

EMMANUEL

GOD IS WITH US

A CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION



WEEKLY ADVENT DEVOTION
FOCUSED ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD

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Advent: Preparation & Waiting



Advent

This is a season of preparation and waiting for the arrival of the gift of God, who is Christ Jesus the Savior. But the first Christmas already happened, and Jesus has already come. He was born, lived, and died for our sins and conquered death through His resurrection. So then, if we've already accepted this gift of Jesus, what are we preparing and waiting for?

Preparation

Let's say you are throwing a Christmas party for beloved family. Where would you start? You would probably move forward knowing the purpose of the party will be to celebrate and be present with the ones you love. Then you would take a look at your calendar, select a time and space, and begin plans. As you make arrangements, you may buy gifts and food, and possibly clear space for gifts you may receive.

This is what Advent preparation is for Christmas. It is a preparing, a clearing out of space in our hearts, minds, and spirits in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Advent is a month-long time to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. There are themes for the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, and one again for Christmas day: Hope, Peace, Love, Joy, and Christ.

With our focus on Emmanuel, which means God is with us, the goal is to practice His presence during the Christmas season. To that end, we've planned intentional times sprinkled throughout your Sundays to help you become more aware of His presence. You can keep the goal of intention on Sundays, or expand it into the rest of your week.

Waiting

Continuing the metaphor of throwing a Christmas party, once you have prepared for your guests you might have a few minutes before their arrival when you put on quiet music, light a few candles, and sit quietly as you anticipate your loved ones' arrival and your time together.

The same is true about an Advent celebration. It may look a bit different in that God is already here. So we shift from waiting for His presence to waiting in His presence. You may relax into songs of worship, read a Bible verse or prepare your heart in silence as you simply sit and wait in His presence.

So how do we get there? Being present with God can sometimes be hard as our minds and lives can be such busy places. This is where contemplative disciplines can help. Each Sunday there will be a focus on a passage of scripture and some tools to help you slow down and wait with God. As we wait on his love, we expand our capacity to receive the abundant gifts of His presence. Gifts of Hope, Peace, Love, Joy and Jesus Christ.

THE PLAN

Get Ready

What a gift it would be for your spirit if you slowed down a bit and made Advent an intentional season of being present with Jesus.

This booklet provides a page for each Advent Sunday and one for Christmas day to help guide you into contemplative exercises that will help you be present. The exercises can be used daily and throughout the week as well.

Advent Candles & Themes

Each Sunday we light a candle of celebration as a reminder that He is with us. During the day, and into the following week, think about and look for signs of that week's focus:

- Week 1 - Hope
- Week 2 - Peace
- Week 3 - Love
- Week 4 - Joy
- Christmas Day - Christ

Morning Scripture Meditation

Each Sunday there will be a scripture focus on the Advent theme. Take your time reading over the scripture. Savor it. Read it over several times. Talk to God about it. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal new insights. You may want to read the given scripture throughout your week or write it in your journal, along with your thoughts and prayers. Directions for each week are provided on that Sunday's Advent page.

Afternoon Breath Prayer

At some point in your afternoon, take a pause for a rest with Jesus. The weekly page includes a short prayer related to the theme of the week. It only takes a few moments for a "breath prayer" to help you become more aware of how very close God is. His spirit is closer than your breath. Read over the given breath prayer (which will be a scripture verse) and then close your eyes. Within your mind, say the first part on your inhale, and the second on your exhale. Do this for a minute or two. You will be amazed at the peace this creates in your body, mind, and spirit.

Evening Reflection

Take a few minutes before bed to prayerfully reflect on your day. It is amazing how this practice helps you become more aware of where God is present in your day, and where you do not feel His presence. Reflecting on your connections with God helps you become more intentional to be aware of His presence in the days to come. This is also a great practice to share with a spouse or children before bed.

*Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.
In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations,
by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—
The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest*

ISAIAH 9:1-3A (NIV)

Morning Scripture Meditation:

Read the above scripture 3 times, slowly and aloud if possible

1. The first read-through, listen for one word or phrase that catches your attention. Savor that word or phrase. Write it down if you have a journal.
2. The second read-through, listen for one word or phrase that intersects with your life today, particularly in the area of hope. Think about the ways it is meaningful to you in your current situation.
3. Read the verse a third time, again listening for one word or phrase that seems to be speaking directly to you. Then, simply sit in the Lord's presence and listen. What is God inviting you to today regarding hope?

Afternoon Breath Prayer:

Take a quiet moment away from the busyness of your day to take a rest with God. Below is a short breath prayer. Read over the prayer and then close your eyes and take a few deep breaths as you pray the breath prayer.

Inhale:
My hope is

Exhale:
in you Lord.

PSALM 42:5 (NIV)

Evening Reflection:

Before you go to bed give yourself a few minutes to reflect on your day with God through prayer. When in your day did you sense the presence of God? When did you feel distant from His presence? What do you sense God is saying to you about hope? What is Jesus inviting you to carry into tomorrow?

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

ISAIAH 9:6-7 (NIV)

Morning Scripture Meditation:

Read the above scripture 3 times, slowly and aloud if possible

- The first read-through, listen for one word or phrase that catches your attention. Savor that word or phrase. Write it down if you have a journal.
- The second read-through, listen for one word or phrase that intersects with your life today, particularly in the area of peace. Think about the ways it is meaningful to you in your current situation.
- Read the verse a third time, again listening for one word or phrase that seems to be speaking directly to you. Then, simply sit in the Lord's presence and listen. What is God inviting you to today regarding peace?

Afternoon Breath Prayer:

Take a quiet moment away from the busyness of your day to take a rest with God. Below is a short breath prayer. Read over the prayer and then close your eyes and take a few deep breaths as you pray the breath prayer.

Inhale:

Let the peace of Christ

Exhale:

rule in my heart.

COLOSSIANS 3:15 (NIV)

Evening Reflection:

Before you go to bed give yourself a few minutes to reflect on your day with God through prayer. When did God pursue your heart today? When did you sense His peace? What is Jesus saying to you about peace right now?

*I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised,
according to all the Lord has done for us—
yes, the many good things he has done for Israel,
according to his compassion and many kindnesses.
He said, “Surely they are my people, children who will be true to me”;
and so he became their Savior.
In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them.
In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

ISAIAH 63:7-9 (NIV)

Morning Scripture Meditation:

Read the above scripture 3 times, slowly and aloud, if possible

- The first read-through, listen for one word or phrase that catches your attention. Savor that word or phrase. Write it down if you have a journal.
- The second read-through, listen for one word or phrase that intersects with your life today, particularly in the area of love. Think about the ways it is meaningful to you in your current situation.
- Read the verse a third time, again listening for one word or phrase that seems to be speaking directly to you. Then, simply sit in the Lord's presence and listen. What is God inviting you to today regarding love?

Afternoon Breath Prayer:

Take a quiet moment away from the busyness of your day to take a rest with God. Below is a short breath prayer. Read over the prayer and then close your eyes and take a few deep breaths as you pray the breath prayer.

Inhale:
His perfect love

Exhale:
casts out all fear.

1 JOHN 4:18 (NIV)

Evening Reflection:

Before you go to bed give yourself a few minutes to reflect on your day with God through prayer. When in your day did God show you His love? Were there times you ignored or resisted His love? What do you sense God is saying to you about His love for you?

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

ISAIAH 61:1-3 (NIV)

Morning Scripture Meditation:

Read the above scripture 3 times, slowly and aloud if possible

- The first read-through, listen for one word or phrase that catches your attention. Savor that word or phrase. Write it down if you have a journal.
- The second read-through, listen for one word or phrase that intersects with your life today, particularly in the area of joy. Think about the ways it is meaningful to you in your current situation.
- Read the verse a third time, again listening for one word or phrase that seems to be speaking directly to you. Then, simply sit in the Lord's presence and listen. What is God inviting you to today in the area of joy?

Afternoon Breath Prayer:

Take a quiet moment away from the busyness of your day to take a rest with God. Below is a short breath prayer. Read over the prayer and then close your eyes and take a few deep breaths as you pray the breath prayer.

Inhale:
The joy of the Lord

Exhale:
is my strength.

NEHEMIAH 8:10 (NIV)

Evening Reflection:

Before you go to bed give yourself a few minutes to reflect on your day with God through prayer. Was there a time when you lacked joy? How did you experience the joy of Christ today? What is He saying to you about joy?

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke2: 4-20 (NIV)

Scripture Meditation:

Read the above scripture 3 times, slowly and aloud if possible

- The first read-through, listen for one word or phrase that catches your attention. Savor that word or phrase. Write it down if you have a journal.
- The second read-through, listen for one word or phrase that intersects with your life today, particularly in the area of Emmanuel, Christ with us. Think about the ways it is meaningful to you in your current situation.
- Read the verse a third time, again listening for one word or phrase that seems to be speaking directly to you. Then, simply sit in the Lord's presence and listen. What is the presence of Jesus inviting you to today?

Evening Reflection:

Before you go to bed give yourself a few minutes to reflect on your Christmas day. When did you sense the presence of Jesus? When did you feel distant from His presence? How will you seek the presence of God in the days to come?

Christmas Arrival & Presence

Arrival

Merry Christmas! The gift of a Messiah, a Savior to the world, is here. He has arrived and His name says it all! He is Emmanuel, meaning God is with us. He is present. In fact, he is your Christmas gift!

If you have already accepted this gift of Jesus then what is next? How can you best celebrate his arrival? How can you even begin to open the boundless gifts of His presence in your life? If you have given your heart to Jesus, then start with embracing the truth that He embraces you. You are loved, accepted, and fully forgiven. He is more than present, He was and is active in your life. From your salvation to every detail of your day, He is present and working on your behalf. He has given us the Holy Spirit and He comforts and empowers. Paul states in Philippians 3:12 (NIV):

"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

That is the essence of the Christian life: taking hold of Jesus, the gift that has taken hold of you. Reading your Bible, going to church, and worshiping Him are all powerful ways to help you soak in His truth. But remember to ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to take hold of the gift of life that has taken hold of you. God is with you, and He gave his life for you. It is here in His presence that you can give Jesus what he died for... and that is you. Be present.

Presence

Often attention to God is confined to a small pocket of time we call prayer. Yet He is always with us, listening and talking. Prayer is a two-way conversation as it would be with anyone in your life. So let your gift to Jesus this Christmas be your presence. Be with him, let him into your whole day and your whole life. Return the embrace of Emmanuel.

Maybe you have not yet accepted this gift of Jesus and what He came to earth to do by dying on the cross. If not, this is an invitation for you this Christmas. The key thing to understand is that Jesus was a gift from God to usher in the Kingdom of God, show us how to live, and pay for our sins. He died on the cross and rose from the dead. Read over the following scriptures. Then, simply say a prayer, or talk to God in your own words as you accept His gift.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 6:23 (NIV)

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

ROMANS 10:9-10 (NIV)



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