



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 3 - JOY

REMIND

"The person who loves their dreams of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

READ

Luke 1:39-55

REMEMBER

When Mary finds out that she is pregnant, she goes to spend her first trimester with her elderly cousin Elizabeth who is in her last trimester. It is likely they are both, given their ages, in the midst of the most challenging parts of their respective pregnancies. It is from this place that they enter into community. We might expect Elizabeth, who has waited her whole life for a child, might approach her cousin with scorn, jealousy, suspicion, or a spirit of competition. But not so. When Mary arrives, Elizabeth literally cries out loudly to bless Mary and the thing that God is doing in her. These women, absent the voices of men in their lives, have a holy moment of honoring the thing that God is doing in both of them. This is an opportunity for them to share their stories, believe each other, and be together. This community between the women is a gift from God to them for their health, their joy, and their belief in what God is doing in them. Our spirituality may be tied up in finding God in specific ways – reading the bible, praying, and going to church. We have been taught a lie that all things spiritual happen separate from community. But one of the greatest "joy gifts" in your life are the people who make you think, laugh, and celebrate your life with you.

REFLECT

- What is something that God is doing in you right now that is bringing you joy or growth? Share that story with your friends, family, or spouse and ask them the same question. Pay attention to your mind as you converse and celebrate with those who are sharing.
- What do you feel or experience as you share and listen to stories?
- Is it difficult for you to "practice joy" by being reminded of the good things that God is doing in your life? If you're unsure, ask a close friend and be open to receiving their feedback.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me to see the things that you are doing in my life that I often take for granted. This week, I invite you to help me enjoy one moment at a time, trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will. May I find deep resonating joy in you as I know you desire to continually reveal yourself to me. Amen.