

Advent

PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS

RON & LORI MOORE

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BY RON & LORI MOORE

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- ★ This guide begins with the first Sunday of Advent. The celebration order starts with Key Verse(s), followed by Lighting of the Candle(s), Christmas Carols, Passage to Read Aloud, Devotional, Closing Song, and Prayer.
- ★ The first, second, and third Sunday celebrations are followed by six devotionals for the following week. These devotionals are purposed for personal reflection. You may want to read them individually, as a couple, or with your family. Since the calendar will vary regarding the number of days from the last Sunday until Christmas, we did not include devotionals following the fourth Sunday of Advent.
- ★ Advent should be participatory. Involve your children. Have them read Scripture, light the candles, participate in a discussion, sing the carols, read a devotional, say the closing prayer, and blow out the candles. We have tried to keep the format simple, short, and to the point so your children will stay engaged.
- ★ This is a great time to enjoy the Christmas carols. You can also sing some of the Christmas songs your children are already familiar with. The Christmas carols are taken from *Great Hymns of the Faith* (Zondervan). All of our children have noted that their favorite part of Advent has been singing the Christmas songs.
- ★ At the end of this guide we have provided a journal for you to record special memories of Christmas. My wife, Lori, always dates her entries, which allows us to reflect on God's goodness, the events, and the fun we have had through the years.

A Note from the Authors

“Come over tonight and celebrate Advent with my family.” My first thought to Lori’s invitation was, “What in the world is Advent?” However, I was smitten. If she had invited me over to help cut the grass one blade at a time with scissors, I would have asked, “What time?”

When I arrived that evening to celebrate my first Advent, I followed her family into the living room. A wreath was on the table. There was a white candle in the middle of the wreath surrounded by four candles, one of which was pink. The Advent “service” included Scripture reading, prayer, the lighting of a candle, and singing Christmas carols. After one song, one of Lori’s little sisters looked my direction and said, “Somebody is mumbling.” My first Advent participation was less than impressive. The Advent time was simple, meaningful, and short enough for Lori’s two younger sisters to stay engaged.

Over the years we have kept Advent as a part of our family tradition. We have used an Advent guide that Lori made in a fourth grade Sunday school class. Although a bit worn, the guide has served us well. Our prayer is that this guide will help you start the Advent tradition with your family.

We do have one request. Please don’t make Advent a legalistic ritual. That is not the purpose. We do not celebrate Advent “by the letter of the law.” During some Christmas seasons, travel has

kept us from celebrating the first Sunday of Advent. College interrupted the flow for a few years.

A few times we have covered a couple of Sundays on Christmas Eve when our whole family was together. No matter what . . . we have always had fun.

There have been long discussions over who would light the candles. We have four children, so thankfully there was a candle for each one! Our daughter Lara was born on Christmas Day, so she always gets to light the Christ candle lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. The wax running down the candles has always been a little too intriguing. Blowing the candles out needed special instruction so hot wax was not sent flying. Our singing has started with the carol of the day and sometimes morphed into a medley of every Christmas song we know with many special effects and as much laughter as singing.

Our prayer is that this guide will help you start a celebration of Advent with your family, keep your Christmas focused on Jesus, and create some fun and meaningful spiritual memories.

May God bless you as you keep your focus on Jesus through this Christmas season and throughout the year.

Ren & Lori Moore



What Is Advent?

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

—Isaiah 40:1–5

Advent is a Latin word meaning “the coming.” Church leaders officially established Advent in the sixth century as a time for Christians to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas.

Advent is celebrated the four Sundays before Christmas in order to help us prepare for the observance of Christmas.

Advent is purposed to be a time of personal reflection and spiritual growth.

The celebration of Advent is a great time for family worship. The weekly celebration helps parents keep focused during the busy Christmas season. When parents are focused, families are focused on the true meaning and purpose of Christ’s coming. On a personal note, Advent helped our family establish a time to become familiar with the prophecies and stories surrounding the birth of Jesus. It also helped our children learn the verses of well-known Christmas carols.



The Wreath and the Candles

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

—Matthew 5:14–16

The wreath and candles provide tangible symbols that help children (and adults) learn and remember key aspects regarding the coming of Jesus. Each candle also reminds us that Jesus is the Light of the world.

While the candles can represent different aspects of Christmas, we have chosen to focus on God's preparation for Christmas with the following themes.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT:

God Preparing Our Hearts

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT:

God Preparing the World

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT:

God Preparing His Servants

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT:

God Preparing His Son

CHRISTMAS OR CHRISTMAS EVE:

The Arrival of Jesus!

WEEK 1



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

God Preparing Our Hearts

KEY IDEA:

Ask God to prepare your heart for Christmas.

KEY VERSE:

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

—Jeremiah 29:13 NIV

CANDLE LIGHTING

As the first candle is lighted, say, "I light this candle on the first Sunday of Advent to remind us that we must prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus."



WEEK 1



PASSAGE TO READ ALOUD

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. —Psalm 95:1–7 NIV

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

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

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

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

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

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
O drive away the shades of night
And pierce the clouds and bring us light.

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

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home
Where all thy saints with Thee shall dwell—
O come, O come, Emmanuel!

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



WEEK 1



O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
Come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of angels:

O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing all ye bright hosts of heav'n above;
Glory to God,
All glory in the highest:

O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning,
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing:

O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.

DEVOTIONAL

Have you ever attended a sporting event when your team scored and won the game?

You jumped straight up with your arms extended into the air! You shouted a loud shout! You pumped your fist! You gave high fives to everyone around you! You could not contain your excitement. You expressed your joy with your entire being.

The writer of Psalm 95 invites us to sing with that same kind of enthusiasm. He calls us to shout loud praises to God. He summons us to sing at the top of our lungs. We are to come before God with thanksgiving. Our God is amazing! He is the “great King above all gods.” When we sing songs about God we can demonstrate joy with our entire being.

“O Come, All Ye Faithful” is a song that invites God’s people to be joyful and triumphant. Jesus has come! The Savior is here! We can sing with great happiness and excitement. When you come to the chorus sing the first “O come, let us adore Him” quietly. Sing the next “O come, let us adore Him” a little louder. Then belt out the last “O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.” To add to that, how about some high fives for everyone in the room!

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, on this first Sunday of Advent we thank you for sending your Son into this world. Thank you that Jesus came to die on the cross for our sins. As we look forward to Christmas, please prepare our hearts. Help us to celebrate this season in a way that honors you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

MONDAY

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” —Luke 10:41–42 NIV

Christmas is crazy! There are trees to put up and decorate; lights to string; malls to maneuver; gifts to buy; parties to host; parties to attend; Christmas cantatas; food prep; getting the house ready for relatives; wrapping; traveling; managing expectations (sometimes our children’s Christmas list is a bit too long). All some people want for Christmas is for it to be over!

Far too many people go to great lengths in preparing everything for Christmas . . . except their hearts. Everybody in our lives gets what he or she wants . . . except God. In our efforts to get everyone the right gift, we miss the great Gift that God has given to us.

This Christmas let’s slow things down. Let’s keep things simple. Let’s not fall into the “Martha Mentality” and be worried and upset about many things when only one thing should be our focus. Let’s follow the “Mary Model” and keep our emphasis on Jesus. After all, it is HIS birthday we are celebrating.

Closing Prayer

Father, slow me down. I feel the Christmas adrenaline flowing already. Keep me focused. There are so many things I feel I need to do. Prepare my heart. Help me to follow Mary’s example and choose the better things—the things that will continue after this Christmas season is over. In Jesus’ name. Amen

TUESDAY

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

—Jeremiah 29:13 NIV

God is not hiding from you. He is not yelling "cold" or "hot" as you maneuver the spiritual journey trying to find him. He desires to be found.

He wants to meet with you. He wants to have a conversation—an ongoing conversation—with you that warms your heart and reminds you of his presence. When you seek him you will find him.

Begin each day conversing with God. Thank him for a new day fresh with his grace and mercy. Tell him what's on your heart. Talk through your schedule with him. Tell him about that meeting you dread, the things you fear, your frustrations, and the things that bring anxiety to your heart. Talk to him about the people you love. Share your joys. Tell him the things you yearn for, the things you dream about. Ask him to remind you of his constant presence throughout the day.

Tell God you want to do Christmas his way this year. Ask him to do his work of preparation in your heart. Ask him to help you lead your family through the season (and beyond) in a way that honors him and serves others. Here's the promise of preparation: When you seek him you will find him when you seek him with all your heart.

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to desire you. I have so many things to do. Help me slow down. Capture my focus and make it yours. Prepare my heart for Christmas. In Jesus' name. Amen