

The background of the entire image is a deep blue night sky filled with numerous small, white stars. At the bottom, a dark, silhouetted horizon line separates the sky from a dark brown, textured ground. A bright, glowing light source, likely the sun or moon, is positioned just above the horizon, creating a soft, warm glow that fades into the surrounding sky.

peace on earth

ADVENT GUIDE 2017

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written and compiled by
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What is Advent?

Welcome to a journey through Advent. Advent is a Latin term meaning “arrival” or “coming”. It is a term of hope and anticipation meant to inspire. The Advent season is a time for God’s Church worldwide to celebrate the first arrival of our Lord as a humble child as we also eagerly await His second coming in glory. We celebrate the faithfulness of our God, who made good on His promise to send a Savior over two millenia ago. It is a time for repentance, reflection, renewed minds and refreshed spirits; that our souls might be stirred up with pure affection and adoration for our great King. 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 season of anticipation and preparation.

Whether you’re a Christian or not, you’re going to hear the story of Christmas over and over again, and it is a good story. Yet, if we make Christmas only about ourselves, it will feel incomplete and unfulfilling. But, if we remember it’s a story about a God who comes *to* us, that is worth celebrating year after year, for it constantly will change us!

There are a variety of Advent traditions that have developed through the centuries. One familiar tradition of this season is the use of an Advent calendar. As windows or doors are opened and Christmas Day draws near, expectation increases. This is 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.

Candles are another popular Advent tradition emphasizing 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 representing His first Advent. The increasing light from the candles is meant to be a picture of the illuminating gospel, as we see light penetrate the darkness.

Traditionally, there has been a “watchword” associated with each of the four weeks 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 step into it meaningfully. Read the passages, pray, take time and ask God what He might be wanting to say to you and change in you through this time of reflection.

While entering into this season of Advent together as a faith family, we reflect on the reality of Christ’s coming. We have the opportunity to rescue this season from commercialism and stress. We can instead treasure Jesus and assume a posture of expectant waiting as we prepare to celebrate our King.

We know there are endless demands on time during this season. We know it is hard to find the motivation for daily reading, and that is never more true than during this season. Nevertheless, we believe God’s blessed invitation during this Advent season is to stop for a moment. Stop and be fully present to the Lord, and to others.

We think it’s amazing that there have been thousands of Jesus’ birth celebrations across the world, with hundreds of millions of people reflecting on the deep and meaningful pictures Advent gives. So walk through this celebration of Advent, and let it fill you afresh!

Using this Guide

This guide contains 30 days of material, starting on November 26th and carrying through to Christmas Day. It is broken down into the four traditional Advent themes. Each day's reading will include:

1. **A Scripture Reference** - You will find the daily reference at the top of each page. We encourage you to make it a priority to open your Bible or a Bible app and read the text as each reflection hinges on the passage given.



2. **Quote** - Something brief to tether our minds to Advent truth.

3. **Reflection** - A short thought to consider and integrate into our day.



4. **Question** - We urge you to take the Scripture, quote and reflection and stir on them throughout the day, the week or the entire season.

5. There may be additional direction towards a video, song or passage to complement the study.

Family Guide

You will see material that is crafted specifically for examining Advent as a family. The material contains additional components applicable for children, although anyone can participate in the suggested activities. It contains the following:

1. **Scriptural Reference** - We have added a shortened version of the text in a translation (International Children's Bible) that is easy for children to grasp.
2. **Reflection** - A short thought to read aloud to your family to set Jesus as the center. Share the lesson, allowing older children or teens to share in reading these and leading your family.
3. **Symbolic Ornament** - Each day there are small cardboard ornaments 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 icon to put on each ornament, each day. Select one family member each day to hang up the ornament. **You can pick up one pack per family at the Kidsway Check-in desks.**
4. **Activity** - These are provided to encourage your family to creatively engage with the biblical story and celebration of Advent. We want you to have fun and also share what you're doing. Some of these activities will encourage you to post what you are doing to social media using the hashtag #bwayadvent

We encourage you to select a set time to do this every day. You are welcome to get creative and take it further than instructed. This may even be something you make into a tradition for your family. Have fun and celebrate Jesus!

week one

HOPE

Hope is an abstract and elusive concept and yet it frames our approach to the purpose of our Savior and King in powerful ways. This week's readings are meant to position us to look both backwards and forwards to the celebration of Jesus' coming: *Advent*.

Day One: Nov. 26 | Isaiah 40:9-11

HOPE THAT GOD IS COMING

“

The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity - hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory - because at the Father's will, Jesus became poor and was born in a stable, so that thirty years later He might hang on a cross.”

- J.I. Packer

Good news tends to meet the expectations in your mind, but excellent news tends to surpass it. Imagine you find \$5 in your coat pocket. That's good news! But if you find \$1000 in your account, right when you needed it. That's excellent news! You made the team: good news! You are awarded MVP of the season: excellent news! See, excellent news changes not just our day, but sometimes the rest of our life. It changes the way we see, think and live.

Our Scripture tells us the city of God (v.9) raises her voice and declares, “Behold, your God!” She comes and speaks with an aura of authority, victory and compassion (v.10-11), and it captures our attention. We've always wanted God close. Or as David states, “my heart longs, my soul thirsts for you.” (Ps. 63:1) In this season our hope and anticipation peaks. It is excellent news that our God comes. He came, He is here. Allow this reality to frame the coming days and weeks, becoming the fulfillment of all you are hoping for.

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Read John 1:29-37 and you will see a model of what to do when such a declaration of excellent news comes into your life!

Day One: Nov. 26

FAMILY GUIDE

Isaiah 40:9-11

Jerusalem, you have good news to tell.

Go up on a high mountain.

Shout out loud the good news.

Shout it out and don't be afraid.

Say to the towns of Judah, "Behold, your God."

Look, the Lord God is coming with power...

Read Aloud:

Today we start 30 days of preparing for the best news ever. Jesus came! God wanted people to know and to shout it out. He would tell people again and again to do this because He matters so much! Let's raise our voices and say together: Behold, your God! It's Jesus!

Let's see how many times this week we can repeat it to each other (and our friends, and teachers, and teammates and co-workers).

When we wake up, during our meals - write it down somewhere! For this news will never get old or get less exciting! We have God so close to us!

Add the day one ornament to the tree:

MEGAPHONE



ACTIVITY

Record a short video of your family saying the phrase: "Behold, your God! It's Jesus!" Be creative - make it into a song, or spell it out with your bodies! You can post it on social media (#bwayadvent) or send it to others, with the message title, "Hey, we're thinking about Christmas! This is for you!"

Day Two: Nov. 27 | Isaiah 11:1-3,10; Jer. 33:15

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.”

- Timothy Keller

We say the story of Jesus begins in Nazareth with a young girl meeting an angel. Yet the hope of one springing up as a Branch, fulfilling God’s awesome promise, was a backdrop to the town of Mary’s encounter. 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. What kind of Branch? On a common olive tree, branches may come out the side (hoter), but specific shoots (neytzer) come up from the roots, capable of forming a whole new tree, even if the tree has been cut to a stump and burned. When all seems lost or forsaken, there is hope springing up!

Jesus’ family line springs up in Nazareth (town of the shoot), and He grows in wisdom and stature there in “Branch-Town”. God is doing something new within what appears to be nothing. There is something rich happening, our righteous King is coming. People were waiting for such a promise. What did they 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? What part of your daily routine would you not expect Him, but should?

Day Two: Nov. 27
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:

Did you know Los Angeles in Spanish means, “The Angels”, and San Diego means, “St. Peter (Diego)”? The town Jesus grew up in had a meaning too: Branch-Town. Not because they lived in trees like Ewoks from Star Wars or had houses made of branches, but because people were waiting for a special “Branch” to come!

The Bible told them of a family tree, with the roots and tree being from King David (the boy who fought Goliath and a man after God’s heart!). God said even if the tree got cut down or damaged, a branch could spring up from the root! Jesus came from David’s family tree and lived in Branch Town and God wanted us to know He was doing something new out of what He already started!

Add the day two ornament to the tree:
BRANCH



ACTIVITY

Go into your yard and see if you can find a tree or tree stump where a branch is shooting up from the roots. Take a picture of your family with the tree and branch and post it to #bwayadvent so we can see your find! If it's at your home or not on someone's private property, carve "Jesus is The Branch" into the tree!

Day Three: Nov. 28 | Micah 5:2, 4-5

HOPE FOR A TRUE LEADER

“

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

- John Maxwell

What we wouldn't give to have a leader we 100% admire and desire to follow. We all want leaders who creates confidence, who care about those they lead, who live up to what they say. When we slow down enough to let our mind wrap around all Jesus is (our Lord, Savior, Bridegroom, Creator), we may find a certain feature of His character, one of His greatest roles, can be gravely diminished: King and Ruler. But at Christmas, that specific feature whirls around us in vivid and expansive ways. A ruler has come who we can trust. He is both powerful and compassionate.

The prophecy in Micah 5 is inspiring in its promise of a messianic ruler out of Bethlehem. It is even more inspiring when you look into the context of this prophesy. At the time Micah was writing, recent leaders had all failed (read Micah 2-3). Line after line reeks of leaders who are unjust, demanding, or driven by power. But Jesus came forth from that ancient foundation, bringing us past a millennia of imperfect and damaging leaders, into a place of trust in the majestic strength of our Lord. That is someone we can and will follow.

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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?
Watch The Bible Project <http://tinyurl.com/BPMicah>*

Day Three: Nov. 28
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:

Jesus is a special and powerful leader. He is extremely good and His leadership comes from a long long long time ago! Sometimes adults can be great leaders and sometimes they can mess up. They can do stuff for themselves and not the ones they leading. Christmas tells us that Jesus is the best leader who will never mess up. He is a leader we can trust. He loves to guide us and loves it when we trust Him.

If you can picture it, following Jesus is like getting on a tandem (two-person) bike, where Jesus is in the front. He wants us to pedal fast and go with Him, even though we cannot see and are not steering. He wants us to not be afraid and to trust where He is taking us. Even adults are still learning these things! But, we can trust and not be afraid because He is a special and powerful leader. Let's follow Him!

Add the day three ornament to the tree:
CROWN



ACTIVITY

Choose a family member to be "leader" for the day or the next day. You are playing a form of Simon Says, but not action by action. Have the leader select three special things the family will do together today or in the next few days.

Day Four: Nov. 29 | Mark 1:1-3; Luke 1:14-17

HOPE PREPARING THE WAY

“

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

Something wonderful is coming. Say it out loud: “Something wonderful is coming.” Now imagine someone of high standing, who you greatly respect, said this. Would you believe it even more? Our ability to believe such an expression often depends on the person saying it. A person’s demeanor, charisma, authority, or trustworthiness can all affect their believability.

Imagine a man speaking with ferocity and great zeal in his eyes. You sense something powerful, he has a dynamic connection with God’s ways and authority. He tells you to expect great things. He speaks of the great road the Almighty King will come down. Things will change and you are along that road. Then his eyes lock with yours and he asks a simple and yet off-putting question: “Are you ready?” Are we? We expect great things, but we wonder what will change in us.

The Lord has come and is present today to us. If the presence of the angel was an awesome thing, causing Zechariah’s immense fear, how much greater is a visitation from the Lord Himself! He is renewing our relationships. He is restoring our minds, He invites us along His way. Things are changing. And that change starts in us. Someone wonderful is coming. Are you ready?

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Look at Matthew 3:5-6 to see what we can glean from the first people who encountered such news. What will you do?

Day Four: Nov. 29

FAMILY GUIDE

Mark 1:1-3; Luke 1:14-17

John will be a great man for the Lord...He will bring those who are not obeying God back to the right way of thinking. He will make people ready for the coming of the Lord.

Read Aloud:

We get excited during Christmas, right? We look forward to eating yummy food, to getting up one morning and finding special items, and spending time with family and friends near and far. People sing, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” It is wonderful and special for those reasons and many more!

John the Baptist was more excited than we ever will be at Christmas. He told the people in Israel, and tells us, to expect great things. Things more exciting than food and presents and family and friends. He was excited because Jesus was coming and would change us! And we need change.

During these weeks, as we get ready for Christmas, let’s see what God is changing - let’s see how Christmas changes us.

Add the day four ornament to the tree:
ROAD SIGN



ACTIVITY

Without using your name, prepare a list of Christmas wishes (not presents!) and blessings you want for yourself during Christmas time. Take that list as a family, choose a wish and find a person outside of your family who you can make that wish or blessing happen for. Be creative!

Day Five: Nov. 30 | John 1:9

HOPE FOR THE LIGHT TO COME

“

Give light, and the darkness will disappear of itself. - **Desiderius Erasmus**

For those able to pull themselves out of bed early enough, a sunrise is an extraordinary sight. As the light of the sun pierces the darkness it escorts us out of night and into a new day bursting with possibility. 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 dwelling in deep darkness (See 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 journey through 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 feel like they need some brightness? Ask God to shine into them!

Day Five: Nov. 30
FAMILY GUIDE

John 1:9

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

YOUR LESSON IS YOUR ACTIVITY

Read Aloud:

Turn off all the lights in your house, indoor and outdoor. Ask you family: without light is it easy to move around? Send someone to go get something from the next room and time them. Is it easy to see who someone is if they came in the room? We need light!

What kinds of natural light has God given us? (Answers could include the sun, fire, candlelight, starlight, powered lights) But we missed one! Truth! God has given us truth of who He is and what He is doing to light up all people. He is the real light that will direct us and make things clear to us.

Now light a candle, and then turn on one string of Christmas lights, or your tree. Lights can look awesome and beautiful, and the Light that came into the world, Jesus, makes everything awesome and more beautiful. Run around and turn on every single light in the house! Even with all these lights, Jesus gives us light that is greater than any light show we will ever see.

Add the day five ornament to the tree:
LIGHT BULB



Day Six: Dec. 1 | Luke 2:25-33

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 expecting a front-row seat to a historic move of God? And when it finally came, in the person of 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. For instance, we live as Christ's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20-21), appointed representatives in the unique environments of our lives. Just as a homeland supports its ambassadors abroad, we act knowing we have the weight of heaven behind us. This infuses the most simple moments of life with incredible meaning.

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Today, remember you are an ambassador. Pay attention to what is happening for you never know what you might see; Jesus in your midst, changing the world.

Day Six: Dec. 1
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 and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the Temple, then Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God.

Read Aloud:

There can be special people or events in our life that we get real excited about. Who is someone we miss and would like to see soon? Where is some place we are excited to go?

Simeon was told by God he would get to see Jesus. What do you think he expected Jesus to look like? Maybe a strong man, a smart man, an old man like him, a glowing angel person, a king? When Simeon was at the Temple to worship God - God directed his eyes at a newborn baby! Can you imagine Mary and Joseph having a strange old man come up excited to hold and see their baby? To talk about Him and praise God? I don't think Simeon was surprised or asked much, he was so thankful to see the One who would change everything. Let's try this week to be excited about Jesus so that others wonder why He is such a big deal to us!

Add the day six ornament to the tree:
OLD MAN HOLDING A BABY



ACTIVITY

As a family, create a journal page of what Simeon would have written about his meeting of baby Jesus on that day. Have each person in the family contribute a line or two and put it up on the fridge or another visible place!

Day Seven: Dec. 2 | 1 John 4:2

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 in power, 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." (Hebrews 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.

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Take a moment today and stir on the humanity of Jesus. Consider your own limitations, frustrations, and pain and find comfort in the truth that Jesus sees you and He knows what you're going through. Consider what God's outrageous coming at Christmas reveals about who He is. Such reflection will lead you to real hope.

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" - Romans 8:32

Day Seven: Dec. 2
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 craziest and best parts about Jesus Christ is that He is *God in a Bod!* God came down and was born just like us. He was very real with skin, muscles, bones, blood and all! He got hungry, tired and felt pain. He smiled, cried, drew pictures and sang songs.

Jesus being God is mysterious but very important. His best friend, John, tells us that God's Spirit guides us to see this and believe it. It is important because Jesus is more than a good person or a wise person, a teacher or a miracle worker. He is *God in a Bod!* It is because He is God that Jesus is able to save us with the power and the love of God. He could have snatched us up from earth, but He came to earth and saved us. This special truth makes Christmas not just a church thing, but it is part of our everyday stuff - snacks, school, messes, normal people and life.

Add the day seven ornament to the tree:
EARTH



ACTIVITY

As a family, come up with a creative version of the nativity scene. Use Legos, dolls, figurines, whatever! Draw or cut out a character and put them together. Be creative! (Look up Coca Cola Nativity on Google to see an amusing example!) Post a picture of this with #bwayadvent so we can enjoy your Christmas creativity!

week two

PEACE

"And when the Lord Jesus has become your peace, remember, there is another thing: good will towards men. Do not try to keep Christmas without good will towards men." - **Charles Spurgeon**

Peace moves us far beyond our personal world and into the lives of all others around us. Allow this week's reflections to direct your eyes outside of your own life into the sphere of others. Receive peace and bring peace!

Day Eight: Dec. 3 | Isaiah 9:6-7

A CHILD LIKE NO OTHER

“

Stop monitoring things you left in God's hands.

- Unknown

God is passionate about seeing you reach your destiny and He wants you to experience a peace you can barely fathom. Jesus steps into his role as a Royal Son and becomes all we need. We can receive the promises of what such a King will bring: peace greater than financial security, greater than feast over famine, greater than our personal value to others. He brings us what we need, and His titles in Isaiah set a vision for us, He is a:

- 1. *Wonder-Working Planner*** - Effectively designing and wisely implementing the purposes of your life.
- 2. *Mighty God*** - A champion whose power means all is possible and that he is unbeatable.
- 3. *Everlasting Father*** - The enduring One who has raised up His own children. Even when we run away, He pursues us, receives us and carries us, forever.
- 4. *Prince of Peace*** - A commander who ends all chaos and conflict that is spinning around in our lives, bringing completeness in all corners.

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Which of these promises do you need present right now in your life? If things seem solid and complete presently, how can you model these realities to others you see waning in this?

Listen to Hillsong United's "Prince of Peace"
<http://tinyurl.com/hillsongpeace>

Day Eight: Dec. 3
FAMILY GUIDE

Isaiah 9:6-7

*A child will be born to us. God will give a son to us.
He will be responsible for leading the people.
His name will be Wonder working planner, Powerful God,
Father who lives forever, Prince of Peace.
Power and peace will be in his kingdom.
It will continue to grow.*

Read Aloud:

As we grow up we take a lot of tests. Sometimes the tests tell us what we're good at, and what we could do when we're older. God told us what His Son would be, what He would be good at and why that's super helpful for us!

Imagine a baby onesie with these words from Isaiah written across it. All these words tell us how much purpose, power, commitment and peace He brings.

During Christmas, we want to see Jesus as more than a cute baby in a manger who later rescues us at the cross. He shows us how to live life everyday.

Add the day eight ornament to the tree:
BABY ONESIE



ACTIVITY

Grab or purchase a blank baby onesie, child's shirt or adult shirt and write the names from today's verse on it with markers (permanent marker works best). Put the shirt on a doll or stuffed animal and place it at your tree or somewhere visible, so that, as your family sees it each day you will see the names and be reminded of all that Jesus is and will be for us!

Day Nine: Dec. 4 | Luke 1:26-35

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**

When the time came for God to send His messenger to speak to Mary, the Bible tells us she was “greatly troubled” and could not discern the meaning of his greeting. We know his greeting was affirming. He called Mary, “God’s favored one” and encouraged her by saying, “the Lord is with you!” But she didn’t feel that way. She felt fear. Enough fear that Gabriel replied, “Do not be afraid.” He was there to describe God’s plan for her to bear Jesus as her son.

We are called to use the gifts and abilities God’s given us. When we reach into the lives and world around us, we often respond with fear. It seems too big. Mary had mused, “How will this be, since I am virgin?” A logical query actually. The angels reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” The call to do something great for God, comes *from God*. It is He who will empower us and cause it to pass. “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love and of a sound mind.” (2 Tim. 1:7). He loves us and is with us! Do not be afraid.

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Why is it that we naturally default towards fear of the things God might be calling to? How can we overcome those fears to live into our purpose?

Day Nine: Dec. 4
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:

Sometimes we ask our kids, "Who made you so funny? strong? smart? They may reply, "You, Daddy," or, "You, Mommy." When they say this we can remind them that parents are a big part of their life but God created them with all these awesome features.

God is in the human-making business. And one of His greatest and most mysterious creations was Jesus. For He was a human and God! Jesus had existed in heaven forever, but God's Holy Spirit and power made this baby within Mary's tummy. Why is that special? The purpose of Jesus was to be God's perfect Son, a special choice made in love, so all of us could be near to God. Like Mary, we can be confused and fearfully amazed, but it all makes sense when we see all that Jesus did at the cross and rising from the dead!

Add the day nine ornament to the tree:
ANGEL



ACTIVITY

Record a 60-90 second video of a family member doing a pretend news interview of Mary after meeting the angel (played by a parent - have fun). Post it up or send to family friends with the hashtag #bwayadvent to remind them of the Christmas story!

Day Ten: Dec. 5 | John 14:27

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 frantic and fearful disciples 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 their hearts be troubled. The audacity of such a command serves to highlight the audacity of the peace Jesus offers. His peace is not like the peace we can find in the world. Worldly peace is all too often dependent upon circumstance. God's peace is the sort of peace that can thrive in the rocky soil of adversity.

As you look into your own heart this Christmas season, do you sense a lack of peace? Or, are you only 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 chased away in an instant with a phone call, a changed schedule, or a personal conflict. There is a greater, more durable, peace that can be yours.

?

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. 5
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:

When we hear the word “peace” it’s easy to think of “a piece of cake” (we think with our taste and our tummies a lot!) We wish having peace in life was a piece of cake, but it can be very hard. However, Jesus told us that He is leaving us a very special present, something we need more than our toys, electronics, clothes or trips. He gives us peace - His peace.

This is better than a present bought at a store. It’s something personal from God. It’s from within His house, and He knows we need it to help fill our hearts so we don’t feel empty, troubled, sad or confused. We want to ask for and look for His peace and happily share about it when we are experiencing it! Let’s pray for peace and ask that we can see it clearly everywhere and every day!

Add the day 10 ornament to the tree:
PEACE DOVE



ACTIVITY

Each person in your family has one thing that brings them peace - a blanket, stuffed animal, special cup of coffee, a comfy outfit - have everyone think about what it may be! Have everyone go get an item and share why it brings peace. During the week, whenever someone seems down or overwhelmed, go grab them their peace item (maybe yours too) and bring it to them, to show them you care!

Day Eleven: Dec. 6 | Matthew 1:18-25

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 at times. Such a command heightens our sense that there is, indeed, something around us worthy of fear.

And yet, 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. The messenger's first instruction is, “Do not fear.” Before the angel shared any other information, the angel told him to not be afraid. The angel knew that Joseph wouldn't be able to properly hear his message if he was listening with fear in his heart.

Fear does funny things to our decision-making capabilities. It skews our view of reality so we make decisions differently than we otherwise would. Often the difference is unfruitful. We are bombarded with reasons to be fearful, but it serves us to remember the angel's words repeated again and again to Joseph and others: “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.

?

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. 6
FAMILY GUIDE

Matthew 1:18-25

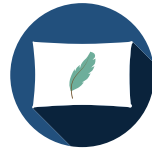
Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You will name the son Jesus. Give him that name because he will save his people from their sins.

Read Aloud:

There are many things that make us afraid. Some are things we think will hurt us - spiders or snakes (ah!). Some are things that leave us feeling trapped, like tight spaces. And some are more embarrassing, like speaking in front of lots of people! There are a lot of people who tell us, "Don't be afraid." God has said that to His people all throughout the Bible.

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 - even mommies and daddies keep learning this! We need to be brave not because we have everything under control, but because God most certainly does!

Add the day 11 ornament to the tree:
PILLOW



ACTIVITY

Have each family member do a drawing or painting of Joseph's encounter with the angel in a dream. Focus on what Joseph's face would have looked like, and write somewhere on the drawing a text bubble, "You will name the son Jesus." Have everyone explain why they drew it the way they did and hang the drawings in each other's rooms!

Day Twelve: Dec. 7 | Revelation 12:1-7

A NATIVITY SCENE IN HEAVEN

“

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

- Unknown

As we consider the various components of our nativity displays, we must realize one piece is missing: Satan. The Christmas story, with all its hope, peace, love and joy, takes place in the context of warfare. The ruler of this world sought to avert and resist God's wondrous work. Our text today paints a vivid picture of a dragon waiting to pounce on a child about to be born. A woman gives birth to a boy, who is to rule all the nations with a scepter of iron. The child is caught up to God and His throne. These images are meant to remind us, in an instant, of Jesus' Advent into the world, His ascension back to heaven, and the amazing story in between.

We can see the dragon's pounce with Herod's murder of children in Bethlehem, with Jesus' family in flight to Egypt, and later, with Jesus' temptation in the desert. Rev. 12:13 expresses that when the dragon sees he was beaten, he pursues the woman and makes war on her offspring. We can't erase the reality that Satan was waiting to take down God, and when that failed, his attention was redirected to those who claim His name, his followers. Yet this reality is overshadowed by the one who was born! Read Rev. 5:11-14, 7:17, and 12:11 for promises of what this child meant for victory and rescue!

?

Do you ever feel like something is battling for your focus? What can you do to remind yourself of Jesus' victory and authority over all resistance and warfare in your life?

Day Twelve: Dec. 7
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 is happening on the heavenly side of things! It shows us how the Devil wanted to beat God by stopping Jesus. But God's purposes were victorious in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus!

The Bible tells us the Devil was defeated already in heaven by Michael and his angels, and he was defeated on earth by the power of Jesus. Even as he goes and tries to battle with us (the Bible says he roars around like a lion), we have the victory of Jesus! The Bible tells us greater is He that is in you, than He that is in the world. So, at Christmas we can celebrate victory! God wins! We have Jesus near to us in any spiritual battle we find ourselves in!

Add the day 12 ornament to the tree:
CROSSED SWORDS



ACTIVITY

As a family, make military badges with titles and their abilities and roles (Captain, Admiral, Sergeant, Colonel, Private). Look the roles up online and explain the roles and experience needed for them. Talk about how you would work as a team on a mission. Help everyone understand they are on the winning team. Satan is already defeated—he has no power over them except what they allow.

Day Thirteen: Dec. 8 | Luke 1:67-80

PROPHECY OF PEACE: JESUS

“

The darker the night, the brighter the light.

- Levi Lusko

Redemption was coming. God's people had encountered many moments of trial, oppression, and downfall. They were waiting for the Most High to come and save them. They had turned into a people of fear and as they were oppressed by their cultural leaders. They were desperate for victory. They had forgotten 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 it is breathtaking. 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 come to pass. Darkness was going to be enveloped. 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.

?

What areas of life do you need our Heavenly Father to light up? What areas today do you need the Messiah to make the "sunrise?"

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

Day Thirteen: Dec. 8
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:

The Lord loves light. He loves brightening things up and shining into every corner of our world. It's fun to picture all the animals, plants, and humans coming out and opening up to the light God brings us every day. Even though our night has a purpose (to rest and refresh), God does not want us to live in darkness. If all we have is darkness, it leaves us sad, worn out, and even affects our bodies (no vitamin D!) He loves to light up our lives and that's what He was doing with Jesus!

God's light is there to help us and direct us - to keep us from getting lost or confused. John the Baptist would come before Jesus, excited to talk about this light that would shine. He was like someone showing fire or a flashlight to cavemen (If you've seen *Night at the Museum* you might recall that scene!) He knew it would move people into a life in the light of God!

Add the day 13 ornament to the tree:
SUN



ACTIVITY

Decide as a family to get up before sunrise tomorrow. Set your alarms, grab blankets and hot cocoa, coffee, or tea and be outside before dawn! Read the passage again! If this won't work, watch some time lapse sunrises online! Post family pics with the hashtag #bwayadvent.

Day Fourteen: Dec. 9 | Daniel 2:31-35; 44-45

GOD'S ETERNAL KINGDOM OF PEACE

“

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

In all our varying nations, states, cities, corporations, communities and private little worlds, we live surrounded by kingdoms. We have human kingdoms that appear secure and purposeful, when in reality, all of them are extremely fragile. When Daniel unlocks a Babylonian king's dream, he tells us something distinctive about Advent - it comes in like a wrecking ball. A rock crashes in, leveling kingdoms and becoming a great mountain. It is eternal and will never be destroyed.

So the Advent (coming) of Jesus, annually rams into our world of fragile kingdoms and reminds us that all these other things will, in some way, crumble. It is God's kingdom we need to set our hearts on, for He is the eternal, imperishable mountain. If this is true, and we believe it is, then we don't want Christmas to be dominated by the values of all these sub-kingdoms. We don't want corporations leading our holidays. We don't want personal preference lording itself over us. We want Jesus Christ to be glorified in our lives and His kingdom to come in its fullness.

?

Identify the top three kingdoms that are dominating your life currently. How can you celebrate the diminishing of other powers in your life and glorify Jesus more?

Day Fourteen: Dec. 9

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! We can skip them on a lake, toss some off a mountain cliff, or even play games like bowling or bocce ball (rock tossing games, technically!).

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 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 is that mountain crashing into the world and starting God's control. So this Christmas, we want to celebrate God's country, His leadership. For His power is growing and filling the earth!

Add the day 14 ornament to the tree:
MOUNTAIN



ACTIVITY

Grab three disposable paper lunch bags and put varying hard objects inside. Take turns having your family reach in and blindly feel, guessing what the items are. After everyone has guessed, tear open the bag and reveal its contents. Talk about which objects are the hardest!

week three

JOY

"Every day is like Christmas for us because Jesus is so good to us every day, but this time is extra special because He pours out His love in extra measure. We feel His love from loved ones, acquaintances, and even strangers. There's just something about Jesus' birthday that turns people's hearts and minds to peace and love and goodwill. It brings out the best in everyone because it brings Jesus out, and He's the best!"

– **David Brandt Berg**

Day Fifteen: Dec. 10 | Luke 1:39-45

PROPHECY OF PEACE: JESUS

“

Joy is a decision, a really brave one, of how we are going to respond to Jesus in this life.

- Wess Stafford

Has someone ever said to you, “I knew you when you were a baby?” How did you respond? Imagine two moms sharing the story of their two babies, key characters in the gospel, meeting significantly and symbolically via their mothers. The Spirit of God interprets the encounter for us. We learn it’s a joyful reception, a pre-emptive celebration by John the Baptist of what God was doing in Jesus.

The passage never tells us how Elizabeth knew Mary was pregnant, allowing the mystery to be an inspiration of how exciting this really was going to be for everyone. So picture a baby, John, in the womb, joyfully squirming and bouncing. The mere awareness of Jesus’ presence and blessing was near. Imagine your hands on Elizabeth’s tummy, feeling it with her and seeing the expression on her face. Like Mary and Elizabeth, we are amazingly in the center of these astounding Advent events and can share in the excitement!

Today, we can have joy, always aware of Jesus’ blessing - He is near! We can have the humility Mary displayed, recognizing the access we have to God’s work in the details of our lives. We can let Christmas be joyful, not because of our circumstances, but because Jesus is near in them! Let us leap in joy!

?

When was the last time you leapt, shouted or danced in joy? What keeps you from doing that freely without shame or fear of others?

Day Fifteen: Dec. 10
FAMILY GUIDE

Luke 1:39-45

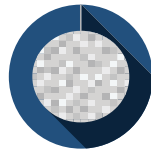
When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the unborn baby inside Elizabeth jumped. Then Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said: God has blessed the baby which you will give birth to. When I heard your voice, the baby inside me jumped with joy. You are blessed because you believed what the Lord said to you would really happen.

Read Aloud:

The Bible gives us pictures of creation responding to the Lord. Mountains leap, rocks cry out, and humans dance around. This started when Jesus was growing in Mary's tummy. We have the story of John, also growing in his mom's tummy, sensing God's Son was near and beginning to bounce and move all around. His mom, Elizabeth, spoke by the Spirit and praised what God was doing with this baby. Mary listened and trusted that it would happen.

There are many cute and fun Christmas stories of kids dancing, excited for parties and presents. This story reminds us of the bubbling joy we can have merely hearing about Jesus, or being near to anyone trusting what God is up to. Let's jump with joy over Jesus!

Add the day 15 ornament to the tree:
DANCING



ACTIVITY

Today is a good day to dance and move with your family. Clear out some space. Put on some comfortable clothes, pick out some joyful music and start talking about what God is doing that makes us joyful. As each person shares, dance and jump around for a few seconds or more!

Day Sixteen: Dec. 11 | Luke 1:46-55

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

Christmas brings out a number of words we rarely use. One example is the word “rejoice!” It’s one of those “Bible” terms rightly associated with the responses to John the Baptist’s birth and Jesus’ coming. It urges us to be exceedingly glad, allowing joy to overflow and go beyond us. It demands joy to have a deep well for us to draw from, both from the past and in the present.

Mary sings from such a well, looking at great things the Mighty One is doing with her in the present, and looking backwards to what God has done a thousand times over. The song weaves together the love, mercy and loyalty of God expressed in His powerful redemption and justice. It’s completion comes in Jesus’ arrival. She reminds us why we can praise out of deep gladness. We possess the ability, in Jesus, to be in proper relationship with the Lord and we experience this in the everyday affairs of life.

So we rejoice out of memory, looking back across our life. We rejoice out of expectation, looking forward to what God is still bound to do. He is active and involved with our families, colleagues, friends and our world. Let’s reflect on how exceedingly glad we are to others. Let’s use the term “rejoice” and tell people about the well of our joy.

?

Post thoughts, send a text or write a message to someone about the events from your past that make you rejoice. Express what you look forward to seeing God do, in you and for others!

Day Sixteen: Dec. 11
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. Think of your favorite books and movies and their special storylines. We all have a special story too, a story of the amazing things God is doing around us. Mary sang a song about God's story in her life and she knew the story went far beyond her. Many others were moved by God's story, and many more would be moved by His new story in her and the birth of the Son of God.

Wherever you are in your story, God is worth praising. When we're young, we can learn from those older than us. We can hear their stories and praise God. We can watch our story open up and tell our stories as we get older and praise God. No matter when or where we are, let us all praise God!

Add the day 16 ornament to the tree:
MICROPHONE



ACTIVITY

Today is a great day to sing Christmas carols: face off style! Divide your family into two groups. Take turns singing carols. You have ten seconds to pick a song and sing for ten seconds. Then the others pick a different song and sing. Go back and forth until one team runs out of songs or time! Have fun and praise God!

Day Seventeen: Dec. 12 | Luke 2:8-20

SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS REJOICE

“

Joy, not grit, is the hallmark of holy obedience. We need to be light-hearted in what we do to avoid taking ourselves too seriously. It is a cheerful revolt against self and pride.

- Richard J. Foster

Have you ever had a work day that was unforgettable? Maybe the day included a memorable interaction with a client, hitting a major deadline, nailing a massive presentation, or experiencing 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, or years.

It is safe to say that the shepherds in Luke had such an unforgettable day. They were doing what they did every other night: watching sheep. Then, in an instant, heaven plunged into their midst with an announcement of Israel's long-awaited Savior. The news from the angels set off a whirlwind of activity as the awestruck shepherds darted off to go see this eternity-changing baby. 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 Advent is a bit less visceral than that of the shepherds. We don't experience heavenly beings or look upon a family stunned by God's mercy. But the magnitude of Advent is good news of great joy for us, just as it was for them. We simply cannot afford to let the story of Christmas become routine. Instead, we need to reclaim the sort of raw joy the shepherds felt at the announcement of Jesus' birth. After all, His birth is still good news of great joy!

?

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. 12

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 to and hear from one would be awesome. It's not really what they look or sound like (bright light would get our attention), but it's what they say. Angels are messengers, so we can be pretty sure whatever they say to us is directly from the Lord.

In this story, an angel tells late night shepherds good news that the coming Savior is born! Then there were a lot of angels singing, "Worship God above and have peace down here with each other!" They went and found the baby in a manger and everyone was amazed. Their amazement didn't come from seeing the angels. It came from who they found in Bethlehem: Jesus. Knowing Jesus was the best thing! And it still is.

Add the day 17 ornament to the tree:
SHEEP



ACTIVITY

If you have a clear garage floor, driveway or apartment parking lot (and it's dry), go grab chalk and make chalk angels out of each of your family member's bodies. Write the song the angels sang next to it! Snap a photo and post (#bwayadvent) or send to family and friends.

Day Eighteen: Dec. 13 | Hebrews 1:1-9

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. Read the text again, especially noting verses three and six. In Hebrews 1:9, 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 reality of His Advent, we can rejoice that the One who came became like us, even though He was not like us.

The joy of Christmas is rooted in this great act of humility and love. During this season we rightly place most of our focus on the humanity of Jesus. May we let God’s great act of humility draw us to greater worship and thankfulness.

?

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. 13

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 how joyful and thankful we can be. 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 and Joseph and shepherds and angels. They all were getting excited, feeling incredible peace and amazing joy.

Just as a parent loves watching their kids' reaction to fun and special moments and blessings, God loves seeing us full and joyful, the way He created us to be. John Piper has said it this way, "God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied (happy) in Him." We want to think about the smile and joy of Jesus, how glad He is to see our lives changed by what He did in coming to the world! Let's be happy and enjoy this day not just because of how we feel, but because God is happy!

Add the day 18 ornament to the tree:

SMILE



ACTIVITY

Make an acronym (example: JIM - Joyful, Invested, Merry) out of each family member's name and use the letters to describe how they bring joy to the family. Be creative! Put these up on everyone's bedroom door!

Day Nineteen: Dec. 14 | Matthew 2:1-2, 10-11

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

The salvation of our King is open to the entire world and the Lord drew the world to come in and see. The magi in Matthew were the first non-Jews to witness the Lord dwelling among men. It is an intriguing fact that early Christian art (250 A.D.) highlighted the magi more than any other portion of the Christmas story. The gospels themselves give no names, or number (some believe it could have been 300), but because three gifts were given three magi are often depicted. Psalm 72 aligns the gifts with kings bearing them.

What is clear is that a star bursting with meaning got the attention of Persian astronomers (maybe reading Balaam's oracle of a rising star from Judah, Num. 24:17) and these pagan specialists journeyed to One they believed to be greater than anything they knew, both human and divine, mortal and eternal. What did their encounter with the coming King mean to them? What effect did it have in their lives beyond the moment? Some wonder whether they renounced their idolatry, or whether their dream to return by another route meant a spiritual return to the Lord. One thing we do know, they were overjoyed and their story was recorded.

?

What is the meaning of Jesus coming to you? Has it actually changed you and reshaped your values? What things is God using to get your attention and draw you into encountering Him?

Day Nineteen: Dec. 14

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:

They heard He was coming. Who did? Men from the Middle East who studied really old writings. They may have read something from Daniel who worked in their area 500 years before Jesus, or Balaam (friend of talking donkeys), who had written things even longer ago about a coming King. And they all came, maybe more than three, looking for someone. A star stood out to them, and they kept following it and found Jesus.

It doesn't matter when or how they came. What matters is what they did when they got there. They were already joyful but that joy led them to bow down and worship Jesus. He was someone greater than anything they had known. They were honored to find Him and left changed forever.

Add the day 19 ornament to the tree:
STARS



ACTIVITY

After going over the lesson on the star the magi saw, go to <http://tinyurl.com/hubblecoolstars> to see 25 different illuminating pictures of starry things in space. Have your kids pick which one they think would be the best to print and put over your nativity set.

Day Twenty: Dec. 15 | Philippians 2:4-11

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 to buy, where to go, what to say at this time of the year (I'm busy, excited, tired, frustrated), and how many calories to consume. As we have stirred on the Christmas story, it's good for us to remember that Jesus' descent came with a choice. As it says in this passage, He didn't want to take advantage of the fact He was God, but He loved us so much that He “emptied” Himself and took the form of a little baby. In a moment He went from being Almighty God, to a small, weak, vulnerable baby boy in a manger. He went from being the most powerful being in the universe to voluntarily humbling Himself and setting aside His power. Even in that moment, He was fully God.

He then took a step further and died on the cross, equaling Himself to the worst of people in those days. Being crucified was only for the worst of people: thieves, murderers and insurrectionists. Nothing was going to stop Him from giving up His life - because it was for us. He has finished what He came down to do and His name has become the most powerful name ever. It is the name we bow down and surrender to.

?

What is something that has required you to be humble in your own life? Are you taking advantage of that opportunity, or just letting it go by? Remember, if God can humble Himself to be with you, then you can humble yourself to show His love with others.

Day Twenty: Dec. 15
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 SEALs, 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 and was trying to show them he *was* one of them. He stayed there until their eyes would meet with his and then whispered he was one of them and here to rescue them. Would they come? He stood up, and one prisoner, then two, then all of them left and all of them ended up safe back home.

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

Add the day 20 ornament to the tree:
HUG



ACTIVITY

Here are some hug ideas for your family for the next week. Do this with each other or stretch yourself and go out and do this for others. Surprise Hug - Sneak up from behind, Hurricane Hug - Group hug and spin, Make it Better Hug - Gentle when it hurts, Bear Hug - Squeeze hard!

Day Twenty One: Dec. 16 | Galatians 4:4-5

ABSOLUTELY PERFECT TIMING

“

Take Christ out of Christmas, and December becomes the bleakest and most colorless month of the year.

- A.F. Wells

It's easy to look at things invented and marketed in our culture and question their actual purpose. Some seem lame and frivolous. Maybe we get too focused on usefulness, but Scripture has shaped us to consider purpose in all regards: the purpose of our “stuff”, our purpose and God's purpose. We all know Christmas has a profound purpose. On the spot, what do you think it is? How would you put Christmas in a few words?

Paul tells the Galatians his outlook on the Advent of Jesus, and his term for its purpose is “Sonship”. Jesus redeems us from the slavery of the law and we get the honor of knowing God as Father, and are known by Him. Paul focuses us on the sending of Jesus, but likewise speaks of the sending of the Spirit that enters us into this intimate child-father dynamic (crying Abba, Daddy!). Isn't it marvelous that the Lord Jesus experienced this child-parent relationship while also unearthing the spiritual experience of Sonship?

Paul looks at all this and rejoices in its timing (that happened in the fullness of time). One period has passed and it was like a cup filled to the brim. Now we enjoy a season drinking in this spiritual encounter and transformation like no other. Advent is about a newborn Son, but its purpose was our adoption!

If we are known by God and are His heirs, what does that mean for your purpose and how will you live that out today?

?

Day Twenty One: Dec. 16

FAMILY GUIDE

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the right time came, God sent his Son. His Son was born of a woman and lived under the law. God did this so that he could buy freedom for those who were under the law. His purpose was to make us his children.

Read Aloud:

God sent Himself at the right time, as a child, to make us all His children. He adopted us. Do we know what adoption is? Even though we grow up and look ahead to all we can do as adults, being a kid who is free and cared for is one of the best things we experience. We will grow up and learn a lot, and experience a lot, but that won't change who we belong to. Knowing we belong to God will make us love God even more!

Because we are His kids first, we are not trapped by rules or goals. We can know God and He knows us. He is not a stranger. We can use special names with Him, like Daddy, or Papa. Because we have this relationship as kids, we get to live in His house and follow His ways. What a special honor!

Add the day 21 ornament to the tree:
BABY FOOTPRINTS



ACTIVITY

As a family, "adopt" a person who is a part of your family's life. Someone in your day-to-day who gets overlooked. It could be a mail person, garbage person, school janitor, secretary, grocery store bagger, or anyone else. Do something kind for them, letting them know they are special, like an adopted member of your family, and you are thankful for them.

week four

LOVE

Love appropriately frames the beautiful pictures we gaze into during the Advent season. It amplifies God's love for His creation and aligns our vision on the One that we seek to love with all our heart, soul and strength. We are equipped to love because He first loved us.

Day Twenty Two: Dec. 17 | Psalm 89:1-4

THIS IS MY LOVE SONG

“

How can I stand here with you and not be moved by you?

- Lifehouse

The Psalms look at our world and its expressions from many distinct angles. They take terms like “love” and “loyalty” and illustrate them in vivid ways. The words it uses are words we feel and see, not just define and categorize. Psalm 89 speaks of the Lord’s loyalty to the Davidic Messiah, that His kingdom, established in love, would continue forever. It’s as if we are there with the writer, and we can see him looking up to the skies with his head aimed to the left. We follow his gaze as he scans from left to right, watching the sky rolling on and on. This is what we see, God’s loyalty and love rolling on and on.

This song of Psalm 89 becomes ours at Advent, when we reflect on God’s love that is refreshed in the royal line of David. People are looking for love (just listen to the radio for a short while). But love was fully realized when Jesus was born into this world. Now our song changes, our world is recentered, and we can look across the skies and see God’s same loyal love rolling on and on.

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Every time you hear a love song this week, get to a window and look out across the sky - the sky is God’s love song to you this Christmas! And we can sing of His love now forever.

Day Twenty Two: Dec. 17

FAMILY GUIDE

Psalm 89:1-4

I will always sing about the Lord's love.

I will tell of his loyalty from now on.

I will say, "Your love continues forever.

Your loyalty goes on and on like the sky.

Read Aloud:

Our spirits are wired to hear and connect with music. We are drawn to beautiful sounds, to rhythms and the power of special words within songs. Our whole brain gets active when we sing and dance to the songs we hear. It sparks our memory! Think of all the songs we can't get out of our head! God loves songs as well, and He inspired many people to write songs for Him and about Him.

One song, Psalm 89, actually hints at Christmas, telling us that God will stay true to His promise of a ruler from David's family to come. God will love Him in a special way! That's Jesus! It tells us God's love keeps going and going and uses a picture of how far our sky goes when we look at it. Just like the sky rolls on and on as far as our eyes can see, God's loyal love stretches farther than we can imagine! We get to celebrate that love at Christmas as Jesus is that loyal love who we can meet and have relationship with!

Add the day 22 ornament to the tree:

SKY



ACTIVITY

Today we are making a special s'mores treat. You will need mini marshmallows, graham crackers and chocolate. Put chocolate on a full graham cracker (this is your night sky), and spell out L-o-v-e with the marshmallows on the chocolate. Heat it in an oven or microwave and take pictures of your family making and eating them together.

Day Twenty Three: Dec. 18 | Zephaniah 3:15-17

GOD WITH US, ON REPEAT

“

We make a god out of whatever we find most joy in. So find your joy in God and be done with all idolatry.

- John Piper

We become so familiar with the common clichés at Christmas, both secular and religious, and we easily overlook the building repetition of the promises of Advent. We know the name *Immanuel*, God with Us, but the reality is repeated beyond the one Hebrew term itself. The expectation for God's presence was electric among the prophets. There was a deep thirst for His presence to be in their midst the way it was with the Tabernacle and then in the Temple. Yet, God's presence departed from the Temple in Ezekiel.

So the Lord Jesus came and is now in our midst. He had promised his nearness, that His presence would return, and Zeph. 3:17 tells us the impact His coming would mean for us.

- He will be seen as the mighty One, who will save.
- He will rejoice over us in gladness.
- He will quiet us by his love.
- He will exult over us with loud singing .

Rescue, celebration and peace in our lives; aren't these the things we sing about, strive to live out and wish for at Christmas?

?

As you continue preparing for Christmas, consider the reality that the Lord Himself rejoices and parties over the power of what He did. He loves it because He loves you!

Day Twenty Three: Dec. 18

FAMILY GUIDE

Zephaniah 3:15-17

*But God said this about his Son: The Lord your God is with you. The mighty One will save you.
The Lord will be happy with you. You will rest in his love.
He will sing and be joyful about you.*

Read Aloud:

I'm sure you like parties. Most people do! Birthday parties, costume parties, team celebrations and more! Although we may focus a lot on them, it's not the sweet treats, decorations and games that make a party. Parties are special because of the person or event we're happy about.

What makes Christmas so amazing and special is we get excited about Jesus. We throw a party for His coming. Yes, we enjoy the decorations, food and presents, but we get to look for ways to make Jesus happy and feel special.

God himself gets happy at Christmas, He sings and is full of joy because of His Son's birthday. We all are rescued and get to really experience His peace. He loves that because He loves you! What do you think Christmas parties look like in Heaven!?

Add the day 23 ornament to the tree:
BIRTHDAY CAKE



ACTIVITY

Tonight, have a special dessert with your family, whether you make your own or go out to somewhere special. Look at it as God treating you to dessert to celebrate how happy He is for His work in your family!

Day Twenty Four: Dec. 19 | 1 John 4:9-10

LIVING IN GOD'S LOVE

“

I want you to be happy, but more importantly I want you to seek wisdom...to be so full of self-respect that you cannot but respect others...to be so self-confident that you breed self-confidence to others...to elevate yourselves by uplifting others and love yourselves by being of service to others. I beseech you to bear your cross in life with faith, courage, and compassion.

- Cornel West

The arrival of Jesus onto the earth provided the answer to what needed to be appeased. We were in need, and Jesus fulfilled this need by the ultimate demonstration of love that served. There could be no greater act of love. All of humanity lacked any capability of presenting love towards God or one another. Our nature maintained a propensity of self-serving, self-dependency and self-sufficiency. Yet, the Father, knowing the greater purpose for our lives, revealed His love through Jesus. He came to display His lovingkindness towards all people, regardless of their ethnicity, culture, or gender. We were all marginalized by sin and shame. Yet, He came to us to serve us in our despair.

Jesus took our place in our brokenness that we might experience the wholeness of relationship with God and one another. His love has lifted us to empowerment and confidence. As imitators of Him, let us move intentionally into a posture of unbridled service towards all. We must be bold in our action, empathetic in our posture, sacrificial in our personal stance, and firm in our belief that we are the hands and feet of our Lord.

What can we do today to demonstrate Christ's presence and His unbridled heart of service towards another person today?

?

Day Twenty Four: Dec. 19

FAMILY GUIDE

1 John 4:9-10

This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his only Son into the world to give us life through him. True love is God's love for us, not our love for God. God sent his Son to die in our place to take away our sins.

Read Aloud:

God created our bodies to do amazing things. Our brain sends signals across our whole body, our ears pick up sound waves, our nose detects smells, and our heart pumps fresh blood to all parts of our body to keep it healthy and strong. God created these bodies and He keeps them running.

But what gives us life is the breath of God. His Spirit energizes us and reminds us that life is powerful and purposeful because of God's love. Jesus came at Christmas to help us see how far God would go to show us that love. As Jesus experienced life, death and resurrection, we fully receive that life from Him. Feel your chest right now. Every pump of your heart, every beat, is a physical reminder of what God is doing inside your spirit! We have life in Jesus!

Add the day 24 ornament to the tree:
HEART



ACTIVITY

Today is a day to serve. It is a day to take what we hear and put feet to it. Brainstorm as a family one way to love on a neighbor, to seek their good and welfare. What is something we can do that they need done? Maybe it's words of affirmation. If so, make a unique Christmas card. Maybe it's providing some groceries, or raking up leaves, or bringing someone soup. How can we uplift their spirits and be life to others?

Day Twenty Five: Dec. 20 | 1 Timothy 1:15

JESUS CAME TO SAVE

“

We sinned for no reason but an incomprehensible lack of love, and He saved us for no reason but an incomprehensible excess of love.

- Peter Kreeft

It is generally recognized that Jesus came to teach, lead, perform miracles, and speak about the Kingdom. All of these sub-missions were in service of His greatest mission: to save. His mission is a stark reminder that we are people who need saving. We are sinners by nature and choice, who in ways small and large have sought wholeness and satisfaction apart from our Heavenly Father.

It is extraordinary to consider that God responded to this cosmic treason not with condemnation, but grace. Instead of casting us away, God dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ. And in His incarnation He came with a message of salvation, not rejection (John 3:16-17), a message of forgiveness, not punishment. Because Jesus came to save, we do not need to live in denial of our sin. We can readily admit our brokenness, knowing there is One who longs to forgive us and make us whole.

?

Take a moment today and consider the brokenness in your life and heart. This may be a painful process, but as you take this honest look, remember the beautiful truth that Jesus came to save, not condemn. Because Jesus saves, we can confess our sin with the promise of forgiveness (1 John 1:9). This confession begins to break the power of sin, and is the first step to walking in the wholeness Jesus wants to give us.

Day Twenty Five: Dec. 20

FAMILY GUIDE

1 Timothy 1:15

*What I say is true, and you should fully accept it:
Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

Read Aloud:

Faith is a funny thing. It can mean believe, trust and commitment all at the same time. Christmas is many things to us and faith can be a very big part. We believe our time will be special and trust it will leave us full of good and happy feelings. But faith in those things does not mean they will come. Our faith is in someone greater: Jesus! We have faith that what happened was true and we trust that He can do what we never can, that He will save us and complete us. The song below can help us remember the story we are committed to.

Add the day 25 ornament to the tree:
BIBLE



ACTIVITY

For today's activity you will need a bag of M&M's. Divide them equally to your family and walk through this song having everyone look at their M&M's and follow the directions as you read.

*As we hold these candies in our hand,
and turn them we will see
The M becomes a W, an E and then a 3
They tell the Christmas story, It's one I'm sure you know
It took place in a stable, a long, long time ago
The E is for the East, where the star shone so bright
The M is for the manger, where Baby Jesus slept that night
The 3 is for the wisemen, bearing gifts they say they came
W is for Worship; Hallelujah, praise His Name
So as you eat these candies or share them with a friend
Remember the point of Christmas, a love story that never ends*

Day Twenty Six: Dec. 21 | Galatians 2:20-21

A LOVE THAT STAYS



Christmas is based on an exchange of gifts. The gift of God to man – His unspeakable gift of His Son. And the gift of man to God – when we present our bodies a living sacrifice.

- Vance Havner

The New Testament describes life in Christ as a life that comes out of death. In 1 Peter 2:24, it says that Jesus suffered so we might, “die to sin and live to righteousness.” This violent, visceral terminology is meant to highlight the deep change the Holy Spirit desires for our hearts. A life of faith is not mere change of some behaviors. It is death to our old way of thinking and living, and an embrace of new life.

The Apostle Paul used similar language saying that he had, “been crucified with Christ.” This was the start of a new life of faith, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Jesus longs to give us not simply moments of inspiration, but *a whole, new life*. He wants to so capture our hearts that we are able to live distinctively in each moment as we are guided by His love and grace. In short, He is committed to our complete transformation.



As you look at your life, you can see glimpses of God’s work. You may have moments of deep connection with Him, or moments to serve Him in tangible ways. But, you probably see plenty of evidence of the old you. Moments ruled by selfishness, anger, and emotions that remind us we still have a lot of room to grow. We need not despair. God won’t give up on us. Instead, He graciously invites us to continue to die to ourselves so that we can live for Him. What areas can you surrender today?

Day Twenty Six: Dec. 21

FAMILY GUIDE

Galatians 2:20-21

I do not live anymore—it is Christ living in me. I still live in my body, but I live by faith in the Son of God. He loved me and gave himself to save me. This gift is from God, and it is very important to me.

Read Aloud:

We receive a lot of “stuff” at Christmastime. Some of our presents will last for years and years (yeah!), some will fall apart in a day or a week (boo!). Some drain a battery and we will have to recharge them or buy more. We have bodies that will one day grow weak and fall apart. We spend a lot of time trying to make them last, but it’s what is inside of us that matters! The gift of Jesus goes inside of us and makes us a brand new person! We live with a “full charge” of Jesus, which means we can trust what He is doing within us, and let it grow in our lives.

Let’s look for and talk about how Jesus changes us on the inside and daily receive the gift of His love. Let’s watch as Jesus’ present lasts for years and years in us!

Add the day 26 ornament to the tree:

A PRESENT



ACTIVITY

Take some time as a family to wrap a present together. Agree on what size box, and which wrapping paper and what bows could go on it. Wrap this empty box, put your family’s name on it and put it with your other gifts. While you are opening gifts this year, pause and have your family open this one together. Give a prayer of thanks to the Lord for His gift of Jesus. Make this pause matter for your family because the gift surely does!

Day Twenty Seven: Dec. 22 | Titus 3:3-8

THEN LOVE APPEARED

“

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

- Brennan Manning

In his letter to 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 righteous works, but God's great mercy.

As we prepare to celebrate, we can do so knowing that Jesus represents God's goodness and lovingkindness. He is the personification of mercy and it is through His sacrifice that we are saved. Merciful love is a particularly powerful kind of love. 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 meting out just punishment, He sent Jesus to display His merciful features. Jesus then went to the cross to show us the radical depth of God's merciful love. We don't deserve this gift, but receive it gladly.

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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 full of pre-holiday gratitude as we consider the great mercy of our God? As we see the decorations, sing the songs and as we experience the sights and smells of the season, may they all remind us of the goodness and loving kindness of our merciful God.

Day Twenty Seven: Dec. 22

FAMILY GUIDE

Titus 3:3-8

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

Read Aloud:

Babies are an amazing and wonderful present. Even with the hard 9 1/2 months of them growing in a mommy's tummy, and how hard it is when they come out, the special moment of a baby able to be held, heard and seen is life changing. And a newborn changes parents' lives! Things get busy, and are very different. But families get excited and they display their child to all: It's a Boy! It's a Girl! And they share cute photos!

The moment Jesus came into the world is a moment when we can stop looking at how hard things are, stirring on the pain or delays we have in our lives. It is a moment when we stop, and see the life that changes our lives. God showed Himself to us in Jesus, His love and kindness in full. He wants us to display Jesus in the same way, excited that He changes our lives! Who will you tell today?

Add the day 27 ornament to the tree:
NEWBORN



ACTIVITY

If you are a family that has kids or grandkids, pull out photo albums or online pictures of your kids being born or newborn pictures (if you don't have kids pull out your baby pictures or look up pictures from someone who recently had kids). Talk about what a special time it was and how much it has changed or is changing your family.

Day Twenty Eight: Dec. 23 | John 3:16

GOD LOVED, GOD GAVE

“

Who can add to Christmas? The perfect motive is that God so loved the world. The perfect gift is that He gave His only Son. The only requirement is to believe in Him. The reward of faith is that you shall have everlasting life.

- Corrie Ten Boom

It is possible to look at Jesus and Christmas from a variety of angles. Because that is true, it is helpful to have a single simple truth to focus on. The reason for the season. The main point. We live with such an overload of information in our world, and so we value clear and catalytic concepts. The truth within John 3:16 has been, and continues to be, such a beautiful concept. It is gift expressing the meaning and generosity of God's love for us.

Although it feels cliché at times, there is a comparison between the gift of Jesus and our gift giving. God gives out of a deep well, and His gift is one of unprecedented power and magnitude. He gives a love large enough to cover the wickedness of not just one person, but that of billions and billions. And His gift is of utmost value, and His giving came at a cost.

His desire is not simply for us to hear or acknowledge His deliverance of a gift. He wants us to believe His gift will be something that transforms us completely. He desires for us to commit ourselves to the heart and power of the gift.

?

How can your gift giving and receiving experience reflect this reality of God's gift this year?

Day Twenty Eight: Dec. 23

FAMILY GUIDE

John 3:16

For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life.

Read Aloud:

Imagine this: Someone powerful providing gifts for all people worldwide in one swift motion! Someone that reaches deep down and never runs out of something to give. Someone that brings life and joy. I know we think Santa, but well before the story of Santa ever existed God was actively doing such things! God loves giving gifts but it is the one gift that mattered the most - His Son, Jesus.

The best gifts always come from someone who knows us best and loves us the most. God's power makes His gift of Jesus big enough to go across the whole world (even farther than Disney!) and still so personal and special for us all. He wants you to receive this gift, believing in what it will do for us. We want gifts that will be fun, not boring, exciting and special. His Son Jesus is the best and much more. It will change you from the inside out. What a gift!

Add the day 28 ornament to the tree:
CROSS



ACTIVITY

Time for some artwork! Grab some paper and art supplies (pens, markers, crayons, pastels, paints, etc.) and do some pictures of Jesus doing Christmas activities (ideas include Jesus pulling gifts out of a bag, Jesus serving the sad and hungry, Jesus embracing the earth, and other Christmas elements). Remind your family Jesus is a part of all of this because He is the gift!

Christmas Eve: 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

Even when we take time in advance to have everything lined out, set up, or planned to a “T”, it is possible to look back across our month and our year and see the messes, imperfections and areas that need improvement. It’s easy to believe that if we worked a little harder, had a little more funds or freed up more time, we would have accomplished everything we set out to do. Maybe then, we tell ourselves, peace and abundant joy would be present. Perhaps if I’d done things a bit better, we say, others would be impressed with how well I juggle my life. (maybe we would be impressed!)

As the season comes to its climax, it’s encouraging, in fact stabilizing, to recall that Jesus came down into the messes of our world. He did not charge into places of efficiency, stability or good impressions. He came to weakness, depletion and uncertainty.

So as you look around at Christmas - whether you are encouraged or discouraged, blessed or struggling, stretched or secure - know that the purpose of Jesus still stands. He came (Advent), He saved (the cross), and He is relentlessly pursuing our hearts. It’s not about you creating a sharp and perfect world. It’s about a perfect Creator sharpening and perfecting you!

?

What expectations from your past or present leave you feeling pressured to have things perfect in your life? Spend time tonight, before Christmas arrives, surrendering all things into His purpose! Wake up free tomorrow!

Christmas Eve: 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:

Some people say location is everything. Location, location, location. When we want to experience a special event or see something beautiful, there are specific places we will go: 49ers game, Disneyland, Lake Tahoe, Santa Cruz, etc. There may be beautiful and extremely fun places to go, but many of the most special places are messy, dirty and even boring. It is who you are with that makes a place memorable and wonderful.

Jesus was born in a side room cave for household animals. It was a messy, smelly place with furniture meant only for animals (not nice stuff!). He was put in a feeding box, a manger, made out of black rough basalt stone. It was still full of hay and maybe even animal slobber. God had come to this world, a messy place needing hope. He started in our mess.

Add the day 29 ornament to the tree:
MOTHER WITH BABY



ACTIVITY

Pick whose room is the messiest today and rather than focusing on it needing to be cleaned, do your family devotion there, noting that the place where Jesus was born was an ordinary, messy, stinky and yet powerful place where God showed up. Emphasize God shows up in every place - especially our rooms - clean or messy.

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!” (cf. Mt 1:23). Behold, indeed. Behold means, ‘Look here! Something amazing is happening!’ After 400 years of silence from the last Old Testament prophet to John the Baptist, up walks 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’s here!’ Have you encountered the risen Christ in your life?

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:

This has been a very busy and exciting time, but it is here, Christmas! We have been challenged over 29 days to think about Jesus and all the feelings and thoughts we have about life and where God fits into it. We have used words like *Hope, Peace, Joy* and *Love* to talk about Him. We have explored the stories and had memorable activities to remind us of those stories. And today is our final day to stop and say: *Our Savior Jesus was born. He is Christ, the Lord. He is the Word that gives life.*

The joy of Christmas is deep down - it's even better than what we are doing now with our hot drinks and meals, with our presents and pajamas, in our decorations and our twinkling lights. The joy is inside of us, and we explore all of this so our joy may be the biggest ever. We have joy not just because we see, taste or get great things. We have joy because God is a great God and did all this for us!

Add the final ornament to the tree:
MANGER



ACTIVITY

We hope your family has some meaningful traditions for Christmas day and that this has provided you with many more activities to keep your hearts centered on the reason we celebrate as Christians. If you have no specific tradition, consider spending time around a nativity scene, or picture and video of the Christmas story and worship together.



Bridgeway
CHRISTIAN CHURCH