



A SIMPLE + SACRED
CHRISTMAS

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ADVENT IS

INVITATION.
AWAKENING.
EXPECTATION.
AWARENESS.
ARRIVAL.
PRESENCE.
HOPE. PEACE.
JOY. LOVE.
JESUS.

We're invited into the story God has been writing for thousands of years, and the story that will continue into eternity. Advent invites us to remember the birth of the Savior, God's own Son, Jesus, to the virgin Mary. Advent invites us to pause and allow that same Jesus to be born within us.

Advent also invites us to look ahead with expectation and hope that Jesus will return. And with His return, all things will be set right. Lean in. Don't miss the moments of His holy presence.

***This is Advent.
This is Christmas.***

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

A journal is a simple tool intended to bring about a regular rhythm, or habit, in our lives. The purpose isn't simply to complete the journal, but rather to allow the journal to open a conduit between us and God. Remember: at the center of it all is Jesus.

COMMUNITY | FAMILY + GROUPS

The best way to journey with Jesus is within a community. While you may engage with this journal alone, don't stop there. Gather regularly with a community for worship, and make time to gather with family or your small group to light the Advent candles together. Choose a weekly time that works best for your household or group — whether that's a Sunday night, over a Wednesday meal, or another time throughout the week.

SERMON NOTES

Each week, you'll find a space to take sermon notes. If you miss the sermon on Sunday, jump online if available and watch.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Daily (Mon-Sat) devotional pages are here to spur some personal time with God. The scripture we provide each day is intended to be a starting point. Feel free to go further in the passage. As you read and pray, consider how God's Spirit might be leading you to think, speak, or act differently.



A GUIDE TO GROUPS WITH FAMILY + FRIENDS

Advent is an invitation to slow down, watch, and wait as we look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus. One way to be intentional about this is to include a set time each week to pause, light a candle, read scripture, and consider the deeper truths of the season.

The weekly activities in this journal are here to help you, your family, and friends do just that. You may practice this with just your spouse and kids, or a small group of friends, or you might invite in some neighbors or church friends to join you. Whatever you choose, our hope and prayer is that this is a season of deep meaning and spiritual formation.

TIPS FOR MAKING AN ADVENT WREATH

There are many options for purchasing a pre-made wreath with advent candles. You can also purchase/cut some live evergreen and place it in a circle on a plate. There are options to purchase candle rings to hold the 4 weekly candles, or you can purchase larger candles that can stand on their own.

Traditionally, the center “Christ” candle is white and the four weekly candles, which are thinner, include three purple candles and one pink candle. But even if you just pick up four simple pillar candles and walk the progression each week, you’ll find deep meaning in the practice.

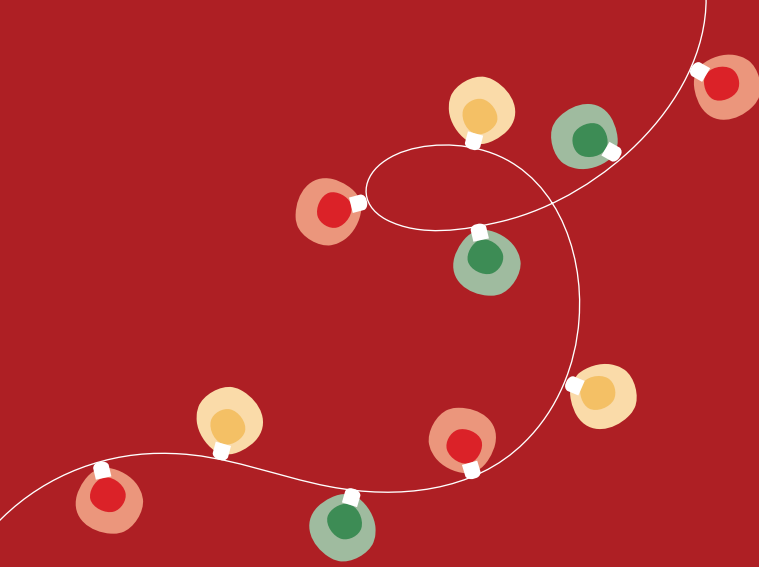
SHOPPING LIST:

BASE: A plate or large tray

CANDLES: Five candles, traditionally with three purple, one pink, + one white

CANDLE HOLDERS: Ring-shaped candle holders or small candle jars

GREENERY: Fresh evergreen cuttings



symbol

Christmas lights represent hope in the darkness, direction when we are lost, constants in our chaos. When you see Christmas lights, set your HOPE firmly in the faithfulness of God, made known through the gift of Jesus.

HOPE

HEBREW:

yakhal | יָכַחַל

qavah | קָוָה

GREEK:

Ipis | ἐλπίς

DEFINITION:

expectation, to anticipate, to wait, patience. It's not about optimism in circumstances, but trust in a person.

Advent: Week 1

GROUP + FAMILY GATHERING

OPENING PRAYER

Father, God – You are the hope of the world. And we place our trust in You. Amen.

LIGHT THE FIRST PURPLE CANDLE

Have someone read **John 8:12**, “Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, ‘I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.’”

DEFINE HOPE

- When you hear the word hope, what do you think of?
- How would you define the word hope?
- Name something you hoped for, but had to wait before you ever experienced it? What was that like?

SCRIPTURE

Have someone read the story of Mary’s encounter with the angel Gabriel, found in **Luke 1:26–38**.

QUESTIONS

- How would you respond to an angel if one just appeared to you?
- Do you think Mary would have been afraid? Why or why not?
- What was Mary’s response to the angel at the end of this passage?
- Do you think Mary had hope for what the angel promised?
- Is there anything in your life that seems overwhelming and impossible? How might you trust God, and have hope for His goodness, in your life?

CLOSING SCRIPTURE

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. –Romans 15:13



ACTIVITY

HOPE STONES

Find or purchase large, smooth river stones. Paint them, and then add encouraging messages, such as: HOPE has a name, God is love, Jesus loves you, hope in the Lord, etc. Place them somewhere people can see them (a trail, sidewalk, etc).



Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Light of the world. May I experience the presence and the hope of Your Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 7:14

The Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

Advent is a season of expectation. And the expectation is built around the arrival of God's own Son.

Why do you think the promise of God being with the people (Immanuel) was a source of hope for them? What were they missing in not having God's presence with them in their daily life?

We have the promise of God's presence today, through His Holy Spirit. But we're also promised a future return of Jesus. How might that promise be a source of hope for us today? What specific hope do you have for Christ's return?

Pause + Pray

Where do you need the hope of God in your life? Who is one person you know who needs to know God's hope?

Father God, as I close this time, I remain open to the presence of your Holy Spirit. Lead me and guide me throughout the course of my day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Light of the world. May I experience the presence and the hope of Your Holy Spirit.

2 Chronicles 20:6 + 12

He prayed, "O Lord, God of our ancestors, you alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you! ... We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help."

[Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-24]

While there are many stories in the Hebrew Scriptures that are difficult for us to fully understand, there are significant truths we can hold onto.

Judah was overcome with the fear that there was no escape for them. Is there any situation in your life that feels hopeless and overwhelming? What fear or anxiety is paralyzing you? This simple prayer, "we are looking to you..." can bring hope to our lives. Where do you need hope today? Write this prayer, and come back to it every time you feel overwhelmed.

Pause + Pray

Where do you need the hope of God in your life? Who is one person you know who needs to know God's hope?

Father God, as I close this time, I remain open to the presence of Your Holy Spirit. I look to you for help. Guide my steps. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Light of the world. May I experience the presence and the hope of Your Holy Spirit.

Psalm 130:5-8

I am counting on the Lord; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word. I long for the Lord more than sentries long for the dawn, yes, more than sentries long for the dawn. O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is unfailing love. His redemption overflows. He himself will redeem Israel from every kind of sin.

[Read all of Psalm 130]

The word and concept of hope are found throughout the Psalms, which were the prayer book or songbook of ancient Israel.

Do you find it difficult to put your full trust and hope in God? Why or why not?

What reasons does the Psalmist give for placing our hope in God? Why should we trust Him?

What are you counting on God for in this season of your life? How can you verbalize that in a prayer like this one? Write it down.

Pause + Pray

Where do you need the hope of God in your life? Who is one person you know who needs to know God's hope?

Father God, as I close this time, I remain open to the presence of Your Holy Spirit. I am counting on You. I place my hope in You. Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Light of the world. May I experience the presence and the hope of Your Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 40:28-31

Have you not heard? Have you not understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust (HOPE) in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

[Read all of Isaiah 40]

In your own words, what do you think the author is trying to communicate?

What encouragement, what hope do you find in this passage?

Why do you think this Hebrew word can be translated as 'hope' or 'wait'? How are those two words connected?

Are you walking through a season of weariness or exhaustion? How might you turn toward the gift of Jesus as a source, or promise, of hope in this season?

Pause + Pray

Where do you need the hope of God in your life? Who is one person you know who needs to know God's hope?

Pause + Pray

Where do you need the hope of God in your life? Who is one person you know who needs to know God's hope?

Father God, as I close this time, I remain open to the presence of Your Holy Spirit. I trust in You today. Give me power and strength in Your name. Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Light of the world. May I experience the presence and the hope of Your Holy Spirit.

Luke 2:29-32

Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He [Jesus] is a light to reveal God to the nations and he is the glory of your people Israel!

[Read Luke 2:25-40]

Why are Mary, Joseph, Jesus, and Simeon in the temple that day? What had Simeon been waiting for? What did Simeon think about Jesus?

How does the birth of Jesus display God's faithfulness and love for us?

Based on this, why should we place our hope firmly in God? Are your eyes on Him? Is Jesus your hope and salvation? Why or why not?

Pause + Pray

Where do you need the hope of God in your life? Who is one person you know who needs to know God's hope?

Father God, as I close this time, I remain open to the presence of Your Holy Spirit. May I know Your salvation through Jesus Christ. I trust in Your promise today. Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Light of the world. May I experience the presence and the hope of Your Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:3

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again. Because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, we now have a 'living hope', a priceless inheritance...beyond the reach of change and decay.



Take a moment to think back over your life and identify moments where God's faithfulness was evident. Oftentimes, God's faithfulness comes after a season of darkness or pain. Many of us will attend a Christmas Eve service in a few weeks. Think of the symbolism – light in the darkness, candlelight in a dark room.

Hope isn't about blind optimism. Hope has a name. That name is Jesus. Place your hope in the Lord today. Turn your eyes to Him. Find the true light in the midst of the darkness.

A grid of 20 rows and 20 columns of small orange dots for reflection.

Pause + Pray

Where do you need the hope of God in your life? Who is one person you know who needs to know God's hope?

Father God, as I close this time, I remain open to the presence of Your Holy Spirit. May I rest and walk today in the living hope of Jesus Christ. He is the light of the world! Amen.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb cooked chicken, shredded*
1 1/2 tsp garlic powder
2 (15 oz) cans northern beans
1 (14 oz) can chicken broth
2 small cans chopped green chilis
1 tsp salt
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp dried oregano
1/2 tsp pepper
sprinkle of cayenne pepper
1/2 cup whipping cream
1 cup sour cream

DIRECTIONS

Combine all ingredients in a crockpot and cook on low for 4-6 hours. If in a hurry, you can cook it on the stovetop in a big pot on medium-high heat until it is almost boiling. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until ready to serve.

Serve with white shredded cheese such as Monterey Jack, sour cream, and broken-up tortilla chips or crackers.

TIPS

*Can also use white meat from one rotisserie chicken, diced or shredded — mostly white meat is suggested.

White chicken chili is even tastier the next day because the spices have a better flavor the longer they marinate. Combine all the ingredients and refrigerate overnight, then cook the next day.



WHITE
CHICKEN
CHILI



symbol

Evergreen trees remain fixed season to season, and the tree is a symbol of the sacrificial death of Jesus, which brings peace.

When you see a Christmas tree, may you remember the steadfast love of Jesus, which brings us peace through His death on the cross.

PEACE

HEBREW:

shalom | שָׁלוֹם

GREEK:

eirene | εἰρήνη

DEFINITION:

complete, whole, state of health, salvation, well-being, contentment, unity. It's deeper than just circumstantial and not just the absence of conflict.

Advent: Week 2

A large grid of orange dots arranged in 20 rows and 30 columns, providing a space for writing notes.

GROUP + FAMILY GATHERING

OPENING PRAYER

Father, God – You are full of love and faithfulness and peace. May we experience your overwhelming peace no matter the circumstances that surround us. Amen.

LIGHT THE FIRST + SECOND PURPLE CANDLE

Have someone read **John 14:27**, “Jesus said, ‘I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.’”

DEFINE PEACE

- When you hear the word peace, what do you think of?
- How would you define the word peace?
- Think of a time in your life when you felt at peace – like all was right in the world. When was it? Where were you? Why do you think you felt at peace?

SCRIPTURE

Have someone read the story of the shepherds surprised by the angels, found in **Luke 2:8-16**.

QUESTIONS

- What do you think the shepherds were doing when the angel appeared? Do you think they would have been afraid of the angels? Why?
- What did the angel first say to the shepherds? Did you know this is a common phrase in scripture? Why do you think we need to hear this from God?
- There are two things the angels say Jesus brings to people. What are they? Do you think it is possible to have true peace even if circumstances in life are difficult? Why or why not?
- How can God’s presence – first through Jesus and now through the Holy Spirit – be a source of peace no matter what we’re facing? How might you trust God, and have hope for His goodness, in your life?

CLOSING SCRIPTURE

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. –Romans 15:13



ACTIVITY

SILENT NIGHT REFLECTIONS

Gather in a quiet, dimly lit room. Find a quiet version of Silent Night on Spotify or Apple Music and play it. When it is finished, have everyone close their eyes and sit in silence for 1-3 minutes. Share what God brought to your mind in the silence. Then talk about the things that can often be distractions during the Christmas season, and how practicing stillness/silence could bring peace.



Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May I experience the presence and the peace of Your Holy Spirit in this busy season.

Ephesians 4:2-3

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

For the Christian community, peace and unity are essential. In your own words, what is peace? Why do you think it is so important, especially among believers?

In Ephesians, Paul leads into his encouragement of unity and peace with some specific instructions. According to this passage, how might we be people of peace through our actions? Be specific. Is there one of these specifics the Spirit might want to develop in you? Why?

Pause + Pray

What specific circumstance or area of your life do you need the peace of God? Name and pray for a person who needs God's peace.

Father God, as I close this time, I open myself to the ongoing presence of the Prince of Peace. May I walk humbly and with gentleness throughout this day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May I experience the presence and the peace of Your Holy Spirit in this busy season.

Numbers 6:24-26

May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace.

This is a priestly blessing found in the Hebrew Scriptures. What stands out to you about this blessing? Imagine it being spoken over you. Read it a few times.

Is there a word or statement that seems to stand out? Why do you think that is standing out in this season of your life? Now focus on the last statement. What do you think the Lord's favor and peace would look like in your life? Have you experienced it?

A grid of 20 rows and 20 columns of small orange dots for reflection and writing.

Pause + Pray

What specific circumstance or area of your life do you need the peace of God? Name and pray for a person who needs God's peace.

Father God, as I close this time, I open myself to the ongoing presence of the Prince of Peace. Father, I need Your blessing and Your protection. Be gracious to me today, and give me Your peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Psalm 4:8

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.

[Read all of Psalm 4]

Verses 4 and 8 both refer to the night. Do you think they are connected? Why or why not? How might a night of reflection keep sin at bay, especially when it comes to anger? And from that, how might peace be experienced? Trust is another primary theme throughout the Psalms. How might trust in God lead to an experience of peace?

Pause + Pray

What specific circumstance or area of your life do you need the peace of God? Name and pray for a person who needs God's peace.

Father God, as I close this time, I open myself to the ongoing presence of the Prince of Peace. Keep me from anger's rage and conflict, and let me find rest in Your promise of peace. Help me bring that peace to others throughout this day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May I experience the presence and the peace of Your Holy Spirit in this busy season.

Isaiah 9:6

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[Read Isaiah 9:2-7]

Last week, we spent time reflecting on hope and light. Where is that found here in Isaiah's prophecy? How does Isaiah point to Jesus in verse 2? Write down the four names Isaiah gives Jesus in verse 6. Read it a few times slowly. Is there one that seems to stand out to you in this current moment of your life? Pay attention to that. Now think of ways that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. How does Jesus fulfill this prophecy?

Pause + Pray

What specific circumstance or area of your life do you need the peace of God? Name and pray for a person who needs God's peace.



Father God, as I close this time, I open myself to the ongoing presence of the Prince of Peace. I place my trust in You today and depend on You fully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PAUSE

READ + REFLECT

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May I experience the presence and the peace of Your Holy Spirit in this busy season.

John 14:27

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others – the armies of heaven – praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened.”

[Read Luke 2:1-20]

This is the classic, traditional reading of Christmas. What do you love about this account of Jesus’ birth? Does it awaken any memories in you (childhood, Charlie Brown, etc)?

The angels appear to the lowly shepherds in this account. Why is that an important detail? In our world today, where do you think such an important announcement would be made?

God chooses to announce the birth of Jesus to the outliers of society. How might they view this announcement of ‘peace on earth’? Why do you think this detail is important?

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Pause + Pray

What specific circumstance or area of your life do you need the peace of God? Name and pray for a person who needs God’s peace.

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ASK

YIELD

Father God, as I close this time, I open myself to the ongoing presence of the Prince of Peace. Help me to overflow with the peace Jesus brings—and may I be a person of peace to those I interact with today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May I experience the presence and the peace of Your Holy Spirit in this busy season.

John 14:27

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.



Jesus' birth is proclaimed by the angels, and defined as peace on earth. And here, in one of Jesus' final moments with His disciples, He promises them peace.

Why do you think peace is such an important theme of Scripture and a promise Jesus makes to His followers? Why do you think He makes it a point to say this is something they will not be able to find in the world? And how does His peace speak to our worries and fears?

What area of your life needs the peace of Jesus to settle your heart and mind? Write a prayer of invitation for Jesus to enter in and bring you peace.

A grid of 20 rows and 40 columns of small orange dots for writing.

Pause + Pray

What specific circumstance or area of your life do you need the peace of God? Name and pray for a person who needs God's peace.

Father God, as I close this time, I open myself to the ongoing presence of the Prince of Peace. I often look for the world's empty promises of peace. Help me rest in real peace so that I step out of today's fears and anxiety. In Jesus' name, Amen.

INGREDIENTS

COOKIES

1 cup butter, softened
1 cup sugar
2 large eggs
1 tsp vanilla
1/2 tsp almond extract
3 cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp salt

FROSTING

1/2 cup butter, softened
3-4 cups powdered sugar
1/2 tsp almond extract
1 tsp vanilla
1/4 cup milk
food coloring drops (if desired)

DIRECTIONS

Preheat your oven to 350°F. Cream butter and sugar for approximately 2 minutes, until the mixture is light and fluffy. Next, beat in eggs, vanilla, and almond extract. Then add flour, baking soda, and salt. Mix until combined. Roll 2 oz balls of dough and arrange them on a cookie sheet. Gently press them down to your desired thickness; the dough will not spread much on its own. Bake for 11 minutes. Let the cookies cool completely before frosting.

For the frosting, mix all the ingredients until smooth and spreadable. Add extra milk for thinner frosting and extra powdered sugar for thicker frosting, as desired.



CHRISTMAS
SUGAR
COOKIES



symbol

Christmas songs and music can bring joy and happiness and lift the spirit.

When you hear the music of the season, find joy in knowing that God is with us (Emmanuel). And remember that His love will never fail.

JOY

HEBREW:

simcha | שמחה

sason | ששון

GREEK:

chara | χαρά

DEFINITION:

jubilant, delight, happiness, gladness. Joy is a deep-seated happiness, not rooted in externals, but a choice of faith and hope. It's not about ignoring sadness, disappointment, or grief, but about being anchored in an eternal hope and faith.

Advent: Week 3

Handwriting practice area consisting of a grid of dots for tracing and writing practice.

GROUP + FAMILY GATHERING

OPENING PRAYER

Father, God – Through Jesus, You brought good news that leads to great joy for everyone. Help us to experience and reflect that joy in our lives. Amen.

LIGHT THE FIRST TWO PURPLE CANDLES + ONE PINK CANDLE

Have someone read **Luke 2:10-11**, “The angel reassured them. ‘Don’t be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!’”

DEFINE JOY

- When you hear the word joy, what do you think of?
- How would you define the word joy?
- When do you feel the happiest, or most joyful, in your life? What brings you a sense of deep joy? Who in your life is a source of joy?

SCRIPTURE

Have someone read the story of the wise men (magi) from the east, found in **Matthew 2:1-12**.

QUESTIONS

- When you think of the wise men visiting Jesus, what do you picture? How did they travel? How many were there?
- When King Herod asked them what they were looking for, what prophecy did they talk about? (verses 5-6)
- What did the wise men see to guide them? And when they saw this in the sky, Matthew says they were filled with something – what was it?
- In their joy, what did they do? And what did they bring to Jesus?
- Today, we have a weekly rhythm of turning back to God along with a community of others. What does worship look like for us? Do you think worship should be an act of joyful celebration, as it was for the wise men? What are the different parts, or components, of our times of worship?

CLOSING SCRIPTURE

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. –Romans 15:13



ACTIVITY

MAKE COOKIES TOGETHER

Find a recipe for Christmas cookies and make them together. As you make them, play Christmas music. Sing, dance, laugh together as you bake. Then, enjoy the cookies as you talk about your favorite Christmas memories and traditions.



Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus. May I experience His presence and choose the joy that comes through Your Holy Spirit in this sacred season.

Proverbs 27:9

*The heartfelt counsel of a friend, is as sweet
(joyful) as perfume and incense.*

This proverb suggests that a good friend brings joy as perfumes bring joy to our noses. What friends in your life bring you joy? What about those friendships gives you happiness and joy?

As we think about joy this week, think about a friendship so good that it just brings a smile to your face. Write the name of the person you are thinking of, and then text/call them today. Thank him/her for their friendship.

Pause + Pray

Are there any needs in your life, or your friends' lives, that you can lift up in prayer? What/who are you thankful for?

Father God, as I close this time, I choose joy in the midst of my circumstances. Thank You for the good gift of friendship in my life, a source of joy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus. May I experience His presence and choose the joy that comes through Your Holy Spirit in this sacred season.

Psalm 100:1-3

Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him, singing with joy. Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

The Psalmist encourages us to shout and worship with joy. What are some current worship songs that help you do just that?

Worship is a decision to turn our hearts (affections) and minds (attention) to God. How can you do that today? Be specific. How can you acknowledge God as you walk through your day?

Pause + Pray

Are there any needs in your life, or your friends' lives, that you can lift up in prayer? What/who are you thankful for?

Father God, as I close this time, I choose joy in the midst of my circumstances. I will worship God with joy today, giving Him my heart and mind. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PAUSE

READ + REFLECT

YIELD

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus. May I experience His presence and choose the joy that comes through Your Holy Spirit in this sacred season.

Isaiah 9:2-3

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder.

This entire prophecy is one of the primary passages we read during Advent. How does a light in the darkness point us to Jesus? Do you believe Jesus continues to be a light in the darkness? Why or why not?

Does singing with joy ignore the realities of darkness that are still present? How do we choose joy even in the midst of difficult or trying times?

Pause + Pray

Are there any needs in your life, or your friends' lives, that you can lift up in prayer? What/who are you thankful for?

Father God, as I close this time, I choose joy in the midst of my circumstances. I thank You for the light that is Jesus, and I trust in Him no matter what may come. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus. May I experience His presence and choose the joy that comes through Your Holy Spirit in this sacred season.

Luke 2:10-11

The angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!"

What is the good news the angels brought to the shepherds? What would the good news bring to all people? Why would this news bring joy? Does it still bring joy to your life? How can you remind yourself of this good news today?

A large grid of dotted lines for reflection and writing.

Pause + Pray

Are there any needs in your life, or your friends' lives, that you can lift up in prayer? What/who are you thankful for?



Father God, as I close this time, I choose joy in the midst of my circumstances. I believe that Jesus is good news, and I choose Him, just as He chose me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Philippians 4:4-6

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.

Paul is writing from prison. And yet he seems to be full of joy and peace. How could Paul be full of joy while his circumstances seem to be overwhelming? If Paul is instructing the Philippians to be full of joy, then it must be possible to choose joy.

Do you think you can choose to be full of joy? How might we do that? In these next lines, what is Paul encouraging them to do? How might those actions support joy in their lives?

Pause + Pray

Are there any needs in your life, or your friends' lives, that you can lift up in prayer? What/who are you thankful for?

Father God, as I close this time, I choose joy in the midst of my circumstances. I will turn my worries into prayers, trusting that You hold all things in Your hands and are working for good. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus. May I experience His presence and choose the joy that comes through Your Holy Spirit in this sacred season.

Romans 15:13

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.



God is our source for hope, and He promises joy and peace. How do we lean into the joy and peace He wants us to experience? What tends to steal your joy in life? How might you find/choose joy even in the midst of the challenges and difficulties of life?

A large grid of yellow dots for reflection and writing.

Pause + Pray

Are there any needs in your life, or your friends' lives, that you can lift up in prayer? What/who are you thankful for?

Father God, as I close this time, I choose joy in the midst of my circumstances. I will turn my worries into prayers, trusting that You hold all things in Your hands and are working for good. In Jesus' name, Amen.

God is never late. But He is
always on time.

TONY EVANS

He came, not as a flash of light or an
unapproachable conqueror, but as
one whose first cries were heard by a
peasant girl and a sleepy carpenter.

MAX LUCADO

WAIT upon the Lord. Wait with
expectancy. Wait as a watchman on a
wall, certain He'll show, not knowing
when but knowing He will. This Advent
season is about waiting. Nothing is more
relevant in a culture conditioned to click
and get. Faster is not better.

WAIT. WATCH. SEE.

BETH MOORE

The Christmas stories are not about the
birth of a remarkable baby; they are
about the arrival of God in person, to rule
and rescue His people and the world.

NT WRIGHT

He became what we are that He might
make us what He is.

ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA



Joy is very different from the trite
advice to 'turn that frown upside down.'
Christian joy is a profound decision of
faith and hope in the power of Jesus'
own life and love.

TIM MACKIE

God can use uncomfortable moments, he
can use darkness and despair, to reveal
to us the things that we are hoping in
that are not God. God wants to be
your hope this year.

SADIE ROBERTSON HUFF

Advent is not that we are faithful in our
waiting but that God is faithful in
His coming.

RICH VILLODAS

Advent is when we remember that we're
waiting for the promised One who has
come and is coming again. He will renew
all things. There will be no more tears,
sorrow, pain, suffering, injustice or death.
All things will be redeemed.

CHRISTINE CAINE



symbol

*God so loved, so He gave
– Jesus is the greatest gift
in human history*

*When you give and
receive Christmas gifts, do
so in the same spirit that
God gave Jesus – a spirit
of love for one another.*

LOVE

HEBREW:

ahavah | אָהָבָה

GREEK:

agape | ἀγάπη

DEFINITION:

affection, acting for the well-being of others, faithfulness, commitment, concern. Love is not just what God does, it is who He is, central to the sacrificial act of Jesus on our behalf.

Advent: Week 4

Handwriting practice area consisting of a grid of dots for tracing and writing practice.

GROUP + FAMILY GATHERING

OPENING PRAYER

Father, God – Because You loved the world, You gave us Jesus. Thank You for this gift of love, which is the gift of Your presence. Amen.

LIGHT ALL THREE PURPLE CANDLES + ONE PINK CANDLE

Have someone read **John 3:16**, “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

DEFINE LOVE

- When you hear the word love, what do you think of?
- Name some of the ways we use the word love in our lives. Think of things, food, places, people – what have you used the word love to describe?
- When Jesus said that “God so loved the world,” what do you think He meant?

SCRIPTURE

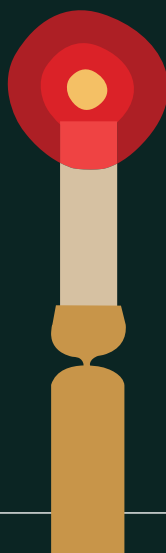
Have someone read the story of Jesus birth, found in **John 1:1-14**.

QUESTIONS

- When John uses the word, ‘WORD’, he’s referring to Jesus. How long has Jesus existed? Where has He been? What does He bring to the world? (v 4-5)
- In verse 12, we find that God adopts people into His family, because of Jesus. Who can be a part of God’s family? How do we become a part of God’s family?
- Jesus enters our world and brings something specific from God (verse 14). What are the two specific things that come from our Heavenly Father through Jesus?
- How are these two specific things the greatest gift we could ever receive? How can we receive these gifts from Jesus?

CLOSING SCRIPTURE

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. –John 3:16-17



ACTIVITY

LOVE ACTION CHALLENGE

Have crayons/markers and a couple of notecards for everyone. Ask everyone to make two cards with practical, simple acts of love, such as: write a 'thank you' note, bake goodies for a neighbor, call someone who is lonely, etc. Mix the cards up and then spread them out on a table.

Everyone select one that you commit to do between now and the end of the year.



Exodus 34:6

Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

How does the birth of Jesus confirm this description of God? Read the verse a few times slowly. What else do you notice about who God is?

Pause + Pray

Begin by acknowledging and thanking God for who He is. Who in your life needs to know this God of unfailing love and faithfulness? Write their name as you pray for God to reveal Himself to them in this season.

Father God, as I close this time, I am so thankful for the gift of love You gave us through Jesus. He is a picture of unfailing love and faithfulness. May I look to Him and find You. May I know Him more and become more like Him in this coming year. Thank You for the love made known at Christmas. Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus in this season that is all about him. May I fully experience His love and His Spirit in this day.

1 John 4:9-10

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

This week, we celebrate the gift of Jesus. Jesus is the love of God made known to the world. He perfectly embodies that love and is a gift of love to each of us. Spend a few minutes today just reflecting on the gift God has given us in Christ.

How is our gift-giving a reflection of this? How do we sometimes miss the mark in our gift-giving? How might our love for each other be reflected by the gift of presence we offer one another?

Begin by thanking God for the gift of love, made known in Jesus. Is there anyone on your heart and mind today that you can lift a prayer for? Write their name as you pray for them today.

Father God, as I close this time, I am so thankful for the gift of love You gave us through Jesus. Jesus is a reminder that You really do love me and entered this world to bring me back to You. Thank You for the love made known at Christmas. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father God, as I take a deep breath and gather my scattered thoughts, I turn my heart and mind to Jesus in this season that is all about him. May I fully experience His love and His Spirit in this day.

John 1:4-5, 14

The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. So the Word became flesh and blood and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.

Jesus was the author of life and now brings life and light to the world. How has Jesus brought life and light into your life? Write some ways your life looks different because of your faith and surrender to Jesus.

Pause + Pray

Begin by thanking Jesus for the light He's brought to you. Is there anyone in your life living in darkness who needs to experience the light of Jesus? Ask Jesus to draw them to His love this Christmas.

Father God, I'm overwhelmed by the gift of Your love made known in the life of Jesus. May His light continue to spread, pushing the darkness back. Today, on Christmas Eve, may His light live in and through me. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Light your Advent candles. As you light the center candle in the Advent wreath, have someone pray: Father God, today we celebrate the gift of love you've given in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. May we know God with us – Emmanuel – as we celebrate His birth today.

Luke 2: 1-20

At that time, the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night, shepherds were staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."*

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

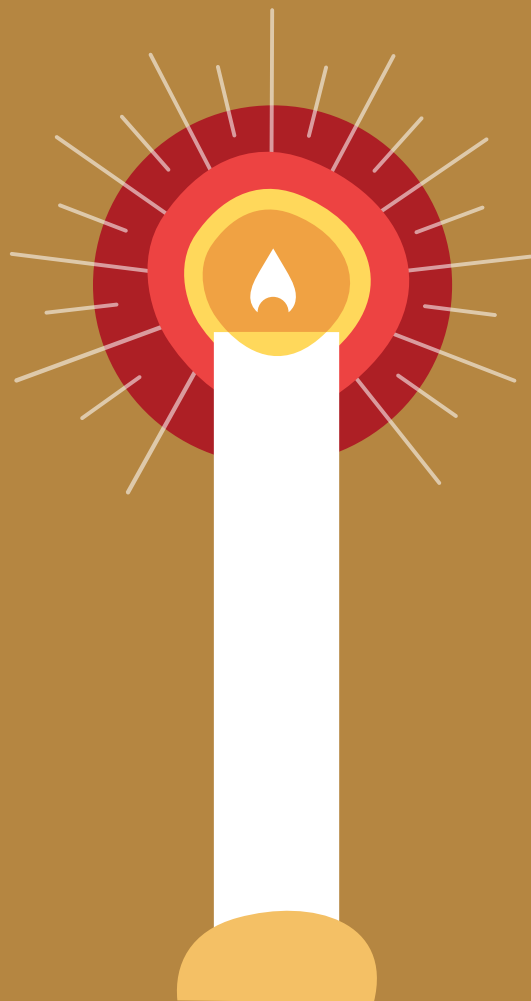
"OUR WREATHS AND COLORED
LIGHTS, OUR GIVING OF GIFTS,
THESE HAVE NEVER BEEN ENDS
IN THEMSELVES.

THEY ARE BUT SMALL WAYS IN
WHICH WE REPEAT
THAT SOUNDING JOY FIRST
PROCLAIMED BY ANGELS
IN THE SKIES NEAR
BETHLEHEM."





— CHRISTMAS LITURGY, EVERY MOMENT HOLY



SILENT NIGHT

LYRICS BY JOSEPH FRANZ MOHR

Silent night, holy night

ALL IS CALM, ALL IS BRIGHT

Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child

Holy Infant so tender and mild

Sleep in heavenly peace

Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night

Shepherds quake at the sight

Glories stream from heaven afar

Heavenly hosts sing 'Alleluia'

Christ the Savior is born

Christ the Savior is born

Silent night, holy night

SON OF GOD, LOVE'S PURE LIGHT

Radiant beams from Thy holy face

With the dawn of redeeming grace

Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

