

AN  
ADVENT  
Devotional

UNWRAPPING

the Names

OF

Jesus

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WHY CELEBRATE

# ADVENT?

I didn't grow up observing Advent.

In fact, other than carefully placing my boots under the window on St. Nicholas Day (a cherished Romanian tradition) and joining the carolers on Christmas Eve, there wasn't much I looked forward to in the Christmas season. I've always been a terrible gift-buyer, and decorating the tree pretty much ensured a family feud.

For the longest time, Christmas filled me with angst, not just because of childhood memories but also because of the insane pressure we place on ourselves to make the holidays picture perfect. We get so wrapped up in getting everything ready that Christmas morning can sneak up on us, and we end up feeling guilty that we don't have more warm and fuzzy feelings about Jesus on the day we should be celebrating His birth.

## THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR?

We spend so much of the holiday season creating our own little winter wonderlands: cookies and cards, lights and decorations, carols

and get-togethers. But what exactly are we doing to prepare spiritually?

Most Christians agree that Christmas is all about Jesus, yet few of our calendars would reflect that priority. Honestly, there just doesn't seem to be much time with all the extra demands on our schedules. But somewhere along the lines, this "most wonderful time of the year" overwhelms us, making our souls feel both stuffed and empty.

Yes, busyness and consumerism may be partially to blame. But perhaps no one has taught us how to focus our hearts on Jesus during this season. And it's precisely in the cacophony of this holiday busyness that Advent invites us to a simple practice of worship and celebration of Jesus.

### EMBRACING AN AGE-OLD TRADITION

I first encountered this idea of Advent as a young college student, and it seemed a bit bizarre at first. *What's with all the candles?* I wondered, sitting back in the pew as I watched a child light purple pillar candles in an evergreen wreath at the front of the church. Besides being a clear fire hazard, this little ritual was accompanied by dry readings of obscure passages that did little to warm my heart. But over the years that followed, Advent seemed to pop up all over the place. Perhaps it was my own heightened awareness, but I was intrigued, so I did a little digging to find out more.

Advent means "coming," from the Latin word *adventus*, and demarks a season of expectantly preparing to celebrate the first

coming of Jesus, while eagerly awaiting His second coming to establish His kingdom, even as we celebrate His presence among us through the promised Holy Spirit.

Although it's impossible to pinpoint the exact date the church began observing Advent, the first clear reference to this preparatory period occurred in the sixth century, with some anecdotal mentions as early as AD 380, at the Spanish Council of Saragossa.<sup>1</sup> Various church traditions practice Advent differently, but generally they set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas to prepare their hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

During the Reformation, some Protestants deemphasized the Christian liturgical calendar in a desire to make a clean break from the Catholic Church. But in so doing, we have lost some of the richness that comes from bridging worship in the twenty-first century to that of the early church. As Philip Meade points out, "Although we are wise to not make our residence in the past, we nevertheless should appreciate and recognize the importance of what the church has been doing for hundreds of years."<sup>2</sup> Insofar as this practice can help us meditate on Scripture and more fully enter the season of Christmas, it is a worthwhile addition to our Christmas traditions, and many evangelical churches are recognizing this as they add Advent practices to their Christmas church programs.

As it's celebrated in the Western church, Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and is observed through Christmas

Eve. Observances often include an Advent calendar, Advent daily devotionals, and an Advent wreath, an evergreen wreath containing five candles. Each candle represents a theme and is lit on successive Sundays and Christmas Eve. The themes that correspond to each week also vary by location and denomination, but generally include these variations: *hope* (or promise), *preparation* (or waiting or prophecy), *joy* (or peace), and *love* (or adoration).

Gradually, I warmed up to the idea of Advent and began incorporating it into my own spiritual preparation. One year, as I reflected on the names of Jesus that appear in Christmas carols, I realized that I need to worship Jesus for who He is in the privacy of my home before I can fully celebrate His birth in the company of His congregation. This practice of meditating on a different name each day, while not an Advent tradition per se, taught me to worship Jesus in a way I'd never learned before. Like twirling a brilliant-cut diamond in sunlight, meditating on Jesus' names led me to admire the many facets of His character, each beautiful on its own, but when put together comprising a breathtaking picture of the Son of God made man for us. As the days of Advent passed, I found myself, like David, gazing upon the beauty of the Lord day by day, delighting in Him and dwelling in His presence (Ps. 27:4).

I unwrapped His names one at a time, excitement and anticipation building for the arrival of Christmas Eve. Presents and parties and pastries faded into the background as the drama of Christ's

birth took center stage. As I walked into the candlelit service on Christmas Eve, my heart soared at the sight of the manger. This was the moment I had been waiting for. This was what Advent had prepared me for. *This* was the meaning of Christmas. This beautiful, profound, majestic scene of the eternal God entering time and space for you and for me. I sat on the edge of my seat in the pew, eyes glued on the manger, waiting for the service to begin so I could release the praise and adoration that were waiting to burst forth. And in my heart I heard the echoing chorus of believers throughout the ages marveling at God’s wondrous gift, joining in with Mary to say, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46–47 ESV).

### HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

We all suffer from soul amnesia, forgetting who God is and what He has done for us from one day to the next. Like you, I too must remind myself each year who Jesus is and why His birth is so miraculous—not because my mind doesn’t know but because my heart ceases to be amazed. As the old saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt, and sadly, my own heart loses that sense of wonder. So I wrote this book for you and for me, an offering to help us grow in both our knowledge and love of Jesus. In the words of Jen Wilkin, “The heart cannot love what the mind does not know,” so I’ve endeavored to engage both our hearts and our minds in worship.<sup>3</sup>

I structured this book around the four weeks of Advent (Hope, Preparation, Joy, and Love) and ended with one last reflection on Adoration. Each week begins with an Advent celebration on Sunday, which you can use individually or with your family. You'll find short reflections on the names of Jesus for each weekday, followed by challenges to go deeper, prayers to jump-start your private worship, and additional Scripture references in case you want to study the name further. I've also provided service-oriented ideas and suggestions for activities that can be done during the week or on Saturday to help you apply that week's theme to your Christmas preparations.

I pray this devotional will become your springboard into deeper worship. Whether your devotions take two minutes or two hours is not as important as whether or not your heart is tuned in to the presence of God in that moment and throughout your day. Dive deeper into each name's significance with singing, praying, journaling, or whatever else focuses your attention on Jesus.

Try adopting different body postures before Him, bowing your face to the ground before the Holy One of God, lifting up your palms before the Lord of lords, and dancing with songs of celebration to the King of kings. Engage your senses in worship as well, lighting a scented candle reserved for just your private times of worship with the Great High Priest, praising the Creator as you walk through nature, or fasting from certain foods as you feast on the Bread of Life. Your worship journey will be as rich, deep, and varied as you

desire it to be, but know for a fact that you will seek God and find Him when you seek Him with all of your heart (Jer. 29:13). (For more creative ideas on how to worship God and a free printable to keep you inspired, visit [www.onethingalone.com/creative-worship](http://www.onethingalone.com/creative-worship).)

**GOD DOESN'T MAKE A LIST  
(NOR DOES HE CHECK IT TWICE)**

Any time you spend quieting your heart before God and worshipping Him is time well spent. But be assured of this: God is not going to be disappointed if you miss a day (or a week's) devotional or challenge. Nor is He going to be impressed if you check it off each day.

The purpose of this devotional is not to get more favor with God—Jesus already secured His approval when He took our place on the cross. You are preapproved in Jesus; He invites you to rest in His finished work.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this devotional is to help us worship Jesus as we gain a greater sense of awe and wonder at who He is. We prepare our hearts so that when we admire the live nativity scene, when we sit in the candlelight service, and when we wake up Christmas morning, we can join the faithful who have gone before us and sing from the bottom of our hearts, “O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!”

Alongside you in the journey of Christmas joy,

ASHERITAH



A PRAYER FOR  
YOU AND ME

Father, You know the precious one who is reading this book right now. Before the creation of the world You knew each of us and You made possible a way to redeem us . . . because of Your great love.

Precious Father, I ask that You meet us right where we are this moment. Whether we're climbing the corporate ladder or climbing the Lego-strewn stairs, help us bow low in worship before You. You know our hearts, and You know our desire to be close to You. We claim Your promise that You will draw near to those who draw near to You and You will reward those who diligently seek You with more of Yourself.

As we seek You this holiday season, help us cast aside any impediments that come between us and You. Reassure us of Your unconditional love even when we don't feel like we measure up, especially when we're tempted to place our identity in our to-do list (whether completed or not).

Help us cling to You and be sustained by Your truth as we dig into the names of Jesus. May His names be more than words on a page; may they become a vocabulary of worship as we come into Your presence through Your Son, Jesus.

Fill us with the joy of Your salvation, which we celebrate at Christmastime. Whatever our agenda may hold each day, help us create little pockets of time to meet with You and be refreshed by Your presence. Guide us into Your sanctuary, and don't let us leave until we've met with You.

And at the end of the season, may our love for You continue to grow as we step deeper and deeper into a relationship with You.

Amen.





WEEK ONE

# HOPE



*The people walking in darkness have seen  
a great light; on those living in the land of  
deep darkness a light has dawned.*



ISAIAH 9:2



WEEK ONE  
ADVENT CELEBRATION



# HOPE

*If you are going through this devotional with your family, you can go to [onethingalone.com/advent](https://onethingalone.com/advent) and print out the questions and Scripture readings on separate slips of paper and distribute them among your family members in order to involve everyone. Most of these components are simple enough for even small children to read alone or with help.*

OPEN WITH A SIMPLE PRAYER

LIGHT THE FIRST CANDLE ON YOUR ADVENT WREATH

READ THE FOLLOWING VERSE ALOUD:

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

— John 8:12

SOMEONE ASKS:

Why do we light this candle?



SOMEONE RESPONDS:

This candle reminds us of the promise that a Messiah would come, bringing peace and love to the world.

READ THE FOLLOWING VERSE ALOUD:

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.” — Isaiah 9:2

TAKE TURNS READING THROUGH THIS PART OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY:

Isaiah 9:2–7



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. God planned Jesus' arrival thousands of years before it happened. What does that tell us about God?
2. How does Jesus' light in our world give us hope?
3. In what ways can we allow Jesus' light to shine through us?

SING THE FOLLOWING CAROL TOGETHER:

Silent Night

*As you read the daily devotions this week, light the first candle and thank Jesus for being our Hope.*



# JESUS

*She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*

MATTHEW 1:21

The name *Jesus* is a transliteration of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means “the LORD is salvation.” In Bible times, it was not an uncommon name, just like Jesus Himself didn’t appear out of the ordinary to those who grew up with Him. Yet His given name holds great significance to who He is and what He did on earth.

In the Old Testament, Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan. He saved the people through courageous leadership, charging into battle upon bloody battle, leading hundreds of thousands into the Promised Land. In contrast to the first Joshua, the second Joshua (Jesus) saved through an epic battle that He fought alone, quietly making the way for His people to enter the Promised Land of God’s presence.

Jesus came to save people from their sins. What the first Joshua was powerless to do, the second Joshua was born to accomplish.

During Jesus' lifetime, the Israelites were waiting for a political leader like Joshua who would free them from the yoke of Roman oppression and allow them to live in the land God had promised them, just as their forefathers had been freed from Egyptian slavery and led into Canaan. They wanted a macho man who would reinstate Israel as an autonomous country and make the Romans run in fear.

But Jesus' perspective is always bigger than ours. His gaze was set on the universal dilemma of sin. His battle was one of cosmic proportions, to deliver all who believe in Him from the bondage of soul-deadening sin and welcome us into the family of God.



## CHALLENGE

As you enter this season of Advent, what expectations do you have of Jesus? Are you expecting Him to provide finances, heal a loved one, mend a marriage, or fulfill some other request? He very well may . . . but He may not. Regardless of what happens or how He answers, open yourself to His saving touch, and ask Him to show you what He wants to do in your life. Begin the Advent season with an open heart filled with hope because of Jesus our Savior.

## PRAYER

Precious Jesus, thank You for coming to save not just Israel but all those who call on You. I often get wrapped up in my own self-righteousness and feel like my salvation is done and over with, but You desire a continual renewal of my heart; You want to save me from my own self-righteousness and transform me into Your image. “Search me, God, and know my heart . . . See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24).

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 139; Isaiah 53; Matthew 21:11; Luke 2:11; Romans 11:26



JESUS IS THE  
RESURRECTION  
AND THE LIFE

*I am the resurrection and the life.*

*The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.*

JOHN 11:25

Many people's greatest fear is death. For those who do not believe in God, the thought of dying can be overwhelming, since they don't know what awaits them once they pass away.

Martha and Mary faced the reality of death when their brother, Lazarus, died of a severe illness. He was most likely their sole protector and provider, since neither husbands nor parents are mentioned in their stories. Martha demonstrated her faith in Jesus when she asked Him to resurrect her brother because "God will give you whatever you ask" (John 11:22).

Although Martha properly acknowledged Jesus' relationship with His Father, she failed to understand that Jesus Himself is the

resurrection and life. The power of life and death are in Jesus. He spoke the world into existence and breathed life into Adam.<sup>1</sup> He carefully fashions every child in their mother's womb, and several times in the New Testament He filled dead bodies with life again (see "For Further Study" notes below).

Jesus nullified death's hold on His creation when He willingly laid down His own life. He didn't just stop or end death—He overcame it by entering it and annihilating it from within, rising from the dead without requiring anyone's intervention. As Scripture says, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

Because Jesus rose to life, we who have believed in Him have also been raised to new life with Him. Although we groan with creation under the weight of the current decay death causes in the world, we do not mourn as those without hope. Even in the face of death, whether a cancer diagnosis or an empty place at the holiday table, we embrace the hope of a physical resurrection—ours and that of all who belong to Jesus.

But resurrection is not just a future event. Jesus' words in this passage remind us that resurrection is also a current reality: those who believe in Jesus will ultimately never die. We may experience temporary physical death, but our souls and spirits will continue to live until we receive glorified bodies. We are a resurrected people, and when Jesus returns, we will fully enter His resurrection—body, soul, and spirit. On that day, we will join the chorus of believers

who will cheer our resurrected Lord and taunt our former enemy: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

Jesus’ historical resurrection gives us hope both for today and for the future. Death is defeated in Jesus as He transitions us from temporal life to life eternal. We live the lives of the resurrected.



## CHALLENGE

What does it mean to live like the resurrected? What implications does this mindset have on your relationships, job, finances, service, evangelism, and pastimes? Today, pick one of these areas and ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to engage in it as one for whom life is eternal.

## PRAYER

Lord, You are the Resurrection and the Life. Our world is still torn by sin and destruction, but we acknowledge Your rule over it and we look forward to the day when there will be no more death, no more sorrow, and no more grieving. In the meantime, help us live out the resurrection of Your Son. May we be an aroma of life to a dying world so that they, too, may enter eternal life with You.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 139:13; Luke 7:12–16; 8:41–56; John 11:39–45; Acts 3:15; Romans 8:18–25; Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–16; Revelation 1:18



JESUS IS THE  
KING OF KINGS

*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?  
We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.*

MATTHEW 2:2

At both the beginning and the end of Jesus' physical life, Gentiles proclaimed His kingship. The wise men were the first non-Jews to seek out Jesus, and they came because the cosmos announced His birth in such a glorious manner that they concluded it must be for royalty.

Acknowledging the crime for which Jesus was being crucified, Pilate ordered that a placard be fastened to the cross that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The Jews themselves did not acknowledge Jesus as their King and wanted Pilate to change the sign, but he refused.

Despite their refusal to recognize Jesus' kingship, Jesus *is* King. He came to rule what is rightfully His, both due to His lineage

and His creation-ownership. Both Matthew and Luke dedicate the first part of Jesus' narrative to His genealogy, carefully tracing His lineage to David's royal blood and all the way back to Adam, son of God.

Perhaps the most fitting moment of worship in the New Testament is when Jesus entered Jerusalem victoriously riding on a donkey, the crowds praising God and shouting, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38). Although many in the crowd may not have understood that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, such praise befits the King of kings, and we who have the benefit of the entire New Testament narrative have ample reason to bow our knees in praise and adoration.

Jesus came first as a humble King, but He will return as a warrior King to claim what is rightfully His. John tells us of the present reality in heaven: "On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16).

The King of Glory is not absent from His kingdom; He is patiently awaiting the time when He will come again to establish His kingdom.

We do not trifle with a weakling, nor do we worship an incompetent wannabe rock star. We worship the King of kings who deserves all honor and glory, and continually receives it from the

heavens, creation, angels, and the chorus of His redeemed. Who is this King of Glory? His name is Jesus.



### CHALLENGE

The entire universe worships the King of kings—but as humans we often miss out on this privilege. We're often so focused on ourselves that we become prideful, angry, and annoyed with others, especially in the busyness of the holiday season. Today, take your eyes off yourself, and fix your gaze on the King of Glory. Worship Him today.

### PRAYER

Most High King, You deserve all my honor and praise. Forgive me for the many times I'm so self-centered that I'm in effect negating Your kingship. What a privilege to worship You. Thank You for the hope within us that we will someday worship You with the angels and the saints who have gone before us in Your glorious throne room. I can't wait!

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 2:2; Luke 19:37–44; John 19:15–19; 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:15; Revelation 15:3; 19:16