EXPERIENCE THE **WONDER OF ADVENT:** FAMILY READING PLAN

From our friends at Wonder Ink®

MINISTRY spark
fueled by DAVID C COOK



EXPERIENCE THE WONDER OF ADVENT: FAMILY READING PLAN

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Integrity Music Limited, a Division of David C Cook
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Thank you to the team at Wonder Ink for creating this Advent reading plan. To learn more about Wonder Ink curriculum, visit WonderInk.org today!

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INTRODUCTION

Christmas is a time filled with anticipation. We look forward to days off work and school, singing Christmas carols, and opening beautifully wrapped presents on Christmas morning. We wait with great excitement for the celebration ahead. In that season of anticipation, the Church celebrates Advent. *Advent* means the arrival or coming of an important person, and the season of Advent in the church begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas.

Advent is a season of waiting and preparation. Waiting for Jesus and preparing our hearts for Him. We don't have to literally wait on Jesus—He is alive, and we can talk to Him antime. But as we look forward to the thrill of Christmas, we want to get ready. Take time to consider what it means that Jesus came to earth as a baby.

One way we can do this is by lighting Advent candles in an Advent wreath. An Advent wreath is a symbolic preparation leading up to Christmas. The shape of the wreath represents God's unending love. The candles symbolize different aspects of Jesus. You can make an Advent wreath and light the candles during Advent to orient your heart toward Jesus during the four weeks leading up to Christmas. The Advent wreath can be as simple or as elaborate as you want. Each week of Advent, you will light a candle around the perimeter of the wreath on Sunday. The candles are associated with hope, peace, joy, and love. Then you will read a short devotional for reflection. The rest of the week will feature short Scripture readings and a discussion question. Then, on Christmas Eve (or Day), you will light the white Christ candle in the center of the wreath, which symbolizes that Jesus is here and is the Light of the World.



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MAKING AN ADVENT WREATH

SUPPLIES: green or white foam circle, purple candles (3), and pink candle (1), white jarred candle, green paint (optional), evergreen branches (optional), glue (optional)

To start, your family is going to need an Advent wreath. The basic elements of an Advent wreath are the wreath itself and the candles. Traditionally, the wreath is made from real or fake evergreen branches. There are five candles: three purple, one pink, and one white. The purple candles represent hope, peace, and love, being lit on the first, second, and fourth Sundays of Advent. The pink candle represents joy and is lit on the third Sunday. The white candle, known as the Christ candle, sits in the center of wreath, lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

You can buy an Advent wreath, or you can choose to make one as a family activity! You could make the wreath out of garland, evergreen branches, green clay, or a foam circle or wreath loop. You can use taper candles, regular jarred candles, purple and pink birthday candles, battery-operated candles, or LED candles. One option for making the wreath is shared here but feel free to get creative! Remember to be careful with kids around the flames if you choose to use real candles.

To make an Advent wreath, start with a foam circle. If the circle is white, you can paint it green. Allow the paint to dry. If using evergreen branches, wrap them around the circle. You can secure the branches with glue. Put three purple candles and one pink candle in the wreath. Place the white jarred candle in the middle.



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WEEK 1—HOPE

Day 1
Light the hope candle.
Open your Bible and read Isaiah 7:13–14.

Say aloud the words in bold. **What is *hope*? When we talk about hoping for something, we describe something we wish would happen. We want it, but we're not sure if it will actually happen. Maybe you hope someone will notice your hard work at school, work, or home. Or maybe there's a really special gift you're hoping to get for Christmas. There are so many things we hope will happen.**

Hope in the Bible is different. When we hope in Jesus, we aren't wondering if He will save us from sin—He already has! The Bible tells us that hope is certain. We know without question that Jesus knows us, loves us, and cares for us. *Hope* is a confident expectation that God will do what He said He will do. Hope is more than wishful thinking—it's being certain that God will come through.

Today we light the hope candle. Long before Jesus came, God promised His people a Savior. They hoped, waiting expectantly, that the Savior would come. We celebrate Jesus coming because He is the fulfillment of that hope, the promised Savior who would take away the sins of the world.

Discuss: What do you hope for? How is that hope different from the hope we have in Jesus?

Day 2
Open your Bible and read Genesis 12:1–3.
Discuss: What did God promise Abraham? What could Abraham hope for?

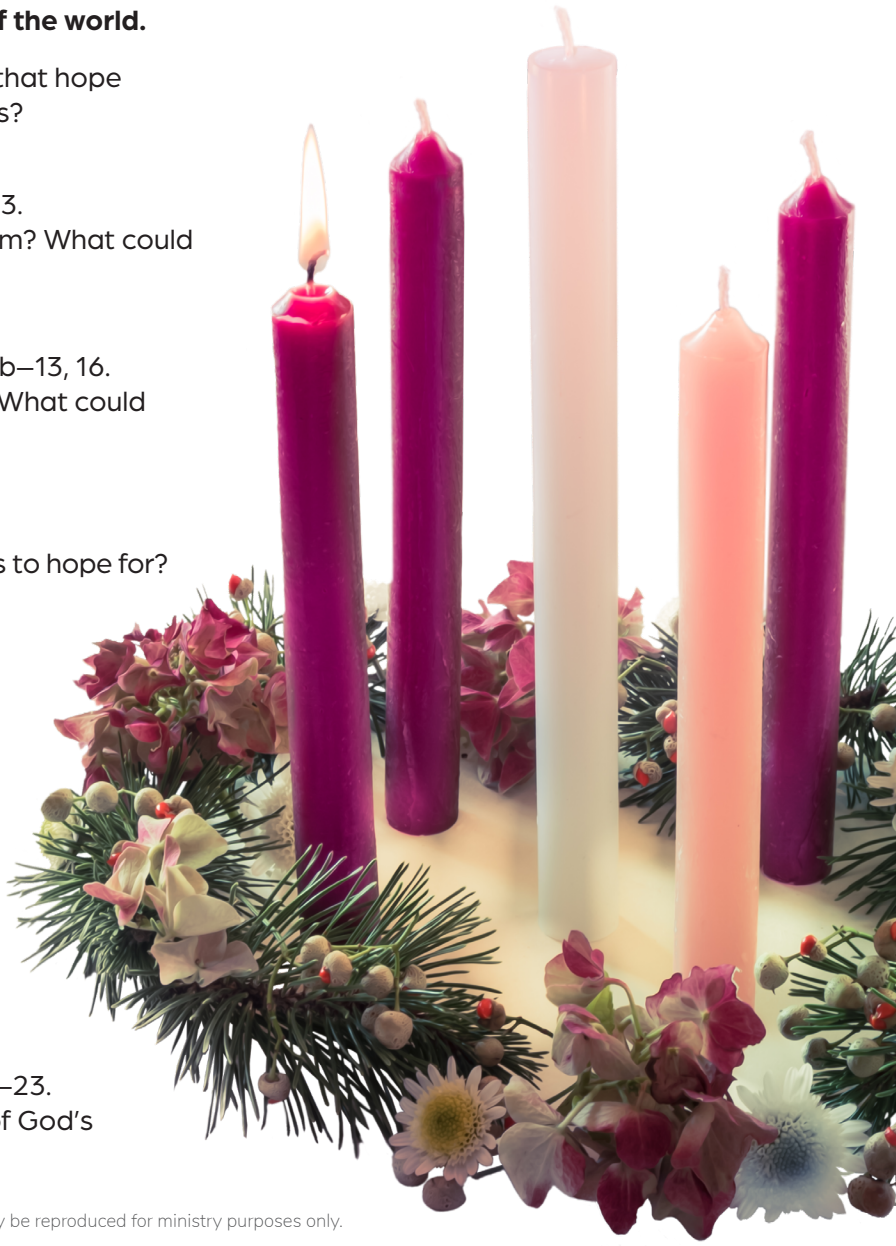
Day 3
Open your Bible and read 2 Samuel 7:11b–13, 16.
Discuss: What did God promise David? What could David hope for?

Day 4
Open your Bible and read Isaiah 61:1–3.
Discuss: What did Isaiah tell the Israelites to hope for?

Day 5
Open your Bible and read Isaiah 42:1–4.
Discuss: What did Isaiah say the servant would do? Why would that help the Israelites to hope?

Day 6
Open your Bible and read Matthew 1:1–17.
Discuss: Why do you think Matthew showed how Jesus was related to Abraham and David?

Day 7
Open your Bible and read Matthew 1:18–23.
Discuss: How was Jesus the fulfillment of God's promises (or the Israelites' hope)?



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WEEK 2—PEACE

Day 1
Light the peace candle.
Open your Bible and read John 14:27.

Say aloud the words in bold. **When do you feel at peace? When we're scared or stressed, we want to feel like things will be OK. Some people might have a special spot they like to go when they're worried, or they might have an activity that helps them relax, like reading, drawing, or taking a walk. Doing these things can help us to feel calm, but they don't keep worries away forever.**

Jesus offers us a different kind of peace. We may do things that make us feel peaceful for a little while, but the peace of Jesus is a deep feeling that everything will be OK. Jesus told his disciples not to let their hearts to be troubled and not to be afraid (John 14:27)**. We can experience peace instead of fear because we can trust Jesus as our Savior.**

Today we light the peace candle. Long before Jesus came, God promised that He would send the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)**. Jesus fulfilled God's promise as the ultimate source of peace, saving us from sin and offering forever life with God. We don't have to worry about sin separating us from God because Jesus is our peace.**

Discuss: What do you do when you're looking for peace? Share about a time when you were worried and Jesus gave you peace.

Day 2
Open your Bible and read Isaiah 9:1–7.
Discuss: Who did God promise to send? Why would this matter to the Israelites?

Day 3
Open your Bible and read Psalm 29:1–2, 10–11.
Discuss: What do you think it means for God to bless His people with peace?

Day 4
Open your Bible and read Romans 5:1–5.
Discuss: How has Jesus given us peace?

Day 5
Open your Bible and read Philippians 4:6–7.
Discuss: What does Paul tell the Philippians to do instead of worrying?

Day 6
Open your Bible and read Romans 15:7–13.
Discuss: How does peace give us hope?

Day 7
Open your Bible and read John 16:28–33.
Discuss: Why can we have peace even in the middle of hard or scary things?



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WEEK 3—JOY

Day 1
Light the joy candle.
Open your Bible and read Luke 2:8–14.

Say aloud the words in bold. **What makes you happy? You might feel happy when you spend time with friends or family, play your favorite sport, or listen to a special song. Everyone has different people, places, and things that make them happy. Sometimes we might even say that these things bring us joy! But joy is not the same as happiness.**

When the angels visited the shepherds to announce Jesus' birth, they proclaim that they are bringing good news that will bring great joy to all people. *Joy* is deep gladness because of Jesus. It is something no one can take away because God loves us always. Joy comes from God and lasts forever.

Today we light the joy candle. Jesus coming to live with us and save us is good news of great joy. He saves us from our sin and brings us close to God. We celebrate Jesus' birth because He is our joy.

Discuss: How are joy and happiness different?

Day 2
Open your Bible and read Isaiah 35:3–6.
Discuss: What does God promise His people through Isaiah?

Day 3
Open your Bible and read Luke 2:15–20.
Discuss: How did people react to the news of Jesus' birth?

Day 4
Open your Bible and read John 16:19–22.
Discuss: Why does Jesus tell the disciples that they will rejoice?

Day 5
Open your Bible and read Isaiah 65:17–18.
Discuss: How is God's promise fulfilled through Jesus?

Day 6
Open your Bible and read Philippians 4:4–5 and Matthew 2:9–11.
Discuss: Why does Paul tell the Philippians to be joyful? Why did the wise men have joy? What was their response to seeing Jesus?

Day 7
Open your Bible and read Philippians 4:10–13.
Discuss: Why is Paul content no matter what happens to him? How can we have joy all in circumstances?



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WEEK 4—LOVE

Day 1
Light the love candle.
Open your Bible and read 1 John 4:9–10.

Say aloud the words in bold. **What is *love*? We might say we love soccer or chili cheese fries, but that "love" is different from when we say we love our dad, sister, or best friend. We use the word love to describe a broad sense of feelings, but none of them come close to the love God has for us.**

God made people as His beloved creation, made in His image, to live in relationship with Him. His people chose sin, chose to run away from Him. God could have called it quits after that, but He didn't. God remained faithful to His people, promising that a Savior would come who would bring us back into right relationship with God. God loved us by sending Jesus to save us from sin.

Today we light the love candle. We celebrate God's amazing love for us and praise Him for rescuing us and never giving up on us.

Discuss: How did God show His love through Jesus?

Day 2
Open your Bible and read John 1:1–4, 14.
Discuss: Why do you think John identifies Jesus as the Word here? Why is it important to know that Jesus is God, and has been with God since the beginning?

Day 3
Open your Bible and read Genesis 3:14–15.
Discuss: Who do you think is God referring to here? Why is it important?

Day 4
Open your Bible and read Isaiah 11:1–4.
Discuss: How does this promise of a "branch" show God's love for us?

Day 5
Open your Bible and read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.
Discuss: What does Paul tell us about love in these verses? What does that tell us about God?

Day 6
Open your Bible and read John 3:16.
Discuss: Why did God send Jesus? What can we do in response?

Day 7
Open your Bible and read 1 John 3:18.
Discuss: How did God put His love for us into action? How can we put our love for God into action?



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CHRISTMAS EVE OR CHRISTMAS DAY

Light the Christ candle in the center of your wreath.
Open your Bible and read Luke 2:1–20 and Hebrews 11:1.

Say aloud the words in bold. **Immanuel! God is with us!**

For hundreds of years, the Israelites waited. And waited. And *waited*. God promised a Savior, but they were still waiting. They had to have faith that God would do what He promised. At Christmas, all of God's promises for a coming Savior were proven true through the coming of Jesus as a baby, born in a manger in the city of David.

We have a different kind of waiting now. Jesus came to earth, lived a sinless life, died for the sins of the world, and was risen from the dead. Because of His sacrifice, we can have a right relationship with God. Now we wait on a new promise: that Jesus will come again to make all things new. Advent reminds us to prepare our hearts not only to celebrate Jesus' birth as a baby but to celebrate His return as triumphant King.

Today we light the Christ candle. We celebrate that Christ is born! God is with us.

Discuss: What do you do with the knowledge that Christ is God with us, come to save us from sin?

Say aloud the blessing in bold.

Blessing: **God loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to earth and promises Jesus will return. May you be filled with hope, for one day you will see Jesus face to face and live with Him forever!**



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