

Advent Devotions for Family & Personal Worship

Devotions and Scripture readings to read on your own, with friends, or with your family for every day of the Advent season. This year, Advent begins on Sunday, December 2, 2007 and ends on Christmas' Eve, Monday, December 24, 2007.

Sunday, December 2, 2007

An Introduction to Advent

Advent means "coming." It has historically tied the First Advent (the coming of Christ in the manger at Bethlehem) to the Second Advent (the coming of Christ again to the earth in Rev. 1:7; 19:11-16). Christians for many years have used this season to anticipate the celebration of Christmas on December 25.

The Advent Wreath: An advent wreath usually includes a simple wreath with five candles.

- Four red candles* will be lit each Sunday of December leading up to Christmas and each will symbolize one of the following themes: Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy.
- One white candle* in the center is called the "Christ Candle" and will be lit on Christmas Eve to represent Christ's birth.

Take a few minutes to read part or all of Luke 2 and think about the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth and what that means for you today. Think of ways you can focus on the hope that Christ brings to your life during this first week of Advent.



Light the first red candle to symbolize the Hope we have in Jesus Christ.

*You can make the Advent wreath as simple or elaborate as you wish. Other traditions use three purple candles, a pink candle, and a white candle. Feel free to adapt this any way you wish.

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Monday, December 3

Read Isaiah 9:6-7

He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

We celebrate the season of Advent because God has entered human history in the form of a man. Never before and never since has humanity had a greater hope than in Jesus Christ.

- When you are confused, discouraged, or brokenhearted, He is the Wonderful Counselor.
- When your circumstances seem impossible, when failure appears to be inevitable, and when it looks as though your world is caving in, He is the Mighty God.
- When loneliness creeps in or it seems no one cares, He is the Everlasting Father. He is the one who passes on to you an inheritance making you a part of a royal family.
- When the stress of hectic schedules and demands upon your time take their toll, when the family scene is anything but “heaven on earth” remember, He is the Prince of Peace.

Begin your prayer by thanking God for being sufficient for everything you will face today. Commit yourself to living in that sufficiency as a praise offering right now. Be sensitive today to the Word of God. Listen for His voice; look for His hand upon your life. Tune out the garbage. You’ll be in for a real adventure.

Tuesday, December 4

Read Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Lord God is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor.

This was the text for one of Jesus’ first sermons. (It almost cost Him His life.) His entire ministry can be seen as an investment in human need.

What can be said about your personal ministry? How many needs will be met as a result of your willingness to be faithful to His empowering leadership? God’s will for us is to be “encouraged people” on a mission of encouragement, for if you know Christ personally, the Spirit of the sovereign LORD is upon you too!

Pray today for your pastor. Ask God to give him strength to preach faithfully. In addition to this, pray for the encouragement of his soul, mind and body. Ask God to show you one way that you can minister to your pastor during this season of Advent.

Wednesday, December 5

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34

Look, the days are coming ... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.

The Old Testament is a road sign pointing toward Jesus Christ. It points to God’s promises for you and me. Here is just one of them which God has already fulfilled in the birth and life of Jesus.

Wouldn’t it be a great world if we kept our promises the same way God does? Is your word still good? If you say you’re going to do something, can you be depended on to completely fulfill your promise? What about your promises to God? Are there any that need to be rededicated today?

Advent holds great meaning to those who keep their word. Advent is about promises fulfilled. Advent reminds us that He who promised is faithful. He promised to send His son and He did. He promised to send Him again, and He will.

Pray today about the promises you’ve made to others, and the promises you’ve made to God. Ask for the strength to keep them both and then look for ways to do that.

Thursday, December 6

Read Joel 2:28-29

I will pour out My Spirit on all humanity.

Here's yet another promise kept by God. He keeps His promises to us because He is faithful and true. As you experience this time of remembering God's promises, allow His Spirit to search your heart. Be faithful to deal with everything that the Holy Spirit brings to the light. Following times of confession, we often emerge from our prayer closets with a stronger conviction that God can be counted on to work out His plan for our lives.

Pray for your church today in a very special way. Remember those who serve in leadership positions of your church. Remember the ministries of your church and the people those ministries are seeking to reach. Ask God to allow your church to be sensitive to His already poured out Spirit. Pray for spiritual renewal!

Spend time in your private worship today by asking God to show you how to become more sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Friday, December 7

Read Micah 5:2-5

**Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah;
One will come from you to be ruler over Israel for Me.**

Here is one more evidence that God keeps His word perfectly. It is a promise, actually a prophecy concerning the birthplace of our Lord. Christ was not born by fluke or chance, it was no accident. Instead, God carefully crafted and masterminded the entire event, even down to the place of Jesus' birth.

Find encouragement today because God keeps His promises. He is absolutely true to His plan. He performs in ways that we do not always understand, but the end result is always according to His plan.

If you have any reservations about what God is doing in your life, admit that in a time of prayer. Recommit yourself today to be sensitive to His leading.

Saturday, December 8

Read Matthew 1:16-17

**... and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus who is called the Messiah. So all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations;
and from David until the exile to Babylon, 14 generations;
and from the exile to Babylon until the Messiah, 14 generations.**

Take a moment to observe the beauty of the crafted, master planned work of God as recorded in the first 17 verses of this chapter. King James has a tendency to lose us in all the "begats" but they are included for a reason.

The generations all experienced hardships, certainly times when to throw in the towel seemed better than life itself. But God had a plan.

He still does. Advent reminds us that the plan continues and includes each of us to a full measure according to God's will.

If you have said no to God in recent days, or if your spiritual indicators point to a stubbornness in your relationship toward His unfolding plan for your life, pause and settle the issue with Him today.

Sunday, December 9

Read Matthew 1:18-21

Light the second red candle in the Advent Wreath which represents our Peace in Christ.

**The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way:
After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered
before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit.**

Ever played “what if?”

- What if something had not happened the way it did?
- What if I had been there?
- What if it had happened today?

First of all, notice Joseph tried to intervene and take care of the situation quietly and discretely. What if he had succeeded? It would only have taken a matter of time and Mary would have become the object of scorn and ridicule, perhaps even stoned for suspicion of adultery.

- What if Joseph had been insensitive to the dream dismissing it as coincidence. What if he had said “God, are you sure? I’ll believe you if you give me a sign.”
- What if all of this took place in 2007? Mary would have been a pregnant, unmarried, young teenager. Someone inevitably would suggest that she have an abortion. No one would believe her story.

Regardless, anything other than what we find recorded in Scripture surrounding the birth of Christ would have been man’s attempt to make things more convenient with no place for the miraculous fingerprint of God.

Advent brings us to the remembrance of commitments, not convenience. Each candle, successively lit, brings light into the dark corners of our lives. Keep the flame burning brightly today. Trust God to use you as a small instrument in the incredible outworking of His magnificent plan. Pray for God’s Peace to be on you, your family, and those you encounter today.

Monday, December 10

Read Matthew 1:22-23

... and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us.”

Dr. Ferris Jordan was a professor of mine while in Seminary. He was diagnosed with cancer early in the fall of 1981, a diagnosis which not only alarmed his family, but shocked the seminary campus as well. Prayers were said as students and faculty members interceded on his behalf prior to his cancer treatments. Just before the Christmas Holiday break, Dr. Jordan stood in the Seminary Chapel to address the entire student body during chapel service.

With grace and dignity this man of God, somewhat weakened by the disease which had touched his life, stood and proclaimed that the name, Immanuel, God with us, had taken on a deeper meaning to him during those difficult days.

I hope that you never have to experience anything so tragic and threatening as cancer to discover the presence of the Lord in your life. It’s great to know that He’s there in such times, but remember, He’s there in the good times too. Advent celebrates the birth long ago, the presence today, and the anticipated second coming of our Savior. If you really need to sense Immanuel in an area of your life, pray now, trusting that God is with you.



Tuesday, December 11

Read Matthew 1:24-25

He did as the Lord's angel had commanded him.

Without obedience, there would have been a very different ending to the story of Christmas. Joseph did what he was told. Plenty of room for question, but instead, he simply offered obedience.

No wonder God selected Joseph to be the earthly role model for a father to Jesus. What a tender heart he must have had.

If obedience replaced pride, fear, and replaced laziness, God could change our entire world. What could be the effect of total obedience in your world, your sphere of influence? Would apologies be said? Would stewardship increase? Would your neighbor or coworker be won to the Lord?

Ask God for the grace you need to be obedient even under difficult circumstances. Make a list of the things that His Spirit brings to your attention, then get busy practicing obedience.

Wednesday, December 12

Read Matthew 2:1-2

[We] have come to worship Him.

Why do you worship the Lord? Make a list and place on it all of the reasons you find to worship Jesus. Your answers may include:

- He healed the sick.
- He fed the five thousand.
- He walked on water.
- He died for my sin.
- He rose from the grave.
- Not one of those reasons mattered to the Magi.

They worshiped the King, not the things the King had done, after all, He was only a baby, perhaps a small child by this time. They were lead by a star, which is a reflection of light much like the moon. The light was Jesus.

We call our thanks to God "worship" when in reality, it is only a portion of worship. While considering the season, try worshiping the Savior, not just the things the Savior has done.

Advent is a time for adoration. Write a prayer today completing this sentence: "Jesus, I love you because..." Try to leave out your thanks for the things He has done for you.

Thursday, December 13

Read Matthew 2:3-8

Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find Him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship Him."

Two biblical principles emerge from this passage:

1. You will never experience real worship based on someone else's search.
2. You cannot fool God by going through the motions of worship with a wrong heart.

With Advent upon us, and Christmas just around the corner, do you sense a tendency to be like Herod in your worship patterns? Here's a simple solution if the answer is "yes" and some preventative maintenance if not.

Be personal with God. Get to know Him, stay in constant contact with Him. Examine your motives for service and attendance at your church. Confess those that are wrong.

Quit playing spiritual games. Herod was probably smiling and backslapping with the Magi, but in his heart he was angry, bitter, and fearful. In short, he was a hypocrite, someone acting a part or speaking the scripted lines of another.

Finally, set aside your dark agenda for that which leads to the light. Give up a bad habit, get rid of resentment, restore an unreconciled relationship.

As you pray today, ask God to put a new desire in the hearts of those in your church to really worship Him.

Friday, December 14

Read Matthew 2:9-10

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed beyond measure.

Do you ever get sidetracked from time to time? Interruptions come our way so often, we learn to expect them. Opposition comes once in awhile, and we learn to ignore it. Sometimes the temptation to change our focus seems like the right thing to do.

The Magi heard the king, but then they went on their way. What an example to us. The most important man in the entire area gives them an offer and entices them in secret to change their focus. It could have happened, but thank the Lord it didn't!

What was the result? Rejoicing! If in your pilgrimage toward Christmas this year you discover the temptation to listen to the voices of compromise, don't. Set your mind on the things above. Chart your course by the light of the King of kings. Settle for nothing less.

Confess the times when you have allowed distractions to prevent you from truly worshipping God this year.

Saturday, December 15

Read Matthew 2:11

Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Advent reminds us that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. God loved and gave! It has also been suggested that the tradition of giving presents at Christmas finds its root in the example of the Magi in this verse. Maybe it does. Unfortunately, we have shifted the gift giving to each other rather than to the One whom we worship.

You have the privilege of being a gift giver all year long. At Christmas, this privilege is underscored. Gifts to missions enable the gospel to spread. Gifts to a crisis pregnancy center enable the message of hope to be given to those who may be experiencing what seems like a hopeless dilemma.

Gifts to the poor may provide opportunities for spiritual needs to be met as physical needs are addressed. Worship is giving. As you celebrate advent this year, do so with a gift fit for a King.

Sunday, December 16

Read Matthew 2:12

Light the third red candle symbolizing the Love of God shown in Jesus.

And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

My favorite observation concerning the Magi is this: after worshiping Jesus, they returned another way. Real worship accomplishes this. To worship is to become vulnerable to the sovereignty of another. Real worship effects personal change.

You cannot have a real encounter with the King of Kings and return to your old patterns of hostility, materialism, resentment, cowardice, fear, laziness, pettiness, or hardheartedness. Jesus will change all of that. You will see Him, fall down in worship, and return a changed individual. The old path you've grown used to will no longer satisfy.

Is there a need to change the route of your life today? Come and worship. Come and be changed.

Ask God for clear insight regarding the spiritual compass of your life. Check the direction you are heading. Make any course corrections deemed necessary by the Spirit.



Monday, December 17

Read Matthew 2:13-15

After they were gone, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to Joseph in a dream.

Joseph must have had an extremely sensitive heart to be used in the way he was during the time of Jesus' life, especially during these days when Jesus was such a little, vulnerable, baby boy. Joseph's mind must have been clear and clean, for God spoke to him in dreams.

Would you ask God to do a miracle in cleansing the hearts and minds of His people? Media influences such as television, movies, the music we listen to, and the magazines we often read have so polluted our thought patterns that the discerning ability of God's people has been disastrously affected. We search for God's will in everyday matters; yet, we often get confused because of a value system that is ungodly.

Tuesday, December 18

Read Matthew 2:16-18

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the male children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under.

God has a plan, but He isn't the only one in the planning business. Herod was being used in a diabolical plot to end the life of Jesus before it had much of a chance to begin. You see the fruit of a wicked heart in Herod's life, a heart unwilling to personally search for the Lord.

Pray that in the personal planning of your daily schedule, there will be time set aside to personally get in on the search for God's incarnational reality in your life. If you are reading this near the end of the day, ask yourself this question: Where was God in my day today? If you are beginning your day with this devotion, determine to find where God is working and find fulfillment in His plans.

Wednesday, December 19

Read Matthew 2:19-21

Herod died.

Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there's something about the name of Jesus. In God's scheme of things, He provided a way of escape for His son on more than one occasion. This was because God's plan was greater than man's, and greater than Satan's. His plan for your life is greater than anything else too.

At times, we do not understand what God is doing. We question the difficulties we face wondering why things don't always go our way. I'm sure that Joseph wondered at the logic of closing down his carpenter's shop to pack everything up and head for Egypt. Yet it was a part of God's plan.

Pray for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions (www.ime.imb.org). If you have not given yet, consider doing so this week.

Thursday, December 20

Read Luke 1:26-30

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

If God broke into human history once again as He did at the birth of Jesus, would He find us "favorable"? Mary's testimony, recorded for the world to see, is phenomenal. What made her favorable to God?

We might imagine several character traits such as devotion, purity, or dependability. Maybe God found Mary's prayer life to be favorable. We really don't know. A better question might be "Does God find favor with me?"

You have been chosen to accomplish something significant in the Kingdom. Live your life in such a way that when God gets ready to do a special work in and through you, you will not have to make emergency preparations, forsake sin, mend your ways, nor rebuild your reputation in order to be used.

Pray about the unfavorable characteristics in your heart today.

Friday, December 21

Read Luke 2:1-7

**She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger,
because there was no room for them in the inn.**

When God looks into our lives, all of the business of our days, rushing to malls, fighting traffic, meeting deadlines, hurrying off to company parties, cooking, baking, wrapping, making, mailing. Does He find any room at all to be born, fresh and new?

When God looks at our homes, is there a place prepared for him? Is there room reserved on the schedule where time is given in prayer? Have we given to Him an opportunity to use us by anticipating the fulfillment of His promises by the faith we exhibit in everyday circumstances?

Saturday, December 22

Read Luke 2:8-20

Shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock.

There is something about this story which never grows old. God chose the shepherds to hear the gospel proclamation first. He sent the angelic choir in all of its majesty and splendor, to herald the good news. He provided a way for Joseph and Mary to get the child to the exact place where Old Testament prophecy could become reality. God allowed the animals in the manger to witness the miracle of miracles.

Shepherds and animals. Simple and sometimes a bit smelly, but they alone witness the magnificent. When is the last time you witnessed a miracle? When is the last time you dropped everything, your schedule, your busy agenda, your business concerns, even your religious traditions, so that you could witness first-hand something God was doing?

God may have chosen the shepherds because they were the only ones being still on the night Jesus was born. Maybe you need to be still and wait upon God too.

Pray for those who still have not heard the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Sunday, December 23

Read Luke 1:34-35

Light the fourth red candle to symbolize the Joy that Christ brings.

How can this be?

Sometimes, the challenges we face in life feel impossible. Regardless of what some say, this is true even when we are walking close to the Lord and in the light we celebrate at a time like Advent.

I would prefer being in Egypt, facing uncertainty, knowing I was where God wanted me, than to be any other place in the entire world. He who has promised, "Lo, I am with you always..." is faithful!

Pray today for someone you know who is going through a time of uncertainty. Ask God to show you a way that you can minister.



Monday, December 24, Christmas Eve

Read Luke 1:38, 46-50

Light the white candle, also called the “Christ Candle” to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

I am the Lord’s slave....

Once Mary had the assurance and the promise that nothing was impossible with God, she willingly risked reputation, probably even her life, and accepted the challenge of being the human instrument needed to cradle within her the Son of God. Mary had the capacity of servanthood.

Read Mary’s musical response once again. Think about the commitment required for Mary to risk glorifying God at this point in her life. The world does not come by this understanding of servant hood naturally. It is a characteristic of those in the family of faith.

How can you bring glory to God today in the form of a servant?

Proddings from the Holy Spirit often enable us to become servants of the Most High. How has God’s Spirit been moving or prodding you?

Write out a prayer sometime today.

Reflect upon what you have experienced during this season of Advent.

Write out your commitments, confessions, praises, and requests.

Read the prayer to God as a way of bringing closure to this worship experience called Advent.



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