

Sun, Dec 1 • Practicing Together



Practicing
Together

Reading

Digging

Listening

Seeing

Doing

INTRODUCTION

The word “Advent”—derived from the Latin word *adventus*—means coming or arrival and is woven into the fabric of the church to signify that the wait is over. The Advent season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. As Christians, we use this special time to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, recalling how the Israelites longed for a Savior. Now, we live between the fulfilled promise of Christ’s first coming and the yet-to-be-fulfilled promise of his second coming. Advent, then, calls us to look back upon Christ’s coming in celebration, while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the future coming of Christ’s Kingdom when he returns for his people.

Use this guide to help prepare your heart for the coming of Christ that we celebrate at Christmas. Each Sunday of Advent starts a new theme of the season, and this guide is broken into one experience for each of those four weeks, plus an experience for Christmas Day (or Christmas Eve). For each experience, this guide includes lighting of the candles, Scripture reading, an element of worship, an optional service activity, and a prayer. We pray this guide will enrich your Advent season.

THE ADVENT WREATH

If you don’t have an Advent wreath, you can find them at any craft store, like Hobby Lobby, or consider putting one together. This simple project can be a great way to include friends or family in your first gathering and talk about the symbolism of each element as you go.

As we progress through the Advent season, the candles are lit one at a time, on each Sunday of Advent. The four themes of Advent are hope, peace, joy and love, in that order.* We will explore these themes as we journey through the season. Additionally, the element of light is woven throughout the whole season. As a new candle is lit each week, you will have the impression of dawning (growing, increasing) light, culminating with the Christ candle.

This year, the first Sunday of Advent falls on December 1, 2024. You’ll light one of the purple candles on this day, signifying hope. The second purple candle, to be lit on December 8, represents peace. On the third Sunday, light the pink candle, which stands for joy. And light the last purple candle on Sunday, December 22. This candle symbolizes love. The four candles—nestled in evergreen which signifies eternal life—represent the 400 years of “silence” between the Old Testament and the New Testament. From the final words of Malachi to the opening words of Matthew, there were 400 years during which God did not speak. No prophetic words were spoken, and the people of God, the children of Israel, waited for the coming of their king, an event promised and prophesied hundreds of years before. Then, on Christmas Eve, as the Apostle Paul says “in the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4), the final white candle is lit, representing the birth of Jesus Christ, the true light of the world.

Scan QR
code or
[CLICK HERE](#)
for simple
instructions
on creating
an Advent
wreath.



**Note: If you research Advent, you may find these themes in a different order, but this is the order Crossings follows.*

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On this first Sunday of Advent, gather your people around the Advent wreath, and ...

LIGHT

One purple candle on the Advent wreath. This week's candle represents hope.

PRAY

God of hope, we light this candle as we prepare for the coming of your Son. Remind us of the hope we find only in you. Awaken our hearts to you this Advent season, so when Christ arrives, we are ready to receive him. Amen.

DISCUSS

- What is something you are wishing for this Christmas?
- Are wishing and hoping the same thing?

Wishes feel a little bit like dreaming about something coming true—like we see in Disney movies. Biblical hope is different from a wish. Our culture's use of the term *hope* is very weak. We hope it doesn't rain. We hope we get a promotion. We hope to win the lottery. Our use of hope is more like wishing. We really want what we are hoping for, but it's not something we have great confidence in.

The biblical idea of hope, on the other hand, involves certainty. It is the confident expectation that something **will** happen. It is based on God's capacity and his promises, not on a whim. The uncertainty—or waiting—is based on **when** it will happen, not **if** it will happen.

This is the kind of hope the Israelites had while they waited for the Savior God had promised.

READ - ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

The Israelites waited, longing for and expecting a Messiah who would come into their world and set everything right. And they had good reason to hope because God had told them many times—like in this passage from Isaiah—that he would send a Savior. They hoped and they waited—they had faith. They anticipated and looked forward to the day when the promise would be fulfilled.

READ - LUKE 2:25-33

Simeon was an Israelite who hoped for the promised Messiah with even more faith and anticipation because the Holy Spirit had promised him that he would get to see the Messiah with his own eyes. Did Simeon wake up each morning and wonder if this was the day the promise would be fulfilled?

Luke tells us the Holy Spirit led him to the temple on the very day Mary and Joseph brought Jesus. Imagine how Simeon must have felt to see the very thing he had been waiting for and anticipating his whole life. That day had finally arrived. The joy he felt must have been overwhelming. God had kept his promise to the Israelites—and to Simeon!

We are like the Israelites—and Simeon before he saw Jesus—because God has made us a promise, too. Jesus will come again. Advent readings traditionally include passages about the second coming of Christ. Because we are in a second advent, we now wait in eager expectation for our Savior's promised return. With anticipation and longing, we look forward to that day when Christ will come again and make all things new.

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WORSHIP

Read or listen to these songs. Consider how the words demonstrate our longing and hope for Jesus' second advent.

COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS

[youtube.com/watch?v=pFloWX1yuyQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFloWX1yuyQ)

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

[youtube.com/watch?v=xQP0JsxEdPo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQP0JsxEdPo)

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who orders all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in its ways to go.

Refrain

O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's stem,
Unto Thine own and rescue them!
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

Refrain

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe for us the heav'nward road,
And bar the way to death's abode.

Refrain

O come, Thou Bright and Morning Star,
And bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
And turn our darkness into light.

Refrain

O come, Desire of nations,
bind In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid all our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.

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Now, we live between the fulfilled promise of Christ's first coming and the yet-to-be-fulfilled promise of his second coming. We celebrate the birth of Jesus, while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the future coming and ultimate fulfillment of God's promises.

This week, whenever you hear the word *hope*, let it remind you of the certainty we have because of God's great faithfulness.

PRAY

God of hope, thank you for all of your promises—the ones you have already fulfilled and the ones for which we continue to hope. Teach us to trust while we wait, knowing that the waiting will cultivate in us a character that reflects your own. Amen.

ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK

GIVING TO OTHERS (GIFTS OR TIME)

The holidays can be hard for people, especially when they are going through a tough time. Consider how you could help ease that burden and be a voice of hope for someone this week. Here are some ideas to get you thinking:

- Choose your favorite non-perishable food items to fill a grocery sack or two and donate them at your local food bank.
- Sponsor a child or family from your church or school to provide Christmas gifts. (Also: Angel Tree, Operation Shoebox, Toys for Tots, Children's Hospital Toy Drive).
- Donate to City Rescue Mission, Bethany Children's Health Center, Regional Food Bank.
- Bake holiday goodies (cookies, bread, candy, etc.) and give to neighbors or public servants (police, firefighters, librarians, mailman, etc.).
- Invite a neighbor or acquaintance over for dinner.
- Volunteer at a food pantry or soup kitchen.
- Ring the bell for the Salvation Army.