was getting everything ready.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4: DAY 3 -

READ: John 14:25-27

REFLECT: How would you say the peace Jesus brings is different from the world's peace? Why is that important to you?

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5: DAY 4 ----

READ: John 14:1, 1 Peter 5:6-7

REFLECT: What do these verses tell you about the peace Jesus brings us? What anxieties do you need to "cast" upon Jesus?

ATIVITY BUILDING: Place Mary, Joseph and an angel figure across the room from the stable. God sent an angel to tell Mary and Joseph that Jesus would be born to Mary.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6: DAY 5 -----

READ: Colossians 3:15-17

REFLECT: How does taking time to pray, study God's Word and worship together with others help bring the peace of God into your heart?

◆ **NATIVITY BUILDING:** Place a donkey near Mary. She may have ridden a donkey to Bethlehem, because she was so close to having a baby. Donkeys were known to be animals of peace. Years later, Jesus Himself would ride a donkey into Jerusalem.

TRIDAY DECEMBER 9 DAY 6

READ: James 3:13-17

REFLECT: Why does James compare heavenly wisdom with peace-loving and earthly wisdom with jealousy and selfishness? How can you begin to grow in the description of heavenly wisdom that He provides?

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8: DAY 7 .

READ: Ephesians 4:1-16

REFLECT: What are some ways that we can see the Unity of the Spirit? Why do we want to have Unity of the Spirit? Do you have a relationship with someone in the church that needs peace?

PROPHECIES OF JESUS' BIRTH:

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies about the Messiah's coming and birth, like the one we read from Isaiah. Here are just a few of the prophecies in the Old Testament which point to Jesus as the promised Savior and Lord (with their New Testament fulfillment in Christ listed in parentheses).

THE SON OF MAN Genesis 3:15 (Galatians 4:4)

> THE SON OF GOD Psalm 2:7 (Luke 3:22)

BORN OF A VIRGIN Isaiah 7:14 (Luke 1:26-27) **CALLED "LORD"** Jeremiah 23:6 (Luke 2:11)

CALLED "IMMANUEL" Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:22-23)

A BLESSING FROM THE LINE OF ABRAHAM

Genesis 22:18 (Matthew 1:1-2)

THE STAR OF JACOB Numbers 24:17 (Luke 1:33)

ON KING DAVID'S THRONE FOREVER

2 Sam. 7:12-13 (Luke 1:32)

BORN IN BETHLEHEM Micah 5:2 (Matthew 2:3-5) ONE TO WHOM SHEPHERDS BOW Psalm 72:9 (Luke 2:20)

ONE TO WHOM KINGS BOW Psalm 72:10-11 (Matt. 2:11)

BORN INTO SORROW Jer. 31:15 (Matt. 2:16-17)

7 | WEEK 1: PEACE

O Come, O Come Emmanuel



KYMNS ARE TEXTS, USUALLY POEMS, THAT ARE MEANT TO BE SUNG. THE TEXT AND THE MELODIES MAY OR MAY NOT BE WRITTEN BY THE SAME PERSON. IN THE CASE OF O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL, WE DON'T KNOW WHO WROTE THE WORDS, BUT THEY APPEARED IN THE MEDIEVAL ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, IN LATIN, IN THE 12TH CENTURY. ENGLISHMAN JOHN M. NEALE TRANSLATED THE LATIN WORDS INTO ENGLISH IN THE 19TH CENTURY. THE MELODY TO WHICH WE SING THESE WORDS ORIGINATED IN THE 13TH CENTURY, ALSO FROM THE MEDIEVAL ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. IT WAS A "PLAINSONG" MELODY OR "CHANT", MEANING THAT IT WAS A SINGLE, UNADORNED MELODIC LINE WITHOUT HARMONIC ACCOMPANIMENT OF ANY SORT. FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED, THE MELODY IS IN THE AEOLIAN MODE. WHAT A BEAUTY THERE CAN BE IN SIMPLICITY! LISTEN TO A BEAUTIFUL RENDITION OF THIS WEEK'S HYMN IN LATIN AT EASTBROOK.ORG/ADVENT. THE FIRST PART, BEFORE THEY BREAK INTO HARMONY, IS WHAT THE HYMN WOULD HAVE SOUNDED LIKE IN THE 13TH CENTURY. WEEK 2 OF ADVENT



* **DAY 8: SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT** * *F*inding Hape: Elizabeth

"But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old... Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. The Lord has done this for me,' she said. 'In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."" (Luke 1:7, 24-25)



At the very beginning of Luke's Gospel, we encounter Zechariah and Elizabeth, an older Jewish couple living during Herod's reign in Judea. Of the few things we are told about them, Luke mentions that they live righteous lives before God but also that they have no children. Why does Luke tell us this? Certainly, it is at least to help us understand, in the midst of Zechariah fulfilling his priestly duties in the Jerusalem Temple, the significance of the angel Gabriel's message of an unexpected miracle baby given to them in their later years. Perhaps it is also serves to remind us that righteous people do not always get what they desire. That theme lingers throughout the

Bible from the book of Job through the Psalms and into the New Testament. Along with that, it is likely that Luke wants to emphasize how God often reveals Himself in a special way to those who have something missing from their lives. In fact, that is a special theme in the Gospel of Luke: God is close to those who seem on the outside, who carry a wound, or who only have the smallest thread of hope to which they cling.

In the midst of all the grand things God does in Scripture, and in the midst of the story God is writing in the human history, sometimes we may wonder if as human beings we remain too insignificant in the grand scheme of things. Even if we believe in God, we may wonder if we are simply hidden, unnoticed beings before the Divine Majesty.

The story of Elizabeth interrupts that strain of thinking like a hurricane. An angelic messenger blows in from the presence of God to say that hidden prayers have been heard and that God will indeed bring about their fiercest hopes for a child. Not only that, but the wild winds of the message will blow through human history as this miracle baby, John the Baptist, will come in the same untamable power of Elijah the prophet. He will speak words of hope to all people as a forerunner of the promised Messiah. You cannot cage that wind and, as it blows, Elizabeth sees the sails of her life refilled with the billowing winds of hope.

During Advent, Elizabeth's story reminds us that the coming of Jesus brings hope to us. Jesus brings a *"living hope"* (1 Peter 1:3) that serves as *"an anchor for the soul, firm and secure"* (Hebrews 6:19). As we take the journey of Advent, reminded that God sees us and God enters into our world through Jesus Christ, may the sails of our lives be refilled again with the wild winds of living hope through Christ Jesus.

REFLECT:

What is an area of your life where you are "clinging to a thread of hope" about what God can do? How do you think you can "feed" the hope God has brought to you to increase your experience of it?

Я PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (FROM THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY):

God of hope, you call us home from the exile of selfish oppression to the freedom of justice, the balm of healing, and the joy of sharing. Make us strong to join you in your holy work, as friends of strangers and victims, companions of those whom others shun, and as the happiness of those whose hearts are broken. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

* FAMILY TALK * * * SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT: HOPE *

I hope I'm in my friend's class this year! I hope I make the team! I hope I get to have a sleepover for my birthday this year! Sometimes, we don't have to wait too long to see if the thing we're hoping for really happens. But, have you ever hoped for something for so long that you've given up hoping for it at all?

That's what it was like for a woman in the Bible named Elizabeth. She and her husband Zechariah, loved God with their whole hearts and lived to please him. They hoped for a baby, but years passed, and still . . . no baby.

Then, one day, an angel showed up! The angel Gabriel told Elizabeth that God had heard her prayers, and that, even though she was way older than most moms, God would bless her with a baby of her own! But that's not the only lesson of hope in Elizabeth's story. That miracle baby would grow up to be "John the Baptist." John would bring hope to people because he would bring them to Jesus—who IS our hope.

When we understand, like John did, that Jesus was sent to rescue us from sin and to give us a full and happy life, we can have hope, too. The Bible calls this kind of a hope an "anchor for the soul"—a sure, and steady force. We don't have to wait and "wish" for Jesus to make things right—we can know that He is holding us steady, and working all things for our good.

USE THESE "FAMILY TALK" SECTIONS EACH WEEK WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

Week 2 Readings on Hape:

MONDAY, DECEMBER 10: DAY 9

READ: Psalm 130:5-7

REFLECT: What does it mean for you to put your hope in His word? Which "words" in particular from God bring you the most hope?

ATIVITY BUILDING: Place the magi in another room. These travelers remind us that Jesus' followers would be from all nations. We hope for the day when people of all nations, together, will worship Jesus as King of all Kings.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11: DAY 10-

READ: 1 Peter 1:3-9

REFLECT: How do you think the "living hope" God gives you should change your perspective on the things you experience in this life? How can you make this new perspective more of a reality in your life?

ATIVITY BUILDING: Bring out the figures of sheep and shepherds and set them outside of the stable. These will be the first to hear that Jesus is born!

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12: DAY 11 -

READ: Romans 5:1-5

REFLECT: Why do you think Paul says that suffering moves through perseverance and character to bring us hope? Can you think of an example from your life that shows this?

ATIVITY BUILDING: Scatter some sheep figures all around the room. Let them remind you of how people are lost without the Good Shepherd, Jesus.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13: DAY 12

READ: Romans 8:22-28

REFLECT: What reasons for hope do you see in this passage?

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14: DAY 13 -

READ: Jeremiah 29:10-14

REFLECT: While this passage speaks to a specific time and circumstance, it carries a truth we all can find hope in. What does it mean to you that God knows the plans He has for you and the hope and future He has for you?

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15: DAY 14

READ: Colossians 1:3-6

REFLECT: How has the hope you've been given in Christ, led you to show love to others? How can you apply it more in that direction?

◆ **NATIVITY BUILDING:** Bring your sheep figures close to the shepherd figures. The shepherds were keeping watch at night when they heard the news about baby Jesus!

WHAT DOES "HOPE" MEAN?

In English, the word "hope" does not imply as much confidence as it does in other languages. In Spanish, for example, esperanza is a word that we use both when we wish for something and also when we confidently wait for something we know will come, like the bus. Look at the Old Testament and New Testament words below that are most commonly translated as "hope" in our English Bibles. Biblical hope is confident! We can confidently expect that God will fulfill His promises.

QAVAH (HEBREW):

(1) "to bind together", (2) "look patiently, (3)"tarry or wait," and (4) "hope, expect, look eagerly." *See Genesis* 49:18, Job 6:19, Psalm 25:5, Psalm 27:14, 40:1, Hosea 12:6. YACHAL (HEBREW):

(1) "to wait," (2) "hope, wait expectantly." See Genesis 8:12, 2 Samuel 18:14, Job 6:11, 13:15, 14:14, Psalm 33:22, 69:3, Isaiah 42:4, 51:5, Jeremiah 4:19.

PRODECHOMAI (GREEK):

(1) "to receive to one's self, receive favorably," (2) "expect, look for, wait for." See Mark 15:43, Luke 2:25, 12:36, Acts 24:15, Titus 2:13, Jude 1:21.

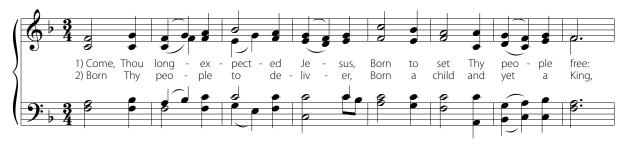
APEKDECHOMAI (GREEK):

(1) "to await, expect
eagerly." See Romans 8:19,
23, 25; 1 Corinthians 1:7;
Galatians 5:5; Philippians
3:20; Hebrews 9:20.

Oome, Thori Long Expected Jesris

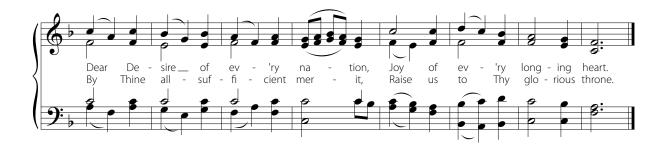
WORDS BY CHARLES WESLEY, 1744

MUSIC BY ROWLAND H. PRICHARD, 1830









THE TEXT FOR COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS WAS WRITTEN IN 1744 BY ENGLISHMAN CHARLES WESLEY, ONE OF THE GREATEST HYMN TEXT WRITERS OF ALL TIME. WESLEY'S HYMNS ARE ALWAYS RICH IN THEOLOGY, AND THIS IS NO EXCEPTION. NOTICE HOW WESLEY COVERS THE REASON FOR THE INCARNATION, THE VICTORY OF THE CHRIST'S KINGDOM OVER SPIRITUAL OPPRESSION, THE SANCTIFYING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE WITH THE LORD. COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS HAS BEEN SUNG TO SEVERAL HYMN TUNES, BUT THE ONE WE SING AT EASTBROOK IS CALLED HYFRYDOL (YES, HYMN TUNES HAVE NAMESI) WRITTEN BY WELSH COMPOSER ROWLAND PRICHARD ABOUT A HUNDRED YEARS AFTER WESLEY WROTE THE WORDS. IN OTHER CHURCH TRADITIONS, DIFFERENT TUNES SUCH AS STUTTGART OR ST. HILARY ARE USED. YOU MIGHT WANT TO LOOK UP THESE ALTERNATE TUNES AND SEE HOW THE WORDS HAVE A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT EMPHASIS WHEN SUNG TO ANOTHER MELODY.

WEEK 3 OF ADVENT



DAY 15: THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT * Finding Joy: John the Baptist

"You are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth." (Luke 1:13-14) "And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them." (Luke 2:18)



In the lead up to Jesus' birth, John the Baptist is one of the most vital characters, promised as a forerunner to the Messiah and a source of many people's rejoicing. As a preacher before the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, John preaches to the crowds outside of Jerusalem in rural spaces near the Jordan River. His outfit is eye-catching and his diet is more than a little interesting, but not in the socially acceptable ways: *"John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey"* (Matthew 3:4). His first recorded words at the start of a sermon were *"You brood of vipers"* (Matthew 3:7). If John is trying to live out

the part of an outsider prophet, he is doing a good job. But how does that fit with the promise of rejoicing attached to him in the angel Gabriel's prophetic message to his father, Zechariah?

Sometimes, real joy requires a wake-up call. A study of people who had breakthroughs to greater meaning and joy in their lives, sometimes called "awakening experiences," showed that these breakthroughs were often triggered by some form of psychological turmoil, such as stress, loss, or bereavement. While the breakthrough was an overwhelmingly positive experience, the pathway to get there was intensely difficult. As C. S. Lewis writes in *The Problem of Pain*: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Difficulty, even suffering, can serve as a wake-up call to joy.

And so, John the Baptist stands by the Jordan River's edge, issuing a wake-up call to humanity. He refuses to mince words about what is distracting them from God's best, whether it be specific sins or the pleasures of life. Even today, John's words call us out of zombielike distraction and back to attentive anticipation as we prepare for the joyful wonder of Christmas. All around us the frenzy of activity and acquisition ratchets up higher and higher in this holiday season. But do we hear the grating words of that camel-skin-wearing, locust-eating prophet cutting through the false promises of the sales pitch?

He tells us that there is another way to joy, a way that is found in Jesus the Messiah, who has come and will come again. John the Baptist reminds us that Jesus prayed we *"may have the full measure of joy"* (John 17:13), and that it is found in Him who is the bringer of *"great joy for all people"* (Luke 2:10).

REFLECT:

Have you experienced a "wake-up call" that has led to greater joy in your life? If so, how did God turn it around into something to rejoice over? How specifically has the arrival of Jesus in your life brought you joy? List as many ways as you can.

A PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (FROM THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY):

God of timeless grace, you fill us with joyful expectation. Make us ready for the message that prepares the way, that with uprightness of heart and holy joy we may eagerly await the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

Last week, we read about Elizabeth and her miracle-baby, John. Growing up, John and Jesus were pretty close in age, and since they were related, they may have hung out together at holidays or family events.

But when they grew up, John became ... a wild man! He lived far out of the city—in the wild. He wore animal skins, and ate wild things—like locusts and honey right out of a hive! And he delivered a wild message: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!"* (Matthew 3:2). In other words, *"Stop—Turn around! Stop doing wrong because King Jesus is almost here!"* When people believed this message, John would baptize them in the Jordan River, (which, of course, is how he came to be known as "John the Baptist".)

You see, John was preparing people for Jesus' coming—for joy! But, sometimes, the way to joy is through hard choices and hard work. Think of it this way: Right now, you're super-excited for Christmas. But, BEFORE all of the treats and the presents, there's work to be done! You've got school assignments and tests to take, you've got to help with cleaning, shoveling, or extra chores. There's so much to do! But, then ... the joy of Christmas!

John was preparing the way for Jesus-Joy by telling people to prepare their own hearts—to clean out the sin and to make God the most important part of their lives. We can get ready for a more joyful Christmas too, by doing the same, by "turning around" from other things to instead wait and watch for Jesus' coming.

USE THESE "FAMILY TALK" SECTIONS EACH WEEK WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

Neek 3 Readings on Joy: MONDAY, DECEMBER 17: DAY 16

READ: Psalm 16:5-11

REFLECT: What is the psalmist's source of joy in this passage? How has the presence of God in your life brought you joy?

ATIVITY BUILDING: Bring out the wise men figures and set them across the room from the stable. These men studied the Scriptures for a long time before setting out on their journey to worship King Jesus.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18: DAY 17 -----

READ: Philippians 1:3-6

REFLECT: What seems to be bringing Paul joy in this passage? Who do you see in your life as someone that is a 'partner in the gospel?' How do they bring you joy?

◆ **NATIVITY BUILDING:** Move Mary and Joseph and the donkey a little closer to the stable. Mary and Joseph were filled with joy as the time for Jesus' birth came closer.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19: DAY 18 _____

READ: John 15:9-17

REFLECT: Why do you think Jesus ties our love for one another to the joy He brings? How have you experienced this in your life?

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20: DAY 19 -

READ: Philippians 2:1-4

REFLECT: What does Paul say would bring him joy in this passage? Why do you think this brings him joy? How do the things that bring you joy compare?

◆ **NATIVITY BUILDING:** Place animal figures in the stable. This barn was a humble, but joyful place for Jesus to be born!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21: DAY 20.

READ: Romans 12:9-13

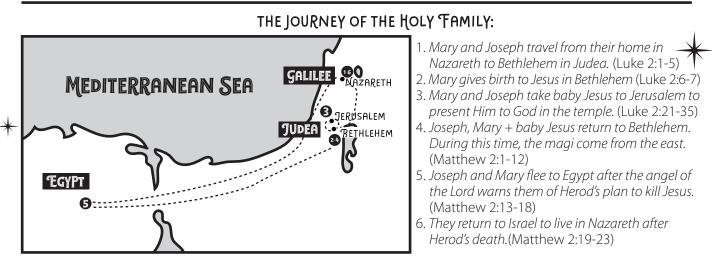
REFLECT: What do you think is the connection between hope and joy? How have you experienced this in your life?

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22: DAY 21 -

READ: Acts 13:44-52

REFLECT: What seems to be bringing the disciples joy in this passage? Why? How do the things that bring you joy compare?

ATIVITY BUILDING: Place Mary and Joseph in the stable. The time has almost arrived for Baby Jesus to be born!

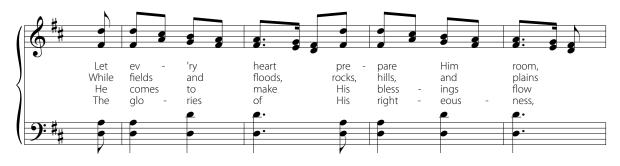


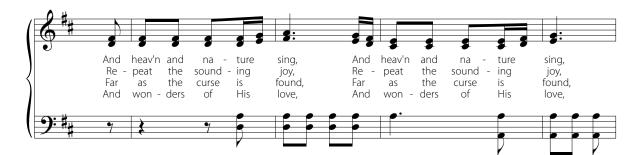


WORDS BY ISAAC WATTS, 1719

MUSIC BY LOWELL MASON, 1848, BASED ON G. F. HANDEL









THE FAMOUS ENGLISH POET ISAAC WATTS WAS RAISED IN A CHRISTIAN TRADITION THAT SANG ONLY THE PSALMS, WORD FOR WORD. IN 1719, HE PUBLISHED A BOOK OF HYMN TEXTS IN WHICH HE PARAPHRASED ALL 150 PSALMS AND "UPDATED" THEM WITH REFERENCES TO JESUS, HIS WORK AND MINISTRY. JOY TO THE WORLD IS ONE OF THESE POEMS, BASED ON "PSALM 98, ESPECIALLY VERSES 4-9. THERE IS ONLY ONE TUNE. IN 1836, AN JMERICAN COMPOSER NAMED LOWELL MASON TOOK SNIPPETS OF HANDEL'S MESSIAH AND CRAFTED THE TUNE JN'TIOCH, TO WHICH WE SING JOY TO THE WORLD. IF YOU KNOW HANDEL'S MESSIAH, YOU WILL RECOGNIZE PARTS OF "COMFORT YE" AND "LIFT UP YOUR HEADS" IN THIS MELODY.

WEEK 4 OF ADVENT



* **DAY 22: FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**



"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed." (Luke 1:46-48)



"Love is blind." At least, that is how the saying goes. The phrase means that when love is in play, a person is prone to overlook, or just plain fail to see, the problems within the person being loved. There is some truth to that, but the kind of love we all deeply desire is a love that truthfully sees everything about us and still loves us. Love that is blind—that turns away from reality—is false love, while love that sees—that leans into reality—is real love.

John 3:16 is such a well-known Scripture passage because it describes God's love as real love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17). In the midst of a world stuck in the cycle of death, Jesus the Son of God comes to bring liberating life. Even as the world could potentially be condemned because of evil and injustice, God takes a different route by sending Jesus to save the world. Jesus Himself echoes this later when He says, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). We see in Jesus the Messiah that God's love is an eyes-open love, leaning into the reality of our world and our lives. Jesus shows us just how far God will go to hold us in His loving embrace.

When the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, announcing God's plan to bring the Messiah to birth through her, Mary was astounded. Her question, "How will this be?", was both a question about the manner of the Messianic birth since she was a virgin and simultaneously a question about the possibility that something like this could occur in human history. When Gabriel emphasized God's decisive plan to intervene through Jesus as Messiah, such knowledge eventually leads Mary to erupt with praise: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation" (Luke 1:46-47, 50).

That little word 'mercy' is an echo of the Hebrew word *hesed*, which refers to God's uniquely steady and faithful love. Mary grasps, and shares with us today, that God sees what is really there in the world and still chooses to love humanity from generation to generation throughout the earth. Mary becomes a picture not only of humble obedience to God's call, but also boisterous praise of God's love. As we draw close to Christmas Day, let us join Mary's wondrous call to praise our God whose love is not blind, but rather eyes-open about us and our world. Let us draw near with anticipation to experience once again the tenderly tenacious love of God found in Jesus the Messiah.

REFLECT: What difference does it make to you that God loves you—no matter what, just as you are? Who in your life needs to hear that God loves them...absolutely and completely? How and when will you tell them?

A PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (FROM THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY):

O God of Elizabeth and Mary, you visited your servants with news of the world's redemption in the coming of the Savior. Make our hearts leap with joy, and fill our mouths with songs of praise, that we may announce glad tidings of peace, and welcome the Christ in our midst. Amen.

FAMILY TALK -

What were you like, as a baby? Did you cry a lot? Were you a messy eater? Did you start crawling and getting into everything? Ask your family to tell you a few things they remember from your baby days.

Babies can be funny little creatures, and if you have a baby brother or sister, you know this already! Babies don't know that they should be quiet and sleep all night. Babies get really excited about eating their birthday cake, but sometimes, they get more cake in their hair than in their mouths! And, babies are fearless explorers—they get into a lot of trouble and need us to watch them.

No matter how much work babies can be, there is one thing that's sure—their families LOVE them! Babies don't try to "be good" and earn their parents' love, and they don't have to. Their parents already love them with a fierce "no-matter-what" kind of love.

This is how God looks at you and me. No matter what we do, God continues to love us, to forgive us when we do wrong, and to care for us until we meet Him in heaven. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for this kind of love is *hesed*.

Mary understood God's *hesed*, and she was amazed by it! She was amazed that God was sending a rescuer to die in place of His people, and she was amazed that she was going to be a part of the plan—the mother of Jesus! When you see a baby this Christmas, think about God's *hesed*, "no-matter-what" kind of love for each of His children—including you!

VISE THESE "FAMILY TALK" SECTIONS EACH WEEK WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24: DAY 23 -

READ: Romans 5:6-8

REFLECT: Why does it matter that God love you, even while you were still a sinner? (A sinner is someone who does something God doesn't want us to do or doesn't do something God wants us to do).

◆ **NATIVITY BUILDING:** Place the Baby Jesus figure in the stable. In the middle of the night, in this little barn, Jesus was born! "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son . . ." (John 3:16).



THE WORDS TO HARKI THE HERALD ANGELS SING WERE WRITTEN BY CHARLES WESLEY IN 1739. MANY TUNES HAVE BEEN TRIED WITH THESE WORDS, BUT THE LASTING FAVORITE IS THE FAMILIAR ONE WE SING TODAY, WRITTEN BY COMPOSER TELIX MENDELSSOHN IN 1840. THE LYRICS ARE A POETIC CRASH COURSE IN THE DOCTRINES OF THE INCARNATION AND SALVATION, AND WELL WORTH MEMORIZING.

CHRISTMAS DAY



DAY 24: CHRISTMAS DAY Finding Gad: Jesus

"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them." (Luke 2:6-7)



The distance between expectations and reality is often one of the greatest strains on us as people. When our expected hopes never arrive we can easily descend into frustration or disillusionment. "What happens to a dream deferred?", Langston Hughes asks in his famous poem, "Harlem," about unrealized equality. The final lines summarize one aspect of that angst-filled reality: "Maybe it just sags / like a heavy load. / Or does it explode?" Endless anticipation that is never realized tumbles from the high peaks of hope into the chasms of hopelessness.

Yet when our anticipated hopes do arrive it is like the flash of glorious sunlight across the mountain peaks. It is like drinking a glass of clear, cool water on a hot, humid day. In the depths of our being we rise up into that realized hope and say: "Yes! Finally! This is what I have been waiting for!"

The birth of Jesus is not only the culmination of our Advent journey, but also the realization of all our greatest longings as human beings. In the words of the old hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem": "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." Jesus arrives, bringing the peace of God Isaiah prophesied, the hope of God that Elizabeth tasted, the joy of God John the Baptist preached about, and the love of God that Mary felt deep within her.

Jesus, "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), "who was with God in the beginning" (John 1:2), is now nestled in the warm flesh and solid bone of humanity at His birth in Bethlehem. God has done it! Our dreams are no longer deferred but met in Him here and now. God has drawn near and the wonder of this moment invites us into awe-filled wonder and worship again. So, let us do that today. Let us join our voices with the women and men of God throughout all the ages to speak praise from the depths of our soul to Jesus, our infant king:

O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

REFLECT:

How has your life with God been different from you thought it to be? What has been the greatest part of knowing you are loved by God, loved by Him so much that He sent His very own son to die in your place?

A PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS DAY (FROM THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY):

God of glory, your splendor shines from a manger in Bethlehem, where the Light of the world is humbly born into the darkness of human night. Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world, so that we, like him, may become beacons of your justice, and defenders of all for whom there is no room. Amen.

* FAMILY TALK*-CHRISTMAS DAY

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son . . ." (Galatians 4:4) Do you remember when you first brought home your Advent wreath? You looked at the four unlit candles, and thought: "Four weeks until Christmas? That's so I-o-n-g!" Look at the candles now. The first candle is really small, isn't it? It must be the right time for Christmas!

Four weeks can feel like a long time, but do you know how long God's people waited for Jesus to come? Isaiah told the people about God's promise of a Rescuer (Jesus) about 700 years before Jesus was born! (And, God actually promised a Rescuer long before that—during Adam and Eve's time.) That means that some people lived their whole lives hearing about a Rescuer, but never seeing Him.

But, God never forgot His promise. He wasn't being slow, or putting things off. He knew the right time—the time when the world was ready, and everything was in place: a time when the king made orders that meant Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem, a time when the wise men had been watching for the special star so they could come to worship Him.

For us, as "people of Advent", now is the right time to celebrate! Jesus has come, and He is the answer to a promise, and the answer to all of our hopes and dreams!

ATIVITY BUILDING: Place the shepherds near the stable. The angel told them that the Savior had been born! They believed, and they were the first to see Jesus and to tell others about Him!

USE THESE "FAMILY TALK" SECTIONS EACH WEEK WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

Neek 4 Readings on Love:

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 26

READ: 1 John 4:8-10

REFLECT: Why does it matter to that God loved you, even before you loved Him?

◆ **NATIVITY BUILDING:** Move the wise men closer to the stable. They are following the star to find the place where Jesus was.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27

READ: John 15:9-17

REFLECT: How does the love Jesus has shown you impact your ability to love others? Be specific!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28 -----

READ: Mark 12:29-31

REFLECT: Why do you think Jesus says there is no greater commandment than to Love God with everything we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves?

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29

READ: Matthew 5:43-45

REFLECT: What does it mean to you to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? Why do you think God wants us to do this?

◆ **NATIVITY BUILDING:** Place the wise men near the stable. Their hearts are filled with joy and love as they worship King Jesus!









THE WORDS TO CANTIQUE DE NOEL WERE WRITTEN BY FRENCHMAN PLACIDE CAPPEAU IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND SET TO MUSIC BY HIS FRIEND, ADOLPHE ADAMS. A FEW YEARS LATER, AMERICAN POET JOHN S. DWIGHT TRANSLATED THE LYRICS INTO ENGLISH, AND THE TITLE BECAME O HOLY NIGHT.

ALL FOUR THEMES OF ADVENT ARE BROUGHT TOGETHER IN THIS HYMN:

HIS GOSPEL IS PEACE.

"A THRILL OF HOPE, THE WEARY WORLD REJOICES."

*SWEET HYMNS OF JOY IN GRATEFUL CHORUS RAISE WE."

TRULY HE TAUGHT US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

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He did not wait till the world was ready, till men and nations were at Peace He came when the Heavens were Unsteady and Prisoners cried out for <u>Release.</u>

He did not wait for the Perfect time. He came when the need was deep and great. He dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine. He did not wait

TILL HEARTS WERE PURE. IN JOY HE CAME TO A TARNISHED WORLD OF SIN AND DOUBT. TO A WORLD LIKE OURS, OF ANGUISHED SHAME HE CAME, AND HIS LIGHT WOULD NOT GO OUT.

He came to a world which did not mesh, to heal its tangles, shield its scorn. In the mystery of the word made Flesh the Maker of the stars was born.

WE CANNOT WAIT TILL THE WORLD IS SANE TO RAISE OUR SONGS WITH JOYFUL VOICE, FOR TO SHARE OUR GRIEF, TO TOUCH OUR PAIN, HE CAME WITH LOVE: REJOICE! REJOICE!



