
David and Joyce Schroeder

CADENCE INTERNATIONAL

Advent

A CANDLE, A WORD, A FRIEND

ADVENT: A CANDLE, A WORD, A FRIEND

By David and Joyce Schroeder

Cadence International

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®

Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture taken from The Message. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002.

Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scripture taken from the New Living Translation, NLT.

Copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation.

Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Copyright ©2017 David & Joyce Schroeder

Cadence.org

All rights reserved.

Contents

WEEK 1

THE PROPHETS CANDLE: HOPE

reading.....5

reflections.....7

candle lighting.....11

WEEK 2

THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE: PEACE

reading.....12

reflections.....15

candle lighting.....19

WEEK 3

THE SHEPHERDS CANDLE: JOY

reading.....20

reflections.....22

candle lighting.....26

WEEK 4

THE ANGELS CANDLE: LOVE

reading.....27

reflections.....29

candle lighting.....33



It's a month before Christmas, and our faithful friend Advent has arrived. Oh, some years we don't give Advent the time of day. But other years we long for its company, for its insight, and for its help in a season full of meaning and mixed emotions.

Advent is also called "arrival"—the arrival of someone or something important. While we journey with Advent, we ponder the underlying understanding that arrival happens after we have been waiting and preparing.

Arrival, waiting, preparation—all facets of our friend, Advent.

Advent tells us that Jesus has arrived and that He will come again. It asks us to reflect on the "already but not yet"—those realities we already know and experience, as well as the promises we believe but are not yet fully ours. These certainties of the "already but not yet" make all the difference in our lives today, and so do the realities of waiting and preparing.

Even though Jesus has come, we are still in the in-between—the waiting—the space between Eden and Heaven. We wait for Jesus to make Himself known to us here, and we wait for Him to one day take us Home.

Our waiting for arrival leads us to preparation. As Christmas approaches, we prepare our homes, our gifts, and our hearts.

We know what it is like to look forward to something, to wait, and to prepare for it—the birth of a child, the soldier coming home from deployment, or the gift wrapped in colorful paper which will soon be ours.

As we wait for the celebration of the arrival of the most important Someone, let us wait and prepare together.

Let us together welcome our friend Advent for a good visit this year. We'll share some of our thoughts and Bible study with you, and we'd love to hear your insights as well.

Because Jesus has arrived,
David and Joyce Schroeder

We invite you to view our Advent messages that correlate to this book at Cadence.org/Advent.

THE PROPHETS CANDLE

Hope

What do You Want to Be?

Think about those awkward days of youth when it seems everyone wants to know what you will be when you grow up. It's a question that can start much earlier than high school and go on for years.

As parents, we tried to emphasize with our four children that character matters more than career, and that who you are is priority over what you do. So it was okay with us that our son, Jonathan, started college without knowing his major. In fact, a professor at new student orientation told the group of undeclared students that they had picked the best major. We knew good things were happening with his character, and he would figure out his career choices along the way.

Not a Prophet

In Old Testament times, young men and women might have dreamed of growing up to be a merchant, a shepherd, a teacher, a father, a mother, or even a king. But it was unlikely they aspired to be a prophet or a prophetess.

Why? Because being a prophet of God guaranteed that many people would not listen to you. While a prophet might be a messenger of comfort, he or she would also be the bearer of bad news.

An Old Testament prophet was one in whose mouth God placed His words to be spoken to His people. Moses was the first prophet, and for the next thousand years God raised up men and women to “speak forth.”

Hope on the Horizon

Isaiah was a prophet around 700 B.C. and his wife was a prophetess. **Isaiah 8:3** The early chapters of his book are filled with warnings both to God's people and to their enemies. Destruction and exile are foretold. Then in chapter 11, the people are offered hope.

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth . . .*

Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist . . .

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

Isaiah 11:1-3, 5, 10

Even though Assyria all but destroyed Israel, and the Babylonians would carry off the people of Judah to exile, Isaiah promised a Righteous Ruler, the Messiah. This hope would not only be for the Israelites, but for **all** people.

Those to whom Isaiah spoke were going to face invasion, captivity, and exile. **But their story was bigger than their difficult circumstance.**

Indeed, more than 700 years later, the Apostle Paul harkened back to Isaiah's prophecy to encourage First Century believers.

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope . . . And again Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope."

Romans 15:4, 12

What will it look like for us, 2700 years after Isaiah and 2000 years after Paul, to live and walk in hope? We'll think about that more in the reflections to follow.

It's the first week of Advent. As we wait for the Promise, we light the candle of the Prophets, the candle of Hope.

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

WEEK 1: REFLECTION 1

Read: Isaiah 20

The Life of a Prophet

The life of a prophet was not glamorous. While the Old Testament prophets seem like celebrities to us today, their calling was actually very difficult.

In Isaiah chapter 20 we learn that for three years of his career, God asked Isaiah to speak a message of warning, urging the people of Judah to not put their trust in Egypt. God also instructed Isaiah to walk around without all of his clothing as an illustration to the people that they would be put to shame if they relied on other nations for help instead of relying on God.

Study and Reflect:

1. *Why would God ask Isaiah to be so undignified for three years?*

2. *When in your life has God asked you for uncomfortable obedience?*

3. *What is your response to God today?*

WEEK 1: REFLECTION 2

Read: Isaiah 11 + 12

Messiah Foretold

Out of the root of Jesse, from the line of King David, would come a Righteous Ruler with the Spirit of God on Him. This prophecy was ultimately about Jesus. The Spirit would be on Him in wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord.

Study and Reflect:

1. *What kind of Ruler will Jesus be?*
2. *How will creation respond when Jesus is ruling?*
3. *Reflect on these outcomes: The people of Judah did not experience the fulfillment of that prophecy in their time. When Jesus was born, the people of Israel did not experience the kind of rule they thought Messiah would bring.*
4. *Is there a way you can relate this passage to a situation in your life that is turning out differently than you expected?*

Isaiah and his wife and the followers of God in that day remind us what it means to live in the “not yet.” We believe, we wait, we prepare, and we hope.

WEEK 1: REFLECTION 3

Read: Romans 15:4-13

Biblical Hope

How can we describe hope? The writer of Hebrews says hope is an *“anchor for the soul.”* **Hebrews 6:19**

The 19th century poet, Emily Dickenson, beautifully pictures it: “Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all . . .”

Study and Reflect:

1. *Where does hope come from?*
2. *How is hope lived out?*
3. *Why does Paul bring up Isaiah’s prophecy about the Root of Jesse?*
4. *How is God asking you to trust in Him today?*

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It is certainty based on evidence. It is trust in God. While it can be light and gentle as a bird, hope is not flimsy. It is sturdy and strong. And it’s necessary.

Week 1
CANDLE LIGHTING

Leader:

As the Old Testament prophets believed, waited, and prepared for the arrival of the Messiah, so we today affirm our belief. As we light the Prophets Candle, we wait in hope, and we prepare our hearts. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

LIGHT CANDLE

Please stand and join me in this responsive reading.

Leader:

Put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore. Psalm 131:3

People:

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Psalm 62:5

Leader:

Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. Psalm 130:7

People:

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. Psalm 33:20

Leader:

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. Lamentations 3:25

People:

But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. Micah 7:7

Leader:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I Peter 1:3

People:

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23

THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE

Peace

Small and Significant

Have you looked at the stars recently? Something about star-gazing is good for perspective. We glimpse the vast majesty of God and His creation, and we get a sense for how small we are in comparison.

David: Psalm 113:4-6 says, *The Lord is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?*

I remember deciding as a 19-year-old that every time I saw a falling star I would take it as a sign of God's personal love for me. I've seen many since, and each one has reminded me that the One whose glory is "above the heavens" is also the One who leans down to look "on the heavens and the earth." I am amazed that our God both holds the universe together by His power and holds you and me in His loving gaze.

Joyce: Years ago at a Cadence winter Bible conference in Switzerland, I stood on a chilly balcony in awe of the grand beauty of snow-covered alps and vivid stars. My friend, Laura, was with me. As we watched the sky and worshipped God, we began to compose a song: "I am so small and significant to the great Creator of the world. Though I take little space in this big universe, all my prayers He has heard . . ."

Perspective!

Bethlehem

Bethlehem means "House of Bread." It was a small but significant town. Around 1900 B.C. it was the place Jacob buried his beloved Rachel after she died giving birth to Benjamin. **Genesis 35:19** Roughly 800 years later Ruth gleaned the fields of her future husband, Boaz, outside Bethlehem. It's where she gave birth to Obed, who was the grandfather of King David. **Ruth 1-4** And Bethlehem would later be called the City of David. **Luke 2:4**

Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, prophesied this about Bethlehem:

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are **small** among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."
Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return*

*to join the Israelites.
He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
And he will be our **peace**.*
Micah 5:2-5a

Three Words

We want to highlight three words from this passage and think about them in three time frames: Micah's day (around 725 B.C.), Jesus' day (around 4 B.C.), and this day.

The first word is **small**. Bethlehem was small, but it had an important job. An unlikely and undignified place for Messiah's birth, Bethlehem's manger protected the King.

God does great work through small places and small people. He is unrestrained by cramped quarters in a cubicle, a car, or a house with young children. What might be small in our eyes—a conversation, a task, a prayer—can well serve the great Creator of the world.

The second word is **until**. We noted events in Bethlehem that spanned almost 2,000 years. And here we are now, more than 2,000 years later. Time has passed, and the story of Bethlehem goes on. **Galatians 4:4** says, *When the time had fully come, God sent his Son.*

God's time-table is greater and grander than ours. Much of the good that is happening in our lives right now takes time. Our story is still being written. Let us trust Him with "until."

The third word is **peace**. The Hebrew word for peace is "shalom," which means not only rest and the absence of strife, but also wholeness. This peace comes to us in a Person. For as Micah said, *He will be our peace*. In and through Jesus our Messiah, we have peace with God, peace with each other, and *on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests*. **Luke 2:14b**

It's the second week of Advent. As we serve God from our small places, we light the Bethlehem Candle. From the House of Bread came the Bread of Life. Into the world and into our hearts comes the Prince of Peace.

I AM SO SMALL AND SIGNIFICANT
TO THE GREAT CREATOR OF THE WORLD
THOUGH I TAKE LITTLE SPACE
IN THIS BIG UNIVERSE.
ALL MY PRAYERS HE HAS HEARD

I AM SO SMALL AND SIGNIFICANT
ALL THE HAIRS ARE NUMBERED ON MY HEAD
TO THE ONE WHO HUNG ALL THE STARS IN THE SKY
I AM THE APPLE OF HIS EYE

I AM SO SMALL AND SIGNIFICANT
TO THE GREAT CREATOR OF THE WORLD

Joyce Schroeder and Laura Hash

WEEK 2: REFLECTION 2

Read: Luke 1:26-38 + 46-55, Luke 2:1-7

What Mary Knew

Fast forward 700 years and we hear the heart of a young woman who is living out God's requirements in Micah 6:8. Mary is stunned and honored by the news that God has chosen her ordinary and faithful life to be the one from whom the Messiah is born.

What did Mary know and believe that we need to know and believe today?

Study and Reflect:

1. *What did Mary know about "small"?*
2. *What did Mary know about "until"?*
3. *What did Mary know about obeying God?*
4. *In what circumstances and times of waiting ("until") is God asking you to trust Him right now?*

Mary knew and believed something real and deep about the goodness of God. It seems the more God's goodness seeps into the core of our belief, the more we trust Him with our "small" and our "until."

WEEK 2: REFLECTION 3

Read: Romans 5:1-11, Ephesians 2:11-18, Colossians 3:15

Peace with God + Peace Within

Once again we see how God's "until" works: *You see, just at the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6 We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1* Wow! How can we comprehend the gift of peace with God?

Study and Reflect:

- 1. What had to happen for us to have peace with God?*
- 2. What will it look like for you to walk in that peace with God today?*
- 3. What is the connection between peace with God and peace within?*
- 4. Think back to Micah's words, "He will be our peace." How do you need Jesus to be your peace today?*

Joyce: When I was in college, I would call my mom in the midst of distress or when trying to make a decision. I knew the verse was coming, but I needed to hear it again. My mom would quote Colossians 3:15. Then she'd say, "Let it rule. Just let peace rule. You don't have to make it rule, just **let it.**"

WEEK 2: REFLECTION 4

Read: Romans 12:9-21, 14:19; Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

Peace with Others + Peace on Earth

Our world is deeply broken—a quick glance at the evening news is evidence enough. Peace between people and nations seems fragile and elusive. Yet we, the representatives of Christ here on earth, are called to *live at peace with everyone*.

Romans 12:18b

Study and Reflect:

1. *List the ways Romans 12:9-21 spells out God's instructions in Micah 6:8 to act justly.*
2. *In Romans 12:18, Paul qualifies his exhortation with, "as far as it depends on you." What is it that depends on us?*
3. *How do we find peace in the "already but not yet" of Isaiah 9:1, 6-7?*

As we do our part to touch others with the love of Jesus, we bring the miracle of peace to that relationship, to that family, and to that spot on the planet.

CANDLE LIGHTING

Leader:

We light the Bethlehem Candle as we remember that in this small place, the Messiah was born. We look forward to the day Messiah, Jesus, returns to rule and reign forever. Until then, we wait in hope and prepare in peace, for the Prince of Peace is here.

LIGHT CANDLE

Please stand and read these verses with us from Isaiah chapter 9.

All:

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.
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.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.*

Isaiah 9:2,6-7

THE SHEPHERDS CANDLE

Joy

Good News

The world had been waiting. God's story was being written for almost 1500 years. People of faith *were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.* **Hebrews 11:13a**

Since the promise of Genesis 3:15, and through the prophecies of Isaiah, Micah and others, the people of God lived in expectation of Messiah's coming. They waited and they prepared.

Then . . . **He arrived!**

God came in flesh and bone, born to Mary, and protected by Joseph. He was the Savior come to deliver us from sin. This was the news for which the world had been waiting hundreds of years.

And who got word of it first?

Shepherds! Shepherds who were *living out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks at night.* **Luke 2:8**

And here's an amazing part: the shepherds *knew* what the birth announcement meant! They were clearly familiar with the Old Testament prophecies. They likely recognized from Scripture that the Messiah would also be known as a Shepherd.

Additionally, they were honored with signs which verified the good news. The message came from an angel surrounded by the visible glory of the Lord—terrifying but undeniable. And another sign was given to them: *You will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.* **Luke 2:12**

A whole host of angels then joined in song, a once-in-a-lifetime concert by heaven's military choir. Let's stop right now and try to picture this! Listen to their anthem:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. **Luke 2:14**

Great Joy

Here comes the part where we are included. Do you think the shepherds' concert was exclusive? Look again! *I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.* **Luke 2:10** We were on God's mind and the angel's lips during the birth announcement on Christmas night!

The good news of great joy for all people is that a Savior has been born for us. He is Jesus, Messiah, Christ the Lord.

But the story doesn't end there. We know from Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and other biblical writers that Jesus lived a perfect life. He was fully God and fully man. He did life on earth in a man's body, experiencing our struggles first-hand.

Jesus lived and loved, and He taught us how to live and love. Then He died a criminal's death. Though innocent of the charges against him, He carried out His plan, laid down His life, and took the punishment for every wrong thought and action we have ever said or done. He did this **for all the people**. Then He proved He was God by rising from the grave, breaking the power of the last weapon against us . . . death.

Now the good news is that we don't have to be good enough, smart enough, brave enough, or clever enough to get to God. Because God came to us, and He is enough.

He came to us like He came to the shepherds. They were ordinary people, now with extraordinary joy.

In our reflections this week, we'll take a closer look at four ways the shepherds responded to the history-changing birth announcement.

It's the third week of Advent. As we light the Shepherds Candle, we share in their joy. Messiah has arrived.

THE SHEPHERDS RETURNED, GLORIFYING
AND PRAISING GOD FOR ALL THE THINGS
THEY HAD HEARD AND SEEN, WHICH WERE
JUST AS THEY HAD BEEN TOLD.

Luke 2:20

WEEK 3: REFLECTION 1

Read: Psalm 23, John 1:29-34

Living + Working

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Luke 2:8 The shepherds were going about their normal lives. Their work required them to be alert and respond swiftly if their sheep were in danger. These shepherds had quick reflexes.

Study and Reflect:

1. *What are characteristics of a good shepherd?*
2. *Why do you think God chose to give His first birth announcement to shepherds?*
3. *Why does John the Baptist call Jesus the Lamb of God?*
4. *As we go about our lives and work, how can we respond quickly to God's agenda for us, exercising our "Kingdom reflexes"?*

We learn from biblical scholars that sheep kept in the fields around Bethlehem included flocks designated for temple sacrifices. To those protecting Passover lambs, the Lamb of God was revealed.

WEEK 3: REFLECTION 3

Read: Luke 2:15-16, John 10:7-18

Determined + Acted

We rejoice as we read of the shepherds acting fast, like they would if their sheep were threatened. They don't have a long discussion, and with unity they determine a course of action.

Then we smile as we hear them call the birth of Christ a "*thing* that has happened," in Greek a *rhema*, which is a matter or topic. They don't even know what to call it!

Study and Reflect:

1. *What motivates the shepherds in Luke 2:15?*

2. *Look again at John 10. How does Jesus describe His care for those who do, and who will, belong to Him?*

3. *In what ways is God asking you to determine and take action as you listen to Him today?*

The shepherds conclude that the Lord himself has given them instructions and they act in obedience. They hurry to Bethlehem, and they don't give up the search until they find Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus lying in the manger.

WEEK 3: REFLECTION 4

Read: Luke 2:16-20, 1 John 1

Saw Jesus + Spread the Word

The Shepherds saw the Messiah with their own eyes. We don't hear them wasting time trying to decide if they are going to be impacted by this Messiah or not. They believe and they spread the word. They tell the good news of great joy in a way that makes people gasp with astonishment!

Study and Reflect:

- 1. Reflect on the fact that God chose shepherds to be the first ones to tell the news of Jesus' birth to others.*
- 2. John is another eyewitness and friend of Jesus. What is his appeal to us based on his first-hand account?*
- 3. What have you seen God do in your life that you could share with someone else this week?*
- 4. Notice the shepherds go back to their living and working. Their occupation didn't change, but their lives did. What are your thoughts?*

Week 3
CANDLE LIGHTING

Leader:

The Shepherds Candle is the candle of Joy, for it was to shepherds that the angel announced good news that would bring great joy to all the people.

The Shepherds Candle also reminds us that Jesus is our Great Shepherd and we can live and work with joy under His care.

LIGHT CANDLE

Please stand as we responsively read these verses in the New Living Translation.

Leader:

*He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young. **Isaiah 40:11***

People:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. **Psalm 23:1***

Leader:

*For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search and find my sheep. I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. **Ezekiel 34:11-12***

People:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. **Psalm 23:1***

Leader:

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. **John 10:11***

People:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. **Psalm 23:1***

Leader:

*Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls. **1 Peter 2:25***

People:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. **Psalm 23:1***

Leader:

*For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes. **Revelation 7:17***

All:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. **Psalm 23:1***

THE ANGELS CANDLE

Love

All In!

Unnoticed by most but eternity-shaking for all, Jesus the Messiah brought heaven to earth. And this “thing that happened” (*rhema* —Luke 2:15) was a convergence of the seen and unseen, mortal and immortal, creatures and Creator.

The coming of Christ was, and is, for all people everywhere in every nation and every generation. Creation is included in the story: the brilliant star in the sky, the likely animals at Christ’s birth in a stable, and the sheep present in the fields when the shepherds heard the news. Also in on it were the angels, those heavenly beings who always obey the will of God and minister to God’s people. **Hebrews 1:14**

Angels Love to Celebrate

We hear angels shouting for joy when God made the world **Job 38:4-7**, and they are singing in full force at the coming of God to earth. **Luke 2:13** They get together for praise and worship sessions, and they party when people repent and turn to Jesus. **Psalm 103:20, 148:2; Luke 15:10**

We know from Scripture that angels are created spirit beings. They are different from humans, with spatial limitations (only God is omnipresent), and invisible to us most of the time. They are allies, organized warriors, messengers, and ministers with people and territory to defend. **Colossians 1:16; Daniel 6:20-23, 10:4-11:1**

Angels get to travel between heaven and earth **Luke 1:19**, so it’s fitting that an angel is the one to announce God’s plan to Mary.

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, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.

For no word from God will ever fail.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:30-33, 37-38

Word Fulfilled

That word from God, promised by the angel Gabriel, confirmed by Mary, became the Word.

Indeed, John tells us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 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 . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5, 14

In our reflections this week, we will look more closely at this passage.

The Word is Love

If we only had one word to describe the Word—to describe Jesus—it would be the word **Love**. *And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. I John 4:16a*

Love is the beat of God's heart, the breath of His words, the touch of His hand, the energy of His power. God never does or says anything that is unloving.

Think about it! No matter what we read in the Bible, whether or not we understand it, we can trust it is from Love.

It's the fourth week of Advent. As we light the Angels Candle, we join them in celebration. Love has arrived. Love has come for us.

One last Candle

Four Advent candles are lit, and yet one remains. This is the **Christ Candle**. The candles of the Prophets, of Bethlehem, the Shepherds, and the Angels all point to this candle.

Jesus is not just a character from a story. He is not just a historical figure. He is Messiah, the Savior, who brings us hope, peace, joy, and love. He moved heaven and earth so we could know Him and belong to Him.

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.

John 3:16

WEEK 4: REFLECTION 3

Read: John 1:5-14, Ephesians 2:8-9

Love Came. Love Saves

The picture of Love we ponder today is one of movement: Love constantly comes towards us. Like a bridegroom pursuing His bride, Jesus gave up His throne in heaven to become a man and be with us. Yet God is a gentleman. He will not pressure or bully us into belief. He has come for us, but He lets us decide if we want to belong to Him.

Study and Reflect:

1. *What are some of the ways people respond to Jesus in John 1:5-14?*
2. *Why is it not possible to save ourselves?*
3. *How does one become part of God's family?*
4. *How is God pursuing you today, and how are you responding?*

Since we could not be good enough to get to heaven, heaven came to us. Since we could not pay the penalty for the wrong we have done, Jesus paid the penalty for us. That baby in a crude, raw feeding trough called a manger would one day die on a crude, raw place of execution called a cross. Love came, and Love saves.

WEEK 4: REFLECTION 4

Read: John 1:14-17, John 14:1-27

Love Stayed. Love Revealed

This Advent we have waited and prepared for the arrival of Messiah. We celebrated when the miraculous birth announcement included us. Not only did He *move into the neighborhood*, as The Message paraphrases **John 1:14**, but Jesus continues to make His home in those who have put their faith in Him.

Study and Reflect:

1. *How does Jesus make God known to us?*
2. *What kind of relationship does Jesus want with us?*
3. *What do we already have in this relationship with Jesus, and what is yet to come?*
4. *Take a few minutes to express your thanks to Jesus.*

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
1 John 3:1

Week 4
CANDLE LIGHTING

Leader:

Today we light the fourth Advent candle, the Angels Candle, the candle of Love.

LIGHT CANDLE

The Bible tells us that angels are ministering spirits who obey God and serve His people. Throughout the history of the Bible we see angels announcing important news.

In the Christmas story, an angel appeared to Zechariah, to Mary, to Joseph, and to the shepherds.

Please stand and read with me the angel's announcement to Joseph from Matthew chapter 1, verses 18-23 in the New Living Translation.

Leader:

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

People:

Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

Leader:

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

People:

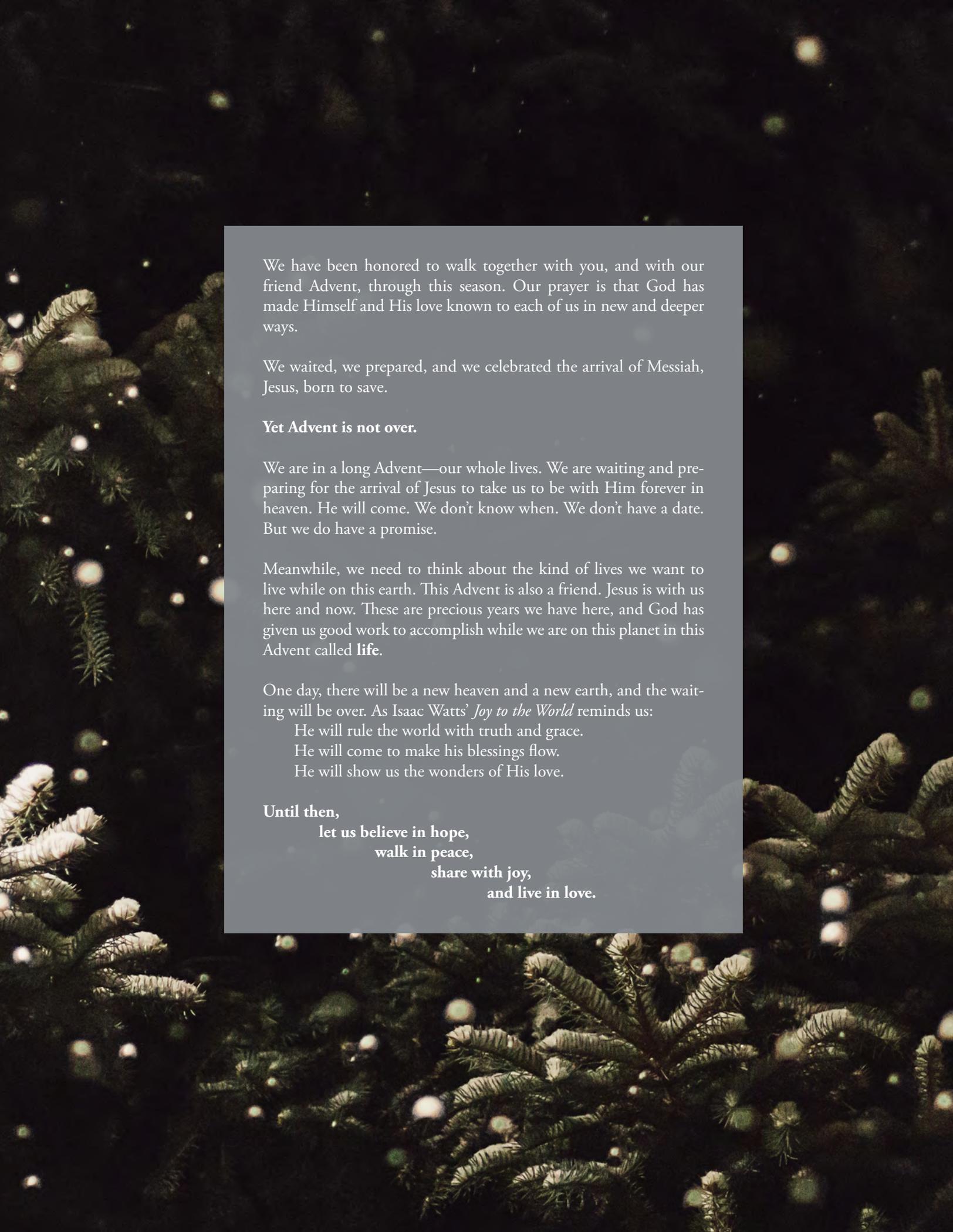
And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Leader:

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

All:

*"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.'"*



We have been honored to walk together with you, and with our friend Advent, through this season. Our prayer is that God has made Himself and His love known to each of us in new and deeper ways.

We waited, we prepared, and we celebrated the arrival of Messiah, Jesus, born to save.

Yet Advent is not over.

We are in a long Advent—our whole lives. We are waiting and preparing for the arrival of Jesus to take us to be with Him forever in heaven. He will come. We don't know when. We don't have a date. But we do have a promise.

Meanwhile, we need to think about the kind of lives we want to live while on this earth. This Advent is also a friend. Jesus is with us here and now. These are precious years we have here, and God has given us good work to accomplish while we are on this planet in this Advent called **life**.

One day, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and the waiting will be over. As Isaac Watts' *Joy to the World* reminds us:

He will rule the world with truth and grace.
He will come to make his blessings flow.
He will show us the wonders of His love.

Until then,

let us believe in hope,
walk in peace,
share with joy,
and live in love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lauren Edmonds—*Designer*
www.evernew.co

Stacy Wiens—*Cadence Director of Communications*

Marlina Bello—*Cadence Mailroom and Communications Assistant*

Josiah Cohen, Kyrie Schroeder, Justin Schroeder—*Editing Consultants*

Cadence Leadership Team

Cadence Board of Directors

