

Ordinary Christmas

A Christmas Family Devotional

THE wesleyan CHURCH

INTRODUCTION:
A different kind of devotional

I want an intentional Christmas. I want our family to embrace Advent as a season of hope and expectation. I want to reflect together on Jesus' character and to read the unfolding of the Christmas story with wonder. And maybe you do too.

Yet somehow, just after Thanksgiving each year, I find myself sucked into a vortex of to do lists, and I get distracted and stressed. I engage in lots of Christmas rituals but often the meaning of those rituals is lost in the moment.

While I'm at it, here's another confession. I know dinner is supposed to be a time of connection. It's good for my kids' development. It builds trust and most kids' curriculum suggests that this is a time for meaningful conversations.

Not in my house ... at least not yet.

My kids are young. The most basic tasks of dinner are a challenge for us. Normal conversation at the table includes corrective statements and instructions intermixed with interruptions for sibling disputes. "Stay in your seat. Please don't wander around while you eat. Don't touch your sister's food. Eat four bites of meat if you want dessert." We do manage to pray before most meals, but that's about it.

So, this devotional guide is designed for families like mine. Rather than adding to a busy season, I hope it brings intentionality to what your family is already doing. Take simple, ordinary moments of the Christmas season as cues to remember and celebrate the Christmas story with your family this Advent. May all our Christmas routines be reinfused with beauty and meaning.

~ Pastor Justine

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL:

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

— Deuteronomy 6:6-8

In Deuteronomy parents are given instructions for discipling their children in God's ways. They were to internalize God's commands and then pass them along to their children at home and while on the move. Discipleship is a process embedded in our everyday lives. Teaching and discipling aren't activities that take place only within the church walls. Modeling the way of Jesus happens in life's ordinary moments day by day. This devotional is designed as a discipleship guide, a simple companion to create intentional conversations while you keep living your real life.

Devotionals are ordered based on the Christmas story and activities. These stand-alone devotional reflections should fit your seasonal rhythms, moments when you and your family are participating in common Christmas memory making. Read them, share them, talk about them and spark intentional conversations around your favorite holiday traditions. And as you do, our prayer is that our extraordinary God would meet with you in ordinary moments.



A **Message** of Good News

ACTIVITY: Preparing Christmas cards.

READ: Luke 1:28-32

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 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."

Our mailboxes can get a little more exciting during the Christmas season when we see envelopes from friends or loved ones start to appear. Our hearts feel warm and fuzzy when we get to see family pictures and familiar handwriting on cards. Some of us may even hang the cards up so we can enjoy them all season long.

The message Mary received didn't come in a mailbox and it certainly didn't make her feel very excited, at least at first. Was she afraid because the angel was bright or unusual looking? Or did the angel maybe sound or smell different than we do? Or was she afraid because she just wasn't expecting to see an angel, much less an angel with a message for her from God?

No matter how she felt at first, Mary didn't have to stay afraid, because the angel had amazing news for her: The Messiah was coming! And she would get to be his mama.

WONDER AND ACT:

As you're putting Christmas cards into envelopes or taking them out, thank God for the message of good news that came to us at Christmas.

PRAY:

Thank you, God, for our friend, the gift of your Son, Jesus. Thank you for our friends and family, too. Amen.



God's Christmas **Promise**

ACTIVITY: Creating Christmas wish list.

READ: Isaiah 9:6

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.

A long time ago a man named Isaiah shared this promise with God's chosen people. This was a promise from God that a special king would come one day to rule. Isaiah made a list of what this king would be like: wise, powerful, loving and peaceful. This reminds me of wish lists we are making for Christmas.

When the people saw Isaiah's list, they hoped God's promise would come true one day. They wished they would see a king like that. But they had to wait 700 years for God's promise, which finally came true when Jesus was born.

He is God's promised king and rules as king today! Jesus is very wise and helps us to be wise. He is powerful and can do things we cannot do. He is very loving like a father and gives us peace in our hearts. Jesus is such a good king to us.

WONDER AND ACT:

Jesus treats us with kindness and love. I wonder, how would Jesus want us to treat others this Christmas season? Add to your Christmas Wish List ways you hope Jesus can help you show the same kindness and love Jesus shows you.

PRAY:

Jesus, sometimes it is hard to be kind and love others. Please answer my wish list and teach me to be more like you. Amen.



God Gives Life that **Never** Ends

ACTIVITY: Searching for or putting up a Christmas tree.

READ: 1 John 5:11

And this is the testimony:
God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Christmas trees are evergreen trees. That means if no one cuts them down, they stay green all year round. Green needles or leaves on a tree means it's alive and growing. When we look at a Christmas tree, we can remember that God gives us life that never ends and he helps us to keep growing.

A tree needs to stay rooted in the ground and get plenty of water and sunlight to keep growing. In the same way, if we want to grow, we need to stay connected to Jesus and receive plenty of nourishment from spending time with him.

WONDER AND ACT:

Think about someone who might not know Jesus. Pray for them by name: "God, help _____ know you and your life that never ends. Amen."

PRAY:

God, thank you for giving us life and helping us grow. Show me ways that I can spend time with you. Amen.



Sharing Joy

ACTIVITY: Visiting a relative's house.

READ: Luke 1:41–42

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"

When Mary found out that she was going to be Jesus' mother, she went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth was someone Mary loved and trusted, and she was going to have a baby too!

As soon as Mary greeted her cousin, the baby inside of Elizabeth jumped for joy. Even before he was born, that little baby, John, recognized God's son. And at a time when Mary may have felt unsure, her family reminded her that she can trust God and he keeps his promises.

WONDER AND ACT:

As we visit our family today, let's think about what Mary may have felt when she was on her way to see her cousin Elizabeth. *I wonder what Mary may have been thinking and feeling?* (Consider having kids point to feelings on a feeling wheel to show how she felt.)

How do you think Mary felt when Elizabeth's baby jumped for joy and when Elizabeth spoke kind words to her? How can we share joy with our family today?

PRAY:

God, help me to trust you in all things. Give me courage to share the joy of being your child with others. Amen.



God with **Us**

ACTIVITY: Setting up a nativity.

READ: Matthew 1:21–23, NLT

"And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message, through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

As we lay out each piece of our nativity (*leaving baby Jesus to the last*), we can remember that God had been setting things up for this one moment for a very long time. As God planned out all of creation, as he called Abraham to be the start of his people, as he walked with Moses and the Israelites in the desert, God knew this moment was coming. And all along the way, God was with his people, guiding them, taking care of them, teaching them, and loving them.

When Jesus came into the world (*place the baby in the nativity*), he was a great reminder that God IS with us. He is always watching over us and caring for us. His Word promises in Deuteronomy 31:6, he will never leave us. Jesus was called "Immanuel" which means "God with us" because he wants us to know he will always be right here for us.

WONDER AND ACT:

Are there times when you feel like no one cares? Do you ever feel like God is far away from you? How can it help you during those times to remember that Jesus is called "Immanuel," which means "God with us?"

PRAY:

Jesus, "Immanuel," help us to remember you ARE "God with us." Thank you for promising that you will never leave us. Amen.



Light in the Darkness

ACTIVITY: Putting up or looking at Christmas lights.

READ: John 1:4–5

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Light is a big part of the Christmas story. At the time when Jesus was born, the people of Israel were living under Roman rulers. In other words, people from another country were in charge and telling them what to do. People had to pay taxes and lived with a lot of uncertainty.

They also had been praying for a Messiah, someone who would come and save them, for many years. This time of waiting felt dark. Then Jesus came. He was the Messiah they had waited so long to see. He brought light in the darkness.

WONDER AND ACT:

Lights remind us of how Jesus was a light for the whole world. They also remind us to shine the light of Jesus to others. *Who could you share the light of Jesus with today?*

PRAY:

Jesus, help my friends and family who feel like life is dark. Show them your light this Christmas. Give me courage to share your light and life with them. Amen.



The **First** Christmas Song

ACTIVITY: Listening to Christmas music.

READ: Luke 1:46–49

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name."

Did you know Jesus' mom wrote the first Christmas song?

After she saw her cousin Elizabeth, after she learned that baby John had jumped for joy inside his mother's belly, Mary sang a song of joy. She sang about the good things that God has done for her and the good things he has done for others. She sang about how God notices people who might feel small and overlooked and lifts them up and calls them special. Mary sings about who God is and how he loves people. We still sing about God and his love today.

WONDER AND ACT:

What is God like? What words do you use to describe God? Have you ever heard these words in a song? If not, can you turn them into a song about God?

PRAY:

Sing your favorite Christmas song together as a prayer of praise, worship and love to God.



Making a **Safe** Place

ACTIVITY: Driving or taking a trip.

READ: Luke 2:4–7

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Just before Jesus was born, his family had to take a long trip so they could be counted in a census. When they came to Joseph's hometown, every place was crowded and they couldn't find anyone with an extra room for them.

Joseph and Mary eventually found a place to stay, but it wasn't a regular room. It was a room where people kept their animals. While they were in that place, Mary had her baby, Jesus, and she wrapped him up and put him in a manger.

WONDER AND ACT:

Think about some crowded places where you have been. *What were those places like? How do you feel in a crowded place?*

When we take a trip that's a good time to remember the trip Mary and Joseph made to Nazareth before Jesus was born. If someone hadn't opened that stable for them, they would not have had a safe place to welcome baby Jesus.

Who do you know who might need a safe place to stay this Christmas? Who do you know that needs someone to welcome them in? I wonder what we can we do to welcome others. How can we help others feel safe?

PRAY:

Jesus, thank you for helping me feel safe. Teach me how to welcome others so they can feel safe too. Amen.



Showing Others that Jesus is **Great**

ACTIVITY: Attending a Christmas performance.

READ: Luke 2:13–14

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Jesus was not born on a big stage or in front of a crowded room. He came quietly to an ordinary family in an ordinary, small town. But when he was born, extraordinary things happened. Angels appeared to announce his birth! These angels came in a way that the shepherds couldn't miss.

We don't know exactly what this looked like, but maybe there were bright lights. Maybe the angels filled the sky. We know they shared the words of a song. The words the angels sang were special. They didn't sing so other people would think they were great. They sang so the shepherds would know that Jesus is great!

WONDER AND ACT:

As we see performances this Christmas, remember the show the angels put on for the shepherds. *How can our singing and actions help others know Jesus is great?*

PRAY:

Jesus, help us show others how great you are. Amen.



Amazed by the Good News

ACTIVITY: Baking Christmas cookies.

READ: Luke 2:16–18

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

The shepherds had been having quite the night! What had probably started off as an ordinary, sleepy evening in the fields with their sheep had turned into anything but ordinary. After hearing the amazing news that the Messiah had been born, the shepherds had to go see if what the angels had said was really true.

Imagine the shepherds running throughout Bethlehem looking for the baby Jesus. How many houses and stables might they have looked in before they finally found him? Bethlehem might have gotten a little noisy with those barn animals being startled! *How might Mary and Joseph have felt when a bunch of shepherds came bursting through their door?*

WONDER AND ACT:

Christmas cookies are fun to share, but the good news of Jesus is even better! As you bake together, think of the people you'd like to share your cookies with and ask God if there is anyone you can share the good news with, too.

PRAY:

Amaze us again with the good news, Jesus. Help us to be like the shepherds, telling everyone we meet that you love us and are with us. Amen.



God Keeps His **Promises**

ACTIVITY: Decorating a Christmas tree or looking at stars in the sky.

READ: Matthew 2:1–2

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Christmas lights remind us of the stars in the sky. God used a star to show the Magi where to find baby Jesus. God also used stars when he made a special promise to Abraham. God told Abraham his family would have as many family members as the stars in the sky. Even though Abraham and his wife Sarah were very old, God kept his promise. They had a son named Isaac, and their family grew.

Jesus was one of Abraham's descendants, and God's promise to Abraham was part of his plan to send Jesus. The stars remind us that God always keeps his promises.

WONDER AND ACT:

God kept his promise to Abraham, but also to Noah, Moses, Joseph, David and everyone who trusts in him. God always keeps his promises. We keep our promises to others because God keeps his promises to us. How do you keep your promises?

PRAY:

Thank you, God, for how you blessed Abraham and Sarah. Help us to remember that you are a good God who keeps your promises. Thank you most of all for sending Jesus. Amen.



The **Best** Gift

ACTIVITY: Wrapping presents.

READ: John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

We see something so important about God here. He loves us! And his love moved him to give! God loved the world so much that he gave us his one and only Son, Jesus. His coming made it possible for us to be saved from our sins and have eternal life. What an incredible gift!

WONDER AND ACT:

As you wrap presents, think about the person who will get them. *Why did you decide to get them a gift? What do you hope they will feel when they open that gift?* Christmas gifts can be a great reminder for us of the greatest gift God has given. As you wrap each present, take a moment to thank God for his love and for the gift of Jesus.

PRAY:

God, thank you for your love and the gift of Jesus. As I give gifts to others, help me to remember how much you have given me. In Jesus' name, amen.



Light has **Dawned**

ACTIVITY: Lighting a candle or attending a candlelight service.

READ: Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

The book of Isaiah was written hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, yet it is often read during Christmas because it contains passages that describe Jesus and his life in surprising detail. This book, like the whole story of the Bible, has two parts. The first is a warning of the consequences of sin and our need for a Saviour, and the second highlights Jesus as the Messiah, Savior and Light of the world!

John 1:5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." This light is Jesus!

PRAY:

Jesus, thank you for coming into our darkness as the Light of the world. Thank you that darkness cannot overcome you. Fill us with Your light, hope and love, and help us share that light with others. Amen.

WONDER AND ACT:

Have you ever been in complete darkness? How did it make you feel: Fearful, confused? The dark makes it difficult to see where you are or where you are going. Now look at a candle. Even one small flame changes the darkness around it.

The Bible often uses darkness to describe life without Jesus — when we feel lost, afraid or unsure of the way forward. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, Isaiah promised that a great light would come to people walking in darkness. John tells us that Jesus is that light.

Jesus came into our dark world to bring hope, rescue and life. But notice what John says: the darkness has not overcome the light.

As you look at the candle, wonder together: *What does light help us do? Where do we need Jesus' light in our lives? Who around us might need to experience his light and hope this Christmas?*



Gifts for a **King**

ACTIVITY: Exchanging gifts.

READ: Matthew 2:10–11, NLT

When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Have you ever been so excited to give someone a Christmas gift that you just couldn't wait for them to open it? Maybe you get to watch someone open presents today. Giving gifts to people we love is so fun!

God's Word tells us that some wise men traveled a long way to bring their gifts to a special king that was born. Do you know what king they were bringing gifts to?

Yes, Jesus! They were so excited to see him. The Bible says the men worshipped him to show him that they loved him and that he is the greatest. The wisemen also gave Jesus gifts. But they didn't give Jesus toys like we might get at Christmas. They gave him gifts that showed he was a special king.

Did you know that God has given us the best gift ever? It's Jesus! Jesus came to love us and be our Savior, and just like we can't wait to watch others open their gifts, God can't wait to watch us getting to know his son.

WONDER AND ACT:

If you were one of the wisemen, what kind of gifts would you bring Jesus?

We can still give Jesus gifts today to show how much we love him. We can spend time with Jesus, sing about him, help someone who needs it, share what we have or serve others.

What is one gift our family can give to Jesus to show that we love him? What can you do to thank God for giving us the greatest gift?

PRAY:

God, thank you for giving me Jesus, your greatest gift. Jesus, I love you and receive your gift of love. Help me to love and serve you every day. Amen.

A HUGE THANKS

to our many writers who contributed to this Ordinary Christmas Family Devotional!

Abby Burg
Executive pastor at
Waite Park Wesleyan Church

Selina Wheeler
Connections and Discipleship pastor at Kannapolis First Wesleyan Church

Amy Donovan
Family pastor at
Sunnyside Wesleyan Church

Caitlyn Nash
Family Ministries pastor at
Fellowship Community Church

Doreen Garmon
Children's pastor at
Shady Grove Wesleyan Church

Allison Hand
Family Ministries pastor at
Real Life Wesleyan Church

Justine Tegen
Associate pastor at
Greenville Multicultural and assistant director of Adult Development for
The Wesleyan Church

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