



CHRISTMAS ADVENT

A collection of writings to keep you and yours focused on what matters most this season.

IN THIS EDITION



5 Devotions for the Advent Season

Discussion Questions for Every Age

Tips To Engage Kids During Advent

Christmas Calendar at Mount Vernon

WHY ADVENT?



EDITED BY BLAKE MCFARLAND

Advent, put simply, means *the arrival* and has been observed throughout church history and across denominational lines.

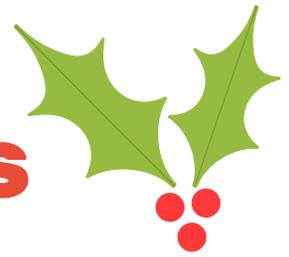
However, it's always a good practice to consider the *why* behind our church traditions before whole-heartedly adopting them into our lives. Not all traditions are biblical. But many traditions, regardless of purpose, have been nonchalantly tossed aside—All in the name of relevance.

But, should we do that with *Advent*?

Historically, Advent has been a marked season drawing the Believer's attention and focus upon the significance surrounding the arrival of Christ. And in the midst of our materialistic and chaotic culture, I can't think of anything better to aim towards this season. Advent has the potential to slow down your hyperspeed holidays and focus you and yours upon the historical event that changes everything.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING KIDS

ADAPTED FROM EMPOWEREDHOMES.ORG



1. Set realistic expectations

I'm not sure about you, but I've never been able to successfully lead an hour and half Bible study with my ten year-old and four year-old. Through trial and error, I learned a while ago that 10-15 minutes of Bible reading, discussion and prayer over the course of many days adds up. If all your kids can do is manage a short time to read God's Word and discuss, then build on that!

2. Keep it simple

As a student pastor I planned at least two services each week for students. These include games, welcome, announcements, teaching lessons, small group questions, etc. When it comes to a family devotional, keep it simple. There are so many different ways to lead a family devotional. A simple method that works usually consists of looking at a passage of Scripture, asking some questions and discussing for a bit and then praying for one another. Keep it that simple and it will be sustainable and repeatable, which is what you ultimately want.

3. Pick the easiest time

For a while, my wife and I were trying to schedule a once a week Bible study after dinner on Monday nights. Inevitably, something would come up or we would get done with dinner and need to clean up and get kids cleaned up. By the time we looked up it was almost bedtime. We decided to keep a family devotional book and Bible on the kitchen table. Now, before we clean up from dinner, we grab the devotional book and Bible and have a 5-10 minute Bible discussion. Every family meal (which isn't always every day) is completed with this routine. Another option is just prior to bed time. Our kids have come to expect and enjoy this time. The point is to find what works best for your family's rhythm and is repeatable.

4. Pray throughout

One of the best pieces of advice I ever received from a friend was to pray and ask the Lord to show me what He was trying to do as I talked with students. This translates easily to my family. When you lead a family devotional time, be asking the Lord to show you where He might be trying to disciple your kids. Invite Him into the conversation. This attentiveness to the Holy Spirit will lead you as you discuss.

5. Ask questions and listen

The best Bible studies are filled with lots of conversation. This means lots of questions and listening. As you pray, the Lord will sometimes give you the right question or allow you to sit quietly and just listen to your kids. When they are talking, it means they are engaging. Therefore, opening a great window into their heart and what they are processing and thinking. Don't feel you have to talk the entire time – as a matter of fact, please don't talk the entire time!

6. Let them lead

Depending on the age of your kids and their maturity level, give your kids a chance to lead your family devotional. I've been surprised so many times in ministry when I challenge students to step up and lead. Kids are begging to be challenged. And just think about how much you personally learn when you prepare to teach something. If anything, allow your kids the opportunity to read God's Word aloud for the family and/or pray at some point during your time together.

FINDING PEACE ON EARTH



BY GREG GOFORTH

Where's the most peaceful place you can think of?

- An empty house?
- A trail in the woods after a fresh snow?
- Sitting in a canoe on a still pond?
- Standing on an empty beach as the warm sun rises?

These are peaceful places and situations. But they don't last and we can't stay in these places forever. And it isn't long before an empty house is filled with busyness and the messiness of everyday life. The snow melts and discolors with rising temps. The wind blows, the pond ripples, and canoes rock. Storms are bound to come—hurricanes hit, rains pour, tides rise, and waves crash.

READ LUKE 2:8-14

On the very first Christmas, angels descended from heaven and announced that God had come to earth in a baby named Jesus. His birth would finally bring what humanity needs—salvation and peace. Not a peace that is the absence of a conflict, but rather, the opportunity to have peace for our souls. The kind of peace that is a contented rest in knowing that Jesus came to do for us everything we could never do for ourselves:

- Love us and forgive us of our sin (Romans 5:8)
- Work out His plans and purposes for us through the ways He has made us (Ephesians 2:10)
- Secure for us eternal life with God (1 Peter 3:18)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the Spirit.

Jesus was born to bring everlasting peace to our lives by knowing Him as our Savior!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Prayer calms us and reminds us again and again of what is true about God...that He is with us. When you are afraid or nervous, do you more naturally panic or pray?
2. Describe a time in your life where the Bible brought you peace.
3. Isaiah 9:6 is a prophecy of Jesus's birth and what He will be for the people who trust Him for salvation.
 - How is Jesus the "Prince of Peace"?
 - And, what does Paul mean by the "peace of God" in Philippians 4:7?
 - Or, the "God of peace" in 1 Thess. 5:23?



GREG & JULIE GOFORTH

MINUTES NOT MILES FROM BETHLEHEM



BY TYLER JONES

There is something special about giving a gift at Christmas time. For weeks a gift sits under the Christmas tree before it can be opened. Time was taken to purchase the gift, wrap it nicely, and place it thoughtfully under the tree. And when the day finally comes to open it, there is a lot of excitement, anticipation, paper ripping, and bow wrestling!

- What are some gifts you enjoyed receiving?
- What are some gifts you enjoyed giving?
- Did you prefer to give a gift or receive a gift?

It seems like the longer you have to wait for a gift, the more your excitement grows! Now, imagine you are one of the Wise Men and you have been waiting for the Messiah, but you were never told when His arrival would be. That would be tough! Yet still, these wise men waited and waited—till one day a sign came! A star shining bright in the sky that would lead them to the Jesus.

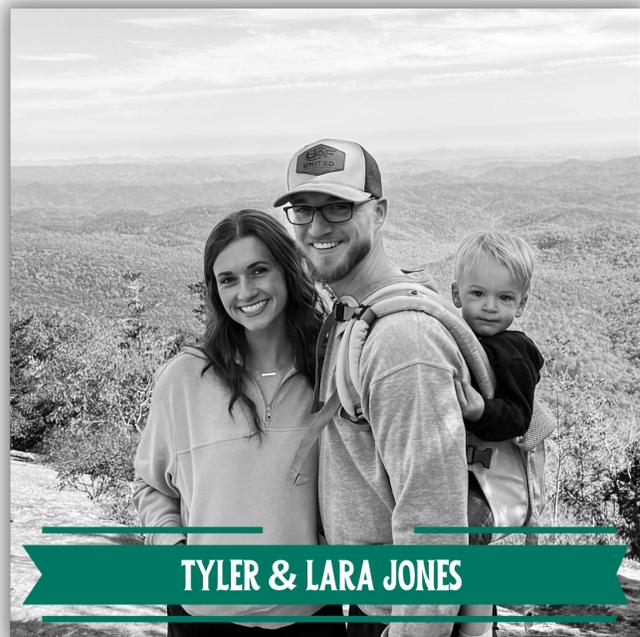
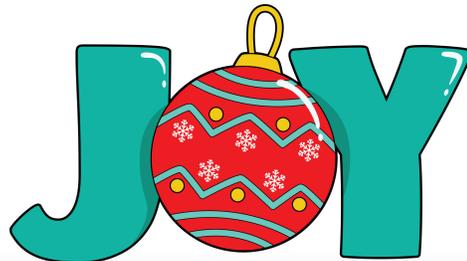
READ MATTHEW 2:10-11

The Wise Men traveled a long distance in order to meet Jesus. Some people say they traveled more than 900 miles! But every part of their journey was worth it because they finally arrived where Jesus was.

You see, Christmas is not about giving and receiving gifts though we all enjoy it. But, Christmas is about the gift of Jesus to the world, and no gift could ever take His place. Just like how the Wise Men were filled with joy when they were with Jesus, you can share in that same joy today! The good news is you don't have to travel across countries to get to Him. He is simply one focused and faithful prayer away.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you think the Magi felt when they saw the star, how would you have felt?
- The star in the sky was good news, it meant Jesus had been born! How can you respond to this good news that Jesus was born?
- The Wise Men were excited to meet Jesus and it made a big difference in their life. Not only were they filled with joy, but they gave Him gifts.
 - How has the joy of Jesus has made a difference in your life?
 - How can you give back to Jesus for what He has done in your life?



HOPE FOR A NEW KING

BY BUD RUSSELL

Take a moment as a family to read these most often cited and beloved verses which speak of the promise of the coming Messiah, who we know to be Jesus, “the hope of the world”!

READ ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

750 years before Christ was born, God’s chosen people were weary, suffering and living in seemingly hopeless conditions. But God inspired the prophet Isaiah to write beautiful words of hope which were for people everywhere... *For unto us a child is born!* There are so many descriptive words in this passage which point to Jesus as being the fulfillment of this truth. In fact, Isaiah has been referred to as the Fifth Gospel. Why? Because the word gospel means Good News!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Q: When Isaiah says *a son is given*, who is this son given to?

A: If you have answered this by saying “All of us”, you are spot on! This is true in that the verse goes on to say that unto us a son is given. God freely gave His only Son to free us from the captivity of sin as He would live sinless, unlike us, and die in our place that we might live free from it’s penalty and have peace with God.

Q: Should we be excited about living in a kingdom with no more campaign ads or questions about the righteousness of the One forever ruling?

A: Of course, the government shall be upon His shoulders, it will be one of peace and have no end. He will be known as “Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”.

QUESTIONS CONTINUED

Q: Where/when do you feel the least at peace? Is it well with your soul? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1= never; 10= always) how often do you truly feel at peace?

A: Have you spoken with The Counselor? You can find renewed hope in Him!



**WISE MEN DON'T SEEK
HIM BECAUSE THEY
ARE WISE MEN;
THEY ARE WISE
BECAUSE THEY SEEK
HIM!**



BUD & BETTY RUSSELL

THE MEASURE OF LOVE



BY JASON POWERS

As a family, discuss who you believe, other than God, loves you the most. Why do you believe their love for you is so great?

As a young teen I would have told you that my friends loved me the most. Often times, I was the happiest around them. We certainly had a great time together and made a lot of memories. But as I grew older and had a family of my own, I started to see love for what it truly was. Love is revealed through sacrifice, and no one had sacrificed more for me than my parents.

READ JOHN 3:16-19

- How did God reveal his love towards you?
- What did you do to deserve God's love?

If love is measured by what we sacrifice for someone, then no one loves you more than your Heavenly Father. Even more, we see that God's love is unconditional. God did not put restrictions on who He loves. No people group, social status, or skill set influences God to love some more than others.

His love is for all people. However, there is one other truth that needs our attention. While His love is for all people, His salvation is only for those who believe. In love God has offered His Son as a payment for our sins, but only in faith can we receive what Christ has done for us. Scripture teaches in Romans 9:10-9 "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

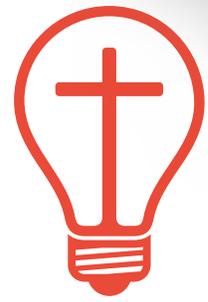
- Have you responded to the love that God has shown you by trusting in Christ alone?
- As a family, how can you show the love of Christ to those around you?

AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS...

1 Corinthians 13:13



LIGHT IN DARK PLACES



BY BLAKE MCFARLAND

Have you ever been somewhere that was so dark, you couldn't see your own hand in front of your face?

Not night-time dark under the soft glow of the stars. I'm talking pitch black. Maybe, your closet? Maybe even a basement closet?

Well, the darkest place I've been happened at 11 years old. Our class took a field trip to Linville Caverns. It's actually just 1 hour from Boone, NC. Linville Caverns is a series of caves that go deeper and deeper underground until you get to this place called the *Bottomless Pool*. Spoiler alert: It's really only 250 ft. deep. But, when you walk out over the grated metal bridge and look down it might as well be bottomless. As you peer over the edge, the tour guide offers you a chance to experience "total darkness." Of course, every tough guy in my class was screaming, "let's do it, bro!" But deep down you are calculating all of the things that could go wrong—but you don't want to seem scared, so you agree loudly with everyone else. Yeah, let's do it! So the tour guide gives the signal and *poof*—just like that—your eyes see nothing. Your other senses become heightened. You can hear a few drips of water plinking into the bottomless pool just a few feet beneath you. Can you imagine it? It's a very eerie experience. So, what does this story have to do with Christmas? Well, let's read our advent passage together and make this important connection.

READ JOHN 1:9-14

Before Jesus' birth the world was in a dark place. Violence and war was everywhere. People treated people like property. Humans worshiped animals, rocks, the sun, or whatever else they hoped would give their life meaning. And only a few faithful descendants of Abraham held on to the hope of a coming Savior. I bet they were often mocked for their beliefs, just like we are from time to time.

And then one day, a star appeared in the night sky. This star was just a reflection of the glory that it pointed people towards. Beneath that star, laid a baby boy in a manger. And as that boy grew into a young man, people recognized something very unique about Him. He seemed to bring light to everywhere he went. Not a physical light, but a spiritual light. He helped people see their spiritual condition. We all have areas of darkness in our lives. Very, very dark areas in our lives. But the good news is, the darkness of lies and insecurity that we may not want others to see can be overcome by simply inviting the true light of God into our lives. This light is not far away, it's not difficult to understand, nor is it expensive like silver and gold. This light has a name, and His name is Jesus.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

WHERE'S THE DARKEST PLACE YOU'VE BEEN?

HOW HAS JESUS BROUGHT THE LIGHT OF GRACE AND TRUTH INTO YOUR LIFE?

WHY DO PEOPLE OFTEN SHY AWAY FROM THE LIGHT THAT SO MANY OF US FIND COMFORT IN AND HOW CAN WE HELP DRAW THEM TOWARD IT?





Christmas at Mount Vernon

Christmas is Jesus

*He is the Light of the world
He is the hope for the hurting
He is love for the lonely
He is joy for the broken
He is peace for the anxious
He is the rescue for the desperate*

Join us all of December

- **Advent** (Sunday Mornings starting November 27)
- **Light Has Come** (Friday, December 2 & Sunday, December 4)
- **Christmas Outreach Dinner** (Friday, December 2)
- **PK Praise Preschool Choir** (Sunday, December 11 | 9:00am & 10:30am)
- **Chosen Road** (Sunday, December 18 | 9:00am & 10:30am)
- **Christmas Eve Candle Light Service** (Saturday, December 24 | 6:15pm)
- **Christmas Morning Service** (Sunday, December 25 | 10:30am)
- **New Year's Sunday Service** (Sunday, January 1 | 10:30am)

