

Advent Reflections & Christmas Prayers



HOPE

December 1: Many Christians observe Advent - the weeks leading up to Christmas. The name was adopted from Latin *adventus* which means coming or arrival. We tend to think of it as referring only to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but it also points to His second coming. *Adventus* is the Latin translation of the Greek word *parousia* from the New Testament which means a coming or a presence and points to His return. Advent should be a time of reflective and joyful preparation and expectant waiting for both.

It is usually celebrated with the lighting of candles on an evergreen wreath - four for the weeks leading up to Christmas and a fifth to be lit on Christmas Day. The first week is the week of *yakhal* - Hebrew for hope or waiting expectantly, and it often applies to waiting in a time of tension or uncertainty.

The Jewish people were waiting expectantly for their Messiah, and many still are. There's a certain tension in waiting, especially when it's for something we truly desire and need. We find ourselves in a period of waiting for new leadership, hoping it will bring positive change, but we need to all understand that we will never find our greatest hopes and needs fulfilled in any government.

Our hope is in the Savior. He came to us as a humble servant-king, and we are busily making preparation to celebrate His birth. But we need to also *yakhal* for the promise of His triumphant return. He's coming back, and that will be the most joyful time of all for those who have received Him as their king.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (**Romans 15:13**)

Jesus as the Center

For God so loved the world: He gave His one and only son (John 3:16) and we call Him Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Ever Lasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). We chose to put You, Lord Jesus, at the center of our family this Christmas and always. We celebrate You as Emmanuel, "God with us." (Matthew 1:23) Our faithful Savior who is with us always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20.) Father, give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know You better (Ephesians 1:17) and be an impacting reflection of Your Holy Son. Increase our peace, patience, kindness and compassion as we await with hope Jesus' second coming. Fill us with mercy, grace, and love everywhere we go. May our family be a light in this world. Help us to share Your truth and hope in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PEACE

December 8: This week's candle is that of *shalom* or peace. How we all long for peace, and yet it often seems unattainable. There is so much division and contention that we can easily get pulled into a state of agitation and frustration. As one lights this second candle, it reminds them that Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My [perfect] peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid. [Let My perfect peace calm you in every circumstance and give you courage and strength for every challenge.] (**John 14:27**, Amplified Bible)

Only in Him can we find that perfect peace in the midst of whatever is assailing us. Remember the words of Moses in the Aaronic blessing -

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you peace.

He is called the Prince of Peace, and His promise is to *bless* us, to *keep* us, to lovingly and graciously smile when He looks at us, and to *give us peace*. Jesus is the fulfillment of this Old Testament blessing, and He is our refuge, our strength, and our ever-present help in time of need. (**Psalm 46:1**) He is our hope and He is the reason we can experience His peace in the waiting.

Thank You, Lord, that You are our peace and that You are Emmanuel, the Lord with us! "Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!" (**2 Thessalonians 3:16**)

Peace

Lord, I set my heart on You. You are trustworthy, faithful and the giver of the gift of peace. Please fill me with Your peace this Christmas season. As others see peace in me, let them recognize You as Savior. May the message of Christmas be a source of hope, guiding us to strive for harmony and understanding with one another. Let Your peace reign in our lives as we seek to live in the light of Your love. Heavenly Father, as we celebrate the birth of Your Son, fill our hearts with the joy that comes from knowing Him. May the joy of Christmas be a constant presence in our lives, reminding us of the true source of happiness found in Jesus Christ. Let us share this joy with others and reflect your love in the world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

LOVE

December 15: For God so loved the world! This is why He sent us Jesus - to demonstrate for us His *agape* love. And this is why we give gifts to those we love. It is our frail attempt to honor the greatest gift ever given - the gift of eternal life, even if we don't realize the reason behind our giving. We give (hopefully) out of love, and we aren't even *capable* of the genuine, deep kind of love God shows us without His Spirit in us.

Some of the hallmarks of God's love are kindness, selflessness, patience, humility, showing mercy and grace, and extreme generosity. He lavishly pours out His love on us that we might be so filled up with His kindness, His patience, His mercy and grace, and His selfless love that they spill out of us into the lives of those we encounter. Can you imagine what an impact that would have on a hungry and hurting world?

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your extravagant love. Thank You for blessing us with every spiritual blessing and for choosing us to be adopted into Your family so that we might be holy and blameless before You, to the praise of Your glory! Help us to treasure this gift and to freely express it to others. In the matchless name of Jesus, our Savior and our Lord - Amen. (from **Ephesians 1:3-6**)

Jesus

Dear Father, I confess sometimes I get too caught up in Christmas commercialism. Today, I'm going to refocus my heart and remember why I'm celebrating this wonderful day in the first place. Lord, I thank You for coming to earth so You could redeem me. When I think of the extent to which You were willing to go to save me, it makes me want to shout, to celebrate, and to cry with thankfulness. You love me so much, and I am so grateful for that love. Without You, I would still be lost and in sin. But because of everything You have done for me, today I am free; my life is blessed; Jesus is my Lord; Heaven is my home; and Satan has no right to control me. I am eternally thankful to You for everything You did and do to save me! Jesus, I cherish Your glorious & sacrificial love. Amen.

JOY

December 22: **Joy to the World!** The final week of Advent is the week of *chara* or joy. Originally this word was associated with external things like material wealth or physical pleasure. But the New Testament gave a new dimension to the word; it defined this joy as a spiritual condition that was independent of and even superseded physical circumstances. The revised definition reflected a joy deeply rooted in the hope and assurance we have in Jesus Christ through His resurrection and the promise of eternal life.

For us as believers, it's a joy that goes deep and cannot be taken from us because it's the product of a spiritual reality rather than a physical circumstance. It's one of the first three fruits of the Spirit: love, joy and peace. It was for the *joy* set before Him and because of His deep *love* for us that Jesus endured the cross in order to bring the promise of *peace* both with God and from Him.

“But let all who take refuge in You be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You.” (**Psalm 5:11**)

And as a final word on where we find our hope, peace, love and joy - “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (**Romans 15:13**)

Be a Blessing to Others

Father, help me to not just look for blessings during the Christmas season, but to go out of my way to be a blessing and release the joy of the Lord, Jesus Christ, to others. Remind me to pray for friends and loved ones every time I pray for myself. Teach me to invest in relationships by sharing Your love and grace with others. Father, keep my heart sensitive to those who are hurting or mourning the loss of a loved one. Help me to be a source of joy to them during this difficult season; give me creative and practical ways to show them the love of Jesus this holiday season. In Jesus name. Amen.

Christmas Bible Verses about the Birth of Jesus

Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

Isaiah 9:6: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Micah 5:2: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."

Luke 1:35: "And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

Luke 2:7: "And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

Luke 2:11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Bible Verses About the Meaning of Christmas

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Luke 2:10: "And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.'"

Titus 3:4-6: "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. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior."

Luke 2:20: "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

1 Peter 1:8-9: "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."