



Advent for FAMILIES

KIDS' EDITION

A FOUR-WEEK GUIDE
TO PREPARE FOR CHRISTMAS

This Advent resource was created to help you celebrate the season of Advent with your kids. Whether you've observed Advent before or it's the first time you've participated, we hope this guide encourages your family as you focus on His coming this Christmas.

★ **START HERE** Start by reading "What is Advent?" This section sets the stage for the rest of the packet. If your kids are old enough, read it with them. If they are younger, pick out a few key points to share.

HELPFUL TIPS

- Adjust this resource as needed to fit your family's schedule and the ages of your kids.
- Pick a time of day that works best, and try to keep it as a consistent part of your routine.
- Read each devotion at the beginning of the week so you can spread out the activities over several days.
- Think about incorporating an Advent wreath into your celebration.
 - » Traditionally, this is an evergreen wreath placed on a flat surface with four candles. On the first Sunday of Advent, light one candle. Light an additional candle each week leading up to Christmas. Some include a fifth candle in the center to represent Jesus. If so, light that candle on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.
 - » You can also create your version of an Advent wreath. There are lots of ideas available online.
- If you typically use a Nativity set, think about setting it up by adding a few figures at a time. You can do this each week, saving Jesus as the last figure you add on Christmas morning. This is another way to represent the Advent themes of waiting and anticipation.
- Make a countdown candle to mark the days from Dec 1 to Dec 25. Using a long taper candle or pillar candle, mark off 25 segments of the candle using permanent markers or paints. Each day, light the candle until it burns down to the next mark. This is another visual reminder that the season of Advent is about waiting and anticipation.



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What is Advent?



Have you ever seen an Advent calendar with the little flaps or doors for each day leading up to Christmas? Maybe you've created a countdown chain where you tear off a piece each day to know how many days remain until Christmas. Counting down to a special celebration can be a lot of fun. As the day gets closer, you feel more and more excited until it seems like you might burst! Your entire being feels like it can't wait any longer for the celebration to begin. That feeling is called anticipation!

The word advent means the arrival or coming of an important person, thing, or event. We wait in anticipation for all kinds of important things: the first day of school, the first day of vacation, a birthday, or a wedding. It's easy to see that Jesus is the most important person anyone could ever wait for and why we would want to celebrate His coming. Advent is a season of anticipation as people look forward to celebrating Jesus' birth. Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. It's a special time to remember God's promise to send a rescuer and to focus on the first celebration that took place when Jesus was born. But that's only one part of Advent.

Advent is also a time of yearning for what's to come. Yearning means to have a strong desire or deep longing for something. Yearning can feel like eagerness in looking forward to something wonderful, and it's hard to keep all the excitement from bubbling over. Sometimes people have to wait so long that they start asking if something wonderful will ever happen! That's when yearning feels like it comes from way down deep inside of you. God's

people waited for the promised Messiah who would rescue them. They waited for generations and generations and generations. They had to remind themselves that, even though it didn't seem like it was ever going to happen, God always keeps His promises. After all of that waiting, He kept His promise to send Jesus. In the same way, we are part of those waiting with anticipation and yearning for Jesus to come back as He promised.

The Bible doesn't talk about Advent or practicing it as a yearly observation, yet many churches have chosen to honor it for centuries. But why would we celebrate Advent if God didn't tell us to? A big reason is that the Bible is full of accounts of when God instructed people to create memorials and observe special days to serve as reminders of His care, His presence, and His faithfulness. He tells people, over and over, to remember the past, remember the things He has done, and remember what He has said. It's why we celebrate Christmas, Communion, and Easter. We are created to be rememberers of God!

The weeks leading up to Christmas can be busy! Buying presents, baking cookies, sending Christmas cards, decorating, and so many more activities are a lot of fun. Still, they can also wear us out and overshadow what Christmas is all about. Advent gives us time to slow down, quiet our hearts, and focus on our Savior. His gifts of hope, joy, peace, and love are priceless treasures we want to remember over and over again. Let's worship Him together in this season of Advent as we celebrate His promises.

WEEK 1
Hope



Psalm 130:5 (NIV)

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.

We use the word hope all the time, saying things like “I hope I get a new bike for my birthday!” or “I hope I get to have chocolate cake for dessert!” When used like this, hoping sounds an awful lot like wishing. Both words are similar and mean that we want or expect a certain thing to happen. Sometimes we think if we have enough hope or wish hard enough, we’ll get the things we really want. Our hopes usually depend on other people who might not have the money to buy a new bike or who might forget about making dessert at all. Despite all our wishing, we have no idea whether or not it will come true.

The Bible describes a much different kind of hope—a hope that relies entirely on God’s promises. For those who follow Jesus, hope doesn’t depend at all on the people around us. As we read about God’s faithfulness in the Bible and see His faithfulness in our own lives, we discover that hope in Him is guaranteed. Biblical hope isn’t about wishing for pets or treats or people to do things for us. It’s about believing in God for treasures that last forever. It’s knowing He always does what He says He will do. This kind of hope means we can expect Him to fill our lives with His presence. David wrote in Psalm 130 that hope in the Lord is something to be longed for with everything in us, and it asks us to trust God’s word no matter what.

Think about the hope God’s people had in the promise of a rescuer. Looking back at all the ways God had already shown His faithfulness to them, the Israelites could put their hope in the promised Messiah with all certainty. Over and over, they saw that God never changed, and He always kept His promises. At just the right time, He sent Jesus

to the world to save people from their sins. During Advent, we remember God’s faithfulness throughout the Bible, see His presence in our own lives, and think about all of the promises He made that have already been fulfilled. We take time to focus on these things as we hope in Jesus’ promised return. Just like Israel waited with hope for the Messiah to come, we wait with hope for Jesus to return. That hope in His promise isn’t a wish that may or may not happen. It is a guarantee anchored in His word. We can trust He will come back to make everything new and perfect without any stain of sin at all. The hope we have in His promises is without question because He has always been and will always be faithful.



DISCUSS

- How have we seen God’s hope in our lives over the past year?
- When it feels like waiting for God to move is taking a long time, what can we do to strengthen our hope in Him and His word?

EXPERIENCE

- Listen to “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus.” Doodle or draw to the music, and focus on how the music and words make you feel. Share your drawings, and talk about what came to mind while listening.
- Use salt dough (recipes available online) to make ornaments with the word Hope to decorate and hang on your Christmas tree. Make some extras to use in one of the Give activities below.

REFLECT

- Think about how it feels to wait for something for a really long time. Consider how it felt for generation after generation of God's people to watch and wait for hundreds of years for the promised Messiah.
- Light a candle, sit together quietly in God's presence, and simply wait. The length of time for this activity will vary depending on the age of your children. Afterward, share what you were feeling while waiting or share something the Lord said to you while you waited.

PRAY

Dear God, It can be so hard to wait for things, and it can be disappointing when what we hope for doesn't happen. Help us remember that you will never disappoint us because you always do what you say you will do. Even if we have to wait a very long time—like people who waited hundreds of years for the promised Messiah to come—we place our hope in you and trust you to be faithful always. Teach us more about your promises, help us have confident hope in you, and show us how to share that hope with others. Amen

GIVE

- Think of people you know who need a reminder of hope. Wrap the extra hope ornaments you created and make cards to go with them. Deliver the gift of hope. You can do this in person or leave the gift for them to find as a surprise.
- Some individuals and families are in situations that seem hopeless. Through a community organization like a food pantry, a mitten tree, or another program that helps people in need, share God's hope by meeting one of those needs. Try to find ways to make it a hands-on learning experience for your children by taking them shopping for needed items and delivering them to the organization together.

Hope

WEEK 2
Joy



Psalm 16:11 (NLT)

You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

So many things make us happy. Receiving a present we really want, playing with our friends, or spending time doing a favorite activity are things that can make us feel happy. The clothes we wear, the food we eat, and the people around us can also make us happy. Happiness is a wonderful feeling, but happiness doesn't always last. It can come and go if it's based on the things we have or the things we get to do. When happiness is our only focus, it's pretty easy to feel disappointed, sad, or even angry when we don't get what we want.

Joy is a gift God puts deep inside of us that never goes away. The Bible teaches us we can have joy regardless of our circumstances. Think about the up and down life of Joseph. His father gave him extra attention and gifts, and then his brothers threw him into a pit and sold him into slavery because they were so jealous. Joseph ended up in Egypt, where things began to get better. Someone important in the land recognized his skills and wisdom and gave Joseph a position of power. Things were going well until he was sent to prison for something he didn't do.

Joseph's life continued to have ups and downs. His life didn't go as he expected it would. If he had only focused on his happiness, Joseph would have seen it come and go all the time. But through everything that happened, good and bad, he remained faithful to God. God used him to keep all Egypt and the surrounding countries from starving, including his own family. Joseph was able to see how God took the things that were meant for evil and turned them around for good! He found joy in God's presence throughout every moment of his life.

As we focus on joy this week, let's remember that this gift from God doesn't depend on anything happening around us, and it doesn't come and go as happiness can. No one can take away the joy inside of us because it comes from God's presence. Because He is always with us, His joy overflows without end.

DISCUSS

- How have we seen God fill us with His joy over the past year?
- How can we have joy no matter what happens to us and around us?

EXPERIENCE

- On a large piece of paper, write the outline of the letters J-O-Y. Using stickers, take turns telling each other about things the Lord does or gives that fill you with His joy. Add a sticker inside each letter for each item. Seeing the word joy fill up with decorations is a visual picture of God filling us up with His joy.
- Bake a cake or any food item that can support a candle. Place a small birthday candle and a large taper candle in the cake (or food item). The birthday candle represents happiness, and the taper represents joy. Light both candles. As the birthday candle burns down, replace it with another birthday candle. Repeat as many times as you'd like. Feelings of happiness fade over time, but God's joy lasts even longer than the large candle will burn!

REFLECT

- Memorize Psalm 16:11 together. Come up with motions or set it to a song to help everyone remember the words. When you repeat this verse, think about the joy God gives us with His eternal presence in our lives.
- Sing "Joy to the World" together in praise to the Lord. Don't worry if you can't carry a tune. Simply focus on the words of this familiar Christmas song. Help your kids understand the meaning of the song and the joy it describes.

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank you for the things that make us happy—family, friends, a home, clothing, and food to eat. Thank you for your presence that fills us with joy. Teach us to remember that no matter what happens in our lives, your joy never goes away. Whether life is easy or hard, you will never disappoint us. Give us opportunities to share your joy with those who need it. Amen

GIVE

- Preparing to celebrate Christmas can be difficult for single parents or young families who have no extended family nearby. Offering to babysit to give the gift of time can bring a lot of joy. If you have kids older than those you're watching, they can help in serving. If your kids are the same age or younger, their participation as playmates is also part of giving as a family.
- Ask God to help you choose a simple way to share joy. It can be as small as thanking store employees for their help, sharing a smile with everyone you see, or holding the door open for others. Whatever you choose, make an effort to do it throughout the day or week. Talk as a family about what happened as you shared God's joy.

Joy

WEEK 3

Peace



Romans 5:1 (NLT)

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.

Peace is a word we hear often, but we don't always stop to think about what it means. Sometimes looking at a word's opposite is helpful. The opposites of peace are irritation, noise, conflict, hostility, and war. It's easy for people to get irritated with each other. Noise can make it hard to feel peaceful. Fights between family members, friends, and strangers happen for many reasons. When fights occur between countries, it can lead to war. Our history contains accounts of many different wars. In every instance, both sides fight to win, but in the end, there is always one winner and one loser.

World War I began as a small conflict between two countries but soon grew into a huge war between two powerful groups of countries. It didn't just affect the soldiers fighting in the war. People all over the world were affected by the absence of peace. Something unusual happened during all the terrible fighting. In some places along the battlefield, enemy soldiers called a truce. Without an official meeting to decide to take a break from fighting for a certain length of time, each side began to stop. On Christmas Eve, the shooting slowly ended as the soldiers started singing carols. Both sides could hear the music of the other from where they were taking cover, and then soldiers began coming out in the open, leaving their weapons behind to meet together in celebration of the holiday. War eventually resumed, but for that moment in time, peace was shared between enemies.

In the beginning, the relationship God created with Adam and Eve was perfect. There was no conflict,

no arguing, no chaos, and no war. But when Adam and Eve chose to follow a voice other than God's, sin entered the beautiful world He had made, and the peace that had been felt in their relationship with God was broken. It wasn't just broken for Adam and Eve, though. It was broken for all of us, and we could do nothing to put things back together again. We needed fixing!

The Old Testament word for peace is shalom, and it means to complete or restore to wholeness. When things are broken and not at peace, we want them to return to the way they were. We want shalom. Human efforts to fix things like broken toys or ripped clothing might work for a while, but the evidence of the cracks and tears is still visible. One of the words we talk about during Advent is peace—the kind that restores things to wholeness the way they were meant to be without any sign of brokenness at all. The peace God gives through Jesus is not anything like the Christmas truce during World War I when the fighting stopped for a short time. The peace created by Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection completely fixes our broken relationship with God—not just for a little while, but forever.



DISCUSS

- How have we seen God's peace in our lives over the past year?
- What does it mean to have peace with God?

EXPERIENCE

- Using the infant Jesus from a Nativity set or a picture, take turns hiding Jesus and letting the

rest of the family find Him. After playing the game, talk about how we can't fix our broken friendship with God if we don't have Jesus in our lives. When Jesus is present in our lives, His peace makes our friendship with God whole again and puts us back in His family forever.

- Write the word peace on black construction paper with a white crayon. Punch small holes with a sharp pencil or pin along the lines of the letters. When finished, talk about how the black paper represents the sin that separates us from God. Hold the paper up to a light to see the word "peace" appear. Jesus is the light who restores our peace with God, making our relationship with Him whole again.

REFLECT

- If you have older kids, listen to the carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." Henry Wadsworth wrote the words during the Civil War after experiencing several personal tragedies. Talk about the words and the power of God's peace to restore brokenness.
- Read Numbers 6:24-26. Talk about the words of this Old Testament blessing and how Jesus is the peace God gives us.

PRAY

Dear God, We know that no matter how hard we try, we can't fix things broken by sin. We understand that Jesus is the only one who can make our relationship with you whole and complete. During this Advent season, show us how to express our gratitude to you by sharing your peace with others. Amen.

GIVE

- Take a drive down your street or through your neighborhood at night. At each house with Christmas lights, pray for those in the house, as well as those nearby, to experience your peace. If you'd like, you can use 2 Thessalonians 3:16 as a prayer.
- There are many members of the Armed Services stationed in places where peace seems really hard to find. Pray for and send Christmas cards to servicemen and servicewomen to share God's peace with them. If you don't know anyone in the military stationed overseas, check with your church, local USO organizations, or even online!

Peace

WEEK 4

Love



1 John 4:9-11 (NLT)

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

Have you ever thought about how often we use the word love when we talk about things or activities? *I love ice cream! I love riding my bike! I love summer!* We use the same word to talk about the people who are really important to us, as well. *I love my parents! I love my friend, Shelley.* We use the word to describe a feeling of affection for someone or enthusiasm for something. We often use the word 'love' because it describes one of the strongest, best-feeling emotions we have.

But what if love isn't an emotion? What if it's *someone*? In 1 John 4, the author says God is love. This is hard for our brains to understand because we are used to thinking about love as a feeling. In the New Testament, the word used for God's love is *agape*. *Agape* love is unconditional, which means it doesn't depend on anything we say or do but rather on who God is. This love is sacrificial, giving without expecting anything in return. It's a love that wants what is best for us, whether we deserve it or not. We learn that God is love through the way He *acts*, and we see that really well through the life of Jesus.

Jesus was the living example of the Father's love to everyone around Him. When He came to the world to live with people, He was fully God and fully human all at the same time. People related to Jesus because He was like them in every way—except for sin. People were able to see the Father's love through what He said and did. The writers of the New Testament looked to Jesus' teachings and His actions to define this new kind of love. Every

word Jesus spoke about love was demonstrated through His actions. Think about all of the wonderful and amazing things Jesus did, and you'll know what God's character of love looks like. Jesus left Heaven to live as a human being and give Himself the perfect and final sacrifice. He died for every sin of every person that ever was or ever will be, so all who believe in Him can be part of God's family forever. That is unconditional and undeserving love given freely with no strings attached!

God's love didn't end with Jesus' death or His resurrection or His ascension into Heaven. It keeps on going as we wait for Jesus to return. His presence, filled with a love we can't fully comprehend, is continually with us as He teaches us more about Him and more about loving Him by showing God's love to others. This love is always with us as we wait for Jesus to come back. His return will completely wipe out every last bit of sin and death and create a perfect world where His family can live together in an unbroken relationship with God forever. That is what we celebrate during Advent, on Christmas Day, and all year long. That is why we share God's amazing gift of love with others all year long.



DISCUSS

- How have we seen God's love in our family's life this past year?
- Why do we look at the life of Jesus to understand the meaning of love?

EXPERIENCE

- One of the ways Jesus showed love was through serving others. Set aside a day this week where everyone serves one other person in your family. Do someone's chores, let someone else go first, let them choose the game or TV show to watch, and find ways to show kindness throughout their special day. After every family member has had their day to be served, talk about the experience. Think about how you can continue doing those kinds of things as an act of love all the time.
- Wrap the baby Jesus figure from your Nativity in a box, and put it under your tree. On Christmas morning, open it first as a reminder of God's love in action. Place Jesus in the manger and thank God for this amazing gift.

REFLECT

- Use a piece of clay and roll it into a line. Ask your kids to point to the beginning and the end of the line. Take the same clay and form it into a circle. Press a hole through the middle to create a ring. Ask your kids to find the beginning and end of the ring. With no beginning or end, the ring is a visual example of God's character of unconditional, never-ending love for all people.
- Read 1 John 4:9-11 phrase by phrase and have your kids echo back the words. For each of your kids, read the verses to them, substituting singular pronouns and their names to make it personal. Discuss how everything God has done isn't reserved for other people, but he did it for you.

PRAY

Dear Jesus, Thank you for coming from Heaven to live with people as a perfect reflection of God's love. Thank you for giving us the Bible, so we can learn about you from the people who walked with you, saw the things you did, heard the words you said, and whose lives were completely changed because of you. Help us to listen to your voice as you show us how to be an example of your love to others. Amen

GIVE

- Invite a person or family who doesn't know Jesus to your home for dinner. We can't make others follow Jesus by telling them that they must. The Lord can use our words to speak to their hearts, but when we look at the way Jesus lived, we see that God's love is made clear through actions. Loving God with every part of ourselves shows others His love because it's spilling out of us in everything we do. Spending time with people who don't follow Him yet is one of the best ways for them to meet Jesus.
- Pack small bags with simple snacks, like granola bars and bottled water, personal hygiene items, and other care items. Keep one or two of these "blessing bags" in your car. The next time you see a homeless person asking for help, give them one of the bags. Ask the Lord to guide you to be wise and safe as you distribute these small bags representing His love in action.

Love