

Waiting in Wonder



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**Advent
Devotions
for Families**



Advent is a time of hopeful (and hopefully joyful) waiting. That may seem like an oxymoronic statement. How can we be joyful *and* hopeful in our waiting?

Waiting typically results in impatient foot tapping, the occasional eye roll, the quick scrolling through a phone to pass the time with random pings and bright lights from our addictive glowing screens.

But what if we waited with a sense of wonder and awe, embracing the unknown surprises of what's to come that we have to see for ourselves?

What if joy was found in the waiting, just like it's found in the morning, because the possibility of what comes next is on the horizon?

We know what Advent leads to—Christmas! But these days of waiting aren't meant to just be us skipping to the good part. These days can be filled with wonder and hope in God's promises and a joy that can only be experienced when we anticipate the surprises of the Lord.

Every day, we're going to pray together, think a little bit about what God has done, and will still do in our lives, all so we can get ready for Advent. Each day, we'll ponder together, pray together and then I'll suggest an activity or offer a quick conversation starter to help guide family discussion at dinner, on the way to school or at bedtime.

Let's wait in wonder together.

—Katie Prejean McGrady



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Practicing Patience



Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long. **PSALM 25:4-5**

I feel like a lot of my day is spent waiting...waiting in the drop-off and pick-up line for school. Waiting on replies to emails for work. Waiting on kids to finish homework or chores or the story they're telling. Waiting for the oven to finish heating up the fish sticks we're having for dinner. Always waiting.

But what if my waiting had purpose? What if waiting, even in the mundane moments of the day, is charged with meaning? What if waiting for moments or people or plans here on earth is revealing how we wait on the Lord? Maybe we are actually *practicing patience* and *leaning into the longing* we have for Jesus.

Advent is a season of waiting with deep meaning because this *is* the time of waiting on the Lord and for his arrival into our world. And much like the psalmist who wants to know the ways of the Lord, know the truth and lean into the salvation of our God, we are longing for the same thing: to know Jesus and to welcome him into our heart and home.

Lord, help me wait with joy, and help me to find meaning in waiting. Give me patience so I may wait with a quiet confidence in your ways and truth. Amen.

Activity: Play a game of hide and seek. As you hide, waiting to be found by the seeker, talk to Jesus. Tell him what you're excited for in this Advent season.

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Hopeful Expectation

And [Jesus] said to him, “I will come and cure him.” **MATTHEW 8:7**

Have you ever asked for something, hoping and praying your request will be fulfilled, and then you have to wait for it? Once, after a very long flight from New York to Dallas, my seven-year-old daughter and I called for the airport hotel shuttle to come pick us up at eleven o'clock at night, and we were told it would be a half-hour wait.

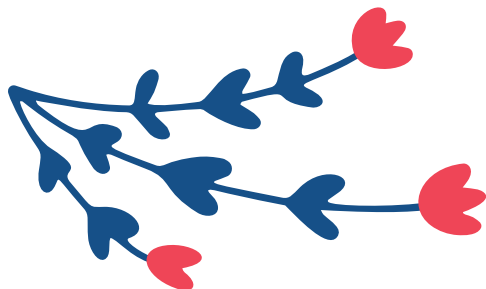
We were so tired, so annoyed, so impatient, but we had no choice but to wait. And then, the shuttle driver texted me, “Be there in 5,” and sure enough, he pulled up five minutes later, loaded our bags and brought us right to our hotel. He said he would get there, and he was there. We called for him, and he showed up. What we thought would be a long wait was, in fact, a very short one.

I wish I could say that's how Advent will go for the next few weeks—we hope it won't be a full month and it'll fly by! But I don't know that a liturgical season will shorten the way our shuttle wait did. That's not how calendars work...

But I do know, if we have some hopeful expectation, rather than annoyed impatience while waiting, we will end up like the centurion in the Gospel of Matthew. He believed that the Lord would show up and do something profound, and he was willing to wait. Are we willing too?

Lord, I want to wait with joyful hope. Help me believe you will show up. Amen.

Activity: Write out a list of three things you're “waiting on” this Advent.





TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Not the Day We Planned



In his days may righteousness flourish

and peace abound, until the moon is no more. **PSALM 72:7**

We left for Missouri a day early, hoping to fit in a quick visit to a local zoo before our ministry event began. We'd talked it up for days—this was a zoo with kangaroos and llamas and a bunch of different monkeys. We told the kids we could go panning for gold and climb down into a cave. Expectations were set for our family day. But that weekend, it was cold and rainy, and when we got to the zoo, all the exhibits were closed.

So much for our family day. Despite our long-awaited trip to the zoo, we needed to figure out something else to do.

We ended up getting ice-cream sundaes, driving out to a local clear water spring in a state park and watching the rain fall while we ate our desserts in the cozy minivan, just grateful to be together.

It wasn't the day we planned but the day we think the Lord wanted us to have.

Sometimes we set expectations for *our* days, or *our* Advent, making all sorts of plans for what we want and think will be best.

But perhaps this Advent, the Lord wants to bring us into *his* days, where his peace and goodness flourish because of his designs, not our own.

Lord, help me to let go of what I want for my Advent days, and let them be days of your design. Amen.

Activity: Over a shared meal, talk about a time when you were surprised by unexpected changes in your plans and liked those changes and surprises.

WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT



Food Brings Us Together

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food... **ISAIAH 25:6**

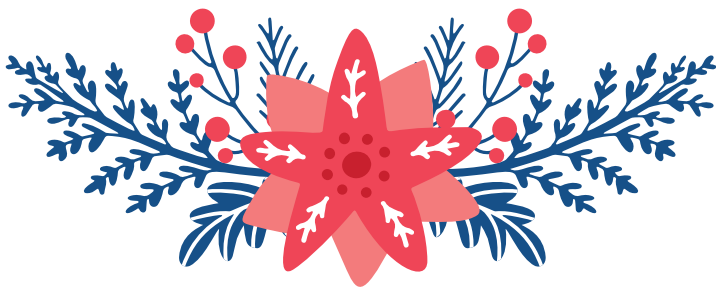
Shortly after my first daughter was born, a friend of mine texted me to ask what day would be best for her to drop off a few frozen meals she'd made for us. Even after insisting we didn't want her to make a fuss, she still showed up a few days later with eight meals for us to store away, a huge pot of chili and a fresh batch of corn bread. She fed us a huge feast, and we felt so loved and cherished.

Food brings people together, especially when we provide a meal for someone in need. There's great symbolism in bringing food to someone, whether a loved one whose favorite meal you might know or a perfect stranger who is down on their luck and desperately hungry for the food you generously offer.

We love to provide for others and seek out ways to do it, and so, too, does the Lord. He provides for us in big and small ways. Our desire to provide for others is a reflection of God's provision for us. Advent, as a season of hopeful waiting, is a time to reflect on all the ways God has made for us a rich feast. As we remember how he's already provided, we are filled with hope that he will continue to do so.

Lord, we remember all you've given us and hope to have open hearts to receive what more you will provide. Amen.

Activity: Make a meal for a friend in need.





THURSDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Small Advent Sacrifices



...but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

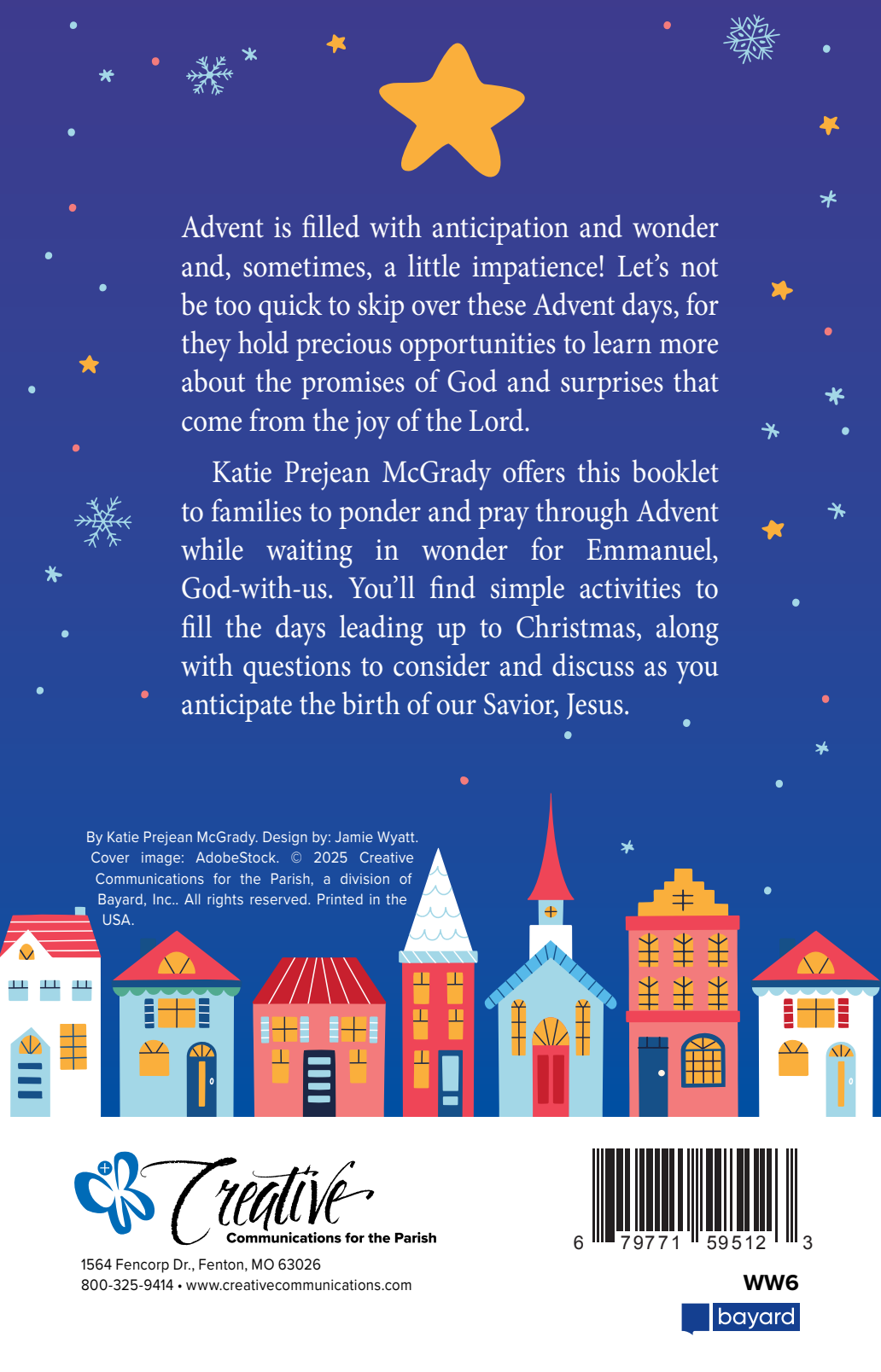
MATTHEW 7:21

In Lent, we give up something, add some prayer practices to our routines and try to find ways to be more charitable and generous. But in Advent, what do we do? Yes, we decorate a tree and light candles around a wreath, but we don't have the same catchy themes of "prayer, fasting and almsgiving" like Lent does. So, Advent should focus on what?

Well, perhaps the same things. Praying, fasting and giving alms are all ways to do the will of the Father—they're tactile practices, in big and small ways, that bring us closer to God. In Lent, it's because we're waiting for the death and resurrection of our Lord, so the sacrifice and the praying make sense! We have to do something to get ready. But Advent is the first season of waiting for something profound as well—the very birth of that Savior who will eventually die and rise again for us. You can't get to Lent without Advent, and so while Lent gives us all these things to do to prepare for the end of Christ's life on earth, we can get ready for the beginning of his life in the same ways this Advent season too.

Lord, this Advent teach me how to pray, give me strength to sacrifice and show me how to love others like you. Amen.

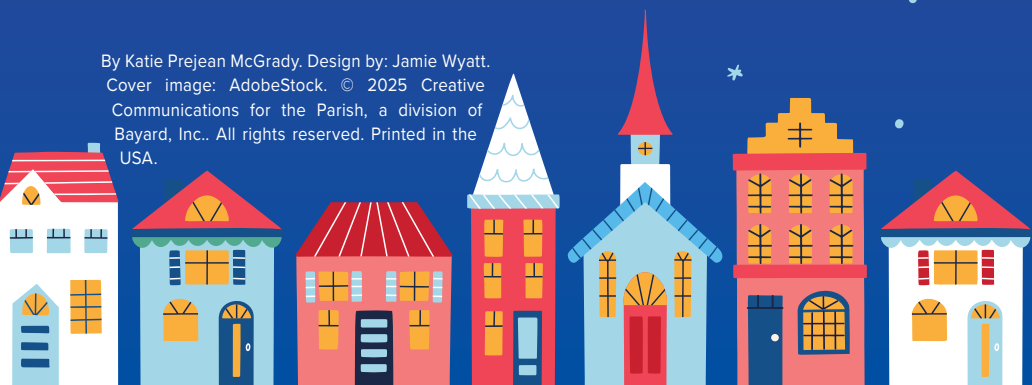
Activity: Choose a prayer practice to incorporate into your Advent routine, pick one small thing to sacrifice from once a week and give up one fast-food drive-thru a week, donating the money you would've spent on the meal to your church.



Advent is filled with anticipation and wonder and, sometimes, a little impatience! Let's not be too quick to skip over these Advent days, for they hold precious opportunities to learn more about the promises of God and surprises that come from the joy of the Lord.

Katie Prejean McGrady offers this booklet to families to ponder and pray through Advent while waiting in wonder for Emmanuel, God-with-us. You'll find simple activities to fill the days leading up to Christmas, along with questions to consider and discuss as you anticipate the birth of our Savior, Jesus.

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