



Opening the Doors of Advent

A Family Guide for Experiencing Hope, Faith,
Joy, Peace and Love as we bring
Bring “Christ” back into “Christ-mas”



Christmas 2016

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Our Christmas Gift to You . . .

is this Advent booklet with our love and best wishes for a joyful celebration of Jesus' Birth.

Advent is the season, including the four Sundays just before Christmas, which devote time, creativity and preparation to the celebration of Christmas: Emmanuel – God With Us. The focus this year is *“Opening the Doors of Advent”*. This is a season of waiting and anticipation. Old Testament people longed and waited for the coming of a Savior, and we long and wait for the coming of Christmas, a celebration of Jesus' birth. Our prayer for you and your family is that this Advent will be a time to prepare more than ever before for the coming of “Emmanuel”.

In today's world, the heart of the Christian holiday is easily lost. It can be replaced by the illusion that buying enough of the right gifts/food/decorations will make us happy and joyful. Advent is an ideal time to establish religious customs and traditions in your home which help your children and entire family remember the messages of hope, faith, joy and peace that culminates in the birth of love in the form of Jesus on Christmas morning.

As a rule, it is best to begin with one or two customs and add others in years to come. It is also highly desirable that families develop their own special customs by adapting traditional ones to their personal circumstances. For example, you might decide that just before bedtime is the best time to gather as a family and implement these new traditions or have a special place in your home dedicated to your new Christmas tradition. Children love ritual and ceremony so dim the lights, light a candle (perhaps on your family Advent wreath), sing together a favorite Christmas carol and then choose a couple of the ideas in this booklet or create one of your own to implement. It is powerful to gather as a family each evening of Advent and connect and remember the real meaning of the season. You may find it rejuvenates you as well.

Hopefully, this booklet will give you some ideas and experiences to bring your family closer and help your children remember to share hope, faith, joy, peace and love this holiday season as we move through the doors of Advent leading to Jesus' birth.



Teach the Children

Author Unknown

Late one Christmas Eve, I sank back, tired, but content, into my easy chair. The kids were in bed, the gifts were wrapped, the milk and cookies waited by the fireplace for Santa. As I sat back admiring the tree with its decorations, I couldn't help feeling that something important was missing. It wasn't long before the tiny twinkling tree lights lulled me to sleep. I don't know how long I slept, but all of a sudden I knew that I wasn't alone. I opened my eyes, and you can imagine my surprise when I saw Santa Claus, himself, standing next to my Christmas tree. He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot just as the poem described him, but he was not the "jolly old elf" of Christmas legend. The man who stood before me looked sad and disappointed. And there were tears in his eyes.

"Santa, what's wrong?" I asked, "Why are you crying?"

"It's the children," Santa replied sadly.

"But Santa, the children love you," I said.

"Oh, I know they love me, and they love the gifts I bring them," Santa said, "but the children of today seem to have somehow missed out on the true spirit of Christmas. It's not their fault. It's just that the adults, many of them not having been taught themselves, have forgotten to teach the children."

"Teach them what?" I asked.



Santa's kind old face became soft, more gentle. His eyes began to shine with something more than tears. He spoke softly. "Teach the children the true meaning of Christmas. Teach them that the part of Christmas we can see, hear, and touch is much more than meets the eye. Teach them the symbolism behind the customs and traditions of Christmas which we now observe. Teach them what it is they truly represent." Santa reached into his bag and pulled out a tiny Christmas tree and set it on my mantle.



"Teach them about the Christmas tree. Green is the second color of Christmas. The stately evergreen, with its unchanging color, represents the hope of eternal life in Jesus. Its needles point heavenward as a reminder that humanity's thoughts should turn heavenward as well."

Santa reached into his bag again and pulled out a shiny star and placed it at the top of the small tree. "The star was the heavenly sign of promise. God promised a Savior for the world and the star was the sign of the fulfillment of that promise on the night that Jesus Christ was born. Teach the children that God always fulfills promises, and that wise men still seek Jesus."



"Red," said Santa, "is the first color of Christmas." He pulled forth a red ornament for the tiny tree. Red is deep, intense, vivid. It is the color of the life-giving blood that flows through our veins. It is the symbol of God's greatest gift. Teach the children that Christ gave his life and shed his blood for

them that they might have fullness of life. When they see the color red, it should remind them of that most wonderful gift."

Santa found a silver bell in his pack and placed it on the tree. "Just as lost sheep are guided to safety by the sound of the bell, it continues to ring today for all to be guided to the fold. Teach the children to follow the true Shepherd."



Santa placed a candle on the mantle and lit it. The soft glow from its one tiny flame brightened the room. "The glow of the candle represents how people can show their thanks for the gift of God's son that Christmas Eve long ago. Teach the children to follow in Christ's footsteps...to go about doing good. Teach them to let their light shine before people that all may see it and glorify God. This is what's symbolized when the twinkle lights shine on the tree like hundreds of bright shining lights, each of them representing one of God's precious children's light shining for all to see."



Again Santa reached into his bag and this time he brought forth a tiny red and white striped cane. As he hung it on the tree he spoke softly. "The candy cane is a stick of hard white candy. White to symbolize the Divine nature of Jesus, and hard to symbolize the Solid Rock, the foundation of the church, and the firmness of God's promises. The candy cane form's a "J" to represent the name of Jesus, who came to earth. It also represents the Good Shepherd's crook, which Christ uses to reach down into all ditches of the world to lift out the fallen lambs who, like all sheep, have gone astray. The original candy cane had three small red stripes, which are the stripes of the scourging Jesus received by which we are healed, and a large red stripe that represents the shed blood of Jesus, so that we can have the promise of eternal life. Teach these things to the children."

Santa brought out a beautiful wreath made of fresh, fragrant greenery tied with a bright red bow. "The bow reminds us of the bond of perfection, which is love. The wreath embodies all the good things about Christmas for those with eyes to see and hearts to understand. It contains the colors of red and green and the heaven-turned needles of the evergreen. The bow tells the story of good will towards all and its color reminds us of Christ's sacrifice. Even its very shape is symbolic, representing eternity and the eternal nature of Christ's love. It is a circle, without beginning and without end. These are the things you must teach the children."

I asked, "But where does that leave you Santa?"

The tears gone now from his eyes, a smile broke over Santa's face. "Why bless you, my dear," he laughed, "I'm only a symbol myself. I represent the spirit of family fun and the joy of giving and receiving. If the children are taught these other things, there is no danger that I'll ever be forgotten."

"I think I'm beginning to understand," I replied.

"That's why I came," said Santa. "You're an adult. If you don't teach the children these things, then who will?"



Family Advent Wreath

“I want . . . “

“I hope I get . . .”

“When can we go see Santa Clause?”

“Do I get a new dress for the Christmas recital?”

Do remarks like these make you wonder how Christmas can possibly be kept as a Holy Day rather than as one long commercial holiday that now seems to start before Halloween is even over? A family advent wreath can help you emphasize the true nature of Christmas. Our church uses an advent wreath in the sanctuary. It can also be a meaningful tradition in your home.

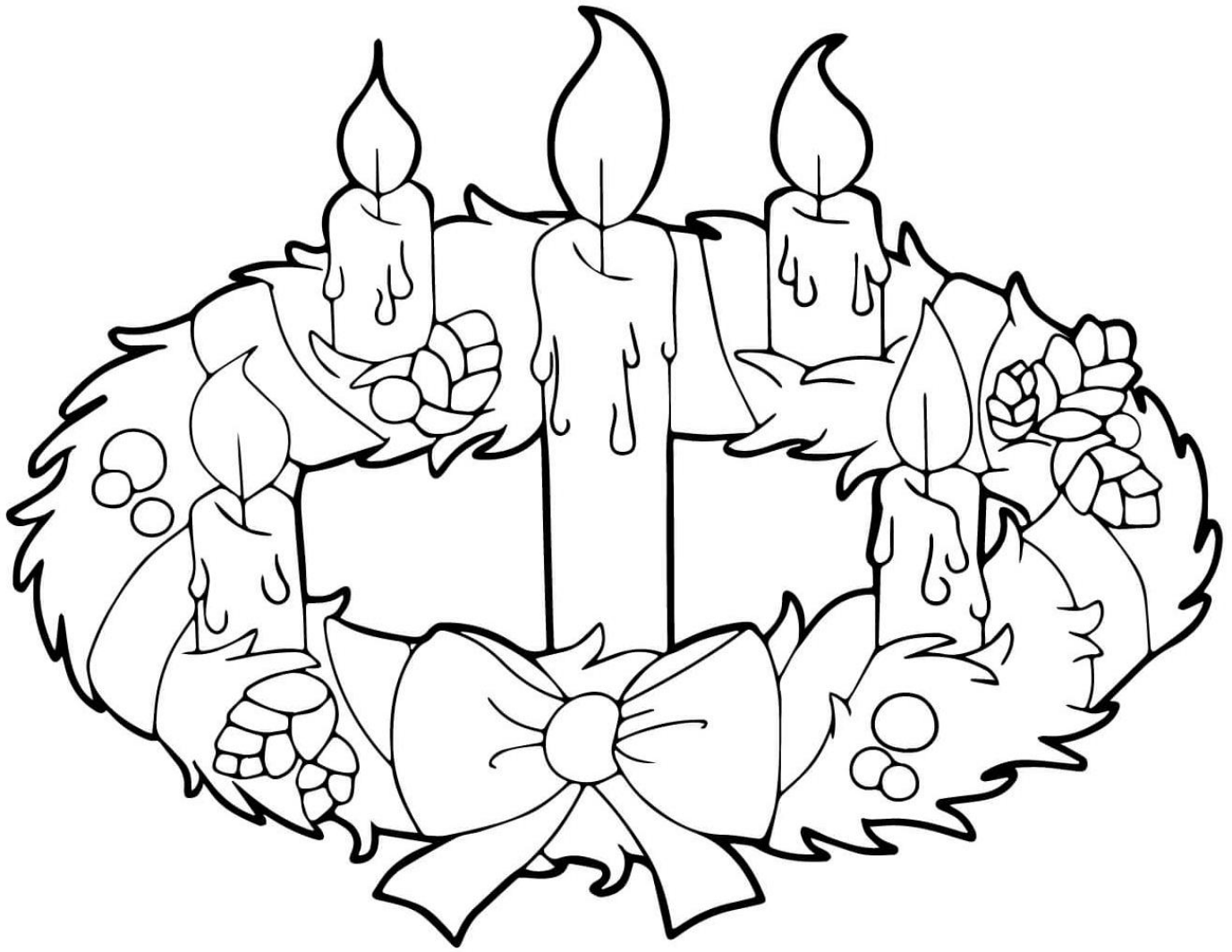
You may buy an advent wreath or easily make one. A round Styrofoam base or creating candle holders with modeling clay and using a paper plate are a couple of ideas. Conceal the base with evergreens and add four candles with a fifth candle in the center. Sometimes you see different colored candles. Feel free to get the colored candles that appeal to your family preferably using white for the center candle.

The wreath is round symbolizing eternity; there is no beginning and there is no end. Evergreens, if used, on the wreath represent new life and the fact that God never changes. The four candles recount the four thousand years the world waited for the Messiah as well as symbolizing Jesus as the Light of the World. Don't let small details prevent you from enjoying the rich experience of the wreath with your family. Any circle of greens or any circle with the candles or even an Advent Log with candles mounted on it and surrounded with greens can be used.

Each week during Advent, one more candle is lit in a special ceremony. The ritual suggested here is informal and simple, designed with elementary-school-age children in mind. Inside each of us, however, lives a child and Christmas calls forth that child. So though the designations are “P” for parent and “C” for child, any two or more people can divide the reading and pray together. The word for each week follows what will be used in the sermons during advent so may not match what you've “traditionally” heard.

Suggested discussion questions and Christmas carol are included. For the carol, gather around the piano or use a guitar or other instrument for accompaniment. Don't have instruments? – Find it on YouTube or sing acapella. You don't have or know the suggested carols? – Substitute other ones. Remember, this is only a *guide*. Tailor it to fit your family. Only then will it prove a blessing.

May your family advent wreath remind you anew of the dark times when prophets dreamed of the coming Redeemer, and when men's hearts glowed with desire for the Messiah. As you celebrate the coming of the Light of the World, may the light of faith be rekindled in your home.



http://www.supercoloring.com/sites/default/files/styles/coloring_full/public/cif/2013/11/advent-wreath-and-candles-coloring-page.jpg

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT – *Opening the Door of Hope*

C: Why are we lighting a candle?

P: We light this candle to represent Hope. Hope is the light at the end of a dark tunnel. The Jews had to wait hundreds and hundreds of years for the Messiah that God had promised. Palestine was a little land, often overrun by foreign armies. The Jews hated being a conquered people but through the hardest times they clung to the hope that someday the Messiah would come to free them. Some scoffed, saying, “After all these years, you still think God will deliver us?” It was a long wait, but the miracle happened and Jesus, the Messiah, did come.

C: I think it’s a long wait until we can open our Christmas presents!

P: Sometimes it does feel like a long wait – like Christmas will never arrive. As we open the door of hope, we remember the miracle of Christmas and the meaning it has for our lives today.

C: What do you mean? I don’t see miracles happening today?

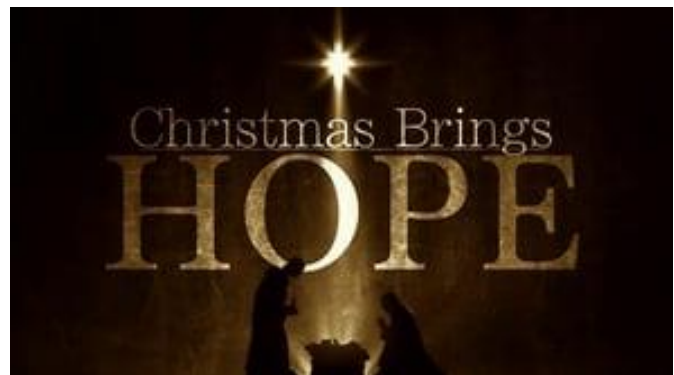
P: Well . . . God does miracles through people like you and me every day. You are God’s miracle worker! You are God’s means to affect change in your world and God wants to birth a miracle through you.

C: There’s hope for all of us – we are all miracle workers!

Discussion Questions: Are you ready for God to birth a Christmas miracle through you? Have you ever witnessed or experienced a miracle? If so, what happened? Do you think God could actually work a miracle through your life? What are your hopes for how God can use you to make the world a better place? What would it take for you to be more prepared for God to use you for miraculous purposes in the world?

Song: O Come All Ye Faithful

Closing Prayer: Creator God – Sometimes we just have to wait. We wait our turn. We wait to grow up. We wait for Christmas to come again. The Jews had to wait for the Messiah. Mary had to wait for baby Jesus to be born. We do not like to wait. Thank you for sending the light of hope that reminds us that miracles happen and it is worth the wait. Amen.



SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT - *Opening the Door of Faith*

C: Why do we light the second candle?

P: The first candle stands for Hope. The second candle stands for Faith.

C: Hope and faith sound like the same thing.

P: They are very similar. As we open the door to Faith, we discover that faith means more than wanting or expecting something to happen, it is complete confidence and trust in something even when there's no proof.

C: Like when I turn on the light switch and there's light? I can't see the electricity, but it's there.

P: Yes - Faith is believing in things you cannot see - like electricity. In the Christmas story, there were three wise men that saw a star in the sky. They heard the voice of God inside their hearts, listened and had faith that the star would lead them to someone important. They followed it not knowing where the path would take them.

C: Wow! That really takes faith.

Discussion Questions: When have you stepped out in faith? What happened? How is your faith supported and challenged during the holiday season? Where in your life can you have more faith? What would your life look like if you took a leap of faith by letting go of any limiting beliefs and fully embraced your full potential? Would you sing, dance, learn an instrument, help out in the food cupboard, teach a Sunday School class, draw outside the lines?

Song: O, Come All Ye Faithful

Closing Prayer: Dear God - May I listen to your voice within my heart and step out in faith the way the wisemen did when they followed the star. It is easy to forget to have faith when the holiday season seems to be about all kinds of things besides Jesus' birth. May I be a beacon of light in the world and remind others to have faith as Christmas is almost here! Amen.



THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT - *Opening the Door of Joy*

C: I remember that the first candle (lighting it) stands for Hope and the second candle (lighting it) represents Faith. What does the third candle stand for? (lights it)

P: This candle represents Joy.

C: I think Christmas is the happiest time of the whole year!

P: And why do you suppose that is?

C: Because of all the excitement – and presents.

P: Presents are a part of Christmas and remind us of God's love for us and the real gift of Christmas.

C: The baby Jesus!

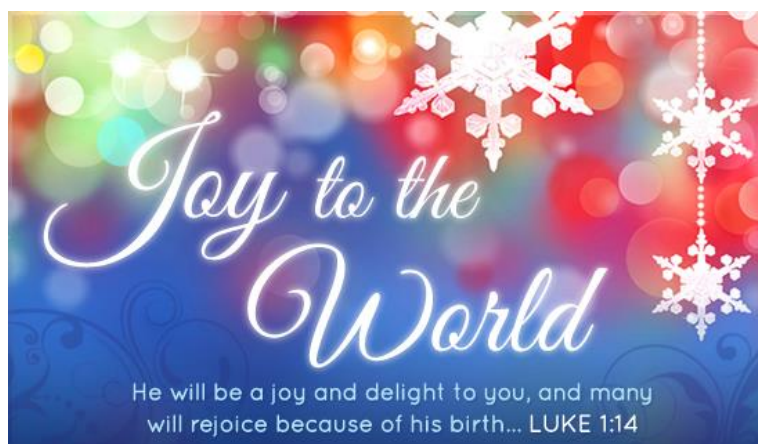
P: Exactly! It's easy to forget the true meaning of Christmas. When we open the door of Joy, we remember that it's Jesus' birthday.

C: And think of what Jesus would like on his birthday wish list.

Discussion Questions: What do you think Jesus would want on his birthday wish list? What would it be like if you put the same amount of energy into Jesus' wish list as you put into getting gifts for other people? Describe a time where you gave of your time, talent or resources and were completely blessed beyond what you expected. What is one new tradition or family practice you could start this year to make every Christmas a more authentic celebration of Jesus?

Song: Joy to the World

Closing Prayer: (All join hands and raise them high, say the following jubilantly!) Thank you God for the JOY of this season. Amen!



FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT - *Opening the Door of Peace*

C: (lighting candles) Hope, Faith, Joy . . . now what?

P: The fourth candle speaks to us of Peace. The peace the angels brought on the first Christmas: “Peace on earth, goodwill to men” and the peace we can find in our own hearts when we remember we don’t have to be perfect.

C: What happened? We don’t have peace on earth.

P: Well . . . we don’t and yet we do. On this earth we still have wars, violence and hatred. But whenever two nations – or even two people – get along, there is a measure of peace. We can have peace in our hearts, and we can live peaceably when we love and accept ourselves just like Jesus does.

C: And I bet when we open the door of Peace, we help spread peace on earth too!

P: That’s right! When we have peace in our hearts, it’s easier to share it with others.

Discussion Questions: What is your vision of a perfect Christmas? What will your reaction be if everything is not perfect? How do you find peace in the midst of busyness? How can you celebrate Jesus in the midst of any struggles you’re going through? What can you do to help someone else who is struggling or not feeling peaceful this holiday season?

Song: Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the Prince of Peace. How desperately the world needs the peace you offer. Teach us to live lovingly, to be concerned with all your children. Help us to share generously – not “exchanging presents” but truly bestowing gifts, thus learning the joy of giving. May we be your peaceful people and spread your peace throughout the world. Amen.



CHRISTMAS DAY - *Love is Born*

C: I know what candle we light today! It's the Christ candle.

P: Yes, we lit the candles of Hope, Faith, Joy and Peace and today, we light the candle of love.

C: Like the love we have for each other in our family?

P: Yes - and even more. It's the love God has for us that no matter what we do or how we act, God still love us.

C: No matter what? That's a powerful love!

P: There's more - Just like God's love blessed Mary with Jesus - God's love blesses our family. When we fill our minds and hearts with God's love, no matter what happens, we have more love and compassion to give to ourselves and others.

Discussion Questions: Have there been times in your life when you felt God's Presence and love for you. How might your life be different if you really understood and embraced God's unconditional love for you? What would it mean for you to love others like God loves you? What are the ways I continue to celebrate Christmas and show love into the new year?

Song: What Child is This?

Closing Prayer: Dear God - Thank you for your unconditional love that is there for me all the time. It is such a blessing to know that no matter what I do, you love me. In fact, you love me so much you sent your son, Jesus, whose birthday we celebrate this Christmas. May your love shine through me this Christmas and always. Amen.



My Gift

By Christina Rossetti

Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. – Acts 3:6

What can I give Him
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would give him a lamb.
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part.
Yet what can I give Him?
Give my heart.

What does it mean to “give my heart?” How would that show up in my day-to-day life?



Kristkindl Custom

The Kristkindl is a German custom. The word means Christ Child. We prepare for Jesus' birthday by seeing and serving Him in others, especially the others in our family. How?

Make a tiny cradle or manger for the Christ Child and add a piece of hay, soft yellow yarn or finely cut tissue paper for each act of kindness during Advent. A small box lined with pretty paper makes a lovely cradle. Then, on Christmas morning, to their great delight, children find (or place) a tiny Baby Jesus lying on this soft bed they have made for Him. (If you don't have a baby Jesus, use some modeling clay or play dough to make one or cut out a picture.)

Children may be encouraged to consider that this is a time to say *Yes to Jesus*, to say *Yes to parents* and to say *Yes to brothers and sisters*. Your child's gifts of kindness or self-denial are more meaningful if they can **see** they are accomplishing something. Consider having the manger in a place your child can reach so they can add to the manger any time they do an act of kindness.

Variation: Have the baby Jesus start far away from the manger and move him closer each week until he ends up in the manger on Christmas morning.

Advent Christmas Chain

Cut 25 strips of construction paper. Use purple for the four Sundays of Advent and white for Christmas day. The others may be any color. Print/write one reading on each strip. (Reading can be found on page 15.) Keeping the dates in order, link paper strips together to form a chain. Remove one chain a day and see how long it is until Christmas. These readings may also be used with any advent candy or paper calendar.

Christmas Angels

Have children color and cut out the angels found on page 19. Find a place where the children can put up an angel a day beginning December 1st. Remember to keep the angels in order as they spell out a special message as children count the days until Christmas.

Advent Calendar

Put up the calendar on the next page and consider adding this into your family's activities for this Advent season.

~ Advent 2016 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
27 Light 1 st Advent Candle Theme: <i>Opening the Door of Hope</i>	28 Think about how you can give of yourself to others.	29 Are you waiting for some event to happen? Discuss "anticipation."	30 Gather in a circle and share a time you felt loved by another family member.	1 Take a slow walk today observing God's creation.	2 Make a star for your tree.	3 Make a handmade Christmas card for someone special.
4 Light 2 nd Advent Candle Theme: <i>Opening the Door of Faith</i>	5 Skip a meal and give extra to food cupboard or to those less fortunate.	6 <i>St. Nicholas Day</i> Give a small present to someone.	7 Smile more and give out free hugs.	8 Play a game of charades with family members acting out special Christmas characters.	9 Bake Christmas cookies to share.	10 Write a family letter to Jesus.
11 Light 3 rd Advent Candle Theme: <i>Opening the Door of Joy</i>	12 Take off shoes and see how far each family member can jump.	13 Take turns finishing the sentence: "Christmas is _____."	14 Parents share their favorite Christmas as a child.	15 Let each family member name their blessings and how they can be used to serve God's people.	16 Take a bus, car or walk around town to look at the Christmas lights.	17 Invite someone to your house today and rejoice in their arrival.
18 Light 4 th Advent Candle Theme: <i>Opening the Door of Peace</i>	19 Look at Christmas tree in silence – then share thoughts and feelings.	20 Have dinner on the floor around the tree with placemats or plastic cloth.	21 Feed the birds and observe them.	22 Share three things you can do to bring peace to yourself, your community and the world.	23 Look at cards received. Which are your favorites and why?	24 Read Christmas story in Luke 2:1-20 then walk through the house singing.
25 CHRISTMAS Have a party - Light candles - Sing "Happy Birthday"	26 Write "Thank you" notes together.	27 Visit a friend.	28 Have a family game night.	29 Take a walk in nature and share your favorite family memory from this year.	30 Discuss what your family can do to be like Jesus in the coming year.	31 Name one thing you will leave behind and one thing you will take with you in the new year.

Advent Chain Readings

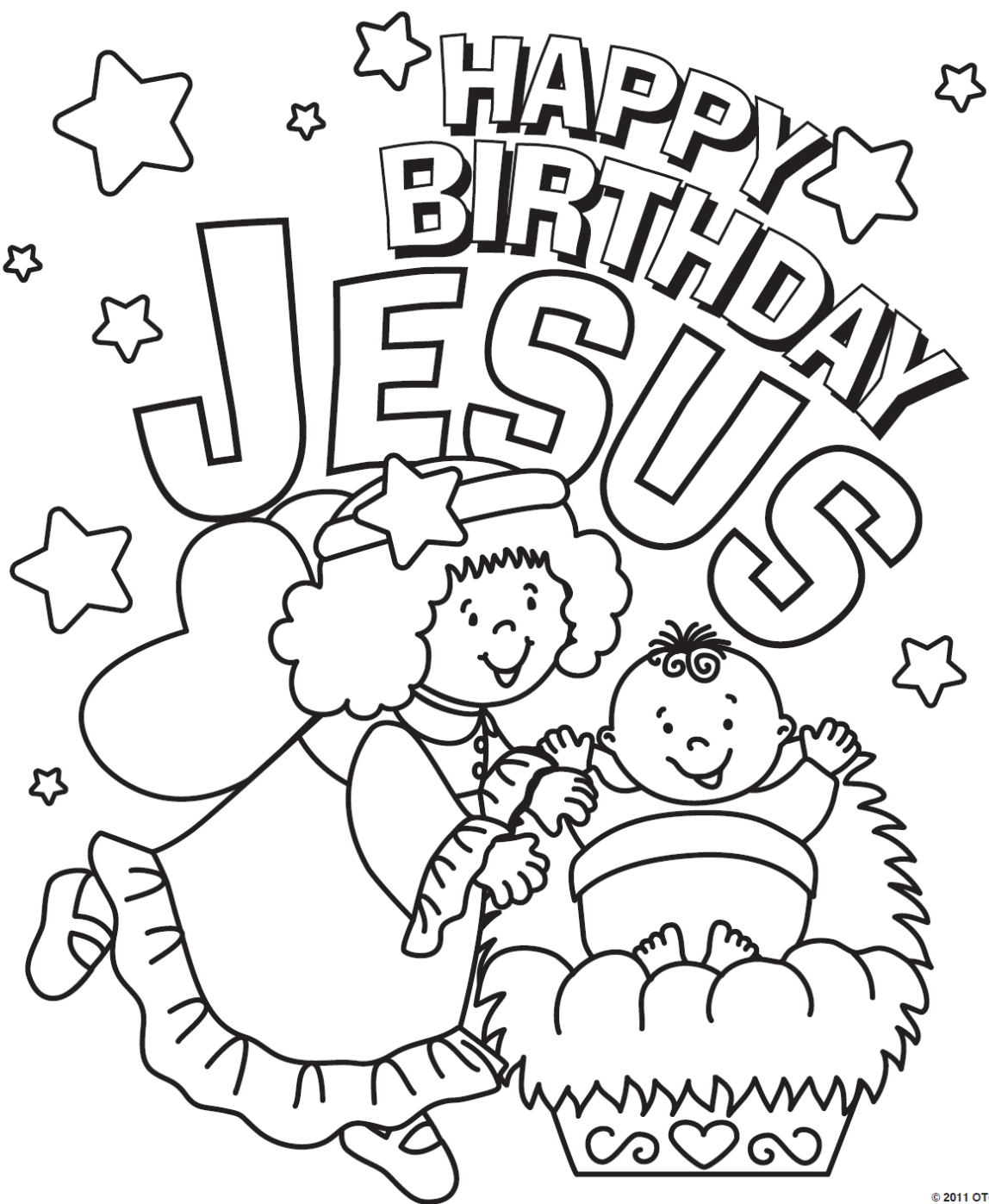
1. One day God sent the angel Gabriel to a young woman named Mary to tell her some wonderful news.
2. Gabriel appeared to Mary and she was frightened. He told her not to be scared for God had chosen her above all the women of the world for a very special task.
3. The angel told her that she was going to have a baby, and the baby would be the Messiah, the Son of God.
4. Mary was very happy and excited; and she hurried to visit her cousin Elizabeth to tell her all about it.
5. The angel also told Mary's fiancé, Joseph, about the wonderful news, and soon after, he and Mary were married.
6. Mary and Joseph made their home in Nazareth, and they were very happy about having a baby.
7. Joseph had a carpenter shop and dreamed of the day when his son would be his helper.
8. When Mary was almost ready for the baby to be born, she heard some news that made her very sad.
9. The Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, decided to have a worldwide census, and everyone had to return to his birthplace to register.
10. Joseph hated to make Mary travel since the baby was due to be born any time, but he had no choice.
11. Joseph and Mary left Nazareth and traveled to Bethlehem in Judea, because that was the place where Joseph was born.
12. When they arrived in Bethlehem, there was a great crowd of people in town and all the rooms were taken. Mary and Joseph couldn't find a place to stay.
13. Mary told Joseph that the baby was about to be born, and one of the innkeepers let them have a place in his barn.
14. Joseph made Mary as comfortable as possible, and during the night, Baby Jesus was born in the stable.
15. Mary wrapped her baby boy in a blanket to keep Him warm, and she laid Him in a manger.

16. Just outside the city in the hills were some shepherds watching their flocks of sheep as they slept.
17. Suddenly, an angel appeared to them and they were very frightened. The whole area was as bright as day with the Glory of the Lord.
18. “Don’t be afraid,” said the angel, “for I bring you great and joyful news. The Savior, Christ the Lord, has been born tonight in Bethlehem.”
19. “You must go and find Him. You will recognize Him because you will find Him wrapped in a blanket lying in a manger,” continued the angel.
20. All of a sudden a whole army of angels appeared and they said, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and goodwill to men.”
21. The shepherds ran as fast as they could and sure enough, they found the Baby just as the angel had said.
22. The shepherds then ran into the streets and marketplaces and told what had happened. Everyone who heard them was astonished.
23. Afterwards, some very important visitors, wise men from the East, from another country, came to Bethlehem to visit and worship Jesus.
24. These wise men had seen a star in the East and knew a Great King had been born. The star led them to Bethlehem where they found the baby.
25. When they came in and saw Jesus, they presented Him with expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They bowed their heads and worshipped him.









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