



WHAT WAS
Written

A FAMILY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

WHAT WAS
Written

MATTHEW 1:18-2:23

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THIS STUDY BELONGS TO

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Scan the QR code for a list of
Advent resources you can purchase.



HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

At Journey, we celebrate Advent in five weeks—the four weeks leading up to Christmas Eve plus Christmas Eve itself. Advent is a wonderful way to create holy anticipation of the Christmas celebration! Everything about the observance is meant to create feelings of expectation and excitement.

While we encourage you to create your own family traditions around this special season, we wanted to help get you started with a few ideas we recommend:

1. **Set a mood:** On Sunday night, turn down the house lights, turn on some Christmas lights, and play soft Christmas music. Gather around in a family room and sit close together.
2. **Read the appropriate night's Advent devotional:** Read the Advent story for the evening with a voice of quiet excitement, expectation, and wonder. Consider taking turns reading. Each night has two versions—one for adult audiences and one for settings that include young children (preschool and younger; see second half of this guide). Choose the one that's best for your family. Let children read if they're able!
3. **Light the appropriate candle for the night:** On November 24 you'll only light one candle, the next week you'll light two, and so forth. By Christmas Eve all five candles will be lit!
4. **End with a special treat:** Some ideas include sparkling fruit juice, lemon blossoms, molasses cookies, hot cocoa, etc. You can have any treat you like. It's most fun if the treats are something you only have during Advent season.
5. **Most importantly, RELAX!** Kids will fidget, play, talk, mess with the candles, fight over who gets to blow them out, etc. Rest assured, this tradition has meaning. Even with silliness and interruptions, you're building what will hopefully be a lasting tradition for your family that can be passed down through generations.

Other ideas you might try:

- Light the candles EVERY night of Advent, not just Sunday
- Invite friends and extended family over to participate
- Hold two Advents, one for small kids and one for adults after the kids go to bed. There's a guide in the last half of this book just for families where most of the children are toddlers or preschoolers.

FOR ADULTS &
OLDER KIDS

WEEK 1 | NOVEMBER 24

FIRST ADVENT CANDLE: HOPE

The Birth of Jesus

No candles are lit as you begin

SCRIPTURE READING

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

— ISAIAH 7:14

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, ‘God with us.’ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

— MATTHEW 1:18-25

REFLECTION

Believe it or not, our story tonight begins seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus. Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel when the nation was split in half) is ruled by a fool named Ahaz (Ah-HOZ). He's both cruel and arrogant, worshipping any god he believes may help him. He has even sacrificed his own child on an altar of fire! Ahaz is at war when he's visited by the prophet Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah brings with him a child named Shear-Jashub. The child's name means "Few will return", as in, few will return after we lose this war. Isaiah was always coming up with clever names for children to give messages to the king. One wonders how these children felt about their special names, but we know how Ahaz felt about them. The name irritated him greatly. The name meant that God was not with him! Isaiah tries to tell the king that if he will turn to the Lord (and the Lord alone), he will have victory. Ahaz, trying to appear more of a man than he is, says he doesn't want to "test" God. More likely, he doesn't trust God enough to rely solely on Him.

The prophet Isaiah is livid. He tells Ahaz another "sign child" is about to be born. This child will be named Immanuel, which means "God is with us," and before this child is three years old, the enemies Ahaz fears so much will be destroyed. And that's just what happened. Isaiah then hung a sign in the city that said, "The end is near." And the end for Judah was near. Isaiah named his next child, "Hurry up! Loot and pillage", and that happened too. But then Isaiah looked into the future of Israel and saw better days coming—the best day in fact!

"...in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

(Isaiah 9:1-2,6)

Seven hundred years later, in Galilee by the sea, Joseph wakes from his dream believing! A new sign child is coming. Isaiah's Immanuel meant God is with us. And this coming child will be God with us in a bigger way than anyone could have imagined! The prophecy Isaiah spoke to King Ahaz was now being made completely full: the King of Kings—the wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, and Prince of Peace—was coming! And Isaiah would have been proud because this child's name meant something, too. Jesus—it means "God is Salvation".

LIGHT THE CANDLE *(First Purple)*

Our first candle stands for HOPE. We light this candle tonight as God's people, and we put our hope in His Son, our Savior. With the whole Church past and present, with all the people of God, even before the church, we look to the God who is with us.

We light this candle because we know Christ is coming. Our work is to announce His Kingdom. To a people walking in darkness, we have good news—a great light has dawned. He is our Hope. Lighting this flame, feeding the hungry, comforting the sick, reconciling the divided, greeting the lonely, preaching salvation to the lost. May He find us working when He returns.

SHARING

Take turns sharing one hope you have for the new year.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord, in the light of this first candle we see hope. This single flame pierces into a dark room in the same way your birth brought hope to a dark and hopeless world. May this light be a sign of your promise of salvation. May we be ready for your return. We ask this in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen."

WEEK 2 | DECEMBER 1

SECOND ADVENT CANDLE: PEACE

Herod and the Wise Men

Light the Hope candle before you begin (one purple)

SCRIPTURE READING

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

— MICAH 5:2

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: ‘

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I

too may go and worship him.'

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

— MATTHEW 2:1-11

REFLECTION

Nativity scenes are as old as the Christmas season itself. Some church legends say Saint Francis of Assisi was the first to set up a public display of actors playing Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus complete with live animals. Perhaps you have one in your house right now made of metal, wood, ceramic, paper, or plastic. Nativity scenes are beautiful, but not entirely accurate. While there's plenty of awe and wonder in the Christmas story, there's also more than a little danger and dread.

Our dreadful story begins with King Herod, a political puppet of the Roman Empire. He was a king so paranoid, he killed his wife, his daughter, and two of his sons to protect his throne. As you might imagine, when a group of foreign astrologers show up with news of a new "King of the Jews", Herod is intensely interested.

The Magi are from a land to the east, though we're not sure which one (though Persia is a good guess). They've heard the Jewish prophecies of a Messiah; from where, we're not absolutely sure. They're following a star. Modern astronomy and computer models let us make some good guesses about which star, but we can't be certain. We only know they've come to visit the newborn king. We don't even know why. Everything about the Magi is shrouded in mystery. Even Herod is mystified. He has to call in scribes to read the old prophecies to him. He doesn't understand the faith of his own nation—a faith he only pretends to follow in public. It's here

he learns the Messiah will come from Bethlehem. Sadly, the king of Israel wants to murder Israel's Messiah. It's foreign astrologers who come to worship Jesus and bring him gifts.

On the first Christmas and this Christmas, peace will come only to those who seek to worship the king. When we try to be in control, to rule, and raise ourselves up, there can be no peace. Only when we come to follow, to bow down, and give over our best can we find true peace.

There's one more thing that brings us peace in this story: God is completely in control. The nightmare of a jealous madman hunting a helpless baby is only half the story. A sign in the heavens announced his birth. Given how stars move, God must have known about this night for many thousands of years. A prophet named Micah heard from God about a very specific baby born in a very small village 700 years before it happened. When the king of Israel forgot the ancient prophecies, foreigners interested in foreign affairs came to investigate instead. Nothing about this night surprised our Father in Heaven. And nothing we're facing tonight has surprised him either. Even now he's working it into his perfect plan.

Because God is in control, we can have peace.

LIGHT THE CANDLE *(Second Purple)*

Our second candle stands for PEACE. This small light reminds us that in Jesus, "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him God was pleased to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making PEACE through the blood of His cross." (Colossians 1:19-20) Nothing has caught our God by surprise—not the evil of the world, not the sin in our own hearts, not accidents or diseases. Before the first stars shone, He was planning the arrival of the Prince of Peace.

SHARING

Take turns sharing one area where you have peace (or need peace) in the new year.

CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord, let your peace come upon us in the light of this second candle. May its light be a reminder for us to let go of our worries and be immersed in your peace which surpasses all understanding. Help us put away our constantly changing cares and focus on You this Advent season. Let us give up our need to control and instead bow before you, our king. Amen.”

WEEK 3 | DECEMBER 8

THIRD ADVENT CANDLE: LOVE

The Flight to Egypt

Light the Hope & Peace candles before you begin (two purple)

SCRIPTURE READING

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”

— HOSEA 11:1

“And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”

— MATTHEW 2:12-15

REFLECTION

This year we take advantage of an Advent tradition which allows us to switch the order of the Sundays of Joy (usually the third Sunday) and Love (usually the last Sunday). We’re switching them because the events in Matthew 2:12-15 give us little call for joy, but we do see the relentless love of God.

Here we have another horrible Christmas story. The King of Israel is trying to kill the Messiah. Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus must escape to Egypt. The idea comes to Joseph from an angel in his dreams. Matthew tells us this fulfills what was spoken by the

prophet Hosea in 11:1. However, if you read Hosea 10-11, you'll not find a prediction of Jesus' escape to Egypt. Instead, you find a retelling of the whole history of Israel and God. It 's the story of a rebellious people and the God who will not (He says cannot) stop loving them:

“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They will come from Egypt, trembling like sparrows, from Assyria, fluttering like doves. I will settle them in their homes,” declares the LORD.”

(Hosea 11:8-11)

Hosea 11 is a chapter tenderly describing the love of God and His refusal to give up on his people. The call out of Egypt harkens back to the rescue of Israel from Egypt in Exodus.

Matthew quotes Hosea because he sees in King Herod another example of rebellion against God. Yet God continues to love and rescue His people. The Messiah loves Israel and the whole world, even though the world rebels against the Messiah. God rescued Israel from Egypt. The Messiah will now come back from Egypt to rescue Israel again (and not only Israel this time, but the whole world).

Perhaps this Christmas season you feel like a rebel. Perhaps you have wandered from God—perhaps it's gone on for years. This story teaches us about the love of God. He makes a way to save us even though there's no earthly reason why He should—even though we don't deserve it. The obvious question is, why does He love us so much? And here's the miraculous answer: ***There is no reason.*** He loves us because He loves us. He rescues us because He said he would. This is His gift of love to us—all we have to do is receive it.

LIGHT THE CANDLE *(Third Purple)*

Our third candle this year stands for LOVE—a miraculous love beyond reason! In this third Advent light we see brightly the love of Jesus—a love we cannot explain. Tonight, we give up trying to explain it and turn our hearts to receiving it instead. It's a wondrous thing to be loved with no strings attached. We thank God that He hid His Son from us in Egypt and called Him home again to make a way for us to be saved. We thank Him for His love, a love that has brought us home to Him!

SHARING

Take turns sharing one way you could show the love of Jesus to someone in the new year.

CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord, as we receive your love in the light of this third candle, may it inspire us to do the only right thing we can do—share your love with others. May we love each other the way you have loved us, with no strings attached. May the world know we are your followers by the way we love one another. Amen.”

WEEK 4 | DECEMBER 15

FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE: JOY

Return to Nazareth

Light the Hope, Peace & Love candles before you begin (all purple)

SCRIPTURE READING

“Thus says the LORD, a voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.”

— JEREMIAH 31:15

“When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

‘A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.’

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home

in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazarene.'"

— MATTHEW 2:16-23

REFLECTION

Can we stop for a moment and have a little sympathy for Joseph? I know Mary has suffered much uncertainty, fear, and pain in this story, but let's look at Joseph—the dad who's trying his best and just can't catch a break—for just a minute.

Did he agree to stay married to a girl carrying a baby he knows isn't his? Yes. And what did he get? No room in the inn. Did he set up shop in Bethlehem, 90 miles and four days travel from home in Nazareth? Yes. And what did he get? Chased away by a king trying to kill his adopted son. Did he run all the way to Egypt and do whatever it took to survive there and keep his strange new family safe? Did he obey yet another angelic dream to come home to Israel because King Herod was dead? Yes, and once again, he packs up and takes a journey, starting over for the third time.

And what does he find there? Archelaus, the son of Herod, a butcher who ordered the death of 3,000 people even before taking his father's throne. How can this be? He falls asleep and has his final angelic dream. This time the Lord directs him to the backwater town of Nazareth. And, ever obedient, Joseph goes.

I cannot tell you what a mother would feel in these circumstances, but every dad can probably tell you he'd feel like a failure. Dads are charged with the guidance and protection of the family, and at every turn Joseph's family finds nothing but danger. Though it's not his fault, Joseph's feelings of defeat were probably unavoidable.

And yet here is where Matthew begins to tell us that there is still reason for joy. He quotes the prophet Jeremiah: "Rachel is weeping for her children...because they are no more."

Rachel, the mother of Israel, the wife of the great patriarch Jacob (also called Israel). Rachel, whose tomb is in—can you guess where?—Bethlehem! In Jeremiah, Rachel cries because the people of Israel are dragged off to Babylon. Matthew suggests she now cries again from her grave in Bethlehem because her children there are being slaughtered by King Herod. How is that reason for joy? Because Jeremiah 31 is not a chapter about defeat. It's a prophecy of coming joy. Read the very next verse and you find this:

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work,’ says the LORD: ‘they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future’, says the LORD: ‘your children shall come back to their own country.’”

(Jeremiah 31:16)

God tells them not to weep, but rather to have joy, for He will bring them home. In the same way, if you read Matthew's story only one verse further you find an angel telling Joseph in a dream to get up and go home. And when that home is not safe, yet another dream to return home to Nazareth. Jesus' adopted dad is catching a break after all! He's guided out of all danger by the hand of God Himself. And there is joy! Joy is not happiness based on circumstances. Joy is refusing to despair despite the circumstances.

And what better way to end this dad's story than with a dad joke? In Matthew 2:23b says, “There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazarene.’”

Search the entire Bible and you will never find a prophecy stating the messiah will grow up in Nazareth (a Nazarene). So, what's this all about? It's a dad joke. No kidding.

Here is how you pronounce Nazareth in Greek: “NAY-ZER-ET.”

And here's a prophecy you find twice in Jeremiah and five times in Isaiah:

*“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”*

(Isaiah 11:1 ESV)

And here is how you pronounce Branch in Hebrew: “NAY-ZER.”

The Branch from the line of King David (son of Jesse) will now grow up in Nazareth. He will be the NAY-ZER from NAY-ZER-ET. Our final prophecy is not a prophecy at all, but a winsome play on words—a dad joke!

I don’t know what you may be facing this Christmas season, but I know these two things: 1) God is in control and, 2) Joy is a choice to live as if that previous statement is true.

All of history was working against the birth of Jesus and His survival, and yet God made it happen. The story of His birth is fraught with danger and yet ends with a prophecy encouraging us not to weep and a dad joke meant to make us chuckle. Joseph leaves the pages of history remembered as a dad who did well. Tonight we celebrate Jesus our King. It’s truly a night of joy.

LIGHT THE CANDLE *(Rose)*

Our final candle stands for JOY, and we light this candle to illuminate the path to joy. Tonight, we invite the “good news of great joy” into our lives.

No one is immune to tragedy and pain, but despite being in situations that cause great grief and fear, we can learn to rejoice in the power of God. This kind of JOY is something to be found in the truth of God’s power over all things.

*“Thus says the LORD: ‘Keep your voice from weeping, and
your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work,’
says the LORD...”*

(Jeremiah 31:16)

SHARING

Take turns sharing one joy you have going into the new year.

CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord, tonight we proclaim the joy we find in knowing you are our God and King over all the universe. Comfort those who may be in sorrow—turn their tears into joy. Bring the lost home and protect the innocent. Our joy is in you and in your promises kept! Amen.”

WEEK 5 | DECEMBER 24

FIFTH ADVENT CANDLE: THE CHRIST CANDLE

Christmas Eve

*Light all candles before you begin (purple, pink, **and white**)*

Our fifth candle is the Christ candle. On this night we end the season of Advent simply by reading the Christmas story.

SCRIPTURE READING

“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. ‘Joseph, son of David,’ the angel said, ‘do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

‘Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means “God is with us.”’

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have

come to worship him.’ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, ‘Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?’ ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they said, ‘for this is what the prophet wrote:

*“And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you who will be the
shepherd for my people Israel.”*

Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, ‘Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!’ After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,’ the angel said. ‘Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: ‘I called my Son out of Egypt.’

Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys

in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

'A cry was heard in Ramah—weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.'

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. 'Get up!' the angel said. 'Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.' So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said:

'He will be called a Nazarene.'"

— MATTHEW 1:19 - 2:23

CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, as past generations waited for your first coming, we now await your final coming. As you fulfilled all the prophecies of that day, we know you will fulfill all the prophecies of the coming kingdom! Amen.”

FOR KIDS
PRESCHOOL &
YOUNGER

WEEK 1 | NOVEMBER 24

FIRST ADVENT CANDLE: HOPE

The Birth of Jesus

No candles are lit as you begin

SCRIPTURE READING

“This is how Jesus was born. Mary and Joseph were going to be married. But before they were married, they found out Mary was pregnant with a baby from the Holy Spirit. Joseph was upset and he planned to leave Mary. He knew he was not the father of her baby but he didn’t know who was. He could not have guessed her baby was from God. So, God sent an Angel to Joseph in a dream! The angel said, ‘Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the baby is from the Holy Spirit. She will have a baby boy and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this happened to fulfill what God had said to a prophet long ago: ‘Look, a virgin will have a baby boy, and she will name him Immanuel which means, “God is with us.”’ When Joseph woke up from the dream, he believed the angel. Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took Mary to be his wife, and very soon after, the baby boy was born; and they named him Jesus.”

— MATTHEW 1:18-25

LIGHT THE CANDLE *(one purple)*

Our first candle is the candle of HOPE. Hope means we don’t have to worry because we know God will be with us when there’s trouble. He will never leave us alone. God wants to be with us and live in our hearts. This is why he sent Jesus to be “God with us”!

SHARING

Everyone take turns answering this question: What are you hoping for in the new year?

CLOSING PRAYER

“Dear God, we know you come to be with us whenever we are afraid or in trouble. We have HOPE this Christmas because you love us and you are our God. Thank you for sending Jesus to be ‘God with us.’ Amen.”

WEEK 2 | DECEMBER 1

SECOND ADVENT CANDLE: PEACE

Herod and the Wise Men

Light the Hope candle before you begin (one purple)

SCRIPTURE READING

“King Herod was a cruel and wicked king—selfish and evil. One day, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, King Herod was visited by three wise men. ‘What do you want?!’ Herod asked them. ‘We are looking for the new king of Israel,’ they said politely. ‘I’m the king!’ Herod growled. ‘Yes,’ one of the wise men said politely, ‘but we are looking for the NEW king. We have followed a very special star in the sky. This star is a sign that a new king has been born.’

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened. He didn’t want a new king. He wanted to be the only king—forever. Herod called together his priests and scribes and they told him that IF there was a new king, he would be born in Bethlehem, according to the Old Testament prophet Micah who preached the word of God 700 years before King Herod!

So, the evil King Herod brought the wise men in and spoke to them in a soft, kind voice. ‘Go and search for this child king in Bethlehem; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and see him.’ Even though Herod pretended to be glad, inside he was planning to kill the baby Jesus—for Herod would have no other king besides himself. Not knowing Herod’s plan, the three wise men followed the star to Bethlehem and there found the baby Jesus. They bowed before him and each gave him a gift: gold, and two perfumes—frankincense, and myrrh.”

— MATTHEW 2:1-11

LIGHT THE CANDLE *(Second Purple)*

Our second candle stands for PEACE. Peace means putting an end to fighting and arguments and evil kings. Peace means we don't have to be afraid because God has sent us a new king—Jesus—a good and loving King who will be King forever and ever.

SHARING

Everyone take turns answering this question: What brings you peace? When do you feel safe and peaceful?

CLOSING PRAYER

“Dear King Jesus, thank you for bringing us peace. Help us to live in peace with each other, not fighting, nor arguing, nor trying to hurt others. Let us live in peace with you—not anxious or afraid but trusting you to take care of us. Let us be people of peace like you! Amen.”

WEEK 3 | DECEMBER 8

THIRD ADVENT CANDLE: LOVE

The Flight to Egypt

Light the Hope & Peace candles before you begin (two purple)

SCRIPTURE READING

“God came to Joseph in another dream. This time God warned him not to go anywhere near King Herod. King Herod wanted to kill the baby Jesus because Herod did not want Jesus to become king. The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you because Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ Then Joseph got up, took the baby Jesus and his mother at night, and went to Egypt. They stayed there until King Herod died. This fulfilled what God had said through the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son.’”

— MATTHEW 2:12-15

LIGHT THE CANDLE *(Third Purple)*

Our third candle stands for LOVE. It reminds us that God loves us, even though we don't always treat Him like we should. The king of Israel tried to kill Jesus, but Jesus came back to save Israel anyway. Sometimes we lie, or hit people, or act selfishly, but God still loves us, and God sent Jesus to save us. He even sends the Holy Spirit to help us become better people. No matter what, God always loves us!

SHARING

Everyone take turns answering this question: How could you show love to someone else this week?

CLOSING PRAYER

“Dear God, you are the best Daddy there has ever been. You loved the baby Jesus and you love us always. Tonight, we pray that you would help us to love other people the way you love us. May we be kind to others because you have been kind to us. Thank you, God, for loving us always and sending Jesus to save us. Amen.”

WEEK 4 | DECEMBER 15

FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE: JOY

Return to Nazareth

Light the Hope, Peace & Love candles before you begin (all purple)

SCRIPTURE READING

“When the evil King Herod saw he had been tricked by the wise men, he was very angry. So very angry he sent soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all the little boys who were two years old or under. If the wise men wouldn’t bring him Jesus, he would just have to kill all the baby boys—surely one of them would be Jesus. But the evil King Herod didn’t kill Jesus because Jesus and Mary and Joseph had already escaped to Egypt. An angel came to Joseph and warned him in a dream to run away, and Joseph listened to the angel, so Jesus was safe. Jesus and his family stayed in Egypt until King Herod grew old and died. Then an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go back to the land of Israel, for the evil King Herod is now dead.’ So, Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when they learned King Herod’s son was now king, they were afraid. King Herod’s son was just as evil as King Herod. Jesus and his parents sneaked into a small town called Nazareth, and that is where Jesus grew up.”

— MATTHEW 2:16-23

LIGHT THE CANDLE (Rose)

Our third candle stands for JOY. Joy is more than happiness. Joy is that very special happiness we receive from God even when things aren’t going well, even when we have a bad day, even when we might be in danger. Joy is a very special kind of happiness that says, “No matter what might be happening, God is with us, God is

loving us, and God is saving us—just like He saved Jesus from the evil King Herod.

SHARING

Everyone take turns answering this question: Tell us about something that brought you joy this week!

CLOSING PRAYER

“Dear God, we pray tonight that you would help us feel joy. Teach us about that very special happiness we can feel in good times and bad. We thank you for the joy we feel when we realize you are with us, loving us, and saving us. Amen.”

WEEK 5 | DECEMBER 24

FIFTH ADVENT CANDLE: THE CHRIST CANDLE

Christmas Eve

*Light all candles before you begin (purple, pink, **and white**)*

Our fifth candle is the Christ candle. On this night we end the season of Advent by reading the Christmas story.

SCRIPTURE READING

“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. ‘Joseph, son of David,’ the angel said, ‘do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

‘Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means “God is with us.”’

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have

come to worship him.’ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, ‘Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?’ ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they said, ‘for this is what the prophet wrote:

*“And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you who will be the
shepherd for my people Israel.”*

Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, ‘Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!’ After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,’ the angel said. ‘Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: ‘I called my Son out of Egypt.’

Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys

in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

'A cry was heard in Ramah—weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.'

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. 'Get up!' the angel said. 'Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.' So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said:

'He will be called a Nazarene.'"

— MATTHEW 1:19 - 2:23

CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, long ago people were waiting for you to be born, and you were! We are now waiting for your return and your Kingdom, and we know you will come again. On that day, you will find us serving you! Amen.”

Advent 2024