The Story of Advent



Christmas Family Devotional

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Letter to Our Rush Creek Families X

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel - Hymn Lyrics 1

Week 1: Hope 2

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus - Hymn Lyrics 7

Week 2: Peace 8

Magnificat - Hymn Lyrics 13

Week 3: Joy 14

O Holy Night - Hymn Lyrics 19

Christmas Eve: Love 20

A LETTER TO OUR RUSH CREEK FAMILIES

Dear Rush Creek Families,
Christmas lights are going up, trees are being decorated, calendars are filling up, and the excitement of the season is everywhere. Between shopping lists, school programs, family gatherings, and Christmas traditions, December has a way of becoming one of the busiest months of the year.

Over the next four weeks, we invite your family to slow down, gather together, and rediscover the incredible story of God's love revealed through the birth of Jesus. Through Scripture, conversation, prayer, and meaningful activities, this devotional is designed to help your family experience Christmas as more than a holiday. It's an opportunity to celebrate the hope, peace, joy, and love we find in Jesus.

And here's a reminder: **You don't have to have all the answers to lead your family spiritually**. You simply have to be willing to begin. You don't need a perfect schedule, a perfectly quiet house, or perfectly behaved kids. Some days your family might spend twenty minutes together. Other days, you might only have five. That's okay! What matters isn't getting everything right. It's creating space for God to work in the everyday moments of your family's life.

Years from now, our kids may not remember every present they opened or every event they attended. But our prayer is that they'll remember the moments when their family gathered, opened God's Word, prayed together, and celebrated Jesus.

At Rush Creek, **we love helping people find and follow Jesus by Loving God, Loving People, and Living Sent**. We believe that journey begins and grows in the everyday rhythms of family life. So this Advent season, let's make room for Jesus. Let's create memories that matter. And let's tell the greatest story ever told... together. We're praying that The Story of Advent will be a blessing to your family this Christmas and that the conversations you begin will continue long after the decorations come down.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

With love and prayers,
Your Rush Creek Family Ministry Team

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL - HYMN LYRICS

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day spring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Adonai, Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

WEEK 1: HOPE

"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

Read Together: Genesis 3:14–15; Genesis 12:1–3
Connect to Jesus: 1 Peter 1:3–4
Song of Advent: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

THE STORY

Before there was a manger, a star, shepherds, or wise men, there was a garden.

God created a beautiful world and invited people to live with Him. But sin entered God's good creation, and everything changed. Our relationship with God was broken. Our relationships with one another were broken. Even creation itself became broken. But God wasn't finished with His story. Right in the middle of the brokenness, God made a promise.

In **Genesis 3:15**, God promised that one day a descendant of the woman would defeat the serpent. Evil would not win. Sin would not get the last word. Here at the very beginning, when it seemed like all hope was lost, God was already pointing toward Jesus.

Years later, God made another promise. He told Abraham that through his family, **"all the peoples on earth will be blessed"** (Genesis 12:3)

Generation after generation would pass before the promise was fulfilled. God's people waited. And waited. And waited. But God had not forgotten them.

Biblical hope isn't crossing our fingers and wishing something good might happen. Hope is trusting God because we know who He is and we put our faith in His Son, Jesus. Peter would later describe Jesus as our **"living hope."** Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection remind us that God keeps His promises... even when we have to wait.

The Story of Advent tells us:
God promised.
God remembered.
God followed through.

And because Jesus stepped into our world, fulfilling God's promise in the past, we can trust His promise that He will return again.

FAITH TALK

Ask these questions around the dinner table, in the car, before bed, or whenever your family has a few minutes together.

FOR YOUNGER KIDS
What is something that's really hard to wait for?

Why is waiting so difficult?

FOR OLDER KIDS
What's the difference between simply wishing something good will happen and putting your hope in someone?

FOR EVERYONE
Why do you think God made a promise immediately after sin entered the world?

What does that tell us about God?

Where does our family need hope right now?

What is one promise from God that we need to remember?

SERVE

DONATE AND DROP-OFF
As a family, decide what food or items you could donate to a food pantry or shelter and take a trip to drop them off.

READ
James 1:22
"But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

WRAP IT UP
As families, we are building a legacy, helping the next generation see and know Jesus. When we serve others, we are removing barriers for them to find and follow Jesus!

FAMILY FUN

MAKE CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS

SUPPLIES
Clear plastic or wooden ornaments (one per person), markers, ribbon or string, mini decorative items (e.g., glitter, beads, stickers, small crosses, stars)

INSTRUCTIONS
As you gather as a family tonight, create Christmas ornaments together and talk about ways you have seen God work in your life and in the lives of your family members!

FAMILY DISCUSSION
- When have you felt closest to God this year?
- What is a word, symbol, or scripture that describes your faith?
- Is there a family tradition or moment that shaped your belief in God?
- How can we help each other grow in faith as a family and own it?

REJOICE & REFLECT

Hope doesn't mean everything in our lives will be exactly the way we want it to be or that we will be free from heartache and challenges. Hope means we believe **God is still in control of the story**. At times, we only see one chapter at a time, but we know God sees everything from start to finish. We can trust Him because of His loving kindness and faithfulness.

TALK TOGETHER
Where have you seen God be faithful to our family?

What are we waiting for God to do right now?

How can remembering what God has already done help us trust Him with what He hasn't done yet?

READ TOGETHER
1 Peter 1:3–9

> "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS - HYMN LYRICS

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne

WEEK 2: PEACE

"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

Read Together: Isaiah 9:2–7
Connect to Jesus: Colossians 1:19–21
Christmas Connections: Luke 1:79; Luke 2:14; Luke 2:29–32
Song of Advent: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

THE STORY

Have you ever walked into a dark room and turned on a light?

What was once scary and unknown is suddenly illuminated, and you're able to see everything clearly.

That's the picture the prophet Isaiah gives us. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God's people knew what it felt like to live in darkness. Their nation experienced war, fear, division, and uncertainty.

Into that darkness, God made another promise: "**The people walking in darkness have seen a great light."** And then Isaiah told them something remarkable: a child is coming. Not just any child, but one sent by God with the ability to change their circumstances forever.

He would be called:
Wonderful Counselor
Mighty God
Eternal Father
Prince of Peace

God's rescue plan wasn't simply going to be a new idea or a better set of rules.

Peace was coming in a Person.

Jesus came to make things whole again. Colossians tells us that through Jesus, God was reconciling us to Himself.

That means biblical peace isn't simply when everyone stops fighting. Peace is what happens **when what was broken begins to become whole again.**

And Jesus is our Prince of Peace.

FAITH TALK

FOR YOUNGER KIDS
What makes you feel peaceful?

What makes you feel worried or afraid?

FOR OLDER KIDS
Where do you see brokenness in your school, friendships, family, or world?

FOR EVERYONE
Why do you think Jesus is called the Prince of Peace?

What's the difference between Jesus giving us peace and Jesus making everything easy?

Is there a relationship in your life where you could help bring peace?

SERVE

ACTS OF KINDNESS
One way to put others first and set aside our pride is by serving them and seeing them for who they are:
Loved by God.

SUPPLIES
Paper, scissors, pen or pencil, a small container.

ACTIVITY
As a family, come up with a list of small acts of kindness. Write them on a sheet of paper (allowing enough space between each one to cut into strips). Cut the strips and place them in a container and let each person grab one.

Allow time for each person to make a plan and choose a day this week to complete their act of kindness. As each person completes their task, talk about how it made you feel.

WRAP IT UP
Remember, we are not doing this so that others can see us and give us praise, but that they would see our good works and glorify Jesus! (Matthew 5:16)

FAMILY FUN

MAKE CHRISTMAS CARDS

SUPPLIES
paper, markers, decorative items (stickers, pom poms, glitter, etc.)

INSTRUCTIONS
Sit around the table, play some Christmas music, and make cards for friends, teachers, church staff, or neighbors. Let your creativity and kindness shine!

FAMILY DISCUSSION
- Who do you think might need extra love or kindness this Christmas? (This could spark ideas for who to send cards to—like neighbors, teachers, elderly friends, or someone who's going through a hard time.)
- What message about Jesus and His love would you want someone to remember this Christmas? (Encourage everyone to write something meaningful in their card—big or small—that reflects the true reason for the season.)

WRAP IT UP
As Rush Creek families, we lead by spreading hope and peace in Jesus. How would you define that hope and peace?

REJOICE & REFLECT

Christmas reminds us that Jesus stepped directly into a broken world. He didn't avoid the darkness. He brought light into it. And Jesus still invites His followers to carry His peace into broken places.

TALK TOGETHER
Where does our family need the peace of Jesus right now?

Is there someone we need to forgive, encourage, apologize to, or reconnect with?

How could our family bring peace into someone else's life this week?

READ TOGETHER
Colossians 1:19–20

> "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

THEN PRAY
"Jesus, Prince of Peace, bring Your peace into us and help us carry Your peace wherever we go."

FAMILY CHALLENGE — BE A PEACEMAKER

Choose one intentional act of peace your family can practice this week.

Maybe you need to apologize to someone. Maybe your family can encourage someone who is struggling. Maybe two siblings need to forgive one another. Maybe you know someone who feels lonely during Christmas.

Whatever you choose, don't just talk about peace… *practice it.*

MAGNIFICAT - HYMN LYRICS

My soul glorifies the Lord.
My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
He looks on his servant in her lowliness;
Henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

The Almighty works marvels for me.
Holy is His name.
His mercy is from age to age,
on those who fear Him.

He puts forth His arm in strength,
and scatters the proud-hearted.
He casts the mighty from their thrones
and raises the lowly.
He fills the hungry with good things,
sends the rich away empty.

He protects Israel, His servant,
remembering His mercy,
the mercy He promised to our fathers,
to Abraham and His children for ever.

WEEK 3: JOY

"My Soul Magnifies the Lord (Magnificat)"

Read Together: Luke 1:39–55
Christmas Connections: Matthew 2:10; Luke 1:14; Luke 1:44; Luke 2:10
Song of Advent: Magnificat

THE STORY

Imagine what it must have been like to be Mary...

The angel Gabriel appears to you and tells you something that seems impossible. "You're going to have a baby. And not just any baby. This child will be the promised Savior."

Mary probably had a thousand questions. *What will people think? What will Joseph think? How could this possibly happen? What will my future look like now?*
So, in light of this revelation, Mary travels to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth is also someone who has recently experienced God's miraculous work. She and her husband, Zechariah, were expecting a child in their old age, and their son was to become a prophet, preparing the way for Jesus. When Mary arrives at Elizabeth's house, something amazing happens.

Luke 1:41–45
"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with

the Holy Spirit. Then she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed! How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, **the baby leaped for joy inside me.** Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill what he has spoken to her!'"

Mary doesn't have every answer and the circumstances she is facing are far from easy. Her future isn't predictable. And yet... she chooses to rejoice by singing. Mary's song is often called the *Magnificat*, from the opening words:
"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

The promise that began generations earlier was no longer simply something God's people were waiting for.

The Messiah was coming.

FAITH TALK

FOR YOUNGER KIDS
What makes you really happy?

How do you show it?

FOR OLDER KIDS
Do you think joy and happiness are the same thing?

Why or why not?

FOR EVERYONE
How could Mary have joy even though she didn't know exactly what was going to happen next?

Why do you think Mary went to Elizabeth after hearing the angel's message?

Who are the people who help you recognize what God is doing in your life?

What is God doing right now that we can celebrate?

SERVE

SHARE A GIFT OF PRAISE
Praising God isn't only something we do with our words or songs. We can praise God with the way we live!

SUPPLIES
A few gift bags or baskets, paper, markers, and several simple items to give away.

You could include snacks, bottled drinks, candy, small gift cards, or homemade treats.

ACTIVITY
As a family, choose a group of people who serve your family or community regularly.

Think about teachers, coaches, first responders, delivery drivers, church volunteers, school staff, neighbors, or someone else who often serves behind the scenes.

Put together a few simple appreciation bags. Then make a card for each person that says: **"We praise God for people like you!"**

Deliver your gifts together as a family. As you do, take a moment to tell each person why you appreciate them.

FAMILY DISCUSSION
- What is something about God that you are thankful for today?
- How can serving someone else be a way of praising God?
- Who has God placed in our lives that we sometimes forget to appreciate?

WRAP IT UP
Psalm 150:6
"Let everything that breathes praise the LORD. Hallelujah!"

Praise isn't just something we do at church. We can praise God everywhere we go!

When we recognize His goodness, thank Him for His gifts, and share His love with others, our whole lives can become an act of praise that reflects the true reason for the season.

REJOICE & REFLECT

Throughout the Christmas story, people keep responding to Jesus with joy. Why? Because the story of the coming Messiah is good news, and that should fill us with great joy.

TALK TOGETHER
What has God done this year that our family can celebrate? When has it been difficult to choose joy? How can worship help us remember God's goodness when our circumstances are difficult?

READ TOGETHER
Luke 1:46–55

> "And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy. His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him. He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts; he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors."

Like Mary, take a moment to **magnify the Lord** by naming things about God that deserve your praise.

FAMILY CHALLENGE — MAKE JOY LOUD

How can your joy be made noticeable this week?

Every day, have each person name one reason they are thankful to God. Keep a running list somewhere in your home. Then find one way to **give joy away.** Bake something for a neighbor. Encourage a teacher. Call a grandparent. Surprise someone with a gift. Serve someone who can't give you anything in return.

Let someone experience the joy of Jesus because your family showed up!

O HOLY NIGHT - HYMN LYRICS

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining;
it is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born!
O night divine! O night, O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
with glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
there came the wise men from Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger;
in all our trials born to be our friend.
He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger.
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,
and in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
let all within us praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever!
His power and glory evermore proclaim!
His power and glory evermore proclaim!

CHRISTMAS EVE: LOVE

"O Holy Night"

Read Together: Luke 2:1–20
Connect to Jesus: John 1:1–5; John 3:16
Song of Advent: O Holy Night

THE STORY

Finally, the waiting is over!

The promise made in the garden. The promise given to Abraham. The words spoken through the prophets.

The announcement given to Mary. They all lead here.

The King Is Born.

But Jesus doesn't arrive the way anyone would expect a king to arrive. There is no palace or throne. No royal celebration or announcement. No great army or procession. Instead, there is a young family, a manger, shepherds, angels, and a newborn baby.

IMMANUEL: God Is With Us.

The God of Angel Armies steps into His creation and becomes human.

Why would He do that? Why would He leave perfection and enter into a broken and imperfect world?

The answer is... **Love.**
John 3:16

> "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

Christmas is the story of a God whose love for His people and creation compelled Him to draw near, enter into this world, save us from our sins, and give us the gift of eternal life.

Merry Christmas, indeed!

FAITH TALK

FOR YOUNGER KIDS
Why do you think Jesus came as a baby instead of arriving as a powerful king?

FOR OLDER KIDS
What does Jesus' willingness to enter our world tell us about God's character?

FOR EVERYONE
What surprises you most about the story of Jesus' birth?

What does John 3:16 teach us about what love does?

How is God's love different from simply saying, "I love you"?

SERVE

SERVE THOSE AROUND YOU
Today, your family will get the chance to live out your faith by loving your neighbors.

SUPPLIES
Cookies, gift tag or strip of paper, pen or pencil, small box

ACTIVITY
Bake cookies as a family and deliver them to a neighbor, the police station, firehouse, or your local coffee shop. Talk about who might need a little extra joy or encouragement.

Matthew 1:23
"...and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'"

WRAP IT UP
God is with you—and He sends us to be with others too. When we serve others, we show them who Jesus is.

FAMILY FUN

A GIFT FOR JESUS
Give each person a small piece of paper or a gift tag.

Invite everyone to write or draw one thing they want to give to Jesus this week—like time, kindness, trust, obedience, or praise. Place these gifts in a small box as a symbol of offering.

FAMILY DISCUSSION
- What does it mean to say, "Jesus is King" in our family?
- Is Jesus King over how we treat each other, how we spend time, how we speak?
- What needs to change so that Jesus really is in charge?

REJOICE & REFLECT

Love moves toward people. God didn't love humanity from a distance. He came near. Jesus entered our mess, our brokenness, our pain, and our world. And now He invites us to love people the same way. Treasure these things.

TALK TOGETHER
What have you learned about God during Advent?

Which part of the Christmas story means more to you now than it did four weeks ago?

How has Jesus brought hope, peace, joy, or love into your life?

Who needs us to move toward them with the love of Jesus?

READ TOGETHER
John 1:1–5

> "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it."

FAMILY CHALLENGE — LOVE COMES NEAR

Choose someone your family can intentionally love this Christmas.

Not simply by giving them something, but by **moving toward them.** Visit someone who is lonely. Invite someone to your table. Serve a neighbor. Encourage someone who is hurting. Give generously. Make time for someone who needs it.

ASK GOD
"Who needs to experience Your love through our family?"

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