

Advent

STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

When you think about Christmas from a Christian perspective, the words hope, peace, joy and love probably come to mind. Maybe you even have a tradition in your family or in your church in which you light the special Advent candles that correspond to these themes. But as you see the candles come to life and hear the words about hope, peace, love, and joy spoken, you might wonder: what is the heart of these themes, and where are they in the Bible?

The themes encapsulate the story of the Gospel and represent realities that we get to live in each day—all because Christ entered the world that one night we now celebrate as Christmas. Yet, there's more to the story.

The invitation of Advent is to meditate on these deeper themes, the words that often come to mind when we think of Christmas. But these four words are so much bigger than that. They are bright, luminescent truths that define our lives, reminding us each moment that we are called to pursue hope, peace, joy, and love—just as Jesus did from the very beginning. And since the moment he set foot on earth, he displayed the heart of those four words in the most perfect way.

Because of Christ's coming, we can now receive and experience the completion, fullness, and layered reality of hope, peace, love, and joy as the virtues and character traits of God. Love, peace, and joy are also listed as fruits of the Spirit, things that we are to emulate (Galatians 5:22–23).

As you notice candles this Advent season and gaze at the light each one gives off, we hope you'll have the chance to meditate and reflect on “the true light” (John 1:9) and the hope, peace, joy, and love we receive from Him.

A unique way to meditate on scripture is Lectio Devina. This is one way to concentrate on a small section of verses to consider what God's Word is saying to you and your current life circumstances. You are encouraged to try this practice with the verses suggested in this study each day of Advent. You will find a great resource for this practice at the back of this study guide.



Week One – Hope

... and in His word I put my hope.

Psalm 130:5, NIV

Jesus came to give humanity hope. This glimpse of hope is present as early as Genesis 3:15, when God tells the serpent that “He [Jesus] will crush your head, and you will strike His heel” (NIV). Ever since the beginning of time, ever since God created the world, there has been an anticipation that Jesus would soon be coming, though it took many years for Him to arrive.

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies about Jesus’ coming, even though the recipients of those prophecies didn’t necessarily fully understand the implications of what was to come. A few such prophecies include Isaiah 11:1 and Jeremiah 23:5, which subtly hint to the hope that would soon appear on the earth.

But what about us today? Jesus already came to earth, and many of the prophecies in the Old Testament have been fulfilled. But the hope that you have, the hope that Jesus brings, is as present today as it was back in Genesis. Why?

Jesus is your hope each and every day. He is your Savior who delivers you from sin and renews your withering heart with His rich love. Every time you ask for forgiveness, every time you trust in Him, He is giving you hope that you will join Him in heaven one day.

You can anticipate Jesus showing up in your life in the same way those in the Old Testament anticipated His coming. Psalm 130:5 says, “I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in His word I put my hope” (NIV).

And beyond that, Jesus will be coming again. This Advent season, let’s remember the anticipation that the prophets felt as they were prophesying about Jesus—and eagerly anticipate His second coming with the same hope and joy.

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you think hope means in the context of Advent?
2. How does our hope today differ from the hope in the Old Testament since we are looking toward Jesus’ second coming instead of His first?
3. What significance do you see in some of the prophecies or hints about Jesus’ coming (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5)? What strikes you about them?
4. What does it mean to “wait for the Lord” (Psalm 130:5)? How do you think that applies to Advent—and to your life today?
5. How are you celebrating Jesus’ first coming and anticipating His second coming this Advent?

Lectio Devina Scripture Verses

☐ **Day 1** – Isaiah 11:1-2 | ☐ **Day 2** – Hosea 11:1 | ☐ **Day 3** – Colossians 1:27 | ☐ **Day 4** – Psalm 130:5-6 | ☐ **Day 5** – Genesis 3:14-15
☐ **Day 6** – Jeremiah 23:5 | ☐ **Day 7** – John 3:17

Week Two – Peace

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

John 14:27, NIV

When we follow Christ, peace runs beneath the surface of our lives, like a quiet stream flowing beneath a bridge. Jesus came to give you peace by saving you and forgiving your sins. While your heart might feel like it's in turmoil, you can always fall back on that simple reality, which is at the heart of His coming.

We have this peace because we are set free. Galatians 4:4–5 describes: “God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children” (NLT). Parents are meant to be a source of comfort to their children, and that is what God is to us. God is the Father who is beside you forever, who sent His son to give us that everlasting peace and comfort that comes from salvation.

You are always His child. As children grow older, parents often become less involved in their children's lives since they don't need the same guidance they needed as young children. But the peace you have as His child never changes or even lessens. You will always have the same peace, the same security, as His child.

Many verses in the Bible highlight the peace that Christ brought with Him when He came to earth. Titus 3:4–5 says, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy” (NIV). And that means you can live with peace and security, knowing that it's “His mercy” that saved you.

Think about the Christmas story. Maybe you read it every year with your family. The very image of Jesus, born in a manger surrounded by animals, is a calming, quiet, even lovely image. When you picture it in your mind, you might find yourself unconsciously relaxing, soaking in the beauty and simplicity of that picture.

And this peace that we feel from reading the story is only a part of the peace that we can experience through Christ. Jesus came as a child to allow you to feel the peace of a child—and that means you can feel complete comfort and security in His loving presence. This week, think about the peace that Christ brought to the world when He came—and how you can remember that peace this Advent season.

Reflection Questions:

1. What role does peace play in the Gospel message? Why does peace matter in this story?
2. Look at other verses that talk about peace, such as John 14:27, Isaiah 26:3, Colossians 3:15. How do you think those verses connect with our study today?
3. Are there certain stories, verses, or biblical truths that remind you that you are His child?
4. What do you think biblical peace means? How does it differ from feeling calm or content?
5. Do you feel at peace in this current season of your life? Do you think it's possible to feel secure and at peace in your faith, even if you're struggling? Why or why not?

Lectio Divina Scripture Verses

☐ **Day 1** – Titus 3:4-5 | ☐ **Day 2** – Galatians 4:4-5 | ☐ **Day 3** – Acts 20:35 | ☐ **Day 4** – 2 Corinthians 9:15

☐ **Day 5** – Deuteronomy 18:15 | ☐ **Day 6** – John 1:9-12 | ☐ **Day 7** – John 1:14

Week Three – Love

*And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love.
But the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV*

Of all the virtues of heaven, Paul tells us that the most foundational and greatest is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). It is woven throughout both the Old and New Testament, the “why” behind God’s great redemptive plan. And most importantly, it is the motivation of Christ as He makes his way to the cross: “Because God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son” (John 3:16, NIV). Without love, there would be no faith, hope, or peace.

Throughout Scripture we see many different expressions of love. In C. S Lewis’ book *The Four Loves*, Lewis breaks them into four distinct categories: storge (“store-gae” meaning affection); philia (friendship); eros (romantic love); and agape (selfless godly love). They are all God created and designed, but they serve us in different ways. In its best form, love promotes and encourages. But other things can masquerade as love and end up harming and manipulating people.

Love captures the essence of God and reveals the best of Him in us. Scripture tells us that we wouldn’t be able to love at all if God didn’t first love us (1 John 4:19). Love can be a noun, verb, or adjective, and when asked which is the greatest of the commandments, Jesus replies:

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29–31, NIV).

Love simply is. And “God is love” (1 John 4:16).

During this week of Advent, open your heart up to the endless love of God. Allow Him into those places where human love has failed you. Embrace Him in trust and believe that because He loved, you are redeemed.

Reflection Questions:

1. Explore the four different types of love mentioned above. Is there one type of love that dominates the others in your life? What area are you lacking in love? What area of love could you try to grow in? Have you welcomed the Lord into this space?
2. Take time to examine the motivation of why you are serving others. Is it out of fear and/or obligation? Have you accepted the unconditional love of Christ for yourself? Have you allowed God to love you?
3. Do you believe God loves you like He says He does? What difference does that make in how you love others?
4. Why do you think love is so foundational to the Gospel message? What does it represent or mean in the context of Jesus’ coming—and in our lives today?
5. How do you show love to others? What are some easy ways to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31)? How about some more challenging ways?

Lectio Devina Scripture Verses

☐ **Day 1** – Isaiah 7:14 | ☐ **Day 2** – Isaiah 9:6 | ☐ **Day 3** – Micah 5:2 | ☐ **Day 4** – Mark 1:1-3 | ☐ **Day 5** – Luke 1:26-28
☐ **Day 6** – Luke 1:30-33 | ☐ **Day 7** – Matthew 1:21-23

Week Four – Joy

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Philippians 4:4, NKJV

The fourth week of Advent is the crescendo of over 90 ancient prophecies coming to fulfillment in the birth of Christ. A child has been born, and God has become man (Luke 2:4–20)! This week is about anticipation, excitement, and celebration of Christ the King—and so much more. The fourth week of Advent allows us to explore the completeness of biblical joy!

The words rejoice, joy, or joyful appear 430 times in the Bible, whereas happiness only appears 10 times. Joy embodies excitement, anticipation, and happiness, but it is also resilient and cannot be diminished by current circumstances.

It is the uncontainable expectancy of the shepherds and the vibrant singing of a choir of angels. It is in the power given to the apostles on Pentecost and the hush of heaven as Jesus hung on the cross. It is the fulfillment of God’s plan for mankind through His son Jesus Christ. It is the eternal victory of the goodness of God.

And the amazing truth about joy—which is worth an eternity of celebration—is that the joy in your life is an expression of God living within you! Here are just a few categories of biblical joy:

1. Joy is God-given (Romans 15:13).
2. Joy is protected and cannot be taken from you (John 16:22).
3. Godly joy bears fruit (Galatians 5:22–23).
4. Joy comes through obedience (John 15:10–11).
5. Joy is an expression of worship (Psalm 32:11).
6. There is certain joy in salvation (Psalm 71:23).
7. Joy can be found in trials (Hebrews 12:10).

During this week of Advent, explore the different expressions of the Lord’s joy so that your joy might overflow by the power of the Holy Spirit to others (Romans 15:13).

Reflection Questions:

1. Look up Zephaniah 3:17. What does it mean to have God in your midst? Do you believe that the God of the universe rejoices over you? Why or why not?
2. Happiness is fleeting, but joy is honed and developed. Where are you seeking happiness instead of joy?
3. When was the last time you worshiped without hesitation or control? When was your last belly laugh? Take time this week to express your love for God in celebration and gratitude! Sing out “Joy to the World” at the top of your lungs!
4. Joy is a key theme throughout the Bible. How has joy been present throughout your life? When do you feel your joy is threatened?
5. What does it mean to “rejoice in the Lord always” with your life (Philippians 4:4)?

Lectio Devina Scripture Verses

☐ **Day 1** – Luke 1:41-42 | ☐ **Day 2** – Luke 1:46-48 | ☐ **Day 3** – Luke 2:4-7 | ☐ **Day 4** – Luke 2:8-12

☐ **Day 5** – Luke 2:13-14 | ☐ **Day 6** – Luke 2:15 | ☐ **Day 7** – Luke 2:16-20

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's word.

Select a Scripture passage

Before starting your prayer, select a passage from Scripture to use for your lectio divina. It can be from the Old or New Testament, but it shouldn't be too long.

Prepare for prayer

Before entering into the prayer, prepare yourself physically and mentally. Find a quiet place and ask for the grace to be receptive to what God will speak to you through this Scripture. Take a breath in for a count of five, hold for five, and then exhale for a count of five.

Read (*lectio*)

Begin by slowly and meditatively reading your Scripture passage out loud (or listen to it being read by a Bible app). Listen for a particular word or phrase that speaks to you at this moment and sit with it for a time.

Meditate (*meditatio*) - Read the same passage a second time. As you re-engage the text, let the word or phrase that stood out become your invitation to dialogue with God. Allow the word or phrase to wash over you and permeate your thoughts. What is God saying to you in these words? What do you want to say to God? What feelings do these words raise up in you? Share your answers with God.

Contemplate (*contemplatio*)

Read the text a final time. As you do, release the word or phrase you have been praying. Be still and rest in God's embrace. What gift has God given you to take away from this prayer? To what action might God be inviting you? Thank God for this gift and invitation as you conclude your prayer.