

Experience Advent

*Waiting for the coming of Messiah
2017*

*A Weekly Devotional Guide
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Introduction

Advent background:

Advent means “coming” or “arrival.” It is a season of waiting for the coming of the Messiah. This period begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent looks to the past to rejoice in Jesus’ first advent to save us from our sins and it looks to the future to anticipate his second advent to fully restore all things. During this time, God’s children are filled with longing, hope, and expectation as they prepare for the arrival of Jesus.

The Advent wreath & candles:

The Advent wreath is in the form of a circle, symbolizing the eternal nature of God, with no beginning and no end. Its greenery stands for the everlasting life we have in Christ. The candles around the wreath represent the light of God coming into the world through his son, Jesus. As we light the candles, we count down the weeks to Christmas, waiting to celebrate the arrival of the Messiah, and we are reminded that the darkness of sin and hopelessness recedes as the presence of Jesus becomes manifest. The colors of the candles have meaning, too: purple represents humility, penitence, and royalty; the one rose-colored candle (lit on the third week) signifies joy at the soon-coming Savior; and the white candle in the center represents Christ, the light of the world.

Scriptures are taken from the New International Version.

How to use this devotional:

- This guide allows you to focus weekly on one of the themes of Advent. Make this an opportunity to gather family and friends for a beautiful time of worship. You will need a wreath, 3 purple or blue candles, one pink or rose candle, one white candle, and song sheets.
- Traditionally, the lighting of the Advent wreath takes place each week on Sunday, but any regular time that works best for you is suitable. Many place the Advent wreath on their tables and burn the appropriate candle(s) each night during dinner.
- You may want to dim the lights to emphasize the contrast between darkness and light and to draw attention to the growing light as the weeks of Advent progress.
- Each week read through the corresponding devotion, taking time to mediate and pray. The devotions contain readings, verses, questions, times for prayer, and suggested songs. Select any and all components that you would like to use. You may also want to assign the different components to those present. *For Further Meditation* is designed to be used at another time during the week if you choose and focuses on Scriptures about Jesus' Second Advent or the eternal state.
- Have a hymnal or Christmas song book handy for singing. Make copies of the particular song you plan to sing for each person. Songs can also be found at NetHymnal.org.

Tips for families with children:

- Keep your devotional time short. Take into consideration the ages and attention spans of all participants and modify the lessons if needed. Your children will let you know if it is too long! You will probably want to omit the section *For Further Meditation* and reserve it for yourself for another time.
- Involve the children as much as possible; this will help them to stay focused and "own" the tradition.
 - Some families have the youngest child light the first candle each week, the next oldest light the next candle, and so on. Even a toddler can light a candle with a long-handled lighter and help from an adult.
 - Have children read the scripture passages. Beginning readers can practice reading it beforehand.
 - Gently encourage children to participate in the discussion and to pray a one-sentence prayer with the family.
- Role model good fire safety:
 - Spray fresh greenery with a flame retardant when assembling the wreath and replace it when it appears dry.
 - Don't allow candles to burn down too close to the greenery.
 - Never leave burning candles unattended.

1st Sunday, Dec 3 – Hope

Reading (read or paraphrase): Advent means “coming,” and it is a season of longing and expectation for the coming of Jesus. The ancient Israelites watched and waited for the promised Messiah. He came, entering the world as a baby and bringing his light. John 1:9 says of Jesus: “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” As we light a new candle each week on our wreath, the growing brightness will symbolize God coming nearer to us, purging the darkness of sin and hopelessness.

During Advent, we look to the past, remembering Jesus coming near through his birth to live, die, and conquer death; we look at the present to see our daily need for Jesus to be near us; and we look toward the future coming of Jesus to straighten out the pain and injustice of our broken world.

We will light one of the purple candles today to remind us of the hope we have in Jesus and the knowledge that one day he will come make the world right again. The cry of Advent is “Come, Lord Jesus!” Let’s pray that together as we light the first candle.

Lighting: [Light one purple candle and pray together, “Come, Lord Jesus!”]

Scripture: ...*Isaiah says, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will **hope** in him.” 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 15:12-13*

Discussion: What do you hope for most? If that desire were granted, how do you think it would change your life?

Prayer: Encourage each person to say one sentence, about the great hope that we have in Jesus. It could express thanks, ask for greater understanding about this hope, or ask for help to give hope to others.

Suggested song: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel or Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*

Application questions:

- Where are you discouraged? How does the good news of Jesus coming give you hope?
- Who do you know that needs some hope? What could you do that might give them hope?

For Further Meditation

Purple represents humility—the humility of Christ coming in the flesh to die on a cross and our humble state of need which makes us hope for more.

Romans 8:18-25

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Prayer:

Lord, liberate us. Be a help to those suffering. Remind me that the pain of this world is temporary. I long for your coming.

2nd Sunday, Dec 10 – Peace

Reading (read or paraphrase): Last week we lit the candle of Hope. This week we will light it again and also light a candle that symbolizes peace to remind us that Jesus is the source of peace in a troubled world. We think of the announcement of the angels at his birth in Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **peace** to men on whom his favor rests."

Let's pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" as we light this week's candle, which stands for peace.

Lighting: [Light two purple candles and pray together, "Come, Lord Jesus!"]

Scripture: *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making **peace** through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1:19-20*

Discussion: Where do you see a need for peace in the world around you? What about in your own life?

Prayer: Encourage each person to say one sentence, asking God to bring peace in one of the areas of need that were mentioned.

Suggested song: *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day* or *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*

Application questions:

- Tell me about a time when you experienced peace. What was it like? Is there any way to have peace when things around us aren't peaceful?
- How could you be a representative of God's peace to someone who needs it this week?

For Further Meditation

Purple also represents penitence or contrition and repentance. Recognize and surrender what is keeping you from living more fully in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-23

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Prayer:

Lord, make me ready for your coming. Help me to see what I need to change in my life to be more like you. Thank you for forgiving and cleansing me.

3rd Sunday, Dec 17 – Joy

Reading (read or paraphrase): Last week we lit the first two purple candles which represented hope and peace. Today we will light the pink candle which stands for joy. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angels proclaimed to nearby shepherds in Luke 2:10, “I bring you good news of great **joy** that will be for all the people.” The good news of Jesus’ birth still brings great joy for those who eagerly await his coming.

May these candles remind us that our greatest joy comes from knowing Jesus!

Let’s pray “Come, Lord Jesus!” as we light the pink candle.

Lighting: [Light two purple candles and the pink one and pray together, “Come, Lord Jesus!”]

Scripture: *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious **joy**, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:8-9*

Discussion: Has there ever been a time when you were full of joy even though things were not going the way you wanted them to in your life? Where did your joy come from?

Prayer: Encourage each person to say one sentence thanking God for the reasons you have joy or asking for more joy in your life.

Suggested song: *Joy to the World*

Application questions:

- What keeps you from having joy this Advent season? What has God done that gives you a reason for joy?
- What could you do this week to add some joy to someone else’s life?

For Further Meditation

Pink represents joy and happiness. This is the mid-point of the season. It is marked with joy because the waiting is halfway over.

Revelation 22:12-13

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, come soon! I eagerly wait for you and rejoice in your future coming. Thank you for the promise of a future reward and a glorious body.

4th Sunday, Dec 24 – Love

Reading (read or paraphrase): Today we light all four of the candles around the wreath: the candle of Hope, the candle of Peace, the candle of Joy, and now the candle of Love. God sent his Son to save us because he loves us. His love encompasses forgiveness, cleansing, and the gift of his life in us. Never forget: God loves you.

Let's pray "Come, Lord Jesus!" as we light the fourth candle of Love.

Lighting: [Light the four candles and pray together, "Come, Lord Jesus!"]

Scripture: *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:9-11*

Discussion: What is God's love like? Share one or two words that describe God's love.

Prayer: Encourage each person to pray one sentence thanking the Lord for the characteristic(s) of God's love that he or she mentioned or asking God for help in understanding and experiencing his love.

Suggested song: *O Holy Night* or *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

Application questions:

- How does knowing that God loves you change your life? Can you think of a time when you forgot how big his love for you is? What can you do to remind yourself about how much he loves you?
- What could you do to demonstrate God's love for someone this week?

For Further Meditation

Lastly, purple represents royalty and recognizes our soon coming Sovereign King.

Revelation 19:16

On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Revelation 22:3-4; 22:12-13

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Prayer:

I welcome you King Jesus in my life and look forward to your glorious appearing. You will bring justice and make everything new. Reign in my life and may your will be done on earth.

Christmas Day

Reading (read or paraphrase): For four weeks we have lit these candles and have looked forward with expectation to the hope of deliverance for us and for our world. Now it is time to celebrate! We celebrate his coming as a baby in Bethlehem; we celebrate his coming to us to live in us; and we celebrate his coming again to fully redeem the world. Isaiah's prophecy has come true: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;" (9:2)! God is, indeed, "with us"!

We finally get to light the center candle, the Christ candle, representing Jesus, the light of the world. Before we do that, we'll again light the candles that symbolize gifts that God has given us in Jesus: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Let's declare, "Lord Jesus has come!" when the white candle is lit.

Lighting: [Light the candles and declare together, "Lord Jesus has come!"]

Scriptures: *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the **light** of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the **light** of life. John 8:12*

*You are the **light** of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your **light** shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matt 5:14-16*

Discussion: Why do you think Jesus said that *he* is the light of the world and also said that *you* are the light of the world?

Prayer: Encourage each person to say one sentence thanking the Father for sending Jesus to be the light of the world, or asking for help to recognize the light of Jesus in your life in times of darkness, or asking that he would make you a light to others.

Suggested song: *O Come All Ye Faithful*

Application questions:

- Can you think of a time when it seemed like your life was dark because you were frustrated, afraid, or discouraged? How can you trust Jesus to be the light of your world?
- What opportunities has God given you to be a light to those around you?

For Further Meditation

The white candle represents Christ, the Light of the world. He is the reason for our hope, peace, and joy.

John 1:5

That light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Revelation 22:5

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.

Rev 22:20-21

[Jesus] who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are coming again! You are Faithful and True. I overcome darkness by placing my faith in you. Be the focus of my life. I adore you.

The Christmas story is found in Matthew 1:18-2:23 and Luke 1:26-56; and 2:1-40.