



World Vision

Grow your joy *this* **CHRISTMAS**

Scripture and songs in four
weekly readings and an activity
for children and families



INTRODUCTION

Your Weekly Advent Readings

In a Christmas season when we may be experiencing great happiness and stress all at once, what does it look like to grow in joy? During Advent, the four weeks of preparation and anticipation before Christmas, use these meditations to reflect on different facets of biblical joy through Scripture passages and familiar Christmas songs.

The meaning of Advent

Advent itself means “coming” or “arrival.” It’s the celebration of Jesus’ birth in His first Advent and the anticipation of Christ’s return in His second Advent. So it’s far more than marking a 2,000-year-old event—it’s celebrating a joyous truth about God—that He comes to reconcile His creation.



Get the children in your life involved! Check out the family Christmas bingo activity at [the end of this guide](#).



World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.

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READ Habakkuk 3:17–19**LISTEN** “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”**REFLECT**

These verses that close out the prophet Habakkuk's writings can be some of the most challenging in the whole Bible.

We're tempted to ask, “Really, God? Even if there's nothing in my bank account and my loved ones are sick or dying? ‘Rejoice’ then?” The Bible's answer is yes. And the bracing lines of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” tell us the same thing: Amid “the gloomy clouds of night” and “death's dark shadows,” God's people are called to “rejoice!”

Why? Because Emmanuel—God with us—is on His way here. This hymn is an embodied ache of living in our fallen world. Yet we sing this somber hymn alongside upbeat carols like “Go Tell It on the Mountain” at Christmas to remind ourselves that Jesus was born to deal with a very specific problem:

death's erosive power over our lives and the world. And Christ's solution also brings another gift: Joy!

Biblical joy is rooted in the hope of the incarnated Jesus' certain victory over the hold death has on all we love. With His coming, Jesus disperses the clouds and “put[s] to flight” the shadows. Habakkuk can declare, “I will be joyful in God my Savior” (v. 18) because of the hope that the Savior will put death itself to death—by His own birth, death, and resurrection.

Christian author Corrie ten Boom said it well, “With Jesus, even in our darkest moments the best remains and the very best is yet to be.”

QUESTIONS

How does reflecting on Jesus' world-changing birth reorient your circumstances this Christmas, whether you're rejoicing or suffering?

Think back on a time of hardship in the last few years. How was God with you in a way you didn't realize then, but do now?

Alternatively, where is God showing you how to rejoice in Him today?

PRAY

Dear Lord, prepare my heart for the coming Christ during this season of Advent. Let me worship You through the words “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” Please come and be Lord of my life and help me to rejoice in You always! Thank You for the gift of Your son, Jesus. Amen. ✚

Delight in God's goodness

READ Psalm 98

LISTEN "Joy to the World"

REFLECT

This hymn's title says it all! When we sing, "While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains/ Repeat the sounding joy," we're proclaiming a truth straight from Psalm 98: The entire creation, from a speck of seaweed to the grandest mountain, calls us to revere our glorious God—and joins us in praising Him. Both Psalm 98 and "Joy to the World" express a jubilant, irrepressible praise of the creativity and power of the Creator. It's wildly worshipful.

When was the last time you "shout[ed] for joy to the Lord" because of His glory? This repeated shouting in the psalm and the "sounding joy" of the hymn aren't some forced admission of God's provision. Rather,

they're the overflow of a heart that delights in God because His goodness is abundantly evident everywhere we look in the world. And God's character—His holiness, salvation, righteousness, love, and faithfulness—is a legitimate cause for joy, too.

The Bible portrays this kind of joy as a transformative force that has its source in God's pure goodness. God "has done marvelous things"—thus "all the earth" is exhorted to "shout for joy before the Lord, the King" (vv. 1, 4, 6). Simply because, as the hymn says, "the Savior reigns," heaven and all creation sing, using their whole selves in exuberant, imaginative worship of God. And that worship will show the world the "wonders of His love."

QUESTIONS

What in your life fuels your joyful worship of God this season?

What part of God's creation "sings" loudest for you?

Where do you see God's goodness most abundantly in your life? Is it with another person? Is at a specific time or place? Is it through a particular answered prayer?

PRAY

Dear Lord, please fill my heart with Your truth and joy, and fill my voice with praise for You. Help me to look for Your goodness this season, and help me to encourage others to seek it as well. Amen. 

Receive the Son's joy

READ Colossians 1:15–20

LISTEN “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

REFLECT

“Peace on earth and mercy mild/ God and sinners reconciled.” These gloriously simple words from “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” sum up the joy of the incarnation and the foundation of our Christmas celebrations. In some of its earliest known uses, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “reconcile” meant, “to restore oneself to friendly relations with another.” Yet it’s the central truth of our faith that we can’t on our own achieve the reconciliation we need most: between ourselves and God. And that’s why Paul’s praise song to Jesus in Colossians 1 culminates in the glorious proclamation that “God was pleased ... through [Jesus] to reconcile to himself all things” (vv. 19–20). Restored relationship with our Creator doesn’t depend on our efforts—praise God!

When we consider the depths that separated us from God in our sinful nature, we sing “Glory to the newborn King!” at Jesus’ birth. This gift of reconciliation prompts the response of joy in us—joy that’s based on a right understanding of our fundamental need for restoration with the One who is “the firstborn over all creation” (v. 15).

If God required us to raise ourselves up from our sin, we’d be doomed. But from first to last—from birth to death to victorious resurrection—it’s Jesus’ work that gifts us our rightness with God. As the hymn says, His birth brings “light and life to all,” and through His resurrection, we can receive “healing in his wings.” So we celebrate with the angels that “Christ is born in Bethlehem” and find joy in the reconciling “Son of righteousness.”

QUESTIONS

Colossians 1:16 says all things were created for Jesus. How does His work of reconciliation change how you see your life, your relationships, or your struggles?

Is there a relationship that you’d like to see restored? What would you like to say to this person? Talk to God and lift up that person in prayer.

PRAY

Dear Father, thank You for Jesus Christ and for reconciling Yourself to us through Him. Restore the relationships in my life that need Your grace. Use this Christmas season to bring Your people closer together as one! Amen. ✝

READ John 1:14**LISTEN** "O Come, All Ye Faithful"**REFLECT**

There's a difference between a Christian's joy and a Christian's happiness. Joy isn't based on circumstances ... but on God (see the first week's reflection). Happiness shifts with each small life change. Joy is founded on one crucial moment in history on which every Christian depends: Jesus' life, from His birth to His death and resurrection.

As The Message translation puts John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." God inhabiting our world is an event that transforms all our grounds for joy. That's why the lines of "O Come, All Ye Faithful" call God's people "joyful and triumphant" as we behold Him.

The kind of adoration that this hymn and this verse calls us to isn't passive, much like joy isn't just positive feelings. The

admiration is active, "Come and behold Him." Taking action means worshipping "the King of angels" coming to us as a child. It means contemplating God's glory revealed in the birth of Jesus. As John says in the NIV translation, "We have seen his glory ... full of grace and truth." And when this realization moves from our heads and our hearts to our hands, we act. Joyfully serving God and other people as we were created to do!

We base our joy not on an earthbound circumstance, but on the fact that the Creator of the universe willingly bound Himself to earth as a helpless infant—to restore all of creation to Himself. And that is reason to come and adore Him, and to love others extravagantly in His name!

QUESTIONS

Amid the busy Christmas season, where can you actively make room to contemplate the wonder of Jesus' birth?

Take a moment to visualize yourself there on that holy night. What do you see, smell, and hear? What calls out to you?

In what areas of your life do you feel "joyful and triumphant" in Christ? How can you share this joy with others?

PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You that my joy is dependent on the great works You've already accomplished in Jesus Christ! Help me to dwell on this truth and on the miracle that is Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Please help me to really feel and know Your presence this Christmas season. Amen. 

**FAMILY
ACTIVITY**

Family Christmas Bingo

Get the whole family in on this Christmas competition! Print and display your bingo cards where everyone can see them. Using a pencil or sticker, mark off each activity as the Christmas season unfolds. Decide on a prize for the winner or for anyone who completes five boxes in a row. Want to up your challenge? Mark ALL the boxes!

Family Christmas B • I • N • G • O



Buy new socks and donate them to a shelter	Enjoy a Christmas movie night in festive pjs	Drink hot cocoa	Drive to see festive lights	Build a nativity out of LEGO® or other toys
Read about Jesus in Luke 2	Bake Christmas goodies and give to a neighbor	Buy a new toy to donate to a child in need	Sing along to your favorite Christmas song	Invite someone to Christmas Eve church service
Make paper snowflakes	Read about Jesus in Matthew 1:18-2:23	Wish someone "Merry Christmas!"	Go caroling or receive carolers	Visit a local nativity scene
Share a favorite Christmas memory at dinner	Make real (or fake) snowballs and have a fight	Pray for a friend and tell the you prayed for them	Go to church	Memorize and recite Isaiah 9:6
Decorate the Christmas tree	Volunteer!	Display others' Christmas cards in a fun location	Donate to a food bank	Make a new ornament for your tree