

Advent

2021



For unto you is born this day in the city of David
a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

LUKE 2.11



The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word for “coming.” It’s a season where we prepare for the arrival of Jesus. We invite you and those in your home to engage in this ancient practice of preparing our hearts to both celebrate our Lord’s first coming and to grow in hope in his coming again. With all the noise and clutter this time of year, we want to take one evening a week to quiet our hearts, light candles, sing, and pray.

If you have little kids, we’ve created special, more interactive devotionals to help you participate as a whole family in the Christmas story.

Our prayer as we observe Advent is that Jesus will rise above the busyness of Christmastime as we proclaim to one another, “Good news of great joy for all people!”

You are loved and

Merry Christmas!

Read the Introduction on page three.

Light the first candle.

READER #1 (Adult): Do you know what one of the best and most wonderful things about our God is? It's that he wants to be with us! There are a lot of people in the world who think that God doesn't want to be around us. They think God is kind of a grumpy old man who lives up in the sky and who is always angry with his kids (that's you and me). But that's not who God is at all! The Bible tells us that God wanted to be with you and me so much that he made it possible. He came to earth to live with us and look like us and be like us.

READER #2 (Child): God had lived forever and ever, and he didn't have a body or fingers or hair. But then, one night, a miracle happened. A little baby boy was born with baby skin and soft baby hair, and tiny baby fingers and toes. And that little guy was God.

READER #3 (Adult): Don't worry if you have a hard time understanding how it's possible. Even grown-ups can't totally understand it. But it's true! God came to live with us. He didn't come in a rocket ship. He didn't appear in a bolt of lightning or shoot out of a volcano and land on earth. He came into the world the same way you did—through his mommy.

We're going to read part of a story this week where a young girl hears the news about this baby coming. To her, it seems impossible—like making a tower out of water. But God told her that he was going to make it possible.

READ: Jesus Calling Bible Storybook, The New Testament Intro and "Mary Meets An Angel" pp. 139-141



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Give your kids a cup of water and ask them to build a tower out of only the water in the cup. It's impossible! Then, pull out a tray of ice cubes and ask them to build a tower out of the ice cubes. God can do even more impossible things than that!

READER #4 (Adult): What is something in your life right now that feels impossible? Do you think it would be impossible for God? How could he help you with it?

SING TOGETHER: “Away in a Manger” and/or “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

Special note for Kids’ Devotional Songs: You might find it easier, depending on the age of your kids, to sing the same song each week, such as “Away in a Manger.” Young children often don’t know many Christmas songs because the words can be difficult. Each week, the devotional recommends one or two songs to sing as a family. These are just recommendations. Feel free to sing whatever songs your kids know or just focus on singing one song throughout the season.

Away In A Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appears
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

PRAYER: Thank you, God, that you are not a grumpy old man who stays away. Thank you that you are so full of love for us, and you wanted to be with us so much that you made it possible. There are still a lot of things in life that feel impossible, though. We can’t wait for the day when Jesus comes again as a King. Help our hearts to trust you as we wait for that day. We love you, God. Thank you for loving us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Begin by reading the Introduction on page three.

Light the first candle.

READER #1: Christmas is a celebration of light. It's a story about a world that sat in total darkness, until one day, a single light entered it. This light was God in the form of a baby. What good does one light do in a whole world of darkness? This candle we just lit couldn't possibly fill our home with light. How unimpressive a single flame is surrounded by consuming darkness. And yet, this single point of Light that God sent, this small and unimpressive baby born to peasants, would grow until all the earth was filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. In Advent, we remember both this moment when light entered our world, and we look forward to the future when at last the Shadow will pass away entirely, and the glory of God's presence will be our light forever. One of the reasons we light candles each week is that it reminds us of what this season is all about; a people sitting in the dark, waiting for the dawn. Christmas is that first sunrise (Luke 1.78), and it is meant to stir in us a deep longing for the final dawn.

READER #2: Isaiah 9:2-7

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

³ You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

⁴ For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

SING TOGETHER: “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell thy people save,
And give them victory over the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

READER #3: By the time Gabriel visited Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of God's Son, very few people were waiting. Only a remnant of waiting people remained. These were the people that God chose to impart himself to. In our world, waiting is avoided at all costs. That's because waiting feels passive. But the waiting we see in Luke 1 and 2 isn't passive waiting. It's active.



Active waiting means to be present fully to the moment, in the conviction that something is happening where you are and that you want to be present to it. A waiting person is someone who is present to the moment, who believes that *this* moment is *the* moment.

HENRI NOUWEN

QUESTIONS:

In what ways are you presently waiting?

How have you given up waiting or resigned hope?

What would it look like to begin to actively wait once more?

What would you have to believe about your Father and about yourself for that to happen?

READER #4: In Psalm 27, we read:

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!
Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

As you read these verses again, what do you feel and long for?

SING TOGETHER: “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus”

Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee
Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art
Dear desire of every nation, joy of ev’ry longing heart

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring
By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone
By Thine all sufficient merit raise us to Thy glorious throne

PRAY: *[Read this prayer slowly]*

Father, of all the seasons that seem hard to slow down and wait in, this season may be the most challenging. And so we come to you, Lord, and ask you to help us learn to be patient and wait for you to manifest yourself in specific moments. Give us hearts that wait on your faithfulness. Forgive us for always rushing to the next thing, rarely slowing down, and always worrying if we’re doing enough. Let us lean into the goodness of your heart towards us and the kindness of your plans for us. Thank you for coming to us. Thank you for the promise that you’re coming again for us. Make us ready through Jesus Christ to receive your kingdom. Amen.

Begin by lighting the same candle you lit last week.

Wait to light the second candle.

READER #1 (Adult): Christmas is a celebration of light. It's a story about a dark world, totally black. Until one day a single light entered the world. This light was God in the form of a baby. Now, this little candle can't light up our whole house, right? So what good does one little light in a whole dark world do? But God said this light, which was Jesus, would one day fill the whole earth.

READER #2 (Child): During Christmas we think about light a lot. What are some of the special ways we use light during Christmas?

READER #3 (Adult): We see light all around us at Christmas, and every time you see some, you can remember that Jesus coming into the world was like light coming into a totally dark house. That's why we light candles each week. Each week we'll light another candle until we have five on Christmas. That means that each week the light will get a little brighter. It's like a sunrise. You know how in the morning the sky is dark and then lighter and lighter until it's blue? That's what the arrival of God was like. In fact, one of Jesus' uncles said that Jesus' birth was like a sunrise. (Luke 1.78)



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Turn off all the lights and blow out the Advent candle. Have a strand of Christmas lights but cover all the lights with a blanket except for one. Explain how a single Christmas light may not seem special or exciting, but it can be used to create something beautiful. You may want to look at your Christmas tree with all of the lights or go on a drive to look at the beautiful things that can be done with lights.

Read: Jesus Calling Bible Storybook, "He's Here!" pp. 144-145

READER #4 (Child): God used a tiny baby to bring the whole world hope. God can use small things to make something beautiful. What are some small things in your life that God has used to make something beautiful?

Light the second candle.

And the first one again if you blew it out for the activity.

READER #5 (Child): Jesus is the light of the world, and he makes the darkness bright. This is why we light candles during Advent. It is to remind us that Jesus coming into the world was like light coming into a totally dark house.

SING TOGETHER: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” and/ or “Away in a Manger”

O Little Town of Bethlehem
O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, thank you for entering our dark world and bringing light. Thank you for bringing your peace. Help us to live in your peace. We love you, Jesus, and we're so thankful that you came for us. Amen.

Begin by lighting the same candle you lit last week. Wait to light the second candle.

READER #1: This week we will read the story of God invading the life of a young maiden named Mary. For centuries, Christians have called this the Annunciation, which means “Announcement.” This is God’s announcement to the world that the wait is over – he’s coming! Reading this story, it’s easy to turn Mary into someone other than a normal person, but we must remember as we read accounts like this in the Bible, that Mary was like us. She had the same sort of thoughts, fears, desires, and suspicions that you and I would have in the same situation. As we read this story, work to imagine that Mary is like you. How would you be feeling? What would you be thinking?

READER #2: Luke 1.26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Light the second candle.

READER #3: This week we light what is called the “Peace” candle. In the middle of what must be the most shocking and disruptive moment of Mary’s life, the angel offers her peace. “Fear not. You don’t need to be afraid anymore.” When we live open to the intrusion of God into our “well-ordered” lives, we experience true peace. The fear, stress, and worry that drives much of our doing is washed away by the peace of living in communion with our Father. At Christmas, we remember that this is possible because the Prince of Peace was born into this dangerous world for us.

SING TOGETHER: “Angels We Have Heard On High”

Let’s sing together “Glory to God in the Highest,” which is what “Gloria in excelsis Deo” means. We give glory to God that he is the sort of God who came and who sacrificed himself to bring us into communion with him and give us his peace.

Angels We Have Heard On High

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o’er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Come to Bethlehem and see
Christ Whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

READER #4: On that night when God entered the world, the angels sang out, “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth.” This is the result of God with us—his glory is revealed, and we get his peace.

QUESTIONS:

How can you relate to this idea that God gives you his peace, even while he is disrupting your life?

How do you sense God is moving in your life right now?

Are you open to what he is doing?

Do you feel like you're listening to his voice?

What is he saying?

SING TOGETHER: “Silent Night”

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ, the Savior is born
Christ, the Savior is born

PRAY: Father, we give you glory and we thank you for coming for us. Thank you for invading the silence of our world with the holy Word—your Son. Thank you that this announcement made to Mary 2,000 years ago is still for us today. Make us open to your voice. Give us ears that hear and hearts that respond to you. During this loud and cluttered season, quiet us with your love and draw us into the sweet communion with you, granted to us by your Son who came and died. Thank you for Jesus. In his name we pray, Amen.

*Begin by lighting the same two candles you lit last week.
Wait to light the third candle.*

READER #1 (Adult): It's tough to believe this, but the people that God spoke to in the Bible were just like you and me. They weren't prettier or more perfect. They didn't have halos around their heads. They still had to take baths and do chores, and their mommies and daddies had to discipline them because they disobeyed. They lived their lives like normal people—like us! They played and cooked food and washed clothes, and then suddenly, one day, God spoke to them. He didn't tell them He was coming to talk to them. He just showed up—a surprise!

When was the last time you were surprised? What happened? How did the surprise make you feel?

READER #2 (Child): A lot of people were scared when God showed up. Today's story is about God sending angels to some shepherds to tell them about Jesus' birth.

READ: Jesus Calling Bible Storybook, "He's Here!" pp. 146



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Depending on the age (and willingness) of your kids, have them act out Mary's encounter with the angel as you read the story. Pick one to be a shepherd and one to be an angel. Have the "angel" pop out of an unexpected place and surprise the "shepherd." When the "shepherd" acts surprised and scared, have the angel say something like, "Don't worry. I'm here with good news!"

SING TOGETHER: "Angels We Have Heard On High" and/ or "Away In A Manger"

If you sing "Angels We Have Heard On High" point out the lyric "Gloria in excelsis Deo" and explain that it means "Glory to God in the Highest." We give glory to God that he is the sort of God who came so that we could be with him.

Angels We Have Heard On High

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Come to Bethlehem and see
Christ Whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Light the third candle.

READER #3 (Child): This week we light the third candle. Some people call this the “Joy” candle. We remember that God didn’t come to make us afraid, but to bring us good news of great joy. When Jesus was born, the scary things of the world began to tremble because they knew that Jesus was here to destroy all the evil things and to bring us joy.

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, thank you for entering our dark world and bringing light. Thank you for bringing joy. Help us not to be afraid but to feel really safe because you’re with us. We love you, Jesus, and we’re so thankful you came for us. Amen.

Begin by lighting the same candles you lit last week. Wait to light the third candle.

READER #1: At Christmas, we celebrate the incarnation. God visited us. But it wasn't like he just popped in and then left; he became one of us. He walked through our streets, ate our food, and lived among us. He looked like us, spoke like us, smelled like us. The One who had never not existed, who had lived eternally before the creation of the universe, was suddenly encased in a helpless body and bound by time. The timeless One had a heartbeat. The ageless One had a birthday. God had a body that breathed oxygen, digested food, and pumped blood. He entered the world through his mother and cried like a baby because he was a baby. The incarnation is one of the greatest and most marvelous mysteries in our faith, and this time of year, we invite our hearts to soak in the wonderful truth that God wants to be with us. Indeed, he has come for this very purpose!

READER #2: Read John 1.1-5, 9-14

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

SING TOGETHER: "What Child Is This"

This hymn captures the marvelous mystery that the Eternal Word would become a child lying in his mother's lap.

What Child Is This

What Child is this who laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

What we are in fact celebrating is the awe-inspiring humility of God, and no amount of familiarity with the trappings of Christmas should ever blind us to its quiet but explosive significance. For Christians believe that so great is God's love and concern for humanity that he himself became a man. Amid the sparkle and the color and music of the day's celebration we do well to remember that God's insertion of himself into human history was achieved with an almost frightening quietness and humility. There was no advertisement, no publicity, no special privilege; in fact the entry of God into his own world was almost heartbreakingly humble. In sober fact there is little romance or beauty in the thought of a young woman looking desperately for a place where she could give birth to her first baby...

That is why, behind all our fun and games at Christmastime, we should not try to escape a sense of awe, almost a sense of fright, at what God has done. We must never allow anything to blind us to the true significance of what happened at Bethlehem so long ago. Nothing can alter the fact that we live on a visited planet.

J.B. PHILLIPS, "THE DANGERS OF ADVENT"

Light the third candle.

READER #3: Tonight we light the fourth candle, which has been called the “Joy” candle. (Light the third candle in the circle.) What could give us greater joy than to know that God is for us? He has been born unto you. As we believe and receive his saving movement towards us, we experience the joy that comes from having such a Savior, and our hearts overflow into worship. This is why we were created. Let’s sing as the angels did that night in Bethlehem, that Christ has been born unto us!

QUESTIONS:

What does it tell you about God that he would enter our world in such a “heartbreakingly humble” manner?

Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14.23) How does it strike you that God would not only enter our world as a baby but would also then choose to make his home in your heart?

What difference does this make amidst what is most straining your spirit right now?

SING TOGETHER: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

As you sing this song about the Everlasting Light dwelling in a sleepy little town, remember that this same Light lives within you.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary
And gather'd all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love
O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King
And peace to men on earth

PRAY: Lord Jesus, what a profound mystery it is to remember that as we pray, we speak to One who is altogether other than us, yet who became human like us. We can never grasp the significance of your descent from Creator into creature, but we give you glory for this! And our hearts are enlarged with thanksgiving that you would stoop so low to come and rescue us. Let us marvel in this season that we inhabit a visited planet and give us eyes to look for you and your kingdom all around us. We ask these things in Your Name! Amen.

*Begin by lighting the same three candles you lit last week.
Wait to light the fourth candle.*

READER #1 (Adult): Trying to find something you're looking for can be really hard. Have you ever tried to find your shoes so that you could go outside and play, but they're not where you left them? Or have you ever entered a room, like at school, and tried to find your friend to sit next to? We all know what it's like to be looking for something that we can't find. It's even harder to find it when there are distractions. So, trying to find a shoe in a messy closet or trying to find your friend in a loud and crowded room (especially one with a bunch of tall grown-ups) is even harder. At Christmastime, with all the lights and songs about sleigh bells and special TV shows and cookies and parties and decorations and shopping and packages, it can be hard to find Jesus.

READER #2 (Child): Since Christmas is really all about Jesus, we don't want to forget him, but it is easy to. We have to work hard to remember that we're really celebrating a baby being born and not presents.

READER #3 (Adult): The first people who ever tried to find Jesus were the Wise Men. They traveled hundreds, maybe thousands of miles, through deserts, over mountains, across rivers and streams, in cities and villages, in the heat and cold, in the sunlight and under the moonlight to find this King that the star was leading them to. Let's read about their journey and about what they did once they found Jesus.

READ: Jesus Calling Bible Storybook, "He's Here!" pp. 148-151

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

If you have enough people, play a game of "Marco Polo" but with a few changes. Have "Polo" go off in the house somewhere and hide. Turn on as many distracting noises as you can (e.g., television, Christmas music, blenders, get the dog to bark, etc.) After the noises are going and "Polo" is hidden, blindfold the kids who will be Marco (depending on their age) and release the "Marcos" to find "Polo." You can decide beforehand if "Polo" is allowed to move or not from their hiding place. You may want to play a few rounds, taking turns. Get creative and make it fun.



READER #4 (Adult): What was the hardest part of trying to find “Polo”?
What do you think is the hardest part of trying to stay focused on Jesus throughout Christmastime?

When Jesus came, his Father was so excited he put a giant star in the sky and sent angels to sing in the skies, but people still missed him. It’s hard to imagine, but almost everyone in the world that night didn’t realize what had just happened—God had come to earth as a baby boy. It’s just as easy today to miss Jesus’ birth. He comes quietly, almost in secret. This is what Christmas is celebrating: the secret rescue mission of God.

Light the fourth candle.

READER #5 (Child): Our candle this week is called the “Love” candle. God loved us so much that he came for us, and he tells us in the Bible that whoever looks for him will find him.

SING TOGETHER: “O Come All Ye Faithful” and/ or “Away In A Manger”

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him born the King of angels
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

PRAYER: Father, thank you for sending your most precious gift to us—your Son. We don’t want to miss him this Christmas. Help us find him and not lose him in all of the other things happening this week. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Begin by lighting the same candles you lit last week. Wait to light the fourth candle.

READER #1: The Christmas story is a worship story. In this grand sweeping narrative, Mary, Zechariah, Elizabeth, the Shepherds, the Wise Men, Simeon, and Anna are all worshippers. All of their worship centers on a tiny Jewish baby named Jesus. Today, Christmas is still a worship story, but we can worship a hundred things before worshipping Jesus if we're not careful. We're tempted to worship sentimentality, shopping, tradition, family, decorations, parties, cookies, and a whole sleigh full of other things. These elements of the Christmas season are fun and exciting, but they take on new meaning when the baby remains at the center of our true excitement and affections. Now, how do we keep the baby in the center? By taking the angels at their word, who declared that first Christmas, "For unto you is born a Savior!"

READER #2: Luke 2.8-20

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

READER #3: Martin Luther gave a sermon on this text. Here is a section from it:

[The angel] does not simply say, Christ is born, but to **you** he is born...This is the principal thing and the principal treasure in every Gospel. Christ must, above all things, become our own and we become his. This is what is meant by Isaiah 9.6 “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” To **you** is born and given a child. Therefore see to it that you do not treat the Gospel only as history, for that is only transient...Rather, see to it that you make this birth your own and that Christ be born to you... The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own?

O, this is the great joy of which the angel speaks. This is the comfort and exceeding goodness of God that, if anyone believes this, he can boast of the treasure that Mary is his rightful mother, Christ his brother, and God his father. For these things actually occurred and are true, but we must believe.

MARTIN LUTHER

Light the fourth candle.

READER #4: This week we light what is called the “Love” candle. The Incarnation is ultimately the evidence that God is with us. He is with us. He is not against us or indifferent to us. He is in the fight for us by being with us. It is his declaration, “This is how much I love you.”

SING TOGETHER: “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th’angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”

Christ, by highest Heav’n adored;
Christ the everlasting Lord;
Late in time, behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”

QUESTIONS:

In these final days before Christmas, what is something you want to worship God for in this moment?
Take a few minutes and go around the table, each person sharing something particular about God that they want to worship.

SING TOGETHER: “O Come All Ye Faithful”

O come, all ye faithful. Joyful and triumphant
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him born the King of angels
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above
Glory to God, all glory in the highest
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

PRAY: Father, we confess there are many things this time of year that pull our hearts away from the love of your Son. But we remember tonight our true inheritance—Christ is ours, and we are his! This is the Gospel that saves us and calls us to worship and obedience. And this is how we long to respond. In these final days before Christmas Day, flood our hearts with the joy that comes from hearing the message, “To us a Savior is born.” We ask all this in our Savior's precious name, Amen.

Don't light any candles at the beginning. You'll light them one at a time as you go through.

READER #1 (Adult): The wait is over! We made it to Christmas! I know we're all really excited. We've seen every week how excited the people were about Jesus' birth too. Not everyone knew that God had come to earth, but those who found out were silly with excitement! Let's remember what we've heard each week:

Light the first candle.

The first week we heard the best news—God wants to be close to us. That's why he became a human like us.

Light the second candle.

The second week we saw that God being born was like a light going into a totally dark house and filling it up.

Light the third candle.

The third week we saw that Jesus came to bring good news of great joy so that we wouldn't be afraid anymore.

Light the fourth candle.

This last week we remembered to listen for Jesus, the most precious gift, in the middle of all the other distracting things at Christmastime.

Light the center candle.

Now that we've made it to Christmas, we light the Jesus candle. Jesus has come into the world to save us. And Jesus is coming again to be with us. There are many things to celebrate this day, and there's a lot of fun that we're going to have, but none of it will compare to that day when Jesus comes again. It's like the difference between pretending we're at the beach and actually being at the beach. Playing pretend is fun, but it's not the real thing. Today is like pretend for the real party that comes when Jesus comes again. We give gifts to each other today because God gave his greatest gift to us—his Son. Today, we get to have fun and laugh a lot because Jesus has come, and he's coming again to be with everyone who loves him.

SING TOGETHER: “Joy to the World”

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

PRAYER: Jesus, we celebrate you! Thank you for coming for us! Thank you for loving us! Help us to love you more. Enjoy our Christmas with us—it’s for you, and we want you to be here with us. We can’t wait until the day that we actually see your face. Amen.

Don't light any candles at the beginning. You'll light them as we go along.

READER #1: Today our waiting is over. The season of anticipation and preparation is through, and we celebrate that Jesus is here. Let's take a moment to pause and remember the season we just passed through and then light the Christ candle to celebrate his arrival!

READER #2:

Light the first candle.

The first week we saw that Christmas is a celebration of light entering a dark world. We asked Jesus to make us people who wait for him.

Light the second candle.

The second week we lit the peace candle and asked God to give us ears to listen for his voice and to grant us his peace.

Light the third candle.

On the third week, we marveled at the incarnation and asked for eyes to see him and his kingdom all around us.

Light the fourth candle.

On the final week, we remembered that not only was a Savior born, but he was born unto us! And we sought to worship and love God with our whole hearts in response to his whole-hearted love for us.

Light the center candle.

Now today, we light the center candle—the Christ candle. As we light it, we remember that Christ has come, Christ is here, and Christ is coming again.

READER #3: As we read an excerpt from this sermon by St. John Chrysostom, let your heart be led into joyful worship:

What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and without a

body, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infant's bands. Taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, that He may save me; He gives me His Spirit to sanctify me.

Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been 'in planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle.

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

SING TOGETHER: "Joy to the World"

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Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

PRAY: Almighty God! Thank you for this great and wonderful day! Thank you for stepping out of eternity and into our broken and dying world. Thank you for taking on human flesh and humanity so that you could impart to us resurrected bodies and the Spirit of God! We celebrate you today above all things. To Him, then, Who out of darkness has blazed a clear path to life, to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, we offer all praise, now and forever. Amen.



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