



ADVENT IN A BOX

'Tis the Season!

Dear Ministry Leaders,

This year has been difficult - full of surprises, the unknown, and a lot of waiting. And isn't that exactly what we learn during Advent? We learn patience as we anticipate the birth of Jesus each year, and now more than ever, our anticipation is tinged with anxiety, confusion, yet still, somehow, hope.

We long for the day when we can be together again, in the flesh, and not only through a screen. We remember that God became human to live amongst humanity - Incarnate, in the flesh. And here we are, in the in-between - waiting for Jesus' return to make all things right again.

As we wait this season, be encouraged! Church certainly looks different this year, and the beautiful thing about it is we can share the Good News in new and fresh ways with our communities!

This is for you to share with those in your church and community. The next page offers three ways you might utilize this resource, and you may adapt as you see fit for your ministry context. Additionally, you may want to combine this resource with the upcoming "Christmas in a Box" for more family activities to last through Epiphany!

Happy Holiday Planning!

-Rev. Melissa Collier Gepford



Option A: Digital Format

Email a digital version of the Devotional Booklet to your email list. Share on social media.

Option B: Printed Format

Print off the Devotional Booklet and mail to your mailing list. Leave copies in communal spaces like coffee shops, libraries, and other places that allow.

Option C: Advent in a Box

Assemble boxes that include the Devotional Booklet and all items for the activities. Either deliver to households or invite them to pick up a box at the church.

Each box should contain (links are for bulk items, but we encourage you to purchase local when possible):

- A copy of Faithful Families for Advent and Christmas by Traci Smith (optional)
- A journal or pad of paper (to cut costs, consider using unused church stationery!)
- A pen or marker (again, consider using pens with your church logo!)
- 5 votive candles (to cut costs, use tea lights)
- 1 pillar candle (to cut costs, use a votive candle)

Assembly:

Aesthetics matter! Assemble this box as if you're wrapping a Christmas gift. Unboxing should be exciting! Consider adding a bow on the outside or some nice crinkle paper inside to place the items on. Label each item with which devotion activity it relates. Place the Devotional Booklet and a personalized letter from you on top so that it's the first thing they see when they unbox.

FAITHFUL FAMILIES

Excerpted from *Faithful Families for Advent and Christmas: 100 Prayers, Practices, and Lessons to Make the Season Sacred* by Traci Smith
(Chalice Press: 2020, All Rights Reserved).



YOU WILL NEED:

- *A journal or paper*
- *Pens, markers, crayons, whatever*

SET AN ADVENT INTENTION

A Spiritual Practice for Beginning the Season

Spiritual practice is not just "accidental." If your Advent season is to be a team when connection, family time, and spiritual practice are the focus, it will happen because you and your family have made it a priority. This is not easy, as it goes against the tide of culture. Before the hustle and bustle of the seasons, take a few moments to set an Advent intention. What would you like the season to look like? Would you like to intentionally limit the number of outside invitations you accept as a family in order to have more peace and less rush? Would you like to set aside one day of the week for family time? Maybe you would like to be guided by an Advent word such as peace, joy, hope, or love. Get the whole family in on the discussion, as age and maturity level allow. If you choose, write down your intention in a journal or somewhere the whole family can see it. The Advent intention will look different for each family, but here are a few examples:

- This Advent, we will focus on the Advent values of hope, peace, love, and joy.
- We will not be overscheduled this Advent, but instead, we will take time for one another.
- Every Sunday evening during Advent, we will do a spiritual practice together.
- Advent will be a time of peace and quiet for our family, not noise and hustle.

ADVENT WREATH

Many Protestant and Roman Catholic churches use Advent wreaths to mark the passing of the four weeks in Advent. The candles are lit, one additional one per week, for four weeks. On Christmas Eve, a fifth candle is lit to represent Christ, the light of the world. In this version for the home, the family gathers around a very simple votive wreath to have dessert together and reflect on each of these four Advent values: hope, peace, joy, and love.

To make your wreath, place four votive candles on a plate in a circle with a pillar candle in the center. Light one candle per week, starting with the first Sunday in Advent (four weeks before Christmas). On each subsequent week, light an additional candle. The first week represents hope; the second, peace; the third, joy; and the fourth, love. On Christmas Eve, light all four candles as well as the candle in the middle, representing the baby Jesus.

During each of the four weeks of Advent, on Sunday evening after dinner, sit around the table with your dessert and candles and go through the simple routine of lighting the candle, discussing the Advent value, and ending with a simple prayer. The depth of discussion will vary, depending on the ages of children involved. For very young children, simply saying the word and ending with the prayer is sufficient and lays the foundation for future years. For more in-depth discussion of each of the values, you may choose to lean on some of the practices in chapter 6.

YOU WILL NEED:

- 4 votive candles
- 1 pillar candle
- 1 plate
- 1 Lighter or a box of matches
- (Optional): Greenery or other decor



Week 1: Hope

Light: Today we light the candle of hope.

Read (optional): Psalm 25:4-5

Discuss: What does it mean to have hope?

What do you think about when you hear the word hope? How can we share hope with others?

Pray: *God, we thank you for giving us hope. Help us to have hope and to share hope as we wait for Jesus to be born. Amen.*

Week 2: Peace

Light: Today we light the candle of hope and the candle of peace.

Read (optional): John 14:25-27

Discuss: What does it mean to have peace in your heart? How can we share peace in our family and in the world?

Pray: *God, please help us to understand peace and to share it with others. We wait for Jesus to be born with hope and peace. Amen.*

Week 3: Joy

Light: Today we light the candles of hope, peace, and joy.

Read (optional): Philippians 4:4-6

Discuss: What does it mean to rejoice? How is joy the same or different from happiness? How can we share joy with others?

Pray: *God, we thank you for the gift of joy. Help us to share with with one another. We wait for Jesus with hope, peace, and joy. Amen.*

Week 4: Love

Light: Today we light the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love.

Read (optional): 1 John 4:7-12

Discuss: When have you felt or seen God's love? How can we show God's love to the world?

Pray: *God, thank you for showing us what true love is. Help us to love you and to love one another. We wait for Jesus with hope, peace, joy, and love. Amen*

Christmas Eve or Christmas Day: The Christ Candle

Light: Today we light the candles for hope, peace, joy, and love, and we light the center candle for the birth of Jesus.

Read (optional): Luke 2:1-16

Discuss: The day we have been waiting for is here! How does it feel to celebrate the birth of Jesus today? What does the birth of Jesus mean to you?

Pray: *God, today we are thankful for the birth of your son, Jesus, and for the lessons he teaches us about how to love one another. Help us throughout the year to share hope, peace, joy, and love wherever we go. Amen.*



THE LONGEST NIGHT/SOLSTICE

Marking Grief or Sadness

For those who live in the Northern Hemisphere, the longest night and shortest day falls between December 20 and December 22. The longest night is also called the winter solstice. If your family is feeling down for any reason or experiencing grief, the winter solstice is a good time to name that hard time or grief, mark it, and remember that subsequent days will be getting longer. The longest night doesn't last forever; the days eventually get longer and brighter.

All you need for this practice is a candle and the words below. Gather everyone around a table with the candle and say,

"Today, on this longest night, we remember that even though there is a lot of joy during the Advent season, sometimes there is sorrow, too. We light a candle for [name the reason you've decided to have a longest night ceremony]. We take a moment to remember that, though the nights can feel long and dark sometimes, brighter and longer days are coming soon. Let's pray together. *[Read the longest night prayer or any other prayer you like.]*"

YOU WILL NEED:

- One candle
- A lighter or match

LONGEST NIGHT PRAYER

God, this candle reminds us that there is light, even in the longest night. We thank you for the opportunity to name the things that are difficult for us this season, and for the hope we have as the sun shines more and more each day. Help us to be near to one another and to you as we lift up our prayers on this day.

You can close your longest night moment by extinguishing the candle and saying, "Peace to our family and to our hearts. May we trust in the light that is to come. Peace, peace. Amen." After the ceremony, do something quiet together, enjoying one another's quiet presence. Snuggle together and watch a movie, or go for a drive to enjoy the Christmas lights around town. Remember that sadness and joy can exist together.



YOU WILL NEED:

- *Your loved ones*

CHRISTMAS MORNING

We open our eyes with joy.
Christmas Day is here!
We are happy to love,
happy to share,
happy to be with one another.
We pray today will be a special and holy day!

