

*Journey with your Family
this Christmas season*



Advent

A Devotional by
Pebbles and Stones

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Unless noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from:

Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®)

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Introduction

In a world that is fascinated with tinsel, lights, and Santa Claus, the season of Advent is an opportunity for believers around the world to read and reflect on the birth of Jesus, our Savior.

*“For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,
The mighty God, The everlasting Father,
The Prince of Peace.”
Isaiah 9:6-7*

This 5-lesson intergenerational devotional, *Advent*, is designed to help people of all ages engage in the significance of this event – that the promised Messiah came as Immanuel, God with us, to save His people from their sins (Mt. 1:21-23). It begins on the first Sunday of Advent (Dec. 1), continues through the next three Sundays, and culminates on Christmas Day.

The devotional follows the liturgical calendar in which, traditionally, four candles are lit to represent the themes of hope, joy, peace, and love, and a fifth candle is lit on Christmas Day to represent Christ. As we look at the prophetic events surrounding Jesus’ birth, including the prophecies given to Isaiah, the angel’s visit to Mary, and other events recorded by Luke, this devotional is designed to help you and your family (or small group, school, church, etc.) engage with the story by listening to how God is speaking to you through the Biblical narrative and sharing those reflections with each other.

Each 20-minute devotional has four main parts:

- An Introductory Question
- The Biblical Story
- Listening Prayer & Journaling
- Sharing & Praying

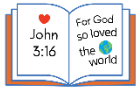
As you begin using these lessons with your family (or small group, church, etc.), we encourage you to create a welcoming environment and, if possible, to have everyone sit in a circle. You may want to introduce why you are gathering and what you will be doing together.



INTRODUCTORY QUESTION (5 min)

Begin each lesson by asking the Introductory Question, which gives everyone a personal connection to the Biblical Story. It also helps everyone get to know each other.

After you ask the question, make sure each person has an opportunity to answer. Don’t force answers from anyone. You may want to begin by sharing your own answer first. Once everyone has shared, use your family’s (or group’s) answers to transition into the Biblical Story.



BIBLICAL STORY (5-10 min)

Share the Biblical Story; we encourage you to use a Bible as you tell it. We've included key events as bullet points in each devotional, but we encourage you to read the story beforehand so that you can tell it in an engaging way.

As you tell the story, there is no need to add much interpretation or application. Leave room for the Holy Spirit to teach, convict, and encourage each person in a way that is specific to them during the next part of the devotional: Listening Prayer & Journaling.



LISTENING PRAYER & JOURNALING (5-10 min)

Make sure everyone has paper and crayons (or other materials) so that they can write or draw what God is saying to them. You may choose to play instrumental music in the background; if you do, make sure it does not have a familiar melody or lyrics – these can be a distraction.

Encourage everyone to quiet themselves on the outside and on the inside. We suggest you begin this time by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to speak to each person through the Scripture that has been shared. For example, you might pray something like this:

Dear Father,

Hi, it's me. I've come to spend time with You. I want to tell You about many things, and I want to listen to what You have to say to me. As I think about today's Bible story, help me to hear what You are saying to me through it.

To help everyone get started, encourage them to reflect on the following questions:

Through the Bible Story, what is God telling you...

- *About Himself?*
- *About yourself?*
- *About others?*
- *Is there anything He's asking you to do?*

You can talk to God about anything.



SHARING & PRAYING (10 min)

Give each person a chance to share their journal page or what their conversation with God was about. After each person shares, have those sitting next to them gently lay a hand on their shoulders – always ask permission before doing this – and pray for them, relying on the Holy Spirit's leading as they pray.

If someone is reluctant to share, don't force them. Ask if you or someone else may pray for them.

If anyone is uncomfortable praying out loud, that's okay. Be patient and don't pressure them. If they want to, they can still place a hand on the shoulder of the person who shared, and you or someone else in the group can pray.

Note: it is important to create an environment of empathy and trust within the group. Below are some guidelines that we suggest discussing and committing to with your family or group:

- *We're here to listen, not just with our ears, but with our hearts.*
- *We will be honest; we will trust one another with our experiences and reflections just as they are, without disguise.*
- *We're here to encourage each other. We will not respond with teasing or joking.*
- *We will not judge, be quick to advise, or have a "know-it-all" attitude.*
- *What is said here stays here; we don't share it with others without permission.*

Note: If someone shares that they may be unsafe or in a situation of danger, abuse, or neglect, you *must* follow appropriate guidelines and report it to local authorities. This includes: a) if they are thinking of hurting themselves; b) if they are thinking of hurting someone else; or c) if someone is hurting them, an elderly person, or an adult who needs special care.

Optional: If you have time, you may choose to end each lesson by singing a praise song together or speaking a blessing over your family.

As you meet, we pray that you and your family or small group may experience Eph. 1:17-21:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

How to Adapt for Large Groups

To use this devotional with large groups (i.e. multiple families, churches, etc.), we recommend that large groups split into small groups of 12 or fewer. As you prepare to facilitate a large group meeting, here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- You will need equipped leaders and co-leaders for every small group. No one leads alone.
- It is important to keep each small group intergenerational.

In a large-group meeting, everyone stays together during the Introductory Question and Biblical Story. Not everyone will have time to answer when you ask the Introductory Question. Take a few responses and incorporate them into the Biblical Story. After the Biblical Story, transition into small groups, where group leaders will:

- Repeat the Introductory Question, giving *everyone* a chance to respond.
- Briefly summarize the Biblical Story, incorporating their group's responses to the Introductory Question.
- Continue to lead their small groups through Listening Prayer & Journaling and Sharing & Praying.

Week 1: Hope



Introductory Question: ***What is something that you're hoping for?***



We all have things that we're hoping for. (Incorporate your family's or group's answers to the Introductory Question – for example,) Just like Jenna hopes that she will pass her test, and Samuel hopes that he will be able to see his friends, the people of Israel were hoping for a messiah, a savior – someone who would rescue them. The Israelites had been waiting for thousands of years, and during those years many prophets had told them how the savior would come:

- **Is. 7:14** – “...The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”
- **Is. 9:6** – “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

*Many times, we don't know how or when what we hope for will happen. But the Israelites had been told through the prophets that the Savior would come as a baby, through a virgin birth. Hundreds and hundreds of years passed, and the people who heard these words held on to them and passed them on to their children, who then passed them on to their children, and so on – until what God had told them through the prophets finally happened (**Luke 1:1-2**). Our story today begins with an angel appearing to Mary, a virgin...*

Tell the story from **Luke 1:26-38**, including main events such as:

- God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary, in Galilee (you may want to find Galilee on a map).
- The angel said, “...Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High...”
- “How will this be?” Mary asked. The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God...For no word from God will ever fail.”
- “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”



Invite your family to spend a few minutes in Listening Prayer and Journaling: *As we've listened to these words from the Bible, God has been speaking to us through them. What is God telling you about: Himself, yourself, others, and what to do? You can talk to God about anything.*

Additional prompt: What is something in God's Word that you are hoping to see fulfilled?



When everyone begins to finish Journaling, give each person an opportunity to share what God has been speaking to them. After each person shares, pray for them.

KEY VERSE: Luke 1:38 “...May Your word to me be fulfilled...”

Additional verses: Hebrews 11:1, Micah 5:2

Week 2: Joy



Introductory Question: ***Tell us about a time when you were excited.***



Last week, we focused on the theme of hope and read about the angel Gabriel appearing to the virgin Mary. This week, we will continue the story in **Luke 1:39-56**, when just like Jane was excited that her family was going on vacation, and James was excited when his baby brother was about to be born (incorporate your family's or group's answers to the Introductory Question – for example), *Mary and her cousin Elizabeth were overjoyed at the news that Mary would give birth to the Savior...*

Tell the story from **Luke 1:39-56**, including main events such as:

- Mary went to visit her relatives, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Elizabeth was also expecting a baby (John the Baptist), which was a miracle because of her old age.
- “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!’”
- Mary said, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm...He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”
- Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.



Invite your family to spend a few minutes in Listening Prayer and Journaling: *As we’ve listened to these words from the Bible, God has been speaking to us through them. What is God telling you about: Himself, yourself, others, and what to do? You can talk to God about anything.*

Additional Prompts: What is something you can rejoice about and thank God for?



When everyone begins to finish Journaling, give each person an opportunity to share what God has been speaking to them. After each person shares, pray for them.

KEY VERSE: Luke 1:47-49

“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior...for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.”

Additional Verses: Philippians 4:4, Romans 15:13

Week 3: Love



Introductory Question: **What is a gift you have given to someone you love?**



Last week, we focused on the theme of joy and read about when Mary and Elizabeth rejoiced that Mary would give birth to the Savior. This week, the story continues in **Matt. 1:18-25** and **Luke 2:1-7**. (Incorporate your family's or group's answers to the Introductory Question – for example,) Benjamin gave his son a bike, and Jenny gave her sister a doll. Just as we give gifts to show others that we love them, in our story today, we read about how God showed His love for us by giving us the gift of a Savior. **John 3:16** says it like this: “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.” Here is the story of how God gave us the gift of His Son...

Tell the story from **Mt. 1:18-25**, **Lk. 2:1-7**, and **1 Jn. 4:9-10**, including main events such as:

- While Mary was engaged to Joseph, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit.
- In a dream, the angel of the Lord told Joseph, “Do not be afraid to marry Mary. What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (**Mt. 1:20-21**). Joseph woke up and did everything the angel had commanded him.
- All this happened to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet (**Is. 7:14**) – “the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” (Also see **Heb. 1:3**, **Col. 1:15**, and **Jn. 14:9**.)
- Joseph took Mary to his hometown, Bethlehem, to register for the census. While they were there, Mary gave birth to a son, and they named Him Jesus, as the angel had said.
- **1 John 4:9-10** sums up the story like this: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation [payment] for our sins.” (*See Appendix A: Salvation Prayer on p. 18.)



Invite your family to spend a few minutes in Listening Prayer and Journaling: As we've listened to these words from the Bible, God has been speaking to us through them. What is God telling you about: Himself, yourself, others, and what to do? You can talk to God about anything.

Additional prompt: How can you show God's love to others this week?



When everyone begins to finish Journaling, give each person an opportunity to share what God has been speaking to them. After each person shares, pray for them.

KEY VERSE: 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.”

Additional Verses: Hebrews 1:3, 1 John 4:9-10, Colossians 1:15, John 14:9

Week 4: Peace



Introductory Question: ***Where and when do you feel peace?***



Last week, we focused on the theme of love and read about how God gave us the gift of His Son, Jesus. This week, the story continues in Luke 2:1-21. (Incorporate your family's or group's answers to the Introductory Question – for example,) Just as Marilyn feels peace sitting by water, and Grant feels peace as he falls asleep, we can have peace through Jesus anytime and anywhere. In today's story, the angels tell the shepherds that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is born.

Tell the story from **Luke 2:1-21**, including main events such as:

- While Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to a son, wrapped him in cloths, and laid him in a manger because there was no guest room for them.
- An angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds in the fields, saying, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”
- “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’” The angels’ words echoed what Isaiah had prophesied long ago: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (**Is. 9:6**).
- The shepherds hurried off and found the baby in the manger. “When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”
- Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God Him for all the things they had heard and seen.



Invite your family to spend a few minutes in Listening Prayer and Journaling: *As we've listened to these words from the Bible, God has been speaking to us through them. What is God telling you about: Himself, yourself, others, and what to do? You can talk to God about anything.*

Additional prompts: In what areas of your life do you need to feel God's peace? How can you share God's peace with others?



When everyone begins to finish Journaling, give each person an opportunity to share what God has been speaking to them. After each person shares, pray for them.

KEY VERSE: 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.”

Additional Verses: John 14:27, Ephesians 2:17, Isaiah 11:1-10

Christmas Day



Introductory Question: ***What is something special you have witnessed (seen with your own eyes)?***



*Last time we focused on the theme of peace and read about when the angels announced peace to the shepherds. Today, the story continues in **Luke 2:22-33**. (Incorporate your family's or group's answers to the Introductory Question – for example,) Just as Thomas saw Niagara Falls with his own eyes, and Nancy got to see her baby nephew, in today's story, a man named Simeon got to see something with His own eyes that he had been waiting to see for a long time: the Savior.*

Tell the story from **Luke 2:22-33**, including main events such as:

- Eight days after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary brought Him to the temple to present him to the Lord.
- Simeon was a devout man who had been waiting a long time for the Savior. "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah."
- The Spirit led Simeon into the temple. When he saw Jesus, Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, proclaiming, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." Mary and Joseph marveled at what he said.
- Years later, the apostle Paul wrote this about Jesus: "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (**Titus 2:11-12**).



Invite your family to spend a few minutes in Listening Prayer and Journaling: *As we've listened to these words from the Bible, God has been speaking to us through them. What is God telling you about: Himself, yourself, others, and what to do? You can talk to God about anything.*

Additional prompt: What has God done for you that you could tell someone about?



When everyone begins to finish Journaling, give each person an opportunity to share what God has been speaking to them. After each person shares, pray for them.

KEY VERSE: Luke 2:30-31

"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations..."

Additional Verses: Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 6:23, Mark 5:19

Appendix A: Salvation Prayer

A Note to Parents—

As you go through the Biblical narrative of Advent, you may want to have a discussion with your family about salvation (becoming God’s child). Here is an example of a salvation prayer:

Father,

During Advent, I’ve learned that You sent your only Son Jesus to save me from my sins – – that is, every wrong thing that I ever did or will do, including not believing in Him.

I want to tell you that I am sorry for my sins, and I want to live differently. I believe that Jesus died for me, rose from the grave, and has forgiven me.

I know I will need your help in the future, and I ask you to send your Holy Spirit to guide me.

Thank you.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

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