





2023

FAMILY ADVENT — GUIDE —

Merry Christmas! Christmas is an exciting time where families can see how God has given us hope, love, joy, and peace! Each week's devotion will explore one of these themes as you open the Bible as a family and read a part of the Christmas story. After you read the story, we have included discussion questions to help get the conversation started and connect this story from Scripture to your kids' lives.

One of the best parts of Christmas is the memories that we make with our families, and we want to give you a chance to make some of these memories. In each devotion, we are opening gifts, but these are special gifts. They are gifts from God; the best gifts around! Prior to starting your Advent family time, wrap a few simple boxes and mark them each with week 1-4 and one as Christmas Day. Inside each box, place a sheet of paper with that week's respective focus. For example week 1's focus is Hope, so write Hope on a sheet of paper and place it in the box for week 1. At the conclusion of the advent, kids will see how God's gifts culminated in and came from the best gift of all, the birth of Jesus.





TALK ABOUT IT: What comes to your mind when you think about the word **hope**?

You might hope you get that video game you really want or hope that it's a white Christmas this year. In those cases, we don't know if what we are hoping for will really happen. We can't control the outcome! But when the Bible talks about hope, there is a certainty, not because of what we hope for, but because of Who we hope in. The Bible teaches us that we can hope in God.

Hope is believing and longing for something while trusting that God will keep His promise. The people of Israel had waited and hoped for hundreds of years. But God's plan began long before Israel even knew to hope for it. Before the world began, God had a plan for our redemption. He knew we would need a Savior. When Adam and Eve sinned, God spoke the first recorded promise about Jesus. God made another promise about Jesus to Abraham, then another to David. Throughout the Old Testament, God promised His people that He would send a Messiah—their Savior. God's timing is perfect, and God always keeps His promises. But it is often hard for us to wait; we can become impatient. Israel waited and waited with hope for the day that God's promise of a Messiah would come true. It had been 400 years since God had last spoken to the people. They waited and hoped.

OPEN IT: Open your week 1 gift which contains the word "Hope"

READ IT: Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6.

Hope in God will never leave you disappointed. Throughout all of history, God has never left His people hopeless. God promised to send Jesus to rescue people from sin and make a way for us to be welcomed into God's family for eternity. What an amazing gift, way better than a video game! When we read through the prophecies of the Old Testament and then see how God kept His promises when we read the New Testament, we know we can trust God to keep all of His promises. Jesus promised that He would return one day and we would be with Him forever (John 14:1-3). We live in hope today as we eagerly await Jesus' return to make all things new. And because God is faithful, this hope is certain!

PRAY IT: Thank God for sharing His plans and promises in the Bible to give us hope. Praise God for sending Jesus to be with us. Thank Him for the gift of hope through Jesus this Christmas.

VERSE CARD:

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Matthew 1:21 ESV





MITTEN UNWRAPPING

YOU'LL NEED:

- a present
- mittens
- a timer



Place a present your family will enjoy inside a box and wrap it. Gather a pair of mittens and a timer. If you have preteens, use cooking mittens to increase the challenge.

Explain that each family member will have 10 seconds to attempt to unwrap the package while wearing the mittens. At the end of time, the next family member gets a chance. The game continues until the package is completely unwrapped. After the game, talk about what it was like to wait and hope you would be the one to open the present.





TALK ABOUT IT: This might sound kind of strange, but sneezing can be quite satisfying. Did you know that when you sneeze, the pressure of the air moving from your body can be 100 miles per hour? The louder the sneeze, the faster it travels! Did you know that you don't sneeze when you are asleep? Did you know that you can't keep your eyes open when you sneeze? God made your body so smart that it knows to automatically close your eyes when you sneeze. One of my favorite things about sneezing is when someone says, "God bless you!" It reminds me that people love God and that they know that He blesses people. That gives me peace. Peace is a feeling of calm, quiet, and knowing that God is in control.

OPEN IT: Open your week 4 gift which contains the word "Peace"

READ IT: Luke 1:28-33, John 14:27

In the Christmas story, the angels played a very special role in announcing the birth of Jesus. When the angel appeared to Mary to tell her she would be Jesus' earthly mother, he told her not to be afraid. He brought a message of peace to Mary. He wanted her to know she was called by God to be the mother of Jesus.

Peace is an important part of Christmas, and a very special gift from God. The Bible verse we studied from week one explained that Jesus would be the Prince of Peace. (See Isaiah 9:6.) Jesus is our peace, and He came to bring us the gift of peace. Because of our sin, the Bible says we are separated from God (Romans 3:23). But God sent Jesus to provide the way for us to be brought back to Him by receiving God's love. Then we will be at peace with Him (Romans 5:1). It was God's love that brought Jesus into the world as a baby. Just like the angels, it is important that we worship Jesus and tell others about His birth and the amazing gift of peace He offers and leaves with us.

PRAY IT: Thank God for the gift of peace. Praise Him for sending Jesus so that we can have peace with God when we trust in Him. Ask God to use your family to point others to the peace of God this Advent season.

VERSE CARD:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

John 14:27 ESV

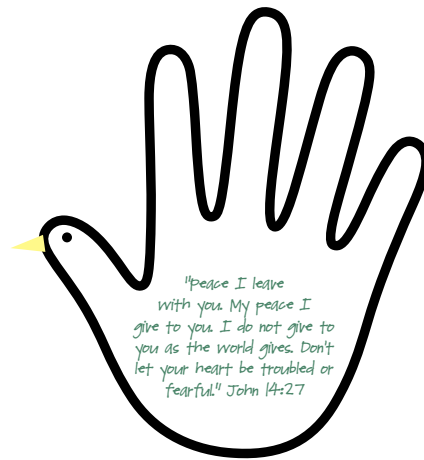




SIGN OF PEACE

YOU'LL NEED:

- white and yellow paper
- black marker
- glue



The dove is a sign of peace. Trace each family member's hand on heavyweight white paper. Cut out each handprint. Draw a small black dot at the top middle portion of the thumb on the cut-out handprint. Cut a small triangle of yellow paper and glue to the thumb near the eye to be the dove's beak. Write today's verse on the dove. Be sure to write each person's name and age on their handprint. Use ornament hangers to hang your dove family on your Christmas tree as a sign of the peace that Jesus gives.





TALK ABOUT IT: Love is a frequently used word. Kids and adults alike use it to describe how much they enjoy or prefer something: I love watching TV. I love pizza. I love spending time with my family. But real love is much more than just liking something.

John 3:16 tells us that God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to be born in a manger, knowing that one day He would die for each one of us. This kind of love is more powerful than liking an activity or a food. Our likes and dislikes may change over time: things you like today may not be the same things you like next year. But God's love for us never changes. He loves us every day.

OPEN IT: Open your week 2 gift which contains the word "Love"

READ IT: Luke 2:1-7

It was in Bethlehem that Mary and Joseph, Jesus' earthly parents, welcomed Jesus into the world. They had traveled to Bethlehem because the law said that Joseph had to go to his hometown to be counted in a census. First John 4:9 says that "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him." God sent the gift of Jesus into the world to be born in the town of Bethlehem to demonstrate His deep and everlasting love for us. The gift of love from God, shown in Jesus' birth, is steadfast and stronger than any other kind of love!

PRAY IT: Thank God for sending the gift of love to us through Jesus. Thank Him for caring about and purposely planning details of Jesus' story and of your story. Thank Him for this Advent season to reflect and rejoice that His unwavering love has come to us.

VERSE CARD:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:16 ESV





CHRISTMAS CARDS OF LOVE

YOU'LL NEED:

paper

markers or crayons



Since God shows us eternal love, we should show this love to others as well. Christmas is the perfect time to show God's love to others in your community. Help your child think of a few people that you could deliver cards to this Christmas season. It could be people you know, or it could be the folks at your local retirement home or homeless shelter.

On the front of each card help your child write out John 3:16. On the inside encourage your child to draw a picture or write a note such as "God loves you. Merry Christmas!" (If your child is a pre-reader, have them trace letters using colorful crayons.) Deliver the cards as a family.





TALK ABOUT IT: Joy is one of the hardest human experiences to explain and describe because the emotion goes beyond surface-level life circumstances. Joy is sometimes confused with happiness. Happiness is often determined by the things that happen to us or around us; joy is determined by something inside us. Since joy comes from within, we can find joy in both good and hard situations. Did you know joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)? This means that God produces joy in us, and one of the ways God produces joy inside us is through giving to and serving others. In our verses for today, the angel said “I bring you good news of great joy ...” which is why we sing songs like “Joy to the World” at Christmas. Jesus is God’s gift to us which, not only gave God joy, but gives us joy, as well.

OPEN IT: Open your week 3 gift which contains the word “Joy”

READ IT: Luke 2:8-20

What an announcement! This special news didn’t come in a way we might expect today, like a text message, email, or letter. No, this important news came directly from an angel from heaven. Can you picture it? Imagine standing outside on a dark night, and suddenly angels appear with exciting news of great joy just for you. How do you think you would feel? The Bible says the shepherds were terrified at first, but their fear quickly turned to joy as they heard the news of the promised Messiah being born.

Did you notice what the Bible said the shepherds did next? They “hurried off” to see Jesus (Luke 2:16). After spending time with Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, the shepherds “reported the message they were told (from the angels) ... and all who heard it were amazed” (Luke 2:17-18). Then they went back to the field “glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard” (Luke 2:20). What an announcement of great joy!

The exciting news of Jesus leads us to respond by joyfully worshiping Him. As we worship Jesus, we will be able to share our excitement about the good news of Jesus with anyone who will listen. What great joy has come into the world, a gift from God!

PRAY IT: Thank God for the gift of joy. Praise God for sending Jesus into the world. Ask for His help to share this joyful news with others this Christmas season.

VERSE CARD:

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

Luke 2:10-11 ESV

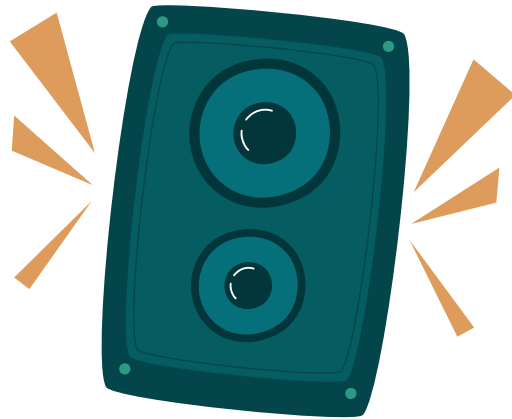




WORSHIP TOGETHER

YOU'LL NEED:

a speaker
your best voices!



Worshiping together is a special experience for any family. Take some time and worship together as you sing, reflecting on how we can joyfully worship today just as the angels did!





TALK ABOUT IT: Why do we celebrate Christmas? Is there anything different that we do as Christians to celebrate than people who don't believe or trust in Jesus? (Allow your family to respond and discuss why you have these different celebrations.)

Today is a special day because it is a day that we pause to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Long before Jesus was born, God had a plan to send His Son into the world to rescue us from our sins. The Bible tells us that Jesus came to bring light and life to everyone who trusts in Him.

OPEN IT: Open your Christmas day gift which contains the word "Jesus"

READ IT: John 1:14-18

We've learned the Christmas story, and now we see how God has given all these incredible gifts through the ultimate present, the gift of sending Jesus to earth. His one and only Son. Because of Jesus, we can experience hope, love, joy, and peace.

This Advent season, we have learned about a few of the greatest gifts you can receive, the wonderful gifts from God. He gave us prophecies of Jesus' coming that gave hope to God's people. God always keeps His promises. We learned that God gave us the gift of love through sending Jesus into the world to be born in a manger in the town of Bethlehem, demonstrating His deep and everlasting love for us. We were given the gift of joy, knowing that when the shepherds heard the news of great joy that Jesus was born, they rejoiced and praised God. Then, we discovered how God gave us the gift of true peace, as peace came into the world through Jesus from the message of the angels.

Today, we celebrate the gift of Jesus, the promised Savior God sent for us. Jesus was born as a baby. He lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be called children of God. This is the best gift ever! Today, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Light of the world, we pray for His light to be seen in our lives as we worship Him.

PRAY IT: Thank God for the gift of Jesus. Thank Jesus for coming to be the Light of the world. Praise Him for coming to be the greatest gift for everyone who trusts in Him as Savior.

VERSE CARD:

"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."

John 1:14 ESV





ACT IT OUT



Reading the Christmas story is always a highlight of the day! Have a family member read the Christmas story (Luke 2:1-2:20) while the rest of the family acts it out. Assign each family member to a role! Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the shepherds, and the angels. You can double up on roles, or even have little sheep if your family is large. Add costumes if you're feeling daring! A blanket around Mary's head, a baby doll as Jesus, use whatever you have. Celebrate together when Jesus is born!

