

Advent Devotional



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Advent is a time to remember the coming of Jesus into the world. We mark a period of waiting, as we prepare our hearts and minds to worship Jesus. It is also a time to remember, not only what God has already done through Jesus, but what God is doing, and has yet to do through Jesus. We are still waiting for everything to be made right. Advent is a picture of the whole life of faith.

These devotionals are designed to help us reflect on the Scriptures prophesying the coming of Jesus into the world, and the events of his birth. There are twelve separate devotionals, each with a scripture reading, thoughts for discussion, a kid-friendly activity to “do” on your own or with your family, and a prayer.

Use some or all of these to enhance your Advent experience, and to draw closer to Jesus during this time.

Blessings to you, as we all await the coming of our Lord.

-Kelly Ladd Bishop

Planning Ahead

If you choose to do the “Do” activities, you will need the following materials for each devotional:

ONE: Play-dough, a fork, a roller, or something to flatten the play-dough

TWO: A bowl or bin that will hold water, a spoon, cup, or something to scoop the water

THREE: A flashlight, and a dark room or space

FOUR: Grass or weeds with roots attached, or simply an image from the internet of a plant with roots attached

FIVE: Any kind of small seed or acorn

SIX: Paper or a notecard, an envelope, and a stamp

SEVEN: Nothing

EIGHT: A cupcake or any kind of sweet treat

NINE: Internet access if you choose to support a charity

TEN: Paper or a paper/plastic cup

ELEVEN: Internet access

TWELVE: A candle and matches or a lighter

One

READ: Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 40:1-5)

DISCUSS: A prophet delivers messages from God. Isaiah was a prophet who lived about 700 years before Jesus was born! God's people were waiting for a rescuer, and God promised that he would send one.

What do you think it means that every mountain and hill will be made low, and the rough ground shall become level?

How does Jesus make all things level? In what ways is that a comfort?

DO: If you have play dough available, make some mountains and valleys together, then roll or press them flat. Use a fork to make "rough ground," then roll it smooth. Talk about the ways that we are all on level ground with Jesus. Jesus' love and grace are available to every single person.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for your promise SO many years ago to send us Jesus. Thank you for being a comfort to our hearts and our souls, and for allowing us all to receive your love and forgiveness. Help us to love others too. Amen.

Two

READ: The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way-
a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

And so, John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. (Mark 1:1-5)

DISCUSS: Look back at the previous reading from Isaiah? This passage is from the gospel of Mark, and it was written more than 700 years after Isaiah. How are the two passages connected? Who is the messenger preparing the way for the Lord? How is John preparing people to hear the message of Jesus? How do we prepare ourselves and others to hear the message of Jesus?

DO: To prepare for the coming of Jesus, people were being baptized in the Jordan River. Water is often used to symbolize washing away our sins. Fill a bowl or dish with water, and use a spoon or cup to scoop and pour it back into the dish. Let it run over your hands. Talk about the ways that water is used to clean things. How does Jesus make us clean?

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for loving us so much that you sent Jesus to wash away all the sins of the world. As we wait to celebrate Christmas and Jesus coming into the world, help us to prepare our hearts for his love. Amen.

Three

READ: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. (John 1:1-9)

DISCUSS: Jesus was with God in the beginning, and everything was made through him! But at Christmas we celebrate Jesus coming into the world as a person. He is called the light that shines in the darkness. Notice that the darkness is not gone, but now there is a light shining that the darkness has not overcome. What is darkness like? How does being in the dark make you feel? What happens when we shine a light in the dark? What does it mean that the darkness has not overcome the light?

DO: Shine a flashlight in a dark place. What is the darkness like without the flashlight on? What happens when you shine the light at something? How does the light of Jesus change the way we see and do things? Are there things we can know in the light that we can't know in the dark?

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for sending your light into the world. Help us to live by it, and to shine your light for others. Amen.

Four

READ: A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD— and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. (Isaiah 11:1-4a)

DISCUSS: Jesse was the father of David. Jesus is a descendant of David and Jesse, fulfilling this message from Isaiah. What words are used to describe “The Spirit of the LORD” in this passage? What do these words mean? How do they make you feel? Isaiah says he will not judge by what he sees and hears, but he will judge with righteousness and justice. Who does the passage say he will judge with righteousness and justice? What do you think this means?

DO: If you are able, pull up some grass or weeds with the roots attached. If not, find an image online of a plant and its roots. We often use the image of roots to show that something is grounded, steady, and well supported. Jesus’ roots reach all the way back to King David. God kept his promise over hundreds of years. Think about your roots, your history. What promises has God kept for you? Write them down in a list, or draw a picture of a plant with roots, and write on it the promises God has kept in your life.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for Jesus who is a good and perfect judge. Thank you for your promise of righteousness and justice. Help us to see and remember all the promises you have kept in our lives, and to trust in your promises yet to come. Amen.

Five

READ: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. (Micah 5:2-4)

DISCUSS: Bethlehem was known as the hometown of King David, but it was small and had very little influence. After the birth of Jesus, the Magi visited Herod looking for “the one who was born King of the Jews.” Herod then called together the chief priests and teachers of the law and asked where the Messiah was to be born, and they quoted this passage from the prophet Micah. Micah, like Isaiah, was writing about 700 years before Jesus was born! What does it mean that his “origins are from ancient times?” How will the “flock” of the Messiah live?

DO: Bethlehem was small and unimportant, but out of Bethlehem came the savior of all the world. God often uses things that seem small and unimportant. If you can, find a seed or an acorn. Describe it. Is it small? Is it hard or soft? What color is it? Does it look important or powerful? Do people eat these seeds? Do animals eat them? Then talk about what grows from that seed. God often chooses to use things, and even people, that seem unimportant to do great things! A tiny baby born in a small town to a young woman became the savior of the world.

PRAY: Dear God, help us to remember that you take the small and unlikely things in the world, and you use them for your glory. Give us the strength to do great things for you this season, as we remember your coming into the world in an unlikely way and an unlikely place. Amen.

Six

READ: In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But 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. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:26-33)

DISCUSS: When angels speak to people in Scripture they often start by saying, "Do not be afraid." Why might Mary have been afraid? The text says she wondered what kind of greeting this might be. What would you wonder if an angel greeted you? Mary received very specific information from the angel Gabriel. Jesus would be called Son of the Most High. Mary would have recognized this term as a descriptor of God used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. She would have understood that Gabriel was talking about the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

DO: Mail someone a greeting this week! Send more than just a holiday card, write a note and mail it to someone. Think about your greeting, as you write it. How will your greeting bring someone joy? What good news can you share? How can you brighten someone's day? As you mail your note remember that the angel's greeting to Mary brought the greatest news of all time.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for the message you gave to Mary, and for fulfilling your promises to us. Help us to share that joy with others this season. Amen.

Seven

READ: In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. (Luke 2:1-5)

DISCUSS: The Bible doesn't tell us what Mary and Joseph's trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was like, but it was probably very difficult. They would have had to travel over 90 miles on hilly trails while Mary was pregnant, and there was always the threat of lions, bears, and robbers! This trip probably would have taken them longer than a week. Why were they traveling to Bethlehem? Why is it significant that Joseph belonged to the house and line of David?

DO: Take a prayer walk! Walk or move around your neighborhood, your home, or anywhere else you go during the week, and pray while you go. Think about Mary and Joseph's long journey. Think about Joseph's commitment to Mary and her calling. Think about God's commitment to us! Ask God to tell you who you should commit to this season, and how you can serve that person.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for your faithfulness to us from the beginning. Help us to remember your love through all the journeys of life. Renew our strength and our faith in you every day. Amen.

Eight

READ: 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)

DISCUSS: Mary and Joseph had traveled to Joseph's family's hometown for the census. This means that Joseph would likely have had family members living in Bethlehem, as well as many family members who had also traveled to Bethlehem for the census. Being from the family line of King David, Joseph would have been welcomed anywhere in town! But all the guest rooms were probably filled up with traveling family members. By the time Joseph arrived with Mary, there was no guest room left empty, but someone made space for the couple anyway. Was Jesus born the night they arrived? Does the Bible tell us how long they were there before the baby was born? After Mary had her baby, the clean dry hay in the manger made a good bed for him. What happens when a new baby is born? How do people celebrate? Think about how Mary and Joseph might have felt? What things might they have been thinking and wondering?

DO: Think about birthdays. Why do we celebrate the day someone was born? Because a new person has come into the world! Make a list of things you need for a birthday party: cake, friends, games, etc. Each of these things is a way to celebrate someone's life. Because of Jesus we have everlasting life. How should we celebrate that? If you are able, have a cupcake or a sweet treat to celebrate the new life we have in Jesus.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for coming into the world to be with us, and to offer us new life. Help us to remember how much you love us, and how valuable our lives are to you. Thank you for the great gift of salvation through Jesus. Amen.

Nine

READ: And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. 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. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:8-12)

DISCUSS: Shepherds were considered poor and unclean. Besides Mary and Joseph and their family, the shepherds were the first outside people to hear the news of the baby’s birth. How did the shepherds feel when the angel appeared to them? What did the angels say would be a sign to the shepherds? Who did the angel say would have great joy? Why do you think the angels sent the shepherds to see the baby?

DO: To remember the shepherds, buy a sheep! To celebrate the wonderful gift of Jesus, consider giving someone else a wonderful gift. Find a charity that provides farm animals to families in need. This is a great way to help others support themselves. Charities such as World Vision or Heifer International allow you to purchase farm animals, or shares in farm animals for communities that need them.

PRAY: Dear God, your goodness to us never ends! Thank you for coming for all of us from the lowly shepherds to the mightiest kings. Thank you for coming for me. Help us to share your love with others. Amen.

Ten

READ: Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. (Luke 2:13-20)

DISCUSS: Not just one angel, but a whole host of angels greeted the shepherds. This was big news from heaven. How do you think the shepherds might have felt? They hurried to Bethlehem to look for the baby that the Lord had told them about. How do you think they found Mary and Joseph? What did the shepherds do after seeing the baby? How did other people respond to the shepherds’ news? How do we respond to the news of Jesus’ birth? Is it still as exciting as it was to those shepherds?

DO: Make a megaphone. You can roll up a piece of paper, or cut the bottom out of a cup. This is a fun way to make announcements. When we have exciting news, we want to share it with others, just like the shepherds wanted to share the news about what they had heard and seen. Save your megaphones to use Christmas morning, to announce the arrival of Jesus to your family! Have fun with it!

PRAY: Dear God, remind us of the excitement of the shepherds. Help us to be filled with joy over the news of your Messiah, and to desire in our hearts to share it with others. Amen.

Eleven

READ: After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:1-2)

DISCUSS: Who were the Magi? They were probably not kings, but astrologers or magicians. The Bible doesn’t say much about them. We don’t know how many Magi there were, or how much time passed between Jesus’ birth, and the Magi’s visit. It might have been as much as two years later! Where did the Magi come from? How did they know the king of the Jews had been born? Why did they come, and why is it important? How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when people from a place far away knew about Jesus being born and came to find him?

DO: Learn about a new place. Pick a country you don’t know much about, and spend some time online looking up information. Where is it in the world? What languages are spoken? How many people live there? What kind of government do they have? What do they eat? What do they grow? What kinds of jobs do people have? What is daily life like? Is it very similar to yours, or very different? Remember that Jesus came for us and for people in every country. Make a little note or sign to put on your wall to remind you to pray for the country you studied.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you that you came to save the whole world. Help us to love others the way that you do. Amen.

Twelve

READ: When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” (Luke 2:22-32)

DISCUSS: Simeon had been waiting for a long time to see the Messiah. Once he saw the baby, Simeon knew that God had fulfilled the promise made to him. What does Simeon say first when he holds the baby? Simeon called Jesus a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel. What does this mean? Think about how long Simeon might have waited to see the Messiah. How much longer had Israel been waiting? What are we still waiting for today?

DO: Light a candle. Describe the flame. Is it still? Does it flicker? What does it do? Does it give off both light and heat? Simeon waited a long time for the promised Messiah. Jesus has already come into the world, forgiven our sins, and redeemed our souls. But the world still has lots of hurt and brokenness in it. We are waiting for the final promise of God, and advent reminds us that God keeps his promises, and one day will make everything new. Jesus is like the light of a candle shining into our dark world. But one day there will be no more darkness! Like Simeon waited faithfully, we are waiting faithfully for that day.

PRAY: Dear God, Christmas is a time for us to remember your faithfulness in keeping your promises to us. You sent Jesus into the world to wipe clean the sin of our souls. And you will one day wipe clean all the brokenness of the world. We are so grateful for all you have done in our hearts and lives. Help us to be part of making the world more like your Kingdom, until your Kingdom comes. Amen.

