

A DEVOTIONAL KIT for ADVENT and CHRISTMAS

The four weeks before Christmas are traditionally called Advent. Advent is a time of preparing our hearts for the celebration of our Lord.

CANDLES FOR HIS COMING

What does Christmas really mean? A simple and beautiful way of preparing our hearts to appreciate this special season centers around a custom from Europe which has spread around the world.

According to this practice, a simple advent wreath is made consisting of four red candles and one white candle in the center. Four weeks before Christmas, on Sunday, the first candle is lighted, symbolizing the joyful anticipation of His coming. While the candle remains lighted, the family shares Scriptures, Christmas stories, carols, and a time of prayer. Each Sunday of the month one more candle is lighted. The second Sunday two candles will be lit, the first candle relit and a second new candle will be lit. On each succeeding Sunday, the old candles will be relit and a new candle lighted until all four red candles have been lit. On Christmas Eve, after the four candles have been lit, the center candle, Jesus' candle, is lighted by the mother, as God chose a woman to bring the Light into the world. The other candles are then extinguished, for Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies and the Light of the world. In the glow of His candlelight, the father reads the Christmas story and all rejoice in the coming Saviour!

FIRST CANDLE: THE PROPHETS

The following verses and ideas are only suggestions of what to share while the candles are lighted. Each family can design their own activities to suit their situation and children's ages. Individual creativity is encouraged.

Read Isaiah 9:6, 40:3-11, Micah 5:2, Jeremiah 23:5-6.

If your children are young, you might want to read the verses from the Living Bible. It might even be more meaningful to them if you read

from a Bible story book about one of the prophets who foretold Christ's coming.

If your family enjoys music, listen to the Isaiah 9:6 portion of "The Messiah". (middle part I) Think about how great Jesus is. Take time to pray together. Learn a verse from the Old and New Testaments.

Jeremiah 23:5 " Behold, the days come saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.....and this is his name whereby he shall be called, the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Galatians 4:4=5 "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

SECOND CANDLE: JOHN THE BAPTIST

Read Malachi 3:1-3, Luke 1:5-22, 57-80.

Again, for younger children, these verses might be more easily understood in the NIV (New International version) or the Living Bible version of the Scriptures.

Think about how God prepared His people ahead of time for the coming of His Son. How is God preparing us ahead of time for the second coming of His Son?

Thank God together.

Learn a verse from both the Old and New Testaments.

Malachi 3:1 "Behold I will send my Messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom you seek , shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come saith the Lord of hosts." KJV

Malachi 3:1 "Listen: I will send my messenger before me to prepare the way. And then the one you are looking for will come suddenly to his Temple - The Messenger of God's promises, to bring you great joy. Yes, he is surely coming, says the Lord of Hosts." LBV (Here is an example of two different versions of the same verse so you can decide which version would be easier for your children to understand.)

John 1:29 "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world."

THIRD CANDLE: MARY AND JOSEPH

Read Luke 1:26=35, 46-55, Matthew 1:18=25.

Think about this great announcement and why God sent His Son. Take time to pray together. Learn a verse from the Old and New Testaments.

Isaiah 9:6 "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Matthew 1:21 "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

FOURTH CANDLE: ANGELS AND SHEPHERDS

Read Luke 2:1-20.

For younger children, it might be interesting to use the figures from a Nativity set to tell the story.

Think about God's great gift to us. Think about how glorious His second coming will be. Thank Him together as a family. Learn a verse from the New Testament.

II Corinthians 9:15 "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift."

FIFTH CANDLE: JESUS' CANDLE

Christmas Eve: After lighting the other four candles and briefly reviewing each one, the mother lights Jesus' candle, as God chose a woman to bring the Light into the world. Extinguish the other four candles because Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies and the Light of the world. In the glow of the candlelight, the father reads the Christmas story. (Luke 2:1-20) Rejoice together, as a family, in the coming of the Saviour. For younger children, it may be helpful to understand the Christmas story by singing Happy Birthday to Jesus, and perhaps even having a birthday cake. This would be a good time to

share why we give gifts on Jesus' birthday. It is helpful to a young child, in understanding the meaning of Christmas, if you can read Matthew 25:35-40, and then allow him to choose a "gift for Jesus". This could be food for a shelter, clothes for an orphan, or perhaps he could even choose one of his toys to share with someone less fortunate. Let him learn the joy of giving.

A song to learn:

JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN THAT DAY

Words by Paralee Eadie

(Sing to the tune of Santa Clause Is Coming to Town)

There was a bright star
Way up in the sky.
The time of God's grace
Has now drawn nigh.
Jesus Christ was born that day.

The angels stood 'round
That stable so small,
With cows and with sheep,
With donkeys and all.
Jesus Christ was born that day.

He was a little baby,
So small in Mary's arms.
But He grew up and died for us.
He's the Saviour of the world!

Oh! The shepherds were there,
The Wise Men were too.
Jesus was there for me and for you.
Jesus Christ was born that day.

PREPARE THE WAY FOR JESUS: To encourage good deeds and make children responsible for their own conduct before God, you may want to try this idea. Set up your Nativity scene with a manger for Baby Jesus, but without the Baby in it. To the side of the scene, place a basket of straw. Children are instructed to place one piece of straw in the manger each time they do a good deed for someone else. They are NOT to tell anyone of the good deed or allow anyone to see them put the straw in the manger; it is to be seen by God alone. Hopefully, on Christmas morn, Baby Jesus will be placed in a nice bed of straw!
(If you can't find straw anywhere, shred straw colored paper, or raffia, or any other creative idea you can come up with.)

Another song to learn:

IT'S JESUS' BIRTHDAY

Words by Paralee Eadie

(Sing to the tune of Jesus Loves Me)

1. Baby Jesus, He was born
In a manger Christmas morn.
God Himself come to earth
As this Babe of lowly birth.

Chorus

It's Jesus' birthday.

It's Jesus' birthday.

It's Jesus' birthday.

Oh Happy Christmas Day!

2. Shepherds tending flocks by night,
They beheld a heavenly sight;
Angels singing of Christ's birth,
Peace, goodwill to men on earth.

Chorus

3. Wise Men from the East afar,
They beheld the Baby's star.
Bringing Him gifts they went hence
With gold and myrrh and frankincense.

Chorus

4. Thank You God for Christmas morn,
And for Jesus being born.
That to Heaven I might go,
Just because You love us so.

Chorus

Use these ideas as a springboard for your God-given creativity with the goal of customizing the Christmas season as a time of learning, joy, and praise to God for His great gift to us - JESUS!