

# FAMILY ADVENT

Devotion and Activity



Family Advent Devotion and Activity 2023  
Kids Connect @ Hope Chapel  
35 Chocksett Rd, Sterling MA 01564  
[hopechapelsterling.org](http://hopechapelsterling.org)

## Introduction and Instructions

While we might be more familiar with the word 'Christmas', the word 'Advent' has been around for centuries, sometime prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Once the birth of Jesus was placed on Dec 25 to emphasize how a great light has dawn in great darkness (winter solstice), a season of focus began to be developed by the church. Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Advent simply means "coming." When Jesus Christ came to earth, He brought hope, joy, love, and peace. Each Sunday centers around one of those themes. Advent focuses both on His coming as a baby as well as His future second coming as the victor.

- Advent reminds us of our need for a savior from our sins.
- Advent reminds us of God's faithful promise throughout history.
- Advent reminds us of our future eternity with Him.
- Advent reminds us to mirror God's love to others around us.

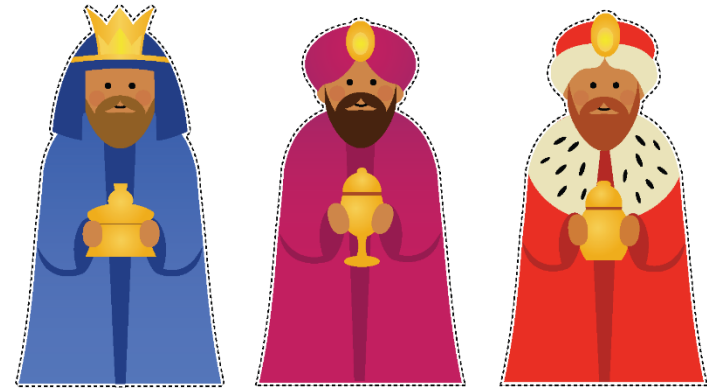
This devotional and activity are great ways for you as a family to talk about the meaning of Christmas in meaningful and fun ways. There are 4 devotions. You might choose to do 1 a week or do several as time is available. Each devotion corresponds to a week in Advent.

- 1) Hope - 3 Magi + Scripture + Devo (Prophecy)
- 2) Peace - Shepherd/Angel + Scripture + Devo (Proclamation)
- 3) Joy - Joseph/Mary + Scripture + Devo (Phenomenon)
- 4) Love - Jesus + Scripture + Devo (Presence)

Take the time to read the Scriptures and devotions together and then engage in spiritual conversation with the suggested questions.

This activity includes a set of 4 blank "nesting dolls", 1 doll per devotion. We recommend using fine tip markers or paint pens for this activity (not included). You can also use acrylic paints as well. Characters are paired together because the unveiling of Christ's coming wasn't a solo experience.

If you'd like to have 1 nesting doll per character, you can find more blank nesting dolls on Amazon. We've included a suggested design for each character but feel free to use your imagination. Then showcase your creations in a special place as a reminder all Advent season!



## Week 1: Hope - 3 Magi (Prophecy)

As we begin our celebration of advent it makes sense that we begin with hope. In the Old Testament, hope means to wait for something with expectation and anticipation. By this definition, the whole advent season is a time of hope. Hoping for a specific gift under the tree, hoping for snow (or hoping for no snow), hoping people like the gift you chose, maybe even hoping for a short sermon at the Christmas Eve service. Waiting for family to arrive, waiting for UPS to deliver that last minute gift, waiting for Mom and Dad to wake up Christmas morning and waiting for the coffee to finish brewing. It is important that amid the holiday concerts, family celebrations, shopping and wrapping we don't lose sight of what we truly are waiting for – the birth of Jesus – the Hope of Nations.

### Read Matthew 2:1-12

In Matthew we read about three wise men who travelled to see Jesus after he was born. These men were not Israelites, but they were familiar with the teachings of the Old Testament. They knew the prophecies about the coming Messiah. They knew how long God's people had been waiting and I imagine they had some of the same hopes. Hopes to see an end to war, suffering, and injustice. Hope for everlasting love, joy, and peace. You see these hopes echoed in the words of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 9:2-7).

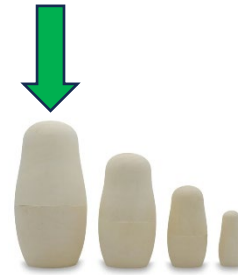
At the time the wise men travelled, the hope prophesied by Isaiah seemed lost. Still today, life can be difficult and confusing. Problems at work or school, difficult family relationships, sickness, pain, and grief can make hope seem lost. When hope seems lost, we can find it again by following the example of the wise men. The wise men hoped in God's guidance: following His star as they made their journey. The wisemen hoped in God's word: finding Jesus because they knew what was written in the Scriptures (Micah 5:2). The wisemen hoped for a Savior: travelling thousands of miles to worship a King like no other. A King who came to be the Hope of Nations.

### Read 1 Peter 1:3-9

Hope is a person. Jesus came at Christmas and because He did there is hope that sinners (that's all of us) can be redeemed and the world can be renewed. Our hope is not found in our job, classroom, or family. Our hope

is not found in what we see around us. Our hope is anchored in the fact that Jesus came, He is always working, He is always good, and He will return.

--written by Kelly Dorval (PreK-K Grade Leader)



**ACTIVITY:** This week, paint the largest nesting doll which represents the Magi (wise men bringing 3 gifts). You'll be working backwards in the Christmas story. We don't know how many magi there were, but they worked together, traveled together, and brought gifts to Jesus together. Think about how God is also 3: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit!

While you're doing that, discuss these questions further or look up the other references below.

- What are you hoping for this Christmas?
- What is the hardest thing to wait for?
- What hopes do we have for our family today? Our country? Our friends?

Read Isaiah 9:2-7 and Micah 5:2

- How does Jesus give you hope?
- How can we show the hope we have in Jesus to others?

**ALL WEEK APPLICATION:** Spend some time as a family practicing waiting patiently and with excitement. Have someone stand up and pose (perhaps on one foot while holding a hammer). If you move, you're out. See who can last the longest. The winner picks a new pose. And next time you're waiting in line at school or the grocery store, try the pose there, ha ha.



## Week 2: Peace - Shepherd/Angel (Proclamation)

### Isaiah 9:1-7

Have you ever been in an argument or a fight with someone? Perhaps it was with your brother or sister, a friend, or even a parent. Maybe someone else had to come in between and stop the fight. They acted as peacemakers by stopping the battle and proclaiming that there was a better way of solving arguments.

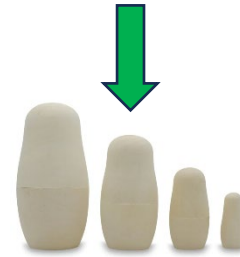
**Read Isaiah 9:1-7.** Every year at Christmas we read about Jesus bringing peace to the earth. We read that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. One of my favorite Christmas Carols is “Angels We Have Heard on High” that retells the story of the shepherds hearing the announcement of Christ’s birth from the Angels, pronouncing in the King James Version Bible; “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” But then, when Christmas is over, we look around hard-pressed to find many, if any, examples of true peace. For many believers the unspoken question is: did Jesus fail?

But let’s look back at the Scripture reading for today. In verse 1 we read that this “time of darkness and despair will not go on forever”. It doesn’t, however, say that this time of “darkness and despair” will end when Jesus is born on the earth. Reading on we realize that this time of perfect peace, when Jesus brings eternal peace, occurs only when Jesus rules as King over the earth (verse 6b and 7). There is a time gap between the first half of verse 6 and the second half of verse 6. We are living in this gap. Jesus has come as a baby in a manger, and one day he will return to rule and then “The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

We all know it can be difficult to live in this “gap” between the baby born in a manger and the future King Who rules bringing perfect peace. That means we’ll probably experience fighting, arguing, and battles all too soon. This year I encourage you to let your celebration of Christmas, the birth of Christ, to include celebration of the PROCLAIMED promise of Christ. The promise that one day Jesus will return as the Prince of Peace. Just as the angel explained to the Shepherds “I bring you good news that will bring

great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!”

*--written by Pastor Jay Tilley (Children’s Ministry Director)*



**ACTIVITY:** This week, paint the second largest nesting doll which represents Shepherds and Angels. There were others who heard from angels. Each time, angels told them not to fear. Peace is not always the removal of problems, but the addition of knowing things will be better and someone is here to help. Think about how peaceful it is to know God is always with you.

While you’re doing that, discuss these questions further or look up the other references below.

- How does patiently waiting for the promise of peace to come stretch and grow your faith?
- In what ways do Isaiah 9.1-5 describe God’s deliverance for His people?
- How may the promises in the passage have brought comfort to the original readers of this passage?
- What kind of “king” does this passage teach us that Jesus will be?
- We don’t have to wait for Jesus to be the King of the earth before we allow him, by faith, to be our king. How can we live today to demonstrate that Jesus is our king to the world?

**ALL WEEK APPLICATION:** Spend some time as a family seeing how lights change the darkness. Turn off all the lights and then light one candle. Or have everyone grab a flashlight and see how far it can shine either in the house or out in the woods. Remember how the light of Jesus was PROCLAIMED in the darkness and the darkness could not overpower it.



## Week 3: Joy - Joseph/Mary (Phenomenon)

Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-7

What brings you joy? Is it winning a soccer or basketball game? Is it getting a new puppy? Is it the joy you feel when it is your birthday? Think about that joy! Christmas is a season of joy, and it all began with the incredible story of Mary and Joseph. They played a vital role in the first Christmas, and their journey is a beautiful example of finding joy in unexpected, confusing, and even mysterious situations.

**Read Matthew 1:18-24 and Luke 1:26-28.** Notice how both Joseph and Mary were puzzled about what was happening and how this could be possible. Mary's response to the angel's message was one of obedience and trust: Luke 1:38 "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." She willingly accepted God's plan, even though it was surprising and maybe a little scary. The phenomenon was that the Son of God would come to earth in the form of a baby. Mary and Joseph were obedient to God even though they did not fully understand God's plan. They did not know how the Messiah (Christ) became a man to save us from sin and restore us as His children. Their obedience to God's plan came with joy. Think about what it was like for Joseph and Mary to hear from the angel.

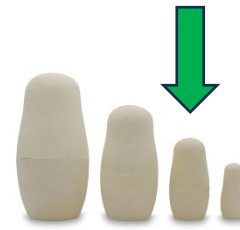
**Read Luke 2:1-7.** Mary and Joseph embarked on a long and challenging journey to Bethlehem. The journey probably took about 10 days to complete. For provisions they may have relied on bread, herbs, and oil, with some dried fish. Take a pretend journey with your family, just like Mary and Joseph. What would you bring?

Mary and Joseph's journey led them to a humble stable because there was no room for them elsewhere. That had to be frustrating and frightening, but it was there that they found the greatest joy of all – the birth of Jesus, the Savior of the world. Sometimes, joy comes in unexpected places. Imagine the joy Joseph and Mary felt after their long journey and trying to find a room to stay in. The miracle of Jesus' birth is complete. They are now holding the Son of God in their arms.

Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem teaches us that joy can be found through obedience, believing in God's promises, and being faithful during the journey itself even in unexpected places and unknown endings. There's

probably going to be times of doubt, worry, and confusion. This Christmas let's remember their story and find joy in our own journey with Jesus, just as they did on that first Christmas night.

*--written by Cherie McComb (1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Leader)*



**ACTIVITY:** This week, paint the second smallest nesting doll which represents Joseph and Mary. Even though each person experienced an angel separately and even though each person had a different role, they were in it together as Jesus' earthly parents. Think about the HUGE responsibility they must have felt to be parents to the Son of God.

While you're doing that, discuss these questions further or look up the other references below.

- Share a time when you were scared or worried, but you did it anyways. How did you feel afterwards?
- Have you ever been surprised by an amazing gift? What was it?

Read Acts 20:35.

- Do you agree that it's better to give a gift than receive one? Why is that?
- Share a time when you got someone a gift and you weren't sure if they'd like it.

**ALL WEEK APPLICATION:** Spend some time as a family putting together a puzzle. You can find inexpensive puzzles at many stores. Pick one that is challenging as well as achievable. A puzzle involves a bit of PHENOMENON, faithfulness, working together, and a final feeling of joy at completion.

## Week 4: Love - Jesus (Presence)

### John 3:16, John 15:9-14

Do you have something that you absolutely love? A favorite toy, game, movie, or book? Why do you love it? You probably play with it a lot or talk about it all the time, right? What about people; are there people in your life you love? How do they know you love them?

I asked my kids recently how they know I love them. Answers varied from “because you take care of me” and “because you like to be with me” to “because God says you have to.” :) When we love someone or something, we want to be around that person or thing. We think about them, play with them, and enjoy their presence. I also asked my children how they know God loves them. Again, they told me “He takes care of them,” and a couple quoted John 3:16 to me. **Read John 3:16.**

We know God loves us because He sent His only Son—the one person He loves so very much—to be born as a baby on earth, to live among us, and to die in our place for our sins. Jesus IS God’s love for us! At Christmas, we often talk about God as Emmanuel, which means “God with us” because Jesus (the Son of God) came to live among us and His death on the cross meant that we could connect with God through Jesus. We are in His presence when we pray and worship! And we get to be with God FOREVER, in heaven, when we accept His gift of salvation. Can you imagine getting to be with the people you love forever?

**Read John 15:9-14.** Jesus tells us that just as God loves him, His only son, He (Jesus) loves us the same. Jesus is the example of God’s love for us, and He was willing to die in our place! Verse 13 says that “greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus loves us with a SACRIFICIAL love. And He asks us to do the same. Now, you may never have to die for someone else, but we can still offer sacrificial love for others. How could we do this? (*Let your kids think of some answers like sharing a toy, letting someone else play with our things, agreeing to go last or not always wanting to be first, letting someone else have something we really want. Things like that.*) This is not always easy to do! But Jesus also tells us that if we focus on Him, we will be able to have His love (John 15:10). The key is to

stay connected to Jesus. We can do that not only at Christmas, but all year round!

--written by Bethany Dattolo (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Grade Leader)



**ACTIVITY:** Now you get to paint the smallest nesting doll which represents Jesus. It’s tiny just like the baby Jesus. However, it was the most important and the greatest. Think about how a HUGE Almighty God humbled Himself to something so small.

While you’re doing that, discuss these questions further or look up the other references below.

- How can we know God loves us?
- How can we show each other sacrificial love?
- How can we stay connected to Jesus?

Read 1 John 4:7-21 & 1 Corinthians 14:4-8.

- What more do we learn about love from these verses?
- Is there a way you as a family can show love to another family or your community?

**ALL WEEK APPLICATION:** Spend some time as a family doing something you love in the PRESENCE of each other (together). Maybe it’s a game, a movie, or cooking, or some specific activity. Maybe each member of your family can pick an activity on a different day of the week. Take turns until everyone has had a chance to do what they love with the people they love!