



Peace Family Advent

Dear Special Family,

A most joy-filled Advent season to you! Advent means “coming.” Christmas Advent is that wondrous period of four weeks in which Christians happily anticipate the celebration of the coming of Jesus, God’s greatest love gift.

Long ago, European Christians set aside this period for prayers and preparation for an appreciation of family and for a renewed dedication to God.

It was then, the beautiful custom of using an Advent wreath in churches and family gatherings began. What an appropriate symbol for the coming of Christ! The wreath was in a circle, no beginning nor end. Jesus, the Son of God, always has been and always will be. The wreath was covered with greens, speaking of the new life we have in Jesus. The candles told of Jesus, the Light of the world.

One new candle was lit on each of the four Sundays in Advent. The fifth candle, in the center of the wreath, was the “Christmas” or “Christ” candle to be lit on Christmas Day.

In recent years, as parents have sought ways to make Christmas more meaningful, there has been a growing interest in reestablishing this important tradition in America.

And so our gift to you is this Advent guide, designed to encourage your family to focus on the joyous Christmas message for the entire Advent season.

Whether you have an heirloom Advent Wreath or just a foil pie plate turned upside down to hold the candles, you will find this guide helpful to explain the significance of each candle. Appropriate Scripture is suggested. There are also Advent related activities for the entire family.

May those who are looking for the Lord Jesus find Him in your home. May you love Him and each other more because of Christmas.

Requirements

For this time of celebration, you will need:

1. A special time and location in the house to hold the Family Advent celebration
 - A place as far as possible from frequent disturbances.
 - The same locale in each of the four weeks.
2. A leader, a reader and a candle lighter for each celebration
 - The reader is to read scripture.
 - The leader reads or tells the significance of each candle. As presented in this book, this will involve part of the Christmas story.
 - Use a variety of ways to select these leaders, giving all members of the family an opportunity. Those not reading can enjoy “echoing” the words from an older helper.
3. A Bible
 - This document, “Peace Family Advent”.
4. An Advent Wreath
 - Purchased or
 - Home constructed
5. Greenery to cover the wreath (optional)
 - Cuttings from the yard or imitation greenery, available at a variety or craft store.
 - Thin wire for fastening the greenery to the base.
6. Four candles for the wreath
 - Traditionally purple, but red may be used.
7. One white candle
 - Christmas or Christ candle
 - For the center of the wreath.
8. Matches for lighting the candles.

First Sunday

Leader: Advent is the time of joyful anticipation of that celebration. We are happy as a family to gather around our Advent Wreath and retell the story of that glorious event, the birth of Jesus.

Our wreath is round, telling us the God's love has no beginning and no end. It always has been and always will be. There are four candles. We will discover the part of the story that each candle represents.

The white candle in the center will be saved for Christmas morning.

And now our circle of light begins. We will light our first candle, the Promise Candle.

LIGHT THE FIRST CANDLE

If you had lived 700 years before Jesus was born, like everyone else, you would have been frightened. Wars and hatred were everywhere. There seemed to be no hope. Then God gave the world a promise. God's messenger Isaiah said:

Reader: Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:2, 6,7

Announcements about the birth of babies are sent after the baby is born. The announcement about Jesus was sent to the world hundreds of years before His birth. It was a promise that God made the world.

Then the people wait... and waited... and waited.

Then years later, the promise came again. This time the promise was given by an angel to a young carpenter named Joseph.

Leader: God kept His promise. This one did come. His name was Jesus. Another beautiful name given to Jesus was "Emmanuel" which means "God with us".

Sing Together: *O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captives Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to Thee O Israel!*

Family Activity: Join hands around the candle so that each member of the family experiences its warmth and light.

Other Scriptures to Read This Week
John 1:1-5, 14 | John 3:16-17 | John 8:12

Second Sunday

Leader: As we gather around the Advent Wreath, we will light again the first candle, reminding us of the promise God made that He would send a Savior.

LIGHT THE FIRST CANDLE

Our second candle is the Bethlehem Candle.

LIGHT THE SECOND CANDLE

The prophet Micah had given another part of the promise. Jesus would be born in the little town of Bethlehem. This was told to the people hundreds of years before the Baby Jesus was born.

Mary and Joseph live a long distance from Bethlehem. How could Jesus be born in Bethlehem? How this all happened was quite amazing.

It was the King's order. Everyone was to go to his home city to register for taxes. Everyone to his own city? Joseph's home town was Bethlehem!

Mary and Joseph bundled up their belongings and left their home in Nazareth for the long journey to Bethlehem.

With advance notice for hundreds of years, you would expect the leaders of the town to welcome Mary and Joseph and rush them to the hospital for the birth of this special baby. The mayor's wife would fluff Mary's pillow and pour orange juice for her after the baby was born.

None of that happened. The noise and bustle of the town began earlier and were louder than usual. Donkeys were braying, dogs were barking, vendors were shouting and tourists were pushing. Pushing to get every available space, blanket or mat in the inn.

The town was so filled with people and camels and sheep and goats that there was NO place for Mary and Joseph except in a cave where animals stayed.

It was quiet there, away from the crowds. There with cows and sheep and goats; Jesus, the Son of God was born. Born in that little town of Bethlehem. Just as God had promised.

Sing Together:	<i>Oh little town of Bethlehem</i>	<i>Yet in thy dark streets shineth</i>
	<i>How still we see thee lie</i>	<i>The everlasting light</i>
	<i>Above thy deep and dreamless sleep</i>	<i>The hopes and fears of all the years</i>
	<i>The silent stars go by;</i>	<i>Are met in thee tonight.</i>

Family Activity: Draw names with your family. This week each person does special favors (secretly) for the family member whose name has been drawn. Have you guessed during the week who has your name?

Third Sunday

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Leader: LIGHT THE FIRST TWO CANDLES

We share the glow of the light from the promise candle and the Bethlehem candle. We will now light the candle that represents the angels with the message: I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY TO ALL THE PEOPLE!

LIGHT THE THIRD CANDLE

Before Jesus was born, the angel appeared to Joseph and said, "Do not be afraid". The angel said to Mary, "Do not be afraid". Now, following the birth of Jesus, the angel said to the shepherds and to people through the ages, "Do not be afraid... I bring you good news... JESUS IS BORN!"

Reader: Luke 2:8-14

Leader: When Jesus was born, there were no announcement cards sent out. But people found out about it in the strangest ways.

Shepherds watching their sheep on a hillside. Young boys were helping their fathers care for the sheep. Probably one boy's name was Joel.

"Nothing ever happens in Bethlehem," Joel may have said as he walked alongside his father. "I wish that I could live in the big city of Jerusalem where kings ride into the city and you could do something besides take care of sheep. Nothing ever happens in Bethlehem."

It may have been at that very moment when the light appeared in the dark sky and Joel, with all the other shepherds, saw the angel and heard the wonderful news, "Do not be afraid... a Savior is born!"

Joel may have still been staring into the sky when he felt a pull on his sleeve and heard his father say, "Son, let's go, now, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."

An angel appeared to Mary. An angel appeared to Joseph. Now an angel came to Bethlehem to make the announcement about the most exciting event in the history of the world.

Then came in the heavens the greatest choir ever as a great company of angels called out.

Reader: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace."(Luke 2:14)

Third Sunday

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Sing Together: *Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"*

*Joyful, all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph in the skies,
With angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"*

Pray Together: Express thanks for Jesus, God's greatest gift and thanks for each other.

Family Activity: Each member of the family is given a candy cane.

Reader: Did you know that the candy cane tells the story of Jesus?

Examine your candy cane as I read the following:
A candy maker in Indiana wanted to make a candy that would tell the story of Jesus, His birth, His ministry, and His love for us shown in His death.

The candy maker began with a stick of pure white, hard candy.

He used white to symbolize the sinlessness of Jesus.

It was made of hard candy to show the firmness of God's promise that He would send His son.

The shape of the candy cane was shepherd's staff, reminding us of those common people who first heard the announcement of Jesus' birth.

The candy cane would not be complete without the red stripes.

He used three small stripes to show the stripes of blood on Jesus' back caused by the beating of the soldiers at the time His arrest. The large red stripe was for the blood that was shed by Jesus on the cross so that we could have eternal life.

The candy cane is sweet. By knowing and following Jesus, our lives are touched by the sweetness and care of this One who is now our Savior, Friend, and Guide.

Fourth Sunday

Leader: Now we gather for our last Advent celebration.
The light is growing brighter. Christmas, Christ's birthday is almost here.

We will light the promise candle, the Bethlehem candle, the Angel candle.

**LIGHT THE THREE CANDLES AS
THE LEADER IS SPEAKING.**

The announcement of Jesus' birth had come not on television, not by telephone, not by an announcement card; But by an angel, a light in the sky. Now the angels were gone. The light was gone. It was dark again.

Reader: Luke 2:15-19

Leader: Our fourth candle is the Shepherd candle.

LIGHT THE FOURTH CANDLE

And so the shepherds hurried to the manger – poor, humble men. These are the ones chosen of God to be Jesus' first visitors? These are the first to know that Almighty God has kept His ages-old promise of One who would bring light and life to the world?

Did Jesus cry while they were there? Maybe. Did Mary lovingly look at Jesus' hands and feet? Probably. Did the shepherds know those hands would be used to heal a leper, to bless the children, to still a storm? Probably not. Did Joseph understand this little mouth would give forth the words giving life to millions of people? Did the shepherds or Mary or Joseph realize that Jesus would die on a cross and then come out of the grave to give eternal hope for all mankind? I think not.

But in that quiet wonderful moment, the shepherds were praising God for this One promised – this Jesus – this Giver of light and life. They knew they would never be the same for they had seen Jesus!

The circle of light is complete. The waiting is almost over.

God is faithful: The Son awaits us.

May we show the Light of the World in our lives as we share the Good News. Jesus is Born!

**Sing
Together:**

*Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace*

*Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia
Christ our Savior is born
Christ our Savior is born*

**Family
Activity:**

Name three people you love very much. Then think of ways you have to let these people know you care about them. Younger members of the family may need help from other family members to complete this.

Christmas Eve / Day

According to tradition, on Christmas Eve or Christmas Morning a larger white candle is placed in the center of the wreath. White signifies the purity of Jesus.

Leader: **LIGHT THE FOUR CANDLES AS THE LEADER IS SPEAKING.**

Our waiting is over. Christmas is here. We greet your coming Jesus, with wonder and love.

We will now light the Christ or Christmas candle.

LIGHT THE FIFTH CANDLE AS THE LEADER IS SPEAKING.

Christ is another name for Jesus. The name tells us that He is God's Son, the One promised so long ago. He is the One through whom Christ saves the world. The word, "Christmas" comes from the name "Christ."

Sing *Happy birthday to You*

Together: *Happy birthday to You
Happy birthday dear Jesus
Happy birthday to You*

Leader: Christmas is a time we think of love. The love of God in sending Jesus. The love of Jesus in His birth, His life, His death and resurrection.

Reader: **1st John 4:9-11**

Leader: As a family, we say: "Joy to us, the Lord is come!"

Sing *Joy to the world! The Lord is come*

Together: *Let earth receive her King
Let every 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*

*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*

Reader: **2nd Corinthians 9:15**