

My Family Devotion Book

Advent and Christmas 2023

HOPE

PEACE



JOY

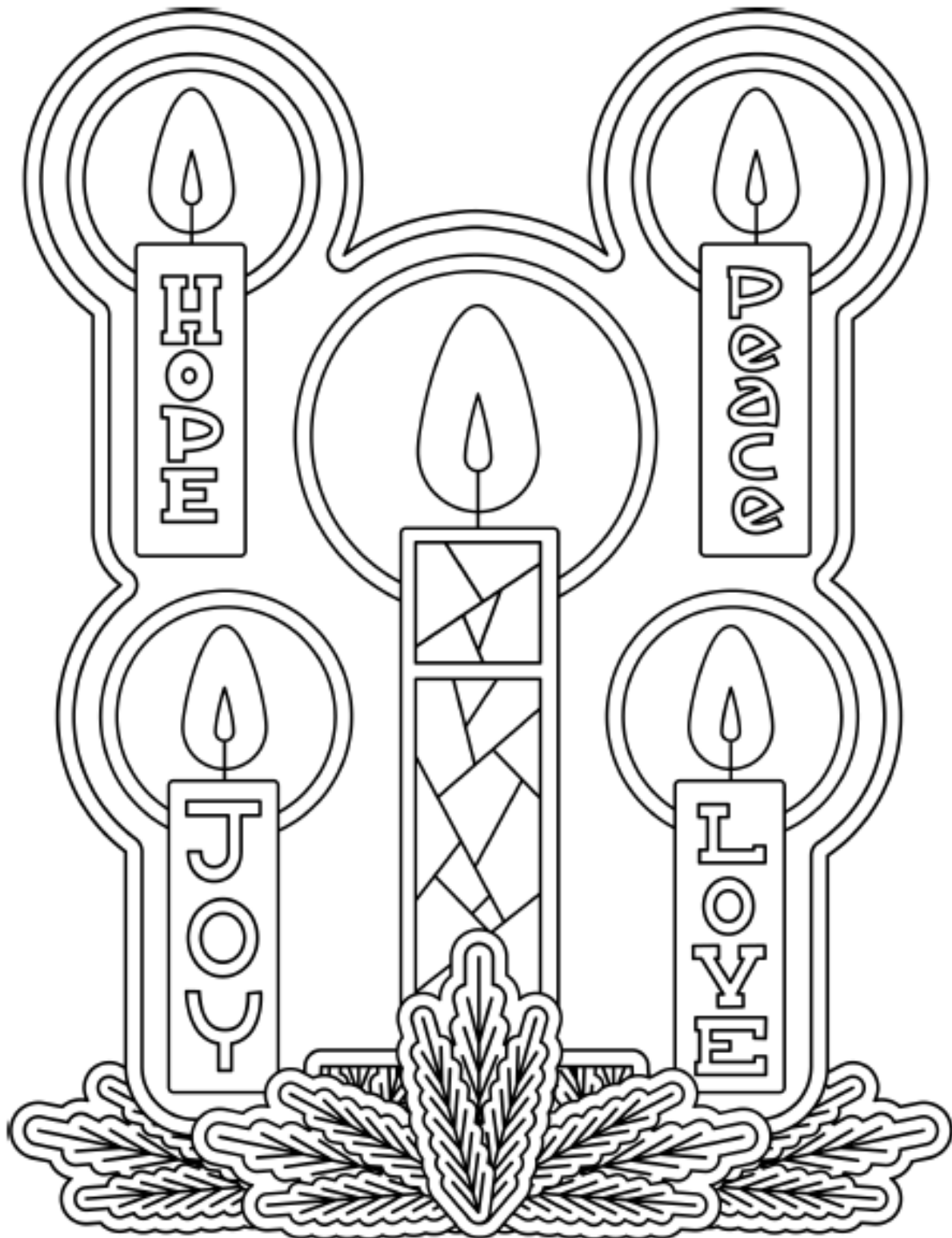
LOVE

Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! -Isaiah 2:5.

Seek the light of Christ with us from Advent to Epiphany
with this devotional booklet for the whole family!



St. Paul's United Methodist Church
5501 Main Street, Houston, TX 77004
stpaulshouston.org



A SEASON TO CELEBRATE

ADVENT

- the beginning of the new church year
- begins the 4th Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve
- means "coming" and is a time of waiting and anticipation
- a time to prepare our hearts and homes for the celebration of Jesus' birth, and for the coming of God's will for our world
- a time for singing, praying, reading scripture and doing acts of kindness



CHRISTMAS

- a church season that lasts for 12 days, beginning December 25
- a time to make visits, offer gifts, do acts of kindness, read the Bible, pray, sing and celebrate
- ends with the Epiphany of the Lord on January 6 when we celebrate the visit of the wise men to the Christ child.



USING THIS BOOKLET

This booklet encourages families to spend time together each day drawing closer to God and reflecting on the true meaning of Christmas - Christ coming into the world and into our hearts. Lighting Advent candles, using an Advent calendar or paper chain, making a Jesse tree, setting up a nativity scene for children to arrange and re-arrange, and attending Sunday School and worship every week are easy ways to keep Christ at the center of our Christmas celebration.



Gather your materials: An Advent wreath or candle set and a Bible are the main supplies you'll need for this devotional. Some of the activities require art supplies, extra time, or additional supplies, so it will be helpful to read ahead. Please adapt the contents of this book for the ages and interests of your family members.

The scripture readings in this booklet follow the Revised Common Lectionary for Year B, which begins in Advent. Christians all over the world will be reading these same verses with you each week, and you'll hear them in worship and Sunday School. We used the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. This is the translation we read in church and selected for our 3rd Grade Bibles.

Thank you to the children of St. Paul's for the illustrations!
Peace, joy and love to each of you!

♥ *Pastor Kate*

Contact us!

kflint@stpaulshouston.org

<https://www.stpaulshouston.org/childrens-ministry>

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Advent Wreath - A simple wreath can be made for your home. The circle of greenery symbolizes everlasting life. In church, the four candles are the liturgical colors of deep blue or purple, but you can use any color at home. Adding a candle each week and then lighting Christ candle on Christmas Eve symbolizes the light of Christ coming out of the darkness. The Christ candle can be used throughout Christmastide and on Epiphany, January 6.



Jesse Tree - Start with a small, potted tree or a banner with a felt tree. Ornaments can be made from any craft material to represent people of faith who lived before Jesus was born and waited for the first "coming." For example, clay tablets might symbolize Moses or grains of wheat for Ruth. Everyone can brainstorm and make symbols for their favorite Bible stories.

Nativity Scene - St. Francis of Assisi is credited with the idea of a live nativity in 1223. A nativity scene which can be handled safely by young children is a wonderful way to draw them into the drama of the Christmas story. Use it as you read or tell the nativity story; let children tell the story to you and each other, or encourage them to imagine what the first Christmas might have been like.



Follow the Star - Use the star and magi from your Nativity set to journey all over your home during Advent. Designate a family member to move the star each night, and in the morning, help the magi search for it. Gradually move closer to the discovery of Baby Jesus on Epiphany.

Advent Calendar - Calendars that count down each day of December until Christmas Eve, are available in lots of styles this time of year. They are a fun way to keep track of the time before Christmas. Your family can design and make your own calendar (or a paper chain with 24 links) with a picture and Bible verse for each day.

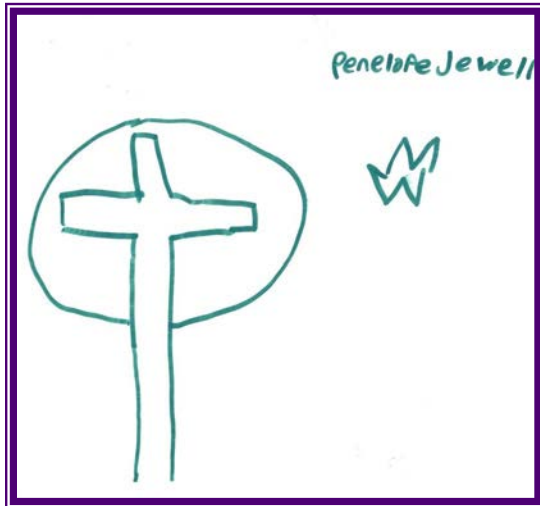


Twelve Days of Christmas - Many celebrate Christmas during the church season of Christmastide, the 12 days between Christmas and Epiphany. Some families hide tiny gifts to be found and opened each day. Twelve small gifts with a number on each package can be tied to the Christmas tree or left beneath it. On Epiphany, you can enjoy a king's cake as you read about the wise men visiting Jesus.



Advent Devotionals for All Ages - As a gift to your family, the Faith Formation department has a devotional book for youth and grown-ups, and some suggested activities to bring meaning to this season. Pick one up for yourself in addition to this one for your children! Carve out a little quiet time amidst the busyness of each day.

Happy Birthday Jesus! - Throw a birthday party for Jesus during the holiday season. Celebrate with birthday cake and other party activities. What do you give Jesus for his birthday? Jesus told us that whatever you do for someone else, especially someone who needs help, you do for him! (Matt 25:40) Collect toys, warm clothes, blankets, or food and donate them. Or bring them to the Children's Candlelight Service, and lay them at the altar as a gift for Baby Jesus!





First Sunday of Advent



Light the first blue candle on your wreath and thank God for HOPE.

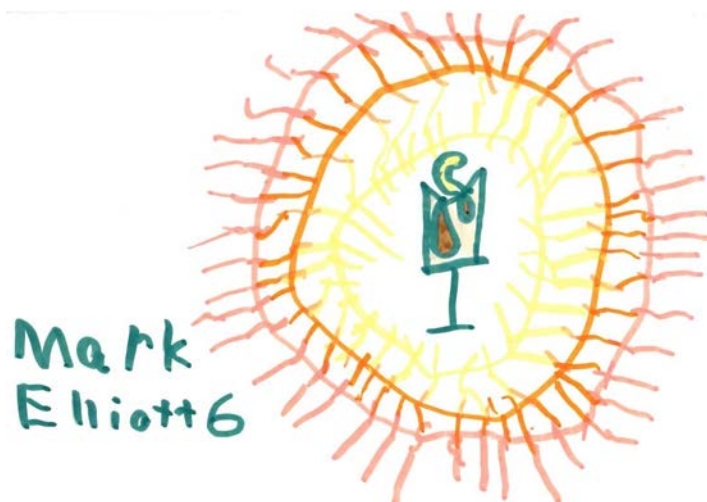
Dec. 3 1st Sunday of Advent

Attend a worship service and look for signs of the new church season: Advent candles, blue paraments (cloths on the altar) and pastors' stoles, the Chrismon Tree, and an Advent banner. Sing and listen to special Advent music and Bible readings. At home, light one candle each day, the candle of HOPE.

Read Mark 13:37. *Jesus said, "What I say to you I say to all: Keep awake!"*

Long ago, people were waiting for God to send the promised Messiah, but they did not know when it would happen. They waited and watched and tried to live in God's ways. During Advent and Christmas, we can look for signs that God is with us. Keep awake... don't miss out on God's surprises!

"Dear God, as we wait for the coming of your Son, help us keep our eyes open and our hearts ready to recognize the gifts you give us every day. Amen."



Dec. 4 Monday

Light a candle and read Isaiah 64:1.3-5a. *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence— When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right. those who remember you in your ways.*



When this was written, God's people were feeling sad and discouraged because their home had been destroyed and it was going to take a lot of hard work to build back to the way things were. They knew that they needed God's help! From earlier stories about God, they knew that sometimes God shows up in a big way, all at once, like when the people were rescued in the book of Exodus. This verse talks about wanting God

to come down to Earth do something big that would change everything. And sure enough, God did come down to Earth and change everything! That's what we celebrate on Christmas!

Can you think of a way God has helped you or your family in the past? When we stop and think about how God is working in our lives, it helps us notice God in the big and the small moments.

Dec. 5 Tuesday

Read Isaiah 64:8.

O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

When working with clay, a potter needs to take their time and work gently. Little changes can make a big difference! Think about how you work when you build with clay or play dough, and how much you try to get the details just right.

The person who wrote this Bible verse (which comes right after the one from yesterday) realized that God was working all the time to help God's people.

We can thank God for making us, and for always being there to support us whether we notice it right away or not. God is very creative, and made you to be creative, too! Can you build a Nativity scene with clay? Sculpt a clay pot or bowl? What is your favorite way to be creative?



Camilla, 10 1/2

Dec. 6 Wednesday

Read Isaiah 11:1-2.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.



Have you ever seen a small tree growing out of the stump of a tree that was cut down? What a surprise that is! Earlier in the Book of Isaiah, God warned the people that they would have to spend many years away from their homes and in a very sad situation. That was hard to believe, because God had promised them a forever king who would come from King David's family. (King David was the son of Jesse.) However, God gave them hope, too! Even when they thought their

story was over, something new began to grow. Soon we'll celebrate the birthday of a new baby from King David and Jesse's family tree, who will be a special kind of king forever! This forever king would be wise and powerful and would show us how to follow God with all our hearts!

Dec. 7 Thursday

Read 1 Corinthians 1:3-7.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus.

These verses are from the beginning of a letter that Paul wrote to his church friends in Corinth. He was happy that God made them part of his life, and wanted them to know that they were important to him.

How do you greet someone you care about? In church we use some of the same traditions the early Christians did. Give a hug, high five, or handshake and say, "The peace of the Lord be with you," and respond "And also with you!"

Write some letters or Christmas cards to send greetings to people you love.



Adrian
8 years old

Dec. 8 Friday

Read 1 Corinthians 1:8-9.

He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

When you are having a hard time, what makes things easier? Often, another person working with you can help! God teaches us to help each other. In Paul's letter, he tells his Corinthian friends that God will give them strength, so that they can keep helping others and doing kind things as Jesus taught. We are a part of a big family (or fellowship) of all the people who love God— the Church! It's great to know there are people we can work together with, even when life feels tough. Look for ways to be a helper today, and make someone feel better.



Dec. 9 Saturday

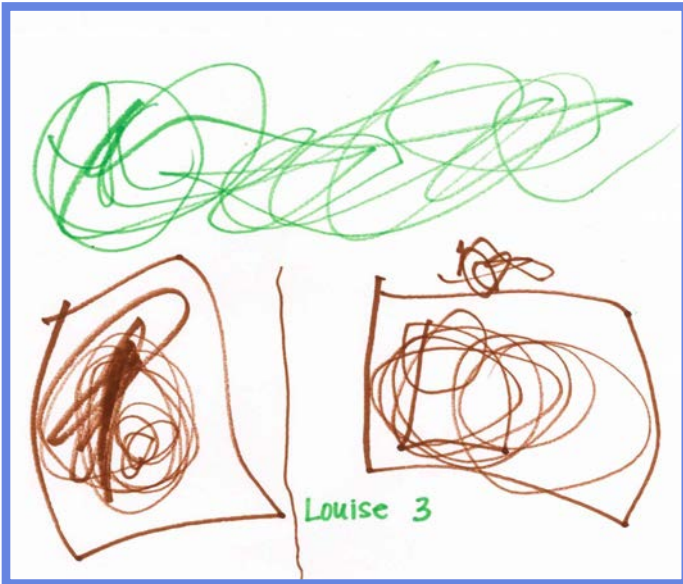
Turn off all the house lights and light one candle while you read Isaiah 2:5.

Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

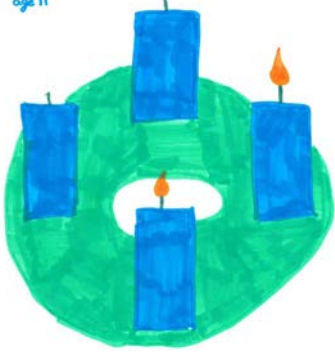
The light reminds us that Jesus came to the world to bring light and hope for all people. The hours of darkness are longer during autumn and winter. What a wonderful season to celebrate the coming of God's light into the world! Take a walk around your darkened house using a flashlight to guide you.

How does having a light make things easier? What do you think it means to follow the Lord's light?





Catherine
age 11



Second Sunday of Advent

Janilen 10
PEACE

Light two candles and pray for PEACE.



Dec. 10 2nd Sunday of Advent

Read Isaiah 40:3-5. *A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

The prophet Isaiah had a message from God to God's people— someone is coming who will be a fair and kind ruler. The ruler who is coming with smooth things out, like a flat road instead of a bunch of ups and downs. Things that feel wrong will be made right! For example, it feels wrong when some people have too much food and some people don't have any. It would feel better if everyone had enough.

We are invited to help! What is something you have plenty of that you could share with someone else?



Dec. 11 Monday

Read Mark 1:1-8. *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me... I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*



Hundreds of years after Isaiah's prophecy, these words came up again! This time, the prophet was Jesus' cousin John. John was a well-known preacher to taught many people to get ready for Jesus by saying they were sorry when they did bad things, and changing their hearts and lives so they could make better choices (repentance.) Being ready to change and do better is an important part of following Jesus! The water of the river that John used was a reminder that people can be "washed clean" of bad things and get a second chance.



Our baptism now is a little different from the one John was doing back then. When we are baptized in the name of God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), we get a special blessing that reminds us that God loves us and we are part of God's family forever. Our church and family promise to help us grow up to know God's way. The Holy Spirit is with all of us in baptism— that's how we feel God's love in our hearts.



Dec. 12 Tuesday

Read Isaiah 40:1. *Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.*

Share a time when you were hurt, sick or afraid, and how it felt to be comforted by someone who cares for you.

God spoke to people through the prophets often to comfort them and make sure they knew God was with them.

If you know a person who needs comforting, make them a card or gift, or plan a special way to show you care. Say a prayer for them.

Dec. 13 Wednesday

Read Isaiah 11:6, 9

The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.



Isaiah shared a vision of the world the way God wants it, where there are no enemies or fighting. These verses give examples of animals we would expect to be natural enemies, or predator and prey. We know that wolves, leopards, and lions are predators. In a peaceful world, even lambs, kids (baby goats), and calves would not be in danger around these big animals. Usually, we would not expect a child to be able to lead or control fierce animals, but in this world, the child has nothing to be afraid of.

We can learn to be peacemakers to help our world become more like what God wants for us. Instead of fighting, or picking on someone less strong than ourselves, we can choose to be kind and helpful.

Make up a story about a big, powerful animal who chooses to help smaller animals. What might be different in that world?

Dec. 14 Thursday

Read Isaiah 40:11. *He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.*

The image of the shepherd is important in the Bible. When we talk about God being like a good shepherd, we remember how loving and caring God is.

God does not want us to be lost or lonely. Instead, the Bible says God wants to take care of us. We see this comparison in the Old Testament with verses like this from Isaiah, or in songs and poetry like the 23rd Psalm.

Make a sheep and shepherd picture or an ornament for your tree that reminds you of these verses.



Dec. 15 Friday

Read Psalm 85:8.

*Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful,
to those who turn to him in their hearts.*

Close your eyes and think about what you can hear. Is it different indoors compared to outdoors? At different times of day? Hearing God's voice isn't the same as hearing sounds like passing cars or your friends talking. Usually, we hear God's voice as a feeling in our hearts.

In the New Testament, we hear Jesus talk about being like a shepherd, too. He told us that when we know the voice of our shepherd, we can follow him better. We learn to recognize God's voice when we spend more time praying, worshipping, reading the Bible, and learning about God. What do you feel when you sing your favorite church songs? What do you feel when you make a good choice instead of a bad one? We hear God speak to us in lots of ways if we listen!

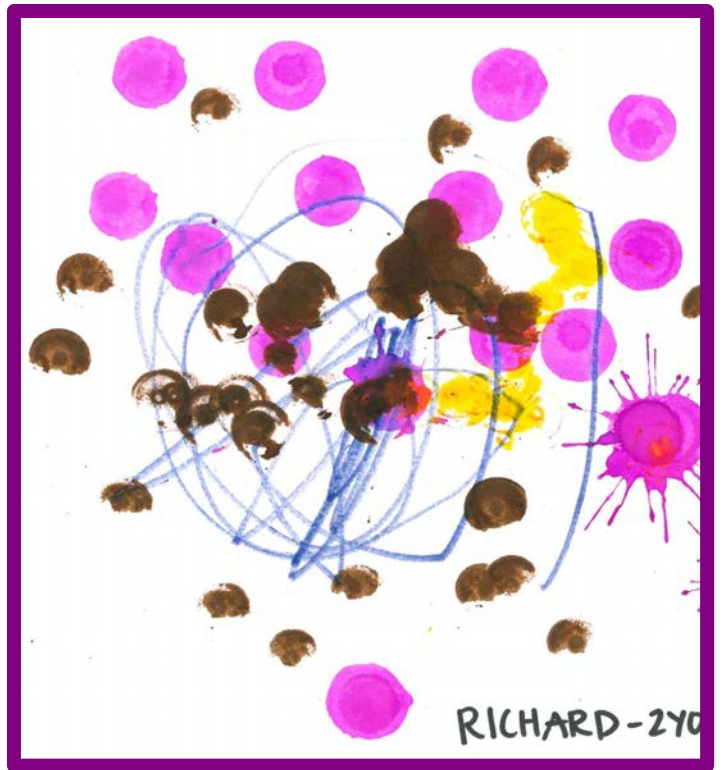


Dec. 16 Saturday

Read 2 Peter 3:8-9,14. *With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, but is patient with you. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace.*

It seems like Christmas Day takes a long time to come, but there are so many things to enjoy while getting ready. Bake some bread or cookies, make decorations for your home, enjoy working a puzzle or think about an act of kindness you can do for someone else. Practice patience!







Third Sunday of Advent



Light three candles and praise God with JOY!

Dec. 17 3rd Sunday of Advent

Read John 1:6-8. *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.*

Remember reading about John the Baptist last week? He was called a messenger, a prophet, and a witness—someone who shares God's word with others. Reading about John helps us remember to "prepare the way" for Jesus to enter our hearts at Christmas.

Share some food, toys, clothing or money with people in need. Look in your room for useful things you no longer need. Giving is one way to share God's light and love in the world!



Dec. 18 Monday

Read I Thessalonians 5:16-18 *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

This doesn't mean we never get sad. But it does mean that even when we are sad, we can think of something that brings us joy! We can be joyful because Jesus loves us, because of the beautiful world God made, or because we have many things to be thankful for! Make a list of things that bring you joy on colorful pieces of wrapping paper and create a chain or other decoration for your home!



Dec. 19 Tuesday

Read Isaiah 61:1 and 11.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners....

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

The coming Messiah was very good news for God's people, especially those who were in hard situation and needed to hear something joyful!

Right now our gardens aren't growing very much because it's almost winter. Soon, however, new plants will spring up from the ground and grow! God wanted the people to know that even if they were captured or had broken hearts or were treated unfairly, good changes were coming. New beginnings would start to grow!

When Jesus grew up, he read these verses from Isaiah to his family and friends. He wanted them to know the good news that he was here to bring!



9
E+411

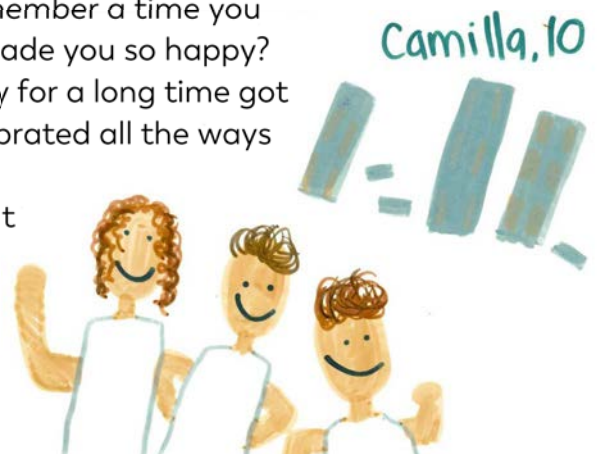
Dec. 20 Wednesday

Read Psalm 126: 1-3.

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Think of some other words for "rejoice." Remember a time you felt like shouting for joy. What was it that made you so happy? When God's people who were lost and lonely for a long time got to come back to Jerusalem (Zion), they celebrated all the ways that God had helped them.

Sing "Joy to the World!" or another song that reminds you of how God brings us joy. Pray together, "Lord Jesus, come and fill our hearts with your joy and love. Amen." |



Dec. 21 Thursday

Read Luke 1: 26-38. *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to Mary who was engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*



Mary might have been frightened by a visit from an angel, but she loved and trusted God. Mary called herself a 'servant of the Lord' and wanted to follow God's plan. Think of some ways you and your family can serve God.

Today is the first day of winter, the shortest day and longest night of the year. Take an Advent walk or drive around the neighborhood to enjoy the lights and decorations. Christmas lights remind us that God sent Jesus, a little baby born to Mary, to be a light for the whole world.



9
Ethan



Dec. 22 Friday

Mary wanted to share her surprising news with her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were also expecting a baby, and he would grow up to be John the Baptist. Mary was so full of joy that she sang a song. You can read Mary's words in Luke 1: 46-55.

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Mary and Elizabeth celebrated what God was doing for them, and then Mary sang about how God had blessed their family long ago. How has God done something special for your ancestors? If you can, call one of your older relatives and ask about special family stories. Share about what joyful things are going on in your family right now.



Dec. 23 Saturday

Read Luke 2: 1-5. *In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.*

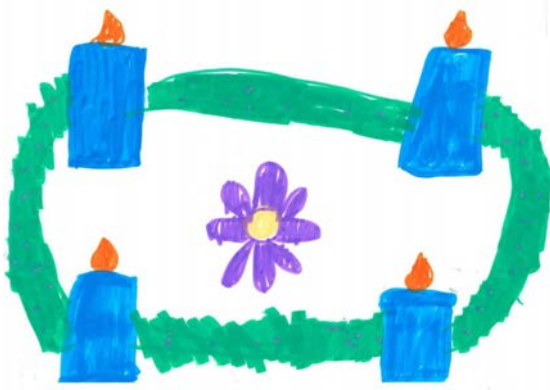
Look on a map to see how far Mary and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. What stories can you remember about David, the shepherd boy who became a great king?

God promised that David's kingdom would last forever. Joseph was from David's family, and so the promise to David was kept with the birth of Jesus.

"Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to our world to bring your love and peace to us. Amen."



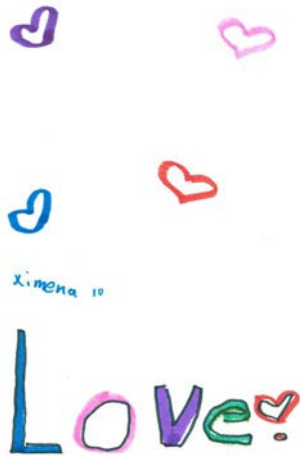




FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Light four candles and remember God's LOVE!



Dec. 24 4th Sunday of Advent

This is the 4th Sunday of Advent, and it's also Christmas Eve so it's extra exciting and busy! Spend a few quiet moments feeling peaceful before the big celebrations begin.

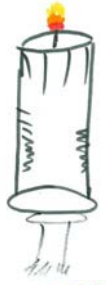






Catherine
age 11

CHRISTMAS EVE



Wiley
Age 9

On Christmas Eve, we light all the blue Advent candles and the large white Christ candle to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World! Read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2: 6-20.

While they were there in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



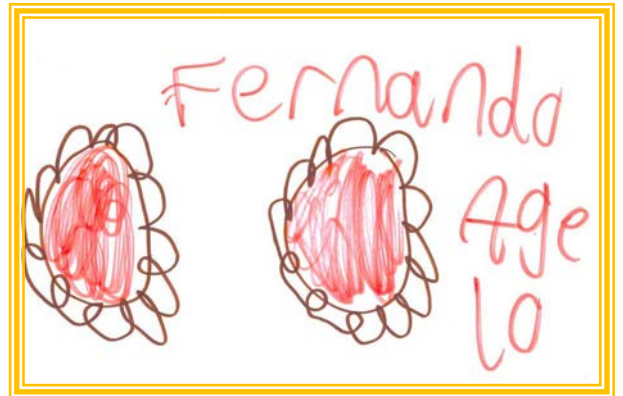
Andrea.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Ellen
9





CHRISTMAS DAY

Merry Christmas!

Today is just the beginning of the 12 days of Christmas!
Light your Christ candle every day.

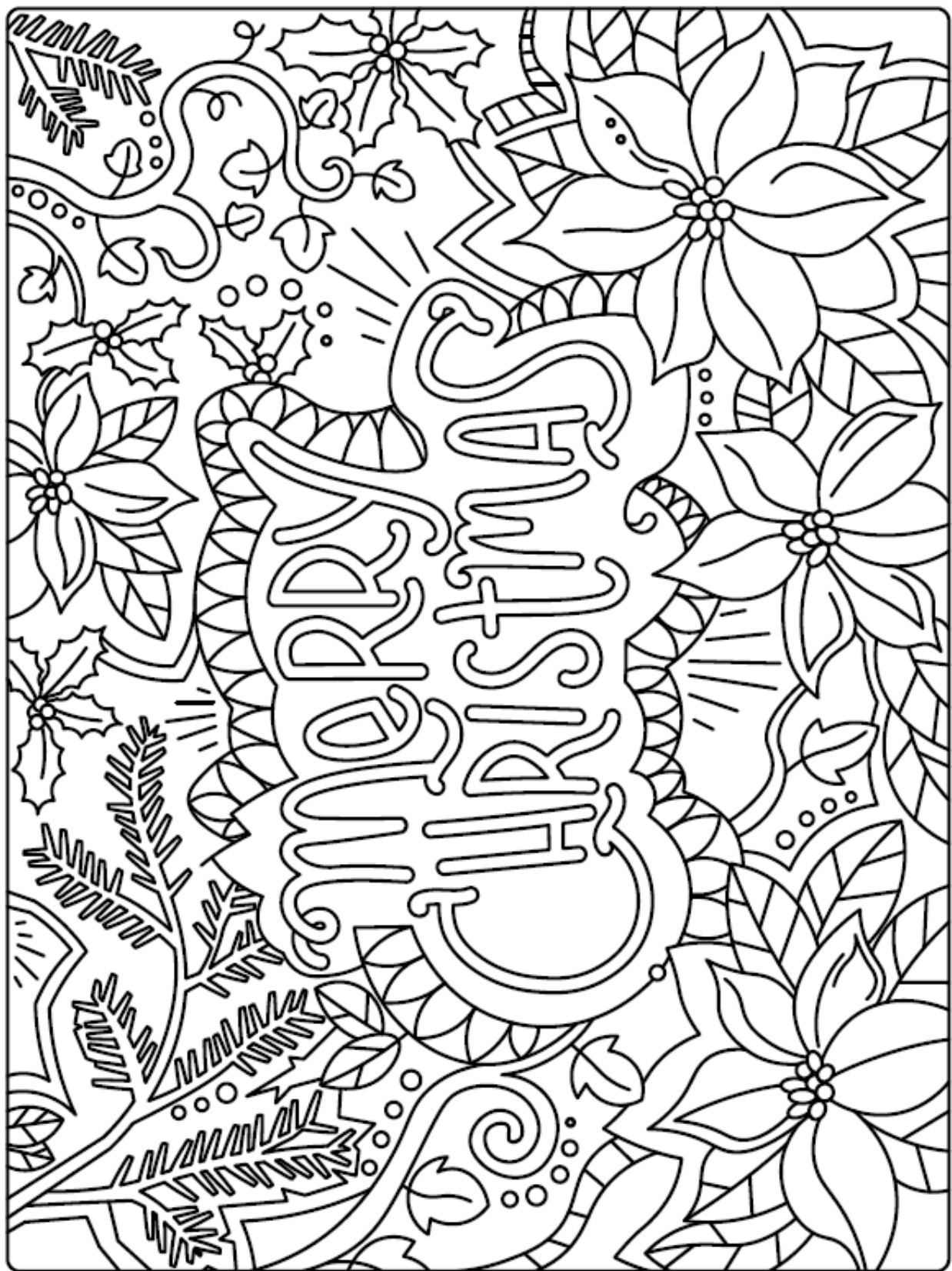


Read John 1:1-5, 12-14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Sing "Away in a Manger" and "Joy to the World." How do you think Jesus was just like other newborn babies? How do you think he was different? Thank God for all the blessings you have received throughout Advent and on this holy day.







Dec. 26 Tuesday

Read Psalm 98:1a, 4-6.



*O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things.
Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.*
Do something noisy today - play Christmas carols,
sing loudly, jingle some bells!
Read a heart-warming story or legend from a
favorite Christmas book.



Dec. 27 Wednesday

Read Isaiah 9:2b, 6-7. *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

A good and fair leader can make a big difference! Isaiah the prophet told the people that a new type of king was coming who would be fair, kind, strong, and peaceful. He would fix things that are going wrong, and help people see the right things to do. Even better, instead of being king for just a little while, he would be the forever king!

What is easier: picking out your clothes and getting dressed in the dark or with the lights on? God's people felt like they had been walking in the dark without a good leader to show them the right way. A king who followed God, especially a forever king like Jesus, made it much easier to understand how to live in God's way. It was like going from darkness to light!





Dec. 28 Thursday

Read 2 Samuel 7:11b-14a, 16

Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you... and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.... Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."



This promise that God made to King David was a very important message for God's people. This is why they expected a forever king to be a part of David's family, and why it matters that Jesus was born in David's family ("house") and his hometown of Bethlehem.

God's promise to David was kept when Jesus became our forever king, and we remember that God was faithful. What promises matter to your family? Why is it so important to keep our promises?



Dec. 29 Friday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1. *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.*

Your family has been busy during Advent and Christmas. Choose some ways to help with the family's work around the house. Then enjoy the extra time you can spend together after the work is done, celebrating the last days of 2023.

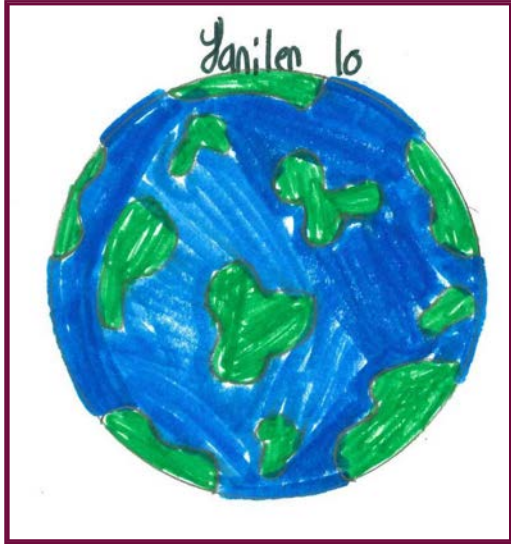
Dec. 30 Saturday

Read Revelation 21:6a. *"I am the Alpha and the Omega; the beginning and the end."*

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. We spend most of our time thinking about things that are happening right now, but it is comforting to know that God is here for all time.

Share some of your favorite experiences from your celebration of Advent and Christmas. Say thank you to your family and friends for the gifts you are enjoying today. Give thanks to God for the greatest gift of all, the gift of Jesus.





EPIPHANY SUNDAY (Observed)

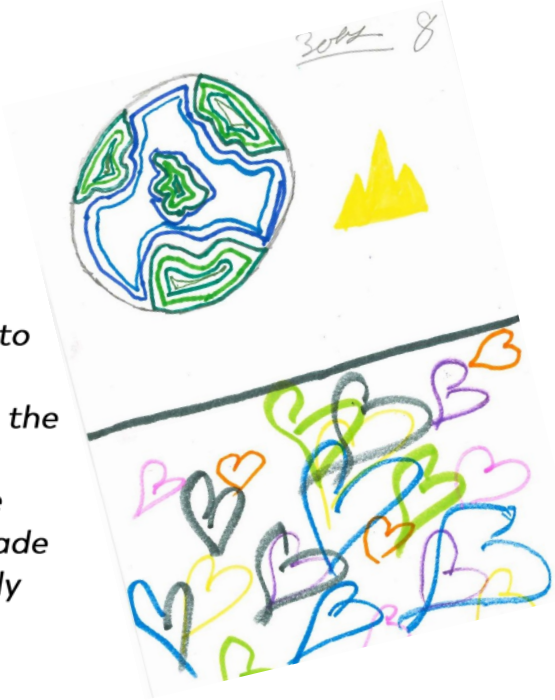
Celebrate with crowns, candles, and Kings' Cake!
Keep lighting the Christ Candle this week as we continue
to celebrate Christmas!

Dec. 31 1st Sunday after Christmas

Read Ephesians 3: 7-11

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

"Dear God, as this year is coming to a close and a new year approaches, guide us in your paths and lead us in your ways by the light of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen."







Catherine
Age 11

New Year's Day

Happy New Year!



Jan. 1 | Monday

Read Psalm 8.

O LORD, our Sovereign,

how majestic is your name in all earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars that you have established;

what are human beings that you are mindful of them,

mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,

and crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under their feet,

all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,

whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Take a nature walk and look for wonderful things that make you feel thankful to God. Begin the new year by praying the Lord's Prayer together.



Jan. 2 Tuesday

Read in Luke 2:22-40 about Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to the temple for the first time. Simeon and Anna knew immediately that Jesus was God's special child, with a special job to do.

Joseph and Mary brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord)... Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do what was customary under the law, Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

There was also a prophet, Anna, a widow of the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Look at pictures of yourself as a baby. Hear a story about how much your family loved you when you were a newborn, and how you have grown to become even more special to them.



Jan 3 Wednesday

Read Hebrews 1:1-4. *Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.*

Every single person you meet was created in the image of God in some way. When you see other people, think about how they reflect something good! Look at your own reflection in a mirror. Are you loving, patient, creative, or strong? Or what other ways do you remind people of God?

Jesus was a very special image of God—because he actually IS God in the form of a human being! When people met Jesus, they were seeing God and learning what God was like. Even 2000 years later, when we listen to the words of Jesus, we are listening to the words of God.



Jan 4 Thursday

Read Psalm 72:11-12.

May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.

For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.

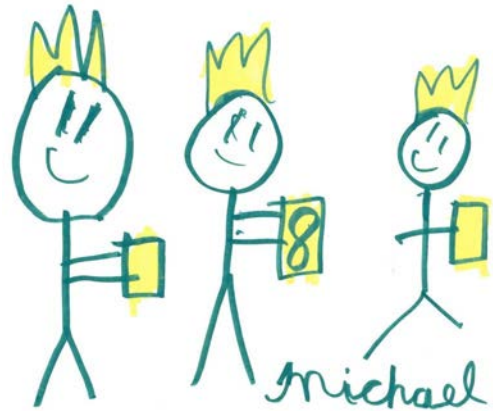
Look on a world map or globe and find the area where Jesus was born and grew up, called the Holy Land. Look how far away from the Holy Land we live. Isn't it amazing that the good news about Jesus spread to every part of the world?! No matter where we are from, or who we are, we can follow Jesus by showing kindness and helping other people.



Jan 5 Friday

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together



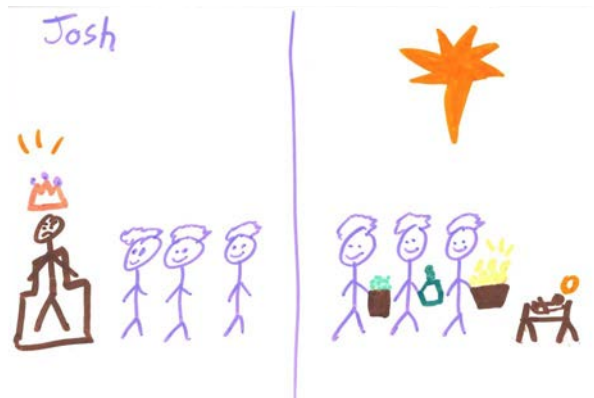
all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

January 5th "Twelfth Night", the last of the 12 days of Christmas. In some countries, children receive gifts from the Three Kings tonight.

Can you think of a free gift to offer to

your family? Make a crown or shiny stars to decorate your dinner table.

Sing "We Three Kings."



Dear Jesus,
YOU ARE HERE!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

We have been planning
and waiting for you.

HELP US REMEMBER

AND

Celebrate Your Love
for us.

AMEN



Epiphany of the Lord

Jan. 6 Saturday

Epiphany is an ancient celebration. It means "to show" and celebrates Christ coming into the world. Read Isaiah 60:1-3, 6a.

Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Try to be outdoors to see the sunrise or sunset, and look at the night sky before going to bed. Light a candle and think of the journey of the wise men to find the infant Jesus.

"Dear God, as you guided the wise men to the Christ Child by a star, guide us as we seek to follow in your paths. Bless our family as we grow together in faith and love. Amen."



