

Pause FOR Christmas



Merry Christmas



Welcome to Advent 2025

Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, a time to reflect on the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In a world that constantly pushes us to hurry, strive, and fill every moment, Advent invites us to do something different: to pause.

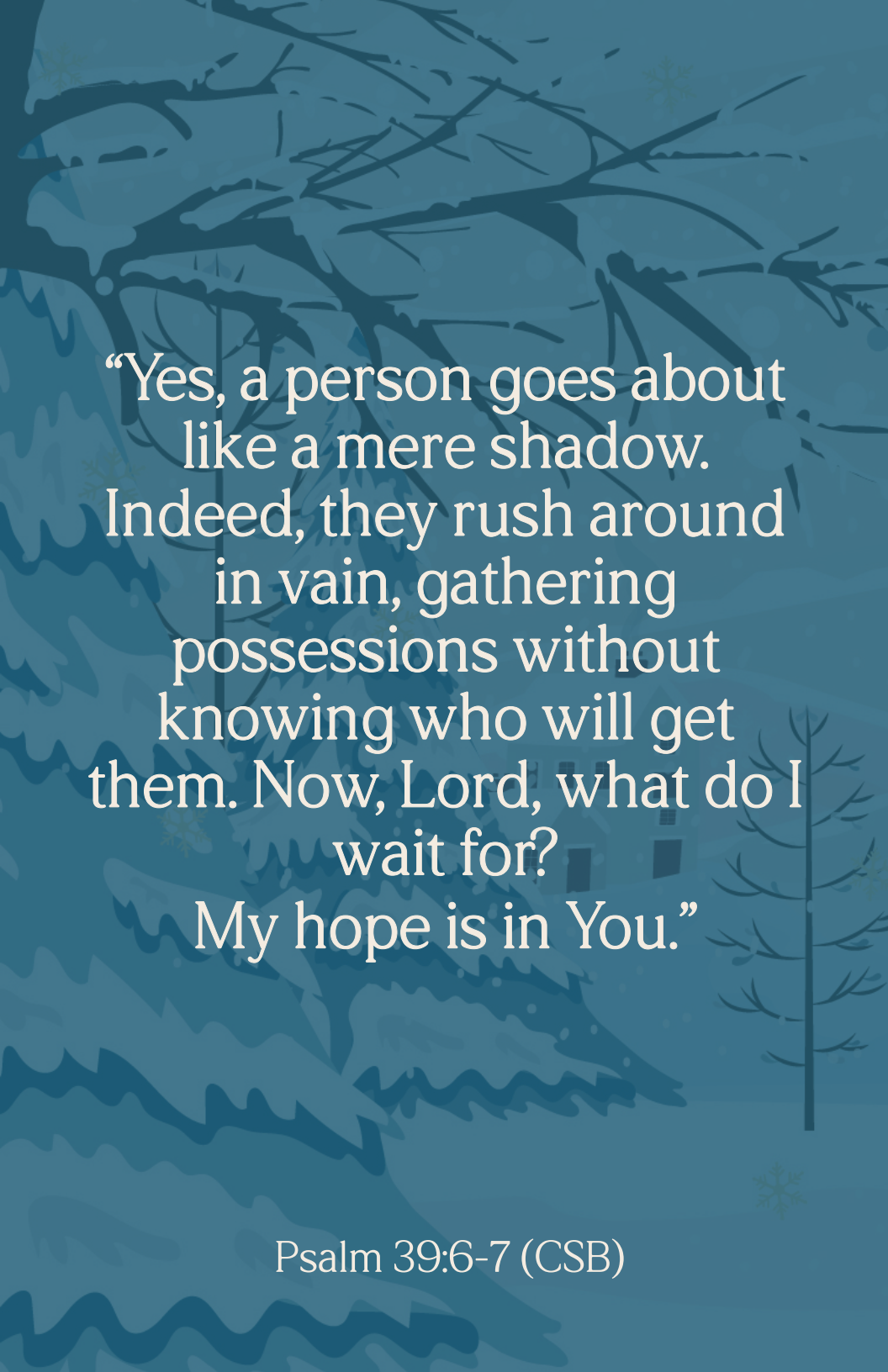
This year, our church family has been walking together under the theme of Pause. We've learned that to pause is not simply to stop, but to create space for God's presence in the middle of our ordinary lives. As we bring that vision into Advent, these devotionals will help us pause for hope, pause in worship, pause to hear His voice, and ultimately, pause to welcome Him in.

We pray this devotional journey will not only prepare you for Christmas morning, but will also give you moments of stillness and wonder in a season often crowded with noise. Each day is an invitation to slow down, to listen, and to encounter the One who is the center of Christmas: Emmanuel, God with us.

As you open these pages, may you discover the gift of holy pauses—times to remember that the good news of Jesus is not just a story of the past, but the living hope that changes us today.

So let us enter this Advent together, not in a rush, but with intentional pauses that draw us closer to Christ, who came near to us.

A special thanks to our staff and elders who wrote this for our Church family! May it bless yours.



“Yes, a person goes about
like a mere shadow.
Indeed, they rush around
in vain, gathering
possessions without
knowing who will get
them. Now, Lord, what do I
wait for?
My hope is in You.”

Psalm 39:6-7 (CSB)



December 1

Pause for Hope

It's December! Many of us rejoice when the calendar turns and no other celebration stands between us and Christmas. Others groan a little. Yet all of us, whether we identify more with Santa or the Grinch, feel a busyness to life as December begins. In Psalm 39, David considers the brevity of life and how amazing it is that God cares for humans. His comment in verse 6 applies directly to the hurriedness and gathering that go on in most homes this time of year.

The solution comes in verse 7. We should focus that energy on the only thing of eternal value—God. The Lord is the one in whom we hope. He is the only one truly worth the wait. In the Lord, we find real hope, which goes beyond a desire for people to enjoy presents we prepare for them, getting what we want for Christmas, or making it through the mall where people rush around like shadows. We hope in a relationship with God Almighty! He has cared so deeply for us that He has made a way for us to find inexhaustible hope in Him.

Pray: “Lord, guide us that we wait on You alone. Jesus, You are returning. You have given us hope. Even in necessary busyness, help us to hope in You instead of rushing around in vain. Amen.”

Family Activity

For 45 seconds, have everyone run around like crazy. Don't get hurt or bump into anyone else! Just rush around in vain for 0:45.

All sit down in a circle and quietly catch your breath. One at a time, starting with the oldest person, answer this question:
Am I more often hoping in the Lord, or running around in vain?

Written By: Dr. Wayne Braudrick, Lead Pastor

Pause and Make Room

Nazareth and Bethlehem were a long journey in those days. After nearly a week of walking and riding on a donkey, they must have been longing for a welcoming place of rest—especially Mary, who was very pregnant. Yet when they arrived, not only was there no hospital, but there also wasn't even a room available at the local inn. The best shelter they could find was among the animals.

When we value people, we make room for them. We make room in our homes to host family or friends who have traveled from far away. We make room in our day to spend time with those we value, deepening our relationships with them. When we don't make room for people, we send a clear message that they are not welcome.

It is the same with God. When we intentionally make room for Him in our lives, we show that we value Him and desire to grow in our relationship with Him. At Christmas, we remember that making room for Jesus is the greatest gift we can give—not only to Him, but also to ourselves and those around us.

Family Activity

This week, take time to declutter one area of your home. As you work, talk together about how you can make room for God in your daily life. You might even use the cleared space to set up a nativity scene or a special Christmas decoration as a reminder that welcoming Jesus is what Christmas is truly about.

Written By: Randall Satchall, Chairman of FB Elder Board

“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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 2:4-7 (ESV)

December 3

“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

Colossians 3:1-2 (CSB)

Pause to Turn Our Hearts

Isn't the Advent season supposed to be this season of wonder and worship? So why does it often feel cluttered and chaotic? Ask around, and you'll find that most people are either excited or overwhelmed by travel plans, social events, and shopping sprees. Our minds are pulled in every direction except upwards. Today we will meditate on what it means to pause to turn our heart to God.

More often than not, our minds and desires seem to be fixed on seeking earthly things. This is especially evident during the season that's supposed to be all about Jesus. If Jesus sat down and looked at our to-do list, how much of it would actually reflect Him? The bumper sticker that says “Jesus is the reason for the season” is only a bold statement if it's truly what we believe. Paul says that we must set our hearts on the things above because our minds already come with a default setting that is not set to the things above, but to the things of this earth: things like comfort, pleasure, control, recognition, wealth, status, and the list goes on. “Set” is an active verb. It means we must pause, recalibrate, and intentionally lift our gaze to Christ. Earthly things aren't sinful unless they take first place in our hearts. Advent gives us the chance to pause and turn our hearts, to reset our affections toward the One who is above all and in all.

Family Activity

Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” As a family, make a list of your Advent plans like events, traditions, or shopping. Then ask: Does this help us turn our hearts toward Jesus? Mark the ones that do with a heart. For the others, talk about how you might shift your focus or replace them with something more Christ-centered.

Written By: Moshe Santillan, SM Director of Teaching/Content

Pause with the Prophets

Imagine the prophets of old, faithfully speaking God's words into a world that often turned a deaf ear. Each prophet prepared the way, pointing toward something greater—Someone greater. John the Baptist stands at the forefront, boldly calling people to ready their hearts for Jesus. Jesus Himself said, "Among those born of women none is greater than John," underscoring the honor and weight of being a prophet of the Most High. Yet even John pointed ahead, for Jesus is the ultimate Prophet and the fulfillment of every promise.

One name of Jesus that shines brightly in this season is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8). This name reminds us that He alone gives true rest—more than a pause from busyness, but deep physical and spiritual renewal. During Advent, it's easy to be swept away by lights, gifts, and packed schedules, yet God gently invites us to pause and rest in Him.

Pausing with the prophets lifts our gaze to God's faithful provision and the unshakable assurance found in Christ. Over 200 names for Jesus are woven throughout Scripture, each revealing His heart, His work, and His love for us. As we focus on Him as our rest, we step into His promise of peace and hope—a gift only He can give.

Family Activity

Read Isaiah 9:6 together.

Have each family member choose one name of Jesus to learn and display creatively in your home! How many names of Jesus can you discover as a family, and how does each name help you better understand who He is?

Written By: Dean Snowball, SM Director of Outreach/Students

“Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. Now we who have believed enter that rest.”

Hebrews 4:1-3a (NIV)

December 5

“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 9:6–7 (NIV)

Pause in the Waiting

How many times do we hear kids say, “I can’t wait for Christmas!” Their excitement and joy as they wait with anticipation for that special day are contagious. But waiting isn’t always easy, especially in our fast-paced world that wants everything now.

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies foretelling the coming of our Savior. Isaiah 9:6–7 was spoken during a time of deep despair for the Israelites. These words encouraged generations of God’s people to wait with hope. For centuries they waited in faith and expectation, trusting that God keeps His promises. In the same way, we can hold on to that same hope in the trials of life—remembering and believing this truth: we can have peace, knowing that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33).

As you wait and prepare for Christmas Day—with all the gifts, traditions, and celebrations it brings—remember this: we no longer wait for our Savior to come. He—our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace—has come so that we may be reconciled with God. With gratitude, take time to reflect on the good news of His birth. And as we continue to wait and prepare for His return, may your heart be filled with faith and hope, rooted in His promise that Christ will come again (Titus 2:13).

Family Activity

Make a paper “waiting chain” to count down the days until Christmas. On each link, write a prayer, a kind action, or something your family is thankful for. Each day, tear off one link and read it together. Talk about how waiting can be joyful when our hearts are focused on Jesus and the hope He brings. As the chain grows shorter, let it remind you that the day we celebrate His second coming is drawing near.

Written By: Celine Elledge, Preschool Associate

Pause to Trust His Timing

Are you a planner? I sure am! I love to make detailed plans and see them come together—right on time. Do you know who else is a planner? God. He is the Ultimate Planner. But as Isaiah 55 reminds us, His ways are not our ways, and His timing is also not our timing.

Mary had a plan. She would marry Joseph and, sometime later, start a family. Yet, one day, before they were married, an angel appeared to announce that Mary would have a baby! Elizabeth had a plan too. She and Zechariah longed for children, but she was not able to get pregnant. Yet, one day, when they were “very old,” an angel appeared to announce they would have a baby (Luke 1)!

In one story, God’s timing seemed early; in the other, late. But His timing is never early or late—it’s always right on time! Pause to consider Mary’s response in Luke 1:38. When the angel revealed God’s plan (which was far better than Mary’s!), she replied, “I am the Lord’s servant. May Your word to me be fulfilled.”

May we follow Mary’s beautiful example and pause to trust God’s timing. As the psalmist writes, “But I trust in you, Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hands” (Psalm 31). Our times are in God’s hands—and His plans are always right on time!

Family Activity

Think about a moment when God’s timing seemed “early” or “late” compared to your own plans. Looking back, can you see how He was working in that situation — perhaps in ways you didn’t expect?

Take a moment to share your thoughts with your family or write them in a journal as a reminder of God’s faithfulness.

Written By: Jen Bryant, Women's Director

“For My thoughts are not
your thoughts, neither are
your ways My ways,”
declares the Lord.

“As the heavens are higher
than the earth, so are My
ways higher than your
ways, and My thoughts
than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)

December 7

“As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: ‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God’s salvation.”

Luke 3:4-6 (NIV)

Pause to Prepare the Way

Christmas is the time to celebrate the coming of the Son. In this season, we’re reminded that we are never alone. Jesus came to bring light into our darkness. He came to die, to pay the price for our sins, and now He lives in us through the Holy Spirit. Through this, we know the depth of His great love for us.

Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus’ first coming, we are called to prepare the way for Him today. Advent is not only about remembering the manger in Bethlehem, but also about anticipating the day of His return. Preparing the way means aligning our hearts, words, and actions with His truth so that our lives point others to Christ. We prepare not with grumbling attitudes or distracted minds, but with hearts stilled in worship and eager expectation.

As we step into the busyness of this season, let us not be consumed by endless lists, crowded calendars, or the pursuit of gifts. Instead, let us prepare for the greater gift: Immanuel, God with us. Advent teaches us to pause, to lift our eyes beyond the moment, and to live ready for His return. Just as John prepared the way for Jesus’ first coming, we prepare the way for His second—bearing witness to His light and waiting with hope for the day He comes again to make all things new.

Family Activity

As a family, talk about what it means to “prepare the way” for Jesus. Make a simple sign that says, “Come, Lord Jesus!” and place it in a visible spot in your home. Each time you see it, let it be a reminder to prepare your hearts, not just for Christmas morning, but for the day when Christ comes again.

Written By: Kayla O'Bier, Elementary Associate

Pause and Hear His Voice

Imagine the manger on that glorious night when Jesus came into the world. Surrounded by the noise of the animals, shepherds spreading the good news, and angels filling the sky with song, Mary “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). She didn’t rush past the moment; she paused. She listened. She reflected. Jesus reminds us that His sheep hear His voice. Listening demands a pause, one long enough to quiet the distractions around us so that we can listen to the gentle whisper of our Shepherd.

The Christmas season is filled with sounds and activities that beg for our attention: laughter, carols, advertisements, long to-do lists, endless invitations to activities, and gift to give. In the midst of the chaos, remember that God’s voice is a gift for those who believe in Him. Don’t get caught up in the noise of the season and miss the opportunity to hear His voice. Like any meaningful conversation, you will only hear Him when you pause to listen.

Pausing may require you to put down your phone, turn off the radio on the ride to school or work, or wake up a little earlier before the house begins to stir. In that stillness, you may find God reminding you that He is your source of peace, He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Don’t miss the Shepherd’s voice amid the chaos of the season; instead, pause, listen, and follow.

Family Activity

Go on a quiet walk together outside. Tell everyone that you’re going to use your ears to listen for God’s creation. Stay quiet for a few minutes and listen carefully—what do you hear?

After the walk, sit together and share what each person heard. Talk about how God made everything we hear and how He can speak to our hearts in quiet moments too. Then, draw or write one thing that reminded you of God. Hang your pictures somewhere in your home as a reminder to pause and listen for His voice every day.

Written By: Erica Wink, SM Director of Leader/Logistics

“Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name bear witness about Me, but you do not believe because you are not among My sheep.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

John 10:25–30 (ESV)

December 9

“...God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph... The virgin’s name was 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... His kingdom will never end... The Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God... 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 1:26-27; 30-35,38 (NIV)

Pause with Mary

Mary was a young, ordinary woman engaged to be married. She was likely dreaming about her wedding and her future. Without warning, an angel appeared with astonishing news no one had ever been given before—and never would again. In a major life detour, Mary would become the mother of God’s own Son. He would be given a throne, and His kingdom would never end. How could anyone absorb that?

My first baby was born five weeks early and spent three weeks in the NICU. I visited often, doing all the things a new mom should. But then I’d drive away without him. That wasn’t my plan—no new mother’s plan. I felt helpless. On one teary drive home, God laid a truth on my heart: that baby was His. He loved him first. Gary and I were entrusted to raise him, but I wasn’t in control. It was hard and freeing all at once. God created that child and would care for him. He knew every day of his life before even one day began (Psalm 139).

Mary’s wholehearted obedience is extraordinary! Let’s take a cue from her—pause and give our questions, fears, and control to the Lord, confident that He loves us and that His plan is best. He will provide.

Family Activity

Read Luke 1:26–38 together. Give each person a strip of paper. Write (or draw) something you’re trying to control, or something causing fear or worry. (A small child may fear the dark; a teen may be anxious about friendships.) Keep this step private. Pray as a family, surrendering these requests to God. Pray together: “I am the Lord’s servant; may your word be fulfilled.”

Burn the papers in a safe fire pit, bowl, or grill—watching fear consumed as your hearts are refined. Now, use the flame to toast marshmallows and rejoice in His goodness!

Written By: Mary Knepler, Ministry Administration Associate

Pause in Obedience

Have you ever hesitated to be obedient? Maybe you've sensed God nudging you to forgive someone, serve, give, or speak, but you answered with, "Lord, I will do that, but first..." You're not alone. It's a common struggle. We intend to obey, but we delay. In Psalm 119:60, the writer says, "I hurried, not hesitating to keep your commands." That kind of response comes from a heart that has already decided that God comes first.

This is such an impressive and honest prayer. Throughout it, the writer humbly expresses his desire to know God's commands and to obey them fully. What we tend to get wrong about obedience is thinking it's just about rule-following. But biblical obedience is relational. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15). Love and obedience go hand in hand.

At Christmas, we're reminded of the perfect example of obedience—Jesus Himself. He came to earth in humble submission to the Father's will so that we could be redeemed. His obedience brought life to the world. As we pause during Advent, it's a chance to reflect on whether we've responded to God with immediate trust or with hesitant delay. What might change in your life if you obeyed without hesitation?

Family Activity

Is there anything we've been delaying in obedience to God? Take time to listen and share. What is one step of obedience each of us wants to take after Advent and into the new year? Write down your commitments and pray together, asking God for the courage and joy to follow through.

For younger kids: Give each person a small paper heart. Write or draw one way you can obey God right away — like being kind, helping, or forgiving. Hang the hearts where everyone can see them this week.

Written By: Moshe Santillan, SM Director of Teaching/Content

"The Lord is my portion; I have promised to keep Your words. I have sought Your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to Your promise.

I thought about my ways and turned my steps back to Your decrees. I hurried, not hesitating to keep Your commands.

Though the ropes of the wicked were wrapped around me, I did not forget Your instruction. I rise at midnight to thank You for Your righteous judgments."

I am a friend to all who fear You, to those who keep Your precepts. Lord, the earth is filled with your faithful love; teach me Your statutes."

Psalm 119:57-64 (CSB)

“I will remember the
Lord’s works; yes, I will
remember Your ancient
wonders.

I will reflect on all You have
done and meditate on
Your actions.

God, Your way is holy.
What god is great like
God?”

Psalm 77:11–13 (CSB)

Pause and Ponder

I spend a lot of time in my head thinking. Most of those thoughts aren’t deep—“What do I want for lunch?” or “What’s that squirrel outside looking for?” But that’s not what it means to ponder.

Pondering is richer—it means to think carefully and deeply. The word comes from the Latin *ponderare*, meaning “to weigh.” In our fast-paced world of quick answers, true pondering feels almost countercultural. It’s slowing down, giving space for an idea to settle, and seeing it from new angles.

We know Mary pondered the wonder of Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:19), but I can’t help but think Joseph did too. As they looked into the eyes of their new Child, having just heard the shepherds tell how angels filled the sky proclaiming, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.”

Imagine what filled their minds as they held the Child who was God’s promise to redeem the world. Psalm 77 reminds us to do the same—to remember the Lord’s works, reflect on all He has done, and meditate on His actions. This Christmas, may we follow Mary and Joseph’s example by pausing to truly ponder the wonder of God coming to earth as Jesus.

Family Activity

Read Psalm 77:11–13 together. Gather pictures that remind you of God’s goodness and share the stories behind them—like the birth of a child or a friend who supported you in a hard time.

Then sing “Silent Night” and ponder the miracle of Jesus’ birth on that starry night.

Written By: Andy Sipes, Senior Executive Pastor

Pause in Silence

We don't have many of these in Texas, but picture a quiet, snowy morning in December. You walk outside and see your breath, and it's early enough that the birds haven't started singing.

The absence of sound can be a stark contrast to the bustle of the holiday season. But how similar is the noise in our daily lives to what Elijah experienced on the mountain? Wind and earthquakes and a roaring fire. Christmas music and shopping and so many commitments!

On the mountain, God's voice followed that cacophony—in a whisper. What would it take for you to hear God's whisper? Do you set aside time to turn the volume down? This world can be full of distractions, some of them very good gifts from God. But the enemy would love nothing more than for us to miss Jesus in the whirlwind of busyness.

Pausing and pursuing silence can be an act of worship for a King who desires that we put Him above all else, even a holiday that celebrates His birth. Let's make sure we pursue those moments to listen to God's still, small voice this Christmas.

Family Activity

Turn off all devices for 15–20 minutes. Sit quietly, then talk about what silence taught you about God. Or commit to a “minute retreat” each day this week, where you shut out distractions to listen for God's voice in the midst of your day.

Written By: Justin Metz, Connections Director

“The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”

1 Kings 19:11–12 (NIV)

December 13

“Yet I am always with You;
You hold me by my right
hand. You guide me with
Your counsel, and
afterward You will take me
into glory.”

Psalm 73:23-24 (NIV)

Pause to Say “Yes”

Life often feels like a rush of voices, choices, and distractions. Asaph, the psalmist in Psalm 73, wrestled with confusion, envy, and doubt. But in the middle of his struggle, he pauses—an acknowledgment that God has never let go of him. He realizes that even when his heart was unsettled, God was steady, holding his hand and guiding his steps.

Sometimes, the most powerful thing we can do is stop for a moment, pause, and say, “Yes, Lord.”

Yes to His presence: “I am always with you.”

Yes to His guidance: “You guide me with your counsel.”

Yes to His promise: “Afterward you will take me into glory.”

Every “yes” we give God may feel small, but it opens space for Him to lead us into His purposes. The pause is sacred—it shifts us from striving to trusting, from wandering to walking with Him.

Pause today. Breathe. Whisper your “yes” to God. It may be a yes to trusting Him with a decision, a yes to obeying a gentle prompting, a yes to laying down a burden, or a yes that requires risk—stepping out of your comfort zone. In that pause, you’ll find His hand already holding yours.

Family Activity

Talk about how Mary and Joseph said “yes” to God. Then, have everyone share one way they can say “yes” to God this Christmas—like helping, sharing, or being kind.

End by praying together: “Thank You, God, for sending Jesus. Help us say ‘yes’ to You. Amen.”

Written By: Denise Schager, Missions Director

Pause for the Unexpected

Life is full of unexpected events! In an incredibly short span of time, Joseph faced two very unforeseen situations. The woman he loved, was engaged to, and was planning to spend the rest of his life with, was found to be pregnant! Joseph was an honorable man who did not react immediately. Instead, he paused, reflected, and planned to handle the situation quietly so as not to bring shame on Mary. In the pause between hearing the news and taking action, another unexpected event took place—an angel appeared! Joseph heard the message and changed his plans because what had been devastating was now exhilarating.

Unexpected events happen regularly in our lives as well. A friend you haven't heard from in years calls, your car gets a flat tire, you find out you're going to be a parent (or grandparent!), you get a raise you didn't ask for, you find out your job is being cut because of downsizing, or someone says something unkind about you online. Whether positive or negative, our days are full of unexpected events, and how we respond matters. Just as Joseph paused between hearing the news and reacting to it, we too would be wise to pause, seek the Lord, and act in His wisdom instead of reacting in the moment—because we never know how God might use the events in our lives for His glory.

Family Activity

Creatively share about one unexpected event that happened in the last twenty-four hours.

Act it out, draw a picture, make a Dr. Seuss-style rhyme, sing a song about it, or use your imagination to share in a way that uses your God-given gifts.

Written By: Jared Coe, Strategic Communications Director

“...After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.’

When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her.”

Matthew 1:18–21, 24 (CSB)

December 15

“After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”

Matthew 2:9–11 (ESV)

Pause Under the Stars

On a clear night, we are often drawn to pause and look up at the stars. The vastness of the heavens reminds us of the greatness of the God who created them all. In the Advent story, one star in particular carried the message of hope and fulfillment—the Star of Christ. It was no accident or coincidence of the sky but a deliberate sign placed by the Creator who holds every galaxy in His hands.

That star pointed to the most miraculous moment in history: the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. God’s sovereignty was on display, not only in the miracle of Christ’s coming, but in the way He orchestrated history itself to announce His glorious Son. When we pause under the stars today, we are reminded that the same God who named each star also knows each one of us fully and calls us to rest in His grace, mercy, and love.

In this busy season, the heavens invite us to stop, breathe, and remember that our Savior has come—and that He holds all things together in His loving arms.

Family Activity

If it’s clear, bundle up and spend a few minutes outside tonight looking at the stars. As you gaze upward, take turns naming ways God has shown His love and faithfulness this year.

Read Matthew 2:9–11 together, and then close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of Jesus, the Light of the world.

Written By: Cristopher Marshall, College Director

Pause with the Shepherds

Shepherds were not the people you would expect to receive heaven's announcement of the Savior's birth. They lived simple lives, spending long days and nights watching over their flocks. Yet God chose them to hear the Good News first, showing that His message is for the humble and ordinary, reminding us how deeply the world needs a Shepherd.

As a farmer, I see this picture of God as our Shepherd in unique ways. Sheep depend completely on their shepherd for food, water, and protection. Like sheep, we wander, panic easily, and are vulnerable to danger. That's why Isaiah's words are so comforting: the Lord doesn't just watch from a distance; He gathers us close to His heart. Just as a farmer lifts a fragile lamb to safety, our Good Shepherd carries us when we are weary or afraid—if only we will pause and let Him.

The shepherds who heard the angels' song didn't keep the news to themselves. They hurried to Bethlehem, saw Jesus with their own eyes, and spread the word about what they had witnessed. Their ordinary night became a mission of encouragement. Pausing with the shepherds reminds us that Jesus loves and cares for our friends and neighbors, too. We are called to share the Good News and invite others into His flock.

Family Activity

Deliver a surprise treat to someone—a neighbor, church leader, or friend. Along with it, share a word of encouragement about Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who carries us close to His heart.

Written By: Dean Snowball, SM Director of Outreach/Students

“He tends His flock like a shepherd:

He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart;

He gently leads those that have young”

Isaiah 40:9–14 (CSB)

December 17

“ ‘Now, Master, You can dismiss
Your servant in peace, as You
promised. For my eyes have seen
Your salvation.

You have prepared it in the
presence of all peoples— a light
for revelation to the Gentiles, and
glory to Your people Israel.’

His father and mother were
amazed at what was being said
about Him.”

Luke 2:29–33 (CSB)

Pause in Awe

We were told it was the biggest church in the world. But being from Texas, we’ve seen large church buildings—so how big could it be? As we left the Vatican Museum and turned the corner, the massive columns of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome dwarfed us. I was in awe!

There have been many moments I’ve felt dwarfed—like standing on the dock of a boat in the middle of the ocean, struck by the magnitude of creation and how very small I really am in the universe. Walking through St. Peter’s was another such moment. That manmade structure highlighted the wealth of creativity, engineering prowess, and skill of humankind. It is a beautiful, big building.

But I am even more struck by how Mary and Joseph marveled at the words of Simeon, who held Jesus in his arms, overwhelmed with the knowledge that this little One was salvation. What an amazing moment for Simeon, Mary, and Joseph—to behold the long-awaited Messiah. This little One was massive! He is the Creator who made all the earth and mankind who builds enormous things (Colossians 1:16; Romans 11:36). He is the One who saves both Gentiles and Israel—the One in whom to marvel.

Family Activity

Read Colossians 1:16 and Romans 11:36 with the Luke 2 passage.

Do a “beauty hunt” in your home or neighborhood. Stop and look at artwork, architecture, or nature, and find five things that cause you to marvel at their design.

Share with one another how each object makes you wonder and how it encourages you to stand in awe of God. Spend time thanking God for these reminders of His greatness.

Written By: Jeremy Mikeska, Executive of Spiritual Formation Pastor

Pause and Follow

The Christmas story reminds us that in the middle of life's movement, there are sacred moments when God calls us to pause and follow. The wise men from the East were men of influence—scholars, astrologers, and possibly “king makers.” Yet when they saw the star, they did not ignore it or explain it away. Instead, they stopped the rhythm of their lives, recognized the sign of God, and chose to follow.

Their journey may have been shaped by Daniel's influence centuries earlier, as he served as chief over the wise men of Babylon and helped preserve Jewish prophecies. Guided by Scripture and the heavens, the Magi set out to find the newborn King—not to study Him from afar, but to bow before Him in worship.

In the same way, the Advent season calls us to pause and follow. Christmas is full of noise, busyness, and distractions—shopping lists, gatherings, and deadlines. Yet if we never pause, we risk missing the signs of God's star before us. The Magi remind us that wisdom isn't found in striving, but in noticing when God places a “star” in our path and being willing to follow it. When we pause to follow, like the Magi, we find the journey always leads us closer to Jesus—the One worthy of our time, devotion, and worship.

Family Activity

Choose one evening this week to “pause” as a family—turn off phones, TV, and distractions for 15–20 minutes. Light a candle and read Matthew 2:1–12 together.

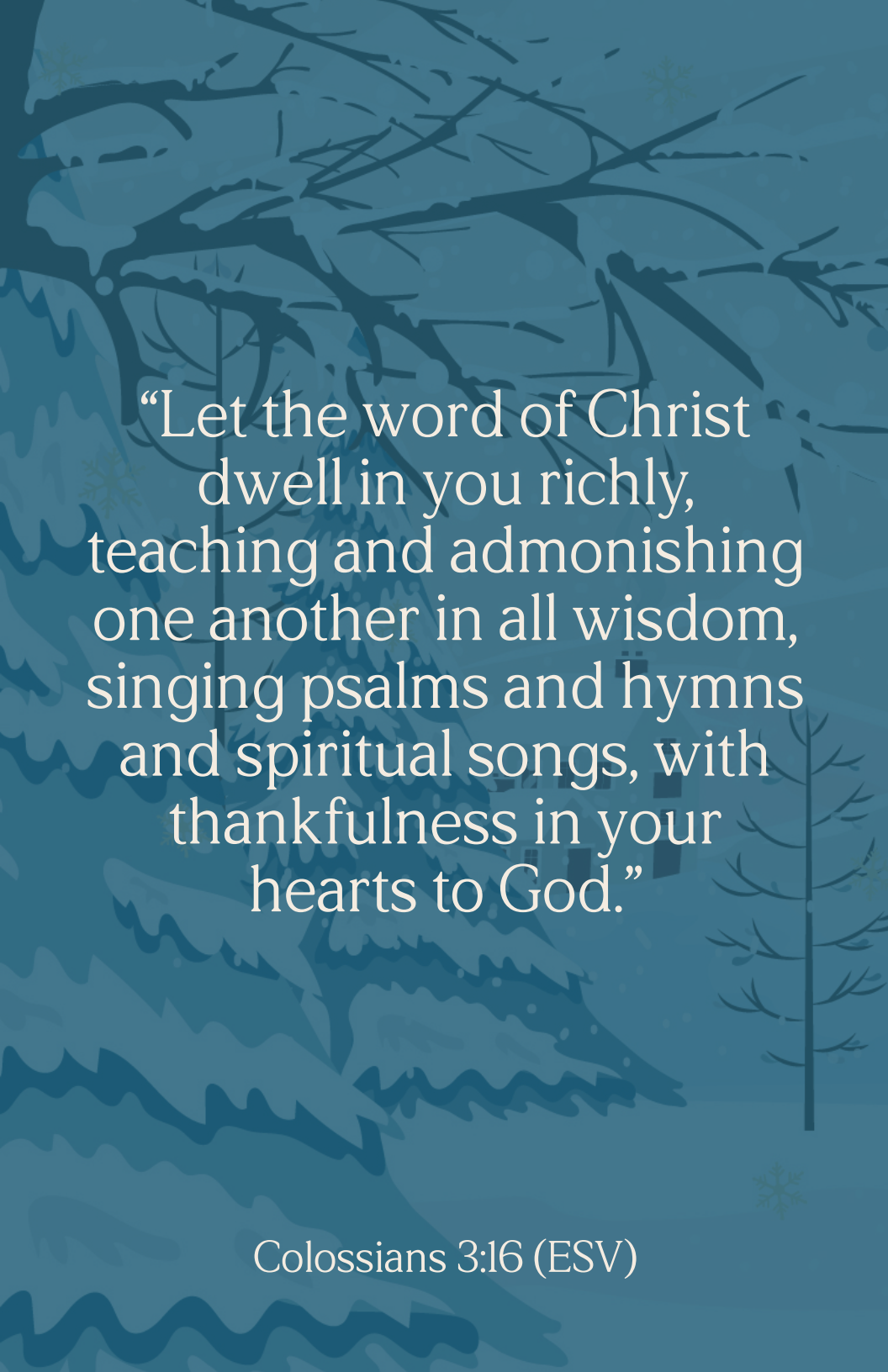
Then, trace your family's journey of faith by mapping key moments where God has led you—times He provided, guided, or showed His love. Display your map like a treasure map to remind you that following God's leading always brings joy. End by singing a simple carol like “O Come, Let Us Adore Him.”

Written By: Jerome Lackey, FB Elder

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying,

‘Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.’”

Matthew 2:1–2 (ESV)



“Let the word of Christ
dwell in you richly,
teaching and admonishing
one another in all wisdom,
singing psalms and hymns
and spiritual songs, with
thankfulness in your
hearts to God.”

Colossians 3:16 (ESV)



December 19

Pause in Worship

Pausing in worship is one of the most meaningful ways we connect with God—bringing head and heart together to draw closer to our Lord. The beautiful Advent hymn Hark! The Herald Angels Sing stands as a shining example of this holy union. It is steeped in biblical truth and alive with the hope of our coming Savior.

Many Advent songs we love are hymns from long ago. They reinforce the great truths of our faith found in the Word of God. This hymn is not a mere melody but Scripture set to song—truth wrapped in rhythm that speaks to both our head and heart.

Christ is born in Bethlehem – Matthew 2:1
Hail the incarnate Deity – John 1:14
Prince of Peace.– Isaiah 9:6
Born to give them second birth – John 3:3
Glory to the newborn King – Luke 2:13–14

During the Christmas season, it's easy to lose focus amid the busyness. Songs that communicate biblical truth help anchor our hearts on our Savior. Theology shapes how we worship—it belongs in our songs, prayers, and everyday faith. As you pause in worship this Advent, may it deepen your understanding and awe of our Savior.

Family Activity

Read and sing “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” Talk together about what truths from the lyrics stand out to you or remind you of who Jesus is. Then let each person choose their favorite Christmas carol to sing during the days before Christmas. As you sing, focus on the words and worship the Savior who came to bring peace, joy, and hope to the world.

Written By: Meaghan Hahn, I45 Director

Pause and Rejoice

Am I taking time to rejoice in the things God does? That was the first question I asked myself when I learned I was to write about this subject. My answer—maybe like yours—was... not enough. I celebrate the big things I see God do: a baptism, watching a grandchild take first steps, or witnessing someone place their trust in the Lord. Those are easy to rejoice in because they're right in front of me!

But am I noticing the little things God is doing day by day? Pause and thank Him for that small win. Why is this mindset important? Because it keeps God at the forefront of our lives. It glorifies Him and reminds us of His goodness.

This season, we celebrate the greatest of God's gifts—the birth of our Savior, Jesus. Yet life often gets crowded with shopping, parties, and endless to-do lists. We give gifts to one another to remember the gift God gave us. Christmas is the perfect time to pause and rejoice in what God did for all of us—sending His Son to save us from sin if we trust in Him.

Now and all year long, let's celebrate the big things, the little things, and everything in between that God does for us—especially the gift of Jesus.

Family Activity

Share as a family one “small win” from your week—something God did that made you smile or reminded you of His goodness. Write them on slips of paper and place them in a “Joy Jar.” On Christmas Day, read them together and rejoice in the Lord's faithfulness.

Written By: Brian Behrman, FB Elder

“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ 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’.”

Luke 2:9-12 (NIV)

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’

The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion.”

Isaiah 52:7–8 (ESV)

Pause for the Good News

Christmas is all about good news. In a world often filled with anxiety, uncertainty, and brokenness, the message of Jesus’ birth cuts through the noise: a Savior has come! This is not just good advice or a list of rules—it’s news. It’s something that has already happened, something we can receive and rejoice in.

Isaiah’s words remind us that this good news is both peace for today and hope for the future. God promised salvation long before Jesus’ birth, and Isaiah painted a picture of people rejoicing because they could see God’s redeeming work with their own eyes. That prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus came to earth—the Prince of Peace bringing salvation to all who believe.

But the good news doesn’t end at the manger. Just as Isaiah’s watchmen looked with joy for God’s coming, we now wait with hope for Jesus to come again—to make all things new and bring perfect peace to the world. The first Advent reminds us that God keeps His promises; the second Advent reminds us to keep our eyes lifted in faith.

As we pause for the good news, may we rejoice in what God has done and look forward to what He will do. The Savior has come—and He will come again.

Family Activity

Make a “Good News Banner” for your home. On a large sheet of paper, write “GOOD NEWS: JESUS HAS COME AND WILL COME AGAIN!” in big letters.

Decorate it with drawings or symbols that show both the joy of Christmas and the hope of Jesus’ return—stars, hearts, or a cross and crown. Hang it where your family can see it as a reminder of the good news we celebrate and the greater hope still to come.

Written By: Summer Sipes, Executive Director of NextGen Ministries

Pause at the Manger

The shepherds were probably breathless when they arrived at the place of Jesus' birth. They had to have been so excited! But I wonder—were they a little nervous to approach the new parents and their Son? What ran through their minds as they rounded the corner and saw the surroundings of the One the angels said was “a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord,” lying in a manger?

Shepherds knew all about mangers. Any feeling of being out of place must have faded away as they gathered around and looked at this precious Child wrapped tightly in cloth and nestled in the hay of a food trough. Anyone planning this long-foretold birth would never have chosen to have this baby rest in a manger. A gilded crib perhaps—but not a manger. What does this show us about Jesus? About God?

Jesus left the glorious riches of Heaven for this humble start in our messy world. His humility was evident throughout His whole life. God knew the magnitude of who Jesus was, but He didn't want us to feel that we couldn't approach Him. While so much of who Jesus is transcends our understanding, we are drawn to Him and welcomed in just as the shepherds were. Can you imagine the shepherds' sense of awe? May we, too, feel that same awe as we pause at the manger.

Family Activity

Gather around a nativity set. Direct each person to select and remove someone found in the nativity, one at a time, ending with Joseph and then Mary, leaving only Jesus in the manger. As each is removed, have them tell of that person's part in the Christmas story. Pause and silently consider the manger scene. After a few moments, have each family member share what comes to their mind as they think of the Savior of the world lying in a manger.

Written By: Lori Franklin, Kids Director

“This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.

The shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’

They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger.”

Luke 2:12, 15–16 (CSB)

“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, and yet the world did not recognize Him.

He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:9-14 (CSB)

Pause and Welcome Him

The story of Jesus' birth reminds us of an almost heartbreaking detail: there was no room for Him. The King of kings entered the world in humility—not in a palace or even a warm home, but in a manger because no guest room was available. This scene is more than a historical fact; it's a spiritual picture for us today.

John tells us that when Jesus came, many did not receive Him. Yet to all who welcome Him, He gives the right to become children of God. The same invitation is open to us this Christmas—to receive Him, to believe in His name, and to make room for His presence in our hearts and homes.

As we move through the Christmas season, our schedules, hearts, and even our homes can become crowded. Shopping, decorating, gatherings, and responsibilities fill every space. But the most important part of Christmas is not the lights or the gifts—it's pausing to welcome Him in. When we make room, we discover that Christ fills us with peace that decorations cannot provide, joy that gifts cannot buy, and love that no celebration can match.

This Christmas, will you pause and welcome Him in?

Family Activity

Talk as a family about someone you can “welcome in” this week—perhaps a neighbor, friend, or someone who may be lonely at Christmas. Choose one simple act of hospitality to do together: write a card, bake cookies, or invite them to join you for a meal or activity. As you plan, connect this act of kindness to welcoming Christ into your lives. When we open our homes and hearts to others, we are also making room for Him.

Written By: Summer Sipes, Executive Director of NextGen Ministries

Pause to Embrace Emmanuel

Driving to Granny and Paw Paw's house each Christmas Eve was a highlight of my childhood. We gathered around the table for a big, yummy dinner and fellowship while my siblings and I attempted to "hurry" the food part and appear to obediently wait patiently. Oh, those presents sparkling under the tree's lights beckoned!

Those fond memories, though, are now just that—memories. Granny and Paw Paw now reside in Paradise with Jesus, so our gatherings haven't been the same for some years, especially as our own families have grown and the busyness of life invades. We have begun new traditions and look forward to starting more as the next generation is around the corner. But one thing remains constant—the presence of God.

The Father's gift of Emmanuel is precious. He shines brightly, beckoning us to rest in His peace, for He is a light that pierces through darkness and chaos to offer life. The nations may rage, the earth may crumble, and life may bring other hardships, but Psalm 46 reminds us, "The LORD of Armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold."

May you stop to rest in the presence of Emmanuel, Jesus, for He is with us.

Family Activity

Gather the family, dim the lights, and light a single candle (or turn on a string of lights). Talk briefly about how Jesus is "the light that pierces through darkness."

Then take turns sharing one way you've seen God's presence this Christmas season—maybe in a moment of joy, peace, or kindness.

End by saying together, "Emmanuel—God with us."

Written By: **Jeremy Mikeska**, Executive of Spiritual Formation Pastor

“Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated ‘God is with us’.”

Matthew 1:22-23 (CSB)

December 25

“And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, ‘Be still, since today is holy. Don’t grieve.’ Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them.”

Nehemiah 8:11–12 (CSB)

Pause and Celebrate

We tend to think of pausing as a cessation of activity only. While stillness can be biblical and good, the Scriptures describe a more fulsome concept of pausing—one that includes rejoicing. In Nehemiah 8, the people of Israel experienced the Word of God. Deeply moved by the encounter, they began to weep in understandable conviction. But notice how God’s servants led them to pause instead. They said, “Be still.” Then, notice what the people did in response—their pause led directly into a massive celebration!

At Christmas, we celebrate the ultimate expression of God’s Word—Jesus. We have encountered Him, and in Jesus, God’s love becomes understandable to us. God Himself came to Bethlehem, and He is coming back to receive all who trust Him. His holiness, love, and sacrifice should not cause us dismay. We should instead be still and think for a moment about the awesome gift of the Word of God—and then celebrate that!

Family Activity

After you unwrap presents, set aside some used wrapping paper. Give each person a roughly 6” by 6” square. Give a pen to those who can write (those not able can dictate to an adult), and each person should write down one thing they understand about Jesus. Read them all, and then shake the paper while you shout together, “Merry Christmas!”

Written By: Dr. Wayne Braudrick, Lead Pastor

Advent 2025

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for walking with us through this Advent season. Thank You for every moment we've been able to pause to slow down, breathe, and remember who You are. You came near to us, not just in Bethlehem long ago, but in our lives today.

As we move beyond these pages, help us keep pausing with You—

to worship in the ordinary,

to notice Your goodness in small, everyday moments,

and to share Your love freely with others.

Fill our homes with joy, our hearts with peace, and our lives with gratitude for the gift of Your presence.

You are the reason we rejoice, today and always.

Amen.

"Be still, and know that I am God."

— Psalm 46:10

Merry Christmas





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