

Faith-Filled HOLIDAYS

Christmas / Advent Season

Week 1 - Hope

Best Use

As a way to anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus and recapture the tradition of Advent in your home this Christmas season

Purpose

The word Advent comes from the Latin word that means *coming* or *arrival*. For centuries the Church has celebrated the four week Advent season by lighting candles in a wreath and reflecting on the coming of Jesus as told in Scripture. The circle of the wreath represents God's never-ending love for us, the evergreens represent Christ's gift of eternal life and the candles announce Jesus as the Light of the World.

Advance Preparation

You can find an Advent wreath and candles in the arts & crafts or holiday section of many stores. You will need some kind of simple wreath and five candles. Arrange them in the center of your table throughout the Christmas season. Use this *Advent* activity to guide your family through a brief moment of reflection during a meal or bedtime snack each of the four weeks before Christmas and on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Light the first candle:

Before eating light the first candle. Traditionally a purple candle is lit first, but the color is not important. Consider taking turns lighting the candles and reading the verses each week.

Explain:

The first week of Advent is the week of *Hope*. The story of Jesus' birth actually began thousands of years before he was born. God promised the people of Israel that he would provide a Messiah (Savior) to save them from their sins. For centuries, the people of Israel waited with great hope for the Messiah to come.

Read:

Isaiah 7:14 - *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

Explain:

The prophet Isaiah, who lived hundreds of years before Jesus, predicted the birth of Jesus as a promise of hope from God. The word Immanuel means God living with us, and was fulfilled when Jesus came to live on earth as the Messiah.

Discuss:

- What is something you are hoping for this Christmas?
- What's the hardest part of waiting until Christmas to receive your presents?
- Can you imagine waiting hundreds of years for Jesus to come like the people of Israel had to do?

Pray:

Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of your son Jesus who was not only the hope of Israel thousands of years ago, but our hope of salvation today. Help us to keep the hope of Jesus in our home this Christmas season. Amen.

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Week 2 - Peace

Best Use

As a way to anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus and recapture the tradition of Advent in your home this Christmas season

Purpose

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Advance Preparation

You can find an Advent wreath and candles in the arts & crafts or holiday section of many stores. You will need some kind of simple wreath and five candles. Arrange them in the center of your table throughout the Christmas season. Use this *Advent* activity to guide your family through a brief moment of reflection during a meal or bedtime snack of the four weeks before Christmas and on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Light the candles:

Before eating, light the first candle and remind everyone that it is the candle of Hope. Then light the second candle and explain that it is the candle of Peace. Traditionally these are both the color purple, but the color is not important. Consider taking turns lighting the candles and reading the verses each week.

Read:

Isaiah 9:6 – *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Explain:

The Second Week of Advent is the week of Peace. This verse tells us that Jesus came to be the *Prince of Peace*. The word peace is the Hebrew word *shalom* which means *completeness* or *well being*. Jesus didn't come just to end wars, but to make us complete by saving us from our sinfulness. All we have to do is trust in Jesus as the Son of God who came to save us and we will have the peace, or *shalom*, of God.

Discuss:

- Did you know that shalom continues to this day as a Hebrew greeting that wishes someone well? Turn to one another and greet each other with, "Shalom!"
- What are some areas where we don't always have peace in our lives? (Not getting along with our family or friends, overloaded schedule, finances, etc.)
- What are some things that can keep us from having peace with God? (Not obeying our parents, breaking rules at school, arguing with our spouse, etc.)

Pray:

Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of your son Jesus who came to be the *Prince of Peace* and save us from our sinfulness. Help us to trust in Jesus to make us complete and to show the peace of Jesus to one another. Amen.

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Week 3 - Love

Best Use

As a way to anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus and recapture the tradition of Advent in your home this Christmas season

Purpose

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Advance Preparation

You can find an Advent wreath and candles in the arts & crafts or holiday section of many stores. You will need some kind of simple wreath and five candles. Arrange them in the center of your table throughout the Christmas season. Use this *Advent* activity to guide your family through a brief moment of reflection during a meal or bedtime snack of the four weeks before Christmas and on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Light the candles:

Before eating, light the first two candles and remind everyone that these are the candles of Hope and Peace. Then light the third candle and explain it is the candle of Love. Traditionally the first three candles lit are purple, but the color is not important. Consider taking turns lighting the candles and reading the verse each week.

Read:

John 3:16 – *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Explain:

The Third Week of Advent is the week of Love. This verse tells us that Jesus came because God loves us so much that he doesn't want any of us to miss out on spending eternity (forever) with him. All we have to do is *believe* that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save us. God's love for us is one of the main themes the Apostle John wrote about in the Bible. He tells us in another verse that the greatest love anyone can have is to give their life for others (John 15:13). He also tells us we are to *love one another* because *love comes from God* (1 John 4:7).

Discuss:

- Who are the people you love the most?
- What would you be willing to give up for those you love? (favorite toys, choosing the TV show, time for hobbies, money, career aspirations, etc.)
- How much do you think God had to love us in order to give his son for us?

Pray:

Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of your son Jesus who came because you love us so much and want to spend forever with us. Help us to believe that Jesus came to save us and help us to show your love to one another. Amen.

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Week 4 – Joy

Best Use

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Advance Preparation

You can find an Advent wreath and candles in the arts & crafts or holiday section of many stores. You will need some kind of simple wreath and five candles. Arrange them in the center of your table throughout the Christmas season. Use this *Advent* activity to guide your family through a brief moment of reflection during a meal or bedtime snack of the four weeks before Christmas and on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Light the candles:

Before eating, light the first three candles and remind everyone that these are the candles of Hope, Peace and Love. Then light the fourth candle and explain it is the candle of Joy. Traditionally the first three candles lit are purple and the fourth is pink, the color of Joy, but any color will work. Consider taking turns lighting and reading the verse each week.

Read:

Luke 2:10-11 – *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”*

Explain:

The fourth week of Advent is Joy. This verse is from the story of Jesus' birth. The angels appeared to the shepherds in the fields nearby to announce that a baby has been born in a manger. The angels describe Jesus' birth as “good news of great joy” because he came to be our Savior! The Bible tells us that right after they announced this news to the shepherds, thousands of angels appeared and sang glory to God because Jesus had been born.

Discuss:

- Joy means *happy, delight* or even *rejoice*. What are some things that bring us joy at Christmas? (family, gifts, parties, etc.)
- Why did the angels say that the news of Jesus' birth is great joy? (Because he came to be the Savior of all people.)
- The Christmas carol *Joy to the World* includes the line, “let every heart prepare him [Jesus] room.” Have you prepared room in your heart for Jesus by trusting in him as your Savior? Have we prepared room in our Christmas activities for him?

Pray:

Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of your son Jesus who came to be the Savior for everyone who trusts in him. Help us to remember that Jesus came to save us and help us to share the great joy of this good news with one another. Amen.

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Christmas Day

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Advance Preparation

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Light the candles:

Before eating, light the first four candles and remind everyone that these are the candles of Hope, Peace, Love and Joy. Light the fifth candle and explain it is the candle of Christ. Traditionally, the first three candles lit are purple, the fourth is pink, and the fifth is white, but any colors will work.

Read:

Luke 2:12...16-17 – *“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” ...So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*

Explain:

The fifth candle celebrates the arrival of Jesus. These verses tell us that Jesus came as a baby born in a manger. The Bible tells us in Philippians that even though Jesus is God and deserved to remain in heaven with God, he chose to come and be born as a baby to be our Savior. In *Week 4 – Joy*, we read how the angels had appeared to the shepherds to tell them about Jesus being born. Today we see how these shepherds responded when they finally saw Jesus for themselves – they were so excited they went and told everyone!

Discuss:

- What about Christmas makes you so excited you want to tell everyone you see? (favorite gift, house with the most lights, trip you took, etc.)
- Why were the shepherds so excited to tell everyone about Jesus? (the angels had appeared to them, Jesus was born in a manger, Jesus was the Savior they had been waiting for, etc.)
- Who are some people with whom you could share the story of Jesus coming to be our Savior?

Pray:

Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of your son Jesus who chose to come and be born as a baby in a manger to be our Savior. Help us to find ways to share the story of Jesus with others. Amen.