

IDEAS, ACTIVITIES & PRAYERS FOR ADVENT

HOPE.

A D V E N T

JOY.

P R E P A R A T I O N

LOVE.

G U I D E

PEACE.

# ADVENT

The following collection of ideas, activities, and prayers can help you make the weeks leading up to Christmas a meaningful time of spiritual growth and worship.

The Christmas season is full of activity: decorating trees, office parties, the arrival of guests, baking cookies, wrapping gifts, singing carols, and last-minute shopping. Yet, in the midst of all the hustle, there lies a very simple story. Although simple, this story dramatically changed the world. It invites each of us to engage in the events that unfolded over 2000 years ago as we remember the amazing gift presented to humankind on that first Christmas morning.

Rather than rushing ahead to Christmas, let's slow down a bit and appreciate the Advent season. Advent is a time of anticipation, preparation, and expectation. Although we commonly think of the days leading up to Christmas as the close of our calendar year, the Advent season is the beginning of the Christian year, ushering in the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day and continues through Christmas Eve, thus beginning on Sunday, December 2nd this year.

Traditionally, each week of Advent has a specific theme: Hope, Love, Joy and Peace. As we move ever closer to Christmas Day, we can focus upon these important themes and how Jesus offers each of them to us.

So, let us take time from the typical busyness of Christmas to slow down and reflect upon the truth of the Christmas celebration. In this season may we be reminded not only of the arrival of Jesus as a baby and Savior of the world, but of the truth that He is coming again to rescue and redeem all who place their faith in Him.



## IDEAS & ACTIVITIES

### Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath has been a time-honored tradition for many to focus on the primary themes of the Advent season. A wreath is an unbroken circle, representing the unending love God has for all Creation. The greenery of the wreath symbolizes life, which is a gift from God. Four candles are arranged in the wreath, each representing one of the Sundays leading to Christmas Day. The candles are typically purple, symbolizing repentance. Some people use dark blue candles, representing the nighttime sky before the light of Christ had come. A large white candle can be placed in the center of the wreath. This candle is referred to as the Christ Candle, representing Jesus, and is only lit on Christmas Day.

On the first Sunday of Advent, the first candle is lit. Each day throughout that week as the family gathers for prayer, the first candle is lit. On the second Sunday of Advent, the first and second candles are lit. Again, every night during the second week both the first and second candles are lit during a time of prayer and worship. Each week continues in this same fashion, all the way through Christmas Day, when the Christ candle is lit in celebration of the birth of Jesus.

You can easily make your own Advent wreath with candles and greenery and participate in this meaningful tradition.

### Give Up to Give More

Here is a challenge you can present to your entire family: give up one present and contribute the money that would go to purchasing that present to a worthy cause. As a family, brainstorm different ways you can give the money away to brighten someone's life. Perhaps you could sponsor a child in need, buy supplies for an underfunded school or support the work of a missionary. You can also contact extended family members who typically buy gifts, explain to them the cause to which you are donating, and ask them to consider sending money which you can add to your contribution instead. Who needs another sweater from your aunt or a new blender from your in-laws? Take the money and celebrate as a family as you give it away at Christmas.

### Blessings Building to Christmas

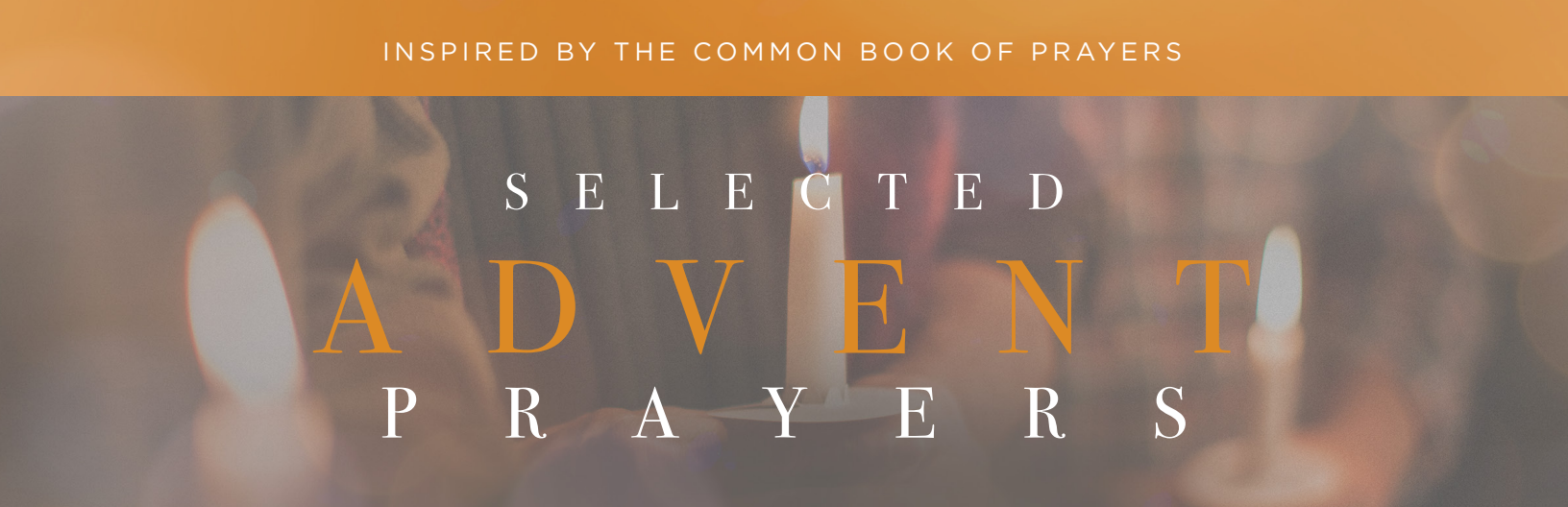
Advent is a time of anticipation building up to the celebration of Christmas. One great way to help build this anticipation is by having all of your family members get involved in a fun and encouraging daily practice that is ultimately celebrated on Christmas Day. To begin, you need a basket or jar, a small notepad or slips of paper, and a pen. Place all of these together in a central area of your home, such as the kitchen counter, fireplace mantle, or dining table. Every day during Advent, each family member writes down a blessing for which they are thankful, folds it and drops it in the basket or jar. On Christmas day, gather together and take turns reading blessings pulled from the jar. Thank God for the many blessings you have experienced during the Advent season.

### Advent Prayer Chain

This fun activity will help your family keep prayer at the center of your Advent season. Gather together and cut one strip of paper representing each day of Advent. On each strip, write out a prayer request. Create a paper chain by taping the first strip in a circle, then inserting another strip through that circle and taping it, and so on, until you have a chain made up of paper links for each of the prayer requests you wrote down. On Sunday, December 2nd, open your first link and pray together as a family for what is on the strip. Continue to open up a new link each day of Advent and pray for that need.

### Daily Advent Readings

As you set aside time each day for worship, it is helpful to focus on a daily reading. If you are using an Advent wreath, you can share a reading and time of prayer each day as you light the appropriate candles. The God with Us Advent devotional books are a great resource which provide daily scripture readings and reflections focusing on the themes of Advent: Hope, Love, Joy and Peace.



# SELECTED ADVENT PRAYERS

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Almighty God, give us grace to overcome darkness, and live in your light, as we prepare our hearts to soon celebrate the time in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility. As we anticipate the day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty, may we daily live lives that honor and glorify you, through Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to prepare the way for the coming of Christ and the gift of our salvation: Give us grace to listen, courage to obey and humility to seek your way over our own ambitions, that we may experience with great joy the coming of Jesus our Rescuer and Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great strength move among us; leading us out of our selfish ways and delivering us through your bountiful grace and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Purify us, Almighty God, as we submit to you daily, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find us full of your love and free from the grip of sin that so easily entangles us. Help prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## CHRISTMAS EVE

Father God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Guide us, that we, who have known the mystery of Christ's Light on earth, may also enjoy his presence for eternity; where with you and the Holy Spirit he will continue to live and reign, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

## CHRISTMAS DAY

O God, what peace we find in the celebration of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: May we, who joyfully receive him as our Lord and Redeemer, celebrate Him with equal hope, peace, love and joy when he returns. Today we honor Jesus above all else, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.