

Reverse Advent Calendar

GUIDE

December 1-24



Written by: Rev. Laurel Cluthe



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Reverse Advent Calendar

GUIDE

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Reverse Advent Calendars: An Overview

What: Reverse Advent Calendars are a creative way of experiencing the “waiting and anticipation” of Advent. **Instead of receiving a calendar with a chocolate or small prize each day of Advent like some do, adults and children will be giving an item each day**, which helps families at Hillcrest transition out of homelessness! This guide includes daily devotionals and instructions on the objects to fill your box with. A box can be completely filled for as little as \$20, so this is a mission project ideal for a single person, small household, or even a large family.

Who: All Holmeswoodians are encouraged to participate! Beginning at Advent Eat-vent or soon thereafter, pick up a box with 12-24 slots (wine boxes work well). If you’d like, decorate the box in holiday paper or other festive décor. Following this guide (more available in the church Galleria), read the daily Advent devotional and gift one item to the box for all 24 days leading up to Christmas Eve.

Why: To learn and serve during the Advent season, showing Christ’s love to others. All 24 of your gifts will be sorted and **given to Hillcrest Transitional Housing**.



When: Beginning Christmas Eve and through January 6, set your box at the altar table in the Sanctuary as a gift to God and to our local Hillcrest community. Additionally, a “drop spot” will be taped off in the church Galleria, for your convenience.

How this Works:

1. Wrap & Choose

As part of our Advent Eat-vent Lunch, each household/person who would like to participate will **WRAP & decorate** a slotted box (wrapping paper, bows, etc., will be provided). **Choose** from 2 themes: **Cleaning Kit** or **Birthday Party Kit**.

2. Read & Fill

EACH DAY of Advent* (December 1—24), use this *Reverse Advent Guide* to **READ** the daily devotional and **FILL** the box with 1 item. Get creative with your gifts!

*Advent Season technically lasts from the Sunday nearest St. Andrew’s day until Christmas Eve but, for the purpose of matching countdown calendars, we will just follow Dec. 1-24 (plus Christmas).

3. Offer

Return your filled box to the altar (or church Galleria) as part of your Worship **OFFERING**. We will collect them **from Christmas Eve (4pm & 11pm Worship) until January 6**. The boxes will then be sorted and delivered to Hillcrest Transitional Housing!

Who will receive our filled boxes?



Families (like this one!) at Hillcrest!

Hillcrest Transitional Housing is a local Kansas City agency that helps families experiencing homelessness move to self-sufficiency.

How do they help families?

- ◆ By addressing the total life situation of a family
- ◆ **a hand up, not a handout**

In 2017 alone, Hillcrest provided some cool stuff...

- ◆ 618 adults & children received Transitional or Rapid Re-Housing & Coaching
- ◆ 119,305 meals were served
- ◆ 7,004 hours of 1-on-1 case management and budgeting
- ◆ 36.090 volunteer hours spent serving families

We are proud to broaden our partnership with Hillcrest as they share God's love with local families, our neighbors. Thank you for joining in this Advent calendar fun!!

<https://www.hillcresttransitionalhousing.org>

A neat mission project...



Cleaning Kit:

Hillcrest will offer these essential kits to **each new family** moving into their apartments! What a welcoming item to ensure that families **1)** share a sense of responsibility and have pride in their new space, and **2)** are able to maintain a clean, safe home for their children. (Plus, kids learn about chores—yippee!)

Help us by joining in on the giving fun!

Birthday Party Kit:

With these colorful kits, Hillcrest's residents who are parents will be able to throw a modest, yet cheerful, birthday party **for their children**. For families experiencing poverty & homelessness, celebrations and holidays are anchors of hope in especially stressful situations.

You can be a part of providing **dignity, self-worth** and sharing in the gift of life milestones with parents and kids!



Suggested Items for Cleaning Kit:

- Sponges
- Scrub brush for tub, scrub brush for dishes
- Assortment of cleaners:
 - Glass cleaner
 - All-purpose/countertop cleaner
 - Bathroom cleaner, toilet cleaner
 - Laundry detergent
 - Dish detergent
 - Dish soap
 - Vinegar and baking soda
 - Lysol wipes
- Hand soap (for kitchen and bathroom; liquid or bar soap)
- Hand towels, dish towels
- Roll of paper towels
- Air freshener (spray, plug-ins, etc.)
- List of helpful tips for cleaning; chore chart for kids
- Other creative items are welcome! **Please make sure they can fit in the box.**



Please DO NOT include:

- Broom/dustpan & mop (Hillcrest already has these for each new resident family!)
- Any used or opened products

Have fun with it!

Suggested Items for Birthday Kit:

- Box of cake mix, jar of frosting
- Birthday candles
- Colorful paper plates, plastic forks/spoons, napkins
- Streamers, balloons, plastic tablecloth, other party decorations
- **Small** toy or game for a boy or a girl (coloring book, puzzle, book, crayons, deck of cards, earbud headphones, etc.)
- A couple of blank “Happy Birthday” cards
- Gift bag, tissue paper
- Party favors, small items to share with siblings/friends
- A game or activity to be enjoyed at the party (bubbles, wall party game, CD of songs)
- Other creative items are welcome! **Please make sure they can fit in the box.**



Please DO NOT include:

- Perishable food items
- Any used or opened products
- Big birthday gifts (the purpose is to celebrate, not shower with gifts) =)

Have fun with it!

What in the world is Advent?

Ad·vent | \ 'ad- ,vent, chiefly British -vent\ the period beginning four Sundays before [Christmas](#) and observed by some Christians as a season of prayer and fasting.



History and Etymology for *Advent*



Middle English, borrowed from Medieval Latin *adventus*, going back to Latin, "arrival, appearance," from *adven-*, variant stem of *advenire* "to arrive" (from *ad-* [AD-](#) + *venire* "to come, to visit" going back to Indo-European **gʷem-je-*) + *-tus*, suffix of action nouns



Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas (around St. Andrew's day) and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year for Christians—**The universal Church's NEW YEAR!** Liturgical=*from liturgy*, which means the forms and functions of public worship. During Advent, we prepare for, and anticipate, the coming of Christ. Also, we take time to remember the longing of Jews for a Messiah **and our own longing for, and need of, forgiveness, salvation and a new beginning.** Even as we **look back** and celebrate the birth of Jesus in a humble stable in Bethlehem, we also **look forward** in anticipating the second coming of Christ as the fulfillment of all that was promised by Jesus' first coming. [sources: Merriam-Webster, Book of Common Prayer, UMC, WJK]

Colors of Advent:

Purple (or Blue) = royalty, anticipating a King, also repentance and fasting
Pink (or Rose) = 3rd Sunday candle represents joy, a season of celebration
White = Christ light, Jesus Christ's lack of sin
At Advent Eat-vent, we are decorating with purple, red AND green, so we can make the connection of Jesus' presence in ALL parts of the holidays!

The Advent wreath, four candles on a wreath of evergreen, is shaped in a perfect circle to symbolize the eternity of God. In some churches, four purple candles, one for each week in [Advent](#), are used with one larger white candle in the middle as the Christ candle. Other churches prefer three purple or blue candles with one candle being rose or pink,



to represent joy. While the Advent wreath with its four candles did bring light to churches, it was not to illuminate the interior as much as to symbolize the coming of Christ. The Advent wreath began in the time of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther.

During each Sunday of the Advent season, we focus on one of the four virtues Jesus brings us: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. The Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day reminding Christians that Jesus is the light of the world. The order and exact wording vary among churches, but the wreath continually **reminds us of who we are called to be as followers of Jesus.**

Getting ready for Christmas:

December 1-6: **HOPE**

December 7-12: **PEACE**

December 13-18: **JOY**

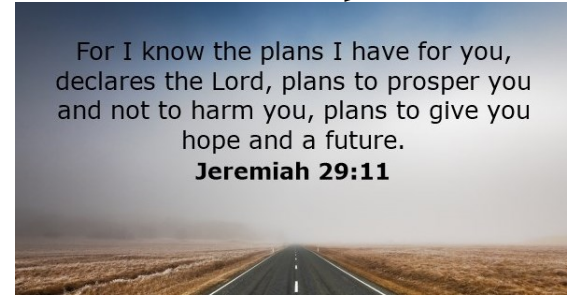
December 19-24: **LOVE**

December 25: **Christmas Day!**

NOW...LET'S GET STARTED!

Notes:

December 1st: Hope Remains



What is hope to you? A long-awaited change in your life, or a vision of what could be. Disney World wonder devoid of reality, or a deflated balloon held by a grumpy Scrooge.

HOPE. While Christian FAITH is the expectation of God's promises here and now, HOPE is the airplane view of God's promises fulfilled in the future. Some think hope resides in the happiest times of our lives, when things are going alright and no one is sick or struggling. Many see Jeremiah 29:11 on a wall and think, "Everything is going to be just fine because God will make things better for me."

But when we look at the context of this best-selling home wall hanging, we see a different angle. God's caravan of people (the Israelites) were in exile, a punishment for being disobedient, and all they wanted to do was go back home. In addition, God told the Israelites in verse 10 that they needed to put down roots in this foreign city of Babylon; when the city prospers, *they will prosper*. Oh--also, it'll take *70 years* for Babylon to prosper, so those struggling Israelites won't even live long enough to finally go home. Their grandkids will experience the move back home (which will be new to those little whippersnappers). Whoa, what a disappointment!

And, yet, *this is where God's people discover hope*...through time and trials and struggles, they discover the ever-present faithfulness of God. While we humans flounder and throw tantrums, **God remains constant with love, presence and promise.** Through perseverance we discover growth and hope. Our current faith informs our future hope.

Pray: Thank you, God, for remaining constant.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box, remembering God's constant presence in your life.





December 2nd: H.O.P.E.

What does H.O.P.E. stand for?

Here are some ideas:

- Helping One Person Every day
- Honor Obey Pray Encourage
- Heart Open Please Enter
- Help Open People's Eyes
- Happy Opportunities Presented Every day

This one stood out:



Hold On, Pain Ends

With forest fires destroying homes in California and violence erupting in many communities, people carry around a lot of pain. We have been harmed. According to Jeremiah 29:11 (see yesterday's photo), harm and pain are not from God.

Hope provides a future and a life raft to grasp on to when we don't know what to do, say or think. Hope is so very powerful. Hope is from God. And Scripture mentions God's healing from our pain many times; here are a few examples: Psalm 23, Psalm 34:18, 2nd Corinthians 1:3-11 and Revelation 21:3-4.

Pray: God of Hope, thank you for today. As we enter into December and the Advent season, help me to see glimpses of your presence within me and your promise to love me. Help me to remember that You have plans for me. You also said You will never harm me. I am loved by You. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Reverse Advent Calendar today. As you place the item in the box, think of the HOPE that you are sharing with a struggling family.



December 3rd: Elf Party



Last year, I went to a special party in Kansas City...an Elf viewing party! It took place at a movie theater, and people dressed up in costumes and had props. We all watched the movie *Elf* together. We were a bunch of strangers bonding over the silly-sweet Will Ferrell movie about Christmas. It was so fun! What is especially wonderful about this beloved movie (please watch it this month, if you are able) is that Buddy the Elf was adopted by Papa Elf and the residents of The North Pole, even though he was a (giant!) human, even as a baby. He was loved and loved and loved, and he loved back. It reminds me of this verse:

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.
—Galatians 4:4-5

You and I have also been adopted by God...isn't that wonderful?

Pray: God of Hope, remind me of your unending love for me. Share your wisdom of how I can creatively love your other adoptees. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box, thinking of how all are adopted as beloved children of God.

December 4th: The Original Crown Center



Isn't Kansas City just grand during the holidays? Colorful lights lining The Plaza, warm white twinkling lights on houses and businesses around town, and let us not forget Christmas Headquarters. Crown Plaza is flocked with crowds during this season. While people travel from near and far, and they bring with them varied feelings and experiences, **all come to experience the wonder** of the holidays at Hallmark's awe-filled home base. The trees and elaborate decorations, the ice skating rink and the shops, the shows and the fountains all come to life this month. And we are offered gifts and beautiful greeting cards and such creative ornaments that local and international artists and designers have crafted *all year long for this special Christmas season*.

The Nativity, with its splintered wood and dirty spots, was **the original Crown Center**. It sat in a cold cave warmed by smelly animals and dim candlelight. While it was not shiny and pristine and full of glitz and retail spectacular, love poured out of that old cave. There is a wonder that always comes when our human brains' attempt to try to understand this setting. Why would God send His perfect Son to this imperfect Earth? The love that pours out of this holy gesture is unmistakably God. Oh, Holy Night. This Hope for All was born.

Pray: God, thank you for sharing Jesus in a way that all can afford and all can experience. Let me remember that Jesus is for all. Amen.

Add: one item to your Advent calendar box and imagine the similar struggles that the holy family and the recipient family of your box might have. Remember that God remembers all.

December 5th: A Caravan of Hope



Entire families were walking, exhausted and hungry. Views of so many people, short and tall, and so much land to cover. Sounds of footsteps, talking, dreaming and arguing, echoed by the desert wind, babies' cries, and children's giggles and whining. Smells of the unfamiliar and road-weary people fill the air.

This caravan was heading straight for us.

What a sight it must have been, to see the caravan of families traveling to reach their birthplaces leading up to Jesus' birth! Can you even imagine? Actually, we can see live videos and photos of a migrant caravan from Honduras making its way to the US as I type.

Is this what pregnant Mary and Joseph looked like?


Laser-focused, the caravan now and the caravan then *had hope*. One was coming home and the other is begging for an open door to a new home. Both governments grasped for control of these caravans. Both caravans were exhausted.

Where is the hope here? What do I do?

Just like the current caravan, God had a plan for Joseph and Mary's caravan long ago:

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting." —Micah 5:2*

Pray: God of Hope, help me to pay attention. Allow me to see the glimpses of hope around me. Give me strength to share hope with others. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box. 



December 6th: Yay for Commercials!



Tired of all of the Christmas ads to buy, buy, buy?

—Each time you see an ad for a Christmas gift (like that Coveted toy or Playstation 4 or Car you’ve been drooling over), **take a second to thank God for the most-amazing-gift-ever that is Jesus.**

—Every time you put on your coat or boots or awesome colorful winter socks, say a little THANKS to God for blessing you with heat, a home, an education, and people who love you to the moon and back. This is a good challenge for kids, youth and adults. (hint, hint) =)

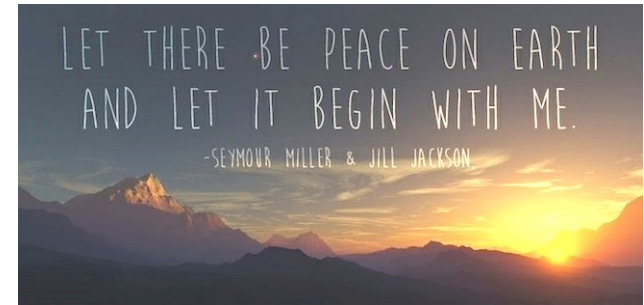
—When you get annoyed with all of the paper ads, TV commercials, holiday road traffic, and long lines at the stores, THANK GOD. Give thanks to God that this tiny, poor, vulnerable baby in Bethlehem has caused such a ruckus over history, that people are still going bonkers over His presence. We might not all understand or lean into the magnitude of Jesus Christ’s life, but Jesus’ fingerprints from 2000 years ago are still affecting our global community today. **Our job is to lean in and look up.**

Experience the wonder that is Advent, as we wait and anticipate. Those Christmas Eve butterflies are real and are exciting—because it’s all about Jesus! Jesus is The True Hope.

Pray: God, thank you for sharing Jesus in a way that all can afford and all can experience. Let me remember that Jesus is for all. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box and imagine the similar struggles that the holy family and the recipient family of your box might have. Remember that God remembers all people.

December 7th: Peace Begins Where?



Let there be Peace was written by Jill Jackson-Miller. She had had some really hard days in her life, and she came to realize the “life-saving joy of God’s peace and unconditional love.” Below are the lyrics to this beautiful song, originally written for a children’s choir to sing in 1955. It has since been printed in hymnals and children’s books, and it has been sung and recorded by soloists and groups all over the world. If you are able, listen to this gem. Let us make these lyrics our **prayer** for today. Be sure to **add** one item to your Advent calendar box, too.

*Let there be peace on earth,
and let it begin with me;
let there be peace on earth,
the peace that was meant to be.*

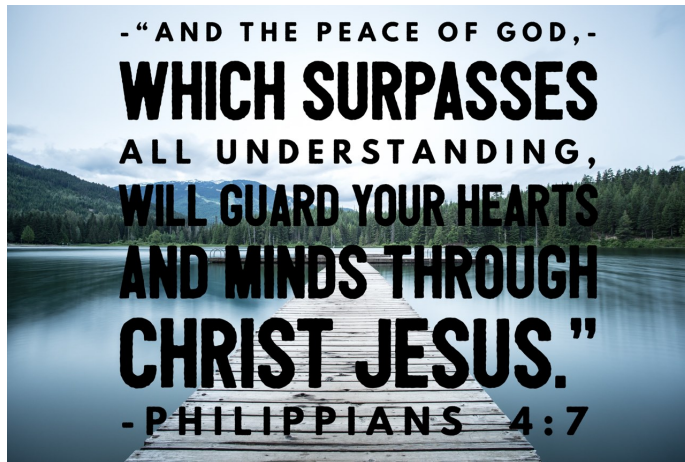
*With God our creator,
family all are we.
Let us walk with each other
in perfect harmony.**

*Let peace begin with me.
Let this be the moment now.
With ev’ry breath I take
let this be my solemn vow:*

*To take each moment
and live each moment
in peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth
and **let it begin with me.***



December 8th: All Connected



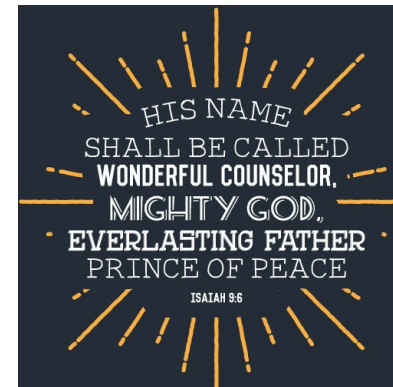
This verse says it all.

Pray: God, your peace surpasses our understanding. And that does not mean we have to cast it aside; rather, teach us how to live into peace. Show us glimpses of Your Holy Spirit's movement, and allow us to embrace the mystery. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box.



December 9th: Prince of Peace or Peas?



Wars are raging. Mass shootings are an almost daily occurrence in our country. And our To-Do Lists and stress grow as our sense of purpose and control dwindle. Yet, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be called "*Prince of Peace?*"

Peas are funny things. They are a vegetable & legume (I know, weird), round enough to roll off of forks and plates (and tables), and are either loved or hated by people's taste buds. They are controversial and divisive, especially for family dinners with involving highchairs or teenagers.

So is Jesus the Prince of Peace, or the Prince of Peas?

Maybe he's a little bit of both. Jesus lived as an unusual person who always had devoted friends and followers, as well as hate-filled enemies nearby. No one could quite pin him down, yet he was so very good to those who approached him.

Yet, Jesus didn't grow up in Candy Land, with fields of candy and perfect, stress-free days of harmony. Jesus was born into a world of war and battles of power. Violence was a normal form of communication in his society; in typical Jesus fashion, he turned violence upside down and offered a bolder approach--peace. Jesus offered care and kindness in the face of rage and fighting. Jesus offered time and comfort in moments of panic and fear. Perhaps he is both the Prince of Peace and unusual like peas. His peace merely flourished in the rest of the world's chaos. How does this translate to today? Quite easily, I think. Our only mission is to respond to today like Jesus would.

Pray: God, teach me about peace so that I can be an instrument of Jesus' loving peace to all. Amen.

Give: Add one item, thinking of ways you can share peace in your neighborhood this week.



December 10th: Passing the Peace



Jesus said this to His closest friends and then left the room.

He passed the peace.

(When I read this, I want to believe that Jesus gives me peace, but I'm still scared!)

What are sneaky ways fear creeps out of us?

- When someone cuts in line on the highway or in the store. (insecurity, lack of control)
- When someone harms another person for no good reason. (insecurity, lack of control, past hurts)
- Overscheduled and exhausted people (fear of disappointment and worthlessness)
- A person who talks about their luxury and connections and fairy tale-like life (insecurity, fear of rejection or abandonment)
- Storing away 10 years' supply non-perishable food and supplies in a bunker (fear of extinction & insignificance)

Whoa, these are heavy! The point is, fear is sneaky and can be found all throughout people's lives, including our own.

We shouldn't feel guilty about being fearful. **We should** recognize it and be aware of how to **handle it**. **Jesus gives us peace, and peace is more powerful than fear. Pass the peace.**

Pray: God, your peace is more powerful than all of my fear. Help me to own my fear and cover it with your peace. Remind me that others have fear, too, and encourage me to pass your peace to them, too. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box and imagine the similar "fear struggles" that others have. Pass Christ's peace.

December 11th: Mr. Spock Knows



Mr. Spock, from the beloved sci-fi conglomerate that is Star Trek, knows peace. But we don't have to travel light years to understand peace.

Peace comes from within.

We are each created in God's image. And God is a God of peace.

Why are doves used as a symbol to represent peace? A few examples:

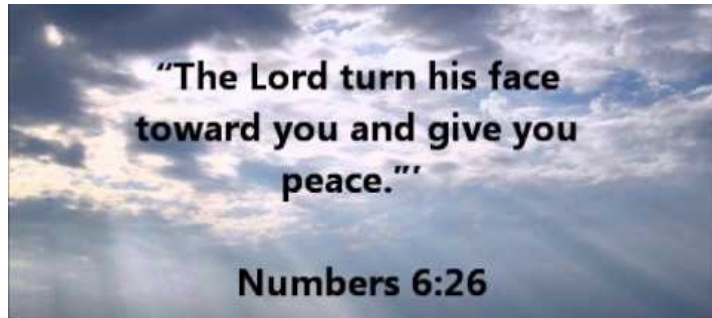
- Noah and God's promise at the ark with a dove and olive branch; olive branches were later used by Romans and Greeks.
- Up until the 3rd century, Christians primarily looked at the dove as a symbol of inner peace, which then translated to outer peace among relationships and daily life.
- Later, many other instances in history of the peace dove were used as a symbol of political, military, pacifist, artistic, community-minded, and universal peace. With the combined image of the dove as a messenger, this gives Christians an image of **peace and messenger together**.

Pray: God of Peace, show us how to be inwardly peaceful and outwardly messengers and advocates of peace. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box.



December 12th:



You know the saying that says, “be careful what you pray for?” If we pray for patience, God supposedly gives us many opportunities to test our patience. Ha. Now I’m not sure that’s completely true; however, when I started studying what the Bible says about peace, this might apply.

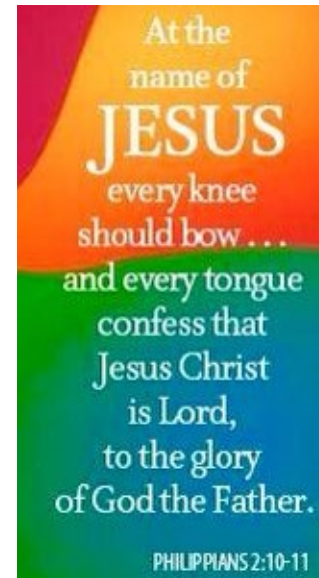
What I’ve learned about PEACE:

- **Peace is rare.** Anxiety and fear run rampant in our World, and those who live in peace are people we should pay attention to.
- **Peace is not always quiet.** The first snowfall feels peaceful and like a Silent Night. Sometimes, when people need to hear it, peace speaks boldly and more deafening than bombs.
- **Peace is powerful.** Having peace does not mean we are timid, powerless creatures; it means we attempt to be open to others, calm in the storm and present at all times. Jesus displayed this on the boat in the storm.
- **Peace is shared.** When one person displays peace to another, holy things happen. And peace grows and grows.

Pray: Holy God, help us to learn more about this mystery you call “peace.” Share your wisdom and wonder with us, as we try to live lives of peace. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box, thinking of ways you can share peace with your friends, family, and even those who test your patience and peace. =)

December 13th: Excited? Blame God



Commercials and ads for Holiday Cheer are everywhere...and have been since November 1st. Why?? Where is the *heavenly peace*?

It’s easy to get annoyed by all of it. What is it about the Christmas season that gets people so nutty and willing to spend lots of money on red & green cups of cheer at coffee shops and Santa-worthy explosions of gifts?? **God’s people get really, really excited!** We can’t help our excitement, but **we can blame it on God.**

You see, God started telling us that this King of Kings would be coming

one day. (See photo above, and remember that it’s also referencing back to Isaiah 45:23 in the Old Testament.) Since God told them Jesus was coming **so long ago**, we have generations of people in the past who were **EXCITED** about Jesus’ Birth. They had been waiting and waiting and waiting...and Jesus finally came! **Their prayers to God were FINALLY answered, and the Messiah (in the form of this tiny baby) came to SAVE US.**

You’d be excited, too, if you were Moses or Isaiah. Maybe you’d be SO THRILLED ABOUT JESUS that you’d buy a \$6 fancy whipped peppermint mocha gingerbread praline half-calf latte. Or maybe even a Star Wars or Harry Potter-themed gift or a 72” crazy-big television. Yes, the excessive gifts are *BONKERS* (Jesus is a way better gift than an iPhone), BUT the **EXCITEMENT and ANTICIPATION of celebrating Jesus’ Birth is totally LEGIT.** And God loves that.

Pray: God, help me to channel my excitement for stuff into excitement for the miraculous gift of Your Loving Son. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box, and think of ways to move from objects to gifts you can’t hold, like God’s love.



December 14th: Mary's Joy



*When they had seen him,
they spread the word concerning what had
been told them about this child.
All who heard it were amazed at what
the shepherds said to them!
But Mary treasured up all these things
and pondered them in her heart.
The shepherds returned, glorifying
and praising God for all the things
they had heard and seen, which were
just as they had been told.
--Luke 2:17-20*

Pray: God, YOU are the Inventor of Joy. Among the chaos of life, You sneak into the quiet places and offer us true joy. Like Mary, help us to *pause and ponder* the joy woven throughout our lives. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box and reflect on the parts of your life that are woven with "joy."



December 15th: Whoopi!



Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit was a 1993 sequel starring Whoopi Goldberg as a former lounge singer disguised as a nun in the witness protection program. (It's a comedy.) Her new job was to teach music to a bunch of uninterested teenagers in a struggling Catholic school.

Joyful, Joyful, a contemporary urban cover of the famous "Hymn of Joy" ended the movie on a high note. While this famous tune has been sung by millions since 1907 (Henry Van Dyke's poem put to Beethoven's final movement of Symphony no. 9), the lyrics and the melody continue to ring true today. May this be our **prayer** as we **add** one more item to our Advent calendar box.

*1 Joyful, joyful, we adore You, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flow'rs before You, Op'ning to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin & sadness, Drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day!*

*2 All Your works with joy surround You, Earth & heav'n reflect
Your rays,
Stars and angels sing around You, Center of unbroken praise;
Field & forest, vale & mountain, Flow'ry meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird and flowing fountain Praising You eternally!*

*3 Always giving and forgiving, Ever blessing, ever blest,
Well-spring of the joy of living, Ocean-depth of happy rest!
Loving Father, Christ our Brother, Let Your light upon us shine;
Teach us how to love each other, Lift us to the joy divine.*

*4 Mortals join the mighty chorus Which the morning stars
began;
God's own love is reigning o'er us, Joining people hand in hand.
Ever singing, march we onward, Victors in the midst of strife;
Joyful music leads us sunward In the triumph song of life.
—from The African American Heritage Hymnal (2001)*



December 16th: Donkey's Moment



Donkeys get such a bad rap. Thanks to Pinocchio and frustrated ranchers, donkeys are known for being stubborn, lazy, slow and dumb. Many cultures even consider riding on a donkey in a parade as an embarrassing punishment (yep, Jesus did this—we'll talk later). But when Mary was pregnant and Joseph needed to go to his birthplace, a young donkey came with them. This was the donkey's moment to shine! The Bible even predicts donkey's shining moment in the Old Testament, around 518 BC! Zechariah says to share joy! So, let us give thanks to the underdog, the donkey, for assisting in God's Bethlehem miracle.

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. for All was born. —Zechariah 9:9

Pray: God, thank you for giving each of us opportunities to shine. Your Son Jesus is the ultimate Light of the World, and our job each day is to grow and shine His Light. Give us wisdom and courage to shine daily. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box and imagine ways you can shine in your daily life, giving all glory to God. Remember that Jesus' Light shines through all.

December 17th: Surprised By Joy



If I could have lunch with one writer, it would probably be C.S. Lewis. He would share wisdom, and I would try to keep my wide-eyed, nervous giggles to a minimum. I am a fan. Not because he was perfect (far from it!) but because he was a master observer of life. He saw the flowers (weeds) in the sidewalk cracks as “God moments” and the tiny laugh lines pop up when a person smiled as joy. Even this brilliant man was “surprised by joy” enough to write a book about his early life and unexpected, overwhelming joy that came with his growing relationship with God. Lewis' view of God shifted from grumpy authoritarian ready to punish to a God of eternal love and care, a God overflowing with JOY. “Surprised by joy” is also a nod to a poem by William Wordsworth, which captures a very rare moment when he forgot about the death of his beloved daughter and was able to experience pure, love-filled joy. He documented this moment.

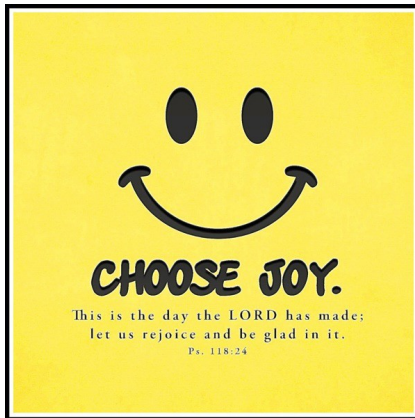
Personally, “surprised by joy” has been a theme in meeting, dating and marrying my spouse, Matt. It's a similar feeling others have as *God provided exactly what I needed when I didn't know I needed it*. And, once we realize this gift, we want to cherish and honor God for it. God is full of surprises. Have you ever been “surprised by joy?” Maybe you haven't noticed it yet? Let us look for moments of joy and ways that God has been a part of the narrative of our lives. No matter how many years we've been on Earth, God never ceases to surprise! We simply must keep our eyes, ears and heart open to these moments.

Pray: God of Joy, open me up to expect your surprising moments of joy. Give me “God eyes” to see them. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box, pondering joy.



December 18th: More than Happy



What does “JOY” mean?

- The Bible uses a couple of different Greek words for “joy,” including *chara* or *khara* (gladness) and *chairō* or *khairo* (be glad, rejoice). This is also a verb and a noun, depending upon the context. It is also a state of being.

Confused yet?

- The English dictionaries define “joy” as 1) an intense and especially ecstatic happiness, 2) the expression or manifestation of such feeling, and 3) a source or an object of pleasure or satisfaction.

With all of these definitions, we can see what joy is NOT. Joy is NOT flippant, silly, fleeting or fake. (No fake smiles here.) Joy is rooted in an act and a state of being, and true joy DOES come from God.

Pray: God, clear my path to discover joy. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box and imagine the joy that you are giving and receiving through this act.

December 19th: Holiness and Joy?



Did you know...

- *You can be joyful in the worst season of your life?*
- *You can be joyful in the best season of your life?*

Holiness sprouts joy.

When you are in conversation with God and open-hearted to God's presence and promises, your eyes are locked on the holy.

*And when you are standing in the hope of God's continued faithfulness, **your holiness is sprouting JOY.***

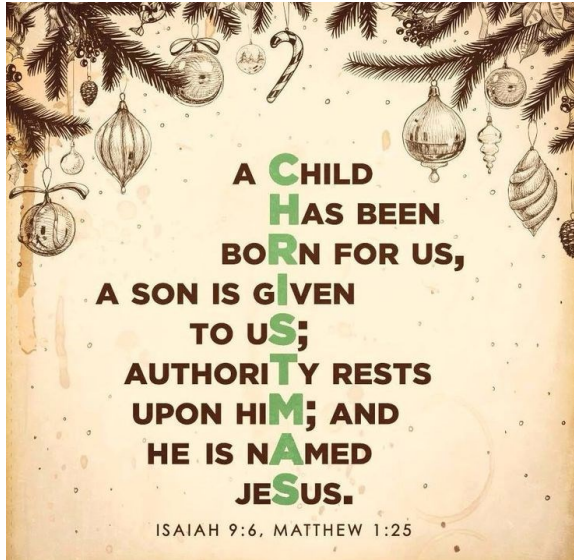
Stand firm, my fellow pilgrims, you are living into your joy.

Pray: God of Joy, give me Your vision of holiness. When I am at my best and at my worst, show me how to lock into your holy moments and your great and powerful joy. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box, and try to gauge your level of joy in this season of your life.



December 20th: The Ultimate Love



This is the ultimate love, poured out for you.

Pray: God of the ultimate love, thank you for Your Son, Jesus. Thank you for creating me and reaching out to me daily. Thank you for embracing my imperfect self, my thoughts and feelings, all of me. Show me how to love others like you love me. And your love for me is a lot. Amen.

Give: Add one more item for your (almost full!) Advent calendar box.

December 21st: Star of Wonder



When my parents lived in Texas, their house had a theme: stars. The sprawling bannisters had stars, the artwork and candleholders had stars, even the front door had a shiny glass star to warmly greet all who entered.

At first, I thought this was too much. Texas is nicknamed “The Lone Star State,” and my immature, college-aged self thought this was looking like Disney a bit, with subliminal hints of mouse ears in the carpet and wallpaper.

But I was wrong.

While their home was built in The Lone Star State, it began to grow inside of me a fascination with stars. Actually, one star in particular—the star of Bethlehem that Christians have referred to for ages. It is the **epitome of wonder and “looking up” at the vastness of God.**

Stars are amazing.

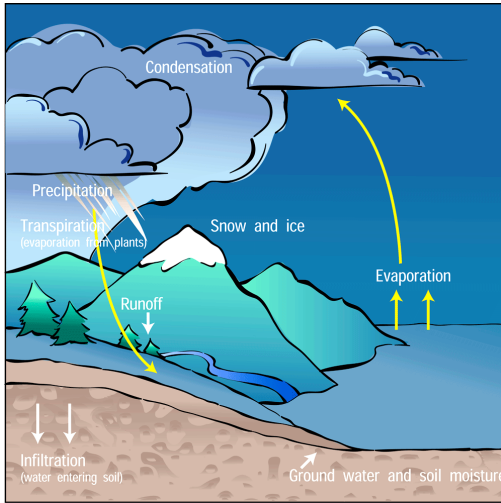
Peering at stars today (with clear skies and few city lights), we have the opportunity every night to breathe in the wonder of life. The **wonder of God’s Life** given freely by His Son for us all. Stars are pretty great.

Pray: God, I live into Your Light. Thank you for life and for nightly reminders of your ultimate love, represented in the stars Amen.

Add: one more item for your Advent calendar box, relishing in God’s Wonder.



December 22nd: Love Does



Ever stared at crashing waves? The ocean simply doesn't stop moving.

But love is more than that...love is like [nerdy love for weather warning] The Water Cycle.

Precipitation, condensation, snow & ice, evaporation, ground water & soil moisture, infiltration, runoff...

Love Does!

Bob Goff wrote a bestseller that uses fascinating stories and key examples of how "love does," how love moves all around us as a verb. It reminds me of the cyclical Water Cycle that kids learn about in school. Everything moves and is connected.

Love doesn't stand still, not even for a moment. Love keeps us connected, even when we annoy/anger/disrupt each other. Love ties Hope, Peace and Joy together. God invented Love as a way to connect to our Creator and to all of Creation. How great is that!?

Pray: God of Love, be patient with us as we lean into love. Make your presence obvious when we struggle to love ourselves and others. Let us love like you do, with excitement and connection. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box and imagine the similar love that the holy family and the recipient family of your box might have. Remember that God loves all.



December 23rd: All Connected

May the GOD of HOPE

fill you with great **JOY**
& **PEACE**

as you TRUST in Him.

Roman 15:13

Why do we talk about Hope, Love, Joy and Peace at church during Advent?

Because they are all connected.

Let's do some math:

God = (Love)(Hope)(Joy)(Peace)

These four all come from God because God created them. And we are made in the image of God!

In conclusion, we must live out who we are...

Love
Hope
Joy
Peace

How? Let's meet separately and then meet together. Let's talk/pray to God and ponder our part of God's story. Then, let's Worship God and live our daily lives authentically and with these 4 elements in mind. (I think this is called church, hee.)

Pray: God of Love, Hope, Joy and Peace, help me to live into who You have created me to be. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box.



December 24th: Love, love, love



The Beatles said it well, "All you need is love."
Let's unpack that a bit.

Do I really **need** love? There is some scientific evidence that reveals that receiving love and showing love is essential for our health—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. But I'm no scientist—what are observations among people around this big, beautiful world?

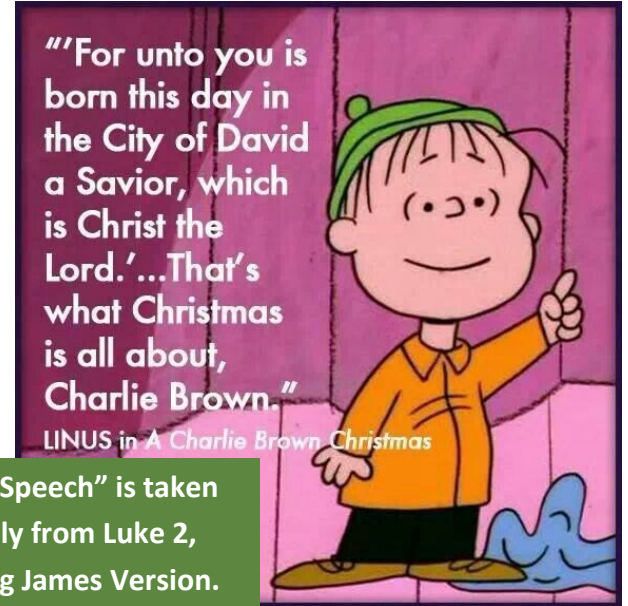
- Feeling unloved is really hard. We forget how to be ourselves, how to interact with others, and we focus on the "lack of" instead of observing the "abundance of" in life.
- Young children who do not receive love at a young age are more likely to struggle with human interaction, social cues, and displaying empathy the rest of their lives.
- People who do not take the opportunities to show love and affection to others are stunting their opportunities for full, hope-embracing life.

Love keeps us connected, even when we annoy/anger/disrupt each other. Love ties Hope, Peace and Joy together. God invented Love as a way to connect to our Creator and to all of Creation.

Pray: God of Love, be patient with us as we lean into love. Make your presence obvious when we struggle to love ourselves and others. Let us love like you do. Amen.

Give: Add one item to your Advent calendar box and think of the similar love that the holy family and the recipient family of your box might have. Remember that God loves all.

December 25th: Jesus!



"For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.' ...That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

LINUS in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*

Linus' "Speech" is taken directly from Luke 2, The King James Version.



Pray: God, today is Christmas! You are the God of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Let us live into these four parts of who you are. Teach us to take care of ourselves and each other, the familiar faces and strangers, too. Let us live as your light. Amen.

Give: If you'd like to add a note or prayer for the family who receives your box, that would be wonderful! **Thank you** for journeying with us this Advent season. Please find drop-off instructions on page 1.

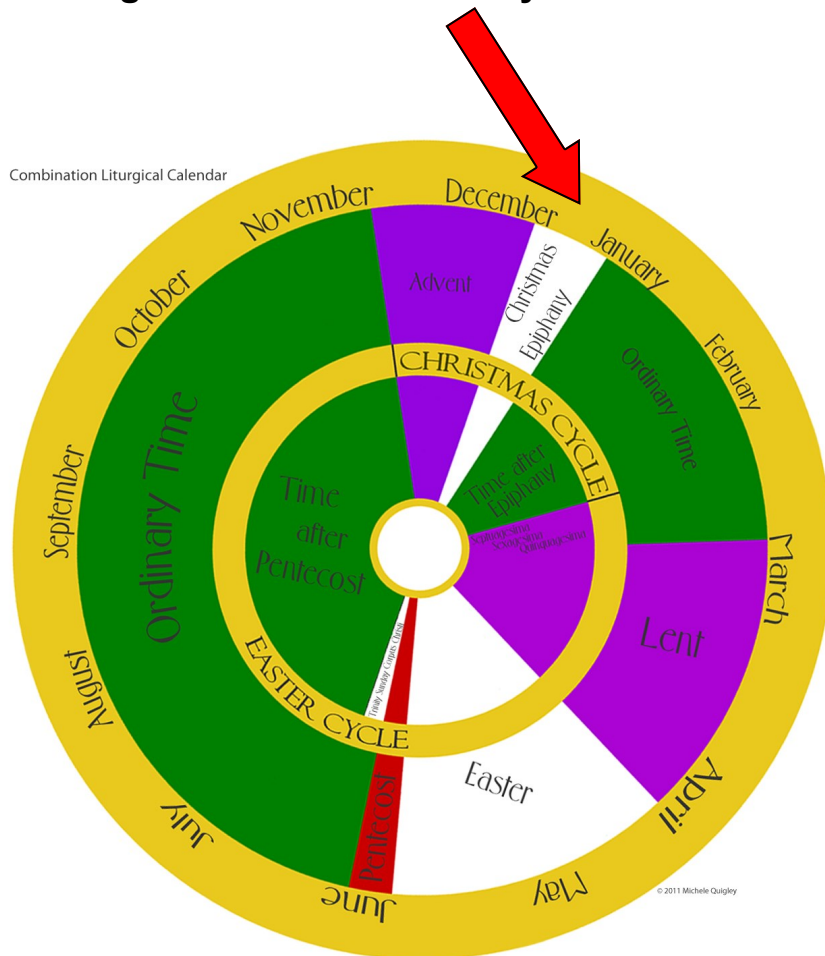


Looking Ahead...

Now, let us join together as a community, loving our neighbors, sharing hope when things seem hopeless, expressing joy in the tiny and huge moments of life, and passing peace wherever we are present.



Looking ahead in our church year....



Advent Prayers for a Meal or Anytime

(Marian Wright Edelman)

Jesus, small poor baby of Bethlehem,
 Be born again in our hearts today
 Be born again in our homes today
 Be born again in our congregations (churches) today
 Be born again in our neighborhoods today
 Be born again in our cities today
 Be born again in our nations today
 Be born again in our world today.
 Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(Marian Wright Edelman)

God, we thank You for this food
 For the hands that planted it
 For the hands that tended it
 For the hands that harvested it
 For the hands that prepared it
 For the hands that provided it
 And for the hands that served it.
 And we pray for those without enough food
 In Your world and in our land of plenty.

More Advent Prayers

(Episcopal Traditionals)

In this Advent of expectation
draw us together in unity,
that our praise and worship
might echo in these walls
and also through our lives.

In this Advent of expectation
draw us together in mission,
that the hope within
might be the song we sing,
and the melody of our lives.

In this Advent of expectation
draw us together in service,
that the path we follow
might lead us from a stable
to a glimpse of eternity.



This Advent-time
we remember Mary and Joseph,
giving thanks for their faithfulness,
courage and obedience,

stepping out into the unknown
in the strength of your Spirit,
playing their part
in the fulfilment of your plan
to bring your prodigal people
home again.

We pray that their example
might be the pattern of our lives,
that when your gentle whisper
breaks through the clamour of this world
and into our small corner,
we might be ready to listen,
and having listened, to act.

Advent Fun Facts

1. What do the 4 candles on the Advent wreath symbolize?

The Prophets' Candle, symbolizing hope; the Bethlehem Candle, symbolizing faith/love; the Shepherds' Candle, symbolizing joy; the Angel's Candle, symbolizing peace.

2. Advent was originally a time of sorrow?

Yes, traditionally, Christians take the time of Advent to pray, reflect on the past year, and mourn for the sin and evil in the world. Now days, we focus on the anticipation and wonder of Jesus' birth and power.

3. What does the third Sunday of Advent represent?

To rejoice! The third Sunday of Advent, called Gaudete Sunday, is a time Christians take a break from repenting to celebrate Christ's imminent arrival. Churches use rose-colored candles and decorations, and the pastors preach about joy, redemption, and blessings. Christians may pray and reflect on the things for which they're grateful.

4. When was the Advent calendar actually first used?

By German Lutherans, in the 19th century. Families made tiny chalk strokes on their door (one per day), in the anticipation of the anniversary of Christ's birth, until Christmas Eve.

5. Who is generally credited as the first to use a nativity set to reflect and share the story of Jesus' birth on Christmas Eve?

St. Francis of Assisi

Post-Advent Reflections

How have you been changed this Advent season?

Take a few minutes to reflect on things you've observed, learned or are able to share since going through the Advent season.

What are a couple of things you'd like to focus on in the New Year, ways to draw nearer to Christ?

Optional: Label for front of box

Reverse Advent Calendar

Birthday Party Kit

24 days of giving to Hillcrest Transitional Housing,
which moves families from homelessness to self-sufficiency



Optional: Label for front of box

Reverse Advent Calendar

Cleaning Kit

24 days of giving to Hillcrest Transitional Housing,
which moves families from homelessness to self-sufficiency

