

FOOTHILL COVENANT CHURCH

Advent 2026

Candle readings and devotions

FOR USE AT HOME AND IN WORSHIP

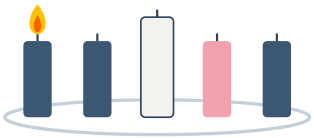
Light a candle, read, pray

Each Sunday of Advent has a devotion written by someone from our congregation, then the order for lighting the Advent wreath: a scripture to read, the words to say as each candle is lit, and a prayer to pray aloud together. On Christmas Eve the four candles are relit and the Christ candle at the centre is lit at last.

Hope	First Sunday of Advent · November 29	Duane Fowler
Love	Second Sunday of Advent · December 6	Divya Reouk
Joy	Third Sunday of Advent · December 13	Michael Lu
Peace	Fourth Sunday of Advent · December 20	Brian Smith
Christ is born	Christmas Eve and Christmas Day	

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT · NOVEMBER 29

Hope



A devotion by Duane Fowler

"Hope." It's such a simple word but full of such complex meanings. Webster's defines it as "To cherish a desire with anticipation. To want something to happen or be true." For most people that means crossing fingers and making a wish. Every day we say things like "I hope I can find a parking space." or "Let's just hope for the best." There's nothing wrong with that. It's just expressing a personal desire even if at times those desires may be a bit selfish - if you get that parking space, someone else didn't.

But as Christians, how do we define "hope"? Like so many other things, concepts that the world has corrupted get put into brilliant focus when we look to the true authority in the Bible. Biblical hope is not a wishful guess; it is a confident and certain expectation based on the promises and character of God. It is based on the knowledge of God's past actions and the certainty of his promises. While worldly hope is based on luck, human effort and emotions, Biblical hope is anchored on an eternal God who has shown consistency through the ages. It is not based on situational events, but on the knowledge that God is always with us and loves us, even when we may not feel it.

When trials hit, your emotions will fluctuate. Our foundation cannot be our job, our health, or even our safety because those things may change and we never know what may happen tomorrow. But hope can grow, and often does grow, through bad times. So often we want God to remove pain immediately but scripture shows that difficult times build the endurance needed for us to hold onto that deeper, living hope. Our true hope is in the life given to us through Jesus' resurrection. It's not just a positive attitude or unfounded optimism; it is tied to a historical event: that Jesus rose from the dead which guarantees our own renewal and eternal future.

Paul wrote in Romans 5:3-5 "... we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

And yet, when trials do hit, it is so difficult to see that hope. Paul reminds us a bit later in Romans 8:24 "Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees?" We know, though, that we can be confident in hope, as the writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen." I love that verse because it is so definitive. Our hope is based on reality and proof, not just wishes.

As we enter the Advent season, we are looking forward to the arrival of God's incredible gift to us in the form of His son and the gift of his living hope. We are waiting with eager anticipation in the reality of God's gift of eternal salvation. And along with that gift of salvation is the gift of his Holy Spirit to guide

us and provide us with hope. I go back to Romans 5:5 again, "This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

We need to ask ourselves, then: "What am I expecting God to do right now? Is my hope in what He can give me, or in who He is?" Sometimes we hope for things for which there is no hope. A hope founded in things or people will usually fail us. True hope comes from the one who created hope and that is God. It comes by trusting God even when things are difficult. In whom shall we place our hope? The writer of Psalm 121:1–2 tells us "I lift my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Perhaps the best way to close these thoughts is with the verse so often recited in benedictions. It deals with hope, the author of hope, and the results of hope.

> "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
>
> ROMANS 15:13

Lighting the Advent wreath

READ

> "The days are coming, 'declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.'"
>
> JEREMIAH 33:14–16

LIGHT THE CANDLES

1. Light a purple Advent candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"Today, we light the candle of hope. May it remind each and every one of us of God's great promise to us. He is our hope, He is our Redeemer, and He is Savior."*

PRAY ALOUD

"Father, during the Advent season may we be reminded of your promises to us and your fulfillment of them. Help us to prepare our lives for His Advent within us. In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen."

Love



Love in Unexpected Places

A devotion by Divya Reouk

> "We love because he first loved us."
>
> 1 John 4:19

During Advent, we celebrate God's love entering the world through Jesus. The Christmas story reminds us that this love often comes in unexpected ways—through humility, vulnerability, and ordinary human circumstances.

Looking back on my own life, I realize how often I have experienced God's love through people I never expected.

There was a time when a life I had worked hard to build fell completely apart. I was broken and had to reconsider what came next. My department chief encouraged me to stop getting caught up in asking "why," take a breath, and keep moving toward my goals. An estranged close friend suddenly stopped by just to say hi, supporting me when I was lonely and lost. I remember sitting on a bench with an uncertain future and praying, "I surrender my life into your hands. Take it and make it what it needs to be." I stood up knowing only that I wanted to continue my medical training. I believed it was God's purpose for me to serve people and be His presence in their vulnerable times.

I moved to the United States at my brother's urging. I had determination, but few resources or connections. I met my husband quite serendipitously, and he has been a constant source of support ever since, even when my journey was uncertain. A friend introduced me to a family who, despite barely having room for themselves, opened their tiny New York apartment to me for six weeks so I could gain hospital experience. My elementary school best friend happened to be living briefly in Los Angeles when I needed a place to stay for an important exam. I worked hard and kept moving forward, but I could not have reached where I am without the generosity, encouragement, and love of these people.

At the time, I was simply trying to take the next step. Looking back, I see a thread of grace running through these encounters. Many of the people who carried me came from different backgrounds and faiths. Yet through them, I experienced love that helped change the course of my life. The Christmas story reminds us that God's love may arrive through people and in ways we would never anticipate.

This Advent, may we ask ourselves:

> *Who are the unexpected people through whom love has reached us?*
>
> *Whose door might we open, or whose burden might we help carry?*

> “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.”
>
> 1 John 4:11

Lighting the Advent wreath

READ

> “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
>
> Isaiah 40:3–5

LIGHT THE CANDLES

1. Light the purple Advent candle that was lit last week; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *“Today we relight the candle of Hope. Let this candle remind us of the great hope we have in Christ the Messiah and in God’s promises.”*

2. Light a new purple Advent candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *“As we now light the candle of Love, let it remind us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ.”*

PRAY ALOUD

Father, guide us in confession of our sins. We know that in the greatness of your love, you have promised to forgive us. Cleanse us as we prepare our lives for the coming of Jesus again. This we ask in His name. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT · DECEMBER 13

Joy



A devotion by Michael Lu

> "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
>
> ROMANS 15:13

When I was young, I remember hearing a wise statement about how to distinguish joy from happiness – "happiness is temporary, but joy is everlasting." According to the Merriam- Webster dictionary, happiness and joy are indeed synonyms. They are often confused to mean the same thing. And yet, the difference lies in the depth of resilience. "Happiness" is a temporary emotion. "Joy" is a state of being.

In Romans 15:13, it is the God of hope who gives us the ability to persevere and trust in Him no matter what comes our way. There are a variety of broken things in this world – broken systems that keep generations in poverty, broken relationships that hinder true reconciliation, and even broken religion, where misrepresentation of the Christian faith has prevented many people from experiencing God. Yet through these worldly challenges, there is still joy, because we have hope – one day God will restore the world for good.

Along with the secret ingredient of hope, joy is meant to be shared with others in our community. Sharing joy sustains us as we look forward to when Jesus will come to redeem His people. I personally relate to this statement through my experiences as a musician. I experience joy in music when playing the violin, but I recognize that as much as I love it, this joy is incredibly empty without an audience to share it with. The greatest gift a musician can offer is giving music a sense of purpose by sharing it with others. Similarly, joy finds fulfillment in community.

During this Advent season, be encouraged and sustained by enduring joy in our hope for a world restored by God. And share joy freely with those around you, uniting in our hope for when Jesus will come one day to make all things new.

Lighting the Advent wreath

READ

> 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. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.
>
> ISAIAH 9:6–7

LIGHT THE CANDLES

1. Light the shortest purple Advent candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"Today we relight the candle of Hope. Let this candle remind us of the great hope we have in Christ the Messiah and in God's promises."*

2. Light the next shortest purple Advent candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"We also relight the candle of Love. Let it remind us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ."*

3. Light the pink candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"Now we light the candle of Joy. May our hearts be forever filled with the joy of His coming."*

PRAY ALOUD

Father, we are filled with joy because we have hope and peace that you have sent your son for all that believe. Help us to be the voices that proclaim grace and truth. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT · DECEMBER 20

Peace



Real Peace — No Peace?

A devotion by Brian Smith

Christ's parting gift is the wholeness that comes from letting go.

Near the end of His time on earth Jesus said:

> "I'm telling you these things while I'm still living with you. The Friend, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send at my request, will make everything plain to you. He will remind you of all the things I have told you. I'm leaving you well and whole. That's my parting gift to you. Peace. I don't leave you the way you're used to being left—feeling abandoned, bereft. So don't be upset. Don't be distraught."
>
> JOHN 14:25–27 MSG

So, what's this parting "Peace" gift He left? I must confess that when I encounter that word, it conjures up either the quiet tranquility of walking through a forest glade or the absence of conflict as in a peace treaty between two warring parties. But Eugene Peterson has it right. The Peace Jesus offers is instead the ongoing process of finding wholeness, completeness, a "fitting-together-of-the- parts," well-being, harmonious relationship with yourself, God and others, being intact and not fragmented.

In contrast, Jeremiah 8:8-12 condemned religious and secular leaders—from both supposed experts in the law and those wise in their own eyes to priests and prophets—for twisting scripture, celebrating greed and wealth, and falsely proclaiming they've created order in the world. He called out unrepentant people who had forgotten how to feel shame. Jeremiah mourned those that marginalized the disadvantaged and minorities, then claimed peace and prosperity to their followers. The leaders of such groups offer a false peace, ultimately falter, stumble into confusion, and are then unable to govern. It's ironic that though Jeremiah lived more than 2,600 years ago, some things never change. Sigh…

A more hopeful story… Though born without arms and legs due to a rare congenital condition, Australian evangelist and author Nick Vujicic shows how peace can be found despite physical limits. Facing severe bullying and early medical skepticism about his quality of life, Nick credits his parents' unwavering belief and his Christian faith with helping him find peace in the body he was given. He came to understand that his identity is not defined by appearances. He travels globally to share a message that God has a peace-filled purpose for every individual, regardless of apparent lack of exterior wholeness.

If you are feeling emotionally distraught for whatever reason or a loss of connection with yourself/loved ones or somehow inadequate this holiday season, take heart. Quiet listening for His uncanny inner

Presence can help you find the true peace that may be eluding you. Don't make finding peace a project! Let the Spirit that's already in you gently reveal His wholeness.

> "May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!"
>
> 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 MSG

Here are some "finding wholeness" questions you can pose on the day you happen to read this or when you're sitting quietly prior to worship. Before you do, take a deep breath, settle in, don't rush. "Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, what do I need to release? What has commanded my attention more than You have? What people, circumstances, obsessions or uncertainties do I need to name and allow You to lift from my anxious heart? I give You everything…" I wish you a "Whew!" of Peace as you name what's going on inside your heart and continue to process the Spirit-answers to such health-giving thoughts.

Lighting the Advent wreath

READ

> "'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
>
> Luke 2:10–14

LIGHT THE CANDLES

1. Light the shortest purple Advent candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"Today we relight the candle of Hope. Let this candle remind us of the great hope we have in Christ the Messiah and in God's promises."*

2. Light the next shortest purple Advent candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"We also relight the candle of Love. Let it remind us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ."*

3. Light the pink candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"As we relight the candle of Joy, may our hearts be forever filled with the joy of His coming."*

4. Light the final purple Advent candle; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"Now we light the candle of Peace. We celebrate the announcement of the coming King and the greatness of God's love revealed through the Christ child."*

PRAY ALOUD

Father, we thank you for revealing yourself through Jesus, and we praise you for the greatness of your love. Help us to share your peace with others and live our lives more like Christ every day. In His name we pray. Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE, DECEMBER 24, AND CHRISTMAS DAY

Christ is born



READ

> “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.
>
> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.
>
> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’
>
> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.
>
> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”
>
> LUKE 2:1–20

LIGHT THE CANDLES

1. Light the four Advent candles, from shortest to tallest; as you are lighting the candles

   SAY *"On this most holy day we relight all four candles in our Advent wreath, and we are reminded of the Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace at His coming."*

2. Light the white Christ Candle in the center; as you are lighting the candle

   SAY *"Now we light the Christ Candle in the center, we rejoice that the promise of God has been fulfilled in the coming of the Baby born in a manger."*

PRAY ALOUD

Gracious and Mighty King, we celebrate your goodness to us as we join the triumph and joy of Christmas. As your love has been revealed in all of its fullness, we pray that love may abound in our hearts during this special day. Grant us the spirit of Christ that we may live in the fullness of his character every day. In His name we pray. Amen.