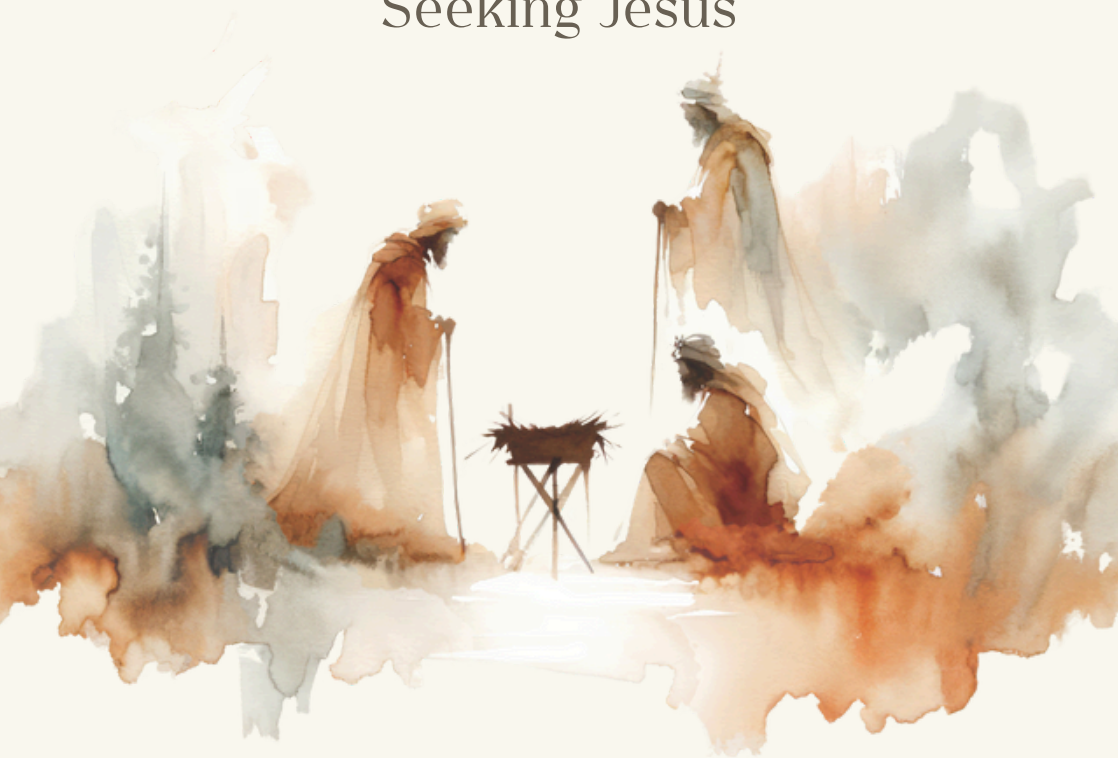


# *Journey Church* Advent Reader

Seeking Jesus



“Come to Him,  
by whatever route you can.”

-N.T. Wright

And the angel said unto them,  
Fear not: for, behold  
I bring you good tidings of great joy,  
which shall be to all people.

-Luke 2:10



artwork by Katelyn Suh, age 10

# | Advent

Advent is the four-week season leading up to Christmas where we prepare our hearts and look forward to the coming Christ. I love how Tish Harrison Warren describes this. She says, “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.”

As a church family, our prayer and intention this Christmas season is to revisit the journey of the Wise Men (Magi) during our Sunday gatherings, remember our own personal stories of coming to Jesus, and consider how to *keep seeking Jesus* in our daily lives, wholeheartedly—by, as N.T. Wright says—“whatever route we can.”

Each week you will find scripture taken from the Revised Common Lectionary—Bible readings that guide Christian churches through the church calendar. From them, are devotionals written from people within our church and ways to reflect on what you have read. However you choose to go through this devotional, we recommend that you create space to quiet your heart and your mind, so that you might be especially attentive to how God wants to speak to you personally.

A HUGE thank you to Kenna Coffee, Leanna Smith, Ken and Wanda Caron, Kasey and Mikayla Sanchez, and Bryan and Kelly Voigt for their written reflections in this Advent Reader. We are so grateful for their prayerful consideration and 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 are creative visuals of the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love found in “God with us.”

Merry Christmas!

*-from the Journey Church staff*



# ADVENT

artwork by Olivia Weeks, age 11

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You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.  
-Jeremiah 29:13

# Week 1

# HOPE

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written by Kenna Coffee

## READING

**Jeremiah 33:14-16**, Psalm 25:1-10,  
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Luke 21:25-36



## DEVOTIONAL

If I was asked what the hardest year of my life was, to the surprise of many it would not be 2020, nor would it be the years before or the several right after the pandemic. However, this year...this year was hard. I layed in bed at the start of the new year, sick and miserable, unsure of whether or not my body could ever feel “normal” again and if I would ever “be myself again”. I was exhausted, tired of saying no to friends and family, tired of turning down plans I desired to participate in, grieving the activities that once brought me life, tired of the pain that never let up, and more than anything, I was so tired of doctor appointments ending in more appointments with no concrete treatment plan. In more ways than not, I felt as though I too was in a season of exile, so to speak. Could it get any worse? Will it ever end? “But surely the days are coming, declares the Lord” (*Jeremiah 33:14*).

Jeremiah 33 speaks to the Israelites who have all been in exile for a long time. To a group of people who know ever so well the impacts of despair and the lament that accompanies this destruction. As the Babylonian’s ruled over Judah and Jerusalem, one can only imagine what the Israelites were feeling and experiencing. And then, a glimmer of hope, a promise: “I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David” (*Jeremiah 33:15*). In the midst of deep despair, amidst the deep longing, hope arises. Hope that the justice and righteousness of Christ would prevail (*Jeremiah 33:16*). It is also important to note that this hope is not without waiting, for “the days that are coming”. It was not for hundreds of more years before this promise was fulfilled.

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In my own season of exile, I too, longed for, grieved, and awaited hope. Hope that maybe one day I would feel myself again, for days where I could once again say yes to friends, to participate in the activities that bring me life, and for days where pain is only a distant memory. Could I really imagine a life this way? Christ's second coming offers us (me) that hope. Hope in a world where suffering is no more, and one where Christ will bring it all together in perfect peace. Maybe that is the invitation of this passage to imagine the fulfillment of this promise. To imagine the hope in the promise that once again, God will be with us.

## REFLECTION QUESTION

How does the promise of a coming righteous Branch—a symbol of hope, justice, and restoration—speak to your own season of struggle or waiting? And how might that change how you view your current hardships?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

**This week, focus on the “practice of patience.”**

Identify one area of your life where you feel an urge to “rush” or “take control.” Each day, spend a few quiet moments acknowledging that place, releasing it into God’s hands, and trusting Him with it.

PRAYER

God of hope, we thank You for Your promises  
of renewal and new creation.

In our seasons of waiting, be near to us.

In times of weariness, let Your promises give us strength.  
When the path feels dark, help us to hold fast to Your light.  
Remind us that even in exile, even in our hardest seasons,  
You are with us, and Your faithfulness endures forever.

Teach us to rest in Your presence,  
filling our hearts with Your peace as we wait on You.

Amen



artwork on pages 2 & 4 by Leon Slusher, age 8



# Week 2

# PEACE

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written by Leanna Smith

## READING

Malachi 3:1-4, **Luke 1:68-79**,  
Philippians 1:3-11,  
Luke 3:1-6



## DEVOTIONAL

There's a small wooden sign in our home that reads, "The best is yet to come." It reminds me of the Christmas presents from my dad that were never under the tree—because they *were* the tree. For the past 40 years, and still today, my dad designs a unique and beautiful Christmas tree as his gift to his family. I still remember the tree of 1990 with its bright red apple ornaments and little white birds. My sisters and I stood in awe, shouting, "Dad! This is your best tree yet!" But year after year, he continues to create a tree even more special than the last. I'm sure this year will be no different; I hear it's going to have a candy theme, at the request of one of the grandkids.

As I eagerly await the reveal of this year's tree, I've come to realize it's not really about the tree at all. It's about the love my dad expresses through his creativity, the joy we share as a family during the big reveal, and the excitement of gathering together to celebrate the birth of Christ.

On a much deeper level, we can experience joy as we anticipate the future that our Heavenly Father promises. We live in a weary world filled with sin and brokenness. But the gift of peace from the Holy Spirit dwells within us, assuring us of an eternally perfect future that awaits us in heaven.

In Luke 1:68-79, we find Zechariah filled with the Holy Spirit, offering praise to God. He recalls God's sovereign work throughout history and prophesies the coming of a Savior who will redeem His people and that his son John would help prepare the way:

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His way, to give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

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# Week 2

# PEACE

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Zechariah expresses hope for salvation and peace through the coming Savior who will lead and direct our lives toward a peaceful way of living. This season reminds us of the significance of Christ's birth—that His coming into the world was God's ultimate gift of hope and love to humanity. As we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and the celebration of Christmas, we can find peace amid the stress and trials of the day, knowing God's promises are true and an eternal future awaits us—the best is yet to come.



artwork on pages 5 & 6  
by Daniel Auth, age 8

## REFLECTION QUESTION

In a world marked by brokenness, how does the hope of Christ's coming and the promise of an eternal future impact your sense of peace today? Where can you bring peace into your world today?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

**This week, practice “walking in the path of peace.”** Each evening, reflect on your day and identify one moment where you experienced peace or a sense of God's presence. Write it down as a reminder of God's faithfulness. Then, pray Luke 1:78-79 over the parts of your life where peace feels distant.



artwork by Addy Brown, age 7

### PRAYER

God of peace, we thank You  
for the gift of peace  
You have given through Christ.  
May Your Holy Spirit fill us  
with comfort and courage, reminding us that  
“the best is yet to come.”  
As we learn to walk each day  
in the light of Your love,  
set our anchors deep  
in your grace and peace. Amen

# Week 3

# JOY

written by Ken and Wanda Caron

## READING

Zephaniah 3:14-20, Isaiah 12:2-6,  
**Philippians 4:4-7**, Luke 3:7-18

## DEVOTIONAL

*Philippians 4:4-7*

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

*Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

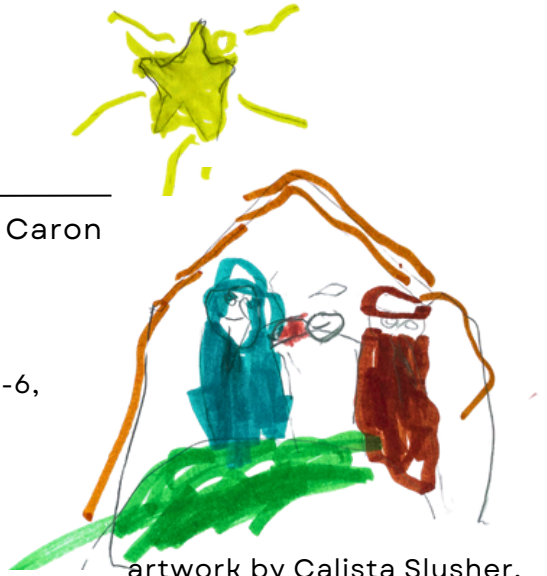
As parents, we desire for our children to follow God's direction in life. We pray all their lives for them, for God to lead and direct them.

When our oldest daughter was a senior in high school, she was going through the process of seeking out where she should go to college. She was admitted to several schools and was figuring out the financial aid piece for each one, to find the best fit which she could afford.

One school was a college in Kansas. It happened to be where Wanda and I met and fell in love, so we knew the school well. It also turned out that if Lizzie went there, she would be the 4th generation in Wanda's family to attend this college. We factored in what we could pay, what certain scholarships would be, and how much she needed to earn between now and when school started. It was still going to be a major struggle for her to attend. They had a scholarship test opportunity, and she flew out to Kansas to visit the school and take the test. She liked the school, but when she took the test, she did not think she did well enough on it to win the scholarship.

She took the ACT test again to try and improve her score to move her up one more scholarship level. Her score did not improve, much to her frustration, and we wondered if she would be able to afford to attend at all.

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artwork by Calista Slusher,  
age 3

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Then a random day, three months later, she received a letter in the mail. I handed it to her not thinking much of it. As parents of seniors have probably learned, there is lots of mail in those days. She went into the other room. Then as only a teenage girl could do, she ran back to me and was excited, shocked, and almost speechless as she handed me the letter.

The school selected her for the Presidential Scholarship. It was the largest scholarship they had, which was a major answer to prayer for our family. This was a moment of God's direction, but it was also a moment where a gift of Joy was given to my daughter and our family. In the midst of our joy and tears (on both our parts) we hugged and took a moment to pray and thank God for his provision and leading in her life. It was a moment of tears of joy and thanksgiving that we shared as she sought after God's plans.

The future can be filled with uncertainty so many times in our lives, but I am reminded this Christmas what the Angel told the shepherds: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

May your Christmas this year bring you great Joy as you seek after Him.



artwork by Luke Auth, age 10

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What would it look like for you to approach uncertainty with prayer, thanksgiving, and trust in God, as encouraged in Philippians 4:6? How might that guard your heart?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

**This week, practice “releasing your worries to God.”** Each evening, reflect on your day and identify one moment where you felt anxious, worried, or uncertain. Write it down, then take a moment to present this concern to God with thanksgiving for His faithfulness. As you release each worry, pray Philippians 4:6-7 over your heart and mind. Let this practice be a reminder of God’s nearness in every circumstance.

## PRAYER

God of joy, I come to You  
with gratitude, knowing You  
are near. Help me to release  
my worries and find joy in  
Your presence. Thank You for  
the moments of joy You  
bring, even in the midst of  
uncertainty. Fill my heart  
with Your peace, and let Your  
joy be my strength today.  
Amen.



artwork by Brynn O'Connell, age 4



# Week 4

# LOVE

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written by Kasey & Mikayla Sanchez

## READING

Micah 5:2-5a, Psalm 80:1-7, **Hebrews 10:5-10**, Luke 1:39-55

## DEVOTIONAL

Love looks like a plate of waffles on a Saturday morning.

It looks like tired eyes straining to find ingredients in the cabinet, and talking through yawns as you explain to the kids why they can't play with the egg whites right now.

Love looks like letting your spouse drive “the good car” because the other one is old and junky or still carries the semi-permanent aroma of the roast beef that spilled in it a month ago.

It looks like a friend dropping their plans to lend support in a time of need.

Love looks like bringing new life into the world at great expense to your own.

Love shows up in the mundane and the major, and it often manifests as sacrifice –choosing to put others above oneself. Jesus Himself said, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” What a profound and challenging thing a life of love is, and we get to live it out in these small and large ways in our lives. Yet Jesus didn’t just teach a principle; He demonstrated it.

In this season, we are reminded of the incredible gift to the world that is the life of Jesus. Yes, there was the final sacrifice, but right now we also pause to remember the sacrificial life that Jesus gifted to us. For God to come so humbly as an infant, and to live the life He did for our sake, is an astounding gift of love. Christ’s example, sacrifice, and gift reverberate through the ages. Here we are, thousands of years later, celebrating that love and letting our day-to-day lives be shaped by it. In this season, may we give and receive love in a way that honors and echoes the unmatched love of God.

# Week 4

# LOVE

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What might shift in your heart and perspective if you began to see everyday sacrifices as sacred acts of love?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

**This week, practice "sacrificing love" by choosing one practical, loving sacrifice you can make each day this week.** This might be something like allowing others to have the "better" option (a preferred seat, choice of food, or parking spot), helping a friend in need, or listening patiently to someone who needs to talk. As you do this, pray quietly, asking God to shape your heart to love sacrificially, and let each small act be a daily reminder of Jesus' sacrifice for us.



artwork by Aurelia Weeks, age 9



**PRAYER**

God of love,  
in moments of inconvenience and sacrifice,  
draw me closer to You  
and remind me of Your great love for me.  
Help me to see beauty in the small acts of love in my day,  
and to embrace each one as a chance to reflect Your heart.  
Teach me to love with humility and grace,  
just as You have loved me. In Your name, I pray.  
Amen



artwork by Levi O'Connell, age 11

# Christmas SEEKING CHRIST

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written by Bryan & Kelly Voigt

## READING

**Isaiah 9:2-7**, Psalm 96:1-13, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-20

## DEVOTIONAL

When we were growing up, our Christmases were filled with excitement and anticipation: the thrill of getting something new and spending time with extended family. For my family specifically, we would celebrate on Christmas Eve by playing a dice game and cards around the table. We'd go through a slide show of photos from the year prior that would include each and every family member. My dad and his siblings, unusually funny people, would play a home video dug up from their childhood that would leave us crying from laughter. I waited every year for this chance to spend the entire night with my big family.

As we've grown up and moved away, we get this less frequently, and have experienced multiple losses in our family that are undeniably amplified around Christmas. The mention of a baby in a manger or hearing about full families getting together for Christmas can strike grief into our hearts.

The themes of celebration and grief may seem like they don't belong at the same table, but in fact they are a perfect pair for Christ. Isaiah 9 says the Messiah will "shatter the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders." God's story tells us this yoke is sin and death, and we have seen it shattered through Christ's time on earth, starting with His arrival as a baby in a manger, and then moving through His life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven. That is an outcome to celebrate! And yet, God's story is not complete. We also recognize this yoke today as grief, which will not be fully broken until He comes again. No matter what yoke you bear, we can celebrate what Christ has already done and also celebrate the promise of what He will do about these present burdens.

# CHRISTMAS CHRIST

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How can the memory of loved ones and traditions bring you closer to understanding the peace and hope that Christ offers?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

**Today, practice “celebrating and remembering” by lighting two candles.**

One candle represents celebration—Christ’s light that has come into the world and shattered the yoke of sin and death. The other candle represents remembrance—acknowledging the yokes of grief and loss still present in your life. As you light the celebration candle, reflect with gratitude on Christ’s first coming and the freedom His birth and life have brought to you and the world. Then, as you light the remembrance candle, reflect with gratitude on the memories of your loved ones and the traditions you miss. Rest in the tension of grief and joy, thanking God for both the “already” and the “not yet” of His kingdom.



artwork by Gwen Suh, age 4

# CHRISTMAS CHRIST

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## PRAYER

Christ Jesus,  
You are the light that broke through the darkness,  
the hope that shatters every burden.  
As I walk through this season,  
help me to carry both joy and grief to You,  
trusting that You hold each moment in Your hands. Amen



artwork by Daniel Auth, age 8

