

Belang

ADVENT GUIDE 2018



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Bridgeway
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

What is Advent?

Welcome to the 2018 Advent season. Advent is a Latin word meaning “arrival” or “coming.” The Advent season is a time for God’s Church worldwide to celebrate Christ’s first coming as a child at Christmas over two millennia ago, and it’s also a time to live with heightened anticipation of Christ’s promised second coming. It is a season of repentance, reflection, and the renewal of our minds. It’s a time to slow down and stir up our affection for our King.

Advent comes at the very end of the Gregorian calendar (January - December), but it actually marks the beginning of the Church calendar. The Church year begins with these four weeks of anticipation and preparation. The Advent season allows us to recapture the beauty and meaning of Christmas as we join with Christians around the world and throughout the centuries in this sacred time.

Advent has been celebrated since near the beginning of Christian history, and over time a number of traditions have developed. One familiar tradition is the use of an Advent calendar. An Advent calendar has a small door for each day of the season, and behind each door there is traditionally some sort of treat or figurine. The practice of opening a door each day increases the anticipation of Christmas. It is also meant to remind us of the period of anxious yet hopeful waiting God’s people experienced in the time leading up to Christ’s first advent. They were eager for change to come, to feel alive again. Similarly, the calendar reminds us that we are a waiting people, as we joyfully await Christ’s return.

Candles are another popular Advent tradition. They remind us of the Scriptural teaching that Jesus is the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9, 8:12). Each week, a new candle is lit in anticipation of Christmas Eve. The last candle, called the Christ candle, is lit on Christmas Eve as a symbol of Christ's first Advent. The increasing light from the candles is meant to be a picture of the light of the gospel penetrating the darkness of our world.

Traditionally, there have been four "watchwords" associated with each week of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Each reading in this guide centers around one of those concepts. While the material is not extensive, we encourage you to engage with it slowly and prayerfully. Read the passages, pray, take time and ask God what He might be wanting to say to you and change in you during this month.

As we walk through this season of Advent together as a faith family, we will reflect on the reality of Christ's coming. We have the opportunity to rescue this season from commercialism and stress. We can enjoy the sights, sounds, smells, and experiences that come with the season, all the while knowing that our true source of hope and joy is elsewhere. We can let this be a season where we are intentional about treasuring Jesus and preparing to celebrate Him.

We know there are endless demands on time during this season. We know it is hard to find the motivation to complete a daily reading. Nevertheless, we believe the payoff for taking time each day to reflect on the core truths of Advent is significant. There is beauty to be found when we allow ourselves to be fully present to God, and others.

As we move through this season, remember, there are hundreds of millions of Christ-followers around the world journeying with us. So join us on this journey, and receive the blessings God has for you during Advent.

Using this Guide

This guide contains 24 days of material, starting on December 2nd and carrying through to Christmas Day. It is broken down into the four traditional Advent themes. Each day's material contains:

1. *A Scriptural Reference* - *The Scripture passage for each devotional is found at the top of each day's Family Guide page. We encourage you to grab your Bible or open a Bible app on your phone and slowly read the passage before continuing to the rest of the content.*



2. Quote - Something brief to introduce the subject matter found in the day's reading.

3. Reflection - A short devotional thought written by a member of the Bridgeway staff.



4. Question - Each day's question will help you put what you've learned into action.

Family Guide

This material is designed specifically for households with children. The content is meant to be understandable for children, although anyone can participate in the activities and discussions. Each day's Family Guide contains the following:

1. Scriptural Reference - We have added a shortened version of the text in a translation (International Children's Bible) that is easier for kids to understand. We encourage you to go to a website like www.biblegateway.com to read the whole passage in the ICB.

2. Reflection - A short thought to read aloud that was written by a member of the Bridgeway staff. You can incorporate older children or teens by inviting them to lead your family by reading the lessons.

3. Symbolic Ornament - Each day there is a small ornament to hang on your tree or somewhere in your house. Put the daily theme sticker on one side and a countdown sticker on the other side. The guide will show you which sticker to use each day. Choose a family member each day to put the stickers on the day's ornament. You can pick up one pack per family at the Kidsway Check-in Desks.

Note: You'll have a few extra stickers during the final week. Feel free to use them however you'd like!

4. ACTIVITY - These are questions or group activities meant to help you and your family talk about the themes of Advent and what they mean for our lives.

week one

hope

Advent is a season of hope. We have hope because of Christ's first coming, and we wait in expectant hope for His second coming. It is easy to lose sight of hope in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Advent is a season when Christians around the world pause to remember their hope. Our hope is not found in our wealth, status, or health. It's found in the beautiful truth that Christ has come, and He will come again.

HOPE FOR REAL BELONGING



Our love to God is measured by our everyday fellowship with others and the love it displays.

- Andrew Murray

We are more connected than we have ever been. Social media gives us a constant window into one another's lives, and video calls to the other side of the world are commonplace. And yet, in the midst of all of this connectivity, isolation is on the rise. The average adult has fewer close friends than adults did a generation ago, and loneliness is becoming a global health crisis. In short, we know how to connect, but we are struggling to belong. Our souls crave belonging because we are made in the image of a relational God who created us for belonging.

John 1:12 tells us, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." God calls us His children. He invites us to belong. And because He has invited us to belong, we can live as agents of encouragement and hope in an isolated and discouraged world.

We understand that creating spaces of belonging is difficult. When we open our lives to each other, we face the risk of rejection, awkwardness, and tension. But it's worth the risk. So in this season, we want to be a community that creates belonging. God has invited us to belong to His family, and so as we move into Advent, we want to create space for others to belong with us.



How can you create belonging during this season? Look at your calendar and find some times that you have available this month to invite others to get together.

Day One: Dec. 2

FAMILY GUIDE

John 1:12

Some people did accept Him. They believed in Him. To them He gave the right to become children of God.

Read Aloud:

Today we are beginning a 24-day journey to get ready for Christmas! This special time of year is called Advent, and it's a time for us to look forward to the celebration of Jesus's birth.

When was the last time someone in your family had a birthday? What did you do? How did you celebrate? Family birthdays are a time to show our family members how special they are to us. Part of what makes the celebration of Jesus's birth so special is that we are part of His family. The Bible tells us that when we believe in Him, we become children of God. How cool is that?!

So as we begin this journey through Advent, remember that you are a child of God. He loves you, He's proud of you, and He thinks it's pretty cool that you're going to celebrate His birthday.

Add the day one ornament to the tree:

Puzzle Pieces



ACTIVITY

Part of the fun of a birthday party is the decorations! Has your family put up some Christmas decorations yet? If you haven't, decide as a family when you will (maybe you could put up a few today!). When you see those decorations, let them be a reminder to you of the big birthday celebration that is coming up!

HOPE FOR THE BRANCH

“

You and I are unavoidably and irreducibly hope-based creatures. We are controlled not by how we live now, but what we think will happen later. Christian hope has to do with the ultimate future, not the immediate.”

- Tim Keller

We say the story of Jesus begins in Nazareth with a young girl meeting an angel. But to understand the power of that encounter, we have to understand the promise that God’s people carried in their hearts during that time. In the Old Testament, God used the metaphor of a growing branch to describe the coming of the Messiah. For out of the stump of Jesse (Isa.11), from its roots — growing up in David’s line (Jer.33:15) — a branch will come. And notice, the prophecy said the branch would spring up from the roots. On a common olive tree, branches may come out the side, but specific shoots (neytzer) come up from the roots. These shoots can form a whole new tree, even when the original tree is damaged. A shoot is a beautiful symbol of hope in the midst of struggle!

Jesus’ family line springs up in Nazareth (town of the shoot), and He grows in wisdom and stature there. God was doing something incredible in this tiny town. Jesus is like a branch growing in the midst of decay. What did the people of Nazareth do when they saw He was here? What do we do when we recognize this too?

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Where can we look and listen in hope for Jesus to spring up among what seems dead or lost? Where in your life is God working in unexpected ways?

Day Two: Dec. 3

FAMILY GUIDE*Isaiah 11:1-3,10; Jer. 33:15*

*A branch will grow
from a stump of a tree that was cut down.
So a new king will come from
the family of Jesse; David's family.*

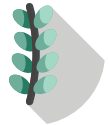
Read Aloud:

Do you know how cities like Los Angeles and San Diego got their names? The names are actually Spanish. Los Angeles means “The Angels” and San Diego means “Saint James” (see if you and your family can think of more cities in California with Spanish names!)

Did you know that the town where Jesus grew up had a special meaning? The town was called Nazareth, and that means “Branch Town”. That doesn’t mean that there were branches everywhere, or that everyone lived in trees. Instead, it was a reminder of what they were waiting for God to do. The Bible told them that they were part of a big family tree, one that went all the way back to King David. It also said that when Jesus came He would be like a new “branch” growing out of their family tree. So Jesus was like a branch on God’s family tree, and He came from Branch Town!

Add the day two ornament to the tree:

Branch

**ACTIVITY**

It’s wintertime, and that means most trees have lost their leaves and are left with only branches. Today when you’re outside and you see trees and branches, let them remind you of Jesus!

HOPE FOR A TRUE LEADER



The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails.

- John Maxwell

We all want leaders we can trust. We want leaders who create confidence, who care about those they lead, and who live with competence and integrity. As Christ-followers we have that sort of leader. Jesus is our Lord, He is our Savior, and He is the Creator. We He is also our King and Ruler. During this season we celebrate that at Christmas we were given a Ruler we can trust. He is powerful and compassionate. He leads with perfect wisdom and complete authority.

The prophecy in Micah 5 promises a messianic ruler out of Bethlehem. It's a powerful prophecy on its own, but it's even more powerful if you consider its context. Micah wrote during a time of significant leadership failures (read Micah 2-3). Line after line reeks of leaders failing the people. They were unjust, demanding, and driven by power. In contrast, Micah 5 promises the kind of leader we sorely need, and at Christmas that promise was made a reality. We can have real hope because we can fully trust Jesus's leadership. Earthly leaders may fail us, but Jesus never will.



When you hear the word "leader" in our society, what words first come to your mind? What do you hope a leader will do for you? In what ways has Jesus surpassed those hopes?

Want to understand the message of Micah better? Search "Bible Project Micah" on YouTube.

Day Three: Dec. 4

FAMILY GUIDE

Micah 5:2, 4-5

“But you, Bethlehem, are one of the smallest towns in Judah. But from you will come one who will rule Israel for me. He comes from very old times, from days long ago.”

Read Aloud:

Who do you know who is a good leader? Who is someone who is kind, smart, loving, and fair? Who is someone you trust to tell you the right thing to do? The person who comes to mind might be a parent, a teacher, or a coach.

The Bible helps us see that Jesus is the best leader who ever lived. While human leaders can be good or bad, Jesus is the only leader who is perfect. He always knows what is best, and He loves us so much that He wants to help us know what is best. When we read our Bibles, pray, and come to church we are able to learn how Jesus wants to lead us.

One thing that is really important when following a great leader is trust. We need to trust that the leader knows what they are doing. The great thing about Jesus is that we know we can trust Him. He'll always lead us in the right direction. Isn't it wonderful that Jesus is that kind of leader?

Add the day three ornament to the tree:

Crown



ACTIVITY

Take a few minutes to pray together as a family. Have each person who is comfortable praying out loud tell Jesus thank you for being such a great leader.

HOPE PREPARING THE WAY

“

While God is sovereign in bringing revival, we must be prepared to receive His sovereign grace.

-Steven Cole

If someone tells you something wonderful is coming, do you believe them? Your answer to that question is probably, “It depends.” Is the person trustworthy? Do they have the information and authority needed to deliver ‘something wonderful’?

Imagine a man telling you about something wonderful that is to come, and doing so with ferocity and zeal in their eyes. Imagine being able to sense the power behind their words. Imagine sensing God’s Spirit speaking through them. Imagine the man talking about a coming King who will change everything. And then imagine such a man looking you in the eye and saying, “Are you ready?”

Mark 1 recounts a surreal scene centered around Jesus’s cousin, John the Baptist. The text tells us he came out of the wilderness and preached with boldness and authority. He declared, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7-8) That proclamation was, of course, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. And from then until now, men and women have been invited to follow Jesus. The King has come. He remains present and at work, and He invites us to join Him. Are we ready?

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Look at Matthew 3:1-12. Imagine being among the first to hear the news that Jesus was coming. How did those first hearers respond? How do you think you would have responded?

Day Four: Dec. 5
FAMILY GUIDE

Mark 1:1-8

I baptize you with water. But the one who is coming will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Read Aloud:

Imagine you are out driving with you family and you spot something out the window that you want everyone else in the car to look at. How would you get everyone's attention? You would probably say something like, "Look over there!", and then point out the window. We naturally point to amazing things we want to share.

There is a story in the Bible about a man named John the Baptist, who was Jesus's cousin. It says that in the time right before Jesus started preaching, teaching and performing miracles, John was doing everything he could to *point* people to Jesus. He knew how wonderful Jesus was, so he wanted to make sure everyone paid attention to him. He was so excited!

We don't have Jesus standing next to us like John the Baptist did, but during this season we can still "point" people to Jesus. When we love people around us and when we tell people about everything Jesus has done for us, we're just like John the Baptist!

How can you "point" people to Jesus?

Add the day four ornament to the tree:

Road



ACTIVITY

Have a short conversation as a family about how you can point others to Jesus this season. You could make cookies for your neighbors, or serve somewhere, or give money to support a cause you care about. Get creative and have fun!

HOPE FOR THE LIGHT TO COME

“

Measure not God's love and favor by your own feeling. The sun shines as clearly in the darkest day as it does in the brightest.

- **Richard Sibbes**

In the Scriptures, the presence of God is described by the metaphor of light shining into darkness. God, in His kindness, is bringing His light to a people walking in and dwelling in deep darkness (Isa. 9:2) Like the sun rising over a ridge, the light of God's love invades those places where it was absent. Jesus is called the true light. He is the light given not just for a particular people, but for all people.

Our world is very different from the one occupied by Isaiah or John, but we still don't need to look far to see evidence of darkness. Some darkness is overt; like violence, disease or poverty. Some is subtle—like materialism, busyness, or greed — and it lures us in by appearing to be light. Only as we chase after it do we see it actually keeps us trapped in darkness.

The hope of Christmas is that a real, true light has come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. He rises like the sun, driving back darkness in any and all of its forms. As we prepare for Advent, it is worth considering where we feel trapped by darkness. Freedom is found in embracing the true light, which gives light to everyone.

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What areas of your life need some brightness? Ask God to shine in them! As you see Christmas lights today, let them remind you of His light.

Day Five: Dec. 6
FAMILY GUIDE

John 1:9

*The true Light was coming into the world.
 The true Light gives light to all.*

Read Aloud:

What happens if you're sitting and reading a book and someone turns the lights off? Reading becomes really difficult! When we don't have light, we can't see clearly. When we're in total darkness, we can't see at all. In order for us to see, we need light.

In the Bible, Jesus says that he is the "light of the world" (John 8:12). When we are separated from Him, it's like trying to walk around in darkness. We can't see clearly. God made us to be close to Him, and when we're far from Him it's hard for us to be everything He wants us to be. When we follow Him, it's like walking around with the world's best flashlight. He provides the light, so we are able to see what is true, good, and beautiful.

One of the most fun parts of the Christmas season is all of the lights. Whether they are on Christmas trees or houses, they are all beautiful. As we enjoy lights this Christmas, they can remind us that Jesus is the light of the world. He makes everything brighter!

Add the day five ornament to the tree:

Lightbulb



ACTIVITY

Get your whole family into a small room and turn off the lights so it's as dark as possible. Have one person read John 1:1-12 from their phone. As you sit in darkness and listen to those words, think about what it means that Jesus is the light of the world. When you are done, have one family member pray and thank God for His light!

I HOPE TO SEE THE MESSIAH

“

Look for Christ and you will find Him. And with Him, everything else.

- C.S. Lewis

Luke 2 tells us about an old man named Simeon. We aren't told about his job, his family situation or what he liked to do on a lazy afternoon. We hear he spent quite a bit of time in the temple, and "the Holy Spirit was upon him." We are also told that at some point in his life he had an unusual encounter with God. Scripture is scant on the details, but this encounter left him believing he would see the Messiah before the end of his life. Can you imagine the sense of expectation he must have lived with - every day he was expecting a front-row seat to a historic move of God. When it finally came and He saw Jesus, Simeon was overcome with emotion.

It's fascinating to consider the role hope played in Simeon's life. As he lived with confidence in God's promise, it filled every day with meaning. You and I may not live with such specific promises as Simeon, but it doesn't mean we cannot live hope-filled lives buoyed by God's promises. As we more fully believe in those promises, our hope increases. Our expectation that we will see God move in our midst increases. Hope is something our world desperately needs, and we can't share it unless we have it ourselves.

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Where are you feeling discouraged today? What is a promise from Scripture that can speak truth to your discouragement?

Day Six: Dec. 7
FAMILY GUIDE

Luke 2:25-33

The Holy Spirit told Simeon he would not die before he saw the Christ promised by the Lord. The Spirit led Simeon to the Temple. Mary & Joseph brought baby Jesus to the Temple, then Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God

Read Aloud:

What is something you are looking forward to? Maybe you get to see a relative soon, or maybe you have a party or event coming up. Maybe you're excited about Christmas! Isn't it fun having something to look forward to?!

There is a story in the Bible about a man named Simeon, and he had something REALLY amazing to look forward to! God told him that he would see the Christ at some point in his life. He lived every day of his life wondering if *that* day would be *the* day. One day when Simeon was very old he was at the Temple worshiping God, Joseph and Mary walked in with Jesus. Simeon immediately knew that this baby was the one! He took the baby in his arms and started praising God. What he had been waiting for finally came! Simeon's excitement helps us remember how awesome Jesus is. He's worth getting excited about!

Add the day six ornament to the tree:

Man Holding Baby



ACTIVITY

Have each family member share something they had to wait a long time for and what it was like to wait. Have one person pray and thank God that His coming is something to be excited about!

HOPE IN JESUS IN THE FLESH

“

It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child Himself.

- **Charles Dickens**

It is spectacular to consider that Jesus, the One who created our universe, experienced first-hand what it is like to hunger, thirst, and tire. In His humanity, Jesus did not spare Himself any part of the gamut of human emotions. The book of Hebrews helps us see why Jesus’ “fleshiness” matters. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15)

Because Jesus came in the flesh, He understands what it is like to be human. Hunger pangs, financial difficulty, and relational heartache are not foreign concepts to Him. In short, Jesus can sympathize with us because of His personal experience. We do not have a God who “doesn’t know what it’s like.” Rather, we have a God who could have avoided all of the pain and heartache that comes from being human, but He didn’t. He became like us because He loves us.

?

Take some time today to consider the humanity of Jesus. Consider your own limitations, frustrations and pain, and find comfort in the truth that Jesus sees you and knows what you’re going through. Consider what God’s coming at Christmas reveals about His character. It means He is with us, He is for us, and He knows what it’s like to be human. Those truths give us real hope.

Day Seven: Dec. 8

FAMILY GUIDE**1 John 4:2**

*This is how you can know God's Spirit: it says,
"I believe that Jesus is the Christ who came to earth
and became a man."*

Read Aloud:

One of the most amazing truths about Jesus is that He is God in a human body! When we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating that God came down from heaven and was born just like us. He had skin, muscles, bones, blood, and everything. He got hungry and tired, He smiled and He cried, and He had friends and a family.

How can Jesus be both God and a human being? It's very mysterious, but it's also very important. In the Bible, Jesus's best friend John writes that God's Spirit helps us understand who Jesus is. The Spirit helps us see that Jesus is more than a good person, a teacher or a miracle worker. He is God! He made the whole world! It would have been really easy for Jesus to just stay in heaven and avoid all of the hard stuff that comes with being on Earth. He also could have just snatched us up and taken us to heaven with Him. But, He loves us so much that He decided to come and live on Earth with us. If you ever wonder if God loves you, remember that! Christmas is a beautiful reminder of just how much He loves us.

Add the day seven ornament to the tree:

Earth

**ACTIVITY**

If you have a nativity scene, get it out and spend some time as a family looking at it (if you don't have one, look up a picture on the Internet). Let everyone in your family share what it means to them that Jesus came to Earth. Have one person pray and thank God that He loves us that much!

week two

peace

When the angels in Luke 2 announced Jesus' birth, they proclaimed "Peace on Earth!" The birth of Jesus brought with it the promise of peace.

The proclamation of peace was also a recognition that there was brokenness and dysfunction on Earth. No one needs to bring peace to where it already exists. In our world there continues to be evidence of brokenness and dysfunction, and yet, Jesus remains the source of real peace. As we read and reflect this week, we will consider the true peace only He offers.

PEACE WORTH FIGHTING FOR



What good things might happen if you truly got to know the people in your neighborhood and they got to know you? .

- Jay Pathak

“Peace” is a term that is easiest to define negatively. In other words, it’s easiest to define peace by what it is not. Peace is the absence of conflict, strife, and confrontation. However, we must not make the mistake of only defining peace negatively.

Peace isn’t passive. We don’t experience it only by avoiding its opposite. Peace is something we work for, it’s something we build. And it is not defined only by what is absent. An environment of peace is defined by what is present. Where there is peace, there is togetherness, commitment, unity, and love.

One of the ways we can make peace in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools is by creating spaces of belonging. Much of the strife in our world is bred from unfamiliarity and suspicion. When we create space for one another, we are sowing seeds of peace. When we engage in the hard work of developing relationships, we are sowing the seeds of peace. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Being a peacemaker doesn’t only mean we avoid creating conflict. It means we actively seek to make peace.



Have you made intentional and specific plans to create belonging this Advent? If you haven’t take a few moments to look at your calendar, then schedule a time and extend some invitations!

Day Eight: Dec. 9
FAMILY GUIDE

Matthew 5:8

Those who work to bring peace are happy. God will call them His children.

Read Aloud:

There is a funny word in the Hebrew language that has an awesome meaning. The word is *shalom*. The closest word we have in the English language to that word is “peace”. The Bible uses the word *shalom* to talk about places where things are the way God likes them. It describes times when people are happy, when people are treating each other with kindness, and when there is no fighting or complaining.

That’s God’s definition of peace. When Jesus was on earth, He said, “Those who work to bring peace are happy. God will call them His children.” There are a few important things we can learn from that statement. First, God wants us to make peace. Peace doesn’t happen by accident. It happens when we are committed to treating each other with kindness and patience. It happens when we ask God to help us be peaceful with each other. Second, we learn that when we try to make peace, we’ll be happy. Sometimes we miss out on peace because we’re only thinking about ourselves. The truth is, thinking about ourselves doesn’t make us happy. We’re happy when we make peace with others. Jesus gives us His peace, and He wants us to pass it on!

Add the day eight ornament to the tree:

Peace Sign



ACTIVITY

One way we can make peace is by spending time with other people. As a family, decide who you can invite over for a meal sometime this month.

ANGEL GABRIEL COMES TO MARY

“

I have good news for you. There is a sure antidote to fear. The apostle John says ‘perfect love casts out fear.’ When you know that God loves you and gave His Son to take your beating, so that you can take His blessings, you will stop fearing.

- **Joseph Prince**

Luke 1 tells us that when Mary was visited by a messenger from God, she was “greatly troubled” (wouldn’t you be, too?!). She was confused, and she couldn’t understand what she was hearing. We know the messenger’s greeting was affirming - he called Mary “God’s favored one” and told her God was with her. But it’s clear she didn’t feel that way. She was stunned and afraid. The messenger, Gabriel, saw she was afraid and simply told her, “Do not fear.” Gabriel went on to describe God’s plan for her to bear Jesus as her son.

We’re never going to be given an assignment like the one given to Mary, but God does call each of us to use the gifts and abilities He has given us. Often we, like Mary, respond with fear when presented with opportunities to be used by God. When Mary expressed her own fear to Gabriel, he replied with powerful words of encouragement. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” When we are afraid of what God is asking us to do, we can be assured that His calling comes with His enabling. God brings the power, we bring the obedience.

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Where is fear keeping you from using the gifts God has given you? Spend some time in prayer asking God’s Spirit to give you courage.

Day Nine: Dec. 10

FAMILY GUIDE**Luke 1:26-35**

Listen Mary! You will become pregnant. You will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and people will call him the Son of the Most High...The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. The baby will be holy. He will be called the Son of God.

Read Aloud:

Who made you the way you are? You might have your mom's nose or your dad's hair color. You might have a personality like one parent, or interests that are similar to your other parent. While you have many of the features of your parents, God is ultimately the one who made you the way you are.

The Bible tells us a story where an angel tells Mary that she is going to be pregnant with Jesus, God's Son. Could you imagine what she thought when she heard that news?! The angel said that God's Holy Spirit made the baby Jesus and put Him in her tummy. Mary was afraid, but the angel reminds her that God is with her, and He is going to take good care of her!

Add the day nine ornament to the tree:

Angel

**ACTIVITY**

Pick one kid from your family to pretend to be Mary, and record a short video of a parent interviewing her asking what she was thinking when the angel told her about Jesus. If you like the final product, share it on social media with the hashtag #bridgewayadvent.

THE PEACE JESUS LEAVES



A great many people are trying to make peace, but that has already been done. God has not left it for us to do; all we have to do is to enter into it.

- D.L. Moody

When Jesus promised to leave His disciples—a frantic and fearful bunch—with His peace, He wasn't simply referring to an absence of conflict or a general sense of settledness. In the Bible, peace means wholeness. When Jesus spoke of peace, He spoke of a heart-level wholeness durable enough to withstand life's greatest challenges. Because Jesus knew the magnitude of the peace He was offering, He was able to tell them, and us, to not let our hearts be troubled. The audacity of such a request serves to highlight the audacity of the peace Jesus offers. His peace is not like the peace we can find in the world, which is often dependent upon circumstance. Instead, His is the sort of peace that can thrive in the rocky soil of adversity.

As you look into your own heart this Christmas season, where do you sense a lack of peace? Are you seeking the sort of peace the world offers? Worldly peace—often gained through improved personal circumstances—is not bad, it's just unreliable. It can be gone in an instant with a phone call, a changed schedule, or a personal conflict. The peace of God, on the other hand, transcends circumstances.



Instead of relying on worldly peace, how can you intentionally lean in to the peace of God today? As you look at your next 24 hours, what would it look like to radiate radical, durable, Jesus-given peace to those around you?

Day Ten: Dec. 11
FAMILY GUIDE

John 14:27

I leave you peace. My peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don't let your hearts be troubled. Don't be afraid.

Read Aloud:

Near the end of Jesus's life, His disciples were scared. They knew He was leaving soon, and they didn't know what to do. The Bible tells us about a time when He gave them a very special promise. He looked at them and said, "My peace I give to you."

He was going to leave, but He was going to give them His peace. That means they were always going to have a special blessing from Him that would go with them wherever they went. God promises that we can have that kind of peace, too. When we have God's peace, it helps us know that God is with us no matter what is going on. God's peace can make the fun moments of life even better, and it can make the sad and scary moments less sad and scary.

That means one thing we can do when we're feeling scared, nervous, or sad is ask God to help us feel His peace. He promised to give it to us, and He is really happy when we ask for it!

Add the day ten ornament to the tree

Dove



ACTIVITY

Take a few moments to let everyone share something they are sad, nervous, or scared about. Then, spend some time praying for each other and asking for God to give everyone in your family His peace.

JOSEPH'S DREAM (NO FEAR)



Fear arises when we imagine that everything depends on us.

- Elizabeth Elliot

“Calm down” may be the most counterproductive expression in the English language. Think about the last time it was directed at you. How did it make you feel? More than likely, it made you anything but calm. The expression, “do not fear” can feel similarly counterproductive in many circumstances. Such a command heightens our sense that there is, indeed, something around us worthy of fear.

In Matthew 1:21 this is the charge given to Joseph. After learning his fiancée was pregnant and resolving (understandably!) to cancel their impending nuptials, Joseph is visited by an angelic messenger who gave him these instructions, “Do not fear.” Before the angel shared any other information, the angel told him to not be afraid.

Fear does funny things to our decision-making capabilities. It skews our view of reality so we make decisions differently than we otherwise would. The difference is usually unfruitful. We are bombarded with reasons to be fearful but it serves us to remember the angel's words repeated again and again in Scripture: Do not fear. When we reject fear and claim God's peace, it clears our head so that we can act with wisdom, thoughtfulness and courage.



Where has fear crept into your heart? Spend a few moments in prayer, recalling God's persistent and beautiful invitation to step away from fear. Resolve to live this day in a state of Spirit-filled peace, not fear.

Day Eleven: Dec. 12
FAMILY GUIDE

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You will name the son Jesus. Give him that name because he will save his people from their sins.

Read Aloud:

There are many things that make us afraid. Some are things we think will hurt us (like spiders or snakes) some are things that leave us feeling trapped (like small spaces) and some are things we think will be embarrassing (like speaking in front of lots of people). God knows there is a lot in the world that makes us afraid, and that's why He tells us over and over again in the Bible, "Do not fear."

Joseph was afraid for Mary and himself when the news came she was having a baby. But God sent an angel in a dream to tell him to not be afraid. He explained God was up to something special and it would change the world. He wanted Joseph to trust in Him! God wants us to trust Him too. That's something kids and grown-ups are always learning to do! We can be brave not because we have everything under control, but because God most does!

Add the day eleven ornament to the tree

Pillow



ACTIVITY

Go to a website like biblestudytools.com and do a search for the phrase "Do not fear" in the Bible. Let everyone in the family read a verse or two out loud. For the rest of the day, remind each other that because God is with you, you don't need to be afraid!

A NATIVITY SCENE IN HEAVEN

“

Let's treat all people as though our Jesus was born for them, because He was.

- Unknown

There are a lot of different kinds of nativity scenes on the market. There are expensive, intricate porcelain scenes, and scenes made entirely of Little People or Star Wars characters.

However, no matter what sort of nativity scene you buy, you'll find a character missing: Satan. The Christmas story - with all of its hope, peace, joy, and love - takes place in the context of warfare. Our great enemy sought to resist and derail God's great work. In Revelation 12 Satan is depicted as a dragon waiting to pounce on a newborn child. A woman gives birth to a boy who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron (this is a Messianic reference), but the child is taken up to God's throne. This is all a picture of Jesus's Advent into the world and His ascension back into heaven.

We see the work of the dragon in Herod's murder of children in Bethlehem following Jesus's birth, and in Jesus's temptation in the desert as an adult. Revelation 12:13 says when the dragon saw he was beaten, he pursued the woman and made war on her offspring. Satan is still trying to wreck havoc, but remember, he is a defeated foe! If we read passages like Revelation 5:11-14, 7:17, or 12:11 we'll see promises that this child, Jesus, guarantees our victory and rescue!

?

What can you do to remind yourself of Jesus's victory and authority over the enemy's schemes in your life?

Day Twelve: Dec. 13
FAMILY GUIDE

Revelation 12:1-7

*A pregnant girl about to give birth.
 A red dragon who wants to stop it.
 God's purpose wins and the baby will rule as king.
 But a war continues on.*

Read Aloud:

The Bible paints a lot of pictures of what happened in the manger at Christmas, it even talks about what was happening in heaven when Jesus was being born on Earth. It tells us that the Devil wanted to defeat God by stopping Jesus, but he failed because God is WAY more powerful than the Devil!

The Bible tells us the Devil has been defeated in heaven (by God's angels) and on Earth (by Jesus). He ever prowls around seeking to come after us and distract us from following Jesus. But, we're protected and safe because of the power of Jesus! The Bible tells us greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world. So we can look at the story of Christmas and remember that God is victorious! There's nothing the Devil can do to get in our way if we have the power of Jesus inside of us!

Add the day twelve ornament to the tree:

Crossed Swords



ACTIVITY

Gather around your nativity scene again (or look up a picture on line). Imagine what was going on in heaven when Jesus was being born on Earth. Take time to try to explain the scene in language everyone can understand. Have one person pray and thank God for His victory!

PROPHECY OF PEACE: JESUS

“

The darker the night, the brighter the light.

- Levi Lusko

Imagine the scene: Redemption was coming. God's people had encountered many moments of trials, oppression, and downfalls. They were waiting for the Most High to come and save them. They had turned into a people of fear. As they were oppressed by the culture's leaders they were desperate for victory. They had forgotten that they were the children of God. But, the sunrise was coming. It was coming to light up their darkness.

If you have paused long enough to watch a sunrise you know how breathtaking it is. The light literally changes everything on the horizon as it bursts into the scene. The light takes over the darkness. This was what was coming for a lost and broken people. God was setting the scene by calling John the Baptist to prepare the way for God in the flesh. The awaited Messiah was so close. Hundreds of prophecies of salvation and hope were about to become reality. Darkness was going to flee. It was time for the Messiah to be known.

It is easy in our culture to continue to live in fear and defeat. Even if we know Jesus, there can be areas of life that are left in the darkness. The good news is, He wants to cover you with His light.

Listen to "Light it Up" by *For King and Country* Live at <http://tinyurl.com/lightituplive>

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What areas of life do you need our Heavenly Father to light up? Where do you need the Messiah's "sunrise" to drive out darkness?

Day Thirteen: Dec. 14
FAMILY GUIDE

Luke 1:67-80

With the loving mercy of our God, a new day from heaven will shine upon us. God will help those who live in darkness, in the fear of death. He will guide us into the path that goes toward peace.

Read Aloud:

God loves light - He loves brightening things up and shining into every corner of our world. It's fun to imagine animals, plants and humans coming alive as they experience God's light each morning. Sometimes we go through seasons of life that feel dark. God's good news for us is that, just like nighttime, dark times in our lives are always temporary. God promises to bring His light to us.

Just like the sun can help us see where we are going when we are walking outside, God's light directs us and keeps us from getting lost or confused. On the day that John the Baptist was born, his father, Zechariah, knew that God was up to something amazing. He shouted out, "God will help those who live in darkness, in the fear of death. He will guide us into the path that goes toward peace!" He knew what Jesus would show us: That God's light was coming, and darkness didn't have a chance! That's still true today!

Add the day thirteen ornament to the tree:

Sun



ACTIVITY

Look up some time lapse videos of sunrises online (or, if you really want to create a memory, wake up early enough on a day soon to see the sunrise). Read the passage again and let the sun be a reminder of God's light!

GOD'S ETERNAL KINGDOM OF PEACE

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The Advent season is a season of waiting, but our whole life is an Advent season, that is, a season of waiting for the last Advent, for the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Between nations, states, cities, corporations, communities and our private little worlds, we live surrounded by kingdoms. We have human kingdoms that appear secure, and others whose fragility is plain to see. It seems we often read in the news about kingdoms being overthrown in different parts of the world. In the book of Daniel, an interpretation of a dream allows Daniel to reveal an important truth about Advent - it comes in like a wrecking ball. When the eternal kingdom breaks through, the temporal nature of even the most powerful human kingdoms is revealed.

Advent can serve as an annual reminder of the fragility of our earthly kingdom and the enduring strength of God's Kingdom. If we are placing our ultimate hope on our business, our nation, or our personal accomplishments, we are setting ourselves up for anxiety and disappointment. Those "kingdoms" will crumble, but God's never will. In this season, it's easy to let other kingdoms steal our attention. It is a good thing to enjoy the trappings of the Christmas season as the precious gifts from God that they are, but we need to be careful to keep them in their place. They can never be the center of our focus, because we know where real hope and peace are found.

?

Where are you asking the "kingdoms" of this world to give you ultimate fulfillment? Ask God to give you eyes to see the immense value of His Kingdom.

Day Fourteen: Dec. 15

FAMILY GUIDE***Daniel 2:31-35; 44-45***

While you were looking at the statue, you saw a rock cut free. But no human being touched the rock. It hit the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them... Then the rock became a very large mountain. It filled the whole earth. That kingdom itself will continue forever.

Read Aloud:

It can be really fun to throw rocks! They can be skipped on a lake, thrown off a cliff, or even used to play different games. In the Bible there is a story of a rock that was bigger than anything any of us could ever throw.

God allowed the prophet Daniel to see dreams of what would happen after his time. He helped one king in Babylon see how other powerful kingdoms would be built, and they would look strong. But a large mountain rock, crafted by God, would knock all of them down. This was a picture to show how God's Kingdom would be the strongest forever. Advent is part of this story. It's a reminder to us that God's Kingdom has come into the world, and it's the greatest Kingdom the world has ever seen or will ever see. As we celebrate Jesus this Christmas season, we can remember that His Kingdom is here!

Add the day fourteen ornament to the tree:

Mountain

**ACTIVITY**

Have each family member grab a small rock from outside (make sure it's safe and clean) and place it on a shelf in their room or office where they'll see it. Let it be a reminder of the power and strength of God's Kingdom.

week three

joy

The story of Christmas is the story of God's response to His wayward image-bearers. He could have condemned us, but instead He offered us extravagant grace. He could have ignored us completely, but instead He stepped out of heaven to be with us. He could have come as an elite ruler who was shielded from the burdens of "real" life, but instead He came as a humble child. And He came to save. And it is this story of Christmas that is our wellspring of real, lasting joy.

OVERFLOWING HOPE



Jesus is your hope as you live in a world where hope is a precious and rare commodity.

- Paul David Tripp

If you ever took a chemistry class in high school, you've observed a chemical reaction. In a basic chemical reaction, two distinct substances (called reactants) are combined to make something new (a product). Perhaps you've witnessed a chemical reaction that gets a little bit out of control, causing the product to overflow out of the beaker.

Romans 15:13 describes a sort of spiritual chemical reaction that God wants to do in our hearts. Paul writes, "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." (NIV)

The God of hope wants to so fill us with the reactants of His joy and His peace that we overflow with the product of hope. And it is when we trust in Him that we place ourselves under the waterfall of God's joy and peace.

The truth is, all of us are overflowing something. We each have a range of influences that serve as our reactants, and they produce what we share with the world. When we are mindful of the peace and joy that God gives us, it causes us to spill over with hope towards those around us.



What are you overflowing into the world? What is one specific way you you can focus more intently on God's joy and peace today so that you can overflow hope?

Day Fifteen: Dec. 16
FAMILY GUIDE

Romans 15:13

I pray that the God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in Him. Then your hope will overflow by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Read Aloud:

Have you ever tried to pour yourself a drink and accidentally poured more than your cup can hold? The result isn't good, is it? An overflowing drink is not a good thing! Did you know that just like a cup overflows what's inside of it, we each overflow what's inside of us?

It sounds weird, but it's true. The things that we pay attention to "fill us up," and then we overflow out into the world. What we overflow depends on what is filling us, and we are filled by whatever we pay attention to. If we pay attention to negativity and anger, that's what we're going to overflow. In the Bible, it says that God wants to fill us with joy and peace. As we think about Him, He wants us to be joyful and peaceful. When we're full of His joy and peace, it says we will overflow hope. God's joy and peace remind us of His love and His promises, and inspires us to spread hope wherever we go!

Add the day fifteen ornament to the tree:

Candle



ACTIVITY

Take some time as a family to talk about joy, peace, and hope. What are they? How can you experience them? What does mean to "overflow hope"? Afterwards, take a moment to pray that thank God that He gives us His joy and peace!

PROPHECY OF PEACE: JESUS

“

There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice!

- John Calvin

There are quite a few words that get used around Christmas time that aren't that common other times of the year. One of those words is "rejoice." It's a term found quite a bit in the Bible - often in times where people were responding to an experience with God - but it's not used much in everyday life. The word describes exceeding gladness and exuberant joy.

Mary uses that word in a famous passage in Luke 1. She is reflecting on what God is doing in her life, and she's looking back on God's faithfulness towards her. Scripture records her breaking into song, singing of the love, mercy, loyalty, justice, and redemption of God. Though her life was full of uncertainty - she was, after all, an unmarried woman pregnant with the Son of God - she rejoiced. Her song came from a deep well of joy and thanksgiving.

It is possible for us to rejoice from a deep well, too. We can rejoice as we look back on God's faithfulness. We can rejoice as we consider God's future promises. We can rejoice because, no matter our circumstances, God is present and at work.

It may be an unusual word, but it's a powerful concept. Make today a day that you rejoice because of what God has done.

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If you are on social media, write a post that expresses your joy in what God has done in the past, what He is doing in the present, and/or what He will do in the future.

Day Sixteen: Dec. 17
FAMILY GUIDE

Luke 1:46-55

My soul praises the Lord; my heart is happy because God is my Savior. I am not important, but God has shown care for me, his servant girl. From now on, all people will say I am blessed, because the Powerful One has done great things for me, His name is holy. God will always give mercy to those who worship him.

Read Aloud:

We all love stories. Take a moment to think about your favorite book or movie. Chances are, part of the reason you love it is because it contains a great story.

Each one of us has our very own story. We have a story of what God is doing around us. In the Bible, Mary sang a song as she thought about what God was doing in her life. She knew that God was up to something big, and as she sang, people could see that was true. Mary sang a song of praise and thanks to God, and people took notice.

What is God doing in your life that is worth praising? What has He done in your past? What do you look forward to in the future? Think about those things, and thank God for them!

Add the day sixteen ornament to the tree:

Microphone



ACTIVITY

Today is a great day to sing Christmas carols! Pick three songs as a family that celebrate God's goodness and sing them together. It doesn't matter how you sound, just have fun praising God!

SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS REJOICE

“

Christmas isn't a season, it's a feeling

- Edna Ferber.

Have you ever had a workday that was unforgettable? Maybe it noteworthy because you had a memorable interaction with a client, hit a major deadline, nailed a massive presentation, or experienced a career-altering setback. The magnitude of such events varies, but we all have them. Some days quickly fade from our memory, but some break the mold and are remembered for days, weeks, and years.

It is safe to say that some shepherds had such an unforgettable workday around 2000 years ago outside of Bethlehem. They were doing what they did every other night: watching sheep. Then, in an instant, heaven plunged into their midst announcing Israel's long-awaited Savior. The news from the angels set off a whirlwind of activity as they darted off to go see this eternity-changing baby, no doubt awestruck. And the Scriptures tell us that in the end, as the shepherds left the baby who was and would be King, they were filled with joy.

Our experience of Christmas is admittedly a bit less visceral than that of the shepherds. We don't experience the sight of heavenly beings and we don't look upon a young family stunned by God's mercy. But the magnitude of Christmas is just as significant for us. It is good news of great joy, just as it was for them. The story might be familiar to us, but that doesn't mean that same raw joy that the shepherds had can't be ours. God wants us to experience it, too.

?

Today, spend a moment and consider that raw joy the shepherds felt at the first Christmas. Imagine the sights, sounds and smells, and let your heart be moved to joy.

Day Seventeen: Dec. 18

FAMILY GUIDE**Luke 2:8-20**

A large group of angels sang, "Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please God." The shepherds went quickly, found the family, and saw the baby lying in a feeding box.

Then they told what the angels had said about this child. Everyone was amazed. The shepherds returned to their sheep, praising God and thanking him for everything they had seen.

Read Aloud:

How crazy would it be to see an angel?! We read of them in the Bible, but to talk and hear one would be awesome. It would be amazing to look at them - their bright white color would definitely get our attention - but it would be even better to listen to them. After all, angels are God's messengers, so we could know that whatever they were saying came from God.

The Bible tells the story of an angel telling late night shepherds good news that Jesus has been born! After they made that announcement, there were A LOT of angels singing: "Worship God above and have peace down here with each other!" The shepherds went and found the baby in a manger and everyone was amazed. Jesus's birth was a reason to rejoice then, and it's still a reason to rejoice today!

Add the day seventeen ornament to the tree:

Sheep

**ACTIVITY**

Take a few minutes today for a family art project! Give each person a piece of paper, and have them draw their best guess of what an angel looks like. Have fun sharing your drawings with each other!

ANGEL TUNES AND JOYFUL OIL



Let us leave sadness to the devil and his angels.
As for us, what can we be but rejoicing and glad?
- **Francis of Assisi**

The first verses of the book of Hebrews are full of beautiful, glorifying language about Jesus. Reread the text, and pay close attention to verses three and six. In verse nine, it says Jesus has been “anointed...with the oil of gladness beyond His companions.” Anointing is a process by which people are marked out, chosen for a specific purpose. The language of gladness speaks to the great joy all of heaven and earth finds in the reality of Jesus’ life, mission, and redemptive work. He has been chosen with joy and for joy!

Passages like these help us to remember the kingly and joyful nature of the Christ child. The One who came is the exact imprint of God’s nature and is the object of the worship of heaven. The one who put on flesh is the radiance of the glory of God. As we anticipate the celebration of His Advent, we can rejoice that the One who came, became like us, even though He was not like us. And not only did He step out of heaven, He stepped out of heaven with pleasure. It was God’s good pleasure for Jesus to come and live among us, and it was God’s good pleasure for Him to save us.



Today, consider the divinity of the Christ child. Consider that the one Hebrews describes in such exalted language became a child for the purpose of our salvation and transformation. To recognize that truth is to drink deeply of real Christmas joy.

Day Eighteen: Dec. 19

FAMILY GUIDE

Hebrews 1:1-9

*But God said this about his Son:
"Your throne will last forever and ever.
You will rule your kingdom with fairness.
You love what is right and hate evil.
So God has chosen you to rule those with you.
Your God has given you much joy.*

Read Aloud:

We talk a lot at Christmas about being joyful and thankful. But it's also good for us to talk about how joyful and thankful God is. He was overjoyed to watch His plan unfold at Advent and see the responses of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the angels. Everyone was excited, and that made God happy!

Just as a parent loves watching their kids reactions to fun and special moments and blessings, God loves seeing us full and joyful, the way He created us to be. A pastor named John Piper has said it this way: "God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him." In other words, God is happy when He sees that He makes us happy! He loves to see how Jesus has changed our lives! Let's be happy and enjoy this day because God is happy and He loves to make us happy!

Add the day eighteen ornament to the tree:

Smile



ACTIVITY

Make an acrostic out of each family member's name and come up with a pick a word to describe why they are special for each letter of their name (example: Jim - Joyful, Invested, Merry) Have fun and be creative! Put these up on everyone's bedroom door!

WISE MEN WORSHIP: SEE THE STAR



While it is good that we seek to know the Holy One, it is probably not so good to presume that we ever complete the task.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

When Jesus was born, God wanted to world to come and see. Some of the first people to visit Jesus were non-Jews who came from a far-away land. Scripture calls them magi, and they were subjects of a significant portion of early Christian art. The Bible doesn't tell us how many of them there were or what their names were, but it does tell us that they brought three gifts. Because of this, it has been traditionally thought that there were three Magi.

What is clear is that from Scripture is that an exceedingly bright star got their attention and the attention of Persian astronomers. It was enough to inspire them to embark on a long journey to see this newborn King. We are left to speculate how their encounter with Jesus changed them. Remember, these were non-Jewish men from an entirely different religious background. What did their encounter with the coming King mean to them? Some wonder whether they renounced their idolatry. Some have speculated that the dream they had to return to their homeland by a different route symbolized a spiritual return to the Lord. One thing we know - they were overjoyed and their story was recorded.



What is the meaning of Jesus coming to you? Like God used the star to get the attention of the magi, is there anything God might be using now to get your attention?

Day Nineteen: Dec. 20

FAMILY GUIDE*Matthew 2:1-2,10-11*

After Jesus was born, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the baby who was born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and came to worship him." ...When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy. They went to the house where Jesus was and saw him with his mother, Mary. They bowed down and worshiped the child.

Read Aloud:

As part of the Christmas story, the Bible tells us about some men from a far-away land who studied really old writings. We think they probably had read something that led them to believe that a king was coming. The Bible says these men (we're not sure how many of them there were) saw a bright star, and they knew they had to follow the star to find this new king. By following the star, they found Jesus.

What's neat about the story of these men is what they did when they saw Jesus. The Bible tells us that they bowed down and worshiped Him. They knew He was someone who was greater than anything they had ever known. When they saw Him, they were changed forever.

Add the day nineteen ornament to the tree:

Stars

**ACTIVITY**

Go to <http://tinyurl.com/hubblecoolstars> to see 25 different incredible pictures of stars in space. Talk about how God made all of them. Take a moment to pray and thank God that He made such an amazing universe, and that He wants people from all over the world to know Him.

A HUMBLE CHOICE TO BE LIKE US

“

Many people have sought to be like God, but only one God has sought to be man.

- Unknown

During Christmas, we make a lot of choices: What should I buy? Where should I go? What should I say when people ask how I'm doing? How many calories can I eat at the party?

As we near Christmas, it is good for us to remember that Jesus made a choice to come at Christmas. Philippians 2 tells us that He did not want to take advantage of the fact that He was God, but that instead, He loved us so much that He emptied Himself and took on the form of a small baby. In a moment He went from being the Almighty God to being a small, weak, vulnerable baby in a manger. He, the most powerful being in the universe, humbled Himself and set His power aside. But even in that moment, He was fully God.

At the end of His life, He went a giant leap further and chose to die a criminal's death on the cross. Crucifixion was a punishment reserved for only the worst of criminals: murders, insurrectionists, and the like. And He did all of that for us. He died the death we should have died, but He conquered death and returned to His throne in heaven. Philippians 2 goes on to tell us that now He has the name that is above every name, the name that will one day cause every knee to bow. He is a King, but He is a humble King. And His humility is an example for us.

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Spend some time thinking about the incredible humility of Jesus. How might He be calling you to model His humble love towards people in your life?

Day Twenty: Dec. 21
FAMILY GUIDE
Philippians 2:4-11

Christ himself was like God in everything. He was equal with God. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be held on to. He gave up his place and made himself nothing. He was born as a man and became like a servant. God made His name greater than every other name.

Read Aloud:

There's a famous story of Navy SEALs rescuing some prisoners. When the SEALs came in and signaled for the prisoners to come quickly - the prisoners were too afraid and wouldn't move. One of the soldiers, seeing them like this, came and took off his helmet, put down his weapon and curled up tightly next to them, getting so close his body was touching. He put his arms around them in an effort to show them he was one of them. He stayed there until their eyes met with his and then whispered that he was one of them and was there to rescue them. Would they come with him? He stood up, and one prisoner, then two, then all of them left - all ending up safe back home.

Jesus came and curled up tightly next to us, showing that He was one of us. He came so we can be rescued. Let's celebrate His coming down to our level!

Add the day twenty ornament to your tree:

Hug



ACTIVITY

Spend a few moments as a family talking about this question: Why does it matter that Jesus became like us? After a few minutes, have one person pray and thank God that He became like us.

THEN LOVE APPEARED



The nature of God's love for us is outrageous.

- Brennan Manning

In the letter of Titus, Paul describes the arrival of Jesus as the appearance of, “the goodness and loving kindness of God.” When this love appeared, God saved us; not based on our righteousness works, but God's great mercy.

As we prepare to celebrate, we can know Jesus represents God's goodness and loving kindness. He is the personification of mercy, and it is through His sacrifice that we are saved. Merciful love is particularly compelling. Mercy, by definition, is compassion or kindness shown by someone who has the authority to punish. Because of our rebellion, God has the authority to punish us. But, instead of doing so, He sent Jesus to display glorious mercy. Jesus then went to the cross to show us the radical depth of God's nature.

Our celebration of Christmas is only a few days away. These final pre-Christmas days are often filled with long lines, short tempers, slow traffic, and hurried hearts? Can it be different this year? Can we be people whose hearts are not full of pre-holiday stress, but are instead full of pre-holiday gratitude as we consider the great mercy of our God? The goodness and loving kindness of God has arrived. That is reason for joy.



Do you best to really savor the sights, sounds, and smells of the Christmas season today. As you see lights, sing songs, or prepare to celebrate, let them be tangible reminders of God's loving kindness.

Day Twenty One: Dec. 22
FAMILY GUIDE

Titus 3:3-8

*But then the kindness and love of God our Savior
was shown.*

Read Aloud:

Who is someone you know that is kind? What is it about them that makes you think they are kind? Take a moment to answer these questions before you keep reading.

The Bible tells us that God is kind. He looks at each one of us like a loving daddy looks at His children. He is always looking out for us and He wants what is best for us. When we are happy, He wants to celebrate with us. When we are sad, He is there to comfort us.

One of the ways that we see God's kindness is by looking at Jesus. Jesus came to live with us to show us just how kind God is. God knew that we could never live a perfect life on our own, so He sent Jesus to be born as a little baby and then live a perfect life for us. Because of God's kindness we can know that He loves us! During these last few days before Christmas, as you look at decorations, or spend time with family, or look at Christmas lights, let all of those things remind you of God's kindness.

Add the day twenty one ornament to your tree:

Baby Footprints



ACTIVITY

Brainstorm as a family one simple way you can show God's kindness to someone in these last few days before Christmas. It can be something as big as visiting someone you think is lonely, or as small as encouraging an employee at a store you shop at. As always, get creative and have fun!

week four

love

God's love is an active love. We are not asked to believe that God loves us on blind faith. Instead, we can look to Christmas to see concrete evidence of God's love. This week we celebrate that the author of history wrote Himself into the story so that He could be its only hero. That is active, extraordinary, eternity-changing love.

LOVE THAT UNITES

“

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

- Jesus

It is all too easy to romanticize what life must have been like for Jesus and His disciples. It's easy to imagine His disciples as willing students who always got along and wanted nothing more than to sit humbly at Jesus's feet and learn.

The truth is a bit messier than that. If you read the gospels, you'll see the disciples bickering with one another, questioning Jesus, and struggling to understand what they were doing. If you look at the disciples' backstories, you'll see that they were not the sort of group you would expect to get along. They came from different professions and had varying levels of education. At least one came from the first century equivalent of the political far left, and at least one came from the equivalent of the far right. The disciples were a recipe for dysfunction and volatility.

And yet, Jesus created space for them to belong. He created a community that transcended these differences. Jesus invited people of diverse backgrounds to be united through Him. The disciples were transformed because they were first invited to belong. We're not Jesus, but we have that same opportunity today. In a divided world, we can love like Jesus loves by creating belonging for others, regardless of their beliefs or background.

?

As you look at the way you behave online, talk, and live, are you more of a force for unity or division? How can you be more of a unifier?

Day Twenty Two: Dec. 23

FAMILY GUIDE

John 13:34-35

I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.

Read Aloud:

What is the best way to show people that you have Jesus living in your heart? The Bible tells us that Jesus gave us the answer to that question when He was on Earth. He said that when we love each other, that's how we show that we follow Him.

Loving each other is sometimes easy and sometimes difficult. It can be easy to love people who are like us or have similar interests to ours. It can be more difficult to love people who are rude or who say mean things. But Jesus is the one who gives us the power to love people, even when it is difficult. He promises to love us on our good days and our bad days, and because He loves us, we can love other people.

One thing that can help us love each other is to remember that God created each person special. That means everyone we meet was made one-of-a-kind by God. And when we love other people, that's a really great way that we can show them that God loves them.

Add the day twenty three ornament to your tree:

Heart



ACTIVITY

Have a short conversation as a family about what makes it difficult to love other people. Brainstorm some ideas about how you can love people who are tough to love.

Day Twenty Three: Dec. 24

BABY IN A BOX



He chooses our dirty places, our stinking places, the places that shame us, as His point of entry.

- Ann Voskamp

“The Christmas Blues” is a part of this season that is often present but rarely talked about. In short, our culture can lead us to put unrealistic expectations on this season. Christmas, we are led to believe, is a time when everything is magical, when all broken relationships are restored, and a when calendar full of gatherings leaves us bursting with joy. Too often, our experience fails to make those impossible expectations. And then the blues comes. We’re left looking back on the season noticing what went wrong and what could have been better had we done things a little bit differently. We resolve to work a little harder to make things better, all the while forgetting that we’re asking material things to do what only God can do for us.

There is only one true antidote to the Christmas Blues. It’s the reminder that Jesus came down into the messes of our world. He didn’t come into a world full of stability, wealth, and power. He made Himself weak, and He joined us in our reality. And He offers sustaining joy that can be ours whether or not this season met our expectations. He came at Christmas, He saved us on the cross, and He continues to pursue our hearts. We don’t have to create a perfect life for ourselves, instead we can place our hope in the One who is perfecting us. Merry Christmas!



What expectations cause you to feel pressure during this season? Spend time, before Christmas arrives, surrendering all things into His purpose!

Wake up free tomorrow!

Day Twenty Three: Dec. 24

FAMILY GUIDE**Luke 2:1-7**

While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. She gave birth to her first son. There were no rooms left in the inn. So she wrapped the baby with cloths and laid him in a box where animals are fed.

Read Aloud:

When you think of special places, what comes to mind? Some places are special because they are really beautiful, like Lake Tahoe, Yosemite, or Santa Cruz. Some places are special because they are really fun, like Disneyland, Legoland, or Six Flags. Some places are special because they are exciting, like a sports stadium or a theater.

There's one thing that can make almost anyplace feel special: being with special people! If you are with people you love, almost any place you go becomes special.

When Jesus was born, He was born in a messy side room that was meant only for animals. He was placed in a feeding box full of hay and animal slobber. It was a messy place, but Jesus was there, so it was special. There are parts of our world that are messy, but we know the world is special because Jesus came. And we know that we're special because Jesus came to live in us. Merry Christmas!

Add your day twenty four ornament to the tree:

Birthday Cake

**ACTIVITY**

What room in the house is messiest right now? Gather in it as a family, and instead of cleaning, take time to pray together to thank Jesus that He came to join us even in our mess!

CHRISTMAS DAY
YOUR SAVIOR WAS BORN



There has only been one Christmas. All the rest are anniversaries.

- W.J. Cameron

John 1:29 tells of how John the Baptist was standing with his disciples when Jesus walked up and he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Matt 1:23). Behold, indeed. Behold means, ‘look here! Something amazing is happening!’ Pastor Lance has taught us that ‘behold’ means something like, ‘seriously, check this out!’ In this case, John the Baptist said ‘behold’ because after 400 years of silence from the last Old Testament, the Messiah they’d all been waiting for. Jesus was there in the flesh. The Son of God had come to rescue His people!

On Jesus’ birthday, the original Christmas, we saw God fulfill an ancient promise that He would come and heal His people. Right there in Bethlehem He showed up and changed everything. There was no more waiting, no more wondering, all the faith that had been clung to for thousands of years was realized in the manger. Our God had come!

Read 1 John 1:1-2 and consider the passion with which those words are written: ‘we saw Him. We heard Him. We touched Him! He’s real! He is here!’ He is Immanuel, God with us. As you celebrate today, consider what all of this means. Rest in the truth that God has come to be with us. Receive the hope, peace, joy, and love that come only from Him.

From all of us on the Bridgeway staff:

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

CHRISTMAS DAY
FAMILY GUIDE

Luke 2:11 & 1 John 1:1-2

Today your Savior was born in David's town. He is Christ, the Lord.

Read Aloud:

Christmas is finally here! We've spent these last few weeks talking about hope, peace, joy and love. We've done a lot of thinking about who Jesus is and what He means for our lives. And all of that has been leading up to the big day today when we get to say, "Our Savior, Jesus, was born!"

We hope that today is a wonderful day for you. We hope you get to have fun with loved ones, and that you're able to enjoy decorations, yummy food, and fun presents. And we hope that you're able to enjoy all of that more than you ever have because after going through this devotional you understand how all that is good and beautiful in this season points us back to our good and beautiful Jesus.

God gives us a lot of good gifts, but the greatest gift He ever gave us was Jesus. That's a gift that will never wear out or grow old. It's a gift that can fill us with hope, peace, joy and love, today and every day!

Add your ornament to the tree for this final day

Baby

Note: You will have extra stickers.

Use them however you'd like!



ACTIVITY

At some point today, pause for a moment to pray as a family and thank God for all of the gifts He has given you. Thank Him for Jesus, the greatest gift of all, and then spend the day in celebration!

Bridgeway
CHRISTIAN CHURCH