



Wonders *of* His Love

FAMILY DEVOTIONS *and*
ACTIVITIES *for* **ADVENT**

Amy Welborn

Introduction

It's time to get ready!

Christmas is coming in just a few weeks, and so of course, we want to be ready for the celebration. How should we start?

How do you get ready for activities other than Christmas? How do you prepare the variety of activities and events in your life? You get ready for school, for parties, for work and playdates with friends. Every morning, you think about what's coming for the rest of the day and you prepare for it. Hours later, you wind down and get ready for bedtime. You get ready to go out to eat dinner—and you get ready for something simple like making a piece of toast. It won't butter itself, you know!

In fact, none of these activities just happen. We prepare for all of them because they're important. We prepare so we're ready for whatever God is going to do in that moment. We give him our best selves, open to his power and love. We want to do our part so we're ready to experience what God has in store for us.

Advent—this time of getting ready for Christmas—is just like that. It's a time to get our hearts ready for Jesus coming to us. Thinking about the ways we prepare for the big and small moments of ordinary life and applying them to this season of Advent might help us dig deeper and find more joy as we journey, prepare and get ready—together!

—Amy Welborn

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

...you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. **ROMANS 13:11**



THINK

Waking up in the morning, or from a long afternoon nap, can be hard, can't it? We're a little groggy, we may be confused, we're still half in our dreams. But we have to get those eyes open. We need to get ourselves awake—we want to welcome all the good things that God has in store for us on this new day!

Advent is a time to prepare for Jesus' coming into our lives more deeply and powerfully. We don't want to stumble into that time in a blur, half asleep. Jesus is the Word Made Flesh, God here among us, Emmanuel. Is there anything more special than him? He's with us now, of course, in many ways—but we know that we're not fully awake and aware of all the peace and joy he wants to bring to us. At Christmas, we'll welcome him with even more of ourselves, our hearts yearning for his love in a deeper way. So let's all stretch, shake off the night, put aside yesterday's busy confusion, open our eyes and get ready. Jesus is coming!

PRAY

Jesus, you have given us this time to pray, study, help and celebrate. May this Advent be a happy time for us as we prepare our home and our lives for you.



DO

With your family members, take out a calendar and point out the important days of Advent and Christmas. Perhaps mark special days—certainly Sundays and Christmas—with stickers or special coloring. If your family uses an Advent calendar, open that first door!

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.”

MATTHEW 8:8

THINK

I’m all ready for school—but wait, where are my shoes? I thought they were under my bed! Maybe I should have paid more attention to where I put them last night. I’ve got a piano recital coming up, but I keep making mistakes on that last page of the piece. Maybe I’m not quite ready. Maybe I need to practice more. I’m going to see a friend I had an argument with last week. I can’t just show up without some thinking time. I need to dig deep and find the strength to forgive—or at least to admit that I was wrong. I need to try to let God’s love guide my actions. Just a few minutes, a few deep breaths and some prayer. That will help me be ready.

Being ready for important moments, big and small, means honestly admitting the ways that, well, we’re not ready. Jesus wants to come into my life in a deeper way at Christmas. Am I open to him? Do I trust him? Part of this Advent time involves admitting the ways that we are not worthy, the ways in which we may be closed and proud. It’s about asking for forgiveness, giving my weakness to Jesus and trusting in his healing love.

PRAY

Lord, we are not worthy to have you come under our roof. But speak the word, and our hearts will be healed.



DO

Together, share a simple family prayer, asking for forgiveness. Say, “Jesus, we love you. Forgive our sins. Heal our hearts so we are ready for you.” Take the time to say “I’m sorry” to each other for any way in which you’ve hurt each other today. Praise Jesus for coming into your home with his mercy!

TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

*The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.* **ISAIAH 11:1-2**

THINK

Are you going for a hike next weekend? Or sometime soon? That's great! How will you prepare? You'll probably make sure you're wearing the right clothes and shoes, right? And you'll probably take a look at a trail map too. Exploring a new place is fun, but we don't want to get lost, do we?

That hike might also be more interesting if we know a bit about what we're going to see ahead of time. What plants and animals will line the way? Is there a history of earlier settlers and explorers who walked this path years ago that will help us see the path we're walking more deeply?

Jesus didn't just appear out of the blue. He was born into a human family that had strong roots—the family of King David, whose father was named Jesse. Learning about Jesus' family history helps us to prepare for his coming. When we listen to the prophet Isaiah, we see how God has cared for his people through history, coming among us as one of us, saving us—Jesus, wise, understanding and strong.

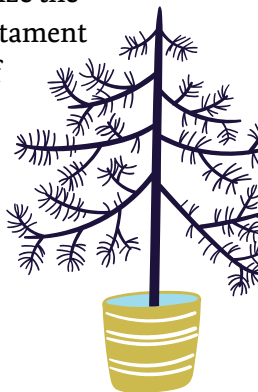
PRAY

*Jesus, Root of Jesse,
son of David, come
to us.*



DO

Consider taking some time over the next few weeks to work on a Jesse Tree. Using a real branch or one made of poster board, make ornaments that symbolize the Old Testament roots of Jesus.



WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all of them ate and were filled. **MATTHEW 15:35-37**

THINK

Food is a really special part of this time of year. All those cookies, tamales, special breads and cakes: what a lot of preparation they take! We study the recipes, we make shopping lists. We ask each other what our favorites are. We make a plan—and then we find the time to work together so we can make wonderful food and share it.

The food is great, but what makes it even more special is making it and sharing it with others. We can share it with people we know and love, and we can share it with those in need. The more carefully we prepare, the more we can share.

At the heart of all of our food preparation is generosity and love. That love comes from Jesus, who feeds us. He feeds us with his love and mercy to overflowing. Jesus shares so much that there's enough left over to share with even more people!

We plan, we shop, we cook, we serve. We're preparing food, but that food means something more than colorful baked goods. It means love, moving from Jesus through our hands. We can always be ready to share.



PRAY

Jesus, fill us with your generous spirit of sharing and love during this time. May all the foods we celebrate with and share reflect your love.



DO

Talk about your favorite foods for this season and make a plan for how you'll prepare and share them! Can you give some to the needy or homebound?

THURSDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. **MATTHEW 7:24-25**

THINK

Whenever we prepare to do something, we must make decisions about what's most important. I have a friend coming over to visit; what should I do first to get ready? Clean my room? Take a shower? Plan our snacks?

During this season, most of us are really busy. We've got parties and celebrations and recitals. We might have tests and exams. We're thinking about gifts, decorating and visiting with friends and family. There's so much to do! What's most important? How should we spend our time and our energy?

Well, Jesus tells us how important it is to base all of those decisions on really solid ground—or else we'll just be in a big mess, won't we? During this time, we're busy with activities, but what are they really all about? They're about welcoming Jesus and celebrating with him. He's our rock. We'll build the house of our busy days on the strongest spot: our Savior's love.

PRAY

Jesus, you are our rock. Help us keep you at the center of our busy days.



DO

Make a list of the important activities your family will be doing over the next few weeks. Are there any that distract you from Jesus' coming? Can you put those aside? Are there any activities like prayer and worship times, opportunities to give and share, that you can add to build on Jesus, your rock?

FRIDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

*On that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a scroll,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.* **ISAIAH 29:18**

THINK

St. Nicholas was a bishop who lived in what is now the country of Turkey in the fourth century. He was known for his wisdom and even more for his generosity. In St. Nicholas' time, young women had to have money, called a dowry, to get married. If they couldn't get married, they would have a hard time living in the world alone. One of the stories told about St. Nicholas is that he gave money to a family of sisters who were very poor so they could all get married. He did this in secret, without letting anyone know he was the one who'd helped.

During these weeks, we're preparing for Jesus by thinking about giving. We're giving gifts to our friends and our family members. And, hopefully, we're giving and sharing with those in need. Jesus works through our gifts and sharing to bring light and life to others. The example of St. Nicholas helps us see how to give in the right spirit—keeping the focus on Jesus' love instead of on ourselves.

PRAY

Loving Jesus, thank you for the chance to share and give. May all of my gifts bring more of your light into the world.



DO

Think of a way your family can share with others in need, perhaps by participating in your church, school or workplace's giving program. Or think of someone you know with whom your family can share in a special way this season. Find a way to help each other in surprising ways over the next week—and keep it a secret!

SATURDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

...your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

ISAIAH 30:20-21

THINK

When we're preparing to start a new grade in school or begin a new activity, we might be a little scared. We might be confused. We probably need some guidance and help. And don't be afraid to ask for it.

It's a good idea to look for guidance as we prepare to receive Jesus into our hearts in a deeper way. Of course, the best person to guide us is—Jesus himself! That's the great gift of Christmas, as Isaiah foretells here. With Jesus, also known as the Word Made Flesh and God With Us, entering into our lives, we don't have to wander any more. When we listen to him closely, when we read the gospels and receive Jesus' words as they are given to us today, we're in the presence of our Teacher, right here among us. We can hear his voice, we can trust him. He will show us the way.

PRAY

Jesus, I believe that you are present with us here. Help us quiet our hearts and listen to you. Teach us your way.



DO

Together, pick out some of Jesus' words that mean a lot to your family. Make a small sign on a piece of paper, poster board or dry-erase board. Write the words of Jesus, decorate the sign and post it in a place where your family members will see it every day. Let Jesus teach you every time you pass by.





Advent gives us all the tremendous opportunity to think about the many ways that God shows us the “Wonders of His Love.” It is a wonder that God sent his only son, that Jesus humbled himself to be born in a manger and live in poverty. Celebrate those wonders, and many more, as a family! Together, each day of the season, prepare for the coming of the Lord through Scripture, reflection, prayers and activities. Let us look to Jesus in the manger and welcome him into our hearts.

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