



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

2023

Advent & Kindness Calendar

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<p>³ First Sunday in Advent: Hope</p>	<p>⁴ Write a letter to a friend or family member in another state.</p>	<p>⁵ </p>	<p>⁶ Donate to charity.</p>	<p>⁷ Bake cookies for your pastor and church staff.</p>	<p>⁸ Pay for someone's food or coffee.</p>	<p>⁹ </p>
<p>¹⁰ Second Sunday in Advent: Peace</p>	<p>¹¹ Pray for a friend. Then text or call them.</p>	<p>¹² </p>	<p>¹³ Meet a friend and buy them coffee.</p>	<p>¹⁴ Give a compliment to someone. You'll feel better than they do.</p>	<p>¹⁵ </p>	<p>¹⁶ Donate food to the food pantry.</p>
<p>¹⁷ Third Sunday in Advent: Joy</p>	<p>¹⁸ </p>	<p>¹⁹ </p>	<p>²⁰ Give something away.</p>	<p>²¹ </p>	<p>²² Support a small business.</p>	<p>²³ Hold the door open for someone.</p>
<p>²⁴ Fourth Sunday in Advent: Love</p>	<p>²⁵ </p>	<p>²⁶ Text five people on your contact list something positive.</p>	<p>²⁷ </p>	<p>²⁸ Bake a dessert for a senior adult who lives alone.</p>	<p>²⁹ Babysit for a friend for free.</p>	<p>³⁰ </p>



The Light Has Come

**Advent Season
2023**

**Glacial Community YMCA
Spiritual Development**

Advent 2023

The Light Has Come

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined." Isaiah 9:2

Advent. It's a season of preparation that looks both backward and forward; through the celebration of the first time Christ came to our world (his first advent), and with great anticipation of his eventual return and the fulfillment of his promise (his second advent). Christians remember Jesus' promise to return one day and restore everything fully. This season invokes feelings of expectation and hope! The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "arrival" or "coming" from the word *advenire* (ad- "to" venire "come"). Advent is a reminder of how the Jewish people waited for the Messiah and how Christians wait for the second coming of Christ today.

Thank you for taking a few moments over the next four weeks to celebrate this special season with your YMCA family. These weekly devotions are designed to prepare you as an individual or as a family for the true spirit of the Christmas season. Over the next four weeks this guide will focus on these four themes:

- 1. Week One: Hope**
- 2. Week Two: Peace**
- 3. Week Three: Joy**
- 4. Week Four: Love**

Find a time, preferably near the beginning of each of these weeks to spend a few moments of quiet reflection, focusing on the theme of each week. Light a candle for each week, if you choose, to signify the light of Christ coming into our world. But whether you choose that or not, our hope is that the thoughts expressed in this guide will help direct you into a genuine celebration of the Christmas season and all the hope, life, and light that it brings. For truly, Light has come into the darkness. And that Light will bring peace, because as Christians, we have the promise of Immanuel, "God with us," who is our eternal Prince of Peace. And in our world today, we need a special gifting of His peace. So, join us in a season of advent, a celebration that the Lord has indeed come, and we have His joy because of advent.

"The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come."

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

An Advent Prayer for The Lord to Come

A Prayer for you as you begin this season of Advent

This Christmas, Lord, come to the manger of my heart. Fill me with Your presence from the very start. As I prepare for the holidays and gifts to be given, remind me of the gift You gave when You sent Your Son from Heaven. The first Christmas gift, it was the greatest gift ever. You came as a baby born in a manger. Wrapped like the gifts I find under my tree, waiting to be opened, to reveal Your love to me.

Restore to me the wonder that came with Jesus' birth, when He left the riches of Heaven and wrapped Himself in rags of earth. Immanuel, *God with us*, Your presence came that night. And angels announced, "Into your darkness, God brings His Light." "Do not be afraid," they said, to shepherds in the field.

Speak to my heart today, Lord, and help me to yield. Make me like those shepherd boys, obedient to Your call. Setting distractions and worries aside, to You I surrender them all. Surround me with Your presence, Lord, I long to hear Your voice. Clear my mind of countless concerns and all the holiday noise. Slow me down this Christmas, let me not be in a rush. In the midst of parties and planning, I want to feel Your hush. This Christmas, Jesus, come to the manger of my heart. Invade my soul like Bethlehem, bringing peace to every part. Dwell within and around me, as I unwrap Your presence each day. Keep me close to You, Lord. It's in Your wonderful Name I pray.

- Renee Swope, *"The Manger of My Heart"* from *Proverbs 31 Ministries*

WEEK ONE

Week of December 3

HOPE

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. [...] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

How would you define "hope"? For many, it may mean nothing more than wishful thinking. However, a definition like that leads us to a false sense of the word, only hoping something will happen, something we have no control over.

Biblically, the meaning of hope is much richer. In Scripture we come to understand that hope is an assurance. It is a complete trust in our God, who is in His very nature trustworthy. If you think of how God has worked his plans in your life in the past, in the same way we know we can trust that he will fulfill all he has promised in our future as well. Our hope waits on a perfect God and is never disappointed. Our hope endures. It's not simply wishful thinking. It withstands the difficulties and the disappointments of this world and keeps our focus on the focus of our hope, God himself, through his Son, Immanuel.

Our hope looks forward. It is anchored in the promise Jesus gave his followers that he would return to make all things right. This Christmas season, as we look back to celebrate the coming of the Christ child, let's remember to also keep one eye forward, anticipating and hoping for his return, just as he promised.

Additional Scripture Readings: Isaiah 11:1; Matthew 1:22; Luke 2:8; John 1:14

Advent Prayer: O God, by your holy prophets, you promised that your only Son would come in the flesh for us and be born of a virgin. In these last days, you have fulfilled your Word. When he who came to redeem the world comes to be our judge, let us not be put to shame, through the merits of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. -Source: Mozarabic Collect

For a time of worship, go interactive here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO7ySn-Swwc>

"God of hope, I look to you with an open heart and yearning spirit. During this Advent season, I will keep alert and awake, listening for your word and keeping to your precepts. My hope is in you." ~ Matthew Kelly

WEEK TWO

Week of December 10

PEACE

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

*¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth **peace** among those with whom he is pleased!"*

-Luke 2:8-14

Shalom! The Hebrew word for peace. In its essence, Shalom is how things are meant to be: a slice of heaven.

Did you know that the Bible mentions the word peace somewhere between 200-400 times? However, in today's world, peace seems so far out of reach. This peace that Scripture refers to is the hallmark of the Christmas story. In the passage for today's reading, we see that. The shepherds themselves proclaim God's glory and speak that peace over God's creation. And we see in Jesus' words that although we may never experience peace in the circumstances of this world, it is possible through Jesus himself. He told his followers this, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid*" (John 14:7). The peace that Jesus brings, not only at Christmas, but for all of life is an inner peace. It is the peace found in all of Scripture. As the apostle Paul would define it, a "peace that passes all understanding" (Philippians 4).

This Christmas season, as you celebrate the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, remember that he came to bring peace on earth. Not in our circumstances, but in him. So celebrate Shalom! And allow that peace of heaven to fill your heart and your home.

Pray this: Heavenly Father, You are the God who gives peace. This second week of Advent causes us to remember that because of Jesus we can experience a Christmas free from turmoil and chaos. Regardless of our circumstances or our situations, you offer us peace that passes understanding. Keep us in perfect peace as our mind is stayed on the truth of your powerful love. Thank you for your mighty, sovereign hand. Help us to trust fully in you and rest in the peace that you offer. It's in the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Additional Readings: Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 9:6

For a time of worship, go interactive here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoL2W9MuA9k>

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." -John 16:33

WEEK THREE

Week of December 17

JOY

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

If you are lighting candles each week for your Advent celebrations, you may know that this week that is themed "joy" is also referred to "The Shepherd's Candle." It is named this because of the great joy that the shepherds felt when they received the news of the Messiah's birth. Joy was, and still is, a very real aspect of the Christmas story. The angels themselves proclaimed to the shepherds the "good news that will cause great joy for all the people." And the shepherds acted swiftly to follow the instructions of the angels, and in fact experienced the greatest joy of all time, witnessing first-hand the little baby, Immanuel, lying in the manger, just as was told.

Joy. In life it can be hard to maintain. Circumstances, difficulties, trials, and discouraging news from around the world can drain the joy of the masses. But when we understand true joy, not based in our circumstances, and solely based in our position in Christ, we can have joy, even in the midst of a difficult world. This Christmas season, may you be reminded that the coming of the Christ child into our world brought not only hope and peace, but the news of His coming gave great joy to the world, then *and* now. So, go ahead and choose joy this Christmas season! And share it bountifully.

Additional readings: Luke 1:26-45; John 15:1-17

Interactive video for the whole family: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jthLvNgmFiA>

"Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God."

— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

WEEK FOUR

Week of December 24

LOVE

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. -Luke 1: 11-15

The fourth week of Advent is typically when you light a purple candle, "The Angel's Candle," signifying the theme of Love. Angels appear in the Christmas story even before Jesus does. In Luke, chapter one, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to announce that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would give birth to a baby boy, John the Baptist, who would later proclaim the coming of Jesus' ministry. After Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, he then appeared to Mary to foretell that she would be the mother of the Messiah, giving birth to Him as a virgin.

Angels often brought good news to God's people, as agents of great love, just as the Christmas story conveys. Within the Christmas story, angels function as messengers of love. They told people "good news" which is unexpected, but no less good for being shocking. In some cases, the news that the angels gave saved people's lives. Other times, it alerted people to something worth celebrating, in the future or nearby. In each of these cases, their message showed God's love.

The greatest expression of God's love is found in John 3:16, which expresses God's heart for sending Jesus to this world. It simply states, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, would not perish, but would have everlasting life." So, you see, the Christmas story is really all about love. It's about a God of love who gave us the perfect gift and example of love through the person of Jesus. This week, the final week of Advent, be thankful for the gift of love that came to us through Jesus, displaying the heart of God our Father.

Additional Readings: Mathew 1:18-25; I John 4:8-12; John 15:13

Enjoy interactive worship with one of these: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq5URsXbKXs>, and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vwu-t7QRaE>

Pray this: Lord Jesus, thank you for your gift of love. We know that we were dead in our sins, and did not deserve anything but death. Thank you that in spite of our many sins, you still loved us and came to save us. You came and showed us how to love. Teach us what it is to love, and how to practice it each day. Remind us that love is paradoxical, sacrificial, and only found in you. Give us the wisdom we need to love well, the mercy to forgive ourselves when we neglect to love well, and the hunger to always learn more about love. We ask for all these things in your name, Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY

A Prayer for Advent

To be read on Christmas day

A Prayer of Gratitude for the Birth of Jesus

Father God, we thank You and praise You today for the miracle of Your Son's birth. Thank You for bringing great JOY to the whole world! Thank You for giving us the assurance that because You came to us in the form of a human, we who believe in Jesus can know with absolute certainty that we'll spend eternity with You. We thank You, Lord, for the many reasons we have been given a merry Christmas. And we rejoice for each blessing. New life. New love. A home. A job. New opportunities. Second chances. And more. We know, Lord, that You bring the sun and the moon and set the stars in motion. You tell the ocean where to stop and the snow when to start. And we thank You for the mighty gift of Your creation.

Thank You, Father, for spiritual leaders and faith-filled friends who keep encouraging us when we are close to giving up. And although we have many reasons to rejoice today, Lord, we also know December 25th can be not-so-merry for a whole host of reasons. We pray for those who are experiencing loss during Advent: relational, financial, spiritual and physical. We pray for those who are coping with loving a prodigal and our friends and family members whose hearts are far from You. We pray for those dealing with unemployment and addictions and chronic sickness... and unending pain and frustrations of all kinds. Thank You, Lord, that You are The Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace, even in the midst of our not-so-merry circumstances. Finally, Lord, we ask You to grant us peace. Peace in our homes, peace in our churches, and peace in our hearts, when the world all around us spins out-of-control. Help us to stay focused on You, this Advent season and always. Thank You for loving the whole world enough to send the greatest gift, Your Son, so that we might truly have a very merry Christmas. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Steph Raquel, from "A Christmas Prayer for the Merry... and Not-So-Merry", Prov. 31 Ministries

Thank you for sharing these four weeks of Advent with our YMCA family. We hope your Christmas season has been and continues to be a joyful time of celebration with family and friends of all God's goodness to us, but primarily for sending His Son, Jesus to our world. Merry Christmas, and all God's best for you in the coming new year.

-From your YMCA family