

**Dear Family,**

Advent is a season of preparation, a time of prayerful anticipation. The very atmosphere of Advent stirs our hearts, as we make ready to celebrate the birth of Christ. Please utilize this resource to help your family make Jesus the focal point of Christmas. In keeping with our children's ministry philosophy (that parents are the primary teachers of their children and that the family and the home is the most important context for learning), we offer this Advent devotional guide as one of many tools for you to heed the instructions of Deuteronomy 6.

This year we are also utilizing the "Advent Conspiracy" program to help us align our hearts with Christ's. The four aspects of "Advent Conspiracy" are: 1) To Worship Fully, by...2) Spending Less, so that we can...3) Give More, thereby...4) Loving All. Each aspect will be highlighted during the four weeks leading up to Christmas. We are encouraging families to intentionally spend less on the commercial aspects of Christmas and use that money instead to reach other people around the world with the love of Christ by investing in livestock for impoverished villages.

Set aside a little time each night to fill in the next blank in the "Advent Alphabet" located at the end of this booklet. On each of the four Sundays during Advent and Christmas Eve, you will light the corresponding candles on the Advent wreath and read the devotion as a family. The devotions correspond with the four aspects of the "Advent Conspiracy."

So, prayerfully consider how you will lead your family spiritually this Christmas season. Take advantage of the opportunities we have provided for you to be the "pastor of your home". Then, gather the family around God's Word as you celebrate and serve the newborn King.

May the Lord richly bless your family in the coming year.

--Pastor Brent

## History of Advent

No one knows exactly when Jesus was born – what day, month or even year. The early Christians paid no attention to the birthday of the man who was God's Son.

For the early church, Easter was the major Christian Festival. Christ's resurrection was celebrated each week and replaced the Hebrew Sabbath as the day of Christian worship. An annual celebration of Easter soon developed. It was not until later when the early Christians reflected on the words of St. Augustine ("If our Savior had not been born, He could neither have suffered and died for our sins, nor sent His Holy Spirit") that it was felt necessary to establish a date for Christ's birth. After quite a few dates had been used and changed, Pope Julius I in the year AD 350 declared that December 25 would be the date of Christmas.

The celebration was not very old when the church felt the need for a period of preparation. Originally the Advent Season was the same duration as Lent – forty days. It represented the four thousand years of patient waiting on the part of the Jewish people for the promised Messiah. Advent today begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and concludes on Christmas Eve. Advent is a season of preparation, a time of prayerful anticipation. The very atmosphere of Advent stirs our hearts, as we make ready to celebrate the birth of Christ.

## The Advent Wreath

One of the most beautiful traditions of Advent is the lighting of the Advent wreath. Advent wreaths are available for purchase at local stores, gift shops, and boutiques, but it is also fun to make one together as a family. Just be careful to use fire-safe materials and always provide adult supervision. Typically, an Advent wreath has four candles around the wreath representing the four Sunday s leading up to Christmas day. Often, a large fifth candle is placed in the center of the wreath and is lit Christmas Eve night or Christmas day.



## The “Advent Conspiracy”

The **Advent Conspiracy** is an international movement centered on bringing a deeper meaning to Christmas. The movement is characterized by its four founding principles: *Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More, Love All*. The movement's message is to avoid getting caught up in the consumerism surrounding the holiday in order to celebrate Christmas more fully.

In 2006, Pastors Greg Holder, Chris Seay, Rick McKinley and others founded the organization to rebel against the hyper-consumerism to which they found many Christians fall victim. They proposed to spend less on gifts and give more to the poor. Advent Conspiracy partnered with Living Water International in order to build clean water wells in impoverished areas. In their first year Advent Conspiracy raised half a million dollars to build a high capacity well in Nicaragua and 13 wells in Liberia.

Today, Advent Conspiracy consists of approximately 1500 member churches and organizations around the globe. Last year Country Oaks Church raised \$5,056.51 in our Advent Conspiracy. We were able to purchase the following items from Samaritan's Purse to help impoverished families around the world: \$140 on Baby Chicks, \$3000 to help build a school, \$560 on Dairy Animals, \$480 on Sheep and \$876.51 to help stock a fish pond.

### First Sunday of Advent – December 1

**Leader:** During the next four Sundays before Christmas, we will use our Advent wreath to prepare us for the celebration of the birth of Christ. Each week our candles will remind us of words that will help us think of the Lord Jesus and His coming. This year we are going to use the 4 aspects of the “Advent Conspiracy” to correspond with the 4 candles of the wreath. The first candle reminds us to Worship Fully.

#### **Scripture:**

Review the story of Ruth.

**Explanation:** The book of Ruth tells the story of a Jewish family who lived during the time when judges ruled over Israel. A famine forced Elimelech to take his wife, Naomi, and their two sons to Moab (a land east of the Jordan River) to find food. While living in Moab, Elimelech dies and his sons marry Moabite women. The two sons also die, leaving Naomi alone with her two daughters-in-law in a foreign land. Naomi decides to return to Israel, but she doesn't expect either of her daughters to leave their homeland. However, Ruth decides to go with her mother-in-law and continue to worship the God of Israel.

While living in Israel, Naomi and Ruth have to seek out a living by harvesting left over wheat. The Law of Moses required land owners to designate part of their crops to be harvested by the poor and widows. Ruth was a virtuous and beautiful woman. She catches the eye of an Israelite man named Boaz who is the owner of the field. The Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 25:5-6) allowed for a single Jewish man to "redeem" a widow who was a close relative.

Boaz marries Ruth and they have a son named Obed who turns out to be in the kingly line of David. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is also in the line of David. So, Ruth and Boaz are direct descendants of King David. The most fascinating thing about this story is that Moabites were under a curse by God (Deuteronomy 23:3) because the nation was founded by the offspring of an incestuous relationship between Lot (Abraham's nephew) and his oldest daughter. Furthermore, the Moabites had rejected the true God, instead sacrificing their children to the false god Chemosh.

So, how did a woman from Moab end up being directly related to Jesus? It is because she was redeemed by the loving kindness of Boaz. In the same way, man is under a curse and banned from the Kingdom of God until he is redeemed by Jesus Christ.

The book of Ruth teaches us that there is a place in God's Kingdom for Gentiles and Jews through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It also teaches us that God has a heart for the poor, the outsider, and the widow. The Good News of Christmas is for all people.

**Application:** How does the story of Ruth help us to worship God more fully this Christmas? Worship means to ascribe worth or value to a person, thing, or idea. Worship of Jesus is not just singing on Sunday mornings at church. We know what or who we worship if we examine our lives and determine how we spend our time and money. Ruth left her home country to live in a foreign land because she wanted to worship the true God. Ask your family to describe how they usually celebrate Christmas. Does your family spend most of the Christmas season thinking about the commercial aspects of the season (Santa Claus, Frosty the Snowman, decorations, presents, etc...)? Now, discuss ways you can worship God more fully this year.

Did you know that many people from poor nations mistakenly believe that Christianity is only for rich people or wealthy nations? Why do you think they believe this?

How can we help the poor and other nations understand that Jesus came to be the Savior of all peoples?

**Advent Activity:** Make a bank by wrapping up a small empty box and cutting a slot on the top. Label the gift: To Jesus, From the \_\_\_\_\_ Family. Encourage your family to fill the box with money during Advent. Children can put birthday money or allowance in the box. The family can choose not to go out to eat, and put the money they would have spent at the restaurant in the box. Think of other ways to fill the box with money. This is your gift to Jesus. At the end of Advent we will collect the money and buy farm animals for people in impoverished nations.

## Second Sunday of Advent – December 8

**Leader:** For this second week of Advent, we light two candles on our Advent wreath: the first candle reminds us to Worship Fully and the second candle reminds us to Spend Less.

### **Scripture:**

Read Matthew 1:1-25

**Explanation:** Notice that Boaz and Ruth are listed in the genealogy of Jesus. You can do a quick review of last week's lesson and ask your children what they remember. Matthew's genealogy is important because it establishes a link between Father Abraham, King David, and King Jesus. God promised Abraham that a great nation would come from his seed, and this seed would be the source of blessing to all the nations on earth. The Bible also prophesied that the Messiah would come from the line of David and reign on David's throne forever.

The Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to come and restore Israel to the place of prominence amongst the nations of the world. They thought the Messiah would overthrow the Roman Empire and make Israel the most powerful and prosperous nation. So, who could believe that Mary, an unmarried virgin, would conceive and give birth to the Messiah? If you have young children, you may want to explain to them that Mary did not have a husband yet, but she was going to have a baby. Explain that God desires for a man and woman to be married before they have a child and that this situation would be very embarrassing for Mary and Joseph, her fiancé. (You don't need to explain how a woman conceives to your young children. They just need to know that apart from God working a miracle, this would be a very uncomfortable situation for Mary and Joseph).

God instructs Joseph to take Mary as his wife, even though he would be embarrassed that she had a baby before they were married. The angel

of the Lord tells Joseph to name the baby “Jesus” because he will save his people from their sins. Matthew tells us that Mary’s virgin birth fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7. Though God could have placed Jesus in a rich, powerful family, He placed his own Son in the womb of meek, unmarried teenage girl. Joseph was a carpenter and the family lived in an unimpressive town called Nazareth.

When King Jesus began his ministry, he preached a famous message called the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Instead of promising the people great riches and earthly prosperity, he tells them that true riches are in heaven. Read this portion of the Sermon on the Mount:

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)*

**Application:** Ask your family members if they ever received a gift that didn’t turn out to be as great as they thought it would be. Have they ever spent money on something that they later regretted? Has your family ever gotten into debt trying to buy Christmas presents for everyone on your list? Have you ever opened a present Christmas morning, played with it for a week, only to have it break or have you get bored with it?

What do you think Jesus meant by “treasures in heaven”? How do we store up treasures in heaven? What kinds of gifts would best represent Jesus? Talk about how the gift of a milk cow, sheep, or hens would bless a poor village. What about a well for clean water or a shoebox with gifts and the Gospel message? Is your family ready to commit to spending less this Christmas? What will that look like and how are you going to accomplish this goal?

## Third Sunday of Advent – December 15

**Leader:** We begin our family time this week by relighting two candles, which remind us to Worship Fully and to Spend Less. The third candle inspires us to Give More.

**Scripture:** Read Matthew 2:1-12

**Explanation and Application:** Wise men from the East saw the star and knew it was a sign that the Christ child had been born. They traveled west and inquired about the birthplace of the Christ. The chief priests and scribes knew that the Scriptures designated Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2) as the place where Messiah was supposed to be born. Notice that the earthly king, Herod, was jealous of this new king and wanted to kill him. But these three other earthly wise men (or kings, according to some traditions) came bearing gifts for the newborn King of Kings. Talk about missing the meaning of Christmas!

Discuss with your family how easy it is for us to only think about getting gifts during Christmas. Have they ever been disappointed after the last gift under the tree was opened? Did it feel like Christmas was over? Have they ever received a gift that was not what they actually wanted?

God gave us the greatest gift of all in the person of Jesus Christ. Some people get disappointed with this gift because it is not what they wanted. The Jewish people ended up crucifying Jesus because he wasn't the kind of king that they wanted. Other people get disappointed at Christmas time because they become so focused on other material gifts that they miss out on the greatest gift of all. Our response to the gift of eternal life through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ should be that we can now freely give to others. We can share the love and grace Jesus has given us abundantly.



What will “giving more” look like in your family this Christmas? You can give more of your time and talents by serving others. Certainly, we can also find ways to give more money to others as we “worship more fully” by “spending less.”

Last year many members of COBC ran in a World Vision sponsored half marathon to raise money for clean drinking water in Africa. Perhaps your family can deposit 25 cents or a dollar for each faucet and sprinkler head on your property into your collection gift box. Or you can deposit money for each animal your family owns as a reminder that owning a pet is a huge blessing and sign of abundance because most people around the world can barely manage to feed themselves, let alone a pet.

Just think of the blessing it will be for a village to receive a cow or goat for milk and cheese, a sheep for wool, or hens for eggs, especially since the gift of these animals will come with the Gospel message, and the village will know the gift came from God through His people.

### **Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 22**

**Leader:** Tonight we light the candles that remind us to worship fully, spend less, and give more. Tonight, we light the fourth candle of Advent which inspires us to Love All.

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:13-14; 22:36-40; John 3:16; John 15:9-13

**Explanation and Application:** God sent his Son into the world, and immediately Satan tried to destroy Jesus through the evil king Herod. But God is in control of human history. It was not time for Jesus to die yet. Eventually, Jesus would die on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. In the meantime, Jesus taught the world that love for God and love for others are the highest commandments. He taught that the

highest form of love is sacrificing your life for others. If we literally give our life for another then we can only give that gift once. Sometimes God does ask Christians to give their actual life for another. But Jesus is also teaching us that we must love God and others by sacrificing our wants, needs, and desires to help others. Instead of doing things our way all the time, God wants us to do things his way, EVEN if it seems like our own way would be better for us.

How can we show love to God and others this Christmas and throughout the new year? What can we do for others in our own home, church, school, community, and around the world? Children can love others at school or on their sports team by befriending another kid who is often alone or teased. Your family can pick names out of hat each week and bless one another with secret acts of kindness. Your family can choose to sponsor a child through WorldVison, forgoing a night out to eat each month to cover the cost of sponsorship. Perhaps, your family can support a missionary family by sending letters and packages. Maybe there is a widow a single mom who can use some help around the house and yard. The possible ways to love people are endless as long as we use our creative minds in the power of the Holy Spirit to honor Jesus through sacrificial love.

### **Christmas Eve – December 24**

(This devotion can be done after returning home from Christmas Eve service.)

**Leader:** This is the last time this year we will light the Advent candles. For four weeks the candles have been burning as we thought about God's promises to us, about the light His coming brings to us, about His love for us, and about our hope in Him. We have been thinking of God's gift to us—Jesus, our Savior. During this Advent season we have been getting

our hearts ready for Christmas. Tonight we light the four candles and for the first time, we light the “Christ Candle.”

**Scripture:** Read Luke 2:1-20

**Advent Song:** *Silent Night* (Consider dimming the lights or going outside under the stars. Talk about what it must have been like for Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds.)

**Prayer:** (You may want to hold hands around the Advent wreath as you pray. Children like to focus on the candle light as they listen to you pray.)

We thank you, O Lord, for all those who are with us in our home on this Christmas Eve. Thank you that we can come together forever in our heavenly home, too, when we become part of your family by believing in Jesus. Thank you for sending Jesus to be our Savior. Thank You for Christmas. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

# Advent Alphabet

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
December 1 <b>A</b>	2 <b>B</b>	3 <b>C</b>	4 <b>D</b>	5 <b>E</b>	6 <b>F</b>	7 <b>G</b>
8 <b>H</b>	9 <b>I</b>	10 <b>J</b>	11 <b>K</b>	12 <b>L</b>	13 <b>M</b>	14 <b>N</b>
15 <b>O</b>	16 <b>P</b>	17 <b>Q</b>	18 <b>R</b>	19 <b>S</b>	20 <b>T</b>	21 <b>U</b>
22 <b>V</b>	23 <b>W</b>	24 <b>X, Y</b>	Christmas Day 25 <b>Z</b>			

## **A** - December 1 - Luke 1:26

This word identifies one of the first persons to have anything to do with the Christmas story. This person announced to Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus. God used Gabriel to bring the good news to Mary.

Gabriel is an \_\_\_\_\_.

## **B** - December 2 - Micah 5:2, Luke 2:4

This is the town where Jesus was born. The word is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **C** - December 3 - Matthew 2:1

This was the reason Mary and Joseph had to leave their home and travel to Bethlehem - just when Jesus was to be born! Caesar Augustus made a ruling that everyone was to be registered or counted. We still do something like that every ten years. It is called a \_\_\_\_\_.

## **D** - December 4 - Matthew 1:20; 2:12; 2:22

Today's word is something we have all had, usually while we are sleeping. God used it in the Christmas story to warn people about danger. The wise men had it and so did Joseph. If you do this during the day, people think you're lazy. At night, it's okay. Tell one another about your last one.

The word is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **E** - December 5 - Matthew 2:13

After Jesus was born and Herod wanted to kill Him, Joseph was told in one of his dreams to take Mary and Jesus to a safe country.

That country was \_\_\_\_\_.

## **F** - December 6 - Matthew 1:22

Today's word has to do with a message the prophet Isaiah wrote (Isaiah 7:15). He said these words 750 years before Jesus was born. Our word today means that the words Isaiah said were coming true. If you take a cup and you put water in it until it is all the way to the top, you have filled it full. Nothing else can be put in. That's what Matthew was saying. The words of Isaiah were filled full or all true because Jesus came. The word is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **G** - December 7 - Luke 2:20

Our word today suggests a way we can express God's greatness. The word means to give honor, praise or admiration. The shepherds did this as they headed back to the sheep after seeing the baby Jesus. We do it when we worship and praise God. The word is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **H** - December 8 - Matthew 2:1

This man was king when Jesus was born. He was a wicked man. His name was \_\_\_\_\_.

## **I** - December 9 - Matthew 2:21

After Herod died, Joseph had another dream where God told him it would be safe to take Jesus and Mary back to their home. That country is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **J** - December 10 - Luke 1:13

This person was Jesus' cousin. His mother, Elizabeth, and Jesus' mother, Mary, were friends and talked together before their babies were born. When he grew up, he preached and baptized people - in fact, he baptized Jesus. His name was \_\_\_\_\_.

## **K** - December 11 - Matthew 2:2-3

Our word for today is not found in the Bible. The Bible tells us that they were magi, meaning they were a group of wise men. But one of our Christmas carols uses this word when it describes them. They were the three \_\_\_\_\_.

## **L** - December 12

There are two books in the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus' birth. One was written by Matthew. The other was written by a doctor named \_\_\_\_\_.

## **M** - December 13 - Matthew 2:11

This was an unusual baby gift! Apparently it was a nice smelling perfume and was a special gift given by three special men. Our word for today is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **N** - December 14 - Luke 2:4

This was the hometown of Joseph and Mary. It was also the home of Jesus while he was a boy and growing up. This is where the carpenter shop was located. The town is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **O** - December 15 - John 3:16

Our word is not found in the Christmas story but it tells the Christmas story! It tells us how special Jesus was. God had no other Son but Jesus. God gave Jesus to the world to save us and not one can ever do what he did. He was the one and \_\_\_\_\_ Son of God.

## **P** - December 16 - Luke 2:19

The word for today means "to think about". The verse says that Mary kept all the things that were happening to Jesus in her mind and thought about them. She \_\_\_\_\_ these things in her heart.

## **Q** - December 17 - Luke 2:46

For today's word we move ahead to when Jesus was twelve years old. He was sitting in the temple, talking with the teachers. Not only did he listen to them but He asked them \_\_\_\_\_.

**R** - December 18 - Matthew 1:5

This woman was married to Boaz and was the great grandmother of David. When she made a choice to follow her mother-in-law, Naomi, and go back with her to the town of Bethlehem, little did she know all that God had planned for her - including being part of Jesus' family tree! Her name was \_\_\_\_\_.

**S** - December 19 - Matthew 2:2

When we travel somewhere we usually follow a road map or the street signs. But not the wise men - they followed a \_\_\_\_\_.

**T** - December 20 - Mathew 2:27

This was home to an old lady named Anna. She lived there night and day. It was also the place where Simeon came the day Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to present Him to the Lord. It was the name of the building where people came to worship God. Our word for today is \_\_\_\_\_.

**U** - December 21 - Matthew 1:23

During one of the Joseph's dreams and angel of the lord told him what to name Mary's baby - Jesus. He was also called Immanuel which means "God with \_\_\_\_\_.

**V** - December 22 - Luke 1:27

This word describes Mary and is one of the most important things to know about Jesus being born. The angel told Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus but that God would be the father. Mary had not been married and would not have been able to have a baby except for the miracle that God performed. Our word for today is \_\_\_\_\_.

**W** - December 23 - Matthew 2:11

As soon as the wise men came into the house where Jesus was, they dropped to their knees and did this. It means that we show reverence and honor. It also means that we tell God how special He is to us. Often we do this when we go to church but we can do it whenever we think of God or pray. Our word is \_\_\_\_\_.

## X, Y - December 24 - Luke 2:7

"X" marks the spot where Jesus was born! He was born a baby, but he wasn't born in a warm bed or nursery. He really was a king, but He wasn't born in a palace. Joseph and Mary couldn't even find a hotel room for Him. Instead He was born where the cattle and horses were fed. He was born in a \_\_\_\_\_.

Jesus came for shepherds,  
He also came for kings,  
He came to give us meaning  
For family, life and things.

He cared for the multitude,  
He also cared for the few,  
He also gave His life for everyone  
He died and lives for \_\_\_\_\_.

## Z - December 25

This man was a priest. God gave him a very important message but he did not believe, and because of that he was not able to speak for nine months! Can you imagine how quiet our world would be if every time we doubted God, we couldn't speak!! This man was the father of John the Baptist. His name is \_\_\_\_\_.

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## Christmas Day

During the Advent Season as you have looked at the calendar to see what letter we would be thinking about, you know we also have a year on the calendar - 2013. We date our calendars from the time of Jesus - A.D. - the year of our Lord.

Throughout the years as we look at the date it can be a constant reminder of the fact that Jesus did come - and we celebrate that now at Christmas!