

“Tis the Season of Waiting



Advent Wreath Reflections

*The true light, which gives light to everyone,
was coming into the world.*

John 1:9

The Advent Wreath: A Brief History

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*

Isaiah 9:2 ESV

LIGHT. The coming of Light into the world's darkness lies at the heart of the tradition behind Advent Wreaths.

Traditionally, Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas. An Advent "wreath" consists of four candles displayed in an arrangement. Not necessarily a wreath, they can be in a line, or a cluster of individual candle holders. The most significant aspect is the four unlit candles.

Each Sunday before Christmas a candle is lit. One the first Sunday, two the second, three the third, until all four are lit on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. With each candle, increased light is ushered into the darkness. The closer we get to the celebration of Jesus's birth, the greater light we experience.

*The true light, which gives light to everyone,
was coming into the world.*

John 1:9 ESV

The tradition of the Advent Wreath is observed in many churches during worship, but it was first created for home devotions. Originating in German and Scandinavian homes, families lit candles to observe the corresponding weeks of Advent, marking the coming of Christmas with a time of prayer either at dinner or in the evening. Merriam-Webster's defines advent as "the arrival

or coming of something.” For Believers it is the season we remember and celebrate the arrival of Jesus into the world.

Creating an Advent Wreath at home is a wonderful reminder of the Reason we celebrate. It is a way for families to prayerfully mark the days and contemplate the arrival of the Babe in the manger.

Unraveled Love created this devotional for you to use alone or with your family each Sunday of Advent.

We pray this offering will inspire you to slow down and remember the Reason for this oftentimes hectic season. A time for you to put down your busyness and find a place for Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace in light of Christ’s birth.

Gather your candles along with your imagination and create a centerpiece for this holiday season. An altar of sorts, where you can gather your thoughts and those around you to celebrate the light of Jesus coming into the world.

Praying you are filled with even more of His Light!

Stacy & Carol

'Tis the Season for Hope

A devotional for the First Sunday in Advent.

*The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.*

John 1:5 ESV

Advent is here. The first of the four Sundays before Christmas and with it comes the glimmer of **Hope**.

This day we begin watching, waiting, hoping for what the season will bring. Anticipation fills the air.

Consider these questions.

Share your answers with one another. With God.

What are you hoping for this year?

What waiting lies deep in your heart?

What keeps you watching with anticipation?

Light the first Advent candle.

The first candle is called the **Prophet's Candle**. Prophets in the Old Testament repeatedly reminded the Israelites their long-awaited Savior was on the way. Isaiah and Micah spoke words of hope to God's children and they waited and watched for the signs of His coming.

We too see signs of the day approaching to celebrate the Savior's birth. Stockings hang waiting to be filled, wreaths of green welcome us home, and the music of the season fills our ears. There's just something special about this time of year. Smiles are brighter and eyes twinkle a bit more.

This is Advent and with it comes the spark of hope that lights our first candle.

Read the Scripture.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

And he came to her and said,

“Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

Luke 1:26-28 ESV

Imagine Mary's surprise when the angel Gabriel appeared with his unexpected greeting!

Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines “greeting” as an expression of good wishes. The original Greek includes rejoicing (Enhanced Strong's Lexicon). Gabriel began his message to Mary by not only wishing her well but that she might rejoice too. He called her favored and reminded her of God's presence.

Lighting the first candle is our greeting to the season. And we do more than wish. We trust in the hope He calls us to stand firm in and look forward to what the Light coming into our darkness will bring.

*But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord,
I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.*

Micah 7:7 NIV

Like Micah we hope and wait for the coming of the King. For His return to set everything right and put an end to all darkness! When things are dark, hope fuels our faith.

So let the season begin. Let us greet Advent with hope. Hear Gabriel's words spoken to you.

Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you!

Rest assured God hears you and is with you. This is our hope. This is the hope of the world!

Pray.

Lord of Hope, fill us with the light of Your love this Advent. Help us to shine hope into the world. Thank You for hearing us, for being with us. Amen.

Respond.

As you wait for the Second Sunday in Advent, use this week to set your hope on Jesus -- the Light of your life.

Additional Scriptures for you to consider when it comes to Hope: Psalm 119:81, Isaiah 40:30-31, Jeremiah 29:11.

“Tis the Season for Love

A devotional for the Second Sunday in Advent.

You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light.

2Samuel 22:31 NIV

Light the first Advent candle.

Remember and sense the first glimmer of hope, the light that fuels our faith in the darkness.

Reflect.

What hope did you discover this past week?
Is Jesus at the center of that hope? How?

Light the second candle.

This is **Bethlehem’s Candle**. As the light of this candle joins the candle of hope, **Love** enters the world.

Read the Scripture.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available to them.

Luke 2:1-7 NIV

Joseph took Mary with him to the town of Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David, the former king of Israel, a man after God's own heart. Bethlehem was David's hometown and according to the census rules everyone had to be registered in the town of their forefathers.

David was the one through whom God gave His promise of a forever King. The Messiah would come through the line of David and bring salvation to God's people.

Only at the time of Joseph's and Mary's arrival in Bethlehem, no one knew or took notice of the prophetic hope being fulfilled. In a town where there was no room for them in the inn, they found shelter in an out of the way place. In a barn among the animals, the King of kings was born and laid in a feed trough.

God left behind heaven -- His majesty and glory, His infinite Being and power -- to enter the world as one of His creations to show us His love and make a way for us to return to Him.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:16-17 NIV

Bethlehem. The birthplace of Love. The place where the One whose name is Love went out of His way to love us.

Consider.

Share a time you went out of your way to love someone.

How did it make you feel?

Was your love appreciated?

Where have you seen God go out of His way to show you love?

How did it make you feel?

Did you appreciate His love for you?

Love goes out of its way, lays down its life and rights to love others.

Jesus, the Son of God, from this humble beginning in a manger in Bethlehem, in a town where there was no room for Him, grew to show us, teach us, make real to us, God's love. The plan from the beginning was for Jesus to become a person and fulfill the mission of paying the debt we owe for our sin: death. A price we cannot pay and live.

Christ has died.

Christ has risen.

Christ will come again.

So we might live.

The ultimate laying down of His life began with going out of His way to leave heaven and become one of us.

*Greater love has no one than this:
to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

John 15:13 NIV

As we continue our Advent journey, may God's love shine bright in and through us and light our way to Bethlehem.

Pray.

Lord of Love, thank You for the gift You've given us. For your love that carries us on the journey toward You. Give us the will and desire to go out of our way to love others, just like You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Respond.

In anticipation of the Third Sunday in Advent, look for places where God is calling you to go out of your way to love someone this week.

Additional Scriptures on God's Love: 1Corinthians 13:1-7, 1Peter 4:8, Proverbs 10:12; Proverbs 17:9; Psalm 136:1-9.

‘Tis the Season for Joy

A devotional for the Third Sunday in Advent.

*Light in a messenger’s eyes brings joy to the heart,
and good news gives health to the bones.*

Proverbs 15:30 NIV

Light the first Advent candle.

Hope began our journey this Advent season. Hope continues to fuel our faith as we wait for the coming Messiah.

Reflect.

Where did you see the light of hope this week?

Light the second Advent candle.

Light grows with the lighting of the second candle just like God’s love grows in us. Love shines its light in the dark places of our hearts and souls.

Reflect.

This past week, did God call you to go out of your way to love someone? How?

Did you choose to “lay down your life” to love? Why or why not?

Light the third Advent candle.

Today we light the third candle and it brings even more light to the world around us filling our hearts with Joy. Some call this the **Shepherd’s Candle**.

Read the Scripture.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Luke 2:8-15 ESV

The shepherds in the fields were some of the first to hear the joyous news of Jesus's birth. Why shepherds? Why not the kings and queens or religious leaders? Why not tell the news to those in society's high places?

God chose some of the lowliest people to share the greatest joy with while they were doing the most ordinary thing... working.

Consider.

Think about the ordinary things you do each day.

- What would it be like for God to interrupt your ordinary?
- What good news might God share with you?
- How would it make you feel?

Hope sparks the beginning of our Advent journey, and love fuels its flame. The two shine brighter together than alone, and when united they ignite our joy. Joyful anticipation of celebrating the infant King. Joy in the news the Savior is born. Like the shepherds in the fields, we feel like we must do something.

Advent has us doing lots of “somethings.” People bustle from place to place to find the perfect gift, some prepare for family gatherings, while others rush to check off the final things on their list. The Christmas season has become a bit hurried, and it doesn’t always feel joyful.

Here in the middle of the season we need an angelic reminder. We need the Good News to interrupt our ordinary Advent. Shining joyful light needs to become more intentional in the midst of the busy.

Listen. God has news that will bring you great joy. News that interrupts your ordinary and urges you to go. Go and see the tiny Babe in Bethlehem. Journey away for a moment from all the Christmas crazy and relish in the joy of this moment. A moment full of hope and love and the Light of the World dawning.

Pray.

Spirit of Joy, fill our hearts with the Good News. For unto us a Savior is born, unto us a Son is given. And we will call Him... Redeemer and Friend. Joy to the world! Amen.

Respond.

As you wait for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, take time to seek and find the true Joy of the season. Listen for God to tell you who to share it with. Be a source of joy for someone this week.

Additional Scriptures about responding with Joy to the light of Jesus: Isaiah 49:13, Psalm 47:1, 1Peter 1:8-9, Romans 12:12-13.

‘Tis the Season for Peace

A devotional for the Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light on my path.

Psalm 119:105 NIV

Light the first Advent candle.

Remember the **Hope** that lights our darkness.

Reflect.

What are you hoping for most in this moment?

Light the second Advent candle.

Watch how **Hope** and **Love** together push the darkness even farther back.

Reflect.

What love that goes out of its way have you experienced this season?

Light the third Advent candle.

Let **Joy** fill your heart as it adds to the brightness of **Hope** and **Love**.

Reflect.

What unexpected joy interrupted your ordinary this past week?

Did you take time to seek the true source of **Joy**? Why or why not?

Were you a source of joy and a messenger of good news to someone this week? Who? How?

Light the fourth Advent candle.

Our fourth candle shines bright with the others and the increased light in the darkness brings **Peace**. This is the **Angel's Candle**.

Read the Scripture.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Luke 2:13-14 ESV

The Christmas story is full of angels bringing God's message into the world.

- Gabriel spoke to Zechariah of the coming birth of John, “I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you good news” (Luke 1:19).
- Mary heard Gabriel's message, “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).
- Gabriel assured Joseph of his purpose in all of this, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20).
- Shepherds in the fields heard the good news of Jesus and were given an assurance of peace.

On Christmas Eve many will gather to celebrate Jesus's entry into the world. Followers of Jesus all around the world will hold candles high and worship the newborn King. Lights of hope, love, joy, and peace.

Consider.

How will you celebrate this Christmas Eve? With whom will you gather? Or will you be alone?

How can you bring the light of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace into your world this Christmas Eve?

A quiet hush falls and peace fills the air as followers of Jesus go out into the world carrying the peace of Christ with them. For this is the angel's message, this is the Good News the church heralds to the world: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace with whom He is pleased....*

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15 NIV

Pray.

God of Peace let your hope fuel my love that I might joyfully go out of my way to share your Good News to the world. Above all let peace reign in my heart. Amen.

In these few days before Christmas ask God to lead you into a place of peace with Him. Be open to seeing what disturbs your peace. Seek to please Him. Find joy and peace in Jesus.

Additional Scriptures to consider when it comes to Peace: Numbers 6:24-26, John 14:27, Matthew 5:9, Psalm 4:8, Isaiah 26:3.

A final note.

Praying the Light of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace fill you this Christmas and throughout the new year!

Stacy & Carol



Unraveled Love



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