



GOD *with Us*



A COLLECTION OF ADVENT
AND CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONS ON
HOPE, LOVE, JOY, AND PEACE



God with Us: A Collection of Advent and Christmas Devotions on Hope,
Love, Joy, and Peace

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A CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS

INTRODUCTION

Everything changed on that unexpected first Christmas more than two thousand years ago. The trajectory of history, the future, even eternity, was transformed when God became man. Jesus the Son of God became the Son of Man, fully divine yet fully human. As the prophet Isaiah foretold long before, Jesus came to earth as Immanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7:14).

This was God *with* us.

Not God out of reach, out there *somewhere*, above us and unattainable. Not God cold and aloof, beyond us and distant, unengaged and disinterested. Not God angry and condemning, overbearing and vengeful, eagerly awaiting our fall.

But God *with* us.

God come near, where we are, in the here and now, where we breathe and live, laugh and cry, love and hate, hope and despair, hurt and heal, create and destroy.

God made flesh. God one of us. God. *With*.
Us. Forever.

As we move toward the Christmas celebration of Jesus's momentous arrival, you are invited to join in an Advent journey of discovery—of hope, love, joy, and peace—as we draw near to Jesus Christ, the light of the world, God with Us.

Advent is a season that is officially observed in many churches. The four weeks before Christmas are set aside as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of Jesus's birth. The term *advent* is a version of the Latin word that means “coming.” But Advent is not just an extension of Christmas; it is a season that links the past, present, and future. Advent offers us the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah, to celebrate His birth, and to be alert for His second coming.

People celebrate Advent differently. While the core concept is the same, some traditions and practices vary. This book is based on common practices, and we invite you to adapt it to match the traditions of your own church. One of the main traditions of Advent is the lighting of the candles on an Advent wreath. A circular evergreen wreath

represents God's unending love for us. And the lighting of five candles throughout the season represents Jesus's coming to a world lost in darkness. Isaiah 9:2 says, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." This can be both a meaningful and fun tradition for kids of all ages, and it can be easily adapted to fit individual, group, or family needs.

This book contains devotions for each of the four weeks before Christmas. Based around the weekly Advent themes of hope, love, joy, and peace, there are seven devotions for each theme. There is also a devotion for Christmas Eve and one for Christmas Day. These emphasize the importance and power of God with Us; they also encourage us to remember that God is with our world through us. Practical ideas help to spur us toward ways to share God's love and presence with others.

In addition, each of the sections contains an introduction page with a song to sing, verses to memorize, a question to ponder, and a verse to fo-

cus on throughout the week. We encourage you to use these sections as a guide for a weekly lighting of your own Advent wreath. Whether you do this alone, as a family, with friends, or as a small group, taking the time to practice the tradition of the lighting of the candles will add to the richness of your Advent experience. And singing the songs can make the experience especially fun and meaningful if you have kids. You'll also find a final section called A Celebration of Christmas, which is filled with fun, creative ideas and activities to start some new family traditions or enhance your own celebration of Jesus's birth.

In a season often marked by frenzied busyness, Advent is an opportunity to set aside time to prepare our hearts. The tradition and the devotions in this book are designed to help us place our focus on a far greater story than our own—the story of God's redeeming love for our world. The story of His presence with us always.

So no matter what the department stores try to tell you, Christmas has not yet arrived. There is val-

ue as well as excitement in patient and expectant waiting. May this be a season of wonder for you. And may the Holy Spirit lead you as you embark on a journey of hope, love, joy, and peace—and ultimately to a deep encounter with God with Us.

Lord Jesus, dwell with us. Abide with us. We welcome you.

GOD *With Us*

BRINGS HOPE

The first Sunday of Advent signifies the hope people felt in their hearts for the promised Messiah to lead them out of dark and hard times. As we begin this season of Advent, we will spend the next seven days exploring the hope in our hearts that God with Us continues to bring to our world. In addition to the daily devotions, take time this week to light the first candle in your Advent wreath. (See Introduction for instructions.) Remember the prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus's coming, express your desires for this season, and place your hope in the Light of the World, who was born a baby in Bethlehem and who is coming again.



READ:

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” —Isaiah 7:14

“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.’” —Luke 1:29–33



MEMORIZE:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” —Isaiah 9:6



ANSWER:

What is your greatest hope this season?



SING:

“Away in a Manger”

1

HOPE ETERNAL

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

—Genesis 28:15 (ESV)

Did hope even exist back in the beginning? If it did, was it very important—or necessary? It seems there was little or no need for it. Life at the beginning was fulfilled. Humanity enjoyed wholeness and intimacy with God and with each other in God's perfect creation. Adam and Eve lived in contentment and harmony—until they fell to the temptation of the serpent.

When everything became broken, hope became vital. The trust that God would not leave Adam and Eve and their descendants became a lifeline. And when God established a covenant with Abraham, He cemented the hope of renew-

al and restoration that eventually would extend to all people of the earth. When God encountered Jacob at Bethel, He renewed that covenant and reinforced the hope rooted in His faithfulness: “I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:15).

Further along in history, we know the fulfillment of God’s promise as Jesus the Messiah. His arrival, life, sacrifice, death, and resurrection reinforce and provide us with a continual resurgence of hope—that there is more than the finality of suffering and death. That God one day will completely restore life and relationship and all of creation. That God is always at work among us and within us. Because of Jesus, we can hope and hope confidently.

What do you hope for? How do you think your hope is the same or different from that of God’s Old Testament followers? What encourages you and fuels your hope?

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