

*Journey Church*  
**ADVENT  
READER**



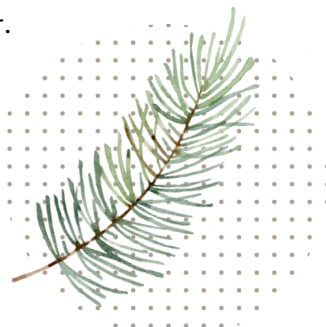
# ADVENT

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.”

Our prayer this year is that as we remember Jesus stepping into humanity and anticipate his return one day to restore all things, that we will encounter him personally in the here and now. And in doing so, experience a renewed desire to share the great gift of his personal presence with everyone we will encounter in the weeks ahead and beyond.

For each week of Advent you will find scripture readings, devotionals written from people within our church family, 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 the Thompsons, The Suhs, Lacey McNay, the Colemans, and the Wellers for helping us put together this Advent Reader. We are grateful for their prayerful consideration and thoughtful words that will help us walk through the Advent season, together.





# ADVENT

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> Week 1 - Hope

> Week 2 - Peace

> Week 3 - Joy

> Week 4 - Love

> Christmas!

# WEEK 1

# HOPE

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written by Ryan & Trish Thompson



## READING

Luke 1:5-25, **Jeremiah 33:14-16**,  
Psalm 25:1-9, Luke 21:25-36

## DEVOTIONAL

Several years ago, we visited a church in Atlanta to observe their children's program, called Godly Play. As we entered the worship space, it was evident we were in a special and holy place. The room contained the stories of God in individual boxes on shelves lining the walls. We were struck by the number of boxes containing the stories of the Old Testament, including a bookcase full of the stories of the desert. So many hundreds of years were in front of us, with some stories of joy, but also many stories of longing, wandering, and suffering. Our eyes were then drawn to a simple wooden nativity in the focal point of the room. The nativity stays in that space year-round. It is a reminder of the hope that the people in the desert looked for, but could not yet know what it would look like. It is a reminder to us that there is still hope. Ever since that visit, we have kept out a nativity in our home year-round. No matter what is happening, there is hope. There is Christ. He came and He is coming.

The odd thing about hope is that it does not include resolution. Once there is full resolution, there is no more need for hope. Hope is an acknowledgement that things are not as they should be, but that we believe one day things will become exactly as they should be. Hope encourages us to move in that direction, not because we know good will happen, but because we have faith that good can happen.

In Jeremiah 33, the Babylonians have taken over and effectively ended the hundreds of years of David's line on the throne of Israel. There was no reason for hope, but hope does not need reason. Jeremiah promises that "a righteous branch [will] sprout from David's line" (Jer 33:15, NIV). His promise took about 600 years to come to fruition, but the people of Israel held on to hope. They waited for Emmanuel – waited for God with us. We also wait.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In Godly Play, reflection questions are posed as wondering statements, in order to invite, but not demand, a response. Sometimes it is helpful to wonder aloud, and sometimes silently.

I wonder what you hope for?

I wonder what reminds you to hold on to hope?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

Breath Prayer: Slow your breath. Feel the air come in. Feel the air move back out. As you inhale, pray (aloud or silently) “Come Emmanuel.”

As you exhale, pray “God with us.”

Notice the emotions and thoughts that come and go. Allow them to come and go as you breathe your prayer.

## PRAYER

a benediction from *Pastor Olivia.*



Father, Son, & Holy Spirit - I put all my Hope in You. As the Christmas season begins, help me not miss your birthday because of consumerism, hurry, or distractions. I want to celebrate You well, and remember what your birth means for me, for my loved ones, and for the world. You are the hope that doesn't disappoint. When I'm struggling to feel it or believe it, increase my hope. Increase my faith through the comfort of your Holy Spirit. I am so grateful to You for Emmanuel and the Living Hope we have each 24 hours because You are always with me and always for me.

- Amen

# WEEK 2

# PEACE

written by Jon & Becky Suh



## READING

**Luke 1:26-38**, Malachi 3:1-4,  
Philippians 1:3-11, Luke 3:1-6

## DEVOTIONAL

Indiana was our quintessential “home sweet home.” It’s where we met, fell in love, and vowed to love in sickness and in health; where we bought our first home; where our kids were born and raised; and where we made countless core memories. That would change when God made an impression to us that a life change was imminent, and made it clear He wanted us to move to Oregon. To say we were confused is an understatement. We hardly knew anything about Oregon, let alone the Pacific Northwest. It seemed so impractical... and improbable. Why Oregon?

In Luke 1, Gabriel, an angel of the Lord, gives Mary the news that she would “conceive and give birth to a son,” and “call him Jesus.” (Luke 1:31) Mary’s initial response is one of disbelief and bewilderment, and understandably so. “How will this be since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34) Gabriel responds, “The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” (Luke 1:35) For no word from God will ever fail.” (Luke 1:37) We then see a profound transition occur in the heart of Mary as she responds, “let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38 ESV) This is a beautiful moment where she finds peace, acknowledging and accepting that what was impossible with man is possible with God.

There was a moment in our life that we chose to accept the life God wanted for us. We resisted at first—none of it made sense—but God sweetly continued to give small, gentle nudges that we belong in Oregon, not Indiana. Moving our family more than halfway across the country, leaving the security of what we knew as home, buying a house we never stepped foot in, moving into a neighborhood and culture that was foreign to us... all of it was daunting. There was anxiety and fear of the unknown, but we found incredible peace trusting that God is faithful, we’re safe in His hands, and He has a wonderful life for us.

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# WEEK 2 PEACE

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Last week we talked about hope, and without hope, Mary, nor we as believers, can have peace. It is beautiful to see the marriage of the two. We can rest in the hope that God has an intricate yet thoughtful design for our world. Mary's "how will this be?" was our "why Oregon?" but we're thankful we found His peace through hope.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Has God made an impression in your life that seemed impractical, improbable, or impossible?

How did you respond?

In what ways was your response similar or different from Mary's?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

Close your eyes and reflect on an impractical, improbable, or impossible impression God made on your life.

Let your thoughts and emotions come and go.

Slowly extend your arms outwards with your palms facing up.

Breathing in, pray "I love you, Lord."

Breathing out, pray "I trust you, Lord."

## PRAYER

a benediction from *Paster Scott*



Jesus, Prince of Peace, fill us with all joy and peace as we trust you with the impractical, improbable, and impossible things in life. By the power of the Holy Spirit (your personal presence) overwhelm us to the point of overflowing with hope, peace, joy and love. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.



# WEEK 3

# JOY

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written by Lacey McNay



## READING

Luke 1:39-56, Zephaniah 3:14-20  
Isaiah 12:2-6, **Philippians 4:4-7**, Luke 3:7-18

## DEVOTIONAL

When I read the words of Paul advising the Philippians to “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice,” it’s hard for me not to chuckle a bit and think that’s just not possible. Always?! No one can do that! Too often, I let life situations get in the way of my rejoicing or delighting in who God is and the Good News of the Gospel. Paul reminds the Philippians, “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” Sometimes, I can get to a point in my day where not only do I fail to rejoice, but I find myself tense or stressed. Gentleness is not my most evident character trait in these moments. But what if I relished in the fact that the Lord is near, that Jesus is Emmanuel--God With Us; what change would people see?

Paul goes on to state, “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 minds in Christ Jesus.” We have a God who cares deeply about what takes up physical space in our lives, emotional space in our hearts, and mental space in our minds. Sharing these concerns and inviting the Lord in is a way to Rejoice in the Lord and allow God to exchange our worries for peace, distractions for purpose, and despair for joy.

In response to Philippians 4:4, evangelist and Bible teacher Beth Moore said, “I shall spend this day rejoicing. I shall rejoice my way back to joy. I shall verb my way to the noun.” This Advent season, may we remember to Rejoice in the Lord because God is near and Jesus is Emmanuel. May this action lead us to the source of true JOY.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In what ways can the Lord's ever-present nearness transform your character and your witness to those around you?

Do you have any worries, distractions, or despair that you could offer to God in exchange for peace, purpose, and joy?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

**Silence:** Set aside some quiet time before the Lord. Let yourself become aware of God's presence.

**Breath Prayer:** Focus on your breathing. As you breathe, let that become a prayer. Breathe in, "The Lord is near," breathe out, "I can Rejoice."

## PRAYER

a benediction from *Olivia Cuddeford*  
Director of Journey Kids



Lord Jesus, thank you for the joy that is in your name. I can imagine that star lighting up the sky on the day of your birth--guiding people to you. People in darkness, who saw a great light. I am overjoyed that in you, I have everything I need. Thank you for deciding to come as a newborn baby, the humblest of all on that first Christmas. May I be humbled and filled with joy this Christmas season, remembering that no matter what is going on around me, I have everything I need in you.

- Amen

# WEEK 4

# LOVE

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written by Coleman and Justina Cookston



## READING

Luke 1:57-80, Micah 5:2-5a  
Psalm 80:1-7, **Hebrews 10:5-10**

## DEVOTIONAL

For most of my life, I have known and been told of the love God has for us and the sacrifice of His son Jesus Christ. However, I couldn't have understood such depth of love until entering parenthood. In Hebrews 10:5-10, we read that God did not desire or delight in sacrifices and offerings according to the law, instead God made an offering with the body of Jesus Christ to sanctify us; taking away the first to establish the second.

As cheesy as this may sound, I can't help but think of the song "Then" by Brad Paisley when I think of how my understanding of sacrifice, promise, and love has matured through the years. My husband and I began dating at the beginning of 2015. We didn't have any good reason to date, he was planning a move out of state for school, yet we had fallen in love anyway. When he moved, we promised to be faithful and supportive from afar; and we thought we loved each other then. A year later, he proposed and the promise was replaced with a new one, one to marry and share a life together; and we thought we loved each other then. The following year, we married and our promise was replaced again with much deeper vows; and we thought we loved each other then. Now six years later, we've welcomed our second baby girl. Before coming home from the hospital, my husband washed my feet and made a new promise, one for our family; and we thought we loved each other then. I repeat this to make light of an ever increasing depth of love that we experience, yet still pales in comparison to the love God has for us.

Looking at my life now, I see the promises that have been fulfilled by God through my husband. When I look at my children, I understand that the depth of our love can be seen through the sacrifices we make and the promises we fulfill. I see what a privilege it is to have the opportunities I've had because of God's unconditional love for me. During Advent, we remember that God sanctified us through the body of Jesus Christ and will fulfill his promise to return.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What sacrifices have you made in your life that have given you a closer understanding of the sacrifice God made for you through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

Was God's glory and love reflected in your sacrifice?

Do you feel God's love in the sacrifices others make for you?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

Write down three challenges you have been facing this week and then rewrite each one as an opportunity that you have the privilege of doing because of God's love.

*Example: My child has difficulty sleeping through the night, interrupting my sleep, often multiple times. I have the opportunity to show my child love by comforting them and praying over them.*

Consider doing something kind for someone else. Like holding the door for a friend or stranger, or writing an anonymous affirmation and leaving it in the break room at work. Prepare yourself to act when presented with an opportunity. Pray that God would use you as a way to reach someone in need.

## PRAYER

a benediction from *Pastor Mitchell*



Heavenly Father, thank You that I know what love is because You first loved me. Thank you for demonstrating Your sacrificial love for me and for the world in Jesus' life, death, and bodily resurrection. Holy Spirit, lead me in sacrificial love to those around me, helping me to love people the way You would.

- Amen

# CHRISTMAS CHRIST

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written by Tony and Barbie Weller



## READING

**Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 2:1-23**, Luke 2:41-52,  
Isaiah 61:10-62:3, Psalm 147,  
Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7, John 1:1-18,  
Jeremiah 31:7-14, Psalm 84,  
Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19

## DEVOTIONAL

Everything about God begins and ends with wonder.

When our family was young, we tried to create traditions that would emphasize the importance of Christ in Christmas in a relatable way for our boys. We decided to celebrate Jesus' birthday every Christmas Eve with "birthday cake" and we would sing the Happy Birthday song. Tony would then read the story of Jesus' birth to our two sons. Later, when they were able, they took turns reading the story of our Messiah's birth, the story of the coming Kingdom through Jesus. A love story between the Father and his children. A story that has been told year after year in our family.

Thinking back on this tradition, it reminds us how the Israelites continued to share with generation upon generation, the promise of a coming King. One who would come to Earth and bring restoration to Israel. The One who would bring salvation for everyone, in all the world.

In reading God's word, I am struck by God's love continuously pursuing His creation. In every story, God is relentless in his passion to restore our relationship to Him, to bring us His salvation. God did this through Christ, his Son. A highly unlikely story entrusted to unlikely characters. Notice their responses to inherit the message of the promise fulfilled. Matthew tells us the Magi, or scholars from the east, upon seeing the star, went to find the newborn King. After traveling thousands of miles, when they had found Him, they responded with joy, and worship, and gifts.

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# CHRISTMAS CHRIST

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The Shepherds were visited by an angel choir declaring “Do not be afraid. We bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people”. The Shepherds left immediately and ran to find the Christ child. When they returned, they “let loose telling everyone, and glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen.”

Luke says, after Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel announcing she would give birth to Jesus, she chose to ponder these things. To ponder is to think deeply upon the things of God, combined with prayer--bringing revelation or a deeper understanding. As a result of her pondering, Mary chose to submit to God’s plan to bring salvation to the world.

Each year we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We read the story. Some may even celebrate with birthday cake and song. God’s relentless love has come into the world through the birth of Jesus. He came for everyone, into all the world. This year, let’s ponder what God can do through you, through me. And like the Magi and Shepherds, let’s be eager to share the good news of God With Us!

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you experience God’s relentless love for you?

How does being so loved by Christ change how we respond to others?

What does Kingdom on Earth mean to you?

## FORMATION PRACTICE

**Lectio Divina:** Read the Christ story out loud as a love letter to us (Luke 2:1-20). This is not an informative practice but an opportunity to be transformed by an encounter with the God who loves us.

Find a comfortable position and allow the inner chaos to settle, or the family or friends to gather. Perhaps close your eyes if you are not the reader. Invite God to speak to you through the Scripture. Take turns reading verses amongst those who are gathered together. What phrases strike you? Sit with the word or idea trusting God has led you. Read the passage a second time – how is your life touched by the word the Lord has given you?

# CHRISTMAS CHRIST

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Is there an invitation or challenge here for you to respond to? What is your response to God's invitation?

## PRAYER

a benediction from *Paster Scott*



Jesus, we celebrate your arrival with deep gratitude and humility knowing you came because of your great love for us. Continue to root us and establish us in your love that we might one day grasp its height, its depth, its width, its length and be transformed by it. As we do, help us to be instruments of your HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE to the world around us by the power of your Spirit within us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

- Amen

MERRY  
CHRISTMAS  
2023



