

A SEASON OF HOPE

2026 Advent Devotional

GLACIAL COMMUNITY YMCA
Roehl Family YMCA
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Produced by Spiritual Development of the Glacial Community YMCA

INTRODUCTION
Making Room for Christmas

Christmas has a way of filling our calendars, our shopping lists, our homes, and our schedules. We decorate, shop, bake, travel, attend gatherings, and prepare for celebrations. Yet, in the middle of all the activity, we can sometimes miss the very gift we are celebrating.

Advent is an invitation to slow down.

The word Advent means "coming". It is a season of anticipation as we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. It reminds us that God entered our world in the most extraordinary way through the birth of an ordinary child in Bethlehem.

At the YMCA, we believe that caring for people means caring for the whole person: spirit, mind, and body. During this Advent season, we invite you to consider how the message of Christmas can shape every part of your life.

As we explore hope, peace, joy, and love, may we discover that Christmas is more than a day on the calendar. It is an invitation to live differently, and a reminder to carry the spirit of the season throughout the year.

WEEK ONE: Hope

Beginning on Sunday, November 29th, 2026

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2, 6

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light..." – Isaiah 9:2

Have you ever experienced a season when hope seemed difficult to find? Perhaps it was a difficult diagnosis, a strained relationship, financial uncertainty, or simply the weight of everyday responsibilities. We all experience moments when life feels overwhelming. Sometimes the darkness around us makes it difficult to see what lies ahead.

The prophet Isaiah spoke to people who understood darkness. They experienced uncertainty, fear, and difficult circumstances. Yet Isaiah offered a promise: a great light was coming. That light would come through a child who would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

That child was Jesus.

The hope of Christmas is not that everything in our lives will suddenly become easy. It is that we are never alone in the challenges we face. Jesus came into our world to bring light where there is darkness, encouragement where there is discouragement, and hope where hope seems lost.

As a YMCA community, we have countless opportunities to share hope with others. A friendly smile, an encouraging word, a listening ear, or simply taking time to notice someone can make a greater difference than we realize.

You may never know the challenges someone else is carrying when they walk through our doors. But you can be a source of encouragement and hope.

This Advent, remember that the light of Christ shines brightest when things seem the darkest.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Where in your life do you need to experience God's hope right now?
2. Who might need a word of encouragement or a reminder that they are not alone?

PUT FAITH INTO ACTION: Look for one person this week whom you can encourage. Let them know they matter. Go out of your way to brighten someone's day.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus to be the light of the world. When life feels uncertain or difficult, remind us that our hope is found in You. Help us to carry that hope into our homes, workplaces, and YMCA community. May our words and actions encourage those who need it most. Amen.

WEEK TWO: Peace

Beginning on Sunday, December 6th, 2026

Scripture: John 14:27

"Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives."
– John 14:27

Have you ever noticed how busy we become during the season when we are supposed to be celebrating peace? December can be one of the most hectic months of the year. There are gifts to purchase, meals to prepare, events to attend, and people to see. We often find ourselves rushing through the very season that invites us to slow down.

But the peace Jesus offers is different from what the world offers.

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples shortly before His death. He knew they would soon face uncertainty, fear, and confusion. He didn't promise them a life without difficulty. Instead, He promised them His presence and His peace. The peace of Christ is not dependent on everything going according to plan. It is an inner confidence that God is with us, even when life feels out of control.

Think about the people you encounter each day. Some may be dealing with family struggles, loneliness, health concerns, or pressures that no one else can see. They may come to the YMCA to exercise, swim, participate in a program, or simply connect with others. What if we viewed each interaction as an opportunity to share peace?

We can bring peace into a room through patience. We can bring peace into a relationship through forgiveness. We can bring peace into someone's day through kindness.

The Christmas story reminds us that Jesus came not simply to bring peace to the world but to bring peace into our hearts.

This Advent, make room for His peace. And be quick to speak peace into other's lives as well.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What tends to rob you of peace during this season?
2. How can you become a calming and encouraging presence in someone's life?

PUT FAITH INTO ACTION: Before reacting to a frustrating situation this week, pause, take a breath, and choose a response that reflects the peace of Christ.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for offering a peace that the world cannot provide. In the middle of our busy lives, help us slow down and recognize Your presence. Give us patience with others, grace in difficult situations, and a heart that seeks peace rather than conflict. Help us become people who bring peace wherever we go. Amen.

WEEK THREE: Joy

Beginning on Sunday, December 13th, 2026

Scripture: Luke 2:10–11

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." – Luke 2:10

When you think about Christmas, what brings you joy?

Perhaps it is the excitement of children opening presents, gathering with family, enjoying a favorite holiday tradition, or listening to Christmas music. Those things can certainly make us happy. But there is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is often connected to what is happening around us. Joy is rooted in something deeper.

When the angel appeared to the shepherds outside Bethlehem, the message was one of great joy. The Savior had been born! This announcement wasn't reserved for the wealthy, the powerful, or the religious elite. It was good news for all people.

The joy of Christmas is found in knowing that God loves us so much that He sent His Son into the world. And that joy doesn't disappear when circumstances become difficult.

We all know people who are facing Christmas without someone they love. Others are experiencing difficult transitions, disappointments, or uncertainty about the future. For them, this season may be more difficult than joyful. That is why sharing joy matters.

Sometimes joy is found in the simplest things: a genuine smile, a shared laugh, a helping hand, or the feeling that someone genuinely cares.

At the YMCA, we see opportunities for joy every day. We see children learning new skills, friends encouraging one another, families spending time together, and people celebrating accomplishments both big and small. True joy effects spirit, mind, and body for all ages. These moments remind us that joy often grows when we share life with others.

This Advent, don't simply look for reasons to be joyful. Look for opportunities to bring joy to someone else.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What brings you genuine joy, beyond the temporary happiness of the season?
2. Who could use a little extra joy or encouragement in their life this week?

PUT FAITH INTO ACTION: Find a way to make someone smile this week. Share a compliment, write a note, offer encouragement, or perform an unexpected act of kindness.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for the good news of great joy found in Jesus. Help us remember that true joy is not dependent on our circumstances but comes from knowing You. Open our eyes to people who may be struggling this season. Use us to bring smiles, encouragement, and hope to those around us. Amen.

WEEK FOUR: Love

Christmas Week–Beginning on Sunday, December 20th, 2026

Scripture: I John 4:9–11

"This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him." – 1 John 4:9

If we had to summarize the message of Christmas in one word, it might be love. Christmas is the story of God's incredible love for us. He didn't simply send a message or offer advice from a distance. He came to us. He entered our world in the person of Jesus Christ.

Think about that for a moment. The Creator of the universe chose to enter His creation as a baby. Jesus experienced the joys and difficulties of human life. He walked among ordinary people, welcomed the overlooked, cared for the hurting, and demonstrated what it means to love others. His life gives us a picture of what love looks like.

Love is more than a feeling. It is a decision expressed through our actions. It means putting others before ourselves, showing compassion, offering forgiveness, and caring for people even when it is inconvenient.

This is a message that connects deeply with the YMCA mission of putting Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. Every day, we have opportunities to demonstrate love. It happens when we welcome someone who feels like an outsider, encourage a person who is struggling, show patience with a child, or reach out to someone who may feel forgotten.

We don't have to do extraordinary things to demonstrate extraordinary love. Often, it is the small, everyday acts of kindness that make the greatest difference. Here at the Glacial Community YMCA, we live by the motto of "Loving like Jesus loves." It's in all our interactions with our community. And it makes a difference.

As we approach Christmas, remember that the greatest gift ever given wasn't wrapped in beautiful paper or placed beneath a Christmas tree. It was wrapped in love and laid in a manger.

His name is Jesus. May we celebrate His love by sharing it with others.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How has God's love made a difference in your life?
2. What is one practical way you can demonstrate Christ's love to someone this Christmas?

PUT FAITH INTO ACTION: Do something for someone this week without expecting anything in return. Let your actions demonstrate the love of Jesus.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us so much that You sent Your Son into the world. Thank You for the example of Jesus, who showed us what it means to love others. Help us move beyond simply talking about love and put it into practice. May our YMCA be a place where people experience kindness, compassion, acceptance, and genuine care. May others see Your love through us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE: The Greatest Gift

December 24th, 2026

Scripture: Luke 2:11

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord."
– Luke 2:11

Tonight, homes will be filled with excitement, families will gather, and Christmas celebrations will begin. For many, it is one of the most meaningful nights of the year. But before the gifts are opened and the celebrations begin, take a moment to remember the greatest gift of all.

God gave us Jesus.

The baby born in Bethlehem would grow to become the Savior who would demonstrate God's love, offer forgiveness, restore broken lives, and provide the promise of eternal life. The Christmas story reminds us that God came near. He entered our world so that we could know Him personally.

As we celebrate Christmas, may we carry the message of Advent beyond December. May we be people of hope, peace, joy, and love throughout the year. And may the spirit of Christ be evident in how we treat others, how we serve our communities, and how we care for one another.

PRAYER:

Gracious God, tonight we pause to thank You for the greatest gift ever given. Thank You for Jesus, who came into the world to bring us hope, peace, joy, and love. As we celebrate His birth, may our hearts be renewed and our lives reflect His example. Bless our families, our YMCA community, and all those who need to experience Your love this Christmas. May the light of Christ shine through us today and throughout the coming year. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A CLOSING THOUGHT FOR OUR YMCA COMMUNITY

May this Advent season remind us that Christmas is not
simply something we celebrate, but something we live.

May we be people who bring hope to the discouraged,
peace to the troubled, joy to the hurting, and love to everyone we encounter.

Because when we put these principles into practice, we are doing more than celebrating the Christmas story. We are living out the example of the One whose birth we celebrate.

Merry Christmas from your YMCA family!