

God with Us

2020 Be in Christ Advent Devotional

November 29 - December 25, 2020

God with Us

We can all agree, 2020 has been quite a year! Many of us have faced challenges, struggles and a range of ups-and-downs like nothing we've had to walk through before. Yet as followers of Jesus, we know that God is with us. He has been present through it all, even if we felt alone.

One of the most beautiful things about the Christmas season is that it gives us the opportunity to slow down and remember the miracle of God becoming flesh. The Creator becomes part of the creation. As Eugene Peterson notes, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood" (John 1:14). God has always been a part of the human story, and He is with us even now.

Our hope is that this Advent Guide will help you slow down and consider the wonder of God being present with us. We pray that your minds and hearts will be stirred as you celebrate Christmas for all of its beauty and complexity and that you will find time each day to know that God loves you deeply and is present with you through the Spirit.

May you sense the presence of God and be filled with Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. Wishing you a blessed Advent season!

With Love,

The BIC Leadership Team

*You've come to bring peace
To be love, to be nearer to us
You've come to breathe life
To be light, to shine brighter in us*

Oh Emmanuel, God with us

- All Sons and Daughters

HOPE

We anticipate the light and bask in
the glory of Emmanuel, God with us,
even in our darkest places.

LOVE

We embrace God's radical love
and demonstrate it by reflecting
His compassion to all.

JOY

Together we worship and celebrate
our King and allow His unfailing love
to brighten our lives.

PEACE

We are free to rest in reconciliation with
God through Christ and strive to extend
peace and grace to others in return.

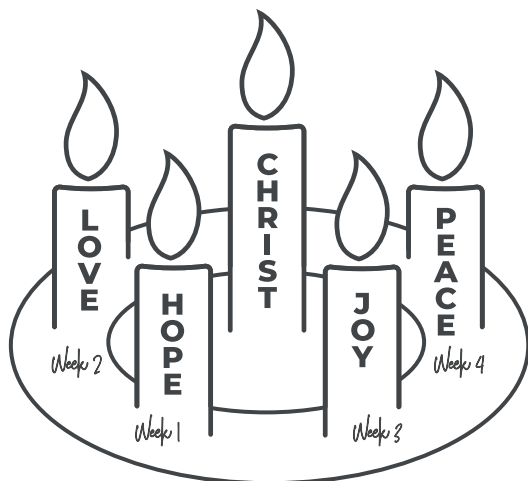
The Advent Wreath

Using an Advent wreath provides us with a beautiful visual centred around the birth of Jesus. The wreath contains four candles representing the four Sundays before Christmas Eve. The candles, placed in a circle, each have a theme: Hope (week one), Love (week two), Joy (week three), and Peace (week four). In the centre of the wreath is a fifth candle, raised higher than the others, known as the Christ Candle.

Advent wreaths come in many shapes and sizes however the traditional shape is a circle that symbolizes God's never-ending love for us.

Light one candle a week during your service or at home during your devotional time. For the first week, light only the Hope candle. On the second week, light both the Hope and Love candles. On week three, light Hope, Love and Joy. On the fourth week, light Hope, Love, Joy and Peace. On Christmas Eve, light all four candles followed by the Christ candle in the very centre!

When you find a special place in your Church or home to place the wreath, determine which side is the front. In your sanctuary, it most likely will be facing the congregation. When facing the wreath to light it, the first candle will be at the front of the wreath on the left-hand side. Next, move clockwise around the wreath and light the candle at the back left. For the third candle, you hop across the wreath and light the candle on the front right. The fourth candle is at the back right.



Find detailed
instructions at
beinchrist.ca/advent

Hope



Carol / O Holy Night

November 29

INCLUSIVE HOPE

Christina Gerber, The Meeting House, Brampton



Read *Roman 15:12*

Reflect Wow! This short verse contains so much!! Let's not miss it! Matthew begins his gospel with a thorough listing of the genealogy of Jesus, the "heir" of David – the one who it was foretold will sit on the throne forever and judge righteously.

One might expect such a king would have a pure lineage, one that is racially pure and morally spotless – but as we look, we are caught off guard by the names of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Uriah's wife, Bathsheba! Women – the second-class citizens of their time, were not usually named in a king's lineage! Not only that but each of these names represents a person who was exploited, or downtrodden, or a sinner – an outsider. Jesus' genealogy demonstrates not racial purity or moral uprightness, but rather the *range* and *reach* of God's redemptive plan. He opens a space of *inclusion* and *belonging*!

No wonder we Gentiles place our hope in Him!

This is the season of hope – the King of Righteousness has come, filled with grace and mercy, with a *place of belonging for you*. Wherever you find yourself this season, Jesus desires to pour His hope into your life. Won't you receive His gift today!

Pray *Jesus, thank you that your message is one of inclusion. This brings me hope. Thank you for making a place of belonging for me. Amen.*

November 30

A PRISONER OF HOPE

Charmaine Stulp, BIC Canada Global, Welland



Read *Zechariah 9:12*

Reflect This is one of my favourite passages, albeit odd. We want to have hope, but we don't want to be a "prisoner".

Generally, I am a hope-filled person, a "bright-side seer"! I like being an optimist. But I'm no stranger to the other side. There are times in my life where hope is not my default emotion, where doubt and fear shadow my prayers and my confidence in who God is.

I wonder if that is how Mary felt when the angel appeared to her and said she would bear a son. The angel's first words to her were, "Do not be afraid." Perhaps hope wasn't Mary's default emotion either and this is why the angel started with these words.

Maybe, just maybe, hope isn't an emotion but rather a positioning, a posture, a "location".

I love imagery and symbolism. This verse presents a beautiful picture. I picture a jail cell with bars and one sliding door. The difference with this jail cell is I control the door. The cell itself represents HOPE and I choose to be inside the space of hope, or not.

Mary shows us she took a hope-filled position and became a prisoner of hope as she spoke the words, "May it be to me as you have said." God was with her!

Pray *Dear God, help me to become your prisoner of hope... walking myself into the cell of hope knowing you sit in that place with me. Amen.*

December 1

CHRIST IN US

Shayne Brown, Pathway Church, Kitchener



Read *Colossians 1:27*

Reflect When I was young, my family got our first snowmobile. My first time out, I felt ready but my dad told me to wait while he got my helmet which I had forgotten inside. Waiting proved too difficult and I decided to go without the helmet. While crossing over the driveway, I hit some ice, lost control and hit my mom's car, pushing it sideways into my dad's van!

We love our independence, don't we? Phrases like "I can do it myself", "I don't need any help", "I know what I am doing", betray an innate desire to figure it out on our own. And so often I have lived out my faith journey the same way. By trying to do it on my own, in my own power, I have believed if I work hard enough I can earn God's approval.

Colossians 1:27 tells a different story. Our hope isn't found in us or our efforts at all. Our hope of forgiveness, to live more like Jesus and to live an abundant life, comes from the mystery that Christ lives in us. It is Christ in us that helps us discover freedom from sin, from striving, and from works-based religion. Our hope for the future, but also for each and every day, is rooted in the truth that God loves us so much He came near to us and now resides in us.

Pray *Jesus, thank you for assurance that you are with us and in us, daily working in us. Teach me to put my hope and confidence in you alone. Amen.*

December 2

THE HOPE OF LIFE

Mark Wall, The Meeting House Cross Regional



Read *Isaiah 61:1-3*

Reflect The hope that arrives with the Christmas season is a special one. The hope of seeing our family, or a white Christmas, or even that special gift we are eager to unwrap happens because Christmas is a special time of year often looked forward to all year long.

The hope of the Israelites in the Old Testament wasn't like the hope of getting our desired Christmas present under the tree... it was deeper. It was a deep longing, or groaning, for something better. For freedom from enslavement. For peace in the midst of violence. For healing in the middle of their pain. And for relief from the suffering they experienced for generations.

The hope the Israelites had was focused on stopping or overthrowing those who were causing the pain and suffering.

Unfortunately, because of the circumstances in our lives and the lives of those around us, we still need this hope today. Thankfully, we have access to that same hope. But this hope comes from Emmanuel, God with us. God with us in the enslavement, in the violence, in the pain, and even in the suffering. We don't hope for the destruction of 'the other' but rather we lean on our assured hope, Jesus, who provides the strength to be carried through those times of suffering, pain, adversity, and uncertainty.

Pray *Lord, you are the hope of my life. Thank you for carrying me through my suffering and pain. Help me to continue to lean on Your hope today.*

December 3

HOPE IN CHAOS

Matt Collins, The Meeting House, Ancaster



Read *Matthew 1:23*

Reflect Have you ever experienced a moment in your life that created fear, panic, or confusion? A situation in which things suddenly got completely turned upside down. No one would have batted an eye if you chose to abandon the situation or maybe even the person. Reflecting on my own life there have been moments where I did not have it in me to deal with the circumstances I found myself in. Scenarios that were progressing in a way I thought I understood, and then suddenly everything went sideways.

In the book of Matthew Joseph finds himself in one of those situations. His bride to be is suddenly pregnant. What was once heading one way had suddenly taken a very sharp turn. He was likely in a moment of fear, panic, confusion, and possibly anger. Suddenly an Angel appears to Joseph and says these words, "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with Us'" (*Matthew 1:23*). God's response to the panic is to say it's okay for I am with you. I will give you a living tangible reflection of Me in the form of my Son. When panic or fear sets in, when the situation seems out of control know that God is with you and He loves you. He will give you hope in the midst of chaos.

Pray *Lord, thank you that in the midst of our chaos you are present. In the midst of our confusion, you are by our side. In the midst of our fear and uncertainty, you give us hope. Thank you for your son "God with Us". Amen.*

December 4

DIVINE HOPE

Herb Anderson,
Delisle Community Church, Delisle



Read *Romans 5:1-5*

Reflect Psychiatrist Robert Coles observed a negative sequence in the people who burn out while serving others. He noted that prolonged weariness causes cynicism, bitterness, despair, depression, and burnout.

When we rely on our own resources, we find that our strength is insufficient for the tough challenges of life. Thankfully, the apostle Paul describes an alternative positive sequence when He observes that suffering produces perseverance, character and hope. Hope is the divine antidote for burnout.

The adage states, "Where there's life, there's hope." A better statement would be, "Where there's hope, there's life." Hope is the power to keep on keeping on without experiencing burnout.

Once a year at the feast of *Shavuot*, later known as Pentecost, ancient Israel celebrated the giving of God's law at Mount Sinai. They considered the law to be a God-given gift. At Pentecost, God gave another, greater gift to His people. The Holy Spirit, a.k.a. the Spirit of Jesus, is the gift of God, and the guarantee of our hope.

Hope is different than a wish. We may wish for many things, and our wishes often end in disappointment. But God-inspired hope does not disappoint.

The Spirit is the promise of things to come. No matter what challenges life may bring, we wait in hope for a better day.

Pray *Spirit of Jesus, make me a purveyor of divine hope. Amen.*

December 5

A NEW HOPE

Keely Powley, Reunion, Oakville



Read *Romans 8:24-25*

Reflect I love the *Star Wars* movies. Whenever I hear a new movie is being released I get so excited. One of my favourites is *Rogue One* - the backstory to obtaining the items that were needed to defeat Darth Vader, once and for all.

Finding what they needed wasn't easy. It took years for them to figure out how to stop Darth Vader. They waited and waited and eventually, all that waiting paid off! At the very end of the movie, a man hands the plan to Princess Leia and asks her, "What is it they've sent us"? She replies with one word: "*HOPE*".

Having a plan, a way to change the world, meant they had hope. They wanted the world to be different but they couldn't change things on their own. They had to wait patiently until the right person had the perfect plan to make a difference.

I imagine this hope and excitement everyone in *Star Wars* felt is the same hope and excitement people in the Bible felt. Everyone had been waiting so long for the Messiah to come, to save them and change the world. Their patience was tested to its limits as they asked God for help, waiting for His plan to be revealed.

And what is it God sent us? Hope, in the form of a little baby.

Pray *Jesus, you were worth the wait. You bring a new hope and excitement into the world, to save and teach us how to love. Amen.*

Find detailed instructions for building a *Hope Luminary* craft at the BIC Canada website, **beinchrist.ca/advent**

Discussion Questions

FOR WEEK ONE, HOPE

1. What is your favourite Christmas memory? Why?
2. What is your favourite Christmas recipe or dish? Why?
3. Read the November 29th refection written by Christine Barber called *Inclusive Hope*.
4. Read Matthew 1:1-17, Romans 15:12. What stands out to you? What is one key idea, question or thought?
5. How do you feel about Jesus' family tree is made up of many people who would normally be considered "second-class"? Does this give you confidence and/or hope? Discuss.
6. Share how you experience hope as a member of Jesus' extended family, and what you might be able to do this Christmas season to extend hope to someone else.
7. Spend some time praying together as a group.

Notes

Love



Carol / Silent Night

December 6

LIFE GIVING LOVE

Corinne Jones Chua, Bluewater Church, Kincardine



Read *John 15:9*

Reflect Can you name one activity that refreshes and uplifts you? Baking with your grandchildren? A hot coffee in the stillness and solitude of morning? Now ask yourself, do these things happen naturally in your day-to-day rhythm or do you have to fight for them? If you're like me, the things that you find most life-giving are the things that require the most intention. The busyness of life has a way of crowding out those restorative moments, until days go by and you realize you've barely slowed down long enough to catch your breath.

Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love." A few verses later, Jesus announces that His followers are then meant to reflect this very same love to the people around us, but first, He emphasizes our need to abide (accept, remain, dwell) in His love. God's love for us is never-ending, available 24/7. If His love is like an overflowing well, we are like empty buckets. We must intentionally place our bucket under the flow of water to be filled. As we've already admitted, the things that nourish us are often the things that fall through the cracks of daily living. Jesus invites us to step away from the pressures around us so that we can soak up God's love within us. When we believe we are loved, we live loved, and will carry love to those around us as naturally as a tree bears fruit.

Pray *Jesus, thank you for your thirst-quenching, life-giving love! Today, I pause to remember that your love is the house in which I dwell and the place where my true identity is found. Amen.*

December 7

BEING PRESENT

Jared Erhardt,

The Meeting House, Uptown Toronto



Read *Luke 2:1-16*

Reflect Each Christmas, millions of people spend millions of dollars travelling to be with family and friends. The holidays seem to emphasize the need we all have to be together to share experiences with loved ones, no matter what that may entail. For some, it's the highlight of the season, yet for others, it is a very challenging time which only amplifies loneliness or the barriers preventing real connection.

In the Christmas story, we see all sorts of traveling for many reasons. Mary and Joseph travel to Joseph's family home. The shepherds travel to see the new baby and then travel to tell anyone that would listen all about it. Even the angels travel (if that's what angels do) to announce the birth of the baby. But most importantly, God lovingly travels through space and time to be with us and to never leave us. God comes in fleshly form to be present with us in every circumstance. He reminds us that we are never alone no matter how it may sometimes seem. This Christmas, in our comings and goings, let's be mindful to both embrace the presence of God With Us and share the loving presence of Jesus everywhere we go.

Pray *Spirit of Jesus, make me a purveyor of divine hope. Amen.*

December 8

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Todd Lester, Director of Ministry

Development & Operations BIC Canada, Waterloo



Read *1 John 4:9*

Reflect I have watched many movies that are love stories... at my wife's request, of course. Often these movies have a simple and repeatable plot: boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, boy loses girl, boy wins girl back. The hilarity and tension in the movie often occurs during the various attempts to win the girl back.

God's love for us is demonstrated in His effort to 'win us back' despite our waywardness. The Bible says, 1 John 4:9, "God showed how much he loved us by sending His one and only Son into the world..."

As we think of Christmas, we are reminded that God wants us back... He wants us back. He wants you back. It is so important to Him that He sends Jesus to be born in a humble manger, live an ignoble life, and die a horrible death.

It has been often said, the Bible is the greatest love story ever told. No greater and more loving effort has been made for another as the act of love made by Jesus' birth, life and death on a cross.

Pray *Father, your unconditional love is difficult for many of us to fully accept and fully embrace. Open our minds and hearts in small and new ways so that we will move closer to you and find the comfort of your mercy and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

December 9

WE LOVE

Alison Lublink, Reunion, Kingston



Read *1 John 4:16*

Reflect Part of loving one another in any type of relationship is commitment. Obviously we know that different types of relationships involve different levels of commitment, but ultimately it comes down to a choice, or desire, to commit.

God gave us a commitment of love in 1 John 4:16. This love is the type of commitment we can trust, can rely on. This love supersedes everything. This is God with us in love.

Sometimes we are tempted to push people out of our lives because we find them too hard to love. We might not say that out loud, but that's the reality. It takes a lot of strength and commitment to love someone for the long haul, and sometimes we are weak and choose the "easy" way out. But can you imagine if God did this to us? Chose to renege on a commitment to love us? The beauty is we don't have to imagine. He is committed. God is with us in love, and in turn, we get to be committed to being that same love for others in our lives.

We love because God first loved us. That's God's and our commitment as Christians.

Pray *God, help me to accept your love in my life as the gift that it is. Help me to in turn be that love for those around me. Let them see your love pouring out through me. Amen.*

December 10

MID-WIVES OF LOVE

Eric Versluis, The Meeting House, Ottawa



Read *Luke 2:7*

Reflect In the early days of COVID-19, many women had to give birth without any family present due to hospital precautions. Though they were surrounded by medical professionals, these women described the experience as traumatic and lonely.

Popular depictions of the Nativity often echo the traumatic experience of these women; a scared teenage girl enduring the pain of her first childbirth supported only by her inexperienced husband and some barn animals.

Yet scholars like Kenneth E. Bailey paint a different picture. Bailey tells us that in first-century Palestine, the manger was not kept in some separate stable out back, but in the heart of the one-room family home, because the animals were brought inside the house at night for safekeeping.

Additionally, the word often translated as “inn” is better understood as “guest room”. So when Mary & Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, their hosts likely already had company staying in their guest room, so they invited Mary & Joseph into the main house, to sleep alongside the family!

Instead of traumatized and alone, it’s likely that Jesus was born in the middle of a family home, surrounded by friends, family and local midwives lovingly guiding Mary through the process.

May this story remind us that simple acts of loving hospitality towards those in need have always been and always will be the way that God’s Kingdom comes to earth.

Pray *Jesus, help us be Midwives-of-Love, using hospitality and community to bring your Kingdom to life all around us. Amen.*

December 11

OUR LOVING PRESENT GOD

Joshua Mutter, Westheights Church, Kitchener



Read *John 11:35*

Reflect I know this is not a very Christmassy passage for today's devotional. But as much as we want Christmas to be full of joy, smiles and laughter, sometimes it just isn't. When we find ourselves in circumstances that are painful, one powerful way that we experience love is through someone coming alongside us and joining their emotions to ours.

The Christmas story invites us to recognize the Good News that the God who is love has come to be with people like us. Our not-very-Christmassy verse today helps us to understand that one of the ways that God expresses His love is through joining with us when we find ourselves experiencing grief and sorrow.

Like many of the onlookers in this passage (John 11:1-44), I find myself shocked that Jesus doesn't just jump in to "fix" things more quickly than He does. Rather, He takes the time to join Lazarus' sisters in crying real tears. It is through these tears that those watching are astounded by His love for His friends.

Pray *Jesus, sometimes the Christmas season can be a strange time when life doesn't feel quite right, and where some of us are struggling as a result. In these moments we are reminded that God is not absent, but is loving us through the tears He shares with us. Amen.*

December 12

LOVING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

Wes and Kristin Wood, Reunion, Belleville



Read *Luke 2:8-20*

Reflect We have a serious Christmas cookie tradition in our home. If you're new to the street, the neighbourhood, or our crew, you get cookies. Our kids have a cookie delivery system that starts with the people they know and love. Everyone inside their circle gets a cookie and when the circle is satisfied, they reach out to new people. Inside out is normal for our kids and, to be honest, it's normal for many of us. We love our people and when or if there's time, we extend our circle.

Christmas is a beautiful reminder that God has a different system. God loves from the outside in.

That first night, the news of Christ and Christ Himself came from the outside in. The shepherds were out. The poor, sick, forsaken, untouchable and unworthy... all out. Christmas reminds us that the outside of our circle is the bullseye of God's. God loves from the outside in.

This Christmas we are giving out cards instead of cookies. This Christmas would you join us by imitating Christ? Would you love from the outside in? Take some time to see who is outside your circle. Who are the shepherds and outsiders around you? God is already with them. We're just being invited to join. So give a card and love like God: from the outside in.

Pray *Abba, thank you for your outside-in love. Thank you for reaching for the people our inside-out tendencies struggle to see. Open our eyes, open our hearts and blow open our circles. Turn us outside in. Amen.*

Find detailed instructions for making
Send Your Love Cards and Cookies
at the BIC Canada website,
beinchrist.ca/advent

Discussion Questions

FOR WEEK TWO, LOVE

1. What is your favourite Christmas movie? Why?
2. What is your favourite winter activity? Why?
3. Read December 6th reflection written by Corinne Jones Chua called *Life Giving Love*.
4. Read John 15:1-17. What stands out to you? What is one key idea, question or thought?
5. What does it look like for you to remain connected to The Vine? How might you further develop this connection with Jesus? What kind of fruit are you hoping to see?
6. How does the way you experience the love of Jesus shape the way you love others?
7. What is your plan to practically love someone this coming week?
8. Spend some time praying together as a group.

Notes

Joy



Carol / Joy to the World

December 13

MARY'S SONG

Paul Kiss, New Life Church, Collingwood



Read *Luke 1:46-47*

Reflect Mary is full of joy when she shares the news about her pregnancy with her cousin. She's praising God and rejoicing in the salvation He would bring. As you keep reading the words of her song, you get a picture of why she is so happy.

God responds to the lowly and does great things for them (v. 49). He shows mercy to all those who stand in awe of Him (v. 50). He brings down the proud, the arrogant, those who are considered powerful, and the wealthy (v. 51-53). He lifts up the humble, feeds the hungry, and is merciful to the oppressed (v. 54-55).

Mary's song is a joyful song, but not in the way we might typically think. To her, the little baby she's about to have means change is coming for those who use their power and wealth to oppress others and keep them down. That idea fills Mary with joy. Her song is revolutionary, with lyrics that Marx or Guevara would appreciate, but not fully comprehend... unless they knew that Baby as she did.

Her song is about Jesus, not quiet and cooing in a manger, but kingly, conquering, and dealing with injustice.

Pray *Jesus, as we reflect this Advent season, may we stop and consider what Mary's song means for the world today... and for us who love and follow you. Amen.*

December 14

MAKING MOMENTS FAMOUS

Dave Stimers, Westside Church, Hamilton



Read *Psalms 118:24*

Reflect There are some moments that refuse to stay locked in their place in the sequence of history. They are too meaningful. They have too much power. Instead, they resound in every moment that comes after them. They have such profound potential and possibility packed into them. They change everything.

That is what we celebrate at Christmas. It was the day that this unmistakable message was cemented into history: God is with us. Every day since has been saturated with the implications of the incarnation. The Saviour has come. The Kingdom is breaking in! Joy is bursting forth!

The English words 'celebrate' and 'celebrity' come from the same Latin word. Just like a celebrity is someone who is famous, a celebration is a moment that we never want to forget. We make that moment famous, and when we do, we practice joy.

Celebrations come in all sizes. Perhaps we sing and dance and feast, or we savour quiet moments of thoughtful gratitude. Whatever form our celebrations take, we use them to remember powerful moments of the past and let them speak into the present.

So, celebrate well this Christmas, and let that ancient moment fill every moment with the joy of Emmanuel - God with us.

Pray *Our Father, it is with great joy that we thank you for the Gift of that first Christmas Day that has transformed every day since. Amen.*

December 15

MATURE JOY

Matt Vincent, Reunion Network, Ancaster



Read *Luke 1:46-50*

Reflect I've often thought about what it would have been like for Mary to find out she was going to have a baby. What would she have been thinking and feeling? Why did she think God chose her? What would she tell her parents and how would Joseph react? This is BIG news at the best of times, but what would that have been like for her as a young teenager who wasn't yet married?

I'm struck by Mary's immediate reaction when the angel appeared to her and gave her the news. She embraced the role and responsibility as an act of surrender and worship (v. 38). We get the privilege of seeing how she absorbed the calling for her life as we read the lyrics to her song. These words give us a glimpse into what she was thinking and feeling, and we discover something beautiful. Mary demonstrated a deep maturity of faith that wasn't based on shallow favourable circumstances. Instead, despite the struggle in front of her, she responded with joy, recognizing and believing that God was present and merciful.

Mary is an example to all. No matter the circumstances we find ourselves in, each new day presents us with the opportunity to put our faith and trust in God. Trusting that God is with us, we move forward with joy. We know this isn't always easy to do, but definitely something worth working towards.

Pray *Father – today I choose joy. I know that doesn't mean that the struggles will fade and that everything will turn out the way I want, but I trust that you are present with me in and through it all. Give me an increased awareness of your presence and help me move forward with JOY. Amen.*

December 16

THE PATHWAY TO JOY

Mellissa Ytsma, The Meeting House, Richmond Hill



Read *1 Peter 1:8*

Reflect I wonder if we find it hard sometimes to let the reality of the Christmas story sink in. We are so familiarized with the shepherds in the fields, angels singing, Magi visiting Jesus... it can all feel like the things of myth or legend rather than the narration of a historical event.

The promise of Emmanuel, God with us, keeps us tethered to this story. The verse in 1 Peter acknowledges that disconnect we can feel – that even though we have never met Jesus face-to-face or held Him as a baby in our arms, we know Him, we trust Him, we love Him, and it fills us with a joy that's hard to put into words. The same God who entered into our world as a helpless baby is present with us, here, now. If that doesn't bubble up joy in our hearts, I don't know what will!

May we find joy today in the Christmas story and the person of Jesus who is present with us, even in those times where it can all feel a little disconnected. Yes, that baby born in the stable was born for YOU, and that is good news of great joy.

Pray *Father, as we go about our day today, may joy be our pathway to your heart and connect us to the Christmas story. We love you and rejoice in the birth of your son that fills us with a glorious, inexpressible joy. Amen.*

December 17

JOY FROM WITHIN

Heather Welch, The Pier, Brockville



Read *Luke 1:39-45*

Reflect *"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!'"*

The Word made flesh. The Incarnate God. Jesus. His presence by the power of the Holy Spirit made the babe in Elizabeth's womb jump for joy!!

God with us is our source of joy, beauty that comes from the inside out. This is not a fickle 'happiness' based on our circumstances. Active, living joy runs deep with contentment and confidence! It is a resolved determination to trust in the goodness and love of Jesus.

Pause and reflect on the opportunity you have today to experience joy from within because God is with us.

Pray *Thank you Jesus that because you came, I CAN experience joy. Allow it to flow through me in order to shine your light and spread your love. Amen.*

December 18

OPPORTUNITY JOY

Melanie Wigg, Director of Next Generation
Engagement BIC Canada, Kitchener



Read *Psalm 16:8*

Reflect It's been an unusual year, to say the least.

When most of us look back on 2020, the word 'joy' will likely not spring to mind. And yet James gives a new way to think about joy and a broader perspective about where we can find it.

The truth is that we can find great joy in the life-altering fact that every trial, every fear, every setback, loss and disappointment are an opportunity to deepen our trust, strengthen our faith, grow our endurance, and deepen our intimacy with our Father. Nothing is wasted in God's economy. As we surrender to the process, God lovingly walks with us in every season and generously transforms us into the image of Jesus.

Living in this paradigm means that, as James says, even trials are an opportunity for great joy.

There is joy in knowing that God is working all things for our good. There is joy in knowing that God is transforming us to be more like Jesus. There is joy in knowing that our present circumstances are preparing us for a future of impact and opportunity that we can't yet see or even imagine.

Our God is close and present in every season. He is forever God With Us. As David sang in Psalm 16:8, "I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me."

Pray *Thank you, Jesus, for staying close to me and guiding me through every season of life. Thank you for the pure joy that is found in knowing you and following your leading. Amen.*

December 19

A CRACK OF JOY

Natalie Frisk, The Meeting House, Brantford



Read *Luke 2:8-12*

Reflect Whenever we are together, a friend of mine always breaks through any sounds that surround us with a *crack of joy*, that is, her laugh. While sometimes people stare, I think it's beautiful, and you cannot help but share in that joy with her. Perhaps you have a friend like that, too?

I think when the angels broke into song for the shepherds, it rang out like a crack of joy. They were there to "bring good news that will bring great joy to all people!" And that good news was the birth of Jesus. God with us. And while this happened a couple of thousand years ago, Jesus is still God with us. He is the joy at the centre of our lives. Jesus, Lord and Saviour of the universe, is with us.

This week, whenever you hear someone laugh joyfully, take that as a reminder to consider the ONE who is with us always.

Pray *Dear Lord God,*

*Thank you for sending Jesus to be You, with us, in joy!
Help us to remember today, and each day, that you
want us to continue to share your good news with
others as that will bring them joy, bring you joy, and
bring us joy too.*

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Find detailed instructions for making
A Crack of Joy Christmas Crackers
at the BIC Canada website,
beinchrist.ca/advent

Discussion Questions

FOR WEEK THREE, JOY

1. Do you prefer a real tree or a fake tree? Any funny stories about setting up your tree?
2. What is your most meaningful Christmas ornament or decoration for your home? Why?
3. Read December 13th reflection written by Paul Kiss called *Mary's Song*.
4. Read Luke 1:39-56. What stands out to you? What is one key idea, question or thought?
5. How does Mary's song demonstrate the upside-down kingdom that Jesus was coming to establish? Why might this fill Mary with joy?
6. In what ways have you experienced joy by participating in the reign of Jesus (recognizing that His kingdom is both now and not yet fully realized)?
7. Spend some time praying together as a group.

Notes

Peace



Carol / O Little Town of Bethlehem

December 20

PEACEFUL GROW-OP

Aaron Holbrough, The Parish, Peterborough



Read *Luke 2:14*

Reflect I cannot be the only person who has struggled with the strange message that the angels declared on the first Christmas. The shepherds are working in the fields and a heavenly choir appears suddenly declaring, "Peace on Earth among people of good will". Peace on Earth? Did they have the right planet?

I even think the shepherds are intrigued by this seemingly paradoxical statement. The following verse records that they said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened". That thing they are referring to is not only the Saviour of the world, but peace on Earth! What they discovered is truly incredible. The Son of God had been growing in the womb of a peasant girl. Perhaps this is the key to understanding the peace that has also been promised. Mary reminds me that we don't just carry God's ideas - they grow inside us. Perhaps the same is true of this peace. The seed has been planted deep in our hearts. Jesus, thirty years later, will teach that those who let this seed grow into fruitful expression will also be called children of God. I have stopped praying for God's peace to come because the assumption is it isn't already here. Instead, I ask for it to grow and bear fruit.

Pray *Heavenly Father, your peace is here. Germinate that seed planted deep. As we love like Jesus, may we bear fruit to feed the world. Amen.*

December 21

RHYTHMS OF PEACE

Grace Spencer, Reunion, Oakville



Read *Philippians 2*

Reflect For four years, I worked as a mediator at the Center for Peacemaking in Fresno, California. The majority of my work involved helping juvenile offenders meet with their victims to apologize and make things as right as possible through a restorative justice process. However, I would handle other cases from time to time.

One such case involved a group of bright, passionate graduate students working together to pursue justice and reconciliation in their community. Conflict unfolded between them, and when left unmanaged, escalated to an irreparable point. We met with each individual to listen to their perspective and experience of the conflict, hoping to move them towards a mediation. Still, not a single one would take any responsibility for the role they played in the conflict.

When this conflict comes to mind, it still troubles my heart. It is difficult to understand how peacemakers, committed to cultivating space for voices to be heard, could develop the mentality and embody the spirit they worked hard to dismantle.

While pursuing wholeness in our communities, it is tempting to believe that we can do it without Jesus. This advent season reminds us that only Jesus, who emptied Himself of His divine privilege and became human to pursue peace with His enemies, can lead us in the way of wholeness.

Pray *Lord, keep my heart humble and teach me to walk in the rhythms of your peace. Amen.*

December 22

GIFT OF PEACE

Jeremy Tyrrell, The Well, Fort Erie



Read *Philippians 4:6-7*

Reflect Christmas can be a time that fuels our worry. We worry about our finances and buying the right gifts. We worry about making the perfect Christmas dinner. We worry about our relationships and those we have struggled to get along with who we might see at Christmas. Christmas can be anything but the most wonderful time of the year.

Paul reminds us to allow our worry to draw us to God, to let our worry be a reminder to pray, and in prayer to acknowledge our dependence on the power and goodness of God. As we pray, we trust that God will exchange our worry for His peace. The peace God gives will guard our hearts. 'Guard' is a military term referring to a soldier whose responsibility is to patrol the camp, guarding that which is valuable and warning of intruders.

What has you worried this Christmas? Give it to God and let His peace *guard* your heart.

Pray *Loving Father, I give to you the worries on my heart and mind and pray that you would grant me the gift of your peace. Amen.*

December 23

RESTING IN MOMENTS OF PEACE

Bobbi Vincent, Ministry Associate BIC Canada/
Reunion Network, Ancaster



Read *Isaiah 55:12*

Reflect When I was a youngster I remember spending hours laying under our family Christmas tree after it was decorated. I would bask in the glow of the twinkling lights and the beauty of the ornaments.

In my later teen years, we lived on a farm with a pond. Given that I was the best skater in my family, I'd often spend time with my much younger sister and brother teaching them how to skate. Every session would end with the sun setting as we spun out on the ice until we lay flat on our backs, touching shoulder to shoulder. We would lay there holding hands, taking in the beautiful night sky filled with diamond stars while a cloud of white air circled our faces.

Now that I'm much older I find myself drawn to going for a walk each evening the winter sky opens up and the largest, fluffiest snowflakes fall from the heavens. My whole neighbourhood becomes captivating.

As I reflect on these memories something sticks out to me. I have sought out experiences that brought me peace and calm from as young as I can remember and, when I would find them, I'd sit awhile in the moment, taking it all in, allowing it to permeate my heart.

May you and yours seek out moments this Christmas season that evoke peace and calm. May you draw closer to Jesus and be reminded of the perfect peace he came to bring into our lives.

Pray *Jesus, we thank you for your peace. May we become more aware of it in our lives. May we in turn be your peacemakers. Amen.*

Find detailed instructions for making
Feel the Peace Snow Globes
at the BIC Canada website,
beinchrist.ca/advent

December 24

THE INCENSE AND THE SMOKE

Ben Crace, Reunion, Kuwait

Read *Matthew 2:12*



Pale light, grey morning
Rough-hewn heirloom rug, crumpled on
Lumpy sand
dying fire, drooping
 off from
 guarding the Night
trance's terror slowly faded but
indelible Message stood:
"The way back is not the way here."
But seldom is it anyway; all of us, changed.
Herod would find other murderous paths
to his Rival's door.

I lit the lifted incense, pieces I
(back)held from God-child.
Watched it sizzle, smoke
S p r e a d i n g sanctified holiness,
aspirating its appropriated acidity
conjuring the Virgin's hovel in
my Spirit-mind
recently vacated of symbols of Herod's fury,
swept and prepared for memory, divination, and for
shame.

Why had I kept this handful?
In left hand clutching: hidden
Right hand:
PRESENTING, ta da.
Never mind, bright
Star Avatar of the Judean god.
The smoke we did serve was enough
to make You feel at home in our
corrupted Age, recalling Your lost
 Paradise of angelic worship.

But I, too, need some temporary heaven
folded into the layers of my now ragged,
quotidian robe.
And if You can hear rough Prophecy in
Your current form from distant p(l)ain:
"The way back will not be the way here, Cross-bound Demigod.
But seldom is it anyway; all of us, changed."

As for me, no longer at ease
With an alien people clutching
their gods.

December 25

A CHILD, A KING, A SAVIOUR

Dagmar Morgan Sinclair,
The Meeting House, East Hamilton



Read *Isaiah 9:6*

O'child, given to us, a gift
of continual receiving, a grace, a redemption
in something so small.
This King presented so lowly, so gently
he cries not
but he will know our suffering as if it is His own.
O' Wonderful counsellor,
O' mighty God whose rule looks like mercy,
whose might is shown in kneeling
to wash another's feet. Everlasting Father, to the
fatherless,
outlasting all others;
as does His peace,
as does His word,
as does His grace.
Let us be extravagant in rejoicing when we have given
more than we can hold.
Let us sing at your arrival.
Make a place in our hearts, curl up and call it home.
O'child given to us; find us at your feet
each new day crying Holy, Holy, Holy!
Prince, crown us that we may know
your peace and that the world may know you.

*Jesus, we bow at your birth. May we receive you fully
as the gift you are. May we rejoice today, and each
day forward, that to us a child is given! Holy, Holy,
Holy! Our Saviour has come! Amen.*

Discussion Questions

FOR WEEK FOUR, PEACE

1. What is your favourite gift you were ever given? Why?
2. What is your family tradition on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning?
3. Read December 20th refection written by Aaron Holborough called *Peaceful Grow-Up*.
4. Read Luke 2:8-20. What stands out to you? What is one key idea, question or thought?
5. How have you experienced the ideas and values of Jesus take root in your life over the past year?
6. More specifically, where do you see the peace of God taking root, growing and bringing about change? How might you join in and participate in the work God is doing around us?
7. Spend some time praying together as a group.

Merry
Christmas

from all of us at
BE IN CHIRST CHURCH OF CANADA



Week 1 Carol
O HOLY NIGHT

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 appear'd and
the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope
the weary soul rejoices
For yonder breaks
a new and glorious morn!

Fall on your knees
Oh hear the angel voices
Oh night divine
Oh night
When Christ was born
Oh night divine
Oh night divine

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

Week 2 Carol
SILENT NIGHT

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
'Round yon virgin
Mother and Child
Holy infant
So tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake
at the sight!
Glories stream from
Heaven afar;
Heavenly hosts
Sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night
Son of God
Love's pure light
Radiant beams from
Thy holy face
With the dawn
Of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth

Week 3 Carol

JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart
prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven,
and nature sing.

Joy to the world!
The Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods,
Rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat
the sounding joy.

No more let sins
and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make
His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as,
the curse is found.

He rules the world
With truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of
His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders,
of His love.

Week 4 Carol

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep
and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears
Of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep,
the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing
To God the King
And Peace to men on earth

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given
So God imparts
To human hearts
The blessings of His heaven
No ear may hear His coming
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will
Receive Him still
The dear Christ enters in

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel



NEPAL PEACE PROJECT

AN EDUCATION INITIATIVE

AN ADVENT GIFT TO THE NEPAL PEACE PROJECT

The BIC Church of Nepal has begun an educational assistance program to provide children from local Nepalese villages with education and mentoring. They have asked for Canadian Be In Christ churches to partner with them in providing the following resources:

- School Uniforms
- School Fees
- Stationery
- Tutoring
- Basic Healthcare
- Spiritual Mentorship
- Faith-Based Organization Enrolment



Our faith calls us to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God, and giving back is a major part of our following of Jesus. Our faith also calls us to be people of action.

Will you prayerfully consider partnering with us, and our sisters and brothers in Nepal, as we seek to extend Jesus' message to others?

To give your Advent Gift to the Nepal Peace Project, visit:

www.NepalPeaceProject.com



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