



## The First Week of Advent focus is Hope

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Scripture Reading	Isaiah 7:14, 40:1-5, Malachi 3:1-4	Matthew 19:16-30	Isaiah 58:6-14	Luke 1:5-25	Luke 1:26-38	Luke 1:39-45	Jeremiah 33:14-16
Spiritual Discipline	Fasting: Darkness	Fasting: Vacancy	Fasting: Hunger	Fasting: Empathy	Fasting: Frugality	Fasting: Pause	Fasting: Self-Denial
Playlist	O Come, O Come, Emmanuel arranged by Salt of the Sound	Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus arranged by Kings (MHM)	All Who Are Thirsty by Kutless	Even So Come by Passion	Arrival by Hillsong	He Has Come For Us (God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen) by Meredith Andrews	Magnificat by Josh Lavender

## Advent Activity Ideas:

The following ideas are suggestions for activities you can do now to participate in preparing Christmas at home. This list is a guide, not a checklist. Give yourself and your family grace. Participate in the activities that interest you and will be a blessing for you and your family. These can be used as a personal practice, for a couple, or with the whole family, including children.

- ❑ **Commit to Follow this Advent Scripture Plan** or another Advent Devotional. The daily Scripture readings can be used as a personal reading plan or read with the whole family. When making your plan, consider a time that would help you stay consistent. Some like early morning readings to start the day; others like to end the day in reflection. If you are planning to read with your family after supper might be best or maybe part of your going to bed routine.
- ❑ **Create (or Buy) Your Own Advent Wreath** and light that week's candle(s) while reading the daily Advent scripture. The Advent wreath is a beautiful symbol of the season. A basic wreath is made up of five candle holders, the first four holding three purple candles and one pink candle in a circle. In the center place a white candle. The circle is often garnished with pine boughs and holly berries.
- ❑ **Learn about the Jesse Tree and Create One for Your Home.** A Jesse Tree is another traditional Advent practice that helps children learn the Christmas Story. The tree is based on Isaiah 11:1, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots, a Branch will bear fruit. But with righteousness, he will judge the needy; with justice, he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips, he will slay the wicked."

The Jesse Tree begins with a small tree (living or artificial). It could even be a tree you make out of construction paper and tape to your wall or refrigerator. Each of the 24 ornaments on the tree connect to a Bible story. Starting December 1<sup>st</sup>, you add one ornament to the tree and read the corresponding story each day till Christmas Eve.

There are several resources online, including Etsy shops that sell beautiful, handcrafted Jesse Tree ornaments. We found free printable Jesse tree ornaments at Faithward.org with both a black and white colouring or a full-colour printing option. They also have a family devotional: <https://www.faithward.org/jesse-tree/printable-jesse-tree-ornaments/>

- ❑ **Make a Prayer Garland.** Using Christmas paper, wrapping paper, or green and red construction paper, cut out 24 strips. On each strip, write the name of a family member, friend, co-worker, church member, pastor, missionary, country, or ministry. Attach the links together into one long garland with either tape or staples.

Hang the garland in your home as a decoration. Every day in December, have a family member remove one of the paper strips. As a family, pray for the person, country, or ministry whose name is on that strip of paper.

- ❑ **Pick Up an Angel Tree Card and Buy a Gift.** You can find the Salvation Army's Angel Trees at Wal-Mart and Canadian Tree this year. The gift listed on the cards are going to children of families in need that the Salvation Army is supporting this Christmas. The Angel Tree gifts need to be delivered to the stores unwrapped by December 11<sup>th</sup>.
  
- ❑ **Use Christmas Cards as Prayer Reminders** As Christmas cards arrive during December, place them in a noticeable area. Once a day, pull out one card and pray for that person or family together. Consider keeping your Christmas cards all year, maybe in a basket or special box, and pray regularly for other families. You may want to write the person a note signed by your family that says, "We prayed for you today."
  
- ❑ **Take Mary and Joseph on a journey to Bethlehem.** There are a few ways you could do this. If you have a nativity set, arrange the stable pieces in your regular display area. Have Mary and Joseph start in another part of the room (or a different room altogether). Each day move the figures close to the manger and Bethlehem. You could also have the shepherds nearby the stable "watching their flocks" and the wise men waiting to visit.

If you do not have a nativity set, you could be creative and make your own nativity figures. There are some free online resources that help Sunday School teachers make nativity puppets out of paper towel tubes, pipe cleaners, or any number of household supplies. If you like the journey idea but making your own set is too much, another option would be to print a picture of Mary and Joseph and move that towards a picture of Bethlehem.

We will have new festive suggestions for you next week.

## Week 1 - Day 1

### The First Sunday of Advent

#### Theme // Hope

Playlist // *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* arranged by Salt of the Sound

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 7:14, 40:1-5, Malachi 3:1-4

Draw, Sketch, or Outline Notes from Scripture Reading:

Look over your notes. Underline anything that points to this week's theme, **Hope**. Add a star \* next to anything that tells more of the story of Jesus at Christmas, including theology and Old Testament discussions and prophecies.

What questions do you have about this?

What curious observations stand out to you as you ponder these verses?

## Fasting as Darkness

As we open this season of Advent, take notice of darkness. We are entering winter soon, and daylight hours are lessening with nighttime darkness lengthening. What is darkness like? What characterizes it? Take a moment and write your thoughts:

In many situations, darkness can foster fear: monsters under the bed, propensity for increased crime, or simply not being able to see what might trip your feet in the dark. But darkness can focus your attention, too. When it is daylight, many things in a million colours can be seen - trees, mountains, flowers, people, animals, and buildings, to name a few. But when it is dark, and light is limited, only a few things can come into focus at any one time. Darkness helps you simplify your focus and zero in on the most important, most pressing. If you are walking in the dark by flashlight, you can only focus on the next few steps in front of you. If you are camping in the wilderness, your campfire's flame and warmth only reach so far.

When it comes to hospitality, darkness helps us focus, too. Candlelight dinners draw our attention to who and what is at the table. The darkness is transformed from cold to warm, from alone to close community. In this positive space, we can also experience hope.

Hope amid the darkness does not diminish pain or suffering but draws your attention away from the chaos to focus on the most important, most pressing, most present before you.

Take inventory of the events and circumstances around you. What is going on in your life and world? Now, audit your response: where is the hope of Jesus bursting through painful or dark circumstances? Can you see it? What's happening?

Read today's scripture, make a note of observations. Read again. Ponder words or phrases that stand out to you.

When it is dark outside, turn off all the lights inside, except for one lamp or candle. What do you notice? What becomes important? With whom do you now share this space? Fast from light to let the darkness teach you to focus on the hope of Christ.

Journal about your thoughts, reflections, and questions.

## Week 1 - Day 2

### Theme // Hope

Playlist // *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus* arranged by Kings (MHM)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 19:16-30

Draw, Sketch, or Outline Notes from Scripture Reading:

Look over your notes. Underline anything that points to this week's theme, **Hope**. Add a star \* next to anything that tells more of the story of Jesus at Christmas, including theology and Old Testament discussions and prophecies.

What questions do you have about this?

What curious observations stand out to you as you ponder these verses?

### Fasting as Vacancy

Because of entropy, everything around us, if left undisturbed, will eventually go into chaos or decay. Our souls become overcrowded and stuffed by various things: busyness, wounds, unforgiveness, worry, anger, fear, and bitterness. We become so filled with darkness that we do not have space for others in our hearts or homes. We don't have time to sit with Jesus. We are too busy or focused to see a family in crisis. It becomes difficult to sit with a friend in need when we are burdened without relief.

Christmas is traditionally a season of hospitality, a time of generously welcoming guests and strangers. A part of hospitality is vacancy. To welcome family, friends, even Jesus, there needs to be empty space in our hearts and homes. For example, if the dinner table is out of seats - or doesn't have any seats in general or the seats cannot be accessed or seen in the midst of the mess - there is no room for hospitality.

With COVID-19 health restrictions hosting dinner parties in your home will not be the same this year. Hospitality will look different. What opportunities are there for you to share? We know of a family that has planned zoom dinners with others. Both eat their meals at the same time while sharing over zoom about their lives.

Do you have room for hospitality this Advent season? You might; you might not. This is not something to be ashamed of - it's something to recognize and spur us into action.

Are you ready to create some space? To make space, you might need to let go or purge. Is Jesus calling you into deeper simplicity so that you can engage with a deeper community? Are you ready to create some deeper space for hospitality? Take an inventory of your life using the questions below. Be honest - this is for you. Rank your score 0 (overcrowded) to 5 (vacant/hospitable space).

\_\_\_\_ My Schedule/Calendar

\_\_\_\_ My Home/Living/Work Space

\_\_\_\_ My Heart - there Emotionally for Others

\_\_\_\_ My Body - overtaxed and exhausted

\_\_\_\_ My Quickness to Forgiveness/Grace

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now that you've taken an inventory, it's time to do something about it. First, we listen to Jesus. Take time in listening prayer. Where does God want to begin? Where does God want to work in your life? Does God want to show you grace? Is there an area of sin that has led to you live an overcrowded life? Do you need to repent? Is God directing you to change in one of these areas?

After your time in listening prayer, you may have a clear direction from God. If not, select the lowest number you listed above. How can you trim, clean, purge, unclutter, heal, pray, or forgive to create more space?

Now, in this space of vacancy, ask the Holy Spirit to pour over you a sense of hope, love, joy, peace, and light. When we are burdened and living in emotional, spiritual, or physical chaos, it is very difficult to practice hospitality.

What act of hospitality can you now take from this place of vacancy?

## Week 1 - Day 3

### Theme // Hope

Playlist // *All Who Are Thirsty* by Kutless

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:6-14

Draw, Sketch, or Outline Notes from Scripture Reading:

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What questions do you have about this?

What curious observations stand out to you as you ponder these verses?

### Fasting as Hunger

What do you crave today? What is something you desire? We often crave foods - salty, sweet, savory, or comforting. In certain seasons we crave specific things, too. Teenagers crave autonomy. New parents crave sleep. Grievors crave the presence of the one lost. We hunger for what is not in our vicinity, not yet in our vicinity, or no longer in our vicinity.

We crave food and sleep as remedies for depleted energy. We desire individuality in community, as we crave to know others and to be known by others. We hunger for hope, love, joy, peace, and light in a weary, dark, unjust world.

But we can also crave, desire, and hunger for unhealthy things. We crave because of addiction, or as a coping mechanism, or as a means of escape. All blessings have shadow sides in overabundance and overindulgence. And sometimes, we just find ourselves participating in dark and dangerous activities because of a million reasons and decisions that have led us to this sinful place. We focus our pain and comfort on things, activities, or people instead of healthy outlets and processes. Yet all cravings, desire, and hunger teach us that there are better things ahead.

Written in the depths of every human soul is the realization that this current world is not as it should be. Craving and hunger preach this message every day. *One day there will be no empty bellies, no empty homes, no needs, no poverty.* This is a message preached about hope. Hope in Christ for when he returns in final victory, hope about the renewal of the entire world, the righting of the entire Created Order. Chaos, war, pain, striving -- these will not occupy our minds and our space when Christ is the last and final victor.

Pause for a moment and reflect: What do you crave? What do you desire? What do you hunger for? Spend some time in prayer and tell God about these cravings, desires, and hungers. Lay it out and be honest with God. Fast something today -- food, light, technology - something *good* you will miss, and when you miss this thing, pray. Ask God to use this craving to teach you about hope, about craving for Jesus to come again.

## Week 1 - Day 4

### Theme // Hope

Playlist // *Even So Come* by Passion

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:5-25

Draw, Sketch, or Outline Notes from Scripture Reading:

Look over your notes. Underline anything that points to this week's theme, **Hope**. Add a star \* next to anything that tells more of the story of Jesus at Christmas, including theology and Old Testament discussions and prophecies.

What questions do you have about this?

What curious observations stand out to you as you ponder these verses?

### Fasting as Empathy

Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy feels sorry for a person, animal, or situation. Sympathy is the emotion stirred up when exploitation is exposed in commercials so that donations can be mustered for the cause of the oppressed. Sympathy is that outside feeling of sadness or sorrow when your parents' friend's brother's wife dies. You feel bad, but it's more of an external or intellectual feeling -- it does not rock you to your core.

Empathy, on the other hand, hurts. Empathy feels *with* a person in emotional or physical pain, without projecting self's emotions or hardships onto the situation. Empathy uses self's past hurts to compassionately feel in the moment. Empathy connects, listens, shuts up, abides, and cries with. A potent Biblical example of this is to "sit in the ashes with" another person who is grieving, mourning, in pain, or otherwise going through a hard time. Being an "Ash Sitter" is NOT being a fixer, preacher, lecturer, or other non-empathetic solution. Ash Sitting just sits -- in the ashes of the situation -- mourning with, listening, and comforting with presence.

Have you had an Ash Sitter before? Who were they, and what did they do (or not do!)? How did this person make you feel in your time of need?

The next time you or someone around you experiences sorrow, heartbreak, or tragedy, pay attention: who is an Ash Sitter? Who sits well and listens well? Perhaps you have a recent experience with pain, and you can remember someone who sat well in the ashes. Notice *how* this person listened. Notice what they *didn't* do.

Job's friends, in the Old Testament book of Job, are notorious for being terrible ash sitters. Instead of listening and grieving with their friend Job in his time of great loss, they did not listen well. Read through Job's story and make some notes on what you notice and observe.

Look up a video on YouTube called *Brene Brown on Empathy*, (found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>).

Watch it again, this time taking notice of what stands out to you most.



Now ponder this: what makes someone a good, empathetic listener? What is one thing you can implement or remove from your listening skills to be more empathetic?

Empathy makes room for hospitality. If the people in your shared space know you can listen well, you can build a more profound and deeper trust and connection. And when you do, you get to demonstrate the love of Jesus to those around you.

## Week 1 - Day 5

Theme // Hope

Playlist // *Arrival* by Hillsong

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Draw, Sketch, or Outline Notes from Scripture Reading:

Look over your notes. Underline anything that points to this week's theme, **Hope**. Add a star \* next to anything that tells more of the story of Jesus at Christmas, including theology and Old Testament discussions and prophecies.

What questions do you have about this?

What curious observations stand out to you as you ponder these verses?

## Fasting as Frugality

Frugality is not being stingy. Stingy people do not give or spend what they have because of *pride*, *greed*, and *fear*. Frugal people do not give or spend because of *planning*. The motivations are different. Frugality allows for carefully planned "yeses" - the many "nos" are also part of the plan. Perhaps a better way to describe frugality is "not yet" - the "yes" is coming, but it is still on its way.

Frugality is one aspect of fasting - saying no to something good for a time. Frugality creates margin in the financial budget and the calendar so that you may invest in others later. If there is no financial wiggle room, no time margin, then generosity will be a hardship, not a joy. John Wesley is famous for saying, "Make all you can, so you can save all you can, so you can give all you can." (paraphrased). He lived this out in his habits with money and gave us an example of how to be frugal to be a blessing to God and others.

One of the easiest ways to create such a margin is to save or to swap. Consider these saves and swaps:

- SWAP: Instead of going out for an activity, do it at home, such as making coffee or meals.
- SWAP: Use reusable items instead of throw-away items for plates, cups, flatware, straws, paper towels, and takeaway containers.
- SAVE: Reduce your purchases of unneeded items. Make a list of what you purchase and put it in one of two categories: Needs/Survival and Wants/Bonuses. Reduce purchases in the second category.
- SAVE: Start your monthly budget by first subtracting your tithe and giving it to the church, then the amount you are setting aside to save. Live within the rest of this budgeted amount. Seek additional advice from someone who is financially wise. We have a great resource in our church with the Kerith Debt Freedom Centre. During Covid, the volunteers are not meeting in person, but if you have a need, please contact the church office at 613-258-4815 or [office@ngccfm.ca](mailto:office@ngccfm.ca), and someone will be in contact with you to schedule a phone call or online video meeting.

When we set aside money to save up funds for something, we delay gratification and satisfaction. When we say "not yet" to comfort, fashion, or easy access, we get just a taste of the much grander and most holy aspect of the Incarnation: self-sacrifice.

Jesus did not consider himself so distant from us to think of us beneath him, but He came to us, in our skin, at our level, to be among us, to redeem us (check out Philippians 2:6-11).

Today as you decide what to save, consider when Jesus set aside all of the glories of heaven to live here on the earth, to partake in our lives, and to ultimately set in motion our freedom and healing from sin, death, and hell.

## Week 1 - Day 6

### Theme // Hope

Playlist // *He Has Come For Us (God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen)* by Meredith Andrews

Scripture Reading Luke 1:39-45

Draw, Sketch, or Outline Notes from Scripture Reading:

Look over your notes. Underline anything that points to this week's theme, **Hope**. Add a star \* next to anything that tells more of the story of Jesus at Christmas, including theology and Old Testament discussions and prophecies.

What questions do you have about this?

What curious observations stand out to you as you ponder these verses?

### Fasting as Pause

Take a deep breath.

And another.

Pause.

What's going on around you? Is today chaotic? Confusing? Wonderful? Normal? Something else?  
Journal your thoughts about today:

Let today be a pause. The work, anxiety, and stress will likely still be there tomorrow. If it is a situation you can resolve easily, do it. If not, set it aside. What can you do today, instead, to rest?

Sabbath is a regular, weekly break from the normal grind so that you can focus on your relationship with God, rest, worship, and recharge. Many Christians think Sabbath is Sunday. Our Jewish friends celebrate Sabbath Friday night through to Saturday night. But here, we are examining Sabbath on Fridays. Perhaps, in your weekly planning, you will Sabbath Saturday or Sunday.

Use this moment now to start thinking about Sabbath. What would be a true rest for you? How do you and your family recharge together? Which worship practices connect you to God best? How can you focus on your relationship with God? How do these answers fit with your Sabbath today or this weekend? As you consider these questions, here is a list of practices that others have found to be a blessing in their Sabbath practices.

Which of these will you continue or add to your sabbath plan?

- Worship Corporately in Church or online
- Worship Individually by yourself through singing, dancing, journaling, or another spiritual practice.
- Talking a walk or hike
- Family board games
- Playing outdoors together, making a snowman, or building a snow fort
- Pray
- Exercise
- Read the Bible
- Read for fun
- Create or bake
- Celebrate
- Limit Screen Time
- Cook and have a family meal together with special or favourite foods.

These are not supposed to be a list of to-dos that need to be accomplished, but a list of invitations into something sacred and holy. It is also not a complete list of all the sabbath possibilities.

The Holy Spirit is with us in our work and everyday lives, but the Holy Spirit can speak louder and clearer when we have fewer influences bombarding our sacred time with the Lord. Carve out some Sabbath time today, even if you will more fully participate in Sabbath on a different day.

## Week 1 - Day 7

Theme // **Hope**

Playlist // *Magnificat* by Josh Lavender

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Draw, Sketch, or Outline Notes from Scripture Reading:

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What questions do you have about this?

What curious observations stand out to you as you ponder these verses?

### **Fasting as Self-Denial**

Serving and being served are both gifts - spiritual gifts and gifts of grace offered to one another. As guests in a friend's home, we are honoured with the gifts of friendship, of breaking bread, of sharing an elaborate meal, and of enjoying good company together. We witness what it might look like to serve others with a radical kind of hospitality.

However, serving includes a significant element of being last -- last to be served, last to get in line, last to eat. It includes other things, too, but some of these are more difficult: self-denial, caring for the needs of others before yourself, watching out for others in their times of vulnerability. Every moment is not like this -- because self-care is important, like putting your air mask on first in the case of an airplane emergency or making sure you practice good hygiene every day.

Who is in your shared space - your places of hospitality? To whom do you serve? If you're a parent, this might be your children. It might be your ageing parents, your roommates, your spouse, your neighbours, co-workers, or grandchildren. There are plenty of people we randomly interact with, such as those at the store, business places, and church. How can you serve these with radical hospitality? How can you be last, even for a moment, to share with those who share your space?

Serving someone else is one of the easiest ways to practice hospitality. Yet, it might also be one of the hardest since serving someone else takes self-denial to put someone else first. Consider someone in your life: your spouse, a housemate, a family member, a neighbour, a friend, or a co-worker. How can you serve them today? Perhaps one of the following:

- Write them a letter of appreciation.
- Do a chore or task for them.
- Do a secret act of kindness
- Brainstorm a few more specific tasks:

Serving someone else is not about getting attention but about showing love for the other person.

All this week, we have been discussing hope and hospitality. Reflect on this week about these topics. What have you learned? Of the activities and reflections, which have been easy and enjoyable?

Which has been more difficult and challenging?