



**The Reality of  
Christmas**

**CHOOSING JOY OVER  
CHAOS**

**by Denise Snyder**

**2018 LIVE BOLD SERIES  
ADVENT CELEBRATION**

# The Reality of Christmas

## ADVENT CELEBRATION INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

There is a long history in Christianity of celebrating—seasons, holidays, and special moments. We celebrate because God is good and is deserving of our praise. But we also celebrate in order to remember. When we stop to think about specific seasons or moments, we remember what God has done and how He has proved Himself faithful. This remembering reminds us of the past, comforts us in the present, and gives us hope for the future.

A large portion of the Christian church has long participated in a church calendar to help us remember, celebrate and learn about big events throughout the Bible—Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, second coming, etc.

The very first event on the Christian calendar—the beginning of the year—is the season of Advent. Advent, which is observed throughout the four weeks in the month of December, means “coming” or “arrival” in Latin. It is a time meant to help us prepare for Jesus’ return and remember His birth.

While we often associate the season of Advent with the birth of Christ because the season leads us toward Christmas, it is also heavily related to the longing and ache we have for Christ’s second coming. Advent reminds us of the reality of the world as it is, and makes us hope for the world as it should be—restored and whole once Jesus returns.

Advent reminds us that we live in the time in between Jesus’ two arrivals, and it asks us to prepare our hearts and then act in order to bring others into His kingdom.



# The Reality of Christmas

## ADVENT CELEBRATION ACTIVITY PREPARATION

### Activity Suggestions to Prepare for Advent

\*This booklet suggests a lot of activities to help you participate in Advent. Please pick and choose based on what works for you and your family. If you are new to Advent or busy during this season, feel free to keep it simple!

1. Make an Advent wreath. Advent wreaths can have a variety of looks. Most wreaths include four candles in a circle, with a fifth candle in the middle. You light one candle the first week, two the second week, etc. The Christ candle in the middle is lit for the first time on Christmas Eve. Google "advent wreaths" for lots of ideas for making your own. (You may even want to make your own wax crayon candles with your family. Find a simple tutorial here: <https://www.evermine.com/blog/diy-crayon-candles/>.)

2. If you have a nativity set, don't put all the pieces up at once. Start by placing Mary and Joseph on their way to the stable, with the shepherds in a different spot, and the wise men far away. Each day move them a little closer to the nativity. Don't put Jesus into the scene until Christmas Day. If you have children, you may even want to hide the figures around the house and have your kids search for them. As you find and move the pieces closer to the nativity each day, talk to your kids about the hope we have because Jesus came as a baby and will return again one day!

3. Buy or create an Advent calendar. Look online for a variety of ideas for creating a calendar that helps you prepare your heart for Jesus' first and second coming. If you have young children and don't have time to make an Advent calendar, no problem! Use the free Jesus Storybook Bible Advent reading plan.

4. Get the free link and guide here: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.faithgateway.com/freemiums/jesus-storybook-bible-advent-printables.pdf>.



# Week One

THE REALITY OF  
DARKNESS



# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK ONE: THE REALITY OF DARKNESS

Week 1: Reality of Darkness

Begins Sunday, December 2, 2018

Advent begins, not by focusing on a baby in a manger or shepherds running to meet Him, but by thinking about when Jesus will return to earth as the Bible talks about. Advent does not begin with warm, fuzzy feelings, but with the reality that things are not right in the world. We need only to check out the news or social media to see the reality of what's going on around us—war, famine, fighting, job losses, abuse—the list goes on and on.

As Fleming Rutledge puts it in her book on the season, “Advent begins in the dark.”

It is the reality of the darkness that causes us to long for Jesus to come make things right. It is the reality of sin and brokenness that makes our hearts call out for Him to break into our world, to fix things once and for all.

This first week of Advent, we sit in the dark. We lament (mourn or grieve) the reality of our broken world. But as Christians, we also cry out to God to step in and make things right. He is the one who will bring justice and destroy evil. In the midst of the darkness, we squint—is that a pinprick of light? We call out for God to answer His promise, to send a Savior to show us what it looks like to walk in His way, to rescue us from our sin. Advent begins in the dark, but we cling to the promises of God and wait and watch for His light to break through.



# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK ONE: THE REALITY OF DARKNESS SCRIPTURE READING

### Read the following from Isaiah 64:1-9

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved?

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to our sins.

Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people.

Further reading:

- Psalm 80:4-7
- Mark 13:24-37
- Isaiah 2:1-5
- Psalm 25:1-9

Questions to Consider

1. What are some of the reminders of the reality of darkness in your life or in the lives of your family and friends?
2. Do you long for Jesus to come back? Why or why not?
3. What are some ways you can bring light to the darkness around you?

# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK ONE: THE REALITY OF DARKNESS ACTIVITY

### Activity Suggestions for Week 1

Take in the local and world news this week. What stories stick out to you? What images can't you forget? Call out to God on behalf of those whose stories affect you this week. Consider praying this for them:

*"The Lord is a God who avenges. O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. How long, Lord, will the wicked, how long will the wicked be jubilant?" —Psalm 94:1-3*

Eat a meal by candlelight this week. As you eat in the semi-darkness, talk about ways that you and your friends and family can bring glimmers of light to your community.

Consider planting an amaryllis or paperwhite narcissus bulb in a pot. Put it by a sunny window. As you water it throughout the month, consider how God makes something from nothing. Your plant should be ready to bloom by Christmas.

### Family Activity Suggestions for Week 1

Help your children understand this week's Advent theme in ways that are tangible for them.

1. Consider setting your table this week with a dark or black tablecloth. Read Genesis 1:1-2 together. Ask your children about situations at home or school that need God's light.
2. Each morning this week, pray with your kids, asking God to help them be a light for Him. Also, spend extra time praying with them for people and situations that need God's light.
3. Plan a flashlight scavenger hunt. Hide items around the house, and then turn out the lights and give each child a flashlight. Give them clues to help them as they search out the hidden items with their lights. Talk about how God brings light to the darkness of the world.



# Week Two

THE REALITY OF  
HOPE



# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK TWO: THE REALITY OF HOPE

Week 2: Reality of Hope

Begins Sunday, December 9, 2018

During the first week of Advent, we dealt with the reality of the darkness of the world. We mourned with those who are mourning, and we called out: How long, O Lord? This week, we see the far-off glimmer of light get a little bit closer. We recognize that those of us living in darkness see a great light with the coming of Jesus, the Savior.

It is easy for us to look for hope in the world around us. We find hope in what might be coming around the bend—a promotion, an addition to our family, a new relationship, a coming vacation. But the Bible points us toward the reality that our only hope—the only hope of the world—comes in Jesus. It was His first coming that brought us hope for our salvation. And it is His second coming that we look forward to as He returns to finally make all things new as the one true judge and king.

The idea of Jesus as judge may not always inspire hope in us, but it should! Because when we think of all of the darkness in the world, and then realize that Jesus is a righteous judge who will make the crooked ways straight and level the valleys and hills, we can rejoice with hope! When we recognize that the future that God talks about when Jesus returns is one where evil will be gone and people will finally walk in His way, we overflow with hope.

The reality is that we live in the meantime. God's kingdom is already here, but not yet finalized. And so, as Christians we live in the hope of the future coming of Jesus, the judge and king. And in the meantime, we point people to their only hope for salvation and renewal—Jesus, the great Light who breaks in on our darkness.



# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK TWO: THE REALITY OF HOPE SCRIPTURE READING

Read the following from Isaiah 40:1-11.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

### Further Reading

Mark 1:1-8

Isaiah 9:1-2

Malachi 3:1-4

Philippians 1:3-11

Isaiah 11:1-10

### Questions to Consider

1. What things in your life bring you hope?
2. What excites you most about the idea of Jesus returning one day?
3. Who in your life needs to hear about true hope? How can you share it with them?

# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK TWO: THE REALITY OF HOPE ACTIVITY

### Activity Suggestions for Week 2

The Scripture readings for the second week of Advent call us to learn about John the Baptist. His job was to be a prophet who called people to truth and repentance. He prepared the way for Jesus and His ministry. Be sure to read Mark 1:1-8 and Luke 3:1-20 this week to get a feel for John the Baptist. Consider the following:

- o What stands out to you about John?
- o Would people in your life see you as passionate as He is about the Gospel?

1. Create a hope tree. Get a small artificial tree or a sturdy plant. Set out some clothespins and slips of paper. Write down your hopes on the slips of paper and attach them to the tree. Invite family and visitors to do so as well.

2. Listen to part 1 of Handel's Messiah. This piece uses words straight from the Scriptures associated with Advent. In it, you'll hear the prophecies about the Saviour who is coming as the hope of the world.

3. Take an intentional action this week to bring hope to someone. Consider the following ideas:

- o Be bold and share the good news about Jesus with someone in your life who needs to hear it. This is the greatest hope that could ever enter someone's life!
- o Bring a donation of food, clothing or soap/shampoo/etc. to one of Red Deer's shelters or schools this week.
- o Shovel your neighbour's driveway and sidewalk.
- o Take time to get coffee with a friend or family member who is going through a hard time. Listen and relate to them.

# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK TWO: THE REALITY OF HOPE FAMILY ACTIVITY

### Family Activity Suggestions for Week 2

Help your children understand this week's Advent theme in ways that are tangible for them.

1. Create a Hope Jar to keep on your table this week. Keep slips of paper beside it, and throughout the week, see how many ideas you and your kids can come up with to bring hope to someone around you. Consider shoveling a sidewalk, drawing a picture for a neighbour, buying someone a coffee, volunteering somewhere, bringing friends a baked good, buying a gift for the women's shelter, etc. As you do an activity that brings hope to someone, write it down and put it in the jar. Each evening, talk about ways you shared God's hope with those who need it. At the end of the week, look through all the ways you shared God's hope with others. (You may want to give your kids a special treat or prize at the end of the week as you celebrate sharing hope with others.)

2. If you haven't yet, consider planting an amaryllis or paperwhite narcissus bulb in a pot. Put it by a sunny window. As you prepare your bulb, talk with your kids about how God makes things grow, and how He often makes something beautiful out of a seemingly hopeless situation. Your plant should be ready to bloom by Christmas.



# Week Three

THE REALITY OF  
PROMISE



# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK THREE: THE REALITY OF PROMISE

Week 3: Reality of Promise

Begins Sunday, December 16, 2018

The season of Advent invites us into anticipation. It recognizes our longings. It acknowledges the questions we have that are brought about by a world in which we say that God reigns, but we experience what feels like His absence.

There is a tension in Advent as we remember Jesus' birth and look forward with expectation to His second coming. We live in the middle of this tension, the reality of what we see around us and what we hope for in the future.

And so, during Advent, we often return to our wonderings. As Fleming Rutledge puts it in her book on Advent, "The real question for this season, and for every season, is this: Is there a living God who acts on behalf of his creation? Is there a righteous God who is working his purposes out in and through the griefs and atrocities of the human drama? Is there a God who can make good on his promise of deliverance in our last hour?"

Can God make good on His promise?

The way we answer this question is by looking to what God has done in the past. If we pick up our Bibles and start reading, we will realize that God always keeps His promises. We see it again and again throughout His story. He makes a promise and then we see how He fulfills it, often in unexpected and glorious ways.

Jesus has promised to return. Jesus has promised that one day, He will make all things new. He has promised that He will gather His people to live with Him for eternity. And so, we call out to Him to fulfill His promise to return and fix what is broken. We look to the past and we see His faithfulness. And we trust Him for the future when one day, for God's people, "gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Isaiah 35:10b).



# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK THREE: THE REALITY OF PROMISE SCRIPTURE READING

### Read the following from Isaiah 35:1-10

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

### Further Reading

James 5:7-10

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

### Questions to Consider

1. In what part of life do you most feel the tension we talk about during the Advent season?
2. Look back on your life. What are some ways you have seen God keep His promises?
3. How can you live differently today in anticipation of Jesus keeping His promise to return?

# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK THREE: THE REALITY OF PROMISE ACTIVITY

### Activity Suggestions for Week 3

1. In the book of Joshua, God's people set up 12 stones as a memorial to remember how God had brought them into the land of Israel. In the future, when they walked by with their children, they could stop at the monument and explain what God had done. Stones of remembrance can be important in our lives too—a physical reminder of how God has kept His promises to us. Consider taking a few stones and writing on them the ways God has been faithful to you. Put them in a potted plant in your house. Or you could create other physical reminders of what God has done—through photos, quotes, Scripture, or other special items. Create some kind of visual reminder of God's work in your life.
2. Think of someone in your life who needs to be reminded of God's faithfulness. Do you have a friend or family member who is struggling? Consider sending them a text with a verse (Lamentations 3:22-23 or Hebrews 10:23 are good options), or ask if they want to get together for a conversation and prayer time. Remind them of God's kept promises in the past to give them hope for the future.
3. As Christmas draws near, take time let excitement build as you anticipate God's promise being fulfilled through Jesus. Move the figures of your nativity scene closer to the stable. Watch a Christmas movie or check out the Christmas section on RightNow Media. As you draw closer to the arrival of Jesus, make a point not to get lost in the busyness of the season, but to slow down and thank God for fulfilling His promise through the coming King!

# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK THREE: THE REALITY OF PROMISE FAMILY ACTIVITY

### Family Activity Suggestions for Week 3

Help your children understand this week's Advent theme in ways that are tangible for them.

1. If you haven't yet, sign up for RightNow Media. RightNow Media has a large variety of sermons, informational videos, kids' videos, etc. You can sign up for free by visiting [CrossRoadsChurch.ca/RightNow](http://CrossRoadsChurch.ca/RightNow). Once signed up, visit [RightNowMedia.org](http://RightNowMedia.org) and search "The Biggest Story." Invite your kids to watch it with you. As you watch, keep track of the promises God made and how He fulfilled them. Talk with your kids about our God who can be trusted to keep His promises.
2. Take a walk as a family this week and pick up stones. (Or if the ground is too covered in snow, buy some stones at a craft store.) Provide some acrylic paint and brushes, and invite your kids to paint their stones with fun colours and designs.
3. Each night at supper this week, take time to share stories of how God has kept His promises in your life or in Bible stories. Write a word on a stone to help you remember the promise. Put the stones in a vase or jar to help remember what God has done!



# Week Four

THE REALITY OF  
IMMANUEL

# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK FOUR: THE REALITY OF IMMANUEL

Week 4: Reality of Immanuel

Begins Sunday, December 23, 2018

Each day we draw closer ... in our current season, we are only a couple of days away from celebrating the arrival of Jesus, born as a baby in Bethlehem. In the span of eternity, we continue to move toward the unknown day when Jesus will return as judge and king, forever reigning in victory. Each day we draw closer.

The same was true long ago when the prophet Isaiah told of a baby who would be born to a virgin. A baby who would be called Immanuel, which means: God with us. Isaiah prophesied his word from the Lord, and time moved on. Until one day, hundreds of years later, an angel appeared to a young woman named Mary and announced: *"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. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end"* (Luke 1:30-33).

God—whom we search for, whom we call out to, whom we long for—was about to enter into the drama of the world and become one of us. It is the Christmas story, but it is not a fairy tale. Jesus was born, in flesh and blood, from a real woman in a real place in history. The God who had never been seen was suddenly here. The God who seemed absent, wasn't. God with us.

During this Advent season, we anticipate Christmas, but we also look forward to when Jesus returns. He will once again be here in the flesh, wiping every tear from our eyes, and reigning forever in a restored and repaired world. God with us.

But until then, we live in the meantime. And if we've accepted Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross, we know that God is still with us. He gives us His Holy Spirit to live within us, to guide and counsel us. God is not absent. He is here, asking us to join Him in sharing His message with those around us.

So as we watch and wait for the coming judge and king with a mixture of joy and fear, we trust that His way and plan and timing are perfect. We rest on the promises of a God who has proved Himself faithful. We hope for all things to be made new one day. And in the meantime, we live out our faith for the glory of our God who is with us.

# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK FOUR: THE REALITY OF IMMANUEL SCRIPTURE READING

**Read the following from Isaiah 7:14-16 and Isaiah 9:2-7.**

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

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. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Further Reading

Matthew 1:18-25

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Luke 1:26-55

Micah 5:2-5a

Hebrews 10:5-10

Questions to Consider

1. What feelings does it spark in you to know that Jesus will return and make all things new? In what part of your life do you most need to know that God is with you?
2. Think back on your past week or two. Where have you felt God's presence and His reminder that He is with you?

# The Reality of Christmas

## WEEK FOUR: THE REALITY OF IMMANUEL ACTIVITY

### Activity Suggestions for Week 4

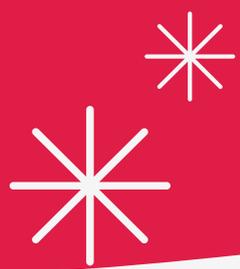
1. During the fourth week of Advent, we get to learn about the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary and telling her she would have a baby named Jesus. Mary then responds with a beautiful song, which is known as Mary's Magnificat. Read Luke 1:46-55 and soak in Mary's words of praise for what God is doing.
2. Hang a poster board somewhere in your house, or tape a sheet of paper to a bathroom mirror. Throughout the week, write down each time you notice God's presence with you—maybe He brings a piece of Scripture to mind, or you feel His presence in prayer, or a friend shows you His grace. Taking note of God's presence in our lives reminds us that He is always here.
3. Invite someone who doesn't know Jesus to attend a Christmas Eve service with you this week. As we come together to celebrate Jesus, Immanuel, we need to share the hope of God with us with those who need to hear it.
4. Find a version of "O Come, O Come, Immanuel" to listen to throughout the week. As you listen, note the longing in the music, and look forward with excitement to celebrating Christmas when God came to be with us.

### Family Activity Suggestions for Week 4

1. Help your children understand this week's Advent theme in ways that are tangible for them.
2. This week we celebrate Immanuel—God with us! Set a place at your table for Jesus this week. Talk about what you would ask Jesus if He were sitting there with you. Remind your children that although Jesus is in Heaven with God the Father, He has given us the Holy Spirit to be with us right now!
3. Find something for each member of your family to keep with them this week (a ring, a special necklace, a rubber band for their wrist, a pebble in a pocket, mismatched socks, something attached to a backpack, a sticker, a temporary tattoo, etc.). Everyone can wear or hold on to their item each day this week and whenever they see or feel it, it can remind them that God's Spirit is with them.



# *\* \* Advent Resources*



# The Reality of Christmas

## ADVENT RESOURCES

### Books

The following books provide teaching on Advent, ideas for Advent activities, and devotionals that will prepare your heart for Jesus' arrival.

Touching Wonder by John Blase  
Advent by Fleming Rutledge  
The Season of the Nativity by Sybil MacBeth  
The Greatest Gift by Ann Voskamp  
Living the Christian Year by Bobby Gross

### Music

Advent-Related Albums  
The Oh Hellos' Family Christmas Album  
Handel's Messiah  
Waiting Songs by Rain for Roots

### Advent-Related Songs

O Come, O Come Immanuel  
Come Thou Long Expected Jesus  
Oh Praise the Name (Anastasis)  
Lion and the Lamb  
Revelation Song  
Even So Come  
Open Up the Heavens  
Build Your Kingdom H

**\*\*This advent resource was made possible by CrossRoads Church, Red Deer, Alberta, CANADA and authored by Pastor Denise Snyder  
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### CONTACT INFO:

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