



ADVENT

A COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS

FAMILY GUIDE

GRACE
KIDS



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HEY GRACE FAMILY!

So many of us are looking for ways to help our kids see Jesus as the real meaning of Christmas, which is why I'm so excited to invite you into something that I believe can help you do that: the celebration of Advent.

Around this time of year, our schedules often blow up. Our rhythms go out the window and the urgency of the season can easily take over everything. What we sometimes miss is that our hearts are shaped and formed by the habits and rhythms we put into our lives.

Advent is a seasonal rhythm. I love it because not only can it help your family focus on Jesus during the Christmas season, but it's a rhythm that can build year after year and is easy to adapt as your family changes.

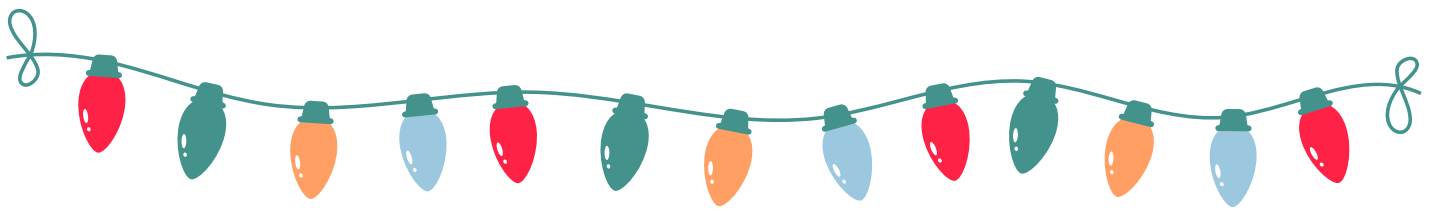
My hope for you is that Advent doesn't become "one more thing" you have to do with your family around Christmas, but instead becomes a beautiful framework for adding meaning to your Christmas season. Through using this guide, it's my hope that you will find three things: wonderful anticipation, a new sense of meaning, and breathing room for God to speak to your heart in a new way.

This Advent Guide is designed to be used once a week (and once on Christmas day) to help you create a rhythm for this season. You don't have to read it word for word (although you can if it's more comfortable for you), and you don't have to feel bad if you miss something. The four themes of Advent - Hope, Peace, Joy, & Love - are used to build anticipation for the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, ending with a celebration on Christmas Day!

I'm looking forward to celebrating with you this Christmas season!

Pastor Evan

Kids Pastor, Grace Kids



A COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER 3RD: ADVENT WEEK 1

- FAMILY TIME- HOPE
- FOLLOW THE STAR GAME

DECEMBER 10TH: ADVENT WEEK 2

- FAMILY TIME- PEACE
- POPSICLE STICK THEATRE

DECEMBER 17TH: ADVENT WEEK 3

- FAMILY TIME- JOY
- POP THAT BUBBLE GAME

DECEMBER 24TH: ADVENT WEEK 4

- FAMILY TIME- LOVE
- CANDY CANE STORY

DECEMBER 25TH: CHRISTMAS DAY

ADVENT

Lots of people know what Christmas is, but not as many people know what Advent is. Many people think of Advent as a 25-day countdown to Christmas, usually marked with a calendar that has chocolate or small prizes in it (like Legos!). But the tradition of Advent is so much more.

Advent comes from the Latin word *Adventus*, which means “Coming”. For over 1500 years, Christian churches and families have used the yearly celebration of Advent to do two big things: look back at Jesus’ first coming (which was promised in the Old Testament and celebrated on Christmas), and look ahead to Jesus’ second coming (which was promised in the New Testament).

The specific ways Advent has been celebrated have changed over time, but one thing has stayed constant: the anticipation that comes from a countdown!

The process of counting down the days to Christmas doesn’t just pass the time - it forms us by building our anticipation of the celebration of Christmas. We slow down, look back, and look forward - and it helps us see a little bit more of what God’s doing in this world.

A FEW MORE HELPFUL NOTES



We have created a Grace Kids Christmas playlist (search for it in Spotify) with all the songs for this guide - plus a few more for you and your family to celebrate this Christmas season!

-SET THE MOOD-

Wiggles, lots of talking, and trying to blow out the candles too soon is *totally normal!* Keep at it, kids are often listening more than we realize and what they are learning may surprise you.

-IT WON'T BE PERFECT-

We have found this Advent devotional works best when done right after dinner at the table or right before bedtime. But as always, we want you to do what works best for your family rhythm!

-TIMING-

For the “Listen To It” portion, our family loves to pull up the artist’s music videos on YouTube to watch. It’s especially helpful for re-engaging the littlest ones in the family.

-MAKE IT YOUR OWN-

WEEK 1- HOPE



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3RD

Set It Up: Place your candles on a tray and turn off the lights. Use a flashlight to read.

Talk About It: Can you imagine our life without any lights? What do you think that would be like? *Allow response.* Did you know that before Jesus was born, it was like the whole world had no light? It's because there was no hope. There was a problem. The world was full of sin and brokenness and people couldn't fix it. But it wasn't always that way.

You see, at the very beginning of the world God created a beautiful garden and put the first man and woman named Adam and Eve in charge of it. It was an amazing place! The best part was it was a place where God would come be with them! But then something happened. They did the one thing God had told them to not do and their choice brought a big consequence. Sin. Their choice caused brokenness, not just for them, but for their kids and their kids' kids - for everybody. It made it so people couldn't be with God anymore, they couldn't live in His garden anymore, and one day people would die. It was very sad.

But God had a plan.

God loved people so much that He didn't want his relationship with them to be broken forever. God promised Adam and Eve that one day one of their descendants would make things right again. But it took a long time!

Is there anything you have waited for that took a long time? *Allow response.*

God chose a family to show the world what it looked like to be in relationship with Him. But, people were still broken by sin. It was hard for people, and they kept messing it up and getting it wrong and there was still sadness and death in the world. But God kept reminding them that He had a plan and would make things right. He told them there was hope and that the world wouldn't be broken by sin forever. He promised a person who would come to fix everything.

Do you have an idea of who that person is? *Allow Response.* It's Jesus!

Read It:

- Isaiah 7:14
- Isaiah 9:2- **After reading this verse, light the first white candle and say, “Jesus is the Light of the World.” *Have kids repeat.***

Say It: Just like this one small candle changes the whole room, when Jesus was born as a baby, it changed everything. Jesus brought hope into the world and the world would never be the same again.

- Matthew 1:18-23

Optional: Luke 1:26-38

Listen to It/Sing It:

- Come Thou Long Expected Jesus By Meredith Andrews
- O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Pray It:

Lead your kids sentence by sentence through this prayer:

Jesus, thank you for the hope you brought into our world. Without you everything was dark and broken, but you came so we could know God again. Please help us see the light of hope this Christmas season.



Follow the Star Game

One part of the Christmas story (told in the book of Matthew) is how the Wise Men followed a star to search for Jesus when he was born. The goal for kids is to do what the wise men did - follow the star to Jesus!

The game is simple: take the star ornament (found in your kit) and hide it somewhere in your house, then let your kids find it!

Depending on the ages of your kids, you can make this easy or difficult. How often and when you hide the star is also flexible. Some families will have fun hiding it every day leading up to Christmas, others will only do the Sundays of Advent. You can hide it overnight and let your kids find it in the morning, or you can hide it while they're at school and let them find it once they get home. If you have multiple kids, have each one secretly tell you once they've found it instead of pointing it out, that way each child gets to experience the joy of finding the star.

On Christmas Eve, put a nativity scene (any set works, including the popsicle stick nativity you can create in Week 2) under the tree, and hide the star for the final time above the nativity so that your kids get to "Follow the Star" all the way to Christmas morning and find Jesus in the manger.

WEEK 2- PEACE



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10TH

Set It Up: Place your candles on a tray and light the first white candle.

Talk About It: What do you think of when I say peace? *Allow for response.* Add what you think of when you hear the word peace. What about when I say broken or sad? *Allow for response.* Add what you think of when you think of broken.

We can probably think of broken or sad things around us today; like when someone gets so mad that they scream at their friend or sibling, calling them a mean name, or trying to hurt them. When a family breaks apart even though we wish it would stay together. When we hear about, or see people get sick, or people dying. All of that comes from the brokenness caused by sin. You can probably think of some things right now that are tough. *Allow for response and be sensitive to what's said.*

But remember how last week we talked about Jesus bringing hope? Well, Jesus also brings peace. In fact, the Bible calls Jesus the “Prince of Peace”! God promised in His plan that He would send a “Prince of Peace” into the brokenness and tough things of this world.

The Bible also calls Jesus “Emmanuel” - that means “God is with us.” This means that when we go through tough stuff, or we feel anxious, scared, or lonely, we can have peace because we are never alone. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is always with us, and we can trust him to take care of us.

Read It:

- Isaiah 9:6-7
- Luke 2:1-7

After reading this verse, light the second white candle and say, “Jesus is the Prince of Peace.” *Have kids repeat.*

Listen to It/Sing It:

- O Come, All You Unfaithful By Sovereign Grace
- Silent Night
- *Optional:* It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Pray It:

Lead your kids sentence by sentence through this prayer:

Jesus, I'm so glad you're the Prince of Peace. Thank you for being with me no matter what I'm going through. Please help me to find my peace in you this Christmas season, and all through the year.



Popsicle Stick Theater

Many kids enjoy reenacting the Christmas story, often using the pieces from a Nativity set or acting it out themselves. The goal this week is for kids to create their own nativity scene using popsicle stick puppets!

For this craft you'll need: Nativity figure cutouts (in your kit), popsicle sticks (in your kit), scissors, & tape or glue to attach the cutouts to popsicle sticks.

Have kids carefully cut out the Nativity figures and attach them to the popsicle sticks (help them as needed). You can use this time to ask questions about each figure and create conversations about the Christmas story.

Once you've created your popsicles stick puppets, your retelling of the Christmas story can be as simple or creative as you choose. You can sit on the floor and move the puppets around, or you can create a whole popsicle stick theatre with stage and sound effects, or even record it! Whatever fits your family. Enjoy the moments of exploring the story together.

WEEK 3- JOY



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17TH

Set It Up: Place your candles on a tray, light the first and second white candle.

Talk About It: What is the best news you have ever received? *Allow for response.* What is the best news that you think someone could tell you? *Allow for response.* Maybe it's an exciting trip, or someone you love is coming to visit or you're about to get a really awesome gift!

In our Bible reading today, we are going to read about some people who received the best news ever in the history of the whole world!

You see, the people we are going to read about today are shepherds. Now, they weren't just any shepherds taking care of just any old sheep. These particular shepherds lived in the town of Bethlehem just six miles outside of the city of Jerusalem. There was something really important in Jerusalem: the Temple. This was the place where God's people would come to be in relationship with Him. But before Jesus, there were a bunch of things that God asked His people to do in order to be with Him. In fact, there are whole books of the Bible that talk about these things. One of the things they had to do was offer sacrifices. That's where the sheep come in.

Back in the beginning in the garden, Adam and Eve's sin brought death into the world, and God covered their sin through the death of an animal (*Optional- See Genesis 3*). At the Temple, sheep were used as the sacrifice to cover the people's sin. This was part of God's plan to restore his relationship with His people.

For God's people, sacrificing sheep and keeping all of God's rules just to get to God was hard. They kept getting it wrong and messing it up! They needed help. They needed a Savior! They needed God to send the person he promised who could save them from the sin and brokenness of the world.

These shepherds we are about to read about were the ones taking care of the sheep that would be used at the Temple. They were reminded every day how much they needed God's promised Savior to come!

And that's why the message the Shepherds received was the best news ever! After waiting for so long, they were the very first ones to be told about Jesus' birth!

Read It:

- Luke 2:8-20

After reading this verse, light the third white candle and say, "Jesus is the Savior." *Have kids repeat.*

Listen to It/Sing It:

- Go Tell it on the Mountain By King & Country
- Joy to the World
- *Optional:* Hark the Herald

Pray It:

Lead your kids sentence by sentence through this prayer:

God, thank you for sending Jesus to bring joy into the world. The news that you were born was the best news ever! Please help me to live in your joy each and every day.



Pop That Bubble! Game

Young and old, there are lots of people who love bubbles! There's just something about the way they float through the air and pop that brings so much happiness. The goal this week is to laugh and have fun together using bubbles!

The game is simple: blow lots of bubbles (found in your kit), and pop them together!

Depending on the age of your kids, you can make this game more or less competitive. If you have young kids, simply blowing and watching the bubbles pop on the ground or their hand is fun! If your kids are older, let them blow the bubbles and see who can pop them the quickest, or have them only use certain parts of them (nose, toes, elbows) to pop the bubbles. At the end of the game, give your kids a big hug and go to the section below.

Bubbles are a great example of the difference between happiness and joy. Like bubbles that appear almost magically and then pop with the slightest touch, happiness comes quickly and goes quickly. But joy is something much more like a hug - after the initial moment, the warmth of it lasts, and it reminds us of something real and solid. Joy is something that God puts inside of us, and it's something that can last because God is always with us!



Set it Up: Place your candles on a tray and light the first, second and third white candles.

Talk About It: Tonight is our final night of Advent, so we are going to switch things up a little bit! Tonight we are going to read our verses from the Bible first!

Read It:

- John 1:1-5
- John 1:14
- John 3:16-17

Talk About It: When Jesus was born, he didn't stay a baby! He grew up and became a man. While he was here on earth, he talked about God's love and showed people what God's love looked like. He also talked about a New Kingdom that he was bringing! This New Kingdom was the fulfillment of the promise God made at the very beginning in the Garden to make everything right again.

Jesus showed the people a new way to live life, a life that would be through Him. To everyone who believes that Jesus is God's promised Savior, God offers the gift of new life and a relationship with Him that will last forever!

Pause. Light the fourth white candle and say, "Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life." *Have kids repeat.*

One day, everyone who loves Jesus will get to be with God forever! It will be just like it was (actually better than) in the garden. We will be with God and He will be with us in His New Kingdom!

But we don't have to wait until then.

Because of Jesus, we get to help bring that New Kingdom and God's love here to earth. Just like on Christmas we get presents and give presents away, because we have received God's love through Jesus, we can show God's love to others around us!

What are some ways we can show others God's love? *Allow for response.*
How can our family show someone God's love this week? *Allow for response. Plan a time to do that thing.*

Listen to It/Sing It:

- Who Would Have Dreamed By Sovereign Grace
- O Come All Ye Faithful

Pray It:

Lead your kids sentence by sentence through this prayer:

God, thank you for loving the world so much that you sent Jesus to save us. Your love is amazing! Please help us to receive your love first, then share your love with our world.



Candy Cane Story

Candy canes are a sweet part of the Christmas Season, but there's actually a cool story behind them! The goal this week is to remember Jesus' love using the story of the candy cane.

For this activity you'll need: a candy cane (found in your kit), Christmas tree (found in your house!)

Show your kids the candy cane and ask them these questions:

- Do you think the candy cane means anything? *(The candy cane was first made by people who loved Jesus and wanted to help kids remember him)*
- What shape do you see? *(It's shaped like a J for Jesus, and also like a shepherd's staff to remind us Jesus is the Good Shepherd)*
- What colors do you see? *(White, which reminds us how perfect Jesus is. Red, which reminds us of how he bled as he was whipped and then died on the cross to save us from sin)*

Take the candy cane and allow your kids to find a special place to put it on the Christmas tree where it can remind them of Jesus.



Set it Up: Place your candles on a tray and light all the white candles.

Talk About It: Today is the day we have been waiting for! It's Christmas! Does anyone remember the four themes of Advent? *Allow response.* Yes, they are Hope, Peace, Joy and Love! Today, we get to light the last candle of Advent, which is the Jesus candle.

Pause and light the red candle.

When we light this candle, we are choosing to remember why we are celebrating Christmas today. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus. The baby who brought God's promise of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love!

Read It: The Whole Christmas Story

- Luke 2:1-20
- Matthew 2:1-12

Listen to It/Sing It:

Enjoy the Grace Kids Christmas Playlist today.

Pray It:

Lead your kids sentence by sentence through this prayer:

God, thank you for your Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Thank you for Jesus! You promised to make things right, and you kept your promise. We praise you today!



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