



THE ARRIVAL

*Advent Devotional 2021*

# WHAT IS ADVENT ALL ABOUT?

## THE HISTORY OF ADVENT

The word advent actually comes from the Latin *adventus*, which simply means “arrival.”

Advent is the coming, the arrival, of the presence of God Himself—God with us.

For hundreds of years, followers of Jesus from a wide variety of church traditions around the world have set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas as a meaningful season of celebration and anticipation.

## CELEBRATION

In celebration, we remember the earnest expectations and fervent prayers of faithful saints of old who longed for the coming of their Messiah to rescue them from Sin and all its cronies. Humanity called upon the name of the Lord, and God answered. He arrived living and breathing and walking among us. Advent is a way to experience their joy as we put their ancient, Spirit-inspired words on our lips as a community.

## ANTICIPATION

So Advent is something that really happened, but Advent will happen again. Jesus is coming back. At His first coming, the future kingdom of God burst into the present with Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Our spiritual enemies were disarmed. Yet our world is not what it will be as we await the reign of our good king. We live in the “already but not yet” of Jesus’ kingdom. At Advent, we give voice to “kingdom come” prayers of our own, looking expectantly for Jesus’ return. In that way, this is a season of both celebration and anticipation. For Christians, Christmas is less sentimental than we think. Advent allows us to be honest about what's wrong with our world and to freely celebrate Christmas as good news—King Jesus has come; King Jesus will come again!

## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Each of the four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas Eve will focus on a different theme of celebration and anticipation—hope, faith, joy, and peace. Take time each week to read through the weekly devotional, meditate & reflect on the Scriptures and spend a moment in prayer. We encourage families to do this together - and we've even included some weekly activities for those with kids to help the whole family focus on Jesus together this Advent season.

*Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).*

Encountering God is not only possible this Christmas season, Jesus said it's a matter of opening the door. Will you let Him into your home? He's waiting.

WEEK ONE

# HOP!E

WEEK ONE

I don't do awkward gracefully...but then, who does. That's why it's called awkward, it simply lacks gracefulness. Hospitals make me feel like a stranger in a strange land. I don't know where to go. I don't know which of my naive questions is most stupid or inappropriate. How long do I sit here before I can know what's going on? ...Yeah, awkward.

When my wife and I were first married, we'd been trying to "get pregnant" and there I was on an OB/GYN floor at the hospital. My wife was somewhere being treated for a painful abdominal issue, and I'm clueless what's going on.

Finally, my wife's doctor emerges and says, "Mr. Bender?" I stand and nod. "Well," he says, "your little girl is fine. She's had an ectopic pregnancy. Surgery went well, and she should heal up good. She can go home tomorrow." A nurse approached a bit later and told me I could see her.

A kiss and a touch and the conversation began with what was in the forefront of both our thoughts... okay, so it works, but can we get pregnant again or are we done? Even though the doctor had told both of us the possibilities were still good, we had our doubts, but we also still had our hopes.

We did eventually get pregnant again, and what a joy... waiting notwithstanding. Look at this passage in Romans 8...

*All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy. -Romans 8:22-25 (Message)*

Everything in creation is waiting for the redemption of Christ's return. The hope and anticipation embedded in our waiting is the same as that of the ones who were alive when Jesus was born of Mary. Generations had waited in earnest expectation of the Messiah. And He came sort of unexpectedly to a place where it seemed no one was looking. Still, they were told in the prophecies that it would happen and where it would happen, just not 'when.'

We too, wait with sometimes anxious anticipation. Yes, it will happen. He will come. "I go to prepare a place for you...I won't leave you comfortless."

The notion of hope is not unfamiliar to us. Outcomes in childbirth, college, grades, job opportunities, marriage, retirement and just life's expectations in general are all wrapped in hope and "this hope (for redemption) will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us because He

has given us His Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love." (Rom. 5:5)

Let's wrap up with this passage from Romans 15: 12 & 13

Isaiah prophesied:

*"An heir to David's throne will emerge,  
and he will rise up as ruler  
over all the non-Jewish nations,  
for all their hopes will be met in him."*

Now may God, the fountain of hope, fill you to overflowing with uncontainable joy and perfect peace as you trust in him. And may the power of the Holy Spirit continually surround your life with his super-abundance until you radiate with hope!

### **PRAYER**

*O Father, you have poured out your extravagant love on us in sending Jesus to us as an infant, who as He grew was familiar with sorrow and grief like any human. Without losing His presence in the moment, He saw beyond this world to that place that He's preparing for us. Help us to lift up our eyes and look through to a hope that does not lead to disappointment. Come Lord Jesus!*

## **FAMILY ACTIVITIES**

Each week you'll read a portion of the the Christmas Story as you focus on the greatest gift - Jesus! If you'd like to use the daily advent guide from Parent Cue - check the last page of this devotional.

### **READ: Luke 1:26-38**

### **REFLECT:**

How did Mary feel at first when Gabriel came to visit her? (afraid)

What did Gabriel say would happen to Mary? (she would have a baby)

What did Gabriel tell Mary to name her baby? (Jesus)

Read verse 37-38 again. How does knowing God will fulfill His promises - give us hope?

### **ACTIVITY:**

Light a candle at dinner time or bed time.

- Share your favorite Christmas tradition you don't want to miss doing together this year.
- Share a prayer or something you're hoping God will answer this year.

Pray together as a family.

WEEK TWO

# FAITH

WEEK TWO

Impetus – A moving force. What does it take to move me to take action? Catalysts are change agents; they are not change themselves, but they make things affect other things that cause still other things to move & morph into something... different.

Luke's account of the events around the birth of Jesus presents us with a cast of characters that include (in order of appearance): a king; an angel; a priest and his wife; various members of the synagogue; a Galilean woman and her husband, a Roman emperor; shepherds; a huge angelic chorus; a prophet and a prophetess... oh yeah, and two baby boys – cousins. (Luke 1 through 2:40)

With the exception of the king and the Roman emperor, everyone is brought face-to-face directly with the faithfulness and mercy of God. What is more, they are asked to believe God along with what He is doing now and beyond the moment. And it changes them.

Zechariah, John the Baptist's father spoke this at his son's dedication: *Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.* – (Luke 1:78-79) He understood through the eyes of faith, what was unfolding in their midst.

One of the characteristics of this virtue called faith, is its capacity to cut across social status, time and space, and land squarely at our feet & ask the question – so, what do you think? What will you do with this information now?

When you drill down into the things, the thoughts and attitudes that have shaped your soul, what do you come up with that has had an impact on you most? At some point something or someone has given you reason to believe that you could or should do something... different.

*And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb.*

*Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous. And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.*

*(Romans 4:19-24 NLT)*

Generations before us have wrestled with these things. Now it is up to us in this generation to see what they saw through the eyes of faith. It is no small thing that we commemorate the birth of Jesus

in the way we do, thinking and remembering the events around "the Word who became flesh to live among us." The season of lights is intended to be the impetus that moves us closer to the God Who keeps His promises, to give us a "future and a hope" (Jer 29:11).

"Abraham believed God..." and God rewarded him.

You? What will you do with this Jesus of Nazareth?

### **PRAYER**

*O great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in this good news of redemption, you've shown us your desire to share fellowship with us that has its beginnings in faith and leads us in a way that awakens even more faith. Lead us by Your Holy Spirit now, in this moment, in this season to put our trust in you for the deepest needs of our souls and all that touches our very lives. Fan the flame of faith in us throughout this week as we remember your faithfulness to us. Amen.*

## **FAMILY ACTIVITIES**

### **READ: Luke 1:39-56**

### **REFLECT:**

What happened when Elizabeth heard Mary's voice? (the baby inside of her jumped for joy)

How long did Mary stay with Elizabeth? (three months)

What did Mary do to celebrate God's plan? (she praised God with a song)

### **ACTIVITY:**

Create a playlist of your family's favorite Christmas & Worship songs. Praise God with song just like Mary :-) Listen to your playlist...

- At home while baking Christmas cookies (maybe deliver a batch to a neighbor or friend)
- On the drive to school, to church or activities during the week.
- Drive around and check out the Christmas lights in a neighborhood while singing along.

Pray together as a family.

WEEK THREE

# JOY

WEEK THREE

*"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever." (Luke 1:46-55 NLT)*

"Wow, I can't believe we're here..." Our family stood looking amazed at the beauty and wonder of the Old Faithful geyser at Yellowstone National Park. Two days of driving across the country (stopping off at Mt. Rushmore), had finally brought us to this magnificent vista of natural wonder. The whole place was like walking into a picture postcard. Each step created a photo-memory etched into my soul. For our family it was the most treasured vacation ever, and probably the last time we would all be together on such a trip, since our oldest would be off to college the following year.

The trip lived up to its expectations. All the planning and preparation of gear and clothes and reservations seemed to ratchet up the anticipation in the weeks and months leading up to the trip. We were not disappointed. It was all we hoped it would be.

In Luke's account of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, Mary and Elizabeth were making plans. Each of them was to give birth to sons. Both had become aware of their impending motherhood via rather unusual means. Their excitement and joy at the prospect of being mothers together with sons who would be the same age was far greater than any fears or misgivings that they might have had. But they knew that all of this was God's doing. The timing was God's timing. These events were in keeping with God's promise conveyed through all the generations to this moment.

Our moment, this moment, is also in God's keeping and His timing. There is no mistake that we are here in this generation for this generation. It's all according to His plan. God has not ceased to pour out His Spirit on His sons and his daughters. Mary's declaration of God's faithfulness came out of her recognition that He loves His own and keeps His promises from generation to generation. And even though all of creation "groans together in anticipation of redemption," we will know the joy of that great event when it comes to pass. Notice that the joy in both Mary and Elizabeth were quite full even though neither had yet given birth. Anticipation had given way to joy because they knew who they believed. They knew the record of His faithfulness in their own lives and in the lives of the generations before them.

In Peter's first letter to the church, he wrote them:

*So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. You love Him even though you have never seen Him. Though you do not see Him now, you trust Him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting Him will be the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet. 1:7-9 NLT)*

We all know a little bit about contagious things having endured the pandemic. Joy is contagious. Think about, remember what Jesus has done for you, and smile. Rejoice, and treat one another generously because of this "...that your joy may be full!"

## **PRAYER**

*O Father of all creation, the scriptures tell us that you "rejoice over us with singing." What a deliciously beautiful thought, that we bring you joy. By your Holy Spirit, bring us to rejoice also in your presence with us in this moment and in moments to come. Let us not waste the beauty of this season on worry and concerns but help us to remember to be grateful and to enkindle joy. Amen.*

# **FAMILY ACTIVITIES**

## **READ: Luke 2:1-7**

## **REFLECT:**

God sent us Jesus - the greatest gift ever! How is Jesus a gift to you?

Share one thing that brings you joy.

## **ACTIVITIES:**

Here's a couple activities as you focus on JOY this week in your lives...

- Make Christmas cards for anyone in your life who might need a little joy today, from the mailperson to the crosswalk guard. You could even add a giftcard or small treat.
- Choose or make a special ornament for your Christmas tree that represents something good God has done for your family this year.

Pray together as a family.

WEEK FOUR

# PEACE

WEEK FOUR

"Sleep in heavenly peace; sleep in heavenly peace." So go the words of a familiar, beloved Christmas song. It's referring to the Christ-child asleep in His mother's arms. The song's setting is based on the account in the gospels where Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and angels announced his coming declaring "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is well-pleased."

There's a story that's been often repeated around Christmas time, about a Christmas Eve during World War I. Apparently, there was a cease-fire (declared or otherwise, I don't know). And during this pervasive silence on Christmas Eve, a song was heard coming from one of the German trenches. Messages began to be shouted between the trenches, and before long soldiers met face to face in no-man's land, absent of malice, taking pictures and exchanging seasonal greetings. Evidently, this truce was not observed everywhere along the Western Front. There was continued fighting with casualties. But the reports of the truce became famous and a bright spot in a terrible war.

Peace among men is fragile at best. Peace among men with whom He is well-pleased is other-worldly. It's that other world, His Kingdom, that beckons us to walk humbly before Him acting justly and loving mercy.

At Christmas we're reminded with a host of verses from Isaiah that show us the remarkable preview of events that actually come to pass in the life of Jesus the Messiah. These verses point to the unrestrained love of God who keeps His promises to redeem mankind and remove the barriers that separate us from Him. He crafted our salvation on the back of His One and only Son, the only One of His kind... Jesus.

The passages from Isaiah regarding the things that have already happened give us a reason to stop and marvel over God's plans as they unfolded around the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. But what about those things that are yet to happen? What about the extension of that peace that we enjoy with God in Christ? Can we believe that He will bring about the peaceable kingdom spoken of in Isaiah 11 (the wolf and the lamb will live together... the leopard will lie down with the baby goat)? If God has been faithful in revealing these things which have already occurred, then He will certainly bring about those things which have yet to come. (*Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*).

The peace sung in refrains around Christmas is not just a sweet sentiment that befits our celebrations, it's a reality in the making. It's being shaped and hammered out and formed in us with each passing day by grace.

We learn of Him who is meek and humble and we find rest for our souls – that elusive peace. As this peaceable way is renovating our souls it has a way of seeping out of our pores in the benevolence we show to believers and unbelievers alike. It's the substance of Peter's statement where he advises us to be ready to respond to anyone who asks about the hope living in you...

it's that Spirit of reconciliation in Christ that's given you peace – a peace that you can lead others to find too.

*"The Lord is near (Emmanuel). Do not be anxious or worried about anything, but in everything [every circumstance and situation] by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, continue to make your [specific] requests known to God. And the peace of God [that peace which reassures the heart, that peace] which transcends all understanding, [that peace which] stands guard over your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus [is yours]." (Phil. 4:6,7 AMP)*

## **PRAYER**

*O gracious heavenly Father, the peace that you have secured for us in the blood of the innocent Lamb of God is the evidence of your desire to draw us near. We can only love you because you first loved us. And we can only love others by that same reason. Make the flame of our love for you burn brightly in us so that like the city on a mountain top that cannot be hidden, we might show off your light and splendor in order that others may see and come to glorify you in their lives. Amen.*

# **FAMILY ACTIVITIES**

## **READ: Luke 2:8-20**

## **REFLECT:**

How did the shepherds feel when the angel appeared? (afraid)

Where did the shepherds find Jesus? (lying in a manger)

Who did the shepherds tell about Jesus? (everyone they saw)

The shepherds told everyone they met about Jesus. Who can you tell about Jesus this week?

## **ACTIVITIES:**

Share Jesus with others! Talk about who you can invite to Christmas at Epic with your family. Send a text message or email to a family friend, call a relative you've been thinking of bringing or invite a friend at school. You could even use a Christmas card and drop an Epic Christmas invite card in there

Pray together as a family.

## FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Gather around every day this month to read the story of how God sent joy to the world with the gift of His Son, Jesus. While you're at it, spread some joy of your own as a family!

ADVENT 2021: THE PARENT CUE FAMILY CALENDAR

|  |   |   |   |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| <b>3</b><br><br>What's stressing you out right now? <i>Share with each other.</i> Then pray that God would give you His peace this season.<br><small>Luke 1:29-30</small>   | <b>4</b><br><small>Luke 1:30</small><br><i>Break out a pack of glow sticks.</i> Have a Christmas dance party with upbeat Christmas music.   | <b>1</b><br>Light a candle at dinner time or bed time. Share your favorite Christmas tradition that you <i>don't want to miss</i> doing together this year.<br><small>Luke 1:27</small>   | <b>2</b><br><br>Choose 1-3 relatives or family friends. Record a short selfie video Christmas greeting as a family and text it to them.<br><small>Luke 1:26-28</small>   |  |   |   |  |
| <b>6</b><br><br>God's plan for Christmas surprised everyone. If you could plan Christmas this year <i>exactly</i> the way you wanted, what would it look like?<br><small>Luke 1:32</small>  | <b>7</b><br><br><i>Taking care of a new baby is a big challenge!</i> Take a meal to a family you know with a new baby, or pick up diapers to donate to a local shelter or food bank.<br><small>Luke 1:34-36</small>                  | <b>5</b><br><br>Have a "baby food" picnic or snack by the Christmas tree <i>with</i> Baby Bel cheese, baby carrots, mini pigs in a blanket, mini muffins, or other mini snack foods.<br><small>Luke 1:31</small>                                   | <b>8</b><br><br><i>Bake a batch of Christmas cookies</i> (no shame if you grab a tube from the grocery fridge section!) Share a snack together <i>and</i> take some of them to a neighbor.<br><small>Luke 1:38</small> |  |   |   |  |
| <b>10</b><br><small>Luke 2:1-4</small><br>Parents, share about a particularly <i>special</i> or <i>unique</i> Christmas that you experienced as a child.   | <b>11</b><br><br>Take a trip around the neighborhood or other areas of your town or city to check out the <i>amazing</i> Christmas lights along the way.<br><small>Luke 2:5</small>   | <b>12</b><br><br>Using Google Maps, take a look at the modern-day streets of Bethlehem. <i>What do you think Bethlehem was like when Jesus was born?</i><br><small>Luke 2:6</small>   | <b>13</b><br><small>Luke 2:7</small><br>Use a Nativity set or stuffed animals to <i>act out the Christmas story</i> as a family member reads it from Luke 2.  | <b>14</b><br><br>Roast marshmallows for s'mores while looking up at the stars—the <i>same ones</i> the shepherds saw! (Or make them in the oven and eat them by candlelight.)<br><small>Luke 1:39-56</small> | <b>15</b><br><small>Luke 2:9</small><br>Tell your child how you shared the good news of their birth ( <i>or arrival in your family</i> ) with others.   |   |  |
| <b>16</b><br><small>Luke 2:9</small><br>What would YOU do if a brilliant angel from God appeared in your home? <i>Share how you would react.</i>   | <b>17</b><br><br>Make Christmas cards for anyone in your life who might need a little joy today, from the mailperson to the crosswalk guard. <i>You could even add a gift card or small treat.</i><br><small>Luke 2:10</small>     | <b>18</b><br><br>Try making " <i>real</i> " hot cocoa with cocoa powder, melted chocolate, sugar, and milk of your choice. While the cocoa heats, share with each other something big you are waiting for right now.<br><small>Luke 2:8</small> | <b>19</b><br><br>Choose a few small gifts to <i>unwrap early</i> . Celebrate together that God gave us such an amazing and unexpected gift as Jesus!<br><small>Luke 2:12</small>                                     | <b>20</b><br><br>Choose or make a special ornament for your Christmas tree that represents <i>something good</i> God has done for your family this year.<br><small>Luke 2:13-14</small>                       | <b>22</b><br><br>Share your favorite Christmas movies with each other. Then pick one (or two!), <i>make some popcorn</i> , and settle down in Christmas PJs for a Christmas movie marathon.<br><small>Luke 2:17-18</small> | <b>23</b><br>What's the biggest thing you want to thank God for right now? (In addition to Jesus!) <i>Share with each other and give God a giant round of applause.</i><br><small>Luke 2:20</small> | <b>25</b><br><br>Before opening gifts, take <i>time to read</i> the story of God's greatest gift of all time, Jesus, in Luke 1:26-2:21. |
| <b>21</b><br><br>Grab a gingerbread man or other Christmas cookie for each member of the family to place on their forehead. Race to see who can shimmy the cookie down and bite it first before it drops. <i>No hands!</i><br><small>Luke 2:15-16</small> | <b>24</b><br><br>Jesus' name means "the Lord is salvation"! Share with each other what your name means. (Google is your friend for this.) Then <i>share the story behind</i> your name if you know it.<br><small>Luke 2:21</small> |   |   |  |   |   |  |