

Experience Advent!

By Lynnette Boyer

These short lessons have been designed to use by families with children of any age, while gathering around an Advent wreath. It is my hope that the questions for discussion are simple enough to invite even young children into the conversation while being thought-provoking enough to challenge adults to consider how they might pursue a more joy-filled and yielded relationship with Christ.

About the Advent Wreath: The Advent wreath represents the light of God coming to the world through his son, Jesus. The wreath is in the form of a circle, symbolizing the eternity of God, with no beginning and no end. The greenery stands for the everlasting life we have in Christ. As we light the candles, we count down the weeks while we wait to celebrate the arrival of the Promised One, and we are reminded that the darkness of sin and hopelessness recedes as the presence of Jesus becomes manifest. The colors of the candles have meaning, too: in ancient times, purple dye was very expensive and was only available to royalty, so the purple candles remind us that Jesus is coming as our Sovereign King. The one rose-colored candle (lit on the third week) signifies joy at the soon-coming Savior and the white candle in the center is Christ, the light of the world.



Tips for Family Advent Devotions with Children

- Traditionally, the lighting of the Advent wreath takes place each week on Sunday, but any regular time that works well for your family is suitable. Many families place the Advent wreath on the table and burn the appropriate candle(s) each night during dinner.
- You may want to dim the lights to emphasize the contrast between darkness and light and to draw attention to the growing light as the weeks of Advent progress.
- Keep it short. Take into consideration the ages and attention spans of all participants and modify the lessons if needed. Your children will let you know if it is too long!
- Involve the children as much as possible; this will help them to stay focused and “own” the tradition.
 - Some families have the youngest child light the first candle each week, the next oldest light the next candle, and so on. Even a toddler can light a candle with a long-handled lighter and help from an adult.
 - Have children read the scripture passages. Beginning readers can practice reading it beforehand.
 - Gently encourage children to participate in the discussion and to pray a one-sentence prayer with the family.
- Role model good fire safety:
 - Spray fresh greenery with a flame retardant when assembling the wreath and replace it when it appears dry.
 - Don't allow candles to burn down too close to the greenery.
 - Never leave burning candles unattended.

Week 1: Hope

Lighting of the Candles (Read or paraphrase): *The word Advent means "coming," and Advent is a season of hope in the coming of Jesus. We think of the ancient Israelites as they watched and waited for the promised Messiah. We look forward to the future coming of Jesus to straighten out the pain and injustice of this bent and broken world. And we recognize our present need for Jesus to come to us individually, transforming us to be like him. We will light one of the purple candles today to remind us of the hope we have in Jesus and in the knowledge that one day God intends to make the world right again.*

The cry of Advent is "Come, Lord Jesus!" Let's pray that together as we light the first candle.

Light one purple candle and together pray, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Scripture: Read Romans 15:12-13.

Discussion: What do you hope for most? If that desire were granted, how do you think it would change your life?

Prayer: Pray together for the hope that God promises those who trust in Him. Encourage each person to say one sentence, asking God for help in recognizing the great hope that we have in Jesus.

Follow-up: As you tuck your child into bed tonight, ask:

- Where are you discouraged in your own life? How does the good news of Jesus coming give you hope?
- Who do you know that needs some hope? What could you do that might give them hope?

Week 2: Peace

Lighting of the Candles (Read or paraphrase): *Which candle did we light last week? What did it represent? (Hope.) This week we will also light a candle that symbolizes Peace to remind us that Jesus is the source of peace in a troubled world. We think of the announcement of the angels at his birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

Do you remember the prayer we prayed together last week when we lit the candle of Hope? Let's pray it together again as we light both last week's candle and this week's, which stands for Peace.

Light two purple candles and pray together, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Scripture: Read Colossians 1:19-20.

Discussion: Where do you see a need for peace in the world around you? In your own life?

Prayer: Pray for God's promised peace on earth. Encourage each person to say one sentence, asking God to bring peace in one of the areas of need that were mentioned.

Follow-up: As you tuck your child into bed tonight, ask:

- *Tell me about a time when you experienced peace. What was it like? Is there any way to have peace when things around us aren't peaceful?*
- *How could you be a representative of God's peace to someone who needs it this week?*

Week 3: Joy

Lighting of the Candles (Read or paraphrase): *When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angels brought "good news of great joy that will be for all the people." The good news of Jesus' birth still brings great joy for those who eagerly await his coming.*

This week we will light three candles, the two purple ones which stand for Hope and Peace, and the rose-colored one, which stands for Joy. May these candles remind us that our greatest joy comes from knowing Jesus!

Light the candles and pray together, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Scripture: Read 1 Peter 1:8-9.

Discussion: Has there ever been a time when you were full of joy even though things were not going the way you wanted them to in your life? Where did your joy come from?

Prayer: Pray, asking God to give you great joy as you think about the coming of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem and about his desire to live in each one of us. Encourage each person to say one sentence thanking God for giving us such a tremendous reason for joy.

Follow-up: As you tuck your child into bed tonight, ask:

- What keeps you from having joy this Advent season? What has God done that gives you a reason for joy?
- What could you do this week to add some joy to the life of someone you know?

Week 4: Love

Lighting of the Candles (Read or paraphrase): *Today we light all four of the candles around the wreath: the candle of Hope, the candle of Peace, the rose-colored candle of Joy, and now the candle of Love. God loved the world so much that he sent his son to be "God with us."*

Light the candles and pray together, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Scripture: Read 1 John 4:9-11.

Discussion: What is God's love like? Share one or two words that describe God's love.

Prayer: Pray together asking God for help in understanding and experiencing his love. Encourage each person to pray one sentence thanking the Lord for the characteristic(s) of God's love that he or she mentioned.

Follow-up: As you tuck your child into bed tonight, ask:

- How does knowing that God loves you change your life? Can you think of a time when you forgot how big his love for you is? What can you do to remind yourself about how much he loves you?
- What could you do to demonstrate God's love for someone this week?

Christmas Eve or Day

Lighting of the Candles (Read or paraphrase): *For four weeks we have lit these candles and have looked forward with expectation to the hope of deliverance for us and for our world. Now it is time to celebrate! We celebrate his coming as a baby in Bethlehem and we celebrate his coming to us to live in us and change us. Those who walked in darkness have seen a great light! God is, indeed, "with us"!*

We finally get to light the center candle, the Christ candle, representing Jesus, the light of the world. Before we do that, we'll again light the candles that symbolize gifts that God has given us in Jesus: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Light the candles and declare together, "Lord Jesus has come!"

Scriptures: Read John 8:12 and Matthew 5:14.

Discussion: Why do you think Jesus would say that *he* is the light of the world and also say that *you* are the light of the world?

Prayer: Pray that God would help each of you recognize the light of Jesus in your lives in times of darkness and that he would make you a light to others. Encourage each person to say one sentence thanking the Father for sending Jesus to be the light of the world.

Follow-up: As you tuck your child into bed tonight, ask:

- Can you think of a time when it seemed like your life was dark because you were frustrated, afraid, or discouraged? How can you trust Jesus to be the light of your world?
- What opportunities has God given you to be a light to those around you?