

Advent



Gingrichs Mennonite

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Overview of Advent



Sermons

Listen to the Advent Sermon series Sundays at 10:15am at Gingrichs Mennonite Church or watch the sermon online. (gingrichsmennonitechurch.com)



Dinners

Host or attend an Advent Dinner. Advent Dinners happen during the week following each Sunday of Advent. Around the table there will be a candle lighting and imaginative prayer experience to help you and your family enter into the Advent Season.



Devotions (Family and Personal)

Personal and Family Devotions are written for each week of advent. They build off of the themes and experiences in the sermon and imaginative prayer experience from the Advent Dinners. The family devotions are for parents to do with their kids whereas the personal devotions are for those who will do their devotions alone.

How to Use This Booklet

How is the booklet Divided?

The booklet is set up as a weekly guide through the Advent season. Each week includes a guide for the Candle Lighting and a script for the Dinner Devotional to be used during the weekly Advent Dinners. They also include a Family and Personal Devotional.

Using the Dinner Devotional

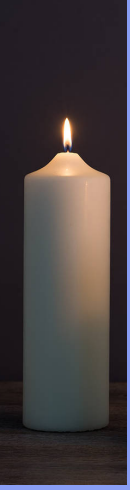
The Dinner Devotional includes a section entitled, For the Leader of the Dinner Devotional and Parents. This section is here to help those leading to have an understanding of the purpose of the experience. Each week includes an imaginative prayer. The leader simply has to read the script. Practicing reading the script 1 or 2 times before is recommended.

Using the Family or Personal Devotions

These devotions are not written as “daily devotions” in the traditional sense of having a specific devotion for each day of the week. Instead, what is provided is more like prompts for discussion, contemplation, and journaling. We want to weave conversation about Jesus and recognition of his presence into your daily lives. For families we encourage you to use the prompts at the dinner table, in the car, at bedtime or anywhere else you spend time with your kids.

**Use this booklet to
host Advent Dinners
and for your
personal/family
devotions during
Advent.**





First Week of Advent: A Season of Waiting

Week 1: Candle Lighting

(We recommend that you do the candle lighting before dinner)

When you think about Advent, which Advent do you think of? The first advent or the second advent? We are living between two advents. When Jesus first came into the world and the gospel writer wrote about Him, he said,

"In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."
(John 1:1-5)

As we light the first advent candle, we are reminded that the light of God has already come into the world.

[Light the first advent candle]

Look at the light of the candle. Notice how small that flickering flame appears in the room. Notice also the darkness throughout the room.

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Now draw your attention back to the flame. This flame is just the beginning. It is a reminder of the first advent when Jesus came in humble obscurity to a small middle eastern village. But there is a second advent coming.

"And there will be strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory. So, when all these things begin to happen, stand, and look up, for your salvation is near!" (Luke 21:25-28)

We are between two advents. The first advent was seen by Mary, Joseph, and a few shepherds. It was small like the candle's flame. The second advent won't be one of obscurity. Notice in Luke's gospel what he says of the second coming of Jesus - "Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory" (v. 27).

As we share the table between advents allow the candle to remind us that the God who was faithful to come 2,000 years ago will be faithful to return again. Our salvation is near. Everyone will see the Son of Man coming.



First Week of Advent: A Season of Waiting

Week 1: Dinner Devotionals

(We recommend that you do this devotional after dinner but if it works best for you to do it before dinner you can do it immediately following the candle lighting)

For the Leader of the Dinner Devotional and Parents

(Read this in preparation for the Advent Dinner or Devotions with your children.)

Let me invite you to think back on past Christmas's. The wrapping paper strewn across the floor. Stockings that were stuffed full the night before are empty hanging on the arm of a sofa. Everything is open. There is nothing left to discover. No boxes left to unwrap. No gifts left to give. It's done. How do you feel? After a month of anticipation building to this moment, how has that climactic moment left you feeling? Thankful? Overwhelmed? Loved? Grateful? Or is there a tinge of deflation? Sadness? Let down?

Maybe you can relate to the feeling of spending a month anticipating this amazing moment unwrapping gifts only to be left feeling unfulfilled. Maybe your kids have felt this way about Christmas. Our goal is to help them join a story that is bigger than themselves. The "Commerical Christmas" that we celebrate every 25th of December is a story that's all about me and my family. It's good. It's good to give and receive gifts. To celebrate family. But that isn't a big enough story to satisfy the deeper longings of our soul. We long for something more. In the words of Augustine, "my heart is restless, until it finds it's rest in God." During this Advent season we are going to help you and your family enter into a story that goes beyond family, giving and a tree surrounded by beautifully wrapped gifts.

Advent is a season of waiting. We want to invite you to wait for someone. To enter into the long history of the Church which has taken this month in the Christian calendar to wait for Jesus. The God who came as a baby all those years ago will come again. What will the return of this king mean for me? For my family? For my town, country, for the very world?



Q and A

Question: *What are we waiting for during Advent?*

Answer: *We are waiting for Jesus to return.*

Imaginative Prayer

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God I pray that you will release our imaginations and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Come Holy Spirit.

Close your eyes and imagine with me. I am going to introduce you to three different people. You will have an opportunity to walk in each of their shoes this evening.

You are standing in the kitchen of your childhood home. You press yourself up onto the tips of your toes to be able to see what's on the counters. It's cold outside. But mom has been baking all day. Imagine the smell of your moms' cookies baking in the oven. Breathe it in.

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Imagine you walk over to the oven and put your hands up on the glass to get a better look inside. You see the lumps of dough only just beginning to brown. What type of cookies are they? Chocolate chip? Oatmeal raisin? The ones with Hershey kisses pressed into the top?

Now imagine your mom stooping down next to you and telling you they've still got a long time to go in the oven. How do you respond to her? What does it feel like to hear your mom say you're going to have to wait?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Now imagine you are someone new. Imagine you're 10 years old and it's Christmas morning. You wake up in a warm bed, throw off the covers, and run into the living room. What do you see? Is it a real Christmas tree or artificial? Are your siblings in the room with you or all you alone?

Week 1: Dinner Devotional

Imaginative Prayer

You gaze at the tree with its lights on and presents, mountains of presents stacked up all around the tree? What is going through your mind?

(Pause 5 seconds)

Now imagine you take two tiny steps towards the tree as you do you hear your dad's voice in your head. "Don't open any presents until everyone is awake." You sigh a deep sigh of disappointment. Mom and Dad are still in bed, but you're ready to open presents now. You look back at the tree and notice two big boxes with your name on them.

Imagine you stand and stare at those boxes. How long do you stare? 20 Seconds? A minute? 5 Minutes? Finally, you decide to run back to your parents' bedroom to wake them up so you can open presents together. Notice again how you feel. Are you bursting with anticipation? Is your mind still picturing what could be in those giant boxes with your name on them? Are you able to stand still while you wake your parents up or is all the excitement making you jump and wiggle?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Now imagine you were alive a long, long time ago. So long ago actually that one incredible day you had the opportunity to meet Jesus. You grew up in a small town. The kind of town that never seemed to have anything special happen to it. Until Jesus of course.

Imagine looking up from the game you are playing with your friends to see this person walking toward you with a huge crowd following him. Imagine the sense of confusion you must of felt not knowing who this strange person was. After all, no one new came to your little pocket of the country, let alone someone as important as this person must be to draw such a crowd.

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Now imagine you see him reach down and take the hand of your friend, the kid in your neighborhood who couldn't walk. As you stand there in the street watching you see your friend do something you've never seen them do before.

Imaginative Prayer

They stand up, take a step, and then another and another. It's incredible. This stranger just fixed your friend's broken legs. All of a sudden you are asking yourself this question, what broken part of me could this stranger heal?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

When this man gets near you hear grown ups talking about him. Some people are saying he's a healer, of course you already knew that from what you saw him do for your friend. Other people are saying he's the one who's going to fix the government. Some people are calling him a friend. Others are calling him the king.

When he gets close enough you step out in front of him and ask him to fix that broken part of you. Does it surprise you that you'd be so forward? Are you nervous that he can't or worse, won't? Are you completely sure he can and will fix the broken thing in you because of what he did for your friend.

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Jesus leans over, looks you in the eye, smiles then winks, and says, "Your faith has made you well, you are forgiven."

What do you say to him? Do you hug him? Who do you run to tell someone about what just happened? Or you stay to watch him heal more people?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

10 years go by, and you haven't seen Jesus since that day. That broken thing Jesus fixed for you is still fixed. But there are other broken things. What other things in your life need to be fixed? Is it something about your body that is sick or not working right? Is there something about your school that needs fixed? Is your family going through some hard time? Did you read something in the news that is breaking your heart?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Imaginative Prayer

What would it feel like if you saw Jesus walking down your street again? What problems would you run to him with this time?

(Pause 5 seconds)

What if this time, when Jesus came down your street, he didn't have to leave? What if Jesus moved in next door? How would it feel to know that the person who fixed your biggest problem all those years ago was back in town?

Q and A

Question: *What are we waiting for during Advent?*

Answer: *We are waiting for Jesus to return.*

Personal and Family Devotions: Week 1

For the Parent or Reader

As you think about what you are waiting for, what has gotten more of your attention in the last few weeks, the story of present/family Christmas or the story of the return of King Jesus on the second Advent? Have you slowed down enough to ask God what it is your soul is hungering for most? The Advent season is a season where we take time to remember that Jesus came once before and that he has promised to come again.

Advent is a season of waiting for Jesus. Spend time this week sitting with these questions: How will Jesus coming back with his kingdom satisfy the deepest longings of my heart? How have I tried to meet those deep longings with the "stuff" of Christmas in years past? What is one thing I am excited will be different about my life when Jesus comes back?

Personal Devotional

- Ask the Lord to bring you into the waiting season.
- Spend some time this week at bedtime reviewing the day. Look for highs and lows throughout the day. Thank God for the joys and pray for the pains.
- Engage a friend in conversation this week about Jesus' second coming.
- Share with Jesus in prayer the sorts of things you'd like to do with Jesus when he comes in flesh and blood.
- Spend some time noticing the things you are excited about in the coming weeks. We want to get a picture for what has the focus of our hearts. Thank God for the goodness of those things. What things are you excited for when Jesus comes back and Heaven and Earth are made new.

Family Devotional

- Invite your child to ask the Lord to bring you into the waiting season.
- Spend some time this week at bedtime helping your child review the day. Look together for highs and lows throughout the day. Thank God for the joys and pray for the pains.
- Engage your child in conversation this week about Jesus' second coming.
- Engage your child in conversation about the sorts of things they'd like to do with Jesus when he comes in flesh and blood.



Personal and Family Devotions: Week 1

Personal Devotional

- Read Psalm 25:1-10. What words stand out to you? Trust, and hope stand out to me. What do trust and hope have to do with Advent and this season of waiting?
- Do some brainstorming about how you can show Jesus that you are waiting with excitement for him to return.

For the Journal

Set aside 15-20 minutes once this week to sit alone in a focused way with your journal. Remember the imaginative prayer from this weeks Advent Dinner. Write a letter to Jesus telling him about all the things you want to do and talk with him about when he comes back.



Family Devotional

- Spend some time noticing with your child the things that they are excited about in the coming weeks. Thank God for the goodness of those things, then pivot and ask them what things are they excited about when Jesus comes back.
- Spend some time in the evening reminding your child of their response to the preceding questions: "Do you remember a few nights ago when we talked about...?" Pray with your child for Jesus to return to us and make everything new and good again.
- Read Psalm 25:1-10. Ask your child, what words stand out to them? Say something like, trust, and hope stand out to me. What do trust and hope have to do with Advent and this season of waiting?
- Ask your child to do some brainstorming about how they can show Jesus that they are waiting with excitement for him to return. Talk and pray about these ideas as a family.



Second Week of Advent: Cleaning House

Week 2: Candle Lighting

(We recommend that you do the candle lighting before dinner)

Are the seasons of Advent and the Christmas season one and the same? Are they interchangeable terms? Actually, it may surprise you but the answer is no they're not. Advent is the season leading up to Christmas which we all likely know. But the Christmas season only starts on Christmas day and lasts for 12 days. Hence, the 12 Days of Christmas. Does this little piece of Christian knowledge have any value other than just fun trivia? Well, maybe.

It's when we look at the difference between these two seasons that it becomes valuable to us as a faith community. Christmas is a season of celebration. Advent is a season of reflection, anticipation, confession, and repentance. Like Lent, it's a season of preparing to receive Jesus.

"Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (Philippians 1:2-6).

As we light the second candle of Advent, take a moment to ask Jesus, what in your life does Jesus want to bring to completion before his return. What is it in your soul that God is asking you to let him heal this Advent season?

[Light the first and second Advent Candles]

As you look at the small flames remember that God's healing work in your life is like this flame. Notice the smallness of the flame, but also notice the halo of light around the flame itself. God's healing work around us starts small like this flame, but like the light is not contained to the flame, God's healing moves to more and more broken places in our soul. The light grows and penetrates the whole room until the whole room is lit. Jesus began a work in you to heal the broken parts of your soul and He will continue to bring that healing to more and more places in your life.

What in your soul is God asking you to let him heal this Advent?

As we share the table between advents allow the candle to remind you that the God who began a healing work in your life is faithful to bring that healing to completion.



Second Week of Advent: Cleaning House

Week 2: Dinner Devotionals

(We recommend that you do this devotional after dinner but if it works best for you to do it before dinner you can do it immediately following the candle lighting)

For the Leader of the Dinner Devotional and Parents

(Read this in preparation for the Advent Dinner or Devotions with your children)

How long is your to-do list right now? If you're like most people this time of year that list gets long! Shopping, attending parties, cleaning the house for company, picking up groceries for meals with friends and family, cleaning the house for the other company that is coming to visit. Let's face it, from Thanksgiving through Christmas there is a lot to prepare for. This week we want to pick up on a theme from last week. During this season of Advent we want to invite you and your family to be a part of a story that is bigger than commercial Christmas. We want to invite you to return your focus to God's Great Rescue plan.

Jesus came once, and he is coming again. He promised and our God is good for his word.

This week we are inviting you and your family to make preparations. One of the major themes of Advent is preparing our hearts to receive Jesus. Much like Lent, it's a season of prayer, anticipation, confession, and repentance – all done with the end goal of preparing to encounter Jesus. In a season when we clean our house, sometimes over and over again, for company, this cleaning is a good reminder to bring ourselves before God to let him clean out the places sin has gone unchecked in our hearts.



Q and A

Question: How do we prepare for Christmas?

Answer: We prepare for Christmas by confession and repentance to present ourselves pure and blameless to Jesus?

Imaginative Prayer

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God I pray that you will release our imaginations and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Come Holy Spirit.

Close your eyes and imagine with me.

It's December 22nd and your family from out of town is going to be arriving that night to spend a week with you over Christmas. You look into your living room where the tree usually stands, but instead of seeing a tree all dressed in ornaments and lights, you see the chair you'll still have to move into the other room. The mantel still has a few gourds and pumpkins on it, even that rotten one in the corner you've been meaning to throw out for the last two weeks. How can Christmas come when you haven't put up the tree or hung the stockings?

(Pause for 5 seconds)

Someone in the family has made the to-do list. It's pretty long. Grocery shopping for the big Christmas dinner, oh and cleaning out the fridge to make room for all the holiday food. Going out to buy a tree, oh and don't forget the wreathes. Making Christmas cookies. Finding the boxes with the ornaments in the basement or attic. Hanging the Christmas lights on the tree. Then re-hanging them of course, because someone in the house didn't think they were quite right. Then decorating the tree. You glance down at the list. Notice your heartbeat. Notice your breathing. How is this list making you feel?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Imaginative Prayer

Your family divides up the chores. You are picked to clean. You can't be the family that has the filthy bathroom when company comes over. So you march into the bathroom armed with a bucket of cleaning supplies. What do you notice first? The smell? The clutter? The grime? After some vacuuming, wiping and scrubbing, so much scrubbing, you step back and look at the bathroom. It will be another year until it's this clean again, so you really take it in. What stands out to you? The mirror free of streaks? The toilet bowl that's actually white? The clean floor that is usually covered in hair? How does it feel to see such a clean bathroom?

(Pause 5 seconds)

Next you clean the kitchen, then the bedrooms, then the living room. One room after another. Until finally, exhausted you fall onto the couch to relax. Why did you just do all that work?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Was it out of obligation? Did your mom or dad make you help clean the house? Was it to impress your guests? Do you like having a clean house? Why did you do all that work to clean your house?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

What was that noise. It sounded like a thud outside. Then 10 seconds later you hear the doorbell ring. They're here! You open the door and see your family, arms full of bags, boxes, suitcases and cookie tins. They come in your front door and you offer to take their bags up to their rooms. When you get to their room you notice that the bed where you place their bags, only hours before had been covered with stuff. How does it feel to know that all your work to clean up that day had made a space for them?

(Pause 5 seconds)

When you come back downstairs you notice that everyone was in the kitchen. Your grandma is putting down a cookie tin. You stop and think for a second. Where they put the cookie tin was the place the mail had been piled up. What would you rather have on your counter, a place for cookies or a place for unopened mail?

Week 2: Dinner Devotional

Imaginative Prayer

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Everyone piles into the living room. Normally there wouldn't be enough room for everyone to sit but you'd cleaned off the "stuff chair" that usually has junk piled on it. You even brought up an extra piece of furniture so everyone could have a place to sit. You look at your grandpa eating a cookie in that extra chair. How does he look? Comfortable? Relaxed? Is he happy to be with his family?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

How does it feel knowing that after all that work to get ready, your guests feel welcomed and loved?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

When we get ready for Christmas, we don't just get ready to welcome our friends and family, we get ready to welcome Jesus. Do you feel ready to welcome Jesus or are there still parts of your life that need to be cleaned up to make room for Him?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Just like our family will be happy to see us no matter how clean our house is, Jesus will be happy to see us because we are his family. Imagine how much more welcome Jesus will feel if you spend some time cleaning up the messy parts of your life.

Is there a bad habit that Jesus is asking you to work on breaking? Has your life become so cluttered you don't have time to sit with Jesus in prayer?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Have you been so focused on yourself with your wants and desires that you've forgotten to put other people first? How can you make room for other people in your life this December?

Imaginative Prayer

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Have you spent so much time making sure your house is clean that you've forgotten to give any attention to your heart? Are your thoughts and feelings about others "clean" or are they mean, twisted and hurtful?

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

We prepare for Christmas by confession and repentance to present ourselves pure and blameless to Jesus.

Q and A

Question: How do we prepare for Christmas?

Answer: We prepare for Christmas by confession and repentance to present ourselves pure and blameless to Jesus.

Personal and Family Devotions: Week 2

For the Parent or Reader

As you think about what you have been preparing for this Advent, what has gotten more of your attention, preparing your house or preparing your soul? If you're like most of us, it's really easy to get swept up in the here and now things of the Christmas season. Don't get me wrong, those things are good things. But how often do you lose track of the best thing in a sea of good things?

Spend some time this week thinking about these questions: What area of my life still needs Jesus to come in to clean? What specific action or attitude is Jesus asking me to work on?

Personal Devotional

- Spend some time this week at bedtime reviewing the day. Ask the Spirit to remind you of times you weren't faithful to God. Then do three simple things, first ask Jesus to forgive you, pause to receive God's forgiveness and then ask Jesus to help you do better tomorrow.
- Remember a time when you were working on a project and needed to call someone for help because you were out of your depth. Just like you needed help with your difficult project we all need Jesus help to help us clean out the sin in our lives. (Read Philippians 1:6 to see how God is doing that work in us, like someone with more experience helping us in a project we can't do ourselves.)

Family Devotional

- Spend some time this week at bedtime helping your child review the day. Look together at the times they weren't obeying God, their teacher, or you their parent. Lead them to do two simple things, first to ask Jesus to forgive them and then to ask Jesus to help them do better tomorrow.
- Engage your child in a conversation this week about a task/chore that they still need your help to do. Maybe it's unloading the dishwasher or cutting the grass. Remind them that just like you help them with that chore, Jesus helps them clean out the sin in their lives. (Read Philippians 1:6 to see how God is doing that work in us, like a parent helping a kid with their chores.)



Personal and Family Devotions: Week 2

Personal Devotional

- Imagine what it would be like to meet Jesus tomorrow? What things would you want to show Jesus? The work you've been doing at your job? The relationships you've been investing in? What things wouldn't you want Jesus to see? The outbursts at your family. A specific habit. The judgmental things you think about others. Out of all these things, what is one thing you want to ask Jesus to help with.
- Imagine a mess that would be too big to clean up? In the depth of your heart, does this mess feel too big for even Jesus. Pause and let Jesus speak to that feeling of hopelessness.
- Do some research about people whose lives were totally changed by God. Try looking up "I am Second" videos to watch on youtube.

Family Devotional

- Engage your child in imagining what it would be like to meet Jesus tomorrow? What things would they want to show Jesus? A dance move? Something they drew? A project from school? What things would they not want Jesus to see? The melt downs they have at bedtime. The times they do and say hurtful things to their siblings. The mean things they think about others. Ask them, out of all these things, what is one thing they want to ask Jesus to help them with.
- Ask your child to describe a mess that would be "too big to clean up." Listen to them and encourage them to embellish the story. Then say something like, is this mess too big for Jesus to clean up? Invite them to think about some sin in their life that they just can't seem to "clean up," lead them to pray for Jesus to help clean that mess up.
- Do some research with your child about people whose lives were totally changed by God.



Personal and Family Devotions: Week 2

For the Journal

Set aside 15–20 minutes once this week to sit alone in a focused way with your/their journal. Remember the imaginative prayer from this week's Advent Dinner. Write a story about one habit, relationship, attitude that you have been feeling convicted about. Describe the present reality. Write about the pattern you are stuck in. Then write an ending to the story where Jesus totally turns that habit, attitude, relationship around? What would it look like for Jesus to heal that broken part of you?





Third Week of Advent: Waiting with Anticipation

Week 3: Candle Lighting

(We recommend that you do the candle lighting before dinner)

Read or listen to "Home At Last" by Josh Garrels

"Who is there at the end of lonesome roads?
All of us hope there's a home

A place to rest where wounds get dressed,
the table's full
The sound of laughter in the halls

Light the fire, gather 'round
Join together, sing it loud
Raise the glass and joyful be
Home at last, one family

We're all orphans looking for an open door
Hard times come no more

Come on up to the house of the Lord
Father adopts us all."

[Light the first two advent candles.]

On that day they will say to Jerusalem,

"Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands
hang limp.

The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty
Warrior who saves.

He will take great delight in you; in his love
he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice
over you with singing."

"I will remove from you all who mourn over
the loss of your appointed festivals, which is
a burden and reproach for you.

At that time I will deal with all who oppressed
you.

I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles.
I will give them praise and honor in every land
where they have suffered shame.

At that time I will gather you; at that time I
will bring you home.

Zephaniah 3:16-20a

[Light the third advent candle]



Third Week of Advent: Waiting with Anticipation

Week 3: Dinner Devotionals

(We recommend that you do this devotional after dinner but if it works best for you to do it before dinner you can do it immediately following the candle lighting)

For the Leader of the Dinner Devotional and Parents

(Read this in preparation for the Advent Dinner or Devotions with your children)

Disappointment is one of those things that no matter who you are, no matter where you grew up, no matter the specifics of your story, we can all relate to disappointment. Even in reading this last sentence I imagine memories are flooding back to you of times you were let down. As common as disappointment is, it's a wonder any of us still expose ourselves to the vulnerability of hope.

And yet when the Apostle Paul reduces Christianity to three words, hope makes the cut. Christians are people who have learned to hope again. In a world of promise breakers we have met someone who keeps His promises. We know a God who is a faithful friend, a loving Father, a just King, and a good Shepherd. We dare to hope for a home in heaven because our Father in heaven is the one who made the promise.

As you prepare for the third week of Advent, and the coming of the Christ Child, allow yourself to hope. God is good for His word.



Q and A

Question: What do we have to look forward to when Jesus returns?

Answer: "A place to rest where wounds get dressed, the table's full, the sound of laughter in the halls"

Imaginative Prayer

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God I pray that you will release our imaginations and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Come Holy Spirit.

Close your eyes and think about what it would be like to wake up in your ideal day. On this day, there is no need to "get something done". You aren't required to do anything. No one is expecting anything from you. This day is a rare opportunity to simply be. You have an open opportunity to spend a day doing something you enjoy. When you think about a day like this, what does it stir within you?

(Pause 5 seconds.)

What about this day makes you excited? Or, does it incite a sense of dread, a sense of losing time?

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

When you wake up, what kind of day is it? Are you able to sleep in? Or, do you prefer to get up early and enjoy the morning light? What is the weather like outside? Is your ideal day a sunny invitation to the outdoors? Do you picture a foggy or rainy day, where you can take shelter in the cozy nooks of your house? Once you can envision this day, ask yourself, if it makes you feel alive, invigorated, cozy, or comfortable? What are you feeling as you picture your ideal day?

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

Imaginative Prayer

As you rise, imagine yourself waking up in this day and beginning to walk through it. Picture yourself waking, brushing your teeth, getting dressed, and preparing for this day. Be specific. If you wear something, is it your favorite thing to wear, like your coziest sweater? Then, what do you have to eat for breakfast? Imagine you have the time to cook whatever you like, whether it be scrambled eggs, pancakes, or oatmeal. Next, possibly the best part, think about your cup of coffee or tea. Think about what it means to be able to luxuriate in these little joys, and how joys as seemingly little as this can be big blessings to us.

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

Now, really move through the day in your mind, as if it's really beginning. Think about those activities you thought about briefly before. Envision that hike or sitting in your favorite armchair reading a book. Whatever that chosen activity was, think about why you chose it specifically. What about this activity fulfills you? How does this enjoyment connect you with God?

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

You have a day where nothing is expected of you, or the people you love. Your day is free. Who do you get to spend the day with? Or do you spend it alone? No matter what, in this day, there is no loneliness. You are guaranteed contentment. What does this look like to you, and how does the thought of a day free of loneliness make you feel?

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

What do you do on that perfect day? What activities do you choose to do with the people you love, or what kind of solitary time do you spend? Do you read, go hiking or swimming, or create something? What things make your soul feel light?

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

Imaginative Prayer

When the sun goes down, and it's time to break bread again, who else is around your table?

(Pause 5 seconds)

What do you talk about, and laugh about? Immerse yourself in this scene and feel the warmth of the people you love.

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

Now, think about how God joins you on your day. How does He wake you up, and how does He walk with you throughout the day? What words, what encouragement does He speak? Are there verses that you hear Him speak into your heart?

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

Finally, think of the sky above you, and what might encroach upon this day. Are there clouds? What's keeping you from seeing the light? Think about them in terms of troubles plaguing you now. Think about your worries, stressors, pressure to perform, conflict with friends or family. Whatever they may be, think about how they make you feel.

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

Now, instead of imagining that this day you pictured is tomorrow or next weekend, think of it instead as your future. What do you feel... Relief? Comfort? Excitement? How does this vision of your future compete with the future you have envisioned for yourself already? What plans have you made that aren't quite working, that you need to let go of? Picture them along with the clouds you had envisioned before.

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

Imaginative Prayer

Now, picture those clouds, envision rays of sunlight spilling through them. Those once opaque clouds now shine, and illuminate the world with the goodness of God. Feel the emotions that come along with letting go of those plans, worries, and stressors. Sit in them for a moment, and then set those free as well.

(Pause 8-10 seconds.)

God promises a beautiful future. And even when things in life begin to grow dark, there is always the promise of the Light, whether it be freedom from stress, worry, sadness, loneliness, and whatever else plagues us in this human condition. And when we think of all the goodness that God has waiting for us, let us thank God for all he does as he prepares us for this future.

Q and A

Question: What do we have to look forward to when Jesus returns?

Answer: "A place to rest where wounds get dressed, the table's full, the sound of laughter in the halls"

Personal and Family Devotions: Week 3

For the Parent or Reader

As you allow yourself to envision your perfect day, really allow yourself to hope for the perfect day. Is it easy for you to allow yourself to hope? How has your experience of family made it difficult to hope that the Father's house will be better? We all come from broken families. All of us. Some of us have experienced that brokenness in the conflict and eventual divorce of our parents. Others of us have seen it in the way anxiety is ever simmering right below the surface. And yet, the promise of God is that His home will be different. Our Heavenly Father is good. His home is good. What parts of you have a hard time believing that?

Personal Devotional

- Ask God to bring to mind experiences in your past that keep you from hoping for God's goodness.
- Think back to our imaginative prayer during the advent dinner. What sorts of things did you do on that day, who were you with, what did you eat. Thank God for each of these things.
- Spend 5-10 minutes in silence sometime this week. When you close your eyes imagine sitting down for a meal with the Trinity. How does it feel to have a seat at the Trinity's "family dinner"?
- As you picture yourself sitting at the table with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, imagine someone you are upset with comes and sits next to you. How do you feel? How do your hosts respond to them? What might God be asking you to do in that relationship?

Family Devotional

- Pause with your child and together ask God to bring to mind experiences in their past that keep them from hoping for God's goodness.
- Invite your child to think back to our imaginative prayer during the advent dinner. What sorts of things did they do on that day, who were they with, what did they eat. Thank God for each of these things.
- Have your kid spend 1-2 minutes in silence sometime this week. Have them close their eyes and imagine sitting down for a meal with the Trinity. Ask them to imagine what their faces look like. Are they smiling? Are they serious? How does it feel to have a seat at the Trinity's "family dinner"?



Personal and Family Devotions: Week 3

Family Devotional

- Say to your kid, do you remember when we pretended/imagined we sat down for a meal with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Let's pretend again, this time when you picture yourself sitting at the table with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, imagine someone you are upset with comes and sits next to you. How do you feel? How do your hosts respond to them? What might God be asking you to do in that relationship?
- Ask your child, if you went to visit Jesus in His house, what games would you want to do with him? What games would you play? What would you eat? Would you play outside or inside? Who else would you want to be there?

For the Journal

This week we have been exploring the hope that when Christ returns the world will be made well. That God will welcome us into His home. And that in that homecoming, our soul will find rest. Take some time to write a letter from God's perspective. Pretend this is the letter you discover on your bedside table in your room in the Father's house. What does the Father write to you in this deeply personal letter now that you are home with Him in His house?





Fourth Week of Advent: Come Lord Jesus

Week 4: Candle Lighting

(We recommend that you do the candle lighting before dinner)

Very soon, the time to celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World, will be here! We have been waiting for the Messiah to come again, preparing our hearts, and longing for our final homecoming. Together, we lit the first three candles of Advent, symbolizing our hope, faith and joy in the coming of Jesus. Yet, we have also been aware of our need. What we need most is a rescuer, a savior.

[Light the first three advent candles.]

Since the beginning of time, even before Adam and Eve chose to disbelieve and disobey their loving Creator, God has had a rescue plan for humanity (Rev 13:8). We have always needed a savior, and God has always wanted to save us. In Hebrew, the name Jesus means "God Saves." Today and in times past, here and around the world, personally and corporately, we all need help. Poverty. Displaced refugees. Wars. Terrorism. Hunger. Suffering. Oppression. Loneliness. And then there's the pandemic... To many of us, never has our need for rescue seemed more urgent.

WE NEED A SAVIOR!

With the Psalmist, we cry out, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth...Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!" (Ps 80:1,3).

And again, with King David in the wilderness (Ps 69:13, 16-18), we plead,

"I pray to you, Lord,
in the time of your favor;
in your great love, O God,
answer me with your sure salvation...

Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me.

Do not hide your face from your servant;
answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.

Come near and rescue me;
deliver me because of my foes.

[Light the fourth advent candle, the candle of Peace and Justice.]

Let each person choose one of the verses (above) that most clearly expresses their desire for a savior or rescuer right now. If comfortable, speak that verse aloud as a prayer for the Savior of the World, the Prince of Peace, the One who restores justice to the world, to come again soon.



Fourth Week of Advent: Come Lord Jesus

Week 3: Dinner Devotionals

(We recommend that you do this devotional after dinner but if it works best for you to do it before dinner you can do it immediately following the candle lighting)

For the Leader of the Dinner Devotional and Parents

(Read this in preparation for the Advent Dinner or Devotions with your children)

We are getting close to Christmas Day. Our houses may be mostly decorated, our presents mostly bought, and most of the ingredients for our Christmas feast stuffed into cupboards. Yet on another level, we know that all is not right with the world and with ourselves. Yes, Jesus came already that first Christmas and saved us from our sins. But so much is still broken.

With our family this week we want to gently but truthfully acknowledge the brokenness, suffering, and oppression in our world. We want our awareness of our own need and the needs of others for a savior to grow and the acuteness of our longing for King Jesus to come again to swell. When the people of God cried out for God to come to their rescue thousands of years ago, the Father sent the Son into the world to save the world. Trusting that the God who was faithful to come once will come again, we follow the pattern of our ancestors in the faith and cry out for our deliverer to “awaken his might and come to save us.”

This week we will explore the pain and suffering of the poor and powerless in our world. As we take on their suffering through imagination we will cry out for the conquering King to come on their behalf and release the grip of evil and injustice. With our family, in ways appropriate for their ages, we will allow ourselves to feel grief for the world’s brokenness along with hope that the Prince of Peace will come to save us.



Q and A

Question: Who brings us peace today and forever?

Answer: Jesus, our Savior, the Prince of Peace.

Imaginative Prayer

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God I pray that you will release our imaginations and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(Pause 8-10 seconds)

Come Holy Spirit.

Close your eyes and imagine with me.

God's people are slaves far, far from home, and you are one of them. Your family left their beloved homeland generations ago to escape hunger. You grew up with stories of that home where you could run free, anywhere you wanted, any time you wanted. Now every day is just work, work, work under the watchful hatred of the overseers. It used to be your people could work doing the things you loved—sewing and weaving, building beautiful wood furniture, but now everyone does the same back-breaking work—endlessly making bricks in the hot sun. Adults and children, all working. No play. No rest. Stomach growling with hunger. And bricks, always more bricks to make. Endless bricks! The ruler seems to hate each and every one of you, driving you to collapse, demanding you make more bricks with less supplies. Even decreeing that half of your precious babies be murdered. Clearly your God no longer cares what happens to you. The God of your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is silent, letting you be used and abused, beaten with whips, utterly exhausted, wiped out.

Join together to cry out to your God—"Save us!! God save us!!"

(Pause 8-10 seconds to feel your desperation and hopelessness.)

Then, imagine you have just heard that one of your own people, a man named Moses, has come from freedom to your place of slavery to demand you be freed. Could this be true? What can this mere man do against a Pharaoh and all the might of Egypt? What could he ever accomplish? Dare you let yourself hope?

Imaginative Prayer

(Pause 8-10 seconds to feel your desperation along with the glimmer of hope that a savior has come.)

Fleeing persecution, violence, and war, one in 97 people on Earth is displaced, far from home. (Pause) One in ten people on Earth face hunger and even starvation. (Pause) Our planet is in deep trouble through pollution and depletion of natural resources. (Pause) Half of the world's population lives in poverty, fighting to survive on less than \$2 per day.

(Pause 5 seconds)

What must it feel like to be displaced from home, to be hungry, and to be helplessly poor or enslaved?

(Pause to pray for those who are suffering in these ways.)

Now let's imagine another time in the life of God's people. Close your eyes and imagine being with David as he is fleeing King Saul's soldiers in the wilderness. You have chosen to follow David as your leader. He is young, but he has defeated Goliath with God's strength and courage. David has no earthly power or wealth, but God's prophet Samuel has anointed David to become God's chosen king.

King Saul is jealous of David and is relentlessly chasing you—David and all his faithful followers. You have been on the run from Saul's army for a very long time. You can never rest for long as you move from hiding place to hiding place. What is even harder is that you just glimpsed your very own brothers and cousins among Saul's men, those who are pursuing you and your friends. How could they possibly be enemies?! Why have they not chosen to follow God's anointed one, King David, like you have?! As you move from town to town, you don't know who to trust. Saul's spies are everywhere. When will you ever be able to lie down safely in your own bed, with your own family again?

Join together to cry out to your God—"Save us!! God save us!!"

(Pause 8-10 seconds to feel your worry and fatigue.)

Imaginative Prayer

Then, imagine that you have heard a rumor that King Saul was killed in battle. Could it be true? Might King David be able to rule in Israel at last? Or is this a trick to get you out of hiding? Dare you let yourself hope?

(Pause 8-10 seconds to feel your worry along with a glimmer of hope that the rightful king will rule at last.)

In America, we are experiencing an incredible amount of conflict—political, economic, and religious. Social media is influencing, addicting, and being used to divide our nation. Our churches are shrinking. We disagree about racism and racial oppression. We disrespect and distrust our neighbors, even police and medical caregivers. We worry about national security, immigration and the economy. And then there's the pandemic...

(Pause to pray for those whose families are divided by conflict. Pray for those who have lost friends over political disagreements. Pray for all those who are suffering because of strife or abuse.)

Close your eyes and imagine with me. You have been sick for twelve years now. Doctors haven't helped. Prayers haven't helped. You have spent all your money trying every possible cure. No matter what you do, you are getting weaker and weaker. No matter what terrible or humiliating treatment you try, you have more and more pain. Because of your illness, you have lost not just all your money but also all your family and friends. You are so terribly alone. Does God even see you? Does God even care?

(Pause 8-10 seconds to feel your pain, loneliness, and disappointment with life.)

Then, imagine you overhear neighbors talking about a prophet who may be coming to where you live. They say he can heal anyone. They say he has power over wind, waves, sickness and evil spirits. They say he is the Messiah, the Son of God. Could it be true? Is he really coming? Would he be willing to heal even you? Would he see you? Dare you let yourself hope?

Imaginative Prayer

Let yourself cry out, "Lord Jesus Christ, save me!"

(Pause 8–10 seconds to let yourself hope that Jesus really will come to touch you, to heal you.)

As individuals, we grieve our losses—friends, family members, dreams and expectations, our sense of safety and security. We suffer illnesses and chronic pain. We are wounded by unkind words, abuse, misunderstandings, and accusations. We are profoundly lonely.

(Pause to pray for those who are sick and those who are anxious. Pray for those with chronic pain, with wounds that have not fully healed. Pray for those who are lonely.)

Q and A

Question: Who brings us peace today and forever?

Answer: Jesus, our Savior, the Prince of Peace.

Personal and Family Devotions: Week 4

For the Parent or Reader

We need a savior. The mess of our world on the macro and micro levels makes this abundantly clear. Throughout this Advent season you have been invited to dare to hope again. To invite the thrill of hope for God's salvation. This week we celebrate the fourth week of Advent, the last week of waiting. Soon Christmas will be here. Soon we will celebrate the arrival of baby Jesus, our Prince of Peace. But for this week we link arms with the poor and powerless of the world. With one voice we call out to Jesus, come, rescue.

Personal Devotional

- Look at the news this week, which may be risky. Intentionally seek out articles about the broken and evil things happening in our world. Then pray for those who are suffering as a result. Invite God to come on their behalf into the places of suffering. Invite Jesus to come again as a conquering King in each of their lives.
- Choose people groups to pray for each night—refugees, the poor, homeless, orphans, those who are sick or lonely. Find photos online of real people in these desperate situations. Pray also for individuals by name who you know are suffering.
- Read stories from Scripture where God saved His people and when Jesus brought hope and healing to individuals.

Family Devotional

- Consider inviting your older children to look at the news with you. Intentionally seek out articles about the broken and evil things happening in our world. Then pray for those who are suffering as a result. Invite God to come on their behalf into the places of suffering. Invite Jesus to come again as a conquering King in each of their lives.
- With younger children, choose people groups to pray for each night—refugees, the poor, homeless, orphans, those who are sick or lonely. Find photos online of real people in these desperate situations. (ctd. on next page)



Personal and Family Devotions: Week 4

Personal Devotional

- Turn your concern for peace and justice into action. Buy toys to donate to Toys for Tots. Put cash in the Salvation Army Bell Ringer buckets. Take food or serve at the Lebanon Rescue Mission. Send supplies or cash to Mennonite Disaster Service or Mennonite Central Committee and learn where the donations will be going. Donate to Heifer Project International or to Church World Service and learn about children overseas or refugees.

Family Devotional

- ...Pray also for individuals by name who you know are suffering. Tell or read stories from Scripture where God saved His people and when Jesus brought hope and healing to individuals.
- Turn your concern for peace and justice into action. Buy toys together to donate to Toys for Tots. Put cash in the Salvation Army Bell Ringer buckets. Take food or serve at the Lebanon Rescue Mission. Send supplies or cash to Mennonite Disaster Service or Mennonite Central Committee and learn where the donations will be going. Donate to Heifer Project International or to Church World Service and learn about children overseas or refugees.



Personal and Family Devotions: Week 4

For the Journal

Pray this week with Mary's "Magnificat"

(Luke 1:46-55)

In what ways can you join Mary in the assurance that Christ has won the victory, even before the evidence can be seen? Write the words, phrases or verses that resonate with you in your journal. In what ways is God inviting you to let Christ be born in you, for you to participate in his saving Incarnation?

Pray next with Luke 4:18-21. We too often spiritualize Christ's declaration here. The transformation of the world that he brings is not just personal and spiritual but affects all of society. He is bringing peace and justice to the poor, the oppressed, prisoners and to all who suffer from the brokenness of this world after Eden. In what ways is God inviting you to join Christ's rescue mission in this world?

Make a list of 2-3 practical things you can do in the next month to join Christ in his rescue mission of the world.



Weekly Scriptures

Week 1:

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Week 2:

Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

Week 3:

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

Week 4:

Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:46b-55; Psalm 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-55