

On the Way to Bethlehem



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***Advent Devotions for
November 29 - December 25, 2020***

On the Way to Bethlehem

Advent is a journey!

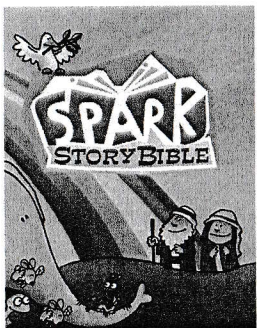
Some journeys involve sitting back, relaxing and watching the world go by. Advent isn't a journey like this. Advent is the kind of a journey that bids us to become active participants, walking and talking with everyone and everything we encounter along the way. Being active helps us better prepare for what we will discover at the end of this road we are travelling together.

Some journeys don't seem to have a destination in mind, but are merely opportunities to go wandering. Advent isn't like that either. Advent is a journey that from the very day we begin is leading us to Bethlehem where we will meet the Christ child. We may wander off the road from time to time, exploring unexpected discoveries along the way, but no matter where we wander we come back to the road that leads us to Bethlehem.

One way we can be active on our Advent journey is to set aside time every day to reflect on the stories found in scripture that lead us toward Bethlehem, to consider how God is preparing us to hear the Good News, and to offer our prayers of thanksgiving and adoration to God. If you have not done daily devotions before, Advent is a perfect season to begin this spiritual discipline. This booklet has been written to accompany you on a devotional journey; it will serve as your guidebook to Bethlehem.

As you go through these devotions you will find yourself walking with the prophets, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi. Each of them will accompany us on our way to Bethlehem, sharing their experiences of God's promises, their experience of hope realized, and the fulness of God's love for us all. Find a quiet time to set apart each day to meet each of them along your way.

If you would like to add additional songs, stories, family activities, recipes and crafts to expand your Advent journey visit www.cnob.org and click on the weekly **Advent Living Room**. Each Sunday of Advent these weekly devotions will be uploaded to our room, along with new activities for you to experience. Click on the objects found in the room and enjoy your Advent journey.



For younger children hearing bible stories read aloud directly from scripture can be challenging. Hearing these same stories read aloud from an excellent children's bible storybook can make them come alive and become far more memorable for young children. For this reason, this devotional booklet also includes options for families with younger children to read one or more of the stories each week from the *Spark Story Bible*. Families may choose to only use of these *Spark Story Bible* readings each week, or blend the Spark stories along with the weekly readings from scripture. Each family will know best what will work for them.

Many of our Presbyterian churches already make use of the *Spark Story Bible* alongside their use of *Spark* curriculum in their Sunday schools. This story bible, published by Sparkhouse, reveals the great, awe-inspiring stories of God through wonderfully expressive images and age appropriate language for our children.

Your church may already have a copy of this story bible in the church library, and/or extra copies to loan out from the Sunday School. Just ask your church if this is possible.

If you would like to purchase a Spark Story Bible for your family to read throughout the year, you can purchase a copy from Amazon, Chapters/Indigo or Parasource.

ADVENT IS A TIME TO WONDER

When we approach scripture with awe and wonder we open ourselves to see and hear what God is revealing to us anew each day.

This Advent, as we experience the prophets who heard God's clear voice promising the world a king who would change everything, yet not arrive for hundreds of years, we wonder how this revelation changed God's people in the here and now. As we reflect on the praises Mary lifts in song to God, knowing her life was being turned upside down, we find ourselves in awe of her willingness to say yes to God. As we walk with the shepherds who've just seen a night sky filled with angels and the Magi who trusted a star's guiding light, we look for our own experiences of the unexpected that transform our lives forever. And, as we come close to the manger and lift our heads over the edge of this feeding trough we gaze with delight and wonder at the greatest gift of all. A gift given in love, encompassing all of God's tremendous promises to us, and leading us to reflect anew with wonder each day.

As you engage with these devotions each day, spend time in awe and wonder. Ask wondering questions and quietly contemplate the answers you discover. Allow these questions to continue throughout the day and evening, and return to them again and again throughout all of Advent. You may wish to think about questions such as these:

- I wonder how the prophets knew that they had heard God's voice?
- I wonder who the prophets are who hear God's voice today?
- I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt when they heard that the prophets words would be coming true in their lives?
- I wonder what the shepherds were feeling as the sky exploded with the voices of angels singing?
- I wonder what the Magi said to each other as they travelled for weeks following a star?
- I wonder what each of these people were feeling as they travelled to Bethlehem?
- I wonder what each felt as they gazed on Jesus and worshipped?

LIGHT, GLORIOUS LIGHT

Advent 1: November 29 - December 5, 2020

The prophet Isaiah brings a message of hope more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus. God promises, through the words of the prophets, that we will emerge from a land of deep darkness, and enter into a new world filled with the light. They tell us that all of this will happen when a child is born, a child whose kingdom will usher in endless peace forevermore.

Light the first Advent candle if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.

Responsive Advent Prayer

L: Wake up sleepy Christians.

R: **The night is over and the dawn is about to happen.**

L: Be up and awake,

R: **To see what God is doing.**

L: We can't waste a minute,

R: **We must be up and about. Amen.**

(based on Rom. 13:11-14)

Scripture readings for each day of the week

Sunday	Genesis 1:1-4
Monday	Isaiah 9:2-7
Tuesday	Micah 5:2-4
Wednesday	Isaiah 2:2-5
Thursday	Isaiah 7:10-17
Friday	Isaiah 11:1-9
Saturday	John 1:1-5

Spark Story Bible (read through the week)

'God Will Bring Peace', p. 164-165

'A Child Called Immanuel', p. 168-171

'God's Peaceful World', p. 172-175

'A Ruler from Bethlehem', p. 194-195

Closing Prayer

God, our hope, we watch and wait for you. Wake us up to see the signs of your coming glory. Amen.

MARY AND JOSEPH

Advent 2: December 6 - December 12, 2020

Mary was just a young girl, entrusted with so much. With Joseph she embarked this long journey to Bethlehem, pregnant, tired, and wondering what God was preparing for her, Joseph and especially her son. Joseph, whose world was turned upside down when Mary shared her story of the angel with him, chose to walk this road with Mary, to love her and care for their child.

Light the first and second Advent candles if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.

Responsive Advent Prayer

L: Oh God, we've only just begun to wait,

R: **To wait for the birth of your Son.**

L: And the way feels long

R: **with many obstacles along the way.**

L: Like Mary and Joseph

R: **We place our trust in you. Amen.**

Scripture readings for each day of the week

Sunday	Matthew 1:1-17
Monday	Luke 1:26-38
Tuesday	Luke 1:39-45
Wednesday	Luke 1:46-55
Thursday	Matthew 1:18-21
Friday	Matthew 1:22-25
Saturday	Galatians 4:4-7

Spark Story Bible (read through the week)

'Angels Visit', p. 196-201

'Mary Visits Elizabeth', p. 202-207

Closing Prayer

God, you have a plan for our lives, calling us out of the ordinary and into the extraordinary. Like Mary and Joseph, may we hear you when you call. Amen.

THE SHEPHERDS

Advent 3: December 13 - December 19, 2020

This week we meet a group of shepherds, hard working people who spent their lives in the hills outside of the towns and villages caring for the safety and well-being of their flocks.

Scripture is filled with stories of shepherds and sheep. God is frequently known as the good shepherd, and God's flock are loved and cared for above all else. How telling that we meet this band of exuberant shepherds praising along our way.

Light three of the four Advent candles if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.

Advent Prayer

God who sent the angels to the shepherds, in the presence of your glory may we not be afraid, but go with courage to see all that you show us today. Amen.

Scripture readings for each day of the week

Sunday	Luke 2:8-11
Monday	Luke 2:12-14
Tuesday	Luke 2:15-16
Wednesday	Luke 2:17-20
Thursday	Psalms 23
Friday	John 10:11-15
Saturday	Isaiah 40:10-11

Spark Story Bible (read through the week)

'Jesus Is Born', p. 214-215. Do not begin this story on p. 212. Read only p. 214-215. We'll read the rest of this story at Christmas. 'The Lord Is My Shepherd' p. 160-163

Closing Prayer

We sing with the angels, O God. Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favours. Amen.

THE MAGI

Advent 4: December 20 - 23, 2020

The Magi, also known as the wise men, had the longest journey of all to get to Bethlehem. They came from the East, likely all the way from Persia, and would have travelled for weeks and months before they could kneel at the feet of Jesus and offer their precious gifts.

Our theme of light overcoming the darkness is repeated this week, as a bright star serves as the guiding light for the Magi. Once the star stopped over the place where Jesus was to be found, the Magi presented precious gifts to Mary and Joseph that would give honour to a king as well as sustain this young family in the challenging years ahead.

Light all four Advent Candles if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.

Responsive Advent Prayer

L: We're getting close to Bethlehem, Lord.

R: We're almost there.

L: Reveal to us this child

R: that has been born to us,

L: for we have seen his star

R: and have come to worship him. Amen.

Scripture readings for each day of the week

Sunday	Matthew 2:1-6
Monday	Matthew 2:7-10
Tuesday	Matthew 2:11-12
Wednesday	Matthew 2:13-14

Spark Story Bible (read through the week)

'Wise Men', p. 218-221

'Wise Men', p. 222-223

Prayer

God of wonder and light, you revealed your marvellous love to the Magi with a star. Reveal to us your love and direction. Amen.

IN BETHLEHEM WE MEET JESUS

Christmas Eve & Christmas Day: December 24 & 25, 2020

Our journey is now complete. We've arrived in Bethlehem.

Come and greet the baby; Immanuel, God with us. Hear the story of the birth of Jesus with open ears and new eyes today. Come and join Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi at the manger. Come and bow down and worship Jesus.

Stay as long as you wish, but then complete your journey just as the shepherds did; go from Bethlehem, rejoicing and telling everyone of the amazing things you have heard and seen this day.

Light the centre Christ Candle if you have an Advent wreath, or light any candle as a reminder that Christ is always with us.

A Christmas Prayer

O Lord, even as the shepherds set out to see this thing which had come to pass, may we too kneel before you on this day of celebration and praise. Amen.

Scripture Readings for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Thursday	Luke 2:1-7
Friday	Isaiah 9:6-7

Spark Story Bible

'Jesus Is Born', p. 212-217

Closing Blessing

Giver of all good gifts, Long ago you promised that we would leave a world of darkness and enter into your glorious light. Today we have experienced this light, the light of your Son. There is no greater gift than this. Today, with all of the angels we sing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, good will among people. Amen."

written by Tori Smit

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