AN ADVENT BOOKLET FOR THE TABLE



From a stump *to a manger*

Twenty-seven days, creation to Christmas Day.
Morning or evening; many families keep it at dinner.

inkling·s · Advent 2026

A NOTE BEFORE WE BEGIN

Advent is the season of longing and expectation. We light a candle, open the Scriptures, and make a little room to listen. In the middle of ordinary life, we slow down long enough to notice the wonder of a God who has drawn near.

The story of Christmas is the story of heaven bending low. The God for whom our hearts long has come looking for us. And the more we learn to see Him, the more we discover that hope, joy, and wonder aren't nearly as far away as we thought.

Join us for a few minutes each day this Advent. To open God's Word, to pray, and to lift our eyes to Jesus. The One we've been waiting for has come.

Steve Brune

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Each day is one open spread, so you never turn back. About ten minutes, morning or evening. Dinner works well: everyone is already at the table.

1. **Light** the candles for this week. One more each Sunday.
2. **Read** the passage. It is printed on the left page.
3. **Think** about the short reflection, and the quote for the day.
4. **Pray** the prayer printed with the day.
5. **Hang** the day's symbol. The symbol sheets are at inkling-s.com/advent.
6. **Talk.** One question to start the conversation, and a simpler one for the kids.

Scan the code on any day to read or hear that day's full devotion.

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT · NOVEMBER 29

The candle of hope

READER The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.

ALL Upon them hath the light shined.

Light the first candle.

READER Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

ALL That ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Isaiah 9:2; Romans 15:13

A WORD FOR THE WEEK

תִּקְוָה tikvah *teek-VAH*

Hope. The same word names the scarlet cord Rahab tied in her window (Joshua 2:18): hope you can hold, with tension on the line. Watch for the red cord along the edge of these pages. It runs from the stump to the manger.

THE PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy 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 quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, the First Sunday in Advent

TO SING

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.

Charles Wesley, 1744



Watch the Stump

God begins again from a stump. The Branch from Jesse's root, cut down at the cross and raised, is where hope grows when life looks finished.

LIGHT The first candle, the candle of hope.

HANG A stump with one green shoot.

READ
Isaiah 11:1–2

1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a
branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the LORD
shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the
Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of
the LORD.

Scripture from the ESV® Bible, © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission.

THINK
Cut a tree down to the ground and what is left looks like an ending. A stump is a kind of gravestone for a tree: a flat gray disk of rings, counting the years down to the day the saw came through. You can set a coffee cup on it. Nobody waits for it to grow.

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Phillips Brooks, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (1868)

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy 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 quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

What's something that looked finished but turned out not to be?

FOR THE KIDS Find a stump or a bare branch outside today. What could grow from it?

DID YOU KNOW? Jesse Trees are old. Medieval churches showed Jesse's family tree growing up to Jesus in stained glass; the Jesse window at Chartres Cathedral in France dates from about 1150.

Read or hear the full devotion



Let There Be

The verdict "very good" came before we did anything, and in Christ the Word who spoke it came to speak it over us again.

LIGHT	The candles you've lit so far.
HANG	Sun over the earth.

READ
Genesis 1:1–5, 26–31

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth
was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And
God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the
light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God
called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was
evening and there was morning, the first day. 26 Then God said, "Let us
make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion
over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the
livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps
on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of
God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God
blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the
earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over
the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the
earth." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding
seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its
fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and
to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth,
everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for
food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and
behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning,
the sixth day.

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THINK

Most of us live as if our worth were a score still being tallied — by a parent, a boss, a mirror — and we check it constantly. Genesis 1 speaks to that before we have done anything at all. "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:3).

The Maker of man became Man that He, Ruler of the stars, might be nourished at the breast.

Augustine, Sermon 191 (On the Birthday of the Lord)

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy 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 quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Where do you most find yourself waiting to hear whether you are good enough, and what changes if God's verdict came first?

FOR THE KIDS God made light just by speaking. Turn off the lights for a moment, then turn one back on, and thank God for one thing he made that you love.

DID YOU KNOW? "Advent" comes from the Latin adventus, "coming." The season looks back to Christ's first coming at Bethlehem and ahead to his second coming.

Read or hear the full devotion



Where Are You?

When the first people hide and blame, God comes looking, and promises that Eve's offspring will crush the serpent.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Fruit and serpent.

READ
Genesis 3:8–15

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in
the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the
presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the
LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And
he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid,
because I was naked, and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that
you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded
you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be
with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD
God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The
woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 14 The LORD God
said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above
all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity
between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her
offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

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THINK

God comes walking "in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8), as if this were a regular visit. They hide. And God asks a question he does not need answered: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). He has not lost them. They have lost themselves, and the question is the mercy of being found before they can finish disappearing.

Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy 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 quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Where do you tend to hide or shift the blame when you've done wrong, and what would it take to simply say, "I did it"?

FOR THE KIDS Play a quick game of hide-and-seek. Then remember: when Adam and Eve hid, God came looking for them, and he promised that one day someone would come to crush the serpent and make things right. At Christmas, he came.

DID YOU KNOW? Christians have long called Genesis 3:15 the "first gospel" (protoevangelium): the first promise that a child of Eve would crush the serpent.

Read or hear the full devotion



The Bow in the Cloud

Watch what God says about the human heart just before he makes his promise.

READ

Genesis 8:20–9:17

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and
some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And when the
LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again
curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his
youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.
22 While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter,
day and night, shall not cease." 1 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to
them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. 2 The fear of you and the dread of
you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon
everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they
are delivered. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you
the green plants, I give you everything. 4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is,
its blood. 5 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will
require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of
man. 6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God
made man in his own image. 7 And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on
the earth and multiply in it." 8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,
9 "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, 10 and with
every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the
earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. 11 I
establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters
of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 And God
said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every
living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the
cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I
bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my
covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the
waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the
clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every
living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign
of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

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LIGHT	The candles you've lit so far.
HANG	Ark and rainbow.

THINK

Elsewhere in Genesis, the word is a weapon. Isaac sends Esau to hunt with "your quiver and your bow" (Genesis 27:3), and the dying Jacob remembers land he took "with my sword and with my bow" (Genesis 48:22). So when God sets his qeshet in the cloud after the flood, the first readers heard the ordinary word for a bow, the kind a soldier carries into battle. Many have seen in it the picture of a warrior hanging up his weapon.

There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench his determination to bless me.

J. I. Packer, Knowing God

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy 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 quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

God made his promise to Noah knowing exactly what the human heart was like. Where do we still act as if God's kindness depends on our getting better first?

FOR THE KIDS Draw a rainbow and write "God keeps his promises" underneath. Can you remember a promise someone kept to you? God keeps every one of his.

DID YOU KNOW? The English word Christmas comes from the Old English Cristes Maesse, "the Mass of Christ," first found in writing in 1038.

Read or hear the full devotion



Counted as Righteousness

A childless old man is told to count the stars, and his trust in God's promise is counted to him as righteousness.

LIGHT	The candles you've lit so far.
HANG	Stars.

READ

Genesis 15:1–6

1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a
vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very
great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I
continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"
3 And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a
member of my household will be my heir." 4 And behold, the word of
the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very
own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him outside and said,
"Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to
number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."
6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as
righteousness.

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THINK

Abram has just won a war. His nephew Lot is rescued, and the spoils of Sodom are turned down so that no one could ever say, "I have made Abram rich" (Genesis 14:23). It should end in satisfaction. Instead God's first words to him afterward are "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (Genesis 15:1) – which suggests the victory had not settled his heart.

The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy 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 quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

What promise of God do you find hardest to believe right now, and what makes it hard?

FOR THE KIDS Go outside after dark and try to count the stars. When you lose count, remember that God told Abraham his family would be even bigger, and everyone who trusts Jesus is part of it, including you.

DID YOU KNOW? The Bible never says there were three wise men. Matthew names three gifts (Matthew 2:11), and the number of travelers was guessed from those.

Read or hear the full devotion



The Knife and the Lamb

God tested what Abraham loved most, provided a substitute on the mountain, and at Calvary gave the Son he spared Abraham from giving.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Ram in the thicket.

READ
Genesis 22:1–14

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said,
"Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go
to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the
mountains of which I shall tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning,
saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac.
And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of
which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the
place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey;
I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." 6 And
Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he
took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And
Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He
said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"
8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my
son." So they went both of them together. 9 When they came to the place of which
God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and
bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham
reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the
LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said,
"Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for
now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only
son, from me." 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind
him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the
ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called
the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the
mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

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THINK

Isaac asks the one question a boy can ask on a mountain with his father: "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7). He has watched his father take the fire and the knife, and he carries the wood himself (Genesis 22:6). Every piece of a sacrifice is there except the sacrifice.

For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man.

John Stott, The Cross of Christ, "The Self-Substitution of God"

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy 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 quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Where are you waiting in a gap right now for God to provide, and what would trusting him there look like this week?

FOR THE KIDS Isaac asked his dad a question, and God gave the answer: he provided a ram. Tonight, thank God together for one thing he has given your family, and for his best gift, Jesus.

DID YOU KNOW? The first nativity scene is usually credited to Francis of Assisi, who set up a manger with a real ox and donkey for a midnight Mass at Greccio, Italy, at Christmas 1223.

Read or hear the full devotion



The Ladder We Didn't Build

A fugitive asleep on a stone finds the gate of heaven, and Jesus says he is that ladder.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Ladder.

READ

Genesis 28:10–17

10 Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a
certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set.
Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay
down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold, there
was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven.
And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!
13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD,
the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on
which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your
offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread
abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south,
and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be
blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go,
and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I
have done what I have promised you." 16 Then Jacob awoke from his
sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know
it." 17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is
none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Scripture from the ESV® Bible, © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission.

THINK

Jacob is running. He has taken his brother's birthright and, with a lie, his father's blessing, and now Esau wants him dead (Genesis 27:41). He is alone on open ground with a stone for a pillow.

And so, with barely a ripple of notice, God stepped into the warm lake of humanity. Without protocol and without pretension.

Ken Gire, Intimate Moments with the Savior

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy 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 quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Where have you assumed God couldn't be until you'd cleaned up the mess behind you?

FOR THE KIDS Draw a ladder from the ground up to the sky. At the top write "God," at the bottom write your name, and remember that Jesus came all the way down to be with us.

DID YOU KNOW? "Silent Night" was first sung on Christmas Eve 1818 at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, near Salzburg, Austria. The assistant priest, Joseph Mohr, wrote the words; the teacher Franz Xaver Gruber wrote the tune; and Mohr played it on the guitar.

Read or hear the full devotion

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT · DECEMBER 6

The candle of peace

READER Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

ALL Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.

Light the first two candles.

READER For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

ALL Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.

Isaiah 40:1–2; 9:6–7

A WORD FOR THE WEEK

שָׁלוֹם shalom *shah-LOHM*

Peace. More than quiet: wholeness, everything as it was made to be. Isaiah names the coming child the Prince of Shalom (Isaiah 9:6).

THE PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, the Second Sunday in Advent

TO SING

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Latin, 12th century; translated by John Mason Neale, 1851

OUR PRAYERS THIS WEEK



The Other Shoe

Read this one for how long the brothers lived inside forgiveness without believing it.

LIGHT The second candle, the candle of peace.

HANG Coat of many colors.

READ

Genesis 50:15–21

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said,
"It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that
we did to him." 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your
father gave this command before he died: 17 'Say to Joseph, "Please
forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they
did evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the
servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to
him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said,
"Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not
fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil
against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many
people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will
provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and
spoke kindly to them.

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THINK

Seventeen years is a long time to wait for the other shoe to drop. That is how long Jacob lived in Egypt (Genesis 47:28), and all those years Joseph's brothers ate his bread and lived on land he had given them (Genesis 47:11). Joseph had long since wept over them and told them not to be "distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here" (Genesis 45:5).

He is a forgiving God who recreates our pasts by forgiving them. He is a promising God who controls our future by making and keeping promises.

Lewis B. Smedes, "Forgiveness—The Power to Change the Past," Christianity Today

PRAY

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Joseph's brothers lived for seventeen years inside forgiveness they didn't trust. What makes it hard for us to believe God's forgiveness is not a truce that could end?

FOR THE KIDS Joseph forgave his brothers and told them, "Do not fear." Is there someone you can forgive today, or someone you can tell "I forgive you"?

DID YOU KNOW? The Advent wreath as we know it is fairly young. In 1839 Johann Hinrich Wichern, a Lutheran pastor running a mission school for poor children in Hamburg, set candles on a large wooden ring made from an old cartwheel so the children could count the days to Christmas.

Read or hear the full devotion



Four Days to Look

Notice who is inspected in this passage, and who is not.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Lamb.

READ

Exodus 12:1–13

1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 "This month
shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the
year for you. 3 Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this
month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb
for a household. 4 And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and
his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons;
according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.
5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from
the sheep or from the goats, 6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day
of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall
kill their lambs at twilight. 7 "Then they shall take some of the blood and put
it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.
8 They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened
bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in
water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. 10 And you shall
let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the
morning you shall burn. 11 In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt
fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you
shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. 12 For I will pass through the
land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of
Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute
judgments: I am the LORD. 13 The blood shall be a sign for you, on the
houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no
plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

Scripture from the ESV® Bible, © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission.

THINK

The instructions come with a gap in them. Each household is to choose its lamb on the tenth day of the month and keep it until the fourteenth (Exodus 12:3, 6). For four days the family's lamb lived with the family before it became the family's sacrifice.

Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain. But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, takes all our sins away; a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.

Isaac Watts, "Not All the Blood of Beasts"

PRAY

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

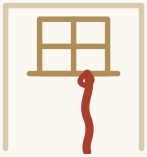
START THE CONVERSATION

We tend to inspect ourselves for the flaw that might disqualify us. What would change if we believed the inspection has already fallen on Jesus, and he passed?

FOR THE KIDS On the first Passover night God kept every family safe that was under the sign of the lamb. Draw a door with a red frame and write the names of everyone in your home inside it. Jesus is the Lamb who keeps us safe with God.

DID YOU KNOW? Handel's Messiah, sung all over the world at Christmas, opens its second part with a chorus taken from John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world."

Read or hear the full devotion



Our Life for Yours

Watch where Rahab lives, and what the city trusted.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Scarlet cord.

READ

Joshua 2:8–21

8 Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof 9 and said to the men, "I
know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon
us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. 10 For we have heard
how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of
Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the
Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. 11 And as soon as we
heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for
the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.
12 Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you,
you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign 13 that you
will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to
them, and deliver our lives from death." 14 And the men said to her, "Our life for yours
even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us
the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you." 15 Then she let them down by a
rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived
in the wall. 16 And she said to them, "Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter
you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you
may go your way." 17 The men said to her, "We will be guiltless with respect to this
oath of yours that you have made us swear. 18 Behold, when we come into the land,
you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you
shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your
father's household. 19 Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the
street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is
laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. 20 But if
you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that
you have made us swear." 21 And she said, "According to your words, so be it." Then
she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

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THINK

"Her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall" (Joshua 2:15). The woman is Rahab, and the city is Jericho, which trusted those walls; they were the reason anyone slept at night.

Moreover, they gave her a sign to this effect, that she should hang forth from her house a scarlet thread. And thus they made it manifest that redemption should flow through the blood of the Lord to all them that believe and hope in God.

Clement of Rome, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 12 (Ante-Nicene Fathers translation)

PRAY

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Jericho trusted its walls; Rahab trusted a promise. What "walls" do we lean on to feel safe with God, and what would it mean to rest on his promise instead?

FOR THE KIDS Tie a piece of red yarn or ribbon somewhere you will see it today, like a window or a doorknob. Each time you see it, remember that God kept Rahab and her whole family safe, and that Jesus gave his life to keep us.

DID YOU KNOW? Rahab is named in Jesus' family tree. Matthew 1:5 lists her as the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, so she was the great-great-grandmother of King David.

Read or hear the full devotion



Where You Go

Watch what Ruth claims on the road, and whether she has any right to it.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Sheaf of wheat.

READ

Ruth 1:16–17; 4:13–17

16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from
following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will
lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where
you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me
and more also if anything but death parts me from you." 13 So Boaz took
Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD
gave her conception, and she bore a son. 14 Then the women said to
Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a
redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15 He shall be to you
a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-
law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth
to him." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and
became his nurse. 17 And the women of the neighborhood gave him a
name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed.
He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

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THINK

On a road somewhere between Moab and Bethlehem, three widows stop walking. Naomi, an Israelite who buried her husband and both her sons in Moab, is going home alone. She tells her two Moabite daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house" (Ruth 1:8). Orpah kisses her and turns back. "But Ruth clung to her" (Ruth 1:14).

God is not ashamed of human lowliness but goes right into the middle of it, chooses someone as instrument, and performs the miracles right there where they are least expected.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Advent sermon on Luke 1:46–55, in The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Isabel Best

PRAY

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Ruth said "your God my God" with no right to the words, and God made them true. Where do we still feel like outsiders with God, and what does Jesus say to that?

FOR THE KIDS Ruth came from far away to a new home, and God welcomed her into his family. Is there someone new at school, church or on your street you could welcome this week?

DID YOU KNOW? Ruth is one of only five women named in Matthew's family tree of Jesus (Matthew 1), along with Tamar, Rahab, "the wife of Uriah" and Mary.

Read or hear the full devotion



Keeping the Sheep

Notice who is missing when Jesse lines up his sons.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Horn of oil.

READ

1 Samuel 16:1–13

1 The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected
him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to
Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." 2 And
Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." And the LORD said,
"Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' 3 And invite
Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for
me him whom I declare to you." 4 Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came
to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you
come peaceably?" 5 And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.
Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse
and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. 6 When they came, he looked on Eliab
and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him." 7 But the LORD said to
Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have
rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward
appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and
made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one."
9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this
one." 10 And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to
Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." 11 Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your
sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping
the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till
he comes here." 12 And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had
beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is
he." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his
brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And
Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

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THINK

Nobody thought to send for David. The prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem with a horn of oil and invited Jesse and his sons to a sacrifice (1 Samuel 16:5). Whatever Jesse's reasons, the youngest stayed out with the sheep.

Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load; 'tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.

Thomas Kelly, "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted" (1804)

PRAY

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Jesse didn't think to send for David. When have we felt overlooked, and how does it change things that God sends for the people nobody counted?

FOR THE KIDS David was the youngest, out taking care of the sheep, and God chose him anyway. Draw David with his sheep. Who is someone who might feel left out that you could include today?

DID YOU KNOW? Bethlehem means "house of bread" in Hebrew. The child born there would one day say, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35).

Read or hear the full devotion



A Throne Forever

Read this one for who ends up building whose house.

LIGHT	The candles you've lit so far.
HANG	Crown.

READ
2 Samuel 7:8–16

8 Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says
the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the
sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 And I have
been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies
from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name
of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my
people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own
place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them
no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over
my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.
Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a
house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your
fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from
your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house
for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.
14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he
commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the
stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart
from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.
16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever
before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'"

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THINK

David has a good idea. The wars are over, the palace is finished, and one evening he is embarrassed by the contrast: “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent” (2 Samuel 7:2). He means to fix it. Nathan the prophet hears the plan and tells him to go ahead.

Hail to the Lord’s Anointed, great David’s greater Son! Hail, in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!

James Montgomery, “Hail to the Lord’s Anointed” (1821)

PRAY

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

David wanted to build something for God, and God promised to build David a house instead. What are we tempted to build to keep God close, and what has he already promised to build for us?

FOR THE KIDS Make a paper crown together. Write the name the angel gave Mary’s baby, Jesus, on the front, and remember that his kingdom will never end.

DID YOU KNOW? In Hebrew, the word bayit, “house,” can mean a building or a family line. David offered to build God a house, a temple; God promised to build David a house, a dynasty, instead (2 Samuel 7:5, 11).

Read or hear the full devotion



A Voice in the Wilderness

Read this one for why God says "comfort" twice.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Path through the desert.

READ
Isaiah 40:1–11

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to
Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity
is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for
all her sins. 3 A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the
LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every
valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.
5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see
it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." 6 A voice says,
"Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its
beauty is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower
fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are
grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God
will stand forever. 9 Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of
good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of
good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your
God!" 10 Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules
for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before
him. 11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs
in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those
that are with young.

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THINK

Ancient kings did not travel on bad roads. Before a royal visit, crews went ahead to fill the ruts, cut through the hills and straighten the bends, so the procession could come in without a stumble. Isaiah takes that picture and turns it around.

Comfort, comfort ye my people, speak ye peace, thus saith our God; comfort those who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath their sorrows' load.

Johann Olearius, "Comfort, Comfort Ye My People" (1671), trans. Catherine Winkworth (1863)

PRAY

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Isaiah's highway is for God to come down, not for us to climb up. Where have we been trying to climb our way to God?

FOR THE KIDS Be road builders: pile up some pillows into hills, then flatten them into a smooth road. God made a way for Jesus to come all the way to us.

DID YOU KNOW? Handel's Messiah begins with this chapter. At its first performance, in Dublin on April 13, 1742, the first words anyone sang were Isaiah 40:1 in the King James Version: "Comfort ye my people."

Read or hear the full devotion

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT · DECEMBER 13

The candle of joy

READER Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

ALL The Lord is at hand.

Light three candles.

READER Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,

ALL which shall be to all people.

Philippians 4:4–5; Luke 2:10

A WORD FOR THE WEEK

מְבַשֵּׂר mevasser *meh-vah-SAIR*

The one who brings good news. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings” (Isaiah 52:7). The angels at Bethlehem were doing his job.

THE PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee: Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, the Third Sunday in Advent

TO SING

Joy to the world! the Lord is come; let earth receive her King; let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing.

Isaac Watts, 1719

OUR PRAYERS THIS WEEK



The Rivers Clap Their Hands

Read this one for why a river would want the Judge to come.

LIGHT The third candle, the candle of joy.

HANG Musical note.

READ
Psalm 98

A Psalm. 1 Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done
marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked
salvation for him. 2 The LORD has made known his salvation; he has
revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. 3 He has
remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. 4 Make a
joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song
and sing praises! 5 Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the
lyre and the sound of melody! 6 With trumpets and the sound of the
horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD! 7 Let the sea
roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! 8 Let the
rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together 9 before the
LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with
righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

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THINK

Tell most people the Judge is on his way and the mood in the room drops. Judgment is the thing we brace for, not the thing we throw a party over. So it is strange to find a whole psalm calling up an orchestra because exactly that is about to happen.

Judgement is apparently an occasion of universal rejoicing.

C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms (1958)

PRAY

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Which wrong in the world do you most long to see set right, and what changes when you remember the Judge was judged in our place?

FOR THE KIDS Psalm 98 asks the rivers to clap and the hills to sing. Make a joyful noise together: clap, tap a pan, or sing one verse of "Joy to the World" as loud as you like.

DID YOU KNOW? "Joy to the World" is Isaac Watts's paraphrase of Psalm 98, published in 1719 in his Psalms of David Imitated. It was written for a book of psalms, not as a Christmas carol: it sings of the Lord who comes to rule the world with truth and grace.

Read or hear the full devotion



A New Covenant

Read this one for what is wrong with the list on the refrigerator.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Heart.

READ

Jeremiah 31:31–34

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make
a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,
32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day
when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of
Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,
declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with
the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my
law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their
God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one
teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for
they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,
declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will
remember their sin no more."

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THINK

Most refrigerators have a list on them somewhere. Drink more water. Call Mom. Be patient at bedtime. Nothing on the list is wrong. The trouble is where it lives: on the outside, held up by a magnet, looking at us.

My whole hope is in thy exceeding great mercy and that alone. Give what thou commandest and command what thou wilt.

Augustine, Confessions, Book X, chapter 29, trans. Albert C. Outler

PRAY

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

What lists do we keep trying to live up to? What changes if we believe God has promised to write his law on our hearts?

FOR THE KIDS Cut out a paper heart. On it write one of God's good commands, like "Love one another." Pray together that God would write it on your heart, not just on the paper.

DID YOU KNOW? Hebrews 8:8–12 quotes Jeremiah 31:31–34 in full, the longest quotation from the Old Testament anywhere in the New. Hebrews 10:16–17 quotes it again.

Read or hear the full devotion



Too Little to Be Counted

Watch which town the prophet picks for the ruler of Israel — the one too small to make the list.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Small town under a star.

READ
Micah 5:2–5

2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.
3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. 5 And he shall be their peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men;

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THINK
Draw up a list of the towns that matter in Judah, and Bethlehem does not make it. It was a farming village six miles from Jerusalem, "too little to be among the clans of Judah" — the kind of place you drive through before you notice you have arrived. Micah, prophesying while Assyria's armies swept the region, picks that village and says the ruler of Israel will come from there: "from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2).

Mighty and proud spirits never have Jesus Christ, for he cometh in at low doors, but he will not come in at high ones.

Charles Spurgeon, "The Incarnation and Birth of Christ" (1855)

PRAY

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Where do we still try to get on God's list, by achievement or by seeming humble enough, and what changes if he came to the low ground anyway?

FOR THE KIDS Bethlehem was a tiny town, but God chose it. Find the smallest thing in your house and talk about why God loves to do big things through small places and small people.

DID YOU KNOW? Phillips Brooks spent Christmas Eve 1865 in the old church at Bethlehem. Three years later, as rector of Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia, he wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem" for the children's Christmas service, and his organist, Lewis Redner, wrote the tune.

Read or hear the full devotion



Joy Got There First

Before anyone in the house has spoken a word, watch which of the two unborn children answers first.

LIGHT	The candles you've lit so far.
HANG	Two cousins and a song.

READ
Luke 1:39–45

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country,
to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and
greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary,
the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy
Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among
women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this
granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For
behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in
my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there
would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

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THINK
Two pregnant women meet at a door in the hill country of Judah, and the first thing that happens is not a word at all: the child inside Elizabeth leaps. Mary has only just called her greeting. We might put it down to reflex — but Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, reads it truly: "the baby in my womb leaped for joy" (Luke 1:44).

He offers not reflection on the old but tidings of something new, not exhortation but a gospel.

J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism

PRAY

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Elizabeth's joy came before anyone explained anything. Where are we waiting to understand God before we let ourselves be glad that he is near?

FOR THE KIDS Baby John leaped for joy when Jesus came close. Who makes you jump up happy when they walk through the door? Thank God together that Jesus comes closer still.

DID YOU KNOW? Mary's song, which follows today's reading (Luke 1:46-55), echoes Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Both praise the God who brings down the proud and lifts up the lowly.

Read or hear the full devotion



O Wisdom

Tonight the seven old "O" prayers begin; read this one for the first.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Lamp.

READ

1 Corinthians 1:22–25

22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach
Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,
24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the
power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God
is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

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THINK

Tonight the church begins an old countdown. For well over a thousand years, on the seven evenings before Christmas Eve, Christians have sung a short prayer that calls Christ by one of his Old Testament names, each beginning with "O." The first is "O Wisdom": O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end and ordering all things mightily and sweetly: come and teach us the way of prudence.

The place that the shepherds found was not an academy or an abstract republic; it was not a place of myths explained or explained away. It was a place of dreams come true.

G. K. Chesterton, The Everlasting Man (1925)

PRAY

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Paul says some people want signs and some want answers. Which do we tend to ask God for, and what did he send instead?

FOR THE KIDS Turn off the lights and light one candle or a flashlight. See how far a small light reaches. Jesus is God's wisdom, the light who shows us the way to God.

DID YOU KNOW? The O Antiphons are traditionally sung at evening prayer, before and after Mary's song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55). That is why they begin on December 17: seven evenings, ending the night before Christmas Eve.

Read or hear the full devotion



O Lord

Read this one for what the fire does not do.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Burning bush.

READ
Exodus 3:1–6

1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the
priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the
wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel
of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a
bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not
consumed. 3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight,
why the bush is not burned." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned
aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And
he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your
sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy
ground." 6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of
Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his
face, for he was afraid to look at God.

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THINK
Moses is eighty years old (Acts 7:23, 30), and forty of those years have been spent in the wilderness, ever since his own attempt to rescue Israel ended with a dead Egyptian and a hasty escape (Exodus 2:12–15). He is keeping someone else's sheep on the far side of nowhere. That is where God finds him.

In our world too, a Stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.

C. S. Lewis, The Last Battle (1956)

PRAY

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Moses turned aside to look. What helps us slow down enough to notice God this week?

FOR THE KIDS Take off your shoes together before you pray tonight, the way Moses did. Why do you think God asked him to do that?

DID YOU KNOW? Adonai is Hebrew for "Lord." Out of reverence, Jewish readers said Adonai aloud instead of pronouncing the name God revealed to Moses at the bush (Exodus 3:14–15). Most English Bibles honor the custom by printing that name as LORD in small capital letters.

Read or hear the full devotion



Out of the Cut Wood

Read this one for why the oldest book in the house was written for latecomers with no claim on it.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Flower on a root.

READ
Romans 15:4, 8, 12–13

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our
instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement
of the Scriptures we might have hope. 8 For I tell you that Christ
became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in
order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 12 And again
Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule
the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." 13 May the God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the
Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

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THINK
Sometimes, months after a tree has been felled, there it is — one green shoot pushing out of the gray stump, as though the wood had never been told it was finished.

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (Book III, "Hope")

PRAY

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

What reasons for hope are we keeping in our own ledger this season, and what would it look like to rest our hope on Christ's faithfulness instead?

FOR THE KIDS A stump looks finished, but God can bring new life out of it. Draw a green shoot growing out of a stump and hang it near your tree.

DID YOU KNOW? Tonight's old Advent prayer is "O Root of Jesse." The seven O Antiphons, sung on the evenings of December 17-23, probably date from the eighth century. "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" paraphrases them; John Mason Neale's English version appeared in 1851 as "Draw nigh, draw nigh, Emmanuel."

Read or hear the full devotion

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT · DECEMBER 20

The candle of love

READER Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,

ALL and shall call his name Immanuel.

Light all four candles.

READER Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us,

ALL and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Isaiah 7:14; 1 John 4:10

A WORD FOR THE WEEK

חֶסֶד hesed *KHEH-sed*

Steadfast love. Loyal love that keeps its promise when the other side has not. The Old Testament uses it again and again for the way God holds on to his people.

THE PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succor us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, the Fourth Sunday in Advent

TO SING

Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine; love was born at Christmas, star and angels gave the sign.

Christina Rossetti, 1885

OUR PRAYERS THIS WEEK



Let It Be to Me

Read this one for what the angel offers Mary in place of an explanation.

LIGHT The fourth candle, the candle of love.

HANG Key.

READ
Luke 1:26–38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of
Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose
name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was
Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the
Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and
tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel
said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with
God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called
the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the
throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of
Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary
said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the
angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the
power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to
be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your
relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is
the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will
be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant
of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel
departed from her.

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THINK

An old woman laughs behind a tent door. She has overheard a visitor promise her husband that she — long past the age, childless her whole life — will bear a son within the year, and her laugh is almost arithmetic: she has done the sum on her own body, and the promise does not survive it. The visitor answers with a question: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). A year later Sarah held a son, and Abraham named him Isaac — he laughs (Genesis 21:3).

That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit, from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, a truly human nature so that he might also become David's true descendant …

The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 35

PRAY

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succor us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Mary was not asked to make God's promise possible, only to receive it. Where are we still trying to earn what God means to give?

FOR THE KIDS Mary said yes to God: "Let it be to me according to your word." Hold out open hands together, say a short yes to God, and name one gift from him you could never make yourself.

DID YOU KNOW? Today's O Antiphon, "O Key of David," comes from Isaiah 22:22: "I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut." Revelation 3:7 calls Jesus the one "who has the key of David."

Read or hear the full devotion



O Dayspring

Read this one for what nine months of silence did to an old priest's song.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Rising sun.

READ
Luke 1:67–79

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and
prophesied, saying, 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has
visited and redeemed his people 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation
for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of
his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our
enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy
promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath
that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being
delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you,
child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before
the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his
people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of
our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light
to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our
feet into the way of peace."

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THINK
For nine months Zechariah could not say a word. An old priest, he had been chosen to burn incense in the temple, the honor of a lifetime, and there an angel told him that his wife Elizabeth, barren for decades, would bear a son. He asked for proof. The proof was silence: "you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words" (Luke 1:20).

The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy.

J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," Epilogue

PRAY

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succor us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Zechariah waited nine months in silence before he could sing. What are we waiting on God for right now?

FOR THE KIDS Tomorrow morning, watch the sky get light together, from a window or outside. Jesus is like the sunrise: he brings light to people sitting in the dark.

DID YOU KNOW? December 21 falls on or next to the winter solstice, the longest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. So the old prayer to the rising sun, "O Oriens," is sung on the darkest evening, and from here the days begin to lengthen.

Read or hear the full devotion



O King of the Nations

Read this one for what Isaiah expects to happen to the soldiers' boots.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Cornerstone.

READ
Isaiah 9:2–7

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those
who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. 3 You
have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice
before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they
divide the spoil. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his
shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of
Midian. 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and
every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. 6 For
to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be
upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of
his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of
David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with
justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

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THINK

Isaiah's picture of peace is a bonfire of army surplus. "Every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire" (Isaiah 9:5). Not stored for the next war. Burned, because no one will need them again.

There fared a mother driven forth / Out of an inn to roam; / In the place where she was homeless / All men are at home.

G. K. Chesterton, "The House of Christmas"

PRAY

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succor us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Who or what are we tempted to put on the shoulder Isaiah saves for the child? What does it mean that his government will have no end?

FOR THE KIDS Build a block tower together, starting with one big cornerstone at the bottom. What happens if you pull the cornerstone out? Jesus is the cornerstone who holds everything together.

DID YOU KNOW? Today's O Antiphon joins two Bible pictures: "the desire of all nations" from Haggai 2:7 in the King James Version, and the cornerstone of Ephesians 2:14–20, where Christ makes Jew and Gentile one.

Read or hear the full devotion



O Emmanuel

Read this one for the man in the story who never says a word.

LIGHT The candles you've lit so far.

HANG Carpenter's tools.

READ

Matthew 1:18–25

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his
mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came
together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And
her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to
shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these
things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream,
saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife,
for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will
bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his
people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord
had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and
bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means,
God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of
the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until
she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

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THINK

Joseph never speaks in the Bible. Not one sentence of his is recorded. What we have instead is what he did, beginning with the hardest night of his life.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; / Hail the incarnate Deity, / Pleased as man with man to dwell, / Jesus, our Emmanuel!

Charles Wesley, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" (1739)

PRAY

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succor us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

Joseph chose mercy before he knew the whole story. Where is God asking us to trust him with a plan that is not ours?

FOR THE KIDS Joseph was a carpenter. Find a hammer or another tool and talk about what Joseph might have built. Jesus grew up in his workshop: God came to live in an ordinary family.

DID YOU KNOW? Read the seven Latin O Antiphons backward by their first words (Emmanuel, Rex, Oriens, Clavis, Radix, Adonai, Sapientia) and the first letters spell ERO CRAS: "Tomorrow I will be there." Whether by design or happy accident, it answers seven nights of "come."

Read or hear the full devotion

CHRISTMAS EVE · DECEMBER 24

The Christ candle

READER The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.

ALL For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.

Light all four candles, then the Christ candle in the middle.

READER And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,

ALL and we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.

Isaiah 9:2, 6; John 1:14

A WORD FOR THE WEEK

ἐσκήνωσεν eskēnōsen *es-KAY-no-sen*

He pitched his tent. John's word for "dwelt" in John 1:14: God moved into the neighborhood, as near as the tabernacle in the wilderness, and nearer.

THE PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, the Nativity of our Lord

TO SING

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King; peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"

Charles Wesley, 1739

OUR PRAYERS THIS WEEK



The Manger

Read this one for the sign the angel gives the shepherds.

LIGHT All four candles, then the white Christ candle in the center.

HANG Manger and star.

READ

Luke 2:1–20

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be
registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.
3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from
Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called
Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with
Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came
for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in
swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the
inn. 8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch
over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory
of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel
said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for
all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is
Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in
swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a
multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the
highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” 15 When the
angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us
go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made
known to us.” 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby
lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had
been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the
shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in
her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had
heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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THINK

Luke starts the story with the most powerful man in the world. "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered" (Luke 2:1). Augustus had titles of his own; inscriptions across the empire hailed him as savior and bringer of peace, and his coins called him son of a god. With one order he put an empire on the roads to be counted.

The shepherds were welcome at the manger. The unclean were judged to be clean. The outcasts became honored guests. The song of angels was sung to the simplest of all.

Kenneth E. Bailey, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes

PRAY

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succor us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

The angels told the shepherds to look for God in the lowest place in town. Where might God be meeting us somewhere we would not think to look?

FOR THE KIDS Set out the manger from your nativity set, or make one from a small box and some straw or shredded paper. Tonight, lay baby Jesus in it.

DID YOU KNOW? "Silent Night" was first sung on Christmas Eve 1818 at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria. The assistant priest, Joseph Mohr, had written the words; the schoolteacher and organist Franz Xaver Gruber set them to music, and the two sang it with a guitar.

Read or hear the full devotion



The Word Became Flesh

Read this one for how far back John starts the Christmas story.

LIGHT Every candle on the wreath, with the Christ candle in the center.

HANG The star for the top of the tree.

READ
John 1:1–14

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the
Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were
made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was
made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light
shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was
a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to
bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was
not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light,
which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the
world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know
him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.
12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the
right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of
the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word
became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of
the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

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THINK

John's Christmas story has no manger, no shepherds, no angels in the sky. It begins further back than any of the others: "In the beginning" (John 1:1). Those are the first words of Genesis, and John means us to hear them. Before Bethlehem, before Abraham, before the first morning, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.

Eugene H. Peterson, The Message, John 1:14

PRAY

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

START THE CONVERSATION

John says the Word pitched his tent among us. What does it mean to us this Christmas that God came to live where we live?

FOR THE KIDS Put the star on top of your Jesse Tree or Christmas tree together. Then read John 1:14 out loud and thank God for coming to live with us.

DID YOU KNOW? The earliest firm record of Christmas kept on December 25 comes from Rome: a calendar for the year 336, preserved in a book known as the Chronograph of 354, lists the birth of Christ on that date.

Read or hear the full devotion

WHAT WE'LL REMEMBER FROM THIS ADVENT

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

The daily readings, questions and facts come from the Advent devotions at inkling-s.com, written for families. Each day's full devotion, with the reflection read aloud, is one scan away.

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“Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed.”

Revelation 5:5

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