



# LOVE IS HERE

*AN ADVENT GUIDE*

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by Sarah  
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## INTRODUCTION

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### Love Is Here

Have you ever felt that you've blown through yet another Christmas season without taking the time to seek the "withness" of the One who has promised His loving presence to all who seek Him?

It's all too easy to get sucked into the undertow of the mistletoe and miss the inspiration of the Incarnation. And even though we often heap guilt and shame on ourselves for getting too caught up in the trimmings, our Emmanuel continues to stand at the door eagerly awaiting our company—like a longing parent anticipating the return of a deeply missed child. And when we walk through the door, road weary, beaten down, and disoriented, we become entrenched in the undeniable reality that *Love Is Here*. This is where we long to be. This is where we find rest and restoration. This is where our hope is renewed. This is where we belong.

Sometimes all we need is a guiding hand to ease us back in. This is what Sarah Bourns Crosby offers us in this volume of Advent poems, passages, and prompts. Set aside some time each week to sit before your "God with you" as you reflect on these "withness" meditations. Resist the distractions. Resist the lies that tell you you may not be worthy to enter in. But don't resist the invitation back to where you truly belong.

Advent, from the Latin *adventus* meaning "coming," represents the period of preparation for the birth of our Emmanuel at Christmas—and also of preparation for His imminent return at the end of the age. Meanwhile, dwelling here in the in-between, we are assured of His presence among us as we linger in His love and extend it to those longing to know that *Love Is Here*.

Emmanuel. God be with you.

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**Sarah Bourns Crosby** writes poetry around themes of hope, waiting, lament, love, and God's faithfulness. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her husband, Paul, and twin sons. You can read more of her work at [sarahbournscrosby.com](http://sarahbournscrosby.com).

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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The Christian tradition of Advent is a season of both remembrance and looking ahead, of waiting and stillness. Advent spans the four weeks leading up to Christmas, and the passing of each week is represented by lighting a candle with a specific meaning each Sunday.

Week 1: Hope

Week 2: Peace

Week 3: Joy

Week 4: Love

A fifth and final candle—called the Christ candle—is lit on Christmas Eve. The light of these candles is symbolic of the light of Christ, which pushes back the darkness.

*“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. . . . For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*  
—Isaiah 9:2, 6

Each devotional includes an Old Testament and New Testament reading along with a Psalm. Additional passages are included for Christmas Eve. Every Sunday during Advent, and on Christmas Eve, meditate on the passages listed, ponder the poem by Sarah, and discuss or pray through the prompt. Whether you use this devotional guide over the dinner table, with a small group, or individually, we pray it will enrich your life in Christ this Advent season. For those who wait, wander, and weep, for those experiencing loss, longing, and love this Christmas—may you come to know afresh that He is with you.



*ADVENT WEEK ONE*  
**THE CANDLE OF HOPE**

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**READ**

*Genesis 18:9-15, 21:1; Luke 1:26-45; Psalm 27*

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**BLESSED IS SHE**

*A poem for those who wait*

I am Sarah  
Bitter and barren  
Burnt out by this promise that never came  
Worn out from waiting  
Laughing to hide the aching  
Longing for these empty arms to hold a baby  
But oh . . .  
How could that be?

I am Tamar  
Tired of trying so hard  
Pushed away, cast aside  
Left with no one to provide  
Longing for these wrongs to be made right  
But oh . . .  
How could that be?

I am Rahab  
Used and abused  
Body broken, soul bruised  
Working late into the night

Weary, just trying to survive  
Longing for some good to come from this tattered life  
But oh . . .  
How could that be?

I am Ruth  
Grieved and alone  
Left with nothing, far from home  
Back, breaking  
Heart, aching  
Leaving so much behind  
Longing to start a new life  
But oh . . .  
How could that be?

I am Bathsheba  
Angry and ashamed  
It was never supposed to be this way  
Years of resentment  
Tears of regret  
Longing for this story to be redeemed  
But oh . . .  
How could that be?

I am Elizabeth  
Washed up and nearing the end  
Disappointed, again and again and again  
Wanting things to finally change  
Wondering if it's just too late  
Longing for faith to still believe  
But oh . . .  
How could that be?

I am Mary  
Overwhelmed and afraid  
Young and small and anything but brave  
I had plans, I had dreams,  
But now everything has changed  
And I don't know if I'll have what it takes

But I do know I'll trust you anyway.

Oh Abba,  
Why me?  
Oh Abba,  
How will this be?

The Holy Spirit will come upon you  
And the power of the Most High will overshadow you  
So this child to be born of you  
Will be the Savior of the world.

For behold,  
She who was said to be barren has conceived  
And she who nearly lost hope still believed  
And she who was worn out from waiting, held a baby  
And she who was grieved, her story was redeemed  
And she who was broken, was honored and healed.

For nothing  
Is impossible  
With God.

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Blessed is she  
Who believed  
That there would be  
A fulfillment  
Of the promise  
Yet to be seen.

*(And,  
Blessed are you  
Who still believe  
That there will be  
A fulfillment  
Of the promise  
Yet to be seen).*

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## **A PROMPT**

What are you currently longing and trusting for with radical hope? What are you believing that you have yet to see? About what have you found yourself saying, “How could that be?”

Would you now speak, out loud, over your disbelief, doubt, or fear the same words Mary said, “May it be to me **just as You say**” . . . even if it comes in a very unexpected way?



*ADVENT WEEK TWO*  
**THE CANDLE OF PEACE**

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**READ**

*Isaiah 40; Psalm 23; Mark 1:1-8*

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**A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS**

*A poem for those who wander*

Dry and dusty, vast and empty  
This is a desolate place  
Wandering in circles  
Weakening every day.

Feet stumbling with each step  
Voices grumbling, under breath.

How did we ever get here?  
Why did we leave what we knew?  
When will we ever get there?  
What will we find if we do?

How long, O Lord? Will you forget us?  
How long will we lack what we need?  
How long will we wander this wilderness?  
How long will we search for peace?

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But . . .  
Into the darkness  
Over the stillness  
A voice  
Crying  
In the wilderness:

Prepare.  
His.  
Way.  
Make these desert paths  
Straight.

These dark mountains, made low  
These bleak valleys, raised high  
This hard soil, new growth  
This dry ground, fresh life.

And the glory of the Lord  
Will be revealed  
And all people  
Will see it.

Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God  
Creator of the ends of the earth.

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Yes, your Shepherd is coming  
You shall want no more,  
Leading you by still waters  
Restoring your soul.

Though you walk through the valley  
He'll stay right beside you  
His rod and His staff  
Gently comfort and guide you.

He prepares an abundance  
In your enemy's presence  
Sets a table before you  
Brimming with blessing.

And your cup  
Overflows  
And goodness and mercy  
Follow

You

(Yes you)

All the days of your life.

And you shall dwell,  
No more in the desert,  
But in the house of the Lord  
Forever.

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## **A PROMPT**

Picture the Good Shepherd walking beside you in the wilderness. He puts His arm around you and asks some honest questions. How would you answer right now as His beloved one?

*What do you lack?*

*What do you need?*

*What do you want?*

*What do you dream?*

And how does He respond to you?



*ADVENT WEEK THREE*  
**THE CANDLE OF JOY**

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**READ**

*Psalm 126; Jeremiah 31; Matthew 2:1-18*

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**MOURNING MERCIES**

*A poem for those who weep*

There were tears that first Christmas  
too

The loud wailing and heaving kind  
The deep groaning and grieving kind

Voices heard in Ramah,  
Lamentation and bitter weeping,  
Rachel grieving,  
Refusing to be comforted,  
For her children are no more.\*

A collective cry  
That filled Bethlehem with despair

Oh, how could Jesus be there  
too?

How could such pain exist  
At the same time  
In the same town  
As Peace?

How could this overwhelming grief  
Leave any room leftover  
For Joy?

How could their sorrow  
Not overshadow  
This bright Hope for tomorrow?

How could lament  
Live alongside  
Love?

But it did.

And it does.



So, too,  
Your cries are not a contradiction  
To the coming  
Of the Christ.

Your fears are not an affront  
To the faithfulness  
Of the Father.

Your tears need not  
Steal away  
Your trust.

This Christmas  
You have permission to have a broken heart  
You are welcome to weep and to wail,  
You are allowed to lament your losses,  
Your sorrow is safe in the hands of the Savior.

Heartache is simply a given in this broken world.  
But joy is given  
By a good good Giver.

May He give you this Christmas  
Grace in the wilderness\*\*  
Gladness for sorrow\*\*  
Joy for your mourning\*\*  
Bright hope for tomorrow.\*\*

\*Jeremiah 31

\*\* Also Jeremiah 31—because grief and joy can exist at the exact same time.

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## **A PROMPT**

As Psalm 26 describes, sometimes our tears water the seeds that lead to new life. How have you seen your grief give way to joy?

Or if you haven't yet, how might your sorrow begin to bring forth greater strength and new hope for tomorrow?

Where could you look for flourishing from what you thought was dead?

How could your weeping lead to a great harvest for reaping instead?



*ADVENT WEEK FOUR*  
**THE CANDLE OF LOVE**

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**READ**

*Exodus 29:44-46; Psalm 139; John 1:14*

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**WITH**

*A love poem*

Love wants to be with  
Love needs to be near  
Love can't stay away  
Love has to be here.

Love comes close  
Love holds tight  
Love moves over  
Love sits beside.

Love pours out  
Love leans in  
Love goes first  
Love tries again.

Love leaps over hurdles  
Love jumps through hoops  
Love stays despite struggles  
Love still chooses you.

Love looks for the lonely  
Love lives on the margins  
Love crosses all boundaries  
Love seeks the forgotten.

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Love becomes flesh  
Love moves in  
Love is here  
Love dwells among.

Love is within us  
Close by us  
Around us  
Beside us.

The very definition of LOVE is: WITH.

Near enough to touch  
His presence here to dwell  
God. With. Us.  
Our Immanuel.

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## **A PROMPT**

When you love someone, you want to be near them. You like being around them. You think about them when you're apart and make plans to be together again.

How have you experienced God's love for you in these ways?

When was the last time you sensed the WITH-ness of Jesus?

How was He present to you? How were you present to Him?



*CHRISTMAS EVE*  
**THE CANDLE OF CHRIST**

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**READ**

*Genesis 1:1-3; Exodus 10:21-23; Isaiah 9:2; Luke 1:26-33; John 1:1-5; Revelation 21:1-6, 22-26*

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**LET THERE BE LIGHT**

*A poem to dispel the darkness*

Christmas began  
In the beginning

In stillness, in emptiness,  
In nothingness

A blanket of silence, an overpowering absence  
A void, a vacuum, the universe a blank canvas

But where darkness covered  
The Spirit hovered

His Fullness filled the stillness  
His Voice broke the silence

And into the night, He spoke,  
Let there be Light.

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The people of Egypt, enveloped  
In a thick cloud of darkness  
The long night of the ninth plague  
A blanket of blackness

While the Hebrew slaves  
Sang in the daylight,  
Their desert land  
Bathed in bright white

With a cloud by day, and fire by night  
Yaweh led them, out of the darkness  
And into the Light

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The prophet saw his people  
Walking in a land of deep darkness  
Wandering, lost, broken and blind  
Watching for a glimmer of hope  
Waiting for the sun to shine

And into the night, he spoke,  
Wait, just wait, for the Light.

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The angel appeared to Mary  
In a time of oppression, injustice, unrest.  
Her people yearning and aching  
For someone to save them from their distress.

He announced this way of salvation  
A strange declaration  
Good news of peace and great joy  
A virgin girl to deliver the Light of the World  
God—as a baby boy.

And over the darkness, he said,  
It is done.

Behold,  
Your Light has come.

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And at the end of time  
There will be no night  
And no more need for the sun.  
For the Son of God  
The Messiah King  
Will be our Eternal Light.

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**A PROMPT**

As you light the Christ candle, look back over your life (like the people of Israel rehearsed and remembered their history). Pick a memory or two when you saw Jesus meet you in the darkness. How did He bring light?

Wherever it may be dark for you today, unknown or unclear, blurry or bleak, would you invite Jesus to shine bright as Christmas morning dawns?