



# ADVENT

## WHAT IS ADVENT:

Christmas has long since gone commercial, hasn't it? When many people think of Advent, they think of plucking chocolates from behind the window of an Advent calendar that counts down the days to Christmas. We have the brilliant holiday marketing minds at Cadbury to thank for that. They created the first chocolate Advent calendar in 1958.

The word advent actually comes from the Latin **adventus**, which simply means "arrival." Advent is the coming, the arrival, of the presence of God Himself – God with us. For hundreds of years, followers of Jesus from a wide variety of church traditions around the world have set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas as a meaningful season of **celebration and anticipation**. That's what we're up to here.

So, allow this season to be a journey of anticipation. One of waiting and expecting God's goodness. One where we discover the ways that our story intersects with the story that God has always told and continues to tell. The story of Jesus' great love for all the world.

## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL:

This Christmas season we want you to consider connecting with a few friends or family members once a week (**Sunday evenings** if you can) to enjoy community and encounter God together.

There's a pattern you may have noticed most people tend to fall into during the Christmas season. We spend more, consume more, eat more, and do more in December than any other month of the year. For this reason, Christmas can be one of the least emotionally healthy seasons of the year. We believe it doesn't have to be. In fact, we're inviting you to resist that pattern. As the famous Christmas carol proclaims, "Let every heart prepare Him room." Make room for these Advent Gatherings. You won't regret it.

Friends don't let friends do Advent alone.

- If you're able to meet in person, we recommend it.
- If not, gathering via video call works too.
- Plan to share a meal together.
- Make it as simple or as extravagant as you like; the point is to be together in celebration and anticipation.
- Have Fun.
- Then conclude by taking some time to **go through this guided devotional** together.

(Parents, consider leading your children through this devotional and then spending some dedicated family time together immediately after by playing a game, doing a puzzle, or watching a movie.)

# WEEK 1 - HOPE

## REMIND

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.” - St. Teresa of Avila

## READ

Luke 1:28-38

## REMEMBER

On the first week of Advent, we wait AND we prepare. We wait for the world to be as God intends it, the world as it should be. We wait for a world free of injustice, pain, and suffering. But it is not enough to simply wait, we must also prepare. Preparation goes beyond dreaming and invites us to participate in building a better world. As we wait and prepare, we look ahead to the hope of a better world that comes because of our partnership with God, not in spite of it. This preparation is a holy act of hope. In a culture obsessed with power, control, and immediate change, hope can seem inefficient and risky. Strategy dominates dreaming, cynicism dominates imagination, and what has been overshadowed what could be. Unfortunately, hope cannot be manufactured out of thin air. It must be chosen and cultivated. When we choose hope, we choose vulnerability, risk, and the possibility of disappointment. We hold tension as we expect things beyond our present moment. This type of hope coupled with courage is the fulcrum to change. We look back to Mary, the mother of Jesus, to find an example of this combination of courage and hope. In the advent, Jesus has a human body to come through because a courageous young woman believes in God's justice enough to courageously say yes to what seemed impossible.

## REFLECT

- Put yourself in Mary's shoes. What do you imagine it would have been like to believe God for something she couldn't see?
- In what ways have you felt drawn to help "build a better world"?
- Who inspires you to hope?
- Whose lives, stories, and work remind you of the need to dream courageously?
- Are there places that God is inviting you to hope or to recover hope that you have lost?

## PRAYER

God of all hope, help us to pray even when we feel nothing and see nothing. May we know, even when we experience little joy or faith in prayer, that you hear and respond to us at our weakest, our most dry, and in our doubting. Teach us to pray, to want to pray, or even to want to want to pray. You know where we are and meet us there. In Jesus' name, amen.