

# ***Journey to Bethlehem***



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**Advent Devotions for Families**  
**November 27 - December 25, 2022**



## ***On the Way to Bethlehem***

### **IN BETHLEHEM WE MEET JESUS**

#### **Christmas Eve & Christmas Day: December 24 & 25, 2022**

Our journey is now complete. We've arrived in Bethlehem.

Come and greet the baby; Immanuel, God with us. Hear the story of the birth of Jesus with open ears and new eyes today. Come and join Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi at the manger. Come and bow down and worship Jesus.

Stay as long as you wish, but then complete your journey just as the shepherds did; go from Bethlehem, rejoicing and telling everyone of the amazing things you have heard and seen this day.

*Light the centre Christ Candle if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.*

#### *A Christmas Prayer*

O Lord, even as the shepherds set out to see this thing which had come to pass, may we too kneel before you on this day of celebration and offer our praise. Amen.

#### *Scripture Readings for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day*

Saturday                      Luke 2:1-20  
Sunday                         Isaiah 9:6-7

*Spark Story Bible*                      'Jesus Is Born', p. 212-217  
*Growing in God's Love*                      'A Baby Is Born', p. 190-191  
*Read Wonder Listen*                      'Jesus Is Born', p. 146-147

#### *Closing Blessing*

Giver of all good gifts, Long ago you promised that we would leave a world of darkness and enter into your glorious light. Today we have experienced this light, the light of your Son. There is no greater gift than this. Today, with all of the angels we sing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, good will among people. Amen.

Advent is a journey!

Some journeys involve sitting back, relaxing and watching the world go by. Advent isn't a journey like that. Advent is the kind of a journey that bids us to become active participants; walking and interacting with everyone and everything we encounter along the way. Being active helps us better prepare for what we will discover at the end of this road we are travelling on.

Some journeys don't seem to have a destination in mind, but are merely opportunities to go wandering. Advent isn't like that either. Advent is a journey that from the very day we start out is leading us to Bethlehem where we will meet the Christ child. We may wander off the road from time to time, exploring unexpected discoveries along the way, but no matter where we wander we come back to the road that leads us to Bethlehem.

One way we can be active on our Advent journey is to set aside time every day to reflect on the stories found in scripture that lead us toward Bethlehem, to consider how God is preparing us to hear the Good News, and to offer our prayers of thanksgiving and adoration to God. If you have not done daily devotions before, Advent is a perfect season to begin this spiritual discipline. This booklet has been written to accompany you on a devotional journey; it will serve as your guidebook to take you to Bethlehem.

As you go through these devotions you will find yourself walking with the prophets, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi. Each of them accompany us on our way to Bethlehem, sharing their experiences of God's promises, their experiences of hope realized, and the fullness of God's love for us all. Find a quiet time to set apart each day to meet each of them along your way.

If you would like to add additional songs, stories, family activities, recipes and crafts to expand your Advent journey visit [www.cnob.org](http://www.cnob.org) and click on the weekly **Advent Living Room**. Each Sunday of Advent a new living room will be uploaded onto the website, along with new activities for you to experience. Click on the objects found in the room and enjoy your Advent journey.

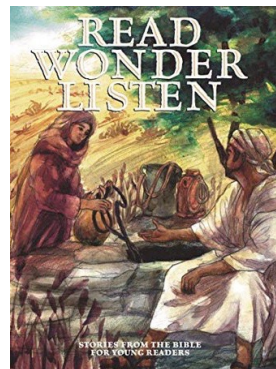
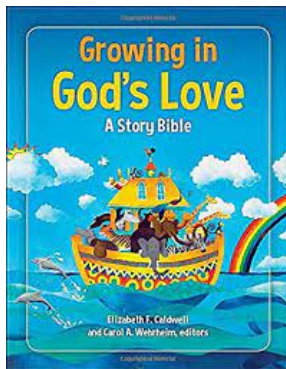
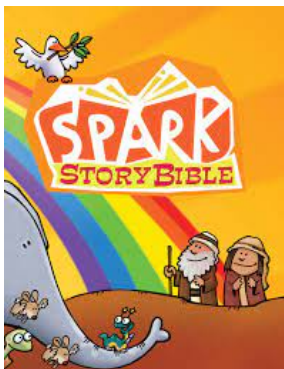
## Wonder-Filled Children's Story Bibles for Advent

For younger children hearing bible stories read aloud directly from scripture can be challenging. Hearing these same stories read aloud from an excellent children's bible storybook can help the words come alive and become memorable for younger children.

For this reason, this devotional booklet includes options for families with younger children to read the scripture stories from either of three excellent children's bible story bibles. They are **Spark Story Bible** from Sparkhouse, **Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible** edited by Elizabeth Caldwell and Carol Wehrheim, and **Read Wonder Listen: Stories From the Bible for Young Readers** by Laura Alary. The first is great for families with pre-readers and early readers, while the third will appeal to older children. *Growing in God's Love* is for readers in between these two groups.

Families with children may choose to only use a bible story book for their devotions each week, or blend the bible story book readings in alongside the daily scripture readings. Parents will know best what will work for them.

Your church may already have a copy of one or more of these story bibles in your church library, and/or extra copies to loan out from the Sunday School. Just ask your church if this is possible. Otherwise they can be purchased through Sparkhouse, Amazon and Wood Lake Books.



## THE MAGI

### Advent 4: December 18 - 23, 2022

The Magi, also known as the wise men, had the longest journey of all to get to Bethlehem. They came from the East, likely all the way from Persia, and travelled for months before they could kneel at the feet of Jesus and offer him their precious gifts.

Our theme of light overcoming the darkness is repeated this week, as a bright star serves as the guiding light for the Magi. Once the star stopped over the place where Jesus was to be found, the Magi presented precious gifts to Mary and Joseph that would give honour to a king as well as sustain this young family in the challenging years ahead.

*Light all four Advent Candles if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.*

#### Responsive Advent Prayer

L: We're getting close to Bethlehem.

**R: We're almost there.**

L: Reveal to us this child

**R: that has been born to us,**

L: for we have seen his star

**R: and have come to worship him. Amen.**

#### Scripture readings for each day of the week

Sunday Isaiah 60:1-3

Monday Matthew 2:1-6

Tuesday Matthew 2:7-10

Wednesday Psalm 72:1-14

Thursday Psalm 96

*Spark Story Bible*

'Wise Men', p. 218-223

*Growing in God's Love*

'Visitors from the East' p. 196-197

*Read Wonder Listen*

'The Magi Come Seeking' p. 151

#### Prayer

God of wonder and light, you revealed your marvellous love to the Magi with a star. Reveal to us your love and direction. Amen.

## THE SHEPHERDS

### Advent 3: December 11 - December 17, 2022

This week we meet a group of shepherds; hard working people who spent their lives in the hills outside of the towns and villages caring for the safety and well-being of their flocks.

Scripture is filled with stories of shepherds and sheep. God is frequently known as the good shepherd, and God's flock are loved and cared for above all else. How telling that we meet this band of exuberant shepherds praising along our way.

*Light three of the four Advent candles if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.*

#### *Advent Prayer*

God who sent the angels to the shepherds, in the presence of your glory may we not be afraid, but go with courage to see all that you show us today. Amen.

#### *Scripture readings for each day of the week*

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Sunday    | Psalm 23        |
| Monday    | Luke 2:8-11     |
| Tuesday   | Luke 2:12-14    |
| Wednesday | Luke 2:15       |
| Thursday  | John 10:1-10    |
| Friday    | John 10:11-15   |
| Saturday  | Isaiah 40:10-11 |

*Spark Story Bible* 'The Lord Is My Shepherd', p. 160-163

*Spark Story Bible* 'Jesus is Born', p. 214-215  
(skip p. 212-213 and p.216-217)

*Growing in God's Love* 'Surprise Visitors', p. 192-193

#### *Closing Prayer*

We sing with the angels, O God. Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favours. Amen.

## ADVENT IS A TIME TO WONDER

When we approach scripture with awe and wonder we open ourselves to see and hear what God is revealing to us anew each day.

This Advent, as we experience the prophets who heard God's clear voice promising the world a king who would change everything, yet not arrive for hundreds of years, we wonder how this revelation changed God's people. As we reflect on the praises Mary lifts in song to God, knowing her life was being turned upside down, we find ourselves in awe of her willingness to say yes to God. As we walk with the shepherds who've just seen a night sky filled with angels, and with the Magi who trusted a star's guiding light, we look for our own experiences of the unexpected that will transform our lives forever. And, as we come close to the manger and lift our heads over the edge of this feeding trough we gaze with delight and wonder at the greatest gift of all. A gift given in love, encompassing all of God's tremendous promises to us, and leading us to reflect anew with wonder each day.

As you engage with these devotions each day, spend time in awe and wonder. Ask wondering questions and quietly contemplate the answers you discover. Allow these questions to continue throughout the day and evening, and return to them again and again throughout all of Advent. You may wish to think about questions such as these:

- I wonder how the prophets knew that they had heard God's voice?
- I wonder who the prophets are who hear God's voice today?
- I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt when they heard that the prophets words would be coming true in their lives?
- I wonder what the shepherds were feeling as the sky exploded with the voices of angels praising God?
- I wonder what the Magi said to each other as they travelled for weeks following a star?
- I wonder what each of these people were feeling as they travelled to Bethlehem?
- I wonder what each felt as they gazed on Jesus and worshipped him?

## LIGHT, GLORIOUS LIGHT

### Advent 1: November 27 - December 3, 2022

The prophet Isaiah brings a message of hope more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus. God promises, through the words of the prophets, that we will emerge from a land of deep darkness, and enter into a new world filled with the light. They tell us that all of this will happen when a child is born, a child whose kingdom will usher in endless peace forevermore.

*Light the first Advent candle if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.*

#### *Responsive Advent Prayer*

L: Wake up sleepy Christians.

R: **The night is over and the dawn is about to happen.**

L: Be up and awake,

R: **To see what God is doing.**

L: We can't waste a minute,

R: **We must be up and about. Amen.** (based on Rom. 13:11-14)

#### *Scripture readings for each day of the week*

|           |                   |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Sunday    | Genesis 1:1-4     |
| Monday    | Isaiah 40:1-5     |
| Tuesday   | Isaiah 2:1-5      |
| Wednesday | Jeremiah 33:14-16 |
| Thursday  | Isaiah 11:1-10    |
| Friday    | Micah 5:2-5a      |
| Saturday  | John 1:1-5        |

|                           |                                     |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Spark Story Bible</i>  | 'God Will Bring Peace', p. 164-165  |
| <i>Spark Story Bible</i>  | 'God's Peaceful World', p. 172-175  |
| <i>Spark Story Bible</i>  | 'A Ruler from Bethlehem', p.194-195 |
| <i>Read Wonder Listen</i> | 'The One Who Is Coming', p. 141     |

#### *Closing Prayer*

God, our hope, we watch and wait for you. Wake us up to see the signs of your coming glory. Amen.

## MARY AND JOSEPH

### Advent 2: December 4 - December 10, 2022

Mary was just a young girl, yet entrusted with so much. With Joseph she embarked on a long journey to Bethlehem, pregnant, tired, and wondering what God was preparing for her. Joseph's world was turned upside down when Mary shared her story with him. He too walked this road with Mary with love and care.

*Light the first and second Advent candles if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.*

#### *Responsive Advent Prayer*

L: Oh God, we've only just begun to wait,

R: **To wait for the birth of your Son.**

L: And the way feels long

R: **with many obstacles along the way.**

L: Like Mary and Joseph

R: **We place our trust in you. Amen.**

#### *Scripture readings for each day of the week*

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Sunday    | Isaiah 7:10-14  |
| Monday    | Luke 1:5-25     |
| Tuesday   | Luke 1:26-38    |
| Wednesday | Matthew 1:18-23 |
| Thursday  | Luke 1:39-45    |
| Friday    | Luke 1:46-56    |
| Saturday  | Luke 2:1-5      |

|                              |                                     |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Spark Story Bible</i>     | 'Angels Visit', p. 196-201          |
| <i>Spark Story Bible</i>     | 'Mary Visits Elizabeth', p. 202-207 |
| <i>Growing in God's Love</i> | 'How Can This Happen?', p. 186      |
| <i>Read Wonder Listen</i>    | 'Zechariah Is Surprised', p. 142    |
| <i>Read Wonder Listen</i>    | 'Mary Is Surprised', p. 144         |

#### *Closing Prayer*

God, you have a plan for our lives, calling us out of the ordinary and into the extraordinary. Like Mary and Joseph, may we hear you when you call. Amen.