

FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY BOOK



SNEAK  
PEEK

UNCORRECTED  
PROOF

# 'TIS THE SEASON



Devotions,  
Recipes, and  
Memories of  
the Christmas  
Season



The memories  
and traditions of the

*Family*

started on



FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY BOOK

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SEASON

Devotions, Recipes, and Memories  
of the Christmas Season





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# Why Celebrate Advent?

## A Parent's Guide

*The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord.* –HENRI J.M. NOUWEN

When we hear the word “advent” today, different images might come to mind—from candles on decorative wreaths to calendars concealing chocolates to the overall season of Christmas itself. Despite its history, however, the majority of believers in the Christian tradition mostly define Advent as the four-week (or forty-day) preparation period leading up to December 25, the date chosen by most church calendars as the day to recognize and celebrate the birth and incarnation of Jesus. While that may be part of what Advent is, it’s not quite the full story.

The word *advent* is derived from the Latin *adventus* and the Greek *parousia*, which both signify a “coming.” In the time of the early church, the practice of Advent began in a response to Jesus’s command: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Matthew 24:42). So the origin of Advent is less about Jesus coming to earth as a baby and more about preparing ourselves for his second coming.

As we read in the book of Acts, this “anticipation” began immediately after Jesus ascended to heaven. The disciples, staring upward and no doubt experiencing a range of emotions from confusion and sorrow to wonder and amazement, were confronted by two angelic beings, who asked, “Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Today, Christians around the world still wait year-round in eager expectation for Jesus’s return. Even so, since the Middle Ages, the actual season of Advent has become more connected to his first coming as a baby in Bethlehem. In the “new” definition, Advent references a time that extends from the end of November to December 25 and is specially marked by the four Sundays in between.

The themes for each of these Sundays vary slightly in different church traditions, but the most common are Hope, Faith, Joy, and Peace. Many churches mark each of these four Sundays by lighting a new candle in a wreath every week during the service. The actual origins of the wreath and candle tradition are a bit unclear since candles have long been symbols of hope and expectation through seasons of darkness. However, there is a story of a German Lutheran pastor in 1839 decorating a cart’s wheel with an evergreen wreath and candles to provide a visual aid of counting down the days until Christmas for the children in his mission school. The evergreen, which remains a vibrant green even through the long and dark winter months, acts as a representation of God’s unconditional love and his promise of eternal life. Red holly berries, which are often intertwined into the wreath, symbolize Jesus’s blood and the crown of thorns. Depending on the country or the specific church tradition, between one and twenty-four candles may be lit during the four weeks leading up to Christmas. The most common tradition involves four candles—with one being lit each Sunday—and a fifth candle in the center marking Christmas Day and the celebration of Jesus’s birth.

Though we may all have different ways of recognizing Jesus’s first coming and anticipating his second, we as the people of God are all united in the practice of hope and expectation. In fact, it’s a tradition that extends back almost to the Garden of Eden. Of course, the specific ways we observe this waiting have changed a lot over time.

Your church or family might have their own unique traditions during this season, and that is part of the beauty of Advent. However your family celebrates Advent, may you all experience a greater feeling of connection to one another as you draw nearer to Christ, reflect together on the importance of the season, create new traditions, and record memories throughout the many Christmases to come.



## How to Use This Book

This book of memories and traditions was created with families in mind. And since all families are different, you'll find multiple options for customizing your family's experience, whether with the reflection questions, the application activities, or even the recipes. You know your family best, so feel free to adapt the content to what suits you!

While the format of this book has been created to follow the traditional rhythm of Advent—with enough readings and activities in each section to fill one week—the devotions and activities can be enjoyed in any order and even over the span of several Christmases. If there are any activities or pages you don't get to one year, feel free to leave them as "unopened gifts" you can enjoy the next year.

As your kids grow older, you can always return to this book year after year and get something new out of the activities and prompts. And the best part is that what you record in the Christmases Past section will quickly become a time capsule of memories shared with your favorite people during one of the most wondrous seasons of the year.

## Family Advent Wreath

Perhaps your family already has an Advent tradition, but if not, try creating your own family wreath this season. Whether you use actual greenery or construct one with cloth or paper, make decorating it a family affair. Be sure to include four candles—one for hope, one for faith, one for joy, and one for peace—and a fifth one for the center.

Once the wreath is complete, place it on your kitchen table, on the hearth, near the front door, or in some other central area of your home. Then as your family reads the devotion each week, "light" each candle using a match, a bulb, a tea light, or colored paper (have adult supervision if using matches). When Christmas dawns, light the final fifth candle in the middle of the wreath. Throughout the season, may the wreath and the lit candles serve as a reminder of the promised Savior and his soon return.



# O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Read Luke 2:25–38

What better way to begin the season of anticipating Jesus’s coming than with hope! Especially when we think about what it must have been like for the people of God who waited for Jesus’s first coming. It probably felt like a long time for them. In fact, in the time between the close of Malachi at the end of the Old Testament and the opening of Matthew in the New, about four hundred years passed.

Can you imagine waiting for something that long?

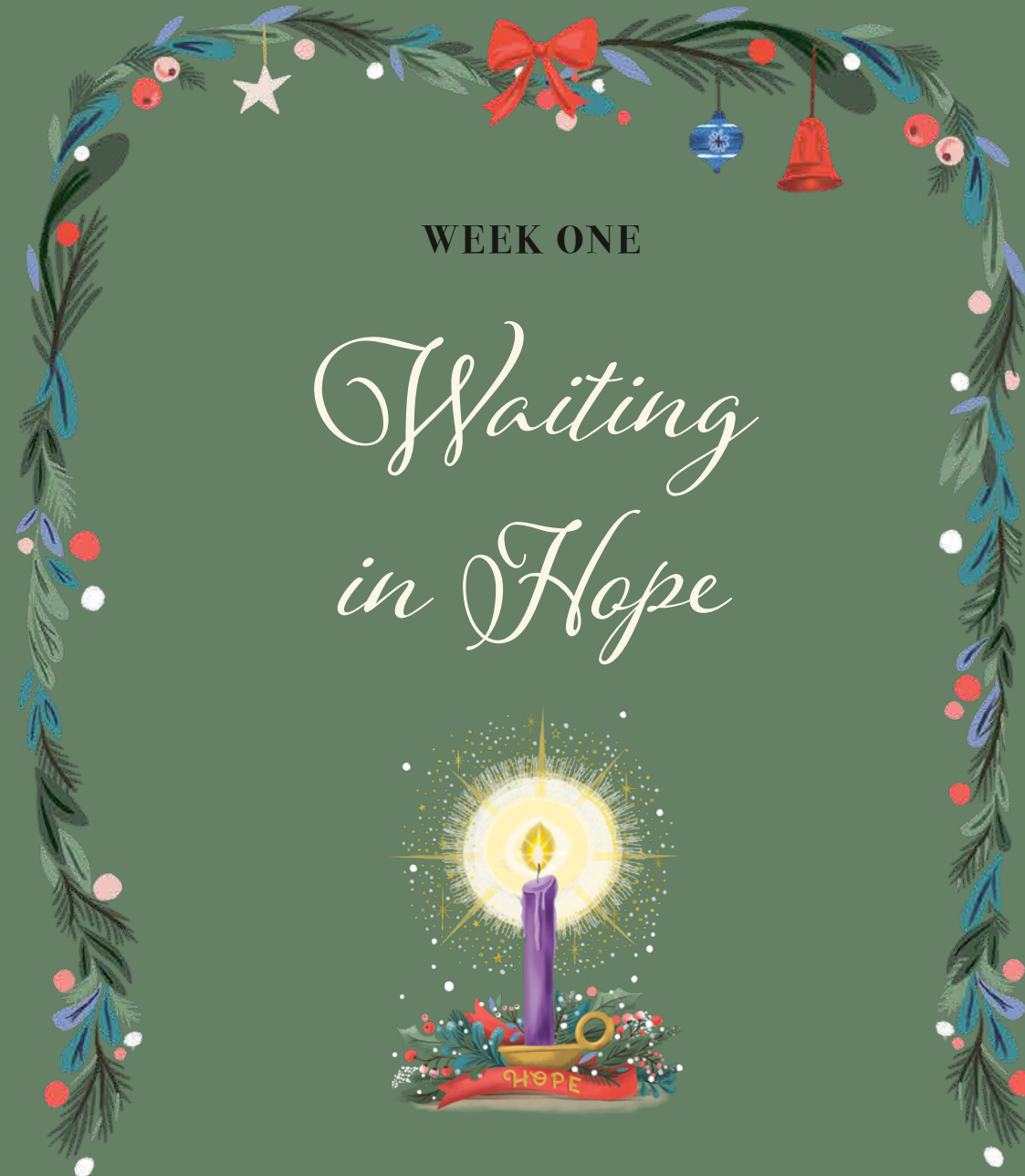
That “intertestamental” era is often called the period of silence, because no one was sharing any great words of prophecy or comfort, and God seemed to have gone “radio silent.” No letters, phone calls, or messages from heaven. It was bad enough that Malachi’s last word in his book was *destruction*. But then God’s people went through four centuries of terrible darkness and violence, marked by captivity, oppression, war, and persecution.

Talk about a cliff-hanger! What do you think it would have been like to wait your whole life for something good to happen after everything you knew fell apart? Do you think you would have been able to keep hoping?

We may not be living in a time of religious persecution, desperate poverty, or life-threatening oppression like so many faced back then, but life now is still far from perfect. We’ve all experienced a lot of bad stuff, like wars, hate, sickness, bullying, fear, loneliness, loss, and paralyzing hopelessness that often keep us from believing God is really there. But that’s the beauty of who God is and how he acts. He always shows up in the most remarkable ways, at the most unexpected times, right when all hope seems lost. He did it with a tiny baby born in a dark stable in an unimportant town out in the middle of nowhere, and he’s doing the same thing today, though it may look a little different.

\* \* \*

If you think about it, God showing up after we’ve had to wait makes the moment hoped for even more miraculous and wonderful—like a beautiful sunrise after a long, dark night or a fun trip after the school term or a much-anticipated birthday after weeks of counting down the days. The anticipation for something isn’t always fun, but sometimes it can be





exciting, and it almost always makes the gift or miracle or event even sweeter when it finally arrives.

But what about when waiting doesn't have the happy ending we wanted? In retrospect, those instances can make the waiting feel like it wasn't worth it. But as believers, we should hold on to a kind of "confident hope" that our faith in God's promises will one day be fulfilled in his eternal kingdom. As 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God." This "Amen" is something we claim in hope, even when we don't know the outcome. For if we knew exactly when and how God was going to show up, we wouldn't have to have faith, and we wouldn't be able to practice trusting him.

It's funny, but when we hear the word "wait" today, we usually take it to mean "stop" or "sit still." But that is not quite the way God intended us to wait. The Hebrew word for hope (*tikvah*) contains the root *kavah*, which means "to wait." In other words, waiting is one of the main parts of hoping. But as we see in the lives of so many biblical figures and people throughout history, waiting doesn't mean stopping or hanging around

— until something happens. Abraham had to wait twenty-five years after hearing he would have a son before Isaac was born, but in that time, he had to leave his homeland to fulfill God's promise. The Israelites had to wait forty years before they reached the Promised Land, but they never would have arrived there at all if they had decided to wait around in Egypt. Anna and Simeon waited their entire lives to see the promised Messiah, but while they waited, they kept showing up in the temple to worship and pray.

All these stories show people living out their faith, even amid long waiting seasons.

God has called all of us to do the same thing today—to wait on his timing, but to keep moving forward, to keep trusting, to keep loving and serving others, and to keep seeking God even while we wait (Psalm 27:14; Luke 12:35–40; Romans 12:12; James 5:7–8). Obviously, waiting on the Lord isn't for the faint of heart. What a relief it is to know we have the Spirit who helps us when we feel like giving up!



## Reflection Questions

- What is the longest time you waited for something?
- When have you become impatient in a season of waiting and tried to speed things up in your own way? What happened?
- What do you feel like you are waiting for right now?

## Family Prayer for Hope

*Heavenly Father, you know we're not very good at waiting and that we like to be in control. Help us to practice the positive side of waiting by putting our hope in you, for you are our help and our shield, our ever-present Comforter whose promises are good and trustworthy. Teach us how to hope for the small, everyday things we are longing for today, in the same way as we hope for your return someday soon. In Jesus's name, amen.*

**Family Advent Wreath (see page 8): Light the Hope candle.**

## Practicing Hope

This week, have each member of the family choose one of the following activities to practice hope (pick one that is age appropriate!):

- Instead of keeping it to yourself, share a hope you've been thinking about with someone you trust.
- At the breakfast or dinner table, talk about one thing you're excited about or looking forward to that day.
- Read Psalm 33 every morning.
- Read Psalm 27 every night before bed.
- Memorize Psalm 42:11, Isaiah 40:31, Romans 5:1–4, or Romans 8:24–25.
- Take time to read through the book of Micah.
- Read one chapter from 1 Thessalonians each day and journal your reflections.





## Games of Anticipation

Have you ever skipped to the end (or at least thought about doing so) of a book or movie because you were dying to see how everything turned out? Sometimes the anticipation is more exciting than the actual resolution, but a great story builds high-stakes anticipation while also delivering the perfectly unexpected conclusion. Keep that in mind as you dive into the following games.

## Who Am I?

For 4 or more players

Ages 4+

### What you'll need:

1 sheet of paper for each player

1 drawing utensil for each player



### How to Play

1. With the sheet of paper in portrait orientation, fold it in half so that the top edge lines up with the bottom edge. Fold one more time the same way so that the piece of paper ends up with three creased lines.
2. Using the creases as guidelines, draw the head of a person, creature, monster, or mythical being in the top space. Feel free to add a background if desired. Extend the neck down just slightly into the second space. Don't show the others your drawing!
3. Fold the paper so that the head is hidden and pass the paper to the left.
4. With your new piece of paper (only the small neck lines should be showing), draw a torso for the person, creature, monster, or mythical being. Extend the torso just slightly down into the third space.
5. Fold the paper so that the head as well as the torso are hidden and again pass the paper to the left.
6. Using only the vague guidelines of the torso, draw the hips and legs in the third space. Extend the ankles slightly into the last space, fold the paper down, and pass one more time to the left.
7. In the last space, draw the feet.
8. Unfold the papers to reveal what people or creatures have been created!

## What Happens Next?

For 4 or  
more players

Ages 8+

### What you'll need:

1 sheet of paper  
for each player

1 drawing utensil  
for each player

### *How to Play*

1. Have every player come up with an opening line for a story and write it at the top of their sheet of paper. (Optional: mark your paper with your initials or a tiny symbol in the bottom right corner of the page so that you recognize it when it comes back to you.)
2. Pass all papers one person to the left.
3. Using the line at the top of the new piece of paper, write down what happens next in the story. Then fold the top of the paper down so that it covers the first line and pass the paper to the left again.
4. Using the visible sentence or phrase on the new piece of paper, draw a picture to illustrate what happens next. Then accordion fold the already folded top of the paper so that the first line remains hidden and the second one becomes covered. With only the illustration showing, pass the paper one person to the left again.
5. Using only the illustration on the new piece of paper as a guide, write a sentence describing what happens next.
6. Continue passing the pattern around the circle until the stories are back with their original authors.
7. Unfold the papers and take turns reading aloud the stories created.

## Advent Ornaments

As you begin to pull out ornaments for the Christmas tree, set aside twenty-four special ones and wrap them or place them in festive bags or boxes. Each day during Advent, take turns opening up one wrapped ornament and hanging it on the tree.

When you take down the tree at the end of the season, feel free to prewrap those special ornaments so you can continue the tradition next year!

# Advent

## Fun Facts



Similar to Lent, Advent began as a season of fasting and prayer for Christians around the world.



The most popular colors for Advent candles are violet and rose, but some churches use blue candles or red ones. In the traditional pattern, the violet candles, which are typically used for the first, second, and fourth Sundays, represent prayer, sacrifice, and reflection. The rose candle, which is lit on the third Sunday, represents rejoicing. Sometimes a white candle is placed in the center of the wreath to symbolize the celebration of Jesus's birth.



On the third Sunday of Advent, a special pink or rose candle is lit to signify the joy that the time of fasting and penitence is more than halfway over. This is called *Gaudete* Sunday, which means “joy” in Latin.



## Ingredients

Butter for greasing the baking dish

### FRUIT LAYER

3 cups chopped apple (any kind works, but pink or red are more festive!)

2 cups cranberries, washed and rinsed

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour/almond flour/gluten-free flour/ etc.

1 cup granulated sugar (or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup honey,  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup maple syrup,  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup agave, or 1 teaspoon stevia)

### TOPPING

3 cups oats

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup pecans, chopped (or  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup rice cereal or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup pumpkin seeds)

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup all-purpose flour (or almond flour or gluten-free flour)

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup brown sugar (or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup coconut sugar or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup date sugar)

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup melted unsalted butter (or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup applesauce,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup Greek yogurt,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup ghee, or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup coconut oil)

## Directions

- Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13-inch glass or metal baking dish.
- In a plastic bag or mixing bowl, mix the fruit layer ingredients until the fruit pieces are well coated. Layer the fruit evenly into the greased baking dish.
- In a small bowl, combine all the ingredients in the topping layer until it has a crumbly texture. Spread the oat topping evenly over the fruit layer.
- Bake at 350°F for 45 minutes, or until the topping is browned and the apple filling is bubbling.
- Enjoy with cream for breakfast, dessert, or a tasty snack!

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