The GIFT

A Simple Guide for Celebrating Advent



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Why Advent?

We practice Advent to point us back to the gift of Jesus.

The weeks leading up to Christmas can fill up fast. There are gifts to buy, people to see, traditions to keep, and then, before you know it, Christmas is over.

Whether Christmas is your favorite time of year or a season you'd rather skip, Advent invites all of us to slow down and remember why Christmas matters in the first place.

Advent is a four-week period leading up to Jesus' birth at Christmas. Each week traditionally focuses on one theme that helps us understand what Jesus' coming means for our lives today.

What Advent Can Give You

Advent may only last a few weeks, but how you practice it doesn't have to end at Christmas. Long into the new year, what you discover during Advent could help you do all this:

- Find **hope** when you're discouraged.
- Experience **peace** when life feels chaotic.
- Choose **joy** when life is hard.
- Show **love** for the people around you.

What Are the Four Weeks of Advent?

Each week of Advent focuses on one theme that helps us understand what Jesus' coming means for our lives today.

Hope: A wholehearted, evidence-based trust that God is making a better future

Peace: A state of wholeness, calm, and renewal between us, God, and others

Joy: A resilient cheerfulness anchored in the goodness of God

Love: Following Jesus' example by treating everyone as valuable and worthy of care

How This Devotional Works

Here's what you'll find each week:

- **One main devotional** that unpacks the week's theme through the Christmas story.
- **Practical ways to apply the theme** through faith in action.
- **Seven daily reflections and short prayers** to help you live out the theme day by day.
- **A bonus resource** to further explore each theme.

Start each week with the devotional, then use the daily reflections and prayers to keep the theme in front of you throughout the week.

Want to spend more time with each theme? This book is the short version. We also created a 25-day Bible Plan with full-length devotionals for anyone who wants to go deeper.

Week 1: Hope

Hope is the wholehearted, evidence-based trust that God is making a better future.

It can be easy for everyday life to steal your hope. Tragedies, division, aging, and disasters can make it feel like our best days are behind us. But is that true? Or could reflecting on the story of Scripture give us real, resilient hope?

Before Jesus was born, in a province of the Roman Empire called Judea, people were low on hope. Their circumstances gave them every reason to give up. But God was still writing their story.

One night, far away, educated stargazers noticed something strange. A new star shone brightly over Judea. The wise men believed it signified the birth of a divine King, so they traveled west to find Him.

Imagine their wonder when they arrived, not at a palace, but at a humble home. It didn't make sense, but the signs told them it was true. That's why they entered, bowed low, and offered kingly gifts.

To others, their actions may have seemed irrational. But hope often looks risky. If you, like the wise men, hold the conviction that this child will make the future better, then hope makes sense.

The child they found was Jesus. One small child in a big world running out of hope. His life became the evidence that God's plan was still moving forward.

Why does Advent begin with hope? It's because the birth of Jesus was a gift showing us that God hasn't abandoned us. He's with us, and He's still working for good.

Read the story of the wise men who came to see Jesus:
Matthew 2:1-12

Learn more about finding hope in God:

Hope trusts that a better future is possible because God is still working.

Jesus' birth reminds us that God keeps His promises, even when it feels like nothing is changing.

PRACTICE

Put Hope Into Practice

When things are hard, hope helps us trust God and keep going. Here are some ideas to try this week:

Tell God what feels hopeless.

When you pray, open your hands and picture what you're worried about. Then imagine placing it into God's hands.

Remember how God has helped you before.

Write down or share three ways God has helped you, provided for you, or been faithful to you. Thank Him for each one.

Take one step forward.

Think of one thing you've been discouraged about or afraid to do. What's one small step you can take this week? If it takes less than five minutes, do it today.

Encourage someone.

Write down or share the name of someone who needs hope today. Then send them a text, give them a call, or do something kind for them.

Need hope this season?

Share what's on your heart. Our prayer team would be honored to pray with you:



Reflect + Pray

DAY 1

Reflect: Where do you feel like you need God's help the most right now?
Pray: *Lord, please be with me in the part of my life that feels the hardest.*

DAY 2

Reflect: Can you think of a time when God helped you or answered a prayer?
Pray: *Thank You, God, for the specific ways You've taken care of me before.*

DAY 3

Reflect: What's one small step of healthy risk you could take this week?
Pray: *Jesus, help me to trust You and take this next courageous step.*

DAY 4

Reflect: Who's one person in your life who may need encouragement right now?
Pray: *Lord, show me how I can share Your hope with this person today.*

DAY 5

Reflect: When life gets discouraging, what practices help you to keep going?
Pray: *God, thank You for staying with me even when I feel worn out.*

DAY 6

Reflect: What's one worry you can give to God today instead of holding on to it?
Pray: *Father, I give You this worry and trust You to guide me through it.*

DAY 7

Reflect: How can you bring hope to your family, friends, or neighbors this week?
Pray: *Jesus, may my words and actions remind others of You.*

Week 2: Peace

Peace is a state of wholeness, calm, and renewal between us, God, and others.

Peace feels fragile in our world. Conflict, stress, and fear show up everywhere. It can be even more obvious during the holidays, when the intensified pace often leaves us worn out instead of renewed.

At the time Jesus entered the world, life was unpredictable, and peace felt out of reach to most ordinary families. Yet in the middle of that uncertainty, a young woman named Mary received perhaps the most surprising news ever. She would give birth to God's Son.

Her world was suddenly turned upside down. There were plenty of reasons to panic or feel overwhelmed. But instead, Mary responded with trust. She sang, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior ... for the Mighty One has done great things for me" (Luke 1:47, 49 NIV).

Mary's story reminds us that peace isn't the absence of problems. It's knowing God is with us no matter what we're facing. Peace comes when we remember that His promises are true, even when life feels uncertain.

Later, Jesus told His disciples:

> *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. ..."* John 14:27 NIV

His peace doesn't depend on perfect circumstances. It comes from knowing we belong to Him and can trust Him with everything.

Peace may feel distant in your life today, but Advent reminds us that true peace has already been given through Jesus. Just like Mary, we can choose to trust God and rest in the peace that only He provides.

Read the story of Mary: Luke 1:26-56

More on experiencing the peace of God:

Peace helps you to be fully present today because you're trusting God with tomorrow.

Jesus' birth reminds us that God won't always give us the answers, but He'll always be with us.

PRACTICE

Put Peace Into Practice

When life feels uncertain, peace helps us trust God instead of trying to control everything. Here are some ideas to try this week:

Tell God what's making you anxious.

Take a slow, deep breath. Tell God what's worrying you, then ask Him to help you trust Him with it.

Take a break from distractions.

Are screens stealing your peace? If so, try setting your phone aside for five minutes daily. Spend that time talking with God, reading Scripture, or simply sitting quietly with Him.

Focus on today.

Think about something you've been worrying about that hasn't happened yet. Ask yourself, "What has God asked me to do today?" Then do that one thing.

Bring peace to someone else.

Think of one relationship that could use a little more peace. Reach out with encouragement, offer forgiveness, apologize if needed, or just start a conversation.

Feeling anxious or overwhelmed? Share your prayer request—our prayer team would love to pray for you:



Reflect + Pray

DAY 8

Reflect: Where do you feel most unsettled or anxious right now?
Pray: *Lord, help me trust You with the parts of my life that feel uncertain.*

DAY 9

Reflect: Mary likely felt afraid, but responded with gratitude. How can you pause and thank God today?
Pray: *God, give me a heart that chooses gratitude over worry.*

DAY 10

Reflect: What promise of God brings you the most peace when life feels overwhelming?
Pray: *Father, remind me of Your promises, especially when I'm afraid.*

DAY 11

Reflect: Mary's trust in God grew even when her future was unclear. Where do you need that same trust?
Pray: *Jesus, help me believe You're working for good even when I can't see it.*

DAY 12

Reflect: How can you slow down this week to rest in God's presence?
Pray: *Lord, quiet my heart so I can experience Your peace today.*

DAY 13

Reflect: Who in your life needs to hear or see the peace of Jesus? How will you show it to them?
Pray: *God, make me a source of Your peace to the people around me.*

DAY 14

Reflect: What step can you take to follow Mary's example of trusting God completely?
Pray: *Father, fill me with Your peace as I choose to trust You more each day.*

Week 3: Joy

Joy is a resilient cheerfulness anchored in the goodness of God.

It's easy to confuse joy with happiness. Happiness comes and goes depending on our circumstances, but joy is different. Joy can last even in hard times because it rests in who God is and what He has done.

On the night of Jesus' birth, a group of shepherds were watching their flocks outside Bethlehem. They were ordinary workers doing ordinary jobs—not the kind of people you'd expect to get history's biggest announcement. Yet God chose them to receive it.

An angel appeared and said, "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" (Luke 2:10-11 NIV).

The shepherds were terrified at first, but then their fear turned to joy. They hurried into town, found Mary, Joseph, and the baby, and then spread the word of what they had seen. They couldn't keep it to themselves.

The story of the shepherds reminds us that joy isn't reserved for the powerful or important. God's joy is for everyone. It's for people doing daily work, facing everyday problems, and wondering if life will ever change.

Joy interrupts our routine when we remember all that God's done for us. Joy isn't pretending life is perfect. It's trusting that God's goodness is real and His promises are true. That is news worth celebrating and sharing.

This Advent, we remember that Jesus is the source of lasting joy. His birth brought joy to shepherds in the fields, and His life, death, and resurrection can bring you authentic joy today.

Read the story of the shepherds: Luke 2:8-20

Take a deeper dive into biblical joy:

Joy helps you notice God's goodness, even when life isn't perfect.

Jesus' birth reminds us that God's goodness is greater than our circumstances.

PRACTICE

Put Joy Into Practice

Joy grows when we remember God's goodness instead of only focusing on our problems. Here are some ideas to try this week:

Thank God for today's gifts.

Think of three good things from today, big or small. Thank God for each one.

Find joy in an ordinary moment.

Choose one simple activity you're already doing, like eating a meal, taking a walk, or driving to work. While you're doing it, slow down and thank God for being with you.

Share your joy.

Who's someone who might need hope, peace, or joy? Invite them to attend a Christmas Eve service with you.

Celebrate with someone else.

Share one thing you're grateful for with a friend, your family, or your LifeGroup. Then invite them to share something they're thankful for too. And if you don't yet have a LifeGroup, consider finding one today.

Find a LifeGroup:



Reflect + Pray

DAY 15

Reflect: Where do you usually look for joy in your life?
Pray: *Lord, help me find lasting joy in You.*

DAY 16

Reflect: The shepherds were ordinary people, yet God gave them extraordinary news. How does that encourage you?
Pray: *God, remind me today that Your best news and greatest joys are for me too.*

DAY 17

Reflect: What's one thing God has done in your life that gives you joy when you think about it?
Pray: *Thank You, Lord, for the joy that comes from remembering Your faithfulness.*

DAY 18

Reflect: The shepherds hurried to see Jesus. What helps you focus on Him, even when you're busy working?
Pray: *Jesus, give me joy as I seek You with my whole heart.*

DAY 19

Reflect: Who in your life could use some encouragement or fresh joy right now?
Pray: *God, prompt me to share Your joy with someone who needs it today.*

DAY 20

Reflect: What's one way you can celebrate God's wonder this week, even if life feels heavy?
Pray: *Father, fill me with joy as I worship You in every part of my life.*

DAY 21

Reflect: The shepherds spread the news of Jesus right away. How can you share His joy with others this Christmas?
Pray: *Lord, make me bold to spread the joy of Jesus wherever I go.*

Week 4: Love

Love is following Jesus' example by treating everyone as valuable and worthy of care.

When we think of love, it's easy to picture warmth, kindness, and special moments. But God's love is deeper than a feeling we get while we're sipping hot cocoa. It's a love that acts, sacrifices, and restores.

The Christmas story is proof of that love. God could have stayed put and told us to figure out our own problems, but instead He entered our humanity through Jesus. As John 3:16 says, "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" (NIV).

God's love didn't shout from the sky. It came in the form of a baby, born to Mary and Joseph in the humblest of places.

Mary responded to God's call with trust, saying yes even when her future was uncertain. Joseph showed love by staying by Mary's side despite the unprecedented nature of her pregnancy, protecting and caring for her when it would have been easier to walk away. Together, they became living examples of God's love in action.

Their story reminds us that love is a choice. It's not always easy or convenient. But real love looks beyond fear, doubt, and even public opinion to see the value in others and serve them sacrificially.

Advent leads us to remember that God is love. His love is not earned, and it doesn't run out. It's unconditional, personal, and available to each of us right now. The birth of Jesus is God's ultimate demonstration that nothing can separate us from His love.

This Christmas, when love feels difficult or costly, look to the manger. God's love came close, and it still does today.

Read the story of Jesus' birth: Luke 2:1-7

Explore examples of God's love in the Bible.

Love does what's best for someone else, even when it costs you.

Jesus' birth reminds us that God came close because He loves us.

PRACTICE

Put Love Into Practice

Love isn't just something we feel. It's something we choose to do. Here are some ideas to try this week:

Celebrate Christmas with others.

If you don't already have plans, join us for a Christmas Eve service. Worship together, hear the Christmas story, and celebrate the greatest gift God has ever given. If you can't attend in person, invite someone to watch a service with you online.

Choose one act of kindness.

Do something helpful for someone this week without expecting anything in return. It could be making a meal, helping with a chore, or leaving an encouraging note.

Repair a relationship.

Think of someone you've been avoiding or someone you've hurt. If you're able, take one small step toward making things right with a text, a phone call, or a conversation.

Remind someone they're loved.

Tell someone why they're important to you. Encourage them with your words, pray for them, or simply spend time with them.

Prayer is one way we remind each other we're loved. Share your request—our prayer team would be honored to pray for you.

Reflect + Pray

DAY 22

Reflect: Where have you seen God's care, kindness, or goodness at work in your life recently?
Pray: *Lord, thank You for showing me Your love in big and small ways.*

DAY 23

Reflect: Mary trusted God when her future was uncertain. Where do you need to trust God's love today?
Pray: *Father, help me to trust that Your love is steady even when life feels unstable.*

DAY 24

Reflect: Joseph chose love by staying with Mary and caring for her. Who can you stay by or care for in a practical way this week?
Pray: *God, give me the courage to love others with my actions.*

DAY 25

Reflect: How does remembering that God's love is unconditional change the way you see yourself?
Pray: *Jesus, remind me that I am fully loved by You no matter what, and help me to feel it more deeply than ever today.*

DAY 26

Reflect: Who in your life feels difficult to love right now, and how could you show them care anyway?
Pray: *Lord, teach me to love and forgive others the way You have loved and forgiven me.*

DAY 27

Reflect: What is one way you can share God's love with your family, friends, or neighbors this Christmas?
Pray: *Father, help me to share Your love freely with the people around me.*

DAY 28

Reflect: How does the birth of Jesus demonstrate the depth of God's love for you?
Pray: *Thank You, God, for sending Jesus to show me what Your love is really like.*

A Christmas Morning Prayer

Dear God, Thank You for coming into our world.

Thank You for keeping Your promises and giving us hope. Thank You for being with us and bringing peace into our lives. Thank You for showing us that joy is found in You, not just in our circumstances. And thank You for loving us enough to come close.

As I celebrate Your birth today, help me remember that Christmas is more than a tradition or a single day. Help me trust You more, walk with You more closely, and love others the way You've loved me.

Thank You for the greatest gift I've ever received.
In Jesus' name, amen.

May We Pray for You?

Share your request, and our prayer team will reach out to you.

What Happens After Christmas?

You've reached the end of this Advent devotional, but you've only read the beginning of Jesus' story.

Jesus grew up. He taught people about God's kingdom, healed the sick, welcomed people everyone else overlooked, challenged religious leaders, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. Everything He did helps us understand why His birth matters.

If spending this month learning about Advent has made you curious about Jesus, don't stop at the manger. Keep reading.

Explore the rest of Jesus' story.



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