



2015 Advent Devotional



THE H. E. BUTT FAMILY FOUNDATION



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Reflections from friends and staff of
The H. E. Butt Family Foundation

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ruth Meharg was born and raised in a big, boisterous family in Fort Worth, Texas. She studied illustration at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta, Georgia, where she met a fellow illustrator who became her husband. The two of them currently travel around the world illustrating and creating as they go.

We originally discovered Ruth's intricate and dynamic work—some of which utilizes cut, painted tissue paper overlaid with acrylic paint—through the Laity Lodge Artist Retreat community, where her mother, artist Gwen Meharg, is a longtime participant. Although Ruth hasn't yet made it down to the Frio Canyon for a Laity Lodge retreat, she has met wonderful friends of the H. E. Butt Family Foundation across the United States and says she looks forward to the day when her travels take her down to the Texas Hill Country.

See more at ruthmeharg.com

PREFACE

For centuries, Advent has been a time of preparation for a deeper, more meaningful celebration of Christmas. The word “advent” comes from the Latin word that means “arrival,” and these early-winter weeks are for us a season to anticipate the arrival of Christ, both as a remembrance of his birth and as a prayer for his return.

These days, many Christians find that Advent helps make sense of the chaos we feel in our hearts as we juggle holiday obligations and Christmas expectations. We’re all experiencing “Christmas creep” these days—the decorations have been in stores since September, and the holiday season has become the busiest, most expensive, and indeed the most challenging part of the year. Advent presents an alternative approach to Christmas, one more suited to the rhythms of our lives as they actually are, not as the stores want them to be.

In our family, we love worshipping together. Years ago for Advent we did away with a lot of gift giving, and then at Christmas we draw names for stocking gifts. It has been quite liberating for us to focus more on Christ’s coming rather than a lot of gift giving lists, tasks, and other things that drain our energy.

— **Laura Sorrell**
Strategic Advisor,
Talent and Innovation

Advent is celebrated in various ways by churches, but in this devotional, we suggest a way it can be celebrated in the home, with simple guides to the traditional Advent materials and activities. Wreaths and candles are the main materials of Advent, and below you’ll find some simple advice on getting the materials together for your home. Prayer is the main activity of Advent, so most of this booklet is dedicated to guiding you through prayer.

Our goal here is simple: that you will use this Advent guide—in your personal time, as a family devotional, or even with your church community—as you prepare your heart for the coming of Jesus.

ABOUT WREATHS & CANDLES

For hundreds of years, Christians have used Advent wreaths to remind them of the main themes of the season, and they've lit Advent candles during prayer and Scripture readings to prepare their hearts for Christmas.

Advent wreaths have five candles—four around the circle of the wreath and one in the center. During the first week, you'll light one candle during your time of reflection. Each week, you'll add another candle, until Christmas comes and you light all five candles to fill the room with light.

The candles come in a variety of colors. Some people use all white candles. Some craft stores sell Advent candle packs that are purple and pink or blue and pink, which is why below we suggest you “light a purple candle” on weeks one, two, and four and “light the pink candle” on week three. The pink candle is typically reserved for the third week of Advent when most observers choose to focus on the joy of waiting.

But there is no official set of themes or colors for each week of Advent. Advent is not about creating new rules so much as providing tools for reflection. For this 2015 Advent devotional guide, we are focusing on the familiar themes of Hope, Faith, Joy, and Peace. If you adjust the candle colors or themes, just adjust the instructions below accordingly.

Each week during Advent, a different family or group of friends light one of the Advent candles in our downtown church. Sometimes, a child crawls between his parents' legs or the Scripto lighter won't light or someone decides to take off her shoes. Whatever happens, Christ is with us, and barefoot works just fine.

— **Deidra Riggs,**
Managing Editor of
The High Calling

In our house, we hang an Advent calendar on the kitchen windows with Scotch tape. Even though we are most likely rushing to get to school, these quick moments are wonderful opportunities to reflect on those things that bring true joy; friends and family, a fire in the fireplace, a Christmas tree, and the arrival of Jesus.

—**Erik Silvius, Director of Outdoor Education and Adventure Recreation**

A WORD ABOUT CHILDREN

If you have children, we encourage you to adapt this Advent devotional as needed so it brings them the most joy. Of course, they are already going to be excited about presents and Santa and parties and Christmas trees. A regular time of prayer and Scripture can help children (and adults) learn more about the original purpose that inspired all of our festivities. In the end, the excitement of anticipating presents is a great analogy for the excitement we learn to feel as we anticipate Jesus.

USING THIS GUIDE AT HOME

November 29 is the first Sunday in Advent this year. We encourage you to set aside time each Sunday during the season of Advent to read through the devotional material for that week. It takes about fifteen minutes to read all of the passages and the short reflection. These reflections are an anthology of entries from years past and new contributions from various friends. You'll also find quotes on Advent sprinkled on pages here and there from voices within the Foundation family.

If Sunday night doesn't work for your family's rhythm, just adapt to whatever suits your schedule best. Some families might like to spread the readings out across the entire week, covering one passage each day during a shared meal at breakfast or dinner. The point isn't to follow a bunch of rules in exactly the right way, but to create space for reflection amidst the bustle and excitement of December preparations.

When my family prepares for Christmas, it's easy to lose sight of its deeper meaning with so much commercial noise. Disciplined practices are great opportunities for us to be still, to draw closer together, and to contemplate Jesus' first incarnational entry into the world as well as his second coming.

—**Perri Rosheger,**
Executive Director of Constituent Relations
and Program Evaluation

The images of Christmas—the presents, trees, and carols—are signs of Jesus' divinity. But the greater wonder of Christmas consists in the historical reality of Jesus' birth—an event that ought to drive home his humanity and all that he gave up—in coming to dwell among us.

Jesus came down to earth, emptying himself of the godhead's glory, in order to set us apart in every down-to-earth thing we do. We find and celebrate the sacred character of the Christmas season best when we look again at our pell-mell daily activities, the brute circumstances of our holiday lives, and realize that these are mangers, the places God chooses to be born.

—Howard E. Butt, Jr.



THE LIGHTING OF THE FIRST CANDLE

Waiting With Hope

Today we focus on waiting to celebrate Christ's birth and hoping for Christ's return.

PRAYER FOR GOD'S HELP

Lord, we thank you that you are a faithful God and promise to save us. We ask that you would help us to trust in you and receive your grace. We look forward to the day when you come again, but help us to experience your comfort and care even now, in Jesus' name. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

NOTE: Parents, you may wish to abbreviate or eliminate certain readings depending on the age(s) of your child(ren). You may also want to read these selections out of a Children's Bible. If you are using this guide by yourself, consider responding to these questions in a journal.

Psalm 25:1-10

In this psalm, we join David as he gives his life to God and places his hope in God's compassion and unfailing love.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

This passage offers a prayer of hope for the Thessalonians as they wait for Paul to visit and for Christ to come again. It is a beautiful model for us as we, too, wait and hope.

Luke 21:25-36

Jesus predicts the future when the Son of Man comes again with power and great glory. Whatever trouble the world may be experiencing, whatever fears we may have, we can wait peacefully for Christ knowing that his Kingdom is near.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

During advent, we anticipate Christmas. What about Christmas are you looking forward to?

Some people feel like the weeks leading up to Christmas are a time of distraction rather than preparation. How can you use the time of Advent to prepare your heart for Christmas?

What good fruit is God growing in you?

ON GUARD

By Al Hsu

“Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down ... ”

— Luke 21:25b-34a

When I was a kid growing up in cold Minnesota winters, I would build snow forts and have snowball fights with friends. Sometimes we ran around the neighborhood and attacked each other. Other times we were stationed as

guards, holding down the fort. We stayed in the base, but we didn't just sit there. We spent our time in preparation, diligently making snowballs in readiness for the next encounter.

Advent is not just about waiting for Christmas. Traditionally, the season of Advent has been a time for the church to prepare for both the first coming and the second coming of Jesus. We remember how Israel anticipated the original coming of the Messiah, and we remember that we still await his return.

Jesus' words in Luke 21 and parallel passages have often been debated. Many Christians have tried to decipher the signs of Christ's return, looking to geopolitical events as indicators that the second coming is near. But Jesus is clear. No one knows the day or hour of his return (Matt 24:36). What is more important is our continued vigilance and readiness.

"Be on guard," Jesus says. Not only that we don't miss his coming, but for our own good! "So that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life." Jesus knows that life is challenging and discouraging. Our own addictions and self-medication only bring despair. He wants to free us from all that. So be on guard. Be alert.

The kingdom of God is near. Theologians describe the kingdom as being both "now" and "not yet." It has already been inaugurated by the first coming of Jesus, but we still await the fullness of the kingdom at his second coming.

In between, we live like fig trees, already growing, already alive with the power of the kingdom, sprouting with signs of vitality, spreading seeds and bearing fruit. In this season of Advent, we live with anticipation between the comings of Jesus. But it is not a passive waiting. It is an active time of growing and living into all that God has called us to be.

May our waiting be generative. May our lives be refined and our character purified. May God grow in us good fruit, as we become the noble citizens he desires to inhabit his kingdom.

LIGHTING THE FIRST CANDLE

As someone lights the first purple candle, the following should be read or paraphrased: *“We light this candle because, like God’s people centuries ago, we also look forward with hope to the coming of the Christ. The purple color of the candle reminds us of the seriousness of our hope.”*

PRAYER OF HOPE

Dear God,

As we light this candle, we anticipate the celebration of your Son’s birth, and we hope for the day when your kingdom will come in its fullness. Help us live faithfully in the tension of that hope. All around us, it is starting to feel like Christmas is already here, even though we know it is not yet fully here. In the busyness of the season, let your kingdom come and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

CLOSING SONG

To be sung to the tune of “O Come Let Us Adore Him” from “O Come All Ye Faithful.”

O come again, our Savior,
O come again, our Savior,
O come again, our Savior,
Christ the Lord!



THE LIGHTING OF THE SECOND CANDLE

Waiting With Faith

Today we light a second candle, waiting with faith in Christ, who saves us from the darkness.

Relight the first purple candle before you begin.

PRAYER FOR GOD'S HELP

Lord, you are the light which the darkness has not overcome. Help me to see your light, even when darkness surrounds me. Help me to put my faith in you, and to trust that you are near. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Malachi 3:1-4

God tells the prophet Malachi about the messenger God is sending to Israel and the judgment this messenger will bring.

Philippians 1:3-11

Paul gives thanks for the Christians in Philippi and challenges them to live blameless lives until the day Christ returns.

Luke 1:68-79

When an angel appears to Zechariah in the temple and tells him that his wife will give birth to a son, the old man doesn't believe the angel. As a result, Zechariah is unable to speak for many months, until immediately after the birth of his son John (the Baptist). Right after the birth, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks the prophecy that we will read.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

This season has many types of decorative and sacred lights. Which lights do you look forward to the most, and why?

How might Christmas lights help you think about the coming light of Christ?

WAITING FOR LIGHT AFTER THE STORM

By Leigh McLeroy

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

— Luke 1:78-79

A few years ago, a powerful hurricane put my city, my neighborhood, and my house in the dark for nights on end. No streetlights. No traffic lights. No glowing digits on my bedside clock. No porch light for safety on the front steps.

Except for hurricanes, we seldom wait for light in our modern cities. Today, with the flip of a switch (or the flick of a flashlight app), we can dispel physical darkness.

It wasn't always so. Centuries ago, the night was irrevocable and unresponsive to man's whims. We could plead for the dawn, but we could not demand it. We could wait, but could not hurry the heavens even one iota. The darkness had to be dealt with and endured with little more than an oil lamp.

The beautiful prayer of Zechariah at the baptism of his son John celebrates the coming of light in the hearing of a people well acquainted with the dark. Not only

did they understand the unforgiving rhythms of daylight and darkness, they had waited in spiritual night for hundreds of years, yearning for a word from their God.

Dawn is never more precious, more desired, more welcome, than just before it breaks.

Each day after the hurricane, my neighbors and I would ask one another, “Do you have power yet?” We watched for public utility trucks on nearby blocks. We phoned the light company service number, now on speed dial. We became flashlight bearers and candle hoarders. And we waited.

When the light finally came, we were ready. The formerly dark windows up and down my street were lit from within again when evening came, and the moon and the stars had tiny, terrestrial competition once more.

Zechariah’s son John proclaimed the coming light of the Son of God—the One who would shine on Israel’s long darkness and overpower the shadow of death for Jew and Gentile alike. We need his light too. We may be able to command enough luminosity to put a dent in the curtain of night—but we cannot dispel sin and death. Only Christ can. And by the tender mercy of our God, he has.

LIGHTING THE SECOND CANDLE

As someone lights the second candle, read aloud the following: *“We light this candle because, like God’s people centuries ago, we wait with faith that our Savior will protect us from the darkness until he comes again. The purple color reminds us of the seriousness of our faith and our great need for God’s protection.”*

PRAYER OF FAITH

Light of the World,

We need your brilliance and your power. We long for you to shine on us and illumine every corner of our lives. You are the Living One. You are the Way. You alone are the author of salvation, and the forgiver of our sins. Let us wait for you, and bless you for the brightness of hope you bring with the dawn of each new day.

Amen.

CLOSING SONG

To be sung to the tune of “O Come Let Us Adore Him” from “O Come All Ye Faithful.”

O come, let us be faithful,
O come, let us be faithful,
O come, let us be faithful,
Christ the Lord!



THE LIGHTING OF THE THIRD CANDLE

Waiting With Joy

Today we remember the joy of waiting, because we know how the story ends!

Relight the first and second candles before you begin.

PRAYER FOR GOD'S HELP

Lord, thank you for your many blessings. Forgive me when I take life into my own hands. Help me to not worry. Thank you for being near and continuing to pursue me and love me in my weakness. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Philippians 4:4-7

Writing from prison, Paul shares the secret of contentment in any circumstance—rejoice and be grateful for all that God has done!

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Through the prophet Zephaniah, God looks ahead to the time when he will renew and heal his people. It will be a day of great rejoicing, both for them and for God!

Luke 3:7-18

We also rejoice in the Lord, in part because we know that “the Lord is near.” This means not only that God is with us right now, but also that Christ is coming soon.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Who in your community or your church might need to experience the joy of God's love this Advent?

Are there ways you can feed the hungry or help those in need during this season of Advent?

What parts of your life need mending as you await the coming of the Lord?

PLOTTING THE RESURRECTION

By Bob Smietana

"Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

— Luke 3:8

For the last two years, construction workers have been widening the highway near our home. We live in a rocky area, so every time I drive by the construction site, I see a sign that reads, "Blasting Zone Ahead." It's a warning that they're building the road with the help of dynamite.

John the Baptist is like God's dynamite in today's passage. He's preparing the way for the Lord by shocking people into mending their ways. There's nothing warm or gentle about his words. And not much hint of joy or even kindness. Get your life together, he says, or there will be consequences.

Luke ends today's reading by saying that John "proclaimed the good news to the people." At first glance, it's hard to see much good news in John's warnings. Most of the readings for Advent are about love, joy, and hope, and those seem to be in short supply in today's scripture.

Yet hidden in John's warnings is an invitation to help prepare the way for God's kingdom.

People are hungry, John tells us, so feed them.

People are naked, so clothe them.

People are oppressed, so treat them fairly.

If we do these things, then those who suffer around us will begin to experience the Good News.

A pastor friend of mine puts it this way: every act of Christian obedience opens up some space for God to work in the world. It's not that God needs our help, my friend would say. But he invites us to take part in bringing his kingdom to life in this world.

Every fall, Katharine S. White, the famed *New Yorker* fiction editor, put on her overcoat, grabbed a hat and some tools, and went out to the garden to plant her bulbs. She did this even late in life, when her health was failing, because she wanted her flowers to bloom even if she was not alive to see them.

"As the years went by and age overtook her," wrote her husband, E. B. White, "there was something comical yet touching in her bedraggled appearance on this awesome occasion—the small, hunched-over figure, her studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be yet another spring, oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, sitting there with her detailed chart under those dark skies in the dying October, calmly plotting the resurrection."

This Advent, may our days be filled with small acts of kindness that prepare the way for the Lord.

LIGHTING THE THIRD CANDLE

Say the following as the candle is lit: *“We light this candle because, like God’s people centuries ago, we know that God has come in Christ and that Christ will come again. We rejoice in God’s work in history and in the future.”*

PRAYER OF JOY

Dear God,

As we light this candle, we rejoice. May we always be on the lookout for ways to help others experience your love and joy and grace. Prepare our hearts and our world to receive you.

Amen.

CLOSING SONG

To be sung to the tune of “O Come Let Us Adore Him” from “O Come All Ye Faithful.”

We wait for you, rejoicing,
We wait for you, rejoicing,
We wait for you, rejoicing,
Christ the Lord!



THE LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH CANDLE

Waiting in Peace

Today, we focus on waiting in peace for the coming of the Son—the son of Mary, the Son of God!

Relight the previous weeks' candles before you begin.

PRAYER FOR GOD'S HELP

Jesus, sometimes it feels like we still live in a land of deep darkness—when the lights go out, when the storms rage, when we are overwhelmed with sadness or fear. Shine a light into the dark places of our lives. Help us feel your presence where we need it most. We thank you so much for Christmas coming soon! Help us know your peace during these last days before the big celebration. Thank you for giving us a reason to celebrate so many years ago when Jesus came into the world. In his name. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-37, 46-52

This psalm celebrates God's covenant with David and with the descendants of David. He even calls God "my Father" (v. 26). But the psalmist composed this psalm at a time when God's blessing upon Israel seemed very far away. He calls upon the Lord to remember his covenant to David.

Micah 5:2-5

God promises through the prophet Micah that his future ruler will come from Bethlehem, even though this town is, indeed, a "little town" and quite insignificant.

Luke 1:39-55

Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth blesses Mary above all women, the mother of our Lord. Mary responds with a beautiful song of praise recounting the good things God has done for her personally and for previous generations of Israel.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Are you excited about Christmas?

What are you especially excited about?

Do you find waiting to be difficult? Or do you enjoy anticipation?

How does waiting for Christmas help you think about how God keeps his promises?

WAITING FOR PEACE

By Dena Dyer

“And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure ... and he shall be the one of peace.”

— Micah 5:4-5

The people of Israel had not heard from their prophets in over 400 years. In the midst of imperial taxation and religious legalism, the long-awaited Messiah became a distant hope, a flicker of promise almost extinguished by doubt and fatigue.

Then a star appeared over a smelly manger in Bethlehem, and rumors began to surface about a child-king who'd been born to a poor man from Nazareth and his young bride. Angels sang to sweaty shepherds, who bowed before a baby in a manger. Some Jews—such as Anna, Simeon, and Elizabeth—worshipped the baby; others stayed mired in confusion.

Thirty long years passed before Jesus began his public ministry. He healed the infirm, emptied graves, and forgave sins. And still, doubts persisted. After a very public trial, crucifixion, and resurrection, thousands of skeptics believed. Even so, many people still await the Messiah.

Because humans are temporal beings in an ever-decaying world, we have a hard time waiting. We have an even more difficult time believing in promises.

My youngest son has prayed like this for years: “God, I hope that Dad has a good day at work. I hope I can go to Morgan’s this weekend. I hope Uncle Marty’s cancer gets better.”

I wondered whether I should correct him when he said “hope,” because I was only familiar with the Webster’s Dictionary definition: “to want something to happen or be true.”

Then I learned the biblical definition of hope. In the Old Testament, hope is often translated from the Hebrew word *yachal* meaning “trust.” In the New Testament, hope is often translated from *elpis*, meaning “to expect or anticipate with pleasure.”

Therefore, hope—in the biblical sense—is more about trust and expectation than mere want. Paul wrote in Romans 8:24-25, “In this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Jesus offers peace in the midst of injustice, war, and catastrophe. He offers peace in the midst of financial and familial stress, job changes, and health crises. He offers peace when we face temptations we could have never imagined.

So let’s wait patiently for the peace of Jesus, encouraging one another to expect and anticipate with pleasure his second Advent, when he will set all things right. We can trust in what we do not see.

LIGHTING THE FOURTH CANDLE

As the candle is lit, say the following: *“We light this candle because we wait in peace for the birth of a child, the son of Mary and the Son of God! The purple color reminds us of how seriously we look forward to the peace that Christ brings.”*

PRAYER OF PEACE

Dear God,

As we light this candle, we wait in peace for the birth of your Son—the Son of David, the Son of Mary. May we be prepared to welcome him with open arms and open hearts. O come now, Son of Mary!

Amen!

CLOSING SONG

To be sung to the tune of “O Come Let Us Adore Him” from “O Come All Ye Faithful.”

O come now, Son of Mary,
O come now, Son of Mary,
O come now, Son of Mary,
Christ the Lord!



THE LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

The Birth of Christ

Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus the Christ, our hope, our faith, our joy, and our peace!

Relight the previous weeks' candles before you begin.

WE CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

This Advent, we have used the wreath and its candles to help us get ready to celebrate the birth of Christ. When we lit the first purple candle, we asked God to help us wait with hope for Christ. God our Shepherd has come in Jesus Christ! When we lit the second purple candle, we asked God to strengthen our faith as we wait. Jesus Christ is the light of the world, and he saves us from the darkness! When we lit the third, pink candle, we felt joyful, even in our longing for Christ to come. Christ, who has been born in a manger, will come again in glory to wipe away every tear from our eyes! When we lit the fourth candle, we remembered that Christ is the Prince of Peace—the Son of Mary, the Son of David, and the Son of God! This Son has been born! He is Immanuel—God with us!

PRAYER FOR GOD'S HELP

Dear God,

Thank you for Christmas! Thank you for Christmas presents and Christmas dinners, for Christmas parties and Christmas specials. Thank you for family and friends who share these joys with us. Be with those for whom this season is hard. Comfort them. Give them peace that passes understanding. Help them to rejoice in you always.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 96

When we join the psalmist to sing a new song to God, the whole earth joins with us! The Lord reigns, and we celebrate because he promises to rule the world with justice and truth.

Luke 2:1-20

Jesus the Messiah is born in Bethlehem!

Isaiah 9:2-7

Unto us a child is born, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What is your favorite Christmas special? Why?

Has your Christmas season this year felt extremely busy and hectic or calm and peaceful?

How can you reflect the true meaning of Christmas today?

THE ONE AND ONLY JESUS

By Dave Peterson

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

— Isaiah 9:6

I've done some research and learned that four human beings are born every second on planet earth—that's sixteen in the four seconds it took you to read this opening sentence. It adds up to 135 million births a year. Total up the number of people who have ever been born, and it comes to something like 106 billion.

In all the billions of people who have lived, one of those unique people changed everything—Jesus! The scriptures testify that Jesus is fully human, fully divine. He came to be what no one has ever been and to do what no one else could do.

Long before Jesus was born, people were longing for him. At an especially dark time in Israel's history, 500 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah wrote with striking clarity about the absolute uniqueness of Jesus (Isaiah 9:2–7).

Jesus is **WONDERFUL**. He is the most interesting person the world has ever known. Every moment in his presence fills a person with wonder

Jesus is **COUNSELOR**. Every element of his teaching is completely reliable and trustworthy. No one will ever regret having received his counsel.

Jesus is **MIGHTY GOD**. He is able to accomplish all that is his to do. No power can defeat him. No circumstance can puzzle him. No opponent can checkmate him.

Jesus is **EVERLASTING FATHER**. He is the originator of everything, and every good thing can be traced back to him.

Jesus is **PRINCE OF PEACE**. In his presence there is profound and perfect peace, wholeness, and wellbeing.

Jesus will rescue us from the destructive powers that bully and defeat us. He gives us information about authentic life, and he demonstrates it to us. He not only demonstrates this life but also empowers us inwardly to live it. His kingdom of justice and righteousness will increase every day.

Have you let the demands of the holiday overwhelm you? Rest in the one, the only, the utterly glorious and entirely unique Jesus. Enjoy the complete presence of Jesus today and every day!

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

As you light the center candle, say, “We light this candle with great joy and celebration, because Christ is born in Bethlehem. God’s Son has come into the world to be our Savior! And he will come again in glory.”

PRAYER OF JOY & ADORATION

Dear God,

As we light this candle, we rejoice in the birth of your Son. He is the source of all hope and faith and joy and peace. May we worship him, welcome him, and make room for him in our hearts. O come, let us adore him!

Amen!

CLOSING SONG

To be sung to the tune of “O Come Let Us Adore Him” from “O Come All Ye Faithful.”

O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

CONTRIBUTORS

Dena Dyer is an author, editor, teacher, and speaker who lives near Fort Worth, Texas, with her husband, Carey, and their two sons, Jordan and Jackson. She's the award-winning author or co-author of eight books, including her most recent release, *25 Christmas Blessings: An Inspiring Countdown to Christmas* (Barbour). In her free time, she enjoys cooking, reading, traveling, and movies.

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Leigh McLeroy is a former corporate marketing executive and mega-church staffer who now devotes the majority of her time to writing, speaking, and collaborating on various creative projects. From her home base in Houston, Texas, Leigh teaches, speaks, and writes. She has several books, including *Treasured* (Waterbrook).

Dave Peterson is an ordained pastor who is the Director of Community Outreach for The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation and Scholarly Advisor for the H. E. Butt Family Foundation. He is the author of *Receiving and Giving*, *Unleashing the Bless Challenge in Your Life*. Dave and his wife, Terri, have four adult children and four grandchildren.

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Special thanks go to **Mark Roberts**, Executive Director of the Max De Pree Center for Leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary in California. Much of this devotional guide has been adapted from the Mark's work in previous years.

For most of my life, I thought of Advent as a special synonym for Christmas that people only used in church, usually with candles. It also meant a calendar with chocolate inside. Gradually, I learned that Advent is a time to cultivate a heart of humility, remembrance, hope, and thankfulness for our Lord Jesus Christ!

—**Karla Heath, Associate Director of Laity Lodge Youth Camp**

We try to make the season of Advent a well-defined and special time for my family. We decorate with Christmas ornaments that each tell the story of our family history. On Christmas Eve, we eat homemade lasagna and share the biblical story of the birth of Jesus around the candlelit dinner table. It is a time of excitement, awe, and wonder!

—**Cary Hendricks, Senior Director of Laity Lodge Family Camp**

I grew up attending the Methodist church, so when I think of Advent, I picture the church all decorated, the candles lit, and the warmth and joy of the season keeping my heart aglow. I'm so thankful for the church calendar and the traditions that invite us to refocus our attention on our Savior and all he came to do for our broken world.

—**Jennifer Hargrave, Executive Director of Accounting and Administration**

I didn't celebrate Advent growing up as a kid, but it has become a time for me to look forward to the second coming of Christ and dream about the day that he will take his proper place as king. I am thankful for what God did for us when he sent Jesus to the Cross, and I eagerly await the day he returns.

—**Beck Marlar, Director of Laity Lodge Youth Camp**



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