



Dreamers

2022 ADVENT GUIDE

FIRST PRES
Tampa

Real Relationships
Real Transformation

WELCOME

Dear First Pres Family and Friends,

Welcome to this Advent devotional guide. Advent is the four week season before Christmas day in which we dream. We dream for the birth of Jesus. We dream for new life. We dream for Jesus' impact on our lives, families and city.

The guide blends with our Sunday morning themes. Our Sundays will examine the deepest dreams of the people who trusted God to repair all brokenness through the Messiah. We will be invited to dream, as well.

What we will learn is that God is faithful to his promise; He comes to us as Emmanuel, God-with-us, Jesus!

We will learn that any and every experience with Jesus is better than our wildest dreams.

Let's use this guide as a way to dream big together and experience Jesus even larger still.

Dreaming with you,

Fitz and Kathy

Fitz and Kathy Conner



INTRODUCTION

‘When the Lord brought back his exiles to Jerusalem,
we were like those who dream.”

—Psalm 126:1

Think of psalms as poetic prayers. This psalm affirms the beauty, power, and might of our incredible God. While we aren't exactly sure to which event the psalmist refers, we have quite a few from which to choose. Perhaps it was the Exodus, and all the many awesome signs and wonders God performed, climaxing with the parting of the Red Sea. Or maybe it was one of the many spectacular conquests the Lord granted the Israelites as they claimed the Promise Land. Whatever it was, the Psalmist says it was so incredible it almost seemed like it was too good to be true. In fact, it felt like a dream. One of those incredibly vivid dreams of something so amazingly good that you don't want to wake up from because you know the moment you do reality will wash over you and disappointment will set in as you realize it's entirely impossible. The Psalmist is describing this event as so incredible it felt like a dream...but it wasn't! It's wasn't a too good to be true, far fetched, impossible wish. The great thing about this dream is it was true!

As we enter another season of Advent we reflect on and celebrate a moment in the history of our world that feels like one of those too good to be true dreams. The moment where God humbled Himself and entered into His creation to dwell amongst us. And in Matthew chapters 1 and 2 we see God used dreams to prepare some for His first Advent. Just like those dreams He gave proved to be true, this wonderful dream that He came into His creation to become sin, so that in Him we might become His righteousness is also true! And so during this season of Advent we celebrate this reality! And we echo the words of the Psalmist. We are like those who dream because the Lord, through His Son Jesus, has restored our fortunes! And that's why we can sing 'it's the most wonderful time of the year!'

But because of all the hustle and bustle that comes this time of year, it can quickly change from being the most wonderful to the most stressful. So our hope is that the devotionals and resources contained in this guide will help direct our eyes back to Jesus; the “reason for the season.” Additionally, we hope this guide will create moments among friends and families to celebrate Advent together. In the midst of the bombardment of commercialism we all face, we hope to encourage the establishing of God-glorifying, fun and memorable traditions in the home.

This guide is laid out in two sections. The first section contains the Advent devotionals. These devotionals are intended to be read one a week on Sunday for the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day, starting the first Sunday of Advent, November 27. Each devotional may also include discussion questions, accompanying song suggestions, daily readings for the remainder of the week, and directions for a time of worship. The second section is a list of Additional Resources. We would recommend checking out the Additional Resource section before you begin this guide in case you want to incorporate any of these resources and suggestions for the coming weeks.

Thank You

for taking the time to work through this guide during the Advent season. We at First Pres Tampa pray that the Lord might use it to grow each of us in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. We also want to thank Midland Church of Columbia, SC for letting us borrow their excellent material.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

³ The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.

— Psalm 126:2-3

WEEK ONE

Sunday, November 27

TRUTHS FOUND IN MATTHEW'S BEGATS | MATTHEW 1:1-17

(Consider listening to Andrew Peterson's song "Matthew's Begats" in place of reading the text)

Let's be honest, most of us don't put up a fight when we consider skipping over the genealogies during our readings of Scripture. We have a hard time seeing how these long lists of names are beneficial except for providing us with ideas for baby names. But we're reminded in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable, even the "begats." In Matthew's Begats, we are confronted with 4 important truths. First, we are reminded of God's faithfulness and we see this in how He kept His promises to Abraham and David. Second, we are reminded of the truth that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. This list is full of sinners: liars, murderers, adulterers, and so much more.

And yet, third, we aren't bound to the chains and sins of our fathers. 17th-century Puritan Thomas Fuller noted that we see in this list good fathers with good sons, and bad fathers with bad sons, and bad fathers with good sons.

Then, Fuller made this observation: "I see, Lord, from this, that my father's piety cannot be handed on; that is bad news for me. But I also see that actual impiety is not always hereditary; that is good news for my son." And lastly, fourth, God is not only capable, but it pleases Him to use sinners to advance His kingdom and accomplish His will. These promises should fill us with hope and confidence when we consider the words of the apostle Paul: "You are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:7-9).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.) What do you know about your family tree and genealogy? How does this knowledge shape how you think about your own life?

2.) Why do you think God inspired Matthew to begin his gospel with a genealogy?

3.) Skim through the list of names in Jesus' genealogy. Who are you most familiar with? What do you know about them?

4.) Why do you think Matthew emphasized Jesus' connection to David and Abraham (v1)?

5.) What does this genealogy tell us about God's plans to send a Savior into the world?

DAILY READINGS

Monday: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Tuesday: Genesis 3:8-21

Wednesday: Genesis 15:1-6

Thursday: Genesis 22:1-14

Friday: Genesis 27:1-29

Saturday: Genesis 32:22-32

WORSHIP AT HOME

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

- Remember that each candle represents the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, Love and finally Jesus
- Light the first candle and explain how the first candle represents **Hope**

STUDY GOD'S WORD

- If you have already read the devotional time then re-read Matthew 1:1. If not, now is a good time to read that devotional.
- How many Jews, including many of the names in the genealogy, were hoping for Jesus to come one day?
- Why do they, and we, need Jesus?
- Consider how because of sin we live in darkness, but because of Jesus we have hope.
- If all scripture is God breathed and is profitable, then memorizing scripture is beneficial. For this week's memorization, attempt to memorize Andrew Peterson's song 'Matthew's Begats'. Have fun with it, and consider memorizing it with a friend or your family. Celebrate with a treat for memorizing it, or for at least trying!

SONG AND PRAYER

- Sing the suggested song, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel".
If you need help with the music look the song up on our Spotify playlist!
- Spend some time praying with a friend or together as a family.

ACTIVITY FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Parents, plan a really fun and exciting Christmas activity to do with your kids later in the week (view our list of activities in the additional resource section if you need ideas). At the end of this family worship time tell your kids you have a surprise for them later this week. Then give hints and reminders throughout the week to build excitement and anticipation. Once you've done the activity talk to your kids about the hope they felt waiting all week. Were they confident the whole time or did they have concern that maybe you would forget or that maybe the surprise wouldn't be any good? Do you think people waiting on Jesus to first come were always confident God would keep His promise and send the Messiah? Talk to them about how you fulfilled the promise and the hints, and relate that to God fulfilling the prophecies and promise to send the Messiah. Rejoice as a family that God not only made the promise, but kept His promise to send Jesus into this world!

FEATURED SONG

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Chorus

Rejoice rejoice Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

Verse 1

O come O come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear

Verse 2

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave

Verse 3

O come Thou Dayspring come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight

Verse 4

O come Thou Wisdom from on high
And order all things far and nigh
To us the path of knowledge show
And cause us in her ways to go

Verse 5

O come Desire of nations bind
All peoples in one heart and mind
Bid envy strife and quarrels cease
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace

ADDITIONAL SONGS FOR REFLECTION

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Deliver Us by Andrew Peterson

A Hymn of Advent by Matt Scott

Hope Was Born This Night by Sidewalk Prophets

WEEK TWO

Sunday, December 4

GOD IS WISER | MATTHEW 2:1-12

In Matthew 2, Matthew shifts our attention to the wise men, or the magi. Did you notice how he said 'Behold, wise men from the east...'? As if to say, 'Hey, stay alert, I don't want you to miss this point!' That 'behold' is probably even more necessary now, roughly 2,000 years later, because it's so easy to overlook these small, but essential pieces to the Christmas story. Given many names - three kings, three magi, three wisemen. Who were they really? These men were astrologers who studied the stars. They were wisemen who were very rich and educated. They were from the east, meaning, they were not Jews. Even though they were not Jews, they would have been familiar with the Old Testament prophecies of a Jewish Savior, also known as the Messiah, from when the Jews had been held captive in ancient Babylon. Thus, they would have known of Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24:17, "...a star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel..." So even though they had not been placing their faith in God, it is they who come to worship Jesus.

Somehow as they looked to the stars, they believed in faith that 'the king of the Jews' had been born. They joyfully worshiped at the feet of King Jesus. What a beautiful reminder that no one is too far outside the saving reach of our Savior! 'Therefore,' as our Lord has commanded us, 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:18-19).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) How do you picture wise men? What have you heard or seen about them?
- 2.) How does that picture line up with reality?
- 3.) Why do you think these men were drawn to seek out this Jewish king?
- 4.) What do we learn about God through this story?
- 5.) How do the wise men prepare the way for people like you and I to worship the King?

DAILY READINGS

Monday: Psalm 51

Tuesday: Isaiah 9:2-7

Wednesday: Malachi 4

Thursday: Luke 1:1-25, 57-80

Friday: Luke 1:26-56

Saturday: Luke 2:1-21

WORSHIP AT HOME

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

- Light the first candle and remember it represents Hope.
- If you are doing this with a friend or your family, have a different person light the second candle and remember how it represents **Peace**.

STUDY GOD'S WORD

- If you have already read the devotional time then re-read Matthew 2:10-11. If not, now is a good time to read it.
- Who were the magi (wise men) looking for?
- What did they need to ultimately find Jesus? (God's word)
- When they saw the star how did they respond?
- When they came before Jesus what did they do?
- Think about how these wise men were not Jews, and they would have been considered 'unclean' (or sinful).
But Jesus filled them with joy and they were allowed to approach Him and worship Him. Jesus can save anyone!
- Try memorizing Matthew 2:10-11 with a friend or with your family. Celebrate with a treat if you can memorize it by Saturday!

SONG AND PRAYER

- Sing the suggested song "Go, Tell it on the Mountain".
If you need help with the music look the song up on our Spotify playlist!
- Spend some time praying with a friend or together as a family.

ACTIVITY FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

This week let's fill our homes and the homes of others with joy! One night early this week, as the **WHOLE** family, put on some Christmas music and prepare some yummy Christmas goodies together. Make enough for both your family to enjoy, and to share with others. Then later this week go and deliver those notes you made last week, along with your goodies. And if you're feeling extra brave, consider doing some Christmas caroling as you deliver these notes and goodies.

Scan this
QR Code for a
Christmas cookie
recipe you can
print out and
make at home.



FEATURED SONG

Go Tell It On The Mountain

Chorus

Go tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and ev'rywhere
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born

Verse 1

While shepherds kept their
watching O'er silent flocks by night
Behold throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light

Verse 2

The shepherds feared and trembled
When lo above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed the Savior's birth

Verse 3

Down in a lowly manger
The humble Christ was born
And God sent us salvation
That blessed Christmas morn

ADDITIONAL SONGS FOR REFLECTION

Joy to the World

Angels We Have Heard on High

Hark the Herald Angel Sings

The First Noel

WEEK THREE

Sunday, December 11

HOLD FAST WHAT IS GOOD | MATTHEW 1:18-25

We don't know how much time passed, but the Lord allowed some amount to pass before He sent an angel into the dreams of Joseph, son of Jacob, to confirm what Mary had told him. The baby being knit together in Mary's womb was, in fact, the Christ, and he should not divorce her, but instead take Mary as his bride and raise Jesus as his own son. God could have easily orchestrated it so that Joseph was conveniently with Mary when Gabriel came and revealed the news to her. But He didn't. Instead, He left Joseph in the dark which forced an uncomfortable conversation to be had between the engaged couple. Trials have a way of exposing both the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, within our heart. And in this awkward moment, we see that Joseph's decision to divorce Mary, while wrong, demonstrates he was a man of just and noble character. God entered this world not to simply rescue us from the dead and give us life, but to give us a new life. In Christ we are new creations. So God isn't satisfied with us being partially new creations. He isn't content with us being free from many sins, but still entangled with a few. We are to be entirely and fully new creations. So God refines us. And one way He does that is through trials, in order to expose both the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.) How hard do you think it was for Joseph to believe Mary when she first told him about baby Jesus?

2.) Why do you think God waited to reveal His plan to Joseph through a second visit from an angel?

3.) Why did the angel tell Joseph to name his son, Jesus?

4.) What does the name, Immanuel, mean and how does it help us understand the ministry of Jesus?

5.) What trials are you facing this Advent season that are making it hard for you to "hold fast to what is good"?

DAILY READINGS

Monday: Genesis 50:15-21

Tuesday: Exodus 12:1-12

Wednesday: Joshua 24:14-28

Thursday: Judges 2:16-23

Friday: 1 Samuel 8:1-22

Saturday: 2 Samuel 7:1-29

WORSHIP AT HOME

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

- Light the first two candles, remembering they represent Hope and Peace
- If you are doing this with a friend or your family, have a different person light the third candle and remember how it represents **Joy**.

STUDY GOD'S WORD

- If you have already read the devotional time then re-read Matthew 1:20-21. If not, now is a good time to read it.
- Who is the baby the angel is talking about?
- Why does the angel tell Joseph not to fear?
- What does the angel say this baby is going to do?
- Read Romans 5:1. Because of Jesus we've been justified by faith (saved from our sins).
Therefore, we now have what with God?
- Can we attain peace in our own strength? Who gives us peace (John 14:27)?
- Try memorizing Matthew 1:21 with a friend or with your family. Celebrate with a treat if you can memorize it by Saturday!

SONG AND PRAYER

- Sing the suggested song, "O Holy Night". If you need help with the music look the song up on our Spotify playlist!
- Spend some time praying with a friend or together as a family.

ACTIVITY FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Through Jesus we find peace with God. Therefore, this week let's prepare notes that proclaim this peace to others. Think of people who you can share His peace with (like your neighbors...even if you don't know their names!) and write encouraging notes to them that point to the peace of Christ. And for the little ones who can't write have them draw pictures! Also, include in these notes your names, your address, and even some contact info so that you can connect with your neighbors. Then save these to hand deliver next week (you'll see why next week). Spend the rest of the week praying for those you made notes for, and that they would experience the peace of Christ this Christmas season.

Peaceful Puzzles

Cut the decorative front cover off the Christmas cards (if desired, use old cards from the previous year) ahead of time. Let the children use permanent markers to copy John 14:27a onto the front of a Christmas card and then use the scissors to cut the card into a puzzle. Have them exchange puzzles with someone else, assemble them, and say the verse together. Discuss the meaning of the verse and thank Jesus for coming to give us peace with God.

Scan this QR Code for a Christmas card template you can print out at home.



FEATURED SONG

O Holy Night

Verse 1

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born;
O night divine, O night, O night Divine.

Verse 2

Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from the Orient land.
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friend.
He knows our need, to our weaknesses no stranger,
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King, Before Him lowly bend!

Verse 3

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever,
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
His power and glory evermore proclaim.

ADDITIONAL SONGS FOR REFLECTION

Little Drummer Boy

In the Bleak Midwinter

We Three Kings

Do You Hear What I Hear

WEEK FOUR

Sunday, December 18

THE TALE OF TWO JOSEPHS | MATTHEW 2:13-24

Joseph, son of Jacob, was a dreamer. And because of these dreams he ended up in Egypt with his family. Add in a maniacal king seeking to kill all the male children, plus a boy who is spared, that grows up and performs many signs and wonders and rescues God's people from slavery. Sounds like the makings of a great and memorable story. In fact, that's such a good story, you could get away with telling it twice. Have you ever noticed these parallels between Old Testament Joseph and New Testament Joseph?

Do you ever wonder if Joseph, that is, the New Testament Joseph, noticed these parallels? Did he and Mary talk about these similarities? Maybe he and Mary had an inside joke about him needing a robe of many colors. How often did he connect the dots that he was a part of something so much bigger than himself? When Caesar Augustus announced that inconvenient decree, did Joseph realize the 100 mile journey to Bethlehem that he and his very pregnant wife must take was in order to fulfill Micah's prophecy (Micah 5:2)? And when the angel appeared to him, for a second time in a dream, and told him his son was in danger and they needed to flee (another 100 miles!) to Egypt, did he realize this was to help us see Jesus, as the author of Hebrews said, as the greater Moses (Heb. 3)? What about when, for a third time in a dream, the angel visited him and told him Herod had died and it was safe to return to Israel? With King Herod's death, did Joseph recall God's promise to the great King David about that eternal throne He was going to establish, and did he wonder if that was about to take place? Did Joseph maybe start daydreaming about the royal life and what it would be like to reap the benefits of being father of the king? And how did Joseph feel when, for the fourth time, a dream changed his plans?

Those dreams of a castle and eternal throne were now gone. Even worse, Joseph found himself in Nazareth. Nothing good comes from Nazareth! It's fascinating to wonder what Joseph may have thought and felt throughout all of that. He was human, so we can certainly put ourselves in his shoes (or sandals?) and try to make educated guesses. Excitement, fear, concern, confusion, frustration. But at the end of the day that's all they are...guesses. I do wonder though, through all of these moments of plans changing and the Lord redirecting their steps, did he gain a deeper appreciation for the words of Old Testament Joseph: "God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive" (Gen. 50:20)?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) Recap the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. What happened in his life?
- 2.) How does the story of Old Testament Joseph parallel the life of New Testament Joseph?
- 3.) How hard do you think it was for Joseph to keep trusting these dreams? Do you think he ever doubted their validity?
- 4.) Why is it significant that Jesus went into Egypt and then eventually made His own exodus to Nazareth?
- 5.) What do these stories tell us about how God works in history?

DAILY READINGS

Monday: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Tuesday: John 1:1-18

Wednesday: John 1:19-34

Thursday: Luke 4:1-13

Friday: Revelation 21-22

WORSHIP AT HOME

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

- Light the first three candles, remembering they represent Hope, Peace and Joy
- If you are doing this with a friend or your family, have a different person light the fourth candle and remember how it represents **Love**.

STUDY GOD'S WORD

- If you have already read the devotional time then re-read Matthew 2:21. If not, now is a good time to read it.
- Who communicated to Joseph in his dreams? How many times do we see this happen in the text?
 - How many times did Joseph obey?
- Read John 14:23. If we love Jesus then what will we do?
- Based on Joseph's repeated obedience, can we say that Joseph loved the Lord?
- Read 1 John 4:19 and explain how the reason we are able to love God and others is because God first loved us.
- Remember how God demonstrated His love to us (John 3:16 and Romans 5:8).
- Try memorizing Matthew 2:21 with a friend or with your family. Celebrate with a treat if you can memorize it by Saturday!

SONG AND PRAYER

- Sing the suggested song "Once in Royal David's City". If you need help with the music look the song up on our Spotify playlist!
- Spend some time praying alone, with a friend or together as a family.

ACTIVITY FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

John 3:16 reminds us that God loved the world. His love isn't limited to a person or people group. It's available to all who put their faith in Him.

Nativity "Seek & Find" - Hide your nativity pieces around your house. Keep it to one room with toddlers and keep it to their eye level. Hide their children's bible or the family bible in another room. Once the nativity pieces are found, help them locate their Bible. Tell them that God gave us our Bibles as our guide. Read to them the story of His birth. We know of His great love because of this gift.

Therefore, let us not restrain our love. As a family, prayerfully consider a person or people who oftentimes our society overlooks and fails to show love to. If you can go and do something this week, then wonderful. But God doesn't demonstrate His love only at Christmas time, so we shouldn't either. Therefore, consider making this something you and your family do regularly, such as visiting a nursing home, or serving at a homeless shelter, or caring for children in your local children's hospital. As parents, help connect the dots for your kids. We serve not simply because it makes us feel good or because it's the "right thing to do," but because Jesus showed His love by coming and serving, and we are to love like He loves.

(Check out Serve Resource page at the end of this booklet for a list of community organizations and service opportunities in the Tampa Bay area this Christmas.)

FEATURED SONG

Once in Royal David's City

(Andy Gullahorn and Jill Phillips)

Verse 1

Once in royal Davids city,
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her Baby,
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little Child.

Verse 2

He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall:
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

Verse 3

For He is our childhood's pattern;
Day by day, like us, He grew;
He was little, weak, and helpless,
Tears and smiles, like us He knew;
And He cares when we are sad,
And he shares when we are glad.

Verse 4

And our eyes at last shall see Him,
Through His own redeeming love;
For that Child so dear and gentle,
Is our Lord in heaven above:
And He leads His children on,
To the place where He is gone.

ADDITIONAL SONGS FOR REFLECTION

O Come All Ye Faithful

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence by The Modern Post
What Child is This

Christmas is the Time to Love by Maranatha Kids

CHRISTMAS EVE

WORSHIP AT HOME

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

- Have someone light the first four candles, reminding everyone they represent **Hope, Peace, Joy and Love**
- Have someone light the fifth and final candle and explain how it represents Jesus

STUDY GOD'S WORD

- Talk about how Christmas is all about Jesus. It's only because of Jesus, and it's only through Jesus, we have hope, peace, joy and love.
- Remember that the baby lying in the manger, is God. And He came into this world to rescue us from our sins and the punishment we deserve, and to make us into new creations!

SONG AND PRAYER

- Sing the suggested song "Angels We Have Heard on High".
If you need help with the music look the song up on our Spotify playlist!
- Spend some time praying alone, with a friend or together as a family.

ACTIVITY FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

It's Christmas Eve! So enjoy the evening together! Get in comfy pajamas, cuddle up on the couch with some cocoa, and read Christmas books or watch a Christmas movie together. But don't stay up too late, because tomorrow is Christmas!!! Parents, one last thought. Tomorrow morning before y'all get started with Christmas, we want to encourage you to view tomorrow's devotional and lead your family in a (short) time of family worship before the craziness of Christmas Day sets in.

FEATURED SONG

Angels We Have Heard on High

Chorus

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Verse 1

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains

Verse 2

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
Which inspire your heavenly song?

Verse 3

Come to Bethlehem and see
Him Whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

Verse 4

See Him in a manger laid
Jesus Lord of heaven and earth;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
With us sing our Savior's birth.

CHRISTMAS DAY

“The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice!” - Psalm 97:1

It's Christmas! Rejoice, rejoice! Again, I say rejoice! Emmanuel has come! The One God promised to send into this world to rescue us from our sins did in fact come and dwell amongst us, lived the perfect and sinless life that we are unable to live, and humbly and lovingly bore the Father's wrath and died the death we each deserve. And it is He whom God raised from the dead and ascended to the Heavens where He sits at the Father's right hand. It is He who reigns over all creation. It is He who will one day return to judge the living and the dead. It is because of His righteousness we can rejoice! Despite the hardships and sorrows of life, we can consider all things joy and rejoice! Therefore, celebrate today! Don't worship the presents, the people, and the “good feelings” the Christmas season brings. But praise and thank the Lord for His amazing grace and awesome gift of salvation. Praise and thank Him for the people (the family and friends), thank Him for the gifts and presents, thank Him for the Christmas lights and music! And above all, thank Him for Jesus, the One who reigns. Therefore let the earth rejoice!

WORSHIP AT HOME

It's Christmas morning. We know what it looks like in many of your homes because it's likely the same scene in our homes too! The kids probably woke you up multiple times this morning because of their excitement, and the coffee hasn't kicked in yet. So let's be realistic, family worship will be hard to pull off. So instead of trying to fight a losing battle this morning, just do this. Before you start opening Christmas presents, take one minute to pause your family and remind them (and yourself) what we're celebrating this morning. If you think you can pull it off, sing a song of celebration, like Joy to the World (even if it's just 1 verse), and/or taking a moment to pray. But above all, take a moment to simply remind them why we rejoice! And then crank up the Christmas music, and have a fun and merry Christmas!!!

FEATURED SONG

Joy to the World

Verse 1

Joy to the world the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room
And heav'n and nature sing
And heav'n and nature sing
And heav'n and heav'n and nature sing

Verse 2

Joy to the earth the Savior reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat repeat the sounding joy

Verse 3

No more let sins and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found
Far as the curse is found
Far as far as the curse is found

Verse 4

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders wonders of His love

CHRISTMAS MUSIC, BOOKS & ACTIVITIES RESOURCES

MUSIC

FIRST PRES TAMPA ON SPOTIFY

First Pres Tampa is on Spotify! Search for 'First Pres Tampa' (look for the circle logo!) and follow us. We have 2 Christmas playlists that we have compiled for your enjoyment. The first playlist is our Advent Playlist which consists of songs that focus our attention on Christ. Many are the classic Christmas hymns that we have grown to love singing in church during the Advent season, some are remixes and new arrangements of those songs, and others may be entirely new songs for you. The second playlist is a general Christmas Playlist made up of all the advent songs, plus the Christmas carols we have come to know and love; some classic, some fun, and some plain silly! We hope you can utilize these playlists to assist you during both your times of worship, as well as filling your home with fun and merry music during the most wonderful time of the year!

Spotify is a music streaming service that has apps available for download on computer, mobile or tablet devices, as well as streaming devices like Roku and Apple TV, video game systems, smart TVs, etc. You can set up a free account to browse music by song title, artist, album, genre, etc. Please note the free account will require you to listen to the occasional ad.

RECOMMENDED CHRISTMAS MUSIC

CHRISTMAS ALBUMS

Prepare Him Room *by Sovereign Grace*

That's Christmas to Me *by Pentatonix*

The Christmas Song *by Nat King Cole*

A Christmas Album *by Amy Grant*

A Neighborly Christmas & Another Neighborly Christmas
by Drew Holcomb

Behold the Lamb of God *by Andrew Peterson*

Christmas *by Michael Bublé*

Christmas Classics *by Bing Crosby*

Ella and Louis Christmas *by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong*

Let it Snow Baby...Let it Reindeer *by Relient K*

Merry Christmas *by Mariah Carey*

James Taylor at Christmas *by James Taylor*

Very Merry Christmas *by Dave Barnes*

Come To The Table *by Sidewalk Prophets*

Christmas Day *by Chris Tomlin*

BOOKS

Here is a list of Christmas themed books we recommend for both adults and children:

FOR THE ADULTS

A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens

A Hidden Christmas

by Tim Keller

Two from Galilee

by Marjorie Holmes

Behold the Lamb of God

by Russ Ramsey

The Dawning of Indestructible Joy

by John Piper

Christmas Playlist

by Alistair Begg

The First Days of Jesus

by Andreas J. Köstenberger & Alexander E. Stewart

Come Let Us Adore Him

by Paul David Tripp

An Even Better Christmas

by Matt Chandler

FOR THE KIDS

Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens (Author) and Brett Helquist (Illustrator)

A Christmas Story by Brian Wildsmith

Come and Meet the Characters of Christmas by Ruth Hearson

Family Worship for the Christmas Season by Ray Rhodes

Goodnight, Manger by Laura Sassi

Long Long Ago in Bethlehem: The Birth of Jesus by Carine Mackenzie

Prepare Him Room: Celebrating the Birth of Jesus Family Devotional by Marty Machowski

The Plan: How God got the World Ready for Jesus by Sinclair Ferguson

The Road to Bethlehem by Brian Wildsmith

The Star Marker by Helen Buckley

The Crippled Lamb by Max Lucado

The Legend of the 3 Trees by Angela Elwell Hunt

The Christmas Promise by Alison Mitchell

Song of the Stars by Sally Lloyd Jones

Jesus Is Born by Sophie Piper

ACTIVITIES & TRADITIONS

Part of the joy and fond memories we have surrounding Christmas are the enjoyable traditions and activities our families observed and partook of during our childhood. We've compiled a list of suggested activities and traditions. We want to encourage everyone, whether you have kids in the home or you do this with friends, to make Christmas a memorable and enjoyable time.

Decorate for Christmas!

Crank up the Christmas music, make some cocoa or cider, and start decorating! And for those who might be tempted to grumble or are prone to be perfectionists, go ahead and accept that with kids around, you will be doing most of the work, it's not going to be perfect and something will probably break. But just laugh, have fun and enjoy it! Enjoy that time spent with your kids and building those memories.

Light the Advent candles each week.

Use the above weekly devotionals for direction on how to lead and instruct during that time. There are also creative 'flameless' ideas if you are unable to light candles.

Create an Advent wreath for your Advent candles.

Create a daily Advent for your kids.

Book-a-day for Advent

Gather 23 Christmas themed books, they don't all have to be Christ-centered, wrap them and then each night let your kids unwrap 1 book and read it before bed. Buy 1 Christmas book, preferably a Christ-centered one, and save that one for Christmas Eve.

Bake and decorate Christmas goodies and deliver to your neighbors.

Go Christmas Caroling!

Gather together with friends and family and go caroling in your neighborhood (this is also a good time to deliver your Christmas goodies!). Make it fun! Incorporate fun and silly Christmas hats and sweaters, jingle bells, etc.

Show hospitality!

Invite people over for a Christmas party, or just a low key evening to sip on some hot cocoa and hang out, wear ugly Christmas sweaters, play gift exchange games, or watch a Christmas movie. Be sure to get out of your comfort zone and invite some neighbors or coworkers you haven't gotten to know yet.

Go see a performance!

Look up local theaters and churches to see what plays, ballets, concerts, musicals, etc, are being put on

ACTIVITIES & TRADITIONS

CHECK OUT SOME OF THE CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES AND CELEBRATIONS AROUND THE TAMPA BYA AREA

November 14, 2022 - January 9, 2023

Christmas Town at Busch Gardens

November 18, 2022-January 4, 2023

Ice-skating/Winter Village at Curtis Hixon Park

November 18, 2022 – November 20, 2022

Festival of Trees

The Long Center, Clearwater, FL

Select nights November -December 2022

Christmas in the Wild at Zoo Tampa

November 25, 2022-January 1, 2023

Enchanted Christmas Tropicana Field

Monday, November 28, 2022 - January 2023

Tampa Riverwalk Holiday Spectacular

Harbour Tree Lighting!

December 1-21, Select dates and times

The North Pole Express at the Florida Railroad Museum in Parrish, FL

December 12, 2022, 11:00 am

Tea with Santa and Mrs. Claus

Oxford Exchange

December 2, 2022, 5:30pm

First at Forbici

All adults are invited to join First Pres for some Christmas cheer, appetizers and some holiday merriment on the patio at Forbici Modern Italian restaurant!

Invite your friends!

December 3, 2022, 1:00 – 7:30 PM

Tampa's Santa Fest & Tree Lighting

Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park

December 4, 2022, 1:50 pm

Santa Comes to Dairy Joy

December 9, 2022, 8:00pm

The Florida Orchestra - Holiday Pops

The Straz Center

December 12, 2022, 11:00 am

Tea with Santa and Mrs. Claus

Oxford Exchange

December 16, 2022 - December 18, 2022, various times

Next Generation Ballet's Nutcracker

The Straz Center

December 17, 2022, 6:00pm (Rain date, December 18, 2022)

Tampa Riverwalk Holiday Lighted Boat Parade

Channelside Downtown Tampa

Various Dates in December

The Lost Pearl! A Pirate's Christmas Cruise/Sparkman Wharf

December 18, 2022, Amelia Arena, 2pm & 7pm

Trans-Siberian Orchestra

The Ghosts of Christmas Eve: The Best of TSO and More!

SERVE THIS CHRISTMAS

CHECK OUT SOME OF THE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AROUND THE TAMPA BAY AREA*

FIRST PRES MATTHEW 25 BLANKETS AND BLESSINGS

Help us serve and love our friends who are hungry and homeless on Saturday, December 3, 8:00am-10:00am at both our Marion St. downtown location and at Tampa Hope Ybor City location. Sign up to volunteer and bring food and blankets. at firstprestampa.org.

METROPOLITAN MINISTRIES HOLIDAY TENT

This holiday season, join the Metropolitan Ministries team and provide a holiday experience that is out of reach for so many struggling families in the Tampa Bay area. for more information and to signup, visit metmin.org/holiday

FEEDING AMERICA

There's no better way to celebrate the holidays than by giving back. Your local soup kitchen, food pantry or food bank rely on volunteers to help make the holidays special for families in need. Whether it's serving meals on Christmas Day or preparing holiday meal boxes - you can make a difference.

Signup at feedingamerica.org

MEALS ON WHEELS

Each December, Meals On Wheels Tampa, delivers a holiday gift bag to each of the over 800 homebound, elderly and disabled recipients on their program. For many of the recipients they serve, this will be the only holiday celebration they will have. Many do not have family or friends near and are unable to travel to visit loved ones. Like food for the body, human contact nourishes the soul. **Volunteers will deliver the Holiday Bags on the 3rd Saturday in December.** *All volunteers must complete an application and attend an orientation prior to delivering.

Signup at mowtampa.org

SALVATION ARMY

Kettle Bells will sound in early November and will keep ringing through Dec. 24. The entire family can take part in the Red Kettle tradition that began back in 1895. Money raised goes to local families for help with food, shelter and emergency assistance. You can learn more about how to take part in Tampa's Salvation Army Kettle Bell program by visiting salvationarmyflorida.org. There are more than 100 locations throughout Hillsborough that are perfect for you and your family to ring the bells and keep the tradition of giving going.

TOYS FOR TOTS

Toys for Tots is the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve program for helping families in need have the holiday season they deserve by collecting and distributing Christmas gifts. Families with young children can set up toy drives to collect donations in October, November and December. Those with children over 16 can volunteer in the warehouse in the sorting process. To learn more about the Toys for Tots program, visit tampa-fl.toysfortots.org.

HUMANE SOCIETY OF TAMPA BAY

The Humane Society of Tampa Bay is committed to helping homeless animals by providing shelter and care. Children aged 5 to 12 can volunteer in the **Paws for Literacy** program in which they read to animals to make them feel more comfortable. Children under 16 are able to volunteer with a parent or guardian with services such as walking dogs, playing with cats, cleaning kennels, and more. Volunteers can also collect items from the wish list to donate to the Humane Society. Register for a volunteer open house or learn more about volunteering opportunities at the Humane Society by visiting humanesocietytampa.org.

THE RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE

The Ronald McDonald House has many opportunities for the whole family to get involved. Children under 14 can help by making and decorating snack bags for families in the hospital, collecting items for the wish list drive, and holding penny drives to support the families. If you have children ages 14 and up, you can volunteer by preparing dinner for resident families at one of the four Tampa Bay Ronald McDonald Houses. To learn more about Ronald McDonald House and the volunteering opportunities available, visit rmhctampabay.org.

*Tampa Bay Parenting Magazine

How to Volunteer with the Kids in Tampa Bay: 10+ ways to give back

By Rosie Raggio and Laura Byrne

August 22, 2022

When the Lord brought back his exiles to Jerusalem,
we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,

"The Lord has done great things for them."

The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.

— PSALM 126:1-3



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