

Advent Devotional 2021

Share in these devotions each week as you light candles on your Advent wreath.

Week 1 -- Hope (November 28)

Light one purple candle

Read: Isaiah 9:2,6-7

Ponder: The start of Advent is always just a little odd. This year, like in many years, it begins immediately after Thanksgiving. We begin the journey to the manger with some leftover mashed potatoes at our side. There's something that can feel rushed about this in a "normal" year. But in this most different 2020, perhaps the quick transition is more welcome than normal. Because as we begin the season of Advent, we do so considering the idea of hope. Long ago, Isaiah prophesied of a coming Messiah, instilling in his followers a sense of hope. Fast forward to now and it feels like we need some hope too. Not just another "it will be ok" kind of speech or image, but real, undaunted hope that can change us and the world around us. May this Advent season bring that kind of transformational hope into our lives and the world around us.

What are you hoping for in the rest of this year? Beyond 2020, what might hope look like for you in the times ahead?

Pray: God, as I come into the season of Advent, I do so bringing the leftovers of what this year has been. May this time be defined less by what has been and more by what will be. Instill in me and all of your creation a sense of hope in this time of Advent. May we begin to understand the blessing that hope can be not just to make life a little better, but to bring radical transformation to us and the whole world. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Week 2 -- Faith (December 5)

Light two purple candles

Read: Romans 5:1-5

Ponder: Have you ever done a “trust fall”? It’s an exercise where a person, standing on a raised platform, falls backwards into the arms of people standing behind her or him. As you are falling, you have no way of seeing whether the people who are tasked with catching you are there, if they are ready, or if they are capable of keeping you from hitting the ground. In all of that uncertainty, however, there is this incredible rush that can come from falling back and being caught. This is what faith asks of us, especially in this Advent. There may be moments in 2020 where it has been hard to see the support we need. We may feel like we are being asked to do things that are beyond our spaces of comfort. But having faith means believing that God is behind us, upholding us, and surrounding us, even when we aren’t sure about where exactly God might be or what exactly God might be up to.

Where are you placing your trust this Advent, and could it be that this is a season where faith may be evidence of that which is unseen?

Pray: God, even in the moments where I know I am called to follow you and trust you, it can be really hard. May you instill in me the kind of faith that believes in your presence and your love even when it is hard for me to see it. And may I speak and live in ways that reflect that kind of faith and trust to the world around me. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Week 3 -- Joy (December 12)

Light two purple candles and the pink candle

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Ponder: When Paul writes the words “rejoice always”, do we think he knew some of the circumstances we might be facing? Rejoice...during a pandemic? Perhaps, as unlikely as joy might feel in the space of this year, Paul knew what he was talking about. Joy as we come to understand it in the season of Advent is not something circumstantial. Joy that comes from God is bigger than our stuff or our conditions. It is an acknowledgment of God’s presence that fills the hearts and lives of believers in such a way that it cannot be put out by anything this life would throw at us. Even for the most faithful, it can be hard to remember the joy that is given to us. Yet this is the call that is in our lives: to remain joyful and prayerful through everything.

Why might it be important to stay centered on joy this Advent of 2020?

Pray: God, may the joy of your presence radiate through my being. I confess that there are times, maybe some longer than others, where I don’t feel especially joyful. Remind me that even when everything around me feels dim, the light of your presence never goes out. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Week 4 -- Love (December 19)

Light two purple candles, the pink candle, and then the last purple candle

Read: John 15:9-17

Ponder: As we read this story from Jesus' ministry that will come quite some time after his birth, perhaps we are reminded of a word that gets connected with love: sacrifice. Jesus will say that there is no greater love than one who gives up life for his friends. In 2020, the kinds of sacrifices we are being asked to make are those of lifestyle. Doing things like wearing masks, keeping social distance, and reframing so many of the normal activities we expect to do around Christmas. What if we saw these not as inconveniences, but as a sign and symbol of love for God and those around us? Perhaps this is the kind of love God is asking us to both receive and give as we grow closer to Christmas.

Who could I show love to by offering a sacrifice from my life?

Pray: God, your love for your creation is boundless, shown time and time again through sacrifice and pouring yourself out for people. May you fill me with this kind of vision of love as we grow closer to Christmas. May I see the circumstances of this season not as a punishment or a restriction, but as an opportunity to show you and my neighbors love in every way. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Week 5 -- Jesus (December 24)

Light all 5 candles, concluding with the white Christ candle in the middle of the wreath

Read: Luke 2:1-20

Ponder: We began Advent almost a month ago by singing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”, recognizing just how much we need Jesus in our lives. Over the course of these weeks, we’ve seen that we have a need for faith, hope, joy, and love in our lives. Jesus, this innocent, holy baby, comes to bring all of these elements into our lives in ways that we could never fully accomplish on our own. In the long-told story of his birth, we find out that there was no room for Jesus in the inn. This opportunity for an incredible moment of welcome for a Savior becomes a learning lesson of what we might miss out on when we don’t pay attention to what God is doing all around us. Yet even in the dirt of the stable, God’s transformative love comes to life to show us what it might mean to really live. What an incredible gift, indeed.

How am I inviting Jesus into my life this Christmas?

Pray: Lord God, on this Christmas Eve, thank you for seeing me not as a lost cause or a forgotten song, but as one of your kids. Thank you for sending Jesus to this earth to be a Savior for all. May the opportunity to welcome you into my life be one that I am always aware of and willing to take. As I consider what gifts look like in the coming hours and days, may you remind me that you’ve already given the world the greatest gift we will ever know. I love you, God. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.