



HARK

HARK

WHEN GOD SPEAKS

ADVENT GUIDE

About Advent

“The word Advent comes from a word for “visitation,” referring specifically to a visit by the emperor.” - Susan Robb, *The Angels of Christmas*

With someone so pivotal arriving, many preparations were necessary; the town had to be at its best to receive such a person of high standing. As we read about the birth of Christ in scripture, we see angels appear on the scene with a jolting message causing people to harken to the message they bring.

Their message helped prepare the hearts of Elizabeth and Zechariah with hope. Their message helped prepare the heart of Mary with peace. Their message helped prepare the heart of Joseph with love. Their message helped prepare the heart of the shepherds with the good news of great joy for all people.

Advent is not a time of passively waiting, merely counting down the days until Christmas. But instead, an active season of preparing our hearts to celebrate the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah!

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

As we look at the ways the angels prepared people for the arrival of Christ, may we prepare our hearts to celebrate and share the hope, peace, love, and joy we have in Christ. This advent guide has a weekly overview, discussion questions you can use with family and friends, and daily scripture readings. Each daily reading has three parts helping you know; what to read, what to do, and how to pray as you prepare your heart this Advent season.

MERRY CHRISTMAS,



Week 1: Hope

This week we will read through Zechariah and Elizabeth's story of HOPE, which teaches us God's timing is worth the wait. (Luke 1:5-25, Isaiah 11:1-10) Please read the following overview from Grow Curriculum as your light the first (purple) candle of Advent, preparing our hearts with HOPE.

When Luke opens his account of the gospel, we are introduced to Zechariah and Elizabeth, a couple who definitely understood the uncertainty of waiting on a promise. Elizabeth was Mary's older cousin. She had not been able to conceive because she and her husband were both advanced in years.

They had spent years hoping for a child, and even when they were met with silence, they prayed. And then, after quite some time, God spoke." Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord." (Luke 1:11–15a)

Once Zechariah and Elizabeth finally heard a word from God, not only was it a favorable answer to their request, but it was something they couldn't have imagined. Their hope was for a child — but an angel promised them a child that would lead the way for people to be reunited with God. "He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God." (Luke 1:16). It was more than they could have asked for on their own!

As you read through Zechariah's story this week, consider how your faith grows in times of hope and waiting. Take time each day to put hope into practice. Pray daily that God will increase your hope this Advent season.



**Follow this link for the full "Silent Night"
video teaching by Grow Curriculum**

Discussion

- How long do you wait before putting up Christmas decorations?
- Read Luke 1:25. What do you think Zechariah felt after being told he would experience silence until the birth of John?
- Describe a time you had to wait upon God's timing in your life.
- What emotions come up for you while waiting on God's timing?
- How are hope and waiting related? How do they both grow our faith in God?

HOPE

NOVEMBER 27

READ: Luke 1:5-17. Zechariah met with the Lord and is promised a son.

HOPE: Set aside a time in your schedule and place to participate with this Advent guide every day until Christmas.

PPRAY: God, I seek your presence with hope today.

NOVEMBER 28

READ: Luke 1:18-25. Zechariah responds with doubt.

HOPE: Admit your doubts to God, write them down, and ask God for renewed hope.

PRAY: God, give me hope through doubt and into obedience.

NOVEMBER 29

READ: Luke 1:57-66, Hebrews 11:1. John's birth brings Zechariah's obedience.

HOPE: Take a step of obedience with hope today.

PRAY: God, fill me with hope that drives me toward obedience today.

NOVEMBER 30

READ: Luke 1:67-75, Romans 15:13. Zechariah speaks hope for everyone.

HOPE: Praise God for his faithfulness that gives you hope. Reach out to encourage someone who needs hope.

PRAY: God, I praise you for your faithfulness that fills me with hope.

Discussion

- Can you think of a time when you were terrified to receive news that turned out to be good?
- How can fear hold us back from experiencing something new and amazing?
- Why do you think God chose Jesus to come to earth the way he did?
- Why do you think he may have used shepherds to deliver the birth announcement of the Messiah? What do we learn about God's love?

LOVE

DECEMBER 1

READ: Luke:76-80, Ephesians 2:10. Zechariah speaks hope and purpose over John.

HOPE: Consider how God has gifted and called you to bring the good news of hope in Christ. Consider how you see God gifting and calling those around you to bring the good news of hope in Christ - tell them what you see in them.

PRAY: God, may I use my words to bring purpose and hope in my own life and the lives of those around me.

DECEMBER 2

READ: John 1:6-9, John 3:22-36. John lives his purpose.

HOPE: Spend time enjoying Christmas lights tonight; consider how knowing Jesus is the light of the world brings us hope. Post a picture of your favorite light display and tag Pineville Church.

PRAY: Jesus, the light of your truth and love is beautiful. You must become greater, and I must become less. May your light reveal ways I am not like you. I adjust my life to your true light. May more of you shine through my life.

DECEMBER 3

READ: Isaiah 40. Wait upon the Lord.

HOPE: Praise God for how he holds and strengthens you as you wait.

PRAY: God Everlasting, my hope is in you - uphold me with your strength.

Week 2: Peace

This week we will read through Mary's story of PEACE, which teaches us God's plan is good news. (Luke 1:26-55, Isaiah 35:1-4) Please read the following overview from Grow Curriculum as your light the second (purple) candle of Advent, preparing our hearts with PEACE.

Luke detailed the story of the angel Gabriel being sent to Mary to share about the miraculous birth of Jesus. Gabriel shared with Mary that God favored her. But what exactly was good about this news? He told her that she would have a son and name him Jesus. Mary sat and listened as Gabriel explained who Jesus would become to humankind. He ended by reminding Mary that no word from God will ever fail.

Much like Isaiah's to the Israelites, this prophecy must have been shocking! Mary has been chosen, but she's not married yet. What thoughts was she navigating? God's plan is good news. Mary recognized this. But for her, the fulfillment of God's promise probably meant a different life than she imagined . . . "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name." (Luke 1:47–49)

Answering God's invitation to the unknown with a "yes" looks like a giant leap of faith, relying on something of which we aren't certain. It opens the door for our lives to be completely transformed in ways we never imagined and through means that may be unexpected. It is a gift to take a chance and be at peace with God's plan — to know that God's plan is good news.



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Discussion

PEACE

- When it's time to plan out the festivities, we sometimes have differing views on Christmas favorites. Which list do these things fall under for you — Good or Bad?
 - Eggnog
 - Mint Chocolate
 - Gingerbread
 - Sugar Cookies
 - Cranberry Sauce
- How do you think Mary felt as she received this news from Gabriel? What was good about it and not so good about it?
- Isaiah challenges his audience to encourage those who are fearful and weary. How might you encourage someone who is going through a season of waiting?
- How does Mary's song reflect the good news she received?
- Why do you think God doesn't typically lay out all the details of a plan for us?
- How do you approach a situation when the plan doesn't go the way you wanted?
- How might practicing patience help us to have peace that God's plans are good?

DECEMBER 4

READ: Matthew 5:9, Acts 10:36. We are peacemakers.

PEACE: Pay attention to where peace is lacking as you go about your day.

PRAY: God, open my eyes to where your peace is needed. Use my words and actions to bring peace.

DECEMBER 5

READ: Luke 1:26-33. God sends an angel to Mary.

PEACE: Be a peacemaker as you share the good news of encouragement with someone today.

PRAY: God, you are my peace when I am confused, disturbed, and when things don't make sense.

DECEMBER 6

READ: Luke 1:34-38. Mary responds with a willing spirit to serve.

PEACE: Be a peacemaker as you serve someone today.

PRAY: God, there is so much brokenness in the world. Yet, nothing is impossible with you! I am the Lord's servant, willing to serve wherever you lead. Send me out to be a peacemaker.

DECEMBER 7

READ: Luke 1:39-45. Elizabeth affirms Mary.

PEACE: Send a word of encouragement to someone you know who is willingly serving the Lord.

PRAY: God, use our church to affirm one another as we collectively serve as peacemakers.

DECEMBER 8

READ: Luke 1:46-55. Mary praises the Lord.

PEACE: Take a moment to listen to the song "Peace Has Come," and allow your heart to praise the Lord as Mary did.

PRAY: God, you have done great things. I praise you for being the Prince of Peace.



Follow this link for a video of the song, "Peace Has Come"

DECEMBER 9

READ: Luke 1:78-79. Zechariah prophesizes how Jesus guides us to the path of peace.

PEACE: Go on a walk today. As you take each step, talk with God about the things that disrupt your peace. Be reminded how the light of Christ guides us toward the path of peace.

PRAY: God, guide me in the way of peace; your ways are often not my ways. Grow my trust in you.

DECEMBER 10

READ: Isaiah 9:6, John 14:27, 16:33, Philippians 4:6. Jesus is our Prince of Peace.

PEACE: Make a list thanking God for times you have experienced His peace.

PRAY: God, thank you for your peace that surpasses all understanding. May your peace lift my heart from discouragement.

Week 3: Joy

This week we will read through Joseph's story of accepting God's plan with JOY. (Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 2:21-47, Isaiah 43:16-19) Read the following overview from Grow Curriculum as you light the third (pink) candle of Advent, preparing our hearts with JOY.

As we read the Old Testament, we find that the Israelites were in constant need of saving from situations that didn't always go according to plan. It's not difficult to find stories of exile or times when they found themselves roaming in the wilderness. And still, we see that God doesn't stop rescuing them.

The prophecies had long been told of God's plan for Israel. Many had proclaimed how things would be restored, healed, and set back on track. Even Mary and Joseph knew of the prophecies and were waiting for God to work a miracle.

Mary praised God for being chosen to play her role in God's miracle rescue. There was one more hurdle to overcome, her fiancé Joseph's reaction. Mary had the benefit of hearing the news from the angel Gabriel, but Joseph did not. Once learning that Mary was pregnant, being certain he was not the father, Joseph decided to break things off quietly with Mary. That is, until he was visited by an angel in a dream who confirmed the truth about Mary's child, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

None of this was what Joseph expected. He chose to believe what he had heard and put his faith in God no matter the personal cost. By believing in a savior that had not even been born yet, Joseph was able to play a role in the arrival of the very savior that would rescue him and bring JOY to the entire world.



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Discussion

- How do you think it felt to be Joseph before the angel's visit in a dream?
- How was Joseph's angel visit different than Zechariah's and Mary's visit from Gabriel?
- How do you think it felt to be Joseph, who had just woken up from this dream?
- What do we learn about belief through Joseph's story? About joy?
- What do we learn about joy in God's desire to rescue His people through unexpected ways?

JOY

DECEMBER 11

READ: Isaiah 55:8-9. God's ways are different.

JOY: Consider how God's thoughts have been different than yours.

PRAY: God, I thank you that your way is the way of love.

DECEMBER 12

READ: Matthew 1:18-25. Joseph chooses God's way.

JOY: Thank someone who has been an example of choosing God's way to you.

PRAY: God, your ways are higher than mine; I take joy in that truth today.

DECEMBER 13

READ: Isaiah 9:1-7. Jesus will bring joy.

JOY: Do something fun today to remember the joy we have in Jesus.

PRAY: God, help me to live free and full of your joy.

DECEMBER 14

READ: Luke 2:21-24. Psalm 37:23-24. Mary and Joseph present Jesus, dedicating him to the Lord.

JOY: Mary and Joseph walking in obedience, experienced unique joy. Consider what this means for your obedience and joy.

PRAY: God, obedience doesn't always seem fun. Help me to remember the joy that comes from walking in your ways.

DECEMBER 15

READ: Luke 2:25-35, Hebrews 12:2. Simeon prophecy's about Jesus.

JOY: Let the joy of Jesus' suffering on your behalf sink into your heart, soul, and mind. Praise Him with joy today.

PRAY: God, I praise you for the joy I have found in you. I recognize the cost of this joy, and I am grateful.

DECEMBER 16

READ: Luke 2:36-40. Anna prophesies about Jesus.

JOY: Attitude check; speak only words of joy and encouragement today.

PRAY: God, thank you for the example of Anna's joy; she didn't have an easy life, yet she waited expectantly for the joy that was placed before her. Give me eyes to see where you are at work and words of joyful praise.

DECEMBER 17

READ: Isaiah 12

JOY: Play one of your favorite Christmas songs about Jesus a few times today; let it fill you with an attitude of joy and celebration.

PRAY: God, you are my joy. May your joy overflow into every area of my life today.

Week 4: Love

This week we will read through the shepherd's story of the Good News of God's wonderful LOVE for all humankind. (Luke 2:1–20) Read the following overview from Grow Curriculum as you light the fourth (purple) candle of Advent, preparing our hearts with LOVE.

In comparison to our modern-day baby preparations, baby Jesus arrived under the radar until a heavenly army of angels burst into a silent night and appeared to shepherds nearby. (Luke 2:9-12)

This angelic announcement showed that even in all majesty, God was personable. God was willing to appear to shepherds bringing monumental news. Shepherds were so busy being out in the fields that they hardly were the first to know anything — a category of folks who were not necessarily noteworthy.

Can you imagine what the shepherds thought they were looking for when they were told of the savior? The angel said they would know they had found Jesus when they found "a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger."

And as if the angel appearing wasn't enough to solidify the night, an army of angels appeared and began praising God. What a sight! 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." (Luke 2:16-18)

The shepherds did not clearly understand God or where they were even supposed to go at first. But the Bible tells us that once they saw Jesus, they couldn't help but spread the word about what God had done.



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video teaching by Grow Curriculum**

DECEMBER 18

READ: Micah 5:2-5, Luke 2:1-7. The birth of Christ.

LOVE: Look up the walking distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Consider how it took a decree from a Roman emperor and an obedient Mary and Joseph to fulfill the prophecy of the coming Messiah's birth.

PRAY: God, your love for us has been pursuing us from the beginning. It endures and will not be stopped.



**Follow this link to
view a google map**

DECEMBER 19

READ: Luke 2:8-12. An angel appears to shepherds.

LOVE: We learn a lot about God's inclusive love when we consider who received the first birth announcement of His Son. Think of ways to include someone in your Christmas celebration, and go for it!

PRAY: God, fill me with your love that includes and loves regardless.

DECEMBER 20

READ: Luke 2:13-15. A host of angels worship God.

LOVE: Invite someone to Christmas Eve services with excitement.

PRAY: God, give me excitement about what your love means to everyone. I want to see your love at work in the lives of others this Christmas.

DECEMBER 21

READ: Luke 2:16-20. The shepherds praise God.

LOVE: Pay attention to how you speak today. Do your words declare the wonder and greatness that God's love is real and at work in this world?

PRAY: God, awaken my soul. May I become so awestruck with your love that my words declare your great love today.

DECEMBER 22

READ: Ephesians 3:14-21. Rooted in Christ's love.

LOVE: Take time to relax in front of your Christmas tree. Read this passage and reflect on the life that comes from being rooted in God's love.

PRAY: God, thank you for the gift of salvation. Make your home in my heart; root me deep into your love that gives life.

DECEMBER 23

READ: Jeremiah 23:1-6, John 10:11-18. Jesus is the good shepherd.

LOVE: Make a list of how Jesus the good shepherd has led you this year.

PRAY: God, I trust your leadership in my life. Continue to lead me in the way of love.

DECEMBER 24

READ: Isaiah 9:2-7. Jesus is the promised Messiah and King.

LOVE: Read this passage while observing a nativity scene. Consider what it felt like for the people waiting and wondering if God would ever fulfill His promise in Isaiah. Listen to the song, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," as you pray.

PRAY: God, as I wait, help me to remember your passionate commitment to saving and restoring all of humanity.



Follow this link for a video of the song, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

DECEMBER 25

READ: Matthew 2

LOVE: Light the Christ candle, remembering God's plans of mercy and love will not be stopped.

PRAY: God, we remember the light of your love today that will never be extinguished. Your love endures forever!





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BE KNOWN FOR LOVE