

ADVENT 2025



# JOY TO THE — WORLD —



REMEMBERING & CELEBRATING CHRIST  
THROUGH OUR TRADITIONS

*Advent Reader*  
JOURNEY CHURCH

“I remember what happened long ago;  
I consider everything you have done.  
I think about all you have made..”  
-Psalm 143:5



artwork by Aylin Thompson, age 9

# | Advent

Advent is the four-week season leading up to Christmas where we prepare our hearts and look forward to the coming Christ. Isaac Watts, writer of the song, “Joy to the World”, wrote the now-famous carol in 1719, based on Psalm 98. While today it is sung at Christmastime, it’s widely believed that Watts actually wrote the song about the second-coming of Christ: “Joy to the World, the Lord has come!”

Pastor Tish Harrison Warren describes the heart behind this well: “We Christians believe, however, not just in one coming of Christ, but in three: the coming of Christ in the incarnation (His birth), the coming of Christ in ‘the last days’ (His return), and the coming of Christ in our present moment through the Holy Spirit’s work and through Word and sacrament.”

In the Bible, traditions of remembering and celebrating the story of God were crucial for maintaining a covenantal relationship, strengthening personal faith, and sharing the Lord with future generations. Scripture shows us that traditions anchored people in the truth of God’s character and His faithfulness, and were built-in to their calendar so they didn’t forget God’s love for them. We never outgrow our need to remember what God has done, and what He will do.

**As a church family, our prayer and intention this Advent is to examine how our Christmas traditions help us connect with the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ. What we do with our bodies, minds, and hearts during this sacred season can go beyond nostalgia, and reveal Emmanuel to us in meaningful ways.**

Each week you will find devotionals written from people within our church family and ways to reflect on what you’ve read. You’ll also find weekly Scripture readings that correspond with the five Advent themes and candles: Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Christ. However you choose to go through this devotional, we recommend that you create space to quiet your heart and mind, so that you might be especially attentive to how God wants to speak to you personally.

**A HUGE thank you to Ed and Felicia Song, Tony and Kelly Zolla, Justine and Dan Haigh, Zach McNay, and Gerardo Mayorga for their written reflections in this Advent Reader. We are deeply grateful for their thoughtful words that will help us walk through the Advent season together.**

And special thanks to the children from Journey Church that did the artwork for our reader! Their winsome drawings of their favorite Christmas traditions are beautiful additions!

**Merry Christmas!**  
*from the Journey Church staff*



artwork by Leon Slusher, age 9

Our wreaths and ribbons and colored lights, our giving of gifts,  
our parties with friends— 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. In view of such great tidings of love  
announced to us, and to all people,  
how can we not be moved to praise and celebration in this Christmas season?  
As we decorate our tree, and as we feast and laugh and sing together,  
we are rehearsing our coming joy! We are making ready  
to receive the one who has already, with open arms, received us!

We would prepare you room here in our hearts and here in our home, Lord Christ.

from “Every Moment Holy” - a liturgy to mark the start of the Christmas Season



# ADVENT

artwork by Leon Slusher, age 9

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Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music...shout for joy before the Lord, the King.

-Psalm 98:4,6

### WEEKLY READINGS: Nov. 30th–Dec. 6th

Sun: Psalm 33

Mon: Hebrews 6:13-20

Tues: Romans 8:18-25

Sat: Romans 15:13

Wed: 1 Peter 1:3-7

Thurs: Luke 2:22-38

Fri: Isaiah 40:28-31

### DEVOTIONAL

*written by Felicia & Ed Song*

## Advent Wreaths and a Tradition of Waiting

“Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light...”

These are the words that begin the prayer read on the first Sunday of Advent when our family lights the first candle of our homemade Advent wreath.

While most folks finish up their Thanksgiving festivities by searching for the perfect Christmas tree, I usually have my mind set on finding trimmings to make an Advent wreath which will sit on our family’s dining table and gets lit at the start of every dinner while we take turns leading the Advent prayer for that given week.

Years ago, we worshipped at an Episcopal church which introduced us to the rich liturgy of the church calendar. Being unfamiliar with liturgical traditions, we found it powerful to experience how the church calendar could structure our year and bind us to embodied practices shared by the communion of saints around the world and through time.

We learned that Advent is the beginning of the church year, the four-week season that precedes Christmastide which begins on the evening of December 24th. Advent doesn’t only point us towards the birth of Jesus, but also towards His Second Coming. It is both about the miracle of God become incarnate and the time of judgment when justice will be meted out and the truth of all things revealed.

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This was all especially meaningful because we were learning this in the fall of 2001, only a few months after we had sat in our living room with friends watching planes fly into the Twin Towers in NYC. It was a dark moment in American history defined by fear, anxiety, anger, and apprehension—a time when the instinct to defend against what felt like threats to our ways of life often led to the villainizing of those not like us.

Episcopal priest Fleming Rutledge taught us that “every year, Advent begins in the dark.” Advent reminds us that darkness does not only reside outside of us in the villains we perceive, but that “the line separating good and evil runs through every human heart.” So, Advent is a season when we not only look unflinchingly at the darkness around us, but also the darkness within our own selves.

Only through this period of preparation—refusing the temptations of escapism or nostalgia—can we genuinely arrive at Christmas. Rutledge writes: “The authentically hopeful Christmas spirit has not looked away from the darkness, but straight into it. The true victorious Christmas spirit does not look away from death, but directly at it. Otherwise, the message is cheap and false.”

Advent therefore is a season of waiting, waiting in the dark, waiting in a world of chaos, violence, and confusion, waiting in our own regrets, unresolved wounds, and losses. Advent is about waiting for the light to *finally* shine and illuminate the darkness, waiting for the Judgment of King Jesus to make things right. What a glorious thing that our church calendar allots time for us to bring the gritty realities of life to the feet of Jesus.

May this Advent season draw us to not look away from the darkness but to acknowledge its reality while waiting for the light—the Astonishing Light of the Christ, the Lion and the Lamb, the Messiah who will bring justice and healing to all of Creation.

**Let us pray the collect for this first Sunday of Advent:**

*Almighty God, gives us grace to cast away the works of darkness,  
and put on the armor of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life in which  
your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility;  
that in the last day, when he shall come again  
in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*



artwork by Calista Slusher, age 4

## REFLECTION QUESTION

Where do our traditions, like lighting a candle, awaken both honest awareness of the dark and a longing for light? How might Jesus teach me to wait with hope this week?



artwork by Daniel Auth, age 9

# PEACE *to the world*

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## WEEKLY READINGS: Dec. 7th – 13th

Sun: Psalm 4

Mon: Numbers 6:22-27

Tues: Romans 12:17-21

Sat: John 14:25-27

Wed: Isaiah 26:1-4

Thurs: Colossians 3:15-17

Fri: Philipians 4:4-7

## DEVOTIONAL

*written by Tony & Kelly Zolla*

Christmas can be a very joyful, hopeful, expectant season, while also being one of the busiest and most hectic times. There are so many Christmas traditions to do all in one month—setting up the tree, baking cookies, and decorating the house. And, by holly jolly, do we love traditions!

Christians have held traditions, especially around the holidays, very sacred for many generations. We realized that this was to keep the customs and stories alive, and it made us appreciate our traditions even more. That was all they had. They didn't have pictures and smartphones to capture the memory, but had to live it out with family and friends every year.

With that in mind, starting our new family together, we wanted to create traditions that would bring us back to the reason for Christmas.

Our tradition is to recreate a shepherd's dinner on Christmas Eve. We gather simple foods that the shepherds would have eaten, like cheese, fruit, and bread—basically a simple charcuterie board. We turn the lights off and light a few long candlesticks. After we eat, we read Luke 2:8-15.

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## Week 2

# PEACE

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### **Luke 2:8-10, NLT**

That night there were shepherds 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."

It brings the focus back on the Advent season: the hope and the joy. But this dinner really highlights the peace before the announcement from the angels to the shepherds. We really love the stillness prior to all the upcoming family functions over the next twenty-four hours. The act of eating by candlelight and simple foods gives us time to reflect on what the shepherds might have been thinking when they heard the wonderful news of the Savior's birth. It reminds us that God has given us a gift, the precious gift of salvation through Jesus. And the same hope that the shepherds and all the Old Testament people had was being fulfilled through Jesus' birth that night.

God is present always, but with this tradition, it helps us to feel him a little closer—with an evening of peace and remembrance.



## Week 2

# PEACE

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### REFLECTION QUESTION

Where do the quiet and simplicity of our traditions stir both ache and wonder in me? How might Christ's good news reorder the way I enter gatherings in this season?



artwork on pages 6 and 7 by Daniel Auth, age 9

## Week 2 **PEACE**



artwork by Addy Brown, age 8

### **PRAYER**

Lord our God,  
through your prophets you comforted us in our weakness and called us  
to use our strengths for the good of others. As we pray in this season  
for Christ's coming, so we ask that we would have the confidence to  
renew our own lives, that, through compassion and practical service, we  
may be made agents of your kingdom in our world, through Jesus Christ  
our Lord.

### WEEKLY READINGS: Dec. 14th–20th

Sun: Psalm 96

Mon: John 16:22-24

Tues: Psalm 5:11-12

Wed: Zephaniah 3:14-17

Thurs: Luke 15:8-10

Fri: Romans 12:12-15

Sat: Psalm 16:9-11

### DEVOTIONAL

*written by Justine & Daniel Haigh*

### The Hands of God

For generations at Christmas, English people have spent hours in the kitchen making the required sweets their families have grown to cherish and enjoy. Being British, a longstanding tradition in our family has involved baking a delicious assortment of goodies passed down from my great grandmother; flakey pastry mince pies, puff pastry sausage rolls, Sheri fruit trifle, and the traditional rich fruit cake (don't judge, the UK version is delicious). As lovely as all of this sounds, in 2019, our holiday baking almost vanished when I went through a divorce and then lost my mother. One way my son Daniel and I continued to keep the tradition alive was through sharing our sweets with friends and neighbors. We would carefully strategize the necessary purchases, plan out the baking days, and then package up the goodies ready for delivery on Christmas Eve.

We had a good holiday rhythm going for a few years until one Christmas I became ill. Due to my illness, I was in intense physical pain and could not tolerate light. I was unable to go outside, drive, enjoy nature, go to stores, restaurants, or anywhere without being blindfolded. I could not endure the lights on in my house, watch TV, or work on my computer. Even my windows were boarded up blocking out the sunlight. Having suffered from a variety of family setbacks and then being isolated due to my illness, I was at an all-time low. My first thoughts were to abandon God. However, rather than retreating into myself, I pursued solace in His loving hands. I drew closer to Him and Psalm 23 took on a whole new meaning.

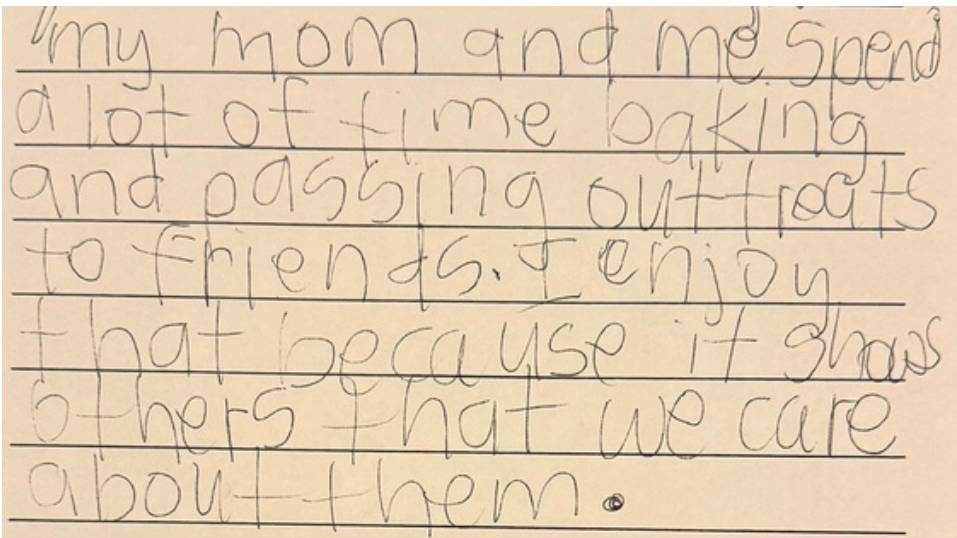
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## Week 3

# JOY

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Coming out of the dark valley, I learned there is another side to seemingly intolerable pain. The steep slope up to the light, has led me to discover new things about myself and my capabilities, but importantly about the unyielding presence and faithfulness of God. That Holy Night when Jesus became Immanuel, God with us, He deliberately brought himself low, into our suffering, so that He could fully experience our humanness. Now when I bake for others, I think of my hands as instruments of servitude - to offer love, hope, and light to a desperately dark world. As Dan and I approach our holiday baking again, we reflect with gratitude upon its true meaning and authentic value.

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in cursive and matches the text in the block below. The paper has horizontal lines and a light beige background.

My mom and me spend a lot of time baking and passing out treats to friends. I enjoy that because it shows others that we care about them.

Daniel's handwritten note, October 2025

## REFLECTION QUESTION

How might Jesus meet us in our traditions and encourage us to turn our hands into love for neighbors?

## PRAYER

Almighty God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God With Us, help us to know  
his presence among us and to be so transformed by his power,  
that in our worship, our words and our actions we may reflect the  
light of the world to those with whom we share our lives, through  
the same Jesus Christ our Lord.



artwork by Melanie Rose, age 4



artwork by Gwen Suh, age 5

“He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of his righteousness,  
And wonders of his love.”

“Joy to the World” verse 4

### WEEKLY READINGS: Dec. 21st–27th

Sun: Psalm 136

Mon: 1 John 4:7–21

Tues: 1 Corinthians 13

Sat: John 13:34–35

Wed: Matthew 1:18–25

Thurs: Luke 2:1–21

Fri: Colossians 3:12–14

### DEVOTIONAL

*written by Zach McNay*

### Hilltop, Incorruptible

Growing up in my family, the most important holiday tradition was something we called "Hilltop." Every Thanksgiving, my grandparents rented a lodge named Hilltop at Aldersgate campground, and would host my Mom and her sister's families for three nights. This was always the high point of my year—the true New Year's Eve—and still the closest thing I can imagine to what heaven will be like: tons of fun things to do, loved ones to talk with, delicious things to eat, and always time for a nap by a fire that never goes out.

As I got older, my joy was complicated by a sense of melancholy, that these perfect days would be over too soon. I remember one year on Wednesday evening, as we were pulling into the parking lot and our cousins ran out to greet us, feeling happy and sad, imagining being in the exact same position but reversed, come Saturday afternoon.

We'd always argue within the family over precisely how many times we'd met for Hilltop. In what turned out to be our last year, we made shirts celebrating the 25th anniversary, later realizing it was actually the 26th. Very sadly, the following year my Grandma's health declined quickly, and she died that Fall.

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That Christmas, my sisters and parents came to visit me in Seattle, and we went to a performance of G.F. Handel's "Messiah" oratorio. All the words sung in this two-and-a-half hour piece come from Scripture, telling the whole story of Christ, from prophecy, to his birth, death, resurrection, and final return. Near the very end, the Bass soloist triumphantly declares the words of 1 Corinthians 15:51-52:

*51 Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,  
52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Our God is unchanging and eternal, the maker of all good things, the fulfiller of our longing for these good things to last forever. Those of us who hate change, who never want to leave the hilltop: be of good cheer! At the same time, God the Son became Jesus the man, His body changing in real time from a perfect baby, to a man in His prime, to abused, broken, a corpse stone dead...and raised, incorruptible. He being just the first. Death, sad endings, are the surest thing, our oldest tradition. But behold, we shall all be changed...

## REFLECTION QUESTION

Where do my most cherished traditions awaken both delight and grief, and how might Christ teach me to love well in the midst of change and loss?

# Week 4 LOVE

## PRAYER

Lord God,  
out of whose love we were made in the beginning and through  
whose love we are redeemed in Jesus Christ, be with us in all  
that we do, that inspired by your creativity, stirred by your  
compassion and empowered by your Holy Spirit, we may bring  
the waiting world the message of salvation through words of  
truth and deeds of love, in Jesus Christ our Lord.



artwork by Aurelia Weeks, age 10

# CHRIST *to the world* Christmas

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## WEEKLY READINGS: Dec. 28th–31st

Sun: Psalm 24

Tues: Psalm 145

Mon: Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Wed: Luke 17:20-21

## DEVOTIONAL

*written by Gerardo Mayorga*

### Las Posadas

‘Las Posadas’ are a Mexican tradition that consist of a series of nightly celebrations from December 16-24, reenacting Mary and Joseph's search for lodging. Traditionally, people walk around town in a candlelit procession, singing "La Canción Para Pedir Posada" (the song to ask for lodging) from house to house, and being "refused" entry until they reach the final house, which will host the party. The celebration continues with traditional foods, drinks, prayers, music, and the breaking of a star-shaped piñata, which symbolizes the triumph of good over evil.

‘Las Posadas’ are the Christmas tradition I remember the most. I loved walking around town with friends and family, enjoying music, tamales, atole (a traditional, warm Mexican beverage made from corn masa) or ponche (a warm, fruit-based beverage). Food and music were great, but as a kid breaking the piñata and getting to collect candy from it, that was the best. ‘Las Posadas’ were a fun cultural and religious activity, but for me, it held little spiritual significance.

As an adult, and a follower of Christ, I can now appreciate the true meaning of ‘Posadas’. It points to the fact that Christmas is a remembrance of God sending His Son into a broken world to save humanity. In that context, ‘Las Posadas’ are a beautiful representation of the community coming together to honor this.

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# CHRISTMAS CHRIST

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When Tina and I started our family, we did not want to fall into using religious acts without meaning. Traditions, when rooted in a relationship with Jesus Christ, can create a rhythm that points us back to Him. Even though we don't have an extravagant tradition like 'Las Posadas', we incorporate traditions such as lighting our Advent candles and reading Scripture. We have had a countdown calendar that includes activities around the real meaning of Christmas. We have let our kids re-enact the story of Mary and Joseph using a kids' nativity scene. And even though every year things look different as the ages of our kids change, we continue to find ways to maintain Jesus at the center, and as the real meaning of why we have the privilege of celebrating Christmas.

Isaiah 9:6 says: "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."

## REFLECTION QUESTION

As we "make room" with our own small posadas—lighting candles, retelling the story, opening our door—where do these practices reveal both habit and hunger, and how might welcoming others help us truly center on Christ?



artwork by Gwen Suh, age 5

# CHRISTMAS CHRIST

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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,  
we give you thanks that your Son, with whom you made the heavens and the earth, came among us as a child in the manger of Bethlehem to bring us light and life and hope. Be with us, we pray, in our journey through life, that we may share his love with others through lives live with joy, friendship and generosity, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.



artwork by Melanie Rose, age 4

