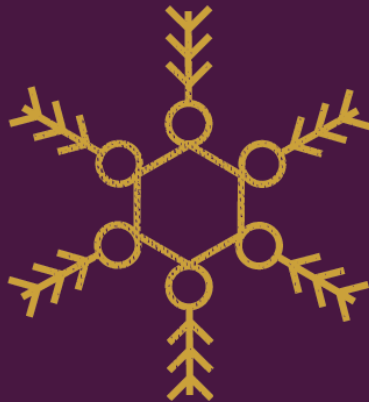


Advent



Celebrating the season with Fellowship Memphis

FAMILY GUIDE

DEAR PARENTS

God's plan is for you to be the primary spiritual nurturers of your child's faith. This resource is designed to allow your family to share time in God's Word during the Advent and Christmas season. This parent guide is meant to inspire you toward a deeper personal relationship with Jesus Christ, equip you to be the primary person to present these biblical concepts to your family, and support you as you connect and grow alongside your children.

ADVENT

The word *advent* means "arrival, a coming into place, view, or being." At Christmastime we celebrate Advent as we anticipate the arrival of Jesus Christ our Savior. We remember the days when Israel waited for a Savior. . . and we wait as well, looking forward to the day when that Savior returns. These readings and activities focus on the four traditional virtues of Advent—hope, peace, joy, and love—through the lens of the Christmas narrative. As you engage in meaningful discussions with your family over the next four weeks, it's our hope that you'll develop a deeper faith, a renewed awe, and a transformed heart.

MAIN IDEA

Nobody likes to wait. Waiting can be boring, frustrating, exhausting, and even fruitless. . . but waiting is unavoidable. We wait for traffic, for downloads, for acceptance letters, for food while it's cooking, for a friend to text or call, for a diagnosis, for someone to notice, for prayers to be answered, and for life to improve.

When the waiting is over we often say, "Boy, that was worth waiting for." Other times we say, "Boy, was that a letdown." Our experience of waiting, whether good or bad, is wrapped up in whether we actually receive what we've been waiting for and expecting. But what if there's actually value in waiting, regardless of the outcome? What if there was a way to wait that could bring meaning to life, even beyond the moment of fulfillment? If waiting in an intentional way taught us more than just patience? What if the waiting itself was the best part of life?

The word *advent* means "arrival, a coming into place, view, or being." At Christmastime we celebrate *Advent* as we anticipate the arrival of Jesus Christ our Savior. We remember the days when Israel waited for a Savior and we wait, looking forward to the day when that Savior returns.

So how do we wait? We wait together, patiently, expectantly, and intentionally. We wait together because God has called us to be His church, His body, and His family. We gather together each week to encourage and support one another as we wait. We wait patiently because we know that God is sovereign and He is working out His plan in His time. Waiting patiently gives us the margin in our lives to hear from God, reflect on His Word, pray, and respond to the Holy Spirit. We wait expectantly because Jesus promised His return and that we'll join Him in a new creation where He is King and everything is as it should be. And we wait intentionally, focusing on those virtues that shape us into the image of Christ: hope, peace, joy, and love.

So let's wait together—patiently, expectantly, and intentionally—for all that God has for us both now and in the future.

PURPOSE

Within the often familiar Christmas story, we will explore four traditional virtues of Advent—hope, peace, joy, and love—by following the Christmas story through the eyes of various people in the narrative. This will help us discover more about who God is and worship Him in response.

While we certainly experience the virtues of Advent on an emotional level, they're more than emotions. These virtues require a response of the mind, the will, and even the body as we respond in worship to the truth of the Christmas story.

In addition, these virtues will teach us to transcend our circumstances. We hope for what is not yet. We claim peace even in the midst of chaos. We choose joy even when our world seems dark. We extend love even in the face of opposition and fear. In growing to understand and own these virtues, students will discover the meaning and beauty embedded within the Christmas story ... that as we wait together, patiently... expectantly... intentionally, we're conformed to the image of the One for whom we wait. We become more like Jesus.

FOUR WEEKS

1. HOPE (Context for the Gospel) - Nov. 27 - Dec. 3

The hope of the coming Messiah is what sustained God's people prior to the first coming of Jesus—and hope of His return is what sustains us now. Hope connects all of history. We'll explore Jesus as the hope of the world.

2. PEACE (Luke 2:8–20) - Dec. 4 - Dec. 10

The coming of Messiah brought peace to a suffering world. Jesus brings *spiritual peace* in reconciling us back to God; *internal peace* by calming our fears; *external peace* by teaching how to love others; and *eternal peace* by promising a kingdom that will never end.

3. JOY (Luke 1:26–56) - Dec. 11 - Dec. 17

The angels announced “good news that will cause great joy” when Christ was born. His coming helped define for us what joy truly is. Joy is much more than Christmas parties, presents, and ornament-laden memories. True joy is deeper, more satisfying, and long-lasting. Jesus is the definition of joy.

4. LOVE (Matthew 1:18–25; John 3:16) - Dec. 19 - Dec. 24

We sometimes mistake warm feelings or intimacy for “love.” But love is so much more. The sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us in becoming a man and then dying an undeserved death shows us what true love is all about.

INVITATION TO BE INTENTIONAL

During this season, we want to challenge your family to participate in some activities that can deepen the faith of your child and your family.

Reading God's Word Together

We have included several reading plans for your family to explore during this season.

Jesus Storybook Bible Reading Plan (Preschool and Elementary)

For preschool and elementary aged children, we encourage you to follow the Jesus Storybook Bible reading plan. Cut out the picture cards and displayed in your home to help your children follow along with God's story.

Advent Reading Plan (Older Elementary, Middle School, High School)

If your children are older, you will be able to enjoy this reading plan together. We have created bookmarks with each day's reading as well as some questions that will help focus your hearts on each reading.

Memorize Scripture

As a family, memorize Isaiah 9:6–7. Consider how your family might celebrate learning this passage together.

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. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6–7)

Advent Family Dinner Questions

Once a week at family dinner, explore some of the most meaningful aspects of Advent. (See the next page for a list of questions you can cut out and place in a jar.) Have your child pull out a question, and learn and grow together as you take turns answering. You might have time for two or three questions per meal.

Activity Sheets and Crafts

We have included some simple crafts and activity sheets that you can use at home with your family. Follow us on Pinterest for other ideas: <https://www.pinterest.com/fellowshipmemtn/>

Music

Enjoy the **Fellowship Memphis** 'Advent & Christmas' playlist for free on Spotify: <http://spoti.fi/1iYeAW4>

Please contact Kelsea Walkley if you have questions about Advent resources or if you would like to add a song to our playlist!
kwalkley@fellowshipmemphis.org

Advent

Reading Plan



Week 1 - HOPE

Day 1. Isaiah 40:1–5

Day 2. Isaiah 9:2–7

Day 3. Isaiah 42:1–9

Day 4. Isaiah 52:7–10

Day 5. Isaiah 53

Week 2 - PEACE

Day 1. Luke 2:22–38

Day 2. Luke 2:39–45

Day 3. Luke 2:46–52

Day 4. Luke 1:5–25

Day 5. Luke 1:57–80

Week 3 - JOY

Day 1. Philippians 4:4–7

Day 2. Matthew 2:1–12

Day 3. Luke 2:1–21

Day 4. Ephesians 2:11–22

Day 5. Psalms 89:1–4

Week 4 - LOVE

Day 1. Matthew 1:18–25

Day 2. Matthew 2:13–23

Day 3. John 3:16–21

Day 4. Micah 5:1–4

Day 5. Psalms 89:19–29



FELLOWSHIP MEMPHIS

Pray.

Ask God to speak to you and empower you to respond to His truth. As God reveals Himself to you, ask the Holy Spirit to help you hear His voice, to connect His story with your own, and to give you a willing heart to follow his leading.

Read & Respond.

As you read and meditate on God's Word and truth, spend time journaling your reflections to these questions and prompts:

1. Read the passage out loud and listen for what God may be highlighting or asking you to pay attention to. What story is God telling? How does His story connect to your own story?
2. Read the passage again. Who was in the story and what made them unique? What experiences did they have? Why did they say or do what they did? How did God use this to grow their faith? What does this show you about who God is?
3. Write down any other questions you may have. Try to find answers these questions on your own or ask others for help.
4. How does this passage stir your heart and emotions? How might God be leading you to respond?

Remember God's Word.

Explore creative ways of focusing on God's Word throughout the day. As you do, your thoughts, words, deeds, and attitudes will be transformed more into the likeness of Christ.

Zechariah's Song captures beautifully the virtues of Advent: Zechariah's joy, the peace that comes from God's salvation, hope from the promises of God, and God's love which proves faithful through His Son, Jesus, the Son of David, the Savior of the world.

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Luke 1:68–75

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.

John 3:16

WEEK 1: NOVEMBER 27 - DECEMBER 3
HOPE (CONTEXT FOR THE GOSPEL) - LUKE 2:22-40

Have you ever waited for something for a long time? Perhaps a letter or package in the mail, a loved one to return home, a desire of your heart to be fulfilled? How long did you wait? A day, a week, a month, a year, a lifetime? Did your hope fade, or was it strengthened with time? Did you get what you were hoping for? Were you disappointed in the end?

This week we will focus on what keeps us going when everything around us screams for us to quit. Hope is the one force in the universe God has designed into life and into our psyches that enables us to persevere, to endure, to take that next step when there seems to be no reasonable evidence that we ought to. Hope keeps us looking to the future with the promise that God is working; the promise that God has a plan and will one day bring an end to sorrow; the promise that all things will be made right. Hope has inspired God's people to trust throughout His grand redemptive narrative. Hope is confidence in the promises of a sovereign God.

When we choose to hope in God, our hope isn't in vain either. Our hope anchors us, strengthens us, and guides us in this life. We won't be disappointed, defeated, or deceived because our hope is in the unchanging God who created us, redeemed us, and will also return for us. Hoping in Jesus is a hope that never disappoints.

FAMILY CONNECTION QUESTION

What are you hoping for this Christmas?

SONGS FOR WORSHIP

"Hope is Alive" by Ellie Holcomb
"When Hope Came Down" by Kari Jobe
"Hope Was Born This Night" by Sidewalk Prophets
"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"
"Cornerstone" by Hillsong Worship
"In Christ Alone" by Matt Papa
"My Hope" by Jonathan Nelson

CRAFT & ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

Cut out "Jesus Storybook Bible" Picture Cards. Reading plan begins December 1st.
Cut out "Family Dinner Questions" and place them in a jar near your dinner table.
Help kids complete "All About Advent" activity sheet (Kids Activity Packet)
"HOPE" Coloring Page (Kids Activity Packet)
Make an Advent Wreath (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)
Decorate Prayer Boxes (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)
Make a Star Ornament (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)

BLESSING

Blessings are often used in the Bible as a prayer or to encourage and guide. You may choose to pray these verses or speak them out loud as a family.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3–5).

(Child's name), **may your faith be strengthened as you see the ways that God has been active in your life. As you reflect on the goodness, power, and provision of your heavenly Father, may you boldly share with others that you have placed your hope in God.**

WEEK 2: DECEMBER 4 - 11

PEACE (SHEPHERDS) - LUKE 2: 8-20

Have you ever been surprised? Not like “amazing Christmas present” surprised, but more like “frightened surprised?” Have you ever been so surprised that you jumped, gasped, or even screamed out loud? Or maybe you were paralyzed in fear and could hardly move or speak?

The shepherds’ in the Christmas story experienced being visited by an angel in the middle of the night. They were dreadfully afraid. But the first words from the angel were “do not be afraid.” While fear would’ve normally been the proper response to an angel from God, this circumstance was different because what the angels had to say was “good news.” God was sending a Savior into the world and they had front row seats for one of the greatest moments in human history—the moment when God stepped into our world and offered forgiveness and peace to all of creation.

Peace, however, is more than just a tranquil feeling. True peace comes when we’re in a right relationship with God. True peace is knowing that God has forgiven our sins and accepted us into His family. True peace transcends our circumstances. The peace that comes from God is spiritual but manifested externally, internally, and eternally. This peace that comes from God is only possible because God has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.

FAMILY CONNECTION QUESTION

What was the best surprise you ever received or experienced at Christmastime?

SONGS FOR WORSHIP

“Christmas Offering” by Casting Crowns
“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”
“Angels We Have Heard on High”
“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”
“Angels from the Realms of Glory”

CRAFT & ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

“PEACE” Coloring Page (Kids Activity Packet)
Paper Plate Dove (Kids Activity Packet)
Pinecone Bird Feeders (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)
Stable Ornament (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)
Christmas Movie Suggestion: *A Christmas Carol*; Ebenezer Scrooge is surprised by the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future,

BLESSING

Blessings are often used in the Bible as a prayer or to encourage and guide. You may choose to pray these verses or speak them out loud as a family.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

(Child’s name), **may God fill you with His peace. May His peace, which is beyond our understanding, guard your heart and your mind. May His peace give you confidence to be and do all that He has planned for you.**

WEEK 3: DECEMBER 12 - 18

JOY (MARY) - LUKE 1: 26-56

Have you ever been troubled? Anxious? Confused? Have you ever experienced something so strange and unusual that you didn't know quite how to react or respond?

Mary had an experience that was filled with worry, anxiety, and confusion. When the angel visited Mary to reveal God's plan for her to give birth to the Messiah, the Savior of the world, we can imagine Mary didn't know what to think or even how to react. In the end, though she still didn't understand it all, she humbly accepted God's will and her trouble turned to joy. Her joy can be clearly seen in her Magnificat, the song that summarizes God's great work of redemption that she was about to take part in.

Joy is something that transcends circumstances. It's not about getting what we want, having it all figured out, or even avoiding trouble. Joy comes from Jesus and His presence in all circumstances. Joy flows from a heart focused on God, a heart that's thankful and dedicated to holiness. When we respond to our circumstances as Mary did, with faith, we can sing a song of praise that proclaims a joy that is extravagant, everlasting, and enduring.

FAMILY CONNECTION QUESTION

Who is the most joyful person you know? Why would you describe him or her as joyful?

SONGS FOR WORSHIP

"Joy to the World"

"My Savior's Love Endures" by JJ Heller

"Joy" by Rend Collective

"Good Christian Men Rejoice" by Smalltown Poets

"Mary, Did you Know?"

CRAFT & ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

"JOY" Coloring Page (Kids Activity Packet)

Scratch Art Angel Ornament (Kids Activity Packet)

Handprint Sheep (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)

Candy Cane Ornament (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)

Christmas Movie Suggestion: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, ending scene, "Christmas doesn't come in boxes ... it's something more"

BLESSING

Blessings are often used in the Bible as a prayer or to encourage and guide. You may choose to pray these verses or speak them out loud as a family.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

(Child's name), **may God fill you with His peace. May His peace, which is beyond our understanding, guard your heart and your mind. May His peace give you confidence to be and do all that He has planned for you.**

WEEK 4: DECEMBER 18 - 24
LOVE (MARY) - MATTHEW 1: 18-25

Have you ever been asked to be sacrificial—to give beyond what you thought you could give? Have you ever sacrificed something so valuable or surrendered something so significant that you could hardly believe it yourself? Have you given to the point that it hurts?

Joseph was pledged to be married to Mary. When she became pregnant, he originally decided to go above and beyond by divorcing her quietly rather than punishing or embarrassing her. But God wanted more from Joseph. God not only wanted him to be husband of Mary, but also the father of Jesus, the Savior of the world. Joseph had a huge decision to make: put himself aside and sacrifice his reputation, dreams, and plans or go his own way. Joseph chose obedient sacrifice. He chose to love God, to love Mary, and to love Jesus.

Love is sacrifice. It means putting oneself aside and choosing to live wholeheartedly for another person. Love means being selfless and thinking of the other person first, above oneself. While this definition of love doesn't seem romantic or easy, this type of love is what we were created for. We were created to be like God who, in love, gave His one and only Son to be our Savior. When we choose to love sacrificially like God, we experience God fully. We fully experience His love.

God the Father sacrificially loved the world by giving us His Son and Joseph sacrificially loved Jesus by being His father. The fathers switch places but what remains the same is the fathers' sacrificial love. To love means to sacrifice. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. How will we respond to the amazing, sacrificial love of God in Jesus?

FAMILY CONNECTION QUESTION

What's the most extravagant or costly gift you've ever given someone else? What's the most extravagant or costly gift you've ever received?

SONGS FOR WORSHIP

"Love Came Down" by Kari Jobe
"When Love Came Down" by Point of Grace
"Love Came Down at Christmas" by Jars of Clay
Silent Night

CRAFT & ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

"LOVE" Coloring Page (Kids Activity Packet)
Paper Nativity Scene (Kids Activity Packet)
Ring the Bells (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)
Christmas Tree Cards (Fellowship Memphis Pinterest)
Christmas Movie Suggestion: *Elf*, any scene between Buddy and his father, but especially where Walter quits his job for Buddy

BLESSING

Blessings are often used in the Bible as a prayer or to encourage and guide. You may choose to pray these verses or speak them out loud as a family.

"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

(Child's name), **may you know that your heavenly Father loves you. May you be filled with a heart of adoration for Christ and His sacrificial gift on the cross for you. This Christmas, may you sacrificially love others as the Holy Spirit brings**

CHRISTMAS DAY!

Throughout the *Advent* series we've taken a look at the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love—and how those themes embody the message of the coming of Messiah. **Hope** is the engine that drives humankind forward, ever seeking, ever expecting, ever desiring the good that God has promised will one day come. We know that God is a promise-making, promise-keeping God. He makes covenants with mankind, giving us the guarantee that He will keep His word. This is the anchor for our hope—the nature of God as seen in the coming of Christ.

Peace is freedom from fear and worry. It's a rested assurance in the sovereignty of God that comes from submitting everything to Him in prayer. We can have peace because of the coming of Christ and His promised return. **Joy** is a powerful gladness that's a gift from God. It comes from walking in the Spirit and submitting our wills to His will. Joy is a result of a life of thankfulness and flows from the coming of Christ. And **love** is choosing selfless sacrifice in service of another. It's seen most perfectly in the incarnation, life, death, and sacrifice of Jesus.

These four themes truly embody all that the coming of Christ represents. They also reflect the mission of the Christian life. This is the life that God calls us to—a life of hope, peace, joy, and love. The advent of Christ encapsulates the entire narrative of history. Mankind was fallen and lost and heading for a godless eternity—so God sent His Son. Because of His coming, we can now have a life that knows hope, peace, joy, and love.

This season of Advent truly does give us a snapshot of the overarching plan of salvation, revealed to us in God's grand redemptive narrative. . . and is a reason for celebration.

FAMILY CONNECTION QUESTION

What's one of your favorite Christmas memories?

SONGS FOR WORSHIP

"Joy to the World (Unspeakable Joy)" by Chris Tomlin,

"O Come Let Us Adore Him" by Hillsong

"Hark! The Herald the Angels Sing" by Paul Baloche

CRAFT & ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

Have a birthday celebration for Jesus!

BLESSING

Blessings are often used in the Bible as a prayer or to encourage and guide. You may choose to pray these verses or speak them out loud as a family.

"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" (John 3:16).

(child's name), **may you find joy in the truth that God loves you so much, He gave you the gift of His Son. May you have peace in your life and hope in your heart as you celebrate the amazing truths of Christmas.**