

WEEK THREE

Advent Devotional

Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas



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Peace for the Journey

WEEK THREE

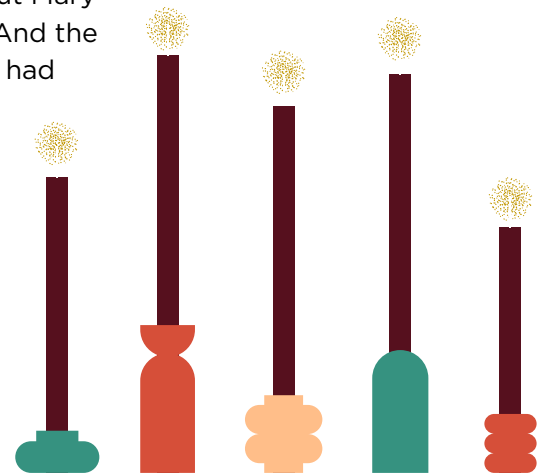
In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

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." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:1-20



PERSONAL REFLECTION

If you were going to plan a peaceful evening at home, what would it look like? Would you want to be surrounded by friends and family? Or would you prefer to be surrounded by pillows and blankets? Would you take a walk outside? Or stay inside by the fire? Our preferences may vary, but let's be honest, we would all love a few moments of peace. Peace from the chaos of life, peace from inner turmoil, and peace from the relational conflict that defines so much of the world around us.

During Christmas, we celebrate that Jesus came to bring peace to the world. Yet the peace Jesus came to bring is so much more than a night at home with a heated blanket and a pint of ice cream.

In the Bible, the word peace is translated from the Hebrew word shalom, which means "wholeness" or "completeness." While peace is an accurate translation, the word shalom carries a deeper meaning that should redirect our focus not just to the beginning of Jesus' life, but back to the beginning of time itself.

In Genesis, God created the world in perfect harmony and a constant state of shalom. Creation was whole, and there was peace between God and man. No death, conflict, sickness, or fear marred what God had made, and God and man walked side by side in the garden. However, shalom was shattered when sin entered the world, and the peace that God had established gave way to chaos.

Yet even in the world's darkest moment, there came a promise of hope. In Genesis 3:15, God declared that an offspring of Adam and Eve would one day deliver the world from the chaos that sin had created. Then, one starry night in Bethlehem, this promise was fulfilled as Jesus came to restore shalom and make whole what sin had shattered.

The story of the Bible is the story of our journey back to shalom, as God made a way in Christ for wholeness to be restored and for mankind to be reconciled to Him.

But even though Jesus came to bring shalom, it doesn't often feel like we've returned to the garden.

Yet this is where a correct understanding of Biblical peace becomes critical because true peace isn't found in the absence of chaos. Instead, it's found in the presence of God. Evidence of this peace is found throughout the Christmas story, reflected in the journeys of those chosen by God to carry out His plan to restore shalom. Their journeys were full of unexpected detours but ended with the angel's proclamation of peace.

Years later, another journey took place. Although this time, the journey didn't end in new life, but in death. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus knew the journey that awaited him and the hardship his disciples would encounter on their journey ahead. Over the course of an evening together, he warned them they would face persecution and adversity. Yet he assured them that even in hardship, there would be peace. In John 16:33, he said "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

The peace that Jesus came to bring isn't dependent on our circumstances or the detours we may encounter along the way. Instead, it's a peace that's found in the journey as we find shalom in the presence of God. And in his presence, we are made whole.

Take time to respond by considering the following questions.

What detours has your journey taken you on recently?
How have you seen God's peace displayed in the midst
of these detours?

What does it look like to pursue wholeness and peace
with those around you? How can you stay connected to
God and others in a way that prepares you for the
journey ahead?



Family Experience

CANDLE LIGHTING

Light the **love** and **hope** candles from the previous weeks.

As you read the following scripture, light the third candle in your Advent wreath to represent the peace we have in Christ.

Read: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” **Romans 5:1**

Pray: Lord, Thank You for being our Prince of Peace. Let us be reminded of your constant presence. As we journey through each day and this beautiful season help us take time to find shalom – peace, in Your presence. Your perfect peace makes us whole. Bring your peace to our hearts, our families, our nation, and our world. We pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

Listen: Away in a Manger

[Click Here to Listen](#)





Family Experience

READ

Read Luke 2:1-20 together as a family.

DISCUSS

Take time to discuss the following questions.

Younger Kids

- 1** Who are we celebrating at Christmas time? Do you think Jesus is special just at Christmas time or is He special all the time? What makes Him so special?
- 2** What did the shepherds do when the angels told them Jesus was born? What would you have done? Who can you share the Good News about Jesus with? Take time to pray for your child to share Jesus with that person.

Older Kids

- 1** Name the characters in the Christmas story as found in Luke 2:1-20. Which of the characters would you have liked to be and why?
- 2** What was the shepherds' reaction to learning of Jesus' birth? Who can you share the Good News with? Take time to pray for an opportunity for your child to share Jesus with that person.

PRAY

If celebrating advent with children, pray the following scripture over each child you are celebrating with. Feel free to add to this prayer or pray other specific requests over your child as you feel led.

May _____ not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let his/her requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard _____'s heart and mind in Christ Jesus. **(from Philippians 4:6-7)**



Celebrate

Gather around the Christmas tree with a cup of hot cocoa and share the story of your children's birth. If your children are adopted or have come into your home under unique circumstances, share what it felt like bringing them home. What anticipation did you feel prior to their arrival? What desires did you have for your children, and how have you seen those desires and longings answered?

Reflect on the fact that we are God's children as well. Just as we love our children, God deeply loves us and desires for us to be in a relationship with Him.

Discussion Prompts for Kids:

- ★ How do we know God loves us?
- ★ How does it feel to know that you can be in a relationship with God and be His child just like you are part of our family?
- ★ How can we as a family share God's love with others in the coming week?