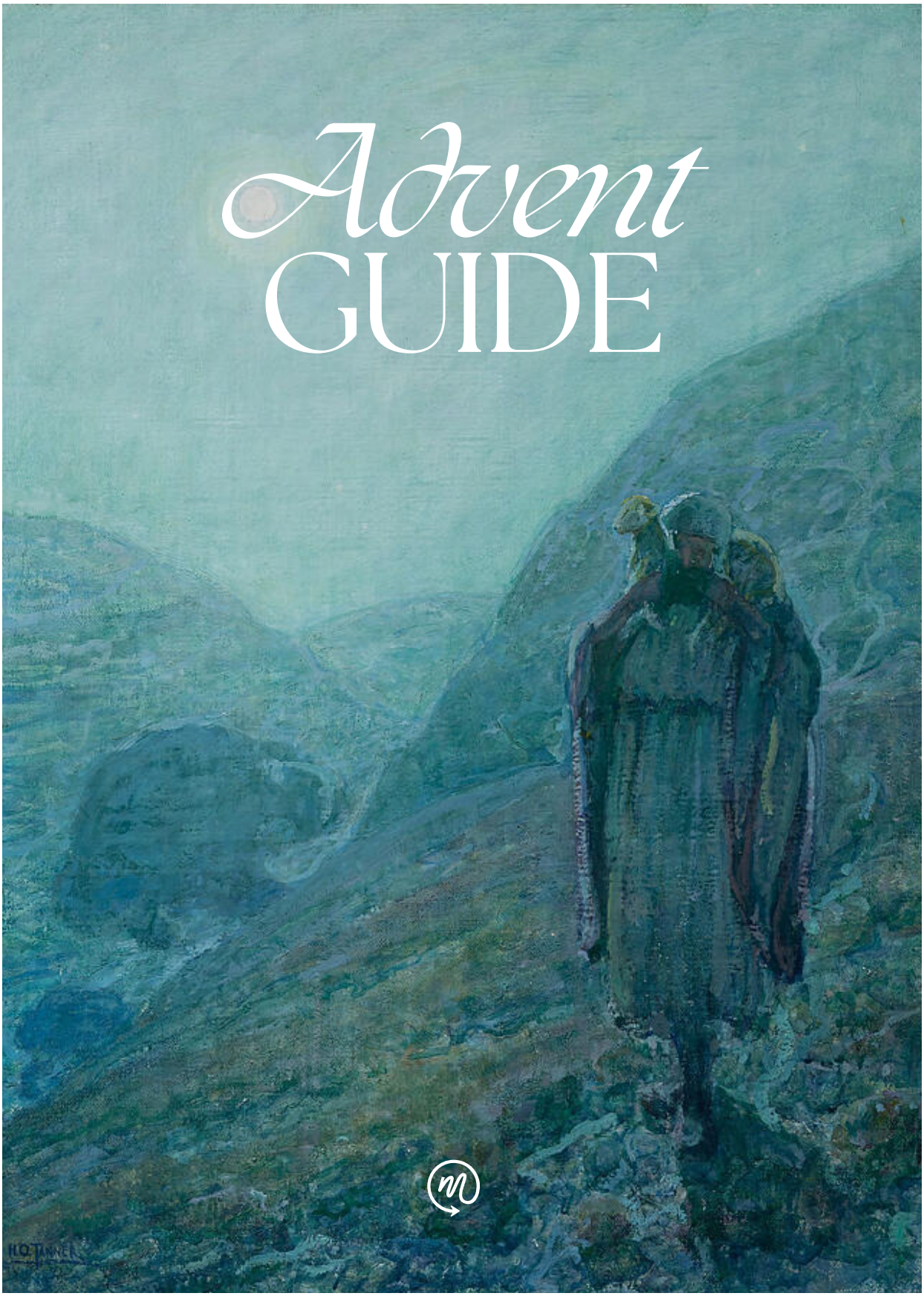
Advent GUIDE



The first Sunday of Advent is Sunday, November 29! In this guide, we want to offer you resources to create a space for celebrating the coming of Jesus in your own homes. Use your advent wreath, candles, and guide to gather friends around a table, lead your family or small group in learning what the season of Advent means, or build time for your own personal worship, prayer, and reflection as we sit in a season marked by waiting for Christ to come.

Advent means "coming." During Advent, we count down in hopeful expectation to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and this waiting connects us to our current waiting as we anticipate the coming of His Kingdom. We are living in-between two advents! The candle lighting provides a way to mark the four weeks of Advent and slows us down to focus on the reason for Christmas.

The wreath is made up of five candles—three purple, one pink, and one white that goes in the center. Each candle symbolizes something to celebrate and contemplate: hope, peace, joy, love, and the arrival of Jesus. The Advent wreath is lit in sequence, lighting a new candle at the start of every week as you approach Christmas.

There are readings for each day as well as extra resources like artwork, liturgy, and music sprinkled throughout this booklet. May it guide you in your worship and waiting as we walk throughout this season as a church body.

Cover Image *The Good Shepherd by Henry Ossawa Tanner*

ADVENT COMPANIONS

Books, stories, prayers, and reflections to accompany you through the season of waiting.

Stories to Read Aloud

Picture books and beautiful stories for little listeners and growing readers.

The Christmas Promise by Allison Mitchell
Sounding Joy by Ellie Holcomb
Song of the Stars by Sally Lloyd-Jones
Room for a Little One: A Christmas Tale by Martin Wadell
The Crippled Lamb by Max Lucado
Mary's First Christmas by Walter Wangerin Jr.

For Your Own Heart

Devotionals and reflections for parents and grown-ups.

Come, Let Us Adore Him by Paul David Tripp
A Wondrous Mystery by Geoffrey Chang & Charles H. Spurgeon
The Advent of Glory by R.C. Sproul
The Greatest Gift: An Advent Devotional by Ann Voskamp
The Dawn of Redeeming Grace by Sinclair Ferguson
Good News of Great Joy by John Piper
Hidden Christmas by Tim Keller



Gather Together

Stories and devotionals to help your family slow down, listen, talk, and pray together.

Jotham's Journey by Arnold Ytreeide
The Promise and the Light by Katy Morgan
The Biggest Story Advent by Kevin DeYoung
The Light Before Christmas by Marty Machowski
The Joy of Advent by Rebecca & Stephen Grabill PhD
Promises Made, Promises Kept by Marty Machowski
The One We're Waiting For by Taylor Combs
Unwrapping the Greatest Gift by Ann Voskamp

Look & Listen

Art, poetry, prayer, sermons, and other ways to linger in the season.

The First Christmas Carol sermon by Charles Spurgeon
Glad and Golden Hours by Lanier Ivester
Sacred Seasons: A Family Guide to Center Your Year Around Jesus by Danielle Hitchen
Every Moment Holy: Advent and Christmastide
All Creation Waits Children's Edition: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings for Children by Gayle Boss
Winter Fire: Christmas with G.K. Chesterton by Ryan Whitaker Smith
The Light Has Come: Prayer Cards for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany by W. David O. Taylor and Phaedra Jean Taylor.

LEADER: As we prepare our house for the coming Christmas season, we would also prepare our hearts for the returning Christ.
PEOPLE: **You came once for your people,**
O Lord, and you will come for us again.

Though there was no room at the inn
to receive you upon your first arrival,
We would prepare you room
here in our hearts
and here in our home,
Lord Christ.

As we decorate and celebrate, we do so
to mark the memory of your
redemptive movement
into our broken world, O God.

Our glittering ornaments and Christmas trees,
Our festive carols, our sumptuous feasts—
By these small tokens we affirm
that something amazing has happened
in time and space—
that God, on a particular night, in a particular
place, so many years ago, was born to us,
an infant King, our Prince of Peace.



Our wreaths and ribbons and colored lights,
our giving of gifts, our parties with friends—
these have never been ends in themselves.
They are but small ways in which we repeat
that sounding joy first proclaimed by angels
in the skies near Bethlehem.

In view of such great tidings of love announced
to us, and to all people, how can we not be moved
to praise and celebration in this Christmas season?
As we decorate our tree, and as we
feast and laugh and sing together,
we are rehearsing our coming joy!
We are making ready to receive the one
who has already, with open arms, received us!
We would prepare you room
here in our hearts
and here in our home,
Lord Christ.

Now we celebrate your first coming, Immanuel,
even as we long for your return.
O Prince of Peace, our elder brother,
return soon. We miss you so!

Amen.

A LITURGY FOR THE

Christmas Season

FROM *EVERY MOMENT HOLY* BY RABBIT ROOM PRESS
WRITTEN BY DOUGLAS MCKELVEY
ILLUSTRATED BY NED BUSTARD

Week One

The first candle is purple, and it can be lit every day this week. It's called the "Hope Candle" and also referred to as "The Prophet's Candle" as prophets like Isaiah told of the coming king and the hope we have in Him.

Our reading this week begin with Hebrews 2, reminding us that Jesus, our promised King, came to us, became like us, and is able to help us in our weakness. We then move to passages in Isaiah and Micah where the birth of Jesus and the hope He brings are prophesied. The readings at the end of the week describe and affirm Jesus as our great hope as we look back to His first coming and look forward to His return.

Readings

Sunday, 11/29	Hebrews 2:10-18
Monday, 11/30	Isaiah 11:1-9
Tuesday, 12/1	Micah 5:2-4
Wednesday, 12/2	1 Peter 1:3-6
Thursday, 12/3	2 Corinthians 4:16-18
Friday, 12/4	Ephesians 2:11-22
Saturday, 12/5	Romans 5:1-8

Listen to this week's song:

"Isaiah (O Come)" by The Porter's Gate

An **art study** is a chance to slow down and take in God's truth, beauty, and goodness revealed in the world around us. Pause to look closely at the artwork in this booklet, noticing the little details and thinking about what's happening. You might ask yourself or others, "What do you notice?" "What do you wonder?" or "What does it remind you of?" As you explore each piece, take comfort! God's great story of redemption is shining through.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:4-5



Mary by Henry Ossawa Tanner



A **nature study** is an invitation to step outside and pay attention to the living things God has made. Take time to observe a plant, animal, or other part of creation, looking carefully at its shape, color, patterns, and changes. You might ask yourself or others, "What do you notice?" "How is it designed?" or "What does this show you about our Creator?" As you explore nature in the weeks ahead, let these small discoveries awaken your curiosity and point you toward the wisdom, creativity, and care of God.

Poinsettia Nature Study

Find a real poinsettia to observe. Before you begin, spend a quiet minute simply looking. Notice the colors, shapes, patterns, and textures.

Look Closely:

- What colors do you see?
- Are all the bracts the same size and shape?
- How are the green leaves different from the red bracts?
- Can you find the tiny flowers hiding in the center?
- Can you trace the veins from the middle of a leaf toward its edges?
- How are the leaves arranged along the stem?
- What detail catches your attention first?

Bracts — The bright red, pink, or white parts that look like petals are actually modified leaves. They surround the flowers and help attract pollinators.
Flowers — Look closely at the very center of the plant. The tiny yellow-green structures tucked among the bracts are the poinsettia's actual flowers.
Leaves — The larger green leaves grow lower on the plant. Look closely at their shape and the veins running through them.
Stem — Look at the green or woody stem that holds the leaves and bracts. Notice where each leaf attaches.

Wonder:
Poinsettias bring bright color during the winter months, when many other plants are dormant. The colorful bracts surround the tiny flowers, helping draw attention to them. Why do you think God made this plant this way? Choose one part of the poinsettia (a bract, green leaf, flower, or stem) and draw it carefully. Try to draw what you actually see, including its shapes, lines, and colors.

Advent Connection:
Poinsettias have become a familiar part of Christmas, and their bright colors can remind us of the hope we celebrate during Advent. For generations, God's people waited for the Savior He had promised. They lived in a world marked by sin, suffering, and darkness, waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled. At Christmas, we remember that Jesus came into that darkness. He is the promised Savior and the Light of the world.

Advent points us toward another promise: Jesus will come again. We are no longer waiting for His first coming, but we still wait with hope for the day when He will return and make all things new.

As you look at this beautiful plant, remember: Jesus has come. Jesus is with us. Jesus will come again.

"The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light."

Matthew 4:16

Week Two

This week we will add the second purple candle to our daily lightings. This candle is called the "Peace Candle" and is also referred to as "Mary and Joseph's Journey Candle." Our reading this week will begin with John 13:1–16, where we see Jesus, the promised King, humbly serving His disciples. The One who is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace came not to be served, but to serve.

We then enter into Mary and Joseph's journey to becoming the parents of Jesus and see the peace and trust that marked their obedience to God. As we continue, we will remember that the promised child is the Prince of Peace, the One who brings us peace with God and gives us His own peace. Our readings invite us to rest in the peace that Christ came to bring–a peace the world cannot give and cannot take away.

Readings

Sunday, 12/6	John 13:1-16
Monday, 12/7	Luke 1:26-38
Tuesday, 12/8	Matthew 1:18-25
Wednesday, 12/9	Isaiah 9:2-7
Thursday, 12/10	Isaiah 53:4-6
Friday, 12/11	John 14:23-27
Saturday, 12/12	Philippians 4:4-9

Listen to this week's song:

"Come Thou Long Expected Jesus (feat. Flo Paris & Sera Oakes)" *by Rain for Roots*



Christ and His Mother Studying the Scriptures by Henry Ossawa Tanner

The Nicene Creed



The Nicene Creed is a statement of what Christians have believed for hundreds of years, beginning at the Council of Nicaea in 325. It teaches us who God is (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and what Jesus has done to save us. During Advent, reading The Nicene Creed helps us focus on the promise of Christ's coming, life, death, resurrection, and the hope of eternal life. You can read it all aloud, or bit by bit throughout the day, thinking about what it declares about God. You can ask questions like: "What does this show me about His love?" or "How can this stir my heart towards prayer or gratitude in this season?"

We believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of the Father before all worlds;
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God;
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made.
Who, for us and for our salvation,
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary,
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried;
and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;
and ascended into heaven,
and sits on the right hand of the Father;
and He shall come again, with glory,
to judge the living and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and Giver of Life;
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;
who with the Father and the Son together
is worshiped and glorified;
who spoke by the prophets.
And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.
And we look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Week Three

This week we add the pink candle to our daily lightings. This candle is known as the "Joy Candle" or the "Shepherd's Candle." We will begin reading in John 14:1–11, where Jesus speaks to troubled hearts and reminds His disciples that He is the way, the truth, and the life. Our joy is not found in easy circumstances, but in knowing and trusting Jesus, who has come to bring us to the Father.

As we continue our readings, we see God faithfully preparing the way for Jesus. We will enter the story of John's birth and hear Zechariah's prophecy that his son would go before Jesus, preparing the way for the Lord. The long-awaited Savior is drawing near, and with His coming comes great joy. At the end of the week, that joy abounds as the shepherds hear the good news of Jesus' birth, the Magi see the star and "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy," and Jesus reminds His disciples that their sorrow will one day be turned into joy. He leaves them with this promise: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Readings

Sunday, 12/13	John 14:1-11
Monday, 12/14	Luke 1:57-66
Tuesday, 12/15	Luke 1:67-80
Wednesday, 12/16	Luke 2:1-7
Thursday, 12/17	Luke 2:8-20
Friday, 12/18	Matthew 2:1-12
Saturday, 12/19	John 6:19-33

Listen to this week's song:

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" *by Sara Groves*



Angels Appearing to the Shepherds by Henry Ossawa Tanner

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

Luke 2:10



The **Heidelberg Catechism** is a set of questions and answers written in 1563 to help Christians understand and remember what we believe. Each question and answer teaches us truth from the Bible. Question 1 reminds us of the best comfort we could ever have...that we belong, body and soul, to Jesus Christ. During Advent, when we wait and hope for His coming, this truth helps us rest in His love and remember that our Savior has already come to make us His own.

Heidelberg Catechism

Question 1

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death— to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Week Four

On this final Sunday of Advent, we will add the last purple candle to our daily lightings. This candle is often called the "Love Candle," reminding us of the incredible love God has shown us by sending His Son. We will reread Ephesians 2:11–22, where we see that God's love does not leave us far off, it draws us near. As we move through this final week of Advent, our readings will continue to unfold this love: God sent His Son into the world to save us, to bring us near, and to make us His children. On Christmas Day, we will light every candle, including the white candle in the center (the Christ Candle!) celebrating that the long-awaited Savior has come.

Christ has come! He has risen! He will come again!

Readings

Sunday, 12/20	Ephesians 2:11–22
Monday, 12/21	Luke 2:1–21
Tuesday, 12/22	Galatians 4:1–7
Wednesday, 12/23	John 3:16–17
Thursday, 12/24	1 John 3:1–3
Friday, 12/25	Luke 2:6–20

Listen to this week's song:

"Go Tell It On The Mountain (feat. Melvin Crispell III, Chandler Moore, and Mav City Gospel Choir)" *by Maverick City Music*



A **nature study** is an invitation to step outside and pay attention to the living things God has made. Take time to observe a plant, animal, or other part of creation, looking carefully at its shape, color, patterns, and changes. You might ask yourself or others, "What do you notice?" "How is it designed?" or "What does this show you about our Creator?" As you explore nature in the weeks ahead, let these small discoveries awaken your curiosity and point you toward the wisdom, creativity, and care of God.

Evergreen Nature Study

Find an evergreen tree or branch to observe. Before you begin, spend a quiet minute simply looking. Notice the colors, shapes, patterns, textures, and the way the branches grow.

Look Closely:

- What shades of green do you see?
- Are all the needles the same length and shape?
- How do the needles grow from the branch?
- Can you find new growth at the ends of the branches?
- How does the bark look and feel?
- Can you find a cone or seeds?
- How do the branches grow and spread?
- What detail catches your attention first?

Needles — The narrow, pointed leaves of an evergreen are called needles. Look closely at their shape, color, and texture. Notice how they grow in groups or patterns.
Branches — Look at how the smaller branches grow from the larger ones. Notice how they spread outward and hold the needles.
Bark — The bark protects the tree. Look closely at its color, texture, lines, and patterns.
Cones — Many evergreens produce cones that contain seeds. Look closely at their shape and the patterns made by the overlapping scales.

Wonder:
Evergreen trees stay green through the winter, when many other trees have lost their leaves and appear dormant. Why do you think God made some trees this way? Choose one part of the evergreen (a needle, branch, piece of bark, or cone) and draw it carefully. Try to draw what you actually see.

Advent Connection:
An evergreen can remind us of the hope and life we have in God, even in seasons of darkness and waiting. Isaiah tells us that the Creator never grows tired or weary. He renews those who look to Him. During Advent, we remember the people who waited for God's promised Savior, and we celebrate that Jesus came, just as God promised. We can trust that same faithful, everlasting God as we wait for Christ to come again.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:28-31



The Three Wise Men by Henry Ossawa Tanner

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:9–10

ADVENT REFLECTIONS

Where did God meet me during advent?

What part of the Christmas story stood out to me this year?

Which activity or piece of art stuck with me? Why?

A Christmas Morning Liturgy

This Christmas Morning Liturgy is a way to lean into the celebration of the incarnation on Christmas day. Work it in after Christmas breakfast, before you exchange gifts, or even after Christmas dinner if that is best. It takes about 10-15 minutes.

- **You will need:** Print copies of this liturgy for everyone, or go to *thecommonrule.org/advent-xmas-morning-liturgy* to read on a phone.
- **For reading:** You will need a Leader & one Reader. All scripture readings are printed here.

★**Small children:** This is written to involve small children, who have one repeated line: on your signal (perhaps the raising of your hand) they will act surprised & yell "Wow!!!" Make sure to practice one or twice beforehand. Older children might prefer to simply read along with the adults.

- **Supplies:** In the case of small children, chocolate milk & marshmallows may be involved, if desired. This will help with excitement and attention span. Have milk poured in appropriate cups & plenty of marshmallows ready in advance.
- **For songs:** If the group is comfortable with signing the song verses, do so! If that will not be comfortable, just have everyone read them together.

Leader: Merry Christmas!

People: Merry Christmas!

Leader: It was a real morning, with real people, with real bodies, like the ones sitting in this room, when a baby was born. This is how it happened:

Reader: In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. Joseph also went up from Galilee to Bethlehem 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.

★ [Leader signals children.]
Children: Wow!

Leader: I know! It was remarkable! This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read):
Away in a manger no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus
laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky
looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

Leader to Children: Do you think baby Jesus had milk in the barn? (Entertain answers.) Do you think he had chocolate milk? (Entertain answers.) Do you all want some chocolate milk while you hear more of the story? ★ (As chaos dies down, hand out chocolate milk.) Now, everyone keep listening for the rest of the story:

Reader: 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.

★ [Leader signals children.]
Children: Wow!

Leader: I know. Can you believe it? A baby and a star. Fire and song. This is when the world was forever changed. It's this baby, who will save us from our sins. Can you believe it?

People: We believe it!

Leader: This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read):
Angels we have heard on high,
sweetly singing o'er the plains!
And the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Leader to Children: Do you think the shepherds had sheep? (Entertain answers.) Are sheep white and fluffy? (Entertain answers.) What else is white and fluffy? (Provide hints until marshmallows are guessed, hand out said marshmallows.) Now, eat some marshmallows while we hear more.

Leader to All: Because there is much more! This baby grew up. Just like these children here. He became a boy who became a man who became a teacher. When he spoke – people were amazed! Listen to the kinds of things he said. He said that, because of him, we could finally be reconciled to God:

Reader: Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Leader: He said that, because of him, the vulnerable would finally be protected:

Reader: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Leader: He said that, because of him, we can all finally rest:

Reader: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Leader: Are you tired?

People: We are.

Leader: Then rest in Jesus. This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read):
Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

★ (Second round of marshmallows optional here.)

Leader: Hear now the good news of this baby that was born: He was not just born, but he lived. And he did not just live, but he died. And he did not just die but he rose again. And he did not just rise again, but he will come again. To set all things right.

People: Let it be so!

Leader: Now, because of him, all that we've done and all that we've failed to do; all the good things and all the bad things, now they all fade away in the bright shadow of the love of Jesus the resurrected Son of God.

★ [Leader signals children.]
Children: Wow!

Leader: And when he comes again all people will beat their spears into plowshares. Melt their guns into spoons for food. Chains will break. War will be no more.

People: We are waiting for a day when the sun will rise on a new world. With no tears, no dying, and no pain.

Leader: It is Jesus who will bring this world. Can you believe it?

People: We believe it!

★ [Leader signals children.]
Children: Wow!

Leader: This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read):
Joy to the world,
the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room,
and Heaven and nature sing,
and Heaven and nature sing,
and Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing

Leader: How we long for you to come again. For you we will celebrate. For you we will wait.

All in Loud Voices: King of kings. Mighty God. Counselor. Emmanuel. Come again soon. Today, for you, we will celebrate. Tomorrow, for you, we will wait. Amen!

More details about this liturgy from The Common Rule



The artwork featured throughout this Advent guide is by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937), an African American artist known especially for his paintings of biblical scenes. Tanner was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His mother, Sarah, had escaped slavery through the Underground Railroad, and his father, Benjamin Tanner, was a minister and later a bishop. Tanner studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts before moving to Paris, where he found greater freedom to pursue his work as an artist. After traveling to the Near East, he brought firsthand knowledge of its people, places, and landscapes into his paintings of Scripture. His beautiful depictions of biblical scenes invite us to slow down and imagine the world surrounding the story of Jesus.



Flight Into Egypt by Henry Ossawa Tanner

MIDTOWN
FELLOWSHIP