



advent illustrated

WAITING 'ROUND THE WREATH

REVISED AND EXPANDED

Sara Wegman



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APPLE CIDER



The Wonder of Advent

If you grew up celebrating Christmas, or even watching Christmas movies, you might be familiar with the famous poem by Clement Clarke Moore, "The Night Before Christmas." Though I never had this poem read to me as a child, I've heard the opening lines often enough to recite by heart:

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse...

Those two lines alone describe perfectly the magical stillness of Christmas Eve. I remember lying in bed as a little girl, practically tingling with excitement, waiting: for sleep, for morning, for the wonder and delight of Christmas Day. The air seemed to hum with a kind of expectant energy, as though the world itself was holding its breath. An author might call this moment a 'pregnant pause.'

Advent invites us into this pause, but for a moment that extends weeks prior to the night before Christmas. In the midst of the chaos of the holiday season and the hum-drum routines our everyday lives, Advent asks us to make room for a quieter pace. In a world of instant gratification and right-now timing, Advent challenges us to give in to waiting; to sit in our expectancy. And in the depths of winter, as the days get shorter and the nights seem to cloak the world in darkness, Advent offers us a spark of hope; a taste of what is to come.

To me, this spark of hope is best displayed by the beauty of the Advent wreath. Each week, families and churches around the world gather around wreaths large and small to light candles. There are four candles placed around the wreath, one for every week of Advent. While the names and symbols of these weekly candles vary from denomination to denomination, when there is a fifth candle, is always the same: the white Christ candle in the center, to be lit on Christmas Day.

As we enter into the Advent season, I invite you to join me in preparing our spirits for the coming of the Christ child.

Join me in these weeks of waiting as we journal through the themes of Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy, in anticipation of Christmas.

Join me in this 'pregnant pause' — a pause that holds not just excitement, but a holy expectancy, as it did for Mary all those years ago.

About Advent & the Liturgical Year

A pastor once told me that the ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* refers to chronological time, like the days of the week or months of the year. *Kairos* refers to the opportune moment for action, and Christians used it to refer to “God’s time.” While *chronos* is quantitative and sequential, *kairos* is somehow qualitative and permanent. It’s separate from everyday life; sacred time flowing through and alongside our everyday lives.

Think of the liturgical year as an invitation to step into this sacred time. It’s a cycle of seasons and celebrations that point us in our everyday lives to “God’s time.” Some of these are well-known across denominations: the holy days of Christmas and Easter, for example, or the season of Lent. Others, like Ordinary Time, are lesser-known, but beautiful and meaningful in their own right. Each season has distinct themes, colors, and even means of practice or prayer, embodying a period of time in the life and ministry of Jesus or in the history of the church.

The seasons build upon each other, going from the anticipation of Jesus’ coming (Advent), to his birth (Christmas and Epiphany), to his death and resurrection (Lent, Holy Week, and Easter), to the formation of the Church (Pentecost and Ordinary Time). The first three seasons — Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany — are sometimes referred to as the ‘Cycle of Light’ because they tell the story of Jesus coming to us as the Light of the World. The remaining seasons — Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost — are called the ‘Cycle of Life’ for focusing on the life of Jesus and us as believers.

advent

Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year, so the first Sunday of Advent is a Christian “New Year’s” of sorts. In the ‘Christian story,’ Advent tells of the time before the birth of Christ, in which God’s people were waiting for the Messiah. Accordingly, the season of Advent focuses on the themes of anticipation, preparation, and the coming of Christ. The liturgical color of Advent is purple, although the third week of Advent uses the color rose to symbolize love or mercy.

christmas

Advent is followed by the liturgical season of Christmas, which lasts twelve days; this is where the “Twelve Days of Christmas” comes from! Christmas is probably the best-known part of the liturgical calendar, though most people don’t celebrate for all twelve days anymore. It tells the story of Jesus coming to earth as the Light of the World.

The Christmas season focuses on the themes of peace, fulfillment, and celebration. The liturgical colors of Christmas are white and gold.

epiphany

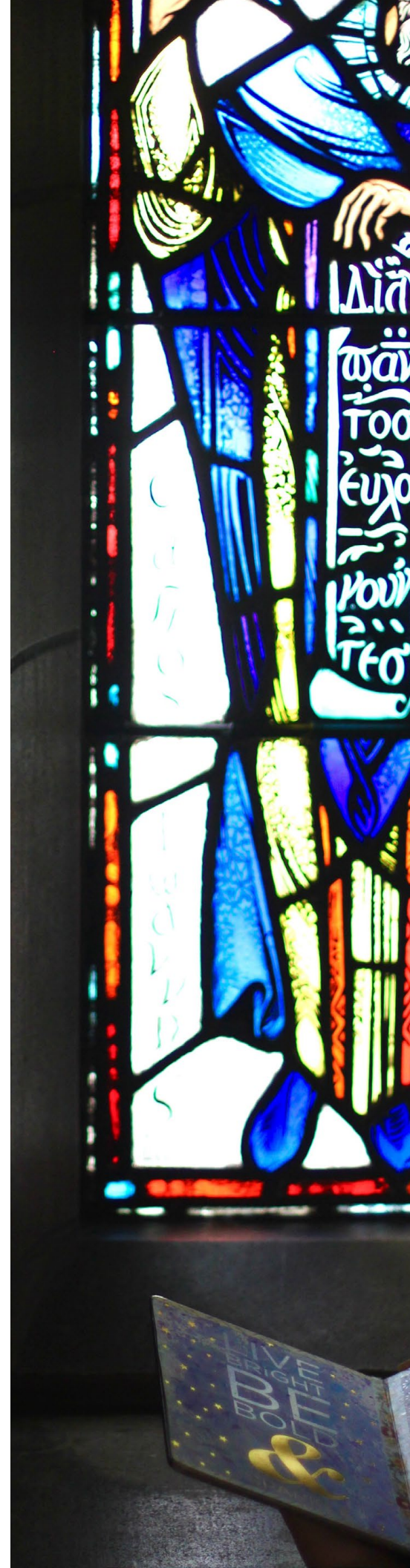
Christmas is followed by Epiphany, lasting until Ash Wednesday. Some traditions celebrate the feast of Epiphany and then Ordinary Time, while others celebrate Epiphany as its own season. In the story of the Church, Epiphany refers to the arrival of the Magi, or wise men, to see Jesus. Epiphany’s colors are white and gold. In Christian practice, this season focuses on the themes of God making God’s work known through the life and ministry of Christ.

lent & holy week

Following Epiphany is the season of Lent, focusing on reflection, repentance, and renewal. In the Christian story, Lent and Holy week tell of Jesus’ ministry on earth, his entrance into Jerusalem, his arrest, crucifixion, and death. The liturgical color of Lent is purple. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and continues through Holy Week until Easter.

easter

The season of Easter celebrates Jesus’ triumph over death, and its themes are resurrection, life, renewal, and rebirth. The liturgical colors for Easter are white and gold.



pentecost & ordinary time

Pentecost is the final major holiday of the Christian calendar, and tells the story of the Holy Spirit descending on the apostles. Similar to Epiphany, some observe Pentecost as its own season, and others observe it as a holy day that marks the beginning of Ordinary Time. The season of Ordinary Time following Pentecost focuses on vocation, and the rhythms and rituals of daily life. Ordinary Time is represented by the color green, and lasts until the year begins again with Advent.

These seasons, and the holy days and feast days that punctuate them, walk us through the year with an eye to the life, ministry, and legacy of Christ. The seasons are a blessing because, like the non-religious holidays that bring us joy through family, traditions, and stories, they help us celebrate what matters most to us. Not just family, but a worldwide community of believers of all backgrounds. Not just tradition, but a legacy of thousands of years of faith and knowledge, passed down to us. Not just stories, but a deep and resounding belief that amplifies our celebration and recognizes us in our deepest and most difficult places.

This calendar of seasons and holy days meets us where we are and reminds us why we're here. If you have spent your life living with the liturgical year, I hope that this study can invite you to spend more time in your own practice and perhaps dig deeper into this season. If the liturgical seasons are new to you, then I hope that this Advent study will help ignite in you the same passion that I feel for the liturgical year. May it be a blessing to you.



About *Advent Illustrated*

Advent Illustrated is a four-week Bible journaling challenge through the season of Advent. Bible journaling is a form of devotional art, in which people make art in the margins or pages of their Bibles, or in separate notebooks if they're so inclined. If you're not experienced or familiar with Bible journaling, fear not! The next few pages will tell you everything you need to know.

the wreath

This challenge is themed around the Advent wreath. If you have an Advent wreath practice at home, or would like to start one, you can choose to say the weekly blessings included in this book when you light your Advent candles each week. If not, you can still fully participate. Each week includes a video that includes me lighting the candles along with a short blessing.

customizing your plan

This challenge is fundamentally designed to be customizable. Every person doing this challenge has their own unique circumstances to take into consideration, and especially around the holidays, our lives can become more hectic than ever. For this reason, there are six different plans for this challenge, ranging from daily journaling to a once-per-week practice. The daily readings are meant to be short reflections that should only take a few minutes to read, meaning that you can reflect on them at home in your devotional corner, while waiting in the pick-up line at your child's school, or during your 15-minute break at work.

Finally, while this is a Bible journaling 'challenge,' please remember that nothing is required of you! I hope to add some additional meaning and structure to your Advent season, but not at the cost of your peace of mind. If you need to skip a day to rest, take care of someone you love, or read one more bedtime story, then go ahead.

music and video codes

Advent Illustrated comes with several videos and a musical playlist to journal along with. As you work through this book, you'll sometimes see a pop-out section like the one to the right. This indicates a code you can scan to open an accompanying video. Use your smartphone camera to scan the code. If you don't have a smartphone, you can type in the url under the code into a browser. Try it out with the code here!



Scan me to
watch a
short video!

OR GO TO
sara.lol/advent0



ADVENT ILLUSTRATED PLAYLIST
By Sara Wegman

Music codes like the one to the left can be scanned using the Spotify app. Green codes represent classical music, and red codes modern music. To scan, open the 'Search' tab in Spotify and tap the camera icon in the upper right corner. You can also search for the song title below the code in your preferred music app or online.

O COME,
O COME
EMMANUEL...



9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah;
if you're not firm in faith,
you will not be firm at all."

The sign of Immanuel

"Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.' But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.' And he said, 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land

10 Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing;
speak a word, but it will not stand,
for God is with us."

Fear God, Wait for the LORD

"For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and wanted me to walk in the way of this people, saying, 'Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be dismayed by the LORD who calls him conspiracy. Let him be your fear and let him be your terror, as he has done to both houses of Israel, and as he has done to Jerusalem, saying, "They shall be a terror and a snare to both houses of Israel, and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." And I will wait for the LORD, for he shall all day long be broken; they shall be snared and taken.' Behold, the testimony, seal the teaching, among my disciples. I will wait for the LORD, for he shall all day long be broken; they shall be snared and taken. Behold, the testimony, seal the teaching, among my disciples, and I will hope in him. Behold, the testimony, seal the teaching, among my disciples, and I will hope in him."

ISAIAH 9:6

The people of

A primer *on* Bible art journaling

I have a true, deep love for the Bible. As someone who wasn't raised Christian, I think it was the beauty of the Biblical text that really pulled me into the Christian faith. The sweeping arcs of the psalms; the incredible symbolism and meaning woven into every word and name in books like Ruth; the beauty and meaning of Jesus' words in the gospels. The Bible isn't just a book, but a library of spiritual instruction, proverbs, poetry, history, and literature. It is truly a treasure.

I say this because I know many people are hesitant about the idea of Bible journaling, specifically because they may associate it with making art in the pages of their Bible. So before we get into the specifics, let me tell you first and foremost that what brings me to this devotional practice is a deep love and appreciation for the Word of God.

what is bible journaling?

Bible journaling is a creative devotional practice. Specifically, it's the practice of responding to the Biblical text in a creative way — with art, prayers, or notes.

In the past few years, the most popular form of Bible journaling that I've seen online has been making art over the pages of your Bible; but art journaling is not limited to only this kind of devotion! You can choose to do Bible journaling any number of ways, such as making art and lettering in the margins of your Bible, next to the text; making art in the headers of a book of the Bible; creating art on a blank page next to the Biblical text, or illustrating in a separate notebook or art book.

how can art be a devotional practice?

God is the Creator, and we were created in God's image. That means that we, too, are creative beings! More than that, we were created to be in relationship with God. Devotional practices are a way to build that relationship. And when those devotional practices involve creativity, especially if that creativity incorporates the Bible, it can be a great way to connect with God for those of us who tend to be 'makers.'

What I especially love about Bible journaling is that it can make the Bible feel more accessible to those who struggle to relate to the text. I know many people have a hard time making sense of the Bible or creating a personal devotional practice with it. I think part of that is because it feels so sacred to us. It's ancient, it's complex, and it's holy — we're afraid to "do it wrong." But Bible journaling creates a new way for us to relate to scripture. It lets you turn off the worried, overthinking part of your brain, and respond to God's word in a way that is emotional, relational, and creative.

I believe that God wants a relationship with us. If we are so caught up in fear and rules that we don't know how to appreciate the beauty of God and God's word, we are not engaging in that relationship. Not all of us need a creative way to connect to scripture. But for those that do, Bible journaling can be a gift. It can be an incredible way to relate to, understand, and appreciate the text better.





Tips *for* Bible journaling

If you're a seasoned Bible journaler, you can skip right over this page. If, however, you find that you need a little more guidance or inspiration to get started, fear not! That's what these tips are for.

what supplies should I use?

Whether you journal directly in your Bible or use a separate notebook is up to you. If you do decide to journal in the pages of your Bible, I recommend using a separate Bible from the one you use day-to-day. I personally use an ESV single-column journaling Bible from Crossway, which has extra wide margins for illustrations. Crossway also offers interleaved Bibles, with a blank page beside each page of biblical text. Most popular Bible translations, including KJV, NIV, HCSB, and others offer some kinds of Bibles like this. Publishers typically call them a 'journaling Bible' or 'notetaking Bible;' if your local bookstore doesn't offer them, you should be able to find one online in your preferred translation!

For art supplies, the honest truth is that you don't need anything fancy. I got started Bible journaling with art supplies I had around the house: colored pencils and a \$5 watercolor palette. If you're an experienced artist, you may already have higher-end supplies and prefer to use those, but don't feel you need to buy something new and expensive! Bible journaling is fundamentally a devotional practice; don't let a lack of fancy supplies stand in the way!

getting inspired

This Advent challenge should already help you as you start an art journaling devotional practice. Each day's reading includes a Bible verse, a little context or explanation, and a creative prompt. The creative prompt will name a few examples of visual imagery you can use as you journal. These suggestions are meant to get your creative juices flowing, but ultimately, they are only a starting point. If a completely different image from the text stood out to you, listen to that!

If, on the other hand, you have a hard time getting inspired, I find it helps to look for example photos online. You can start with a simple Google image search of 'Bible journaling' and the name of the book or verse you're working with.

Pinterest also has a beautiful collection of thousands of stunning Bible journaling images, some of which may have been made for the same verse that you're currently working on. I've created a Pinterest board with Advent-themed examples you can look at to get inspired. To view it, go to sara.lol/pinterest-advent in your browser.

starting a simple practice

If this is new for you, I recommend making a simple art journaling practice for yourself.

Settle into your devotional practice as you normally would. Make a cup of tea or coffee, find a quiet spot. Make some mental space for your time with God. Sink into a prayer to ground yourself. Put on the accompanying playlist, if you wish. The green code below is for the official playlist, which features classical music. If you prefer modern music, try the red playlist code.



ADVENT ILLUSTRATED PLAYLIST
Sara Wegman



THE ADVENT SEASON PLAYLIST
Sara Wegman

Now pore over the verse for that day's reading. Read it over a few times; read the accompanying prompt. Let the text sink into your bones. Feel free to read some of the surrounding text in your Bible to better understand the context. Now, reflect on the themes that stand out to you. Spend some time dwelling over them in prayer, if that helps you.

Once a direction begins to form in your mind, you can start sketching or painting out what you see in your mind's eye. You may find it enjoyable to pray as you journal, or maybe this feels like too much pressure for you. Be open to finding a rhythm that feels natural for your unique situation. It may take a few tries to get into a routine that you enjoy. Don't be discouraged! If you get frustrated, take a break and come back to it later in the day, or try tomorrow. This is meant to be enjoyable, and there is no one right way for everyone.



Orange slice ornaments

These slices smell lovely and they look almost like little stained glass ornaments in the tree. Making them is incredibly simple!



ITEMS NEEDED

3-5 citrus fruits (try a mix of oranges, grapefruits, and lemons. No limes: they will turn brown in the oven)

A knife for cutting

A baking rack

An oven

A few yards of decorative ribbon to hang the ornaments once dried

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat your oven to be 170° F.

Gather your citrus fruits and cut slices of the fruits to be uniform — about 0.5 centimeters each. Remove any seeds from your slices.

Place the slices on a baking rack and put them in the oven.

Bake for 3-4 hours, turning every hour to make sure that they bake evenly. You want the slices to be a little colorful, but also be dry so that they can't go bad.

Using a paring knife, cut a small hole in each of your slices and string a generous piece of ribbon through it to make it into an ornament!

That's it! Making these ornaments is so easy and (with some parental guidance) could also be a great activity with older kids.



Schedule & plans

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we are often swept up in a series of to do's. Buy turkey. Vacuum the pine needles under the tree. Finish the gift for him, find the perfect one for her, wrap the cookbook you found for so-and-so. When our Christmas seasons are grounded in the Christian tradition, the time we spend in prayer, church, or worship should feel like a welcome respite from that stress; but sometimes, even that feels like just another 'to do.'

I hope that Advent Illustrated will be a time of connection and devotion for you, rather than yet another thing to add to your daily checklist. For that reason, this Advent Illustrated program is customizable to your schedule and needs. For *Waiting 'Round the Wreath*, there are six plans, ranging from once weekly to six times per week.

the program

This Advent Illustrated challenge centers around the themes of the Advent wreath: Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy. Each week will feature a selection of verses centered around that week's theme. You'll notice four different kinds of days as you cycle through your plan:

Rest days are our day of preparation and reflection. For those participating in the six-day Wreath plan, these will fall on Sundays.

On **Scripture days**, we journal verses from the Old and New Testaments.

On **Story days**, we will explore the Nativity story and celebrate the coming of the Christ child.

On **Song days**, we enjoy one of the four traditional songs from the Old Testament and the Nativity narrative.

Each week begins with a blessing. If you and your family have an Advent wreath, you can say this blessing as you light the candle for that week (on the Sunday beginning that week of Advent). If not, you can read this benediction to yourself before reading the opening text for that week.

All other days include with a verse to journal. The daily readings include the verse, some context, and a creative prompt for that day to get your artistic juices flowing. Whether you journal once a week, twice a week, or six days a week, I recommend that you do the daily readings so you can follow the entire arc of the Nativity story and readings.

This page includes the six plans that you can choose to follow this Advent season. Each plan is named after a different component of the Advent wreath. Note that the length of Advent differs by a few days each year; you may do the math and realize that you have a few extra days after Christmas in the fourth week. You can choose to skip these or double-up!

the wreath plan

6 days per week. Using this plan, you will participate in every day of the challenge, exploring four verses relating to the weekly theme, and experiencing both the story and songs of the Nativity. The Scripture days will feature an Old Testament verse, a Psalm verse, a Gospel verse, and an Epistle verse from one of Paul's letters.

the cedar plan

5 days per week. This plan includes three Scripture days and both the Story and Song days. The Scripture days include an Old Testament verse, a Psalm selection, and a selection from Paul's epistles.

the laurel plan

4 days per week. In this plan, journalers will enjoy a Song day, a Story day, and two Scripture days. The Scripture days will include a Gospel and Epistle selection every week.

the holly plan

3 days per week. This plan includes a weekly Story day, and two Scripture days every week, including one Old Testament verse and one Gospel verse.

the ivy plan

2 days per week. This plan includes only the Story and Song days, and no Scripture days.

the rosemary plan

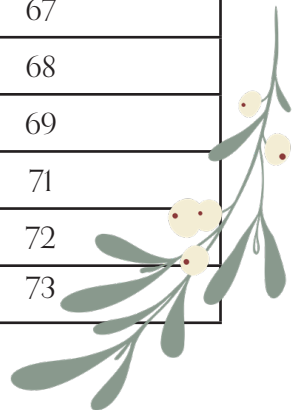
1 day per week. This one-per-week plan includes the Nativity story spread out over four weeks, and does not include Song or Scripture days.

SCHEDULE

The Wreath Plan



WEEK THEME	DAY	READING	PAGE NUMBER
Hope	Rest	First Sunday of Advent	30
	Scripture – Old Testament	Isaiah 9:2	31
	Scripture – Psalm	Psalm 62:5	32
	Story	Isaiah 9:6	33
	Song	Psalm 130	34
	Scripture – Gospel	John 8:12	35
	Scripture – Epistle	Romans 15:13	36
Peace	Rest	Second Sunday of Advent	42
	Scripture – Old Testament	Isaiah 54:10	43
	Scripture – Psalm	Psalm 29:11	44
	Story	Luke 1:30-33	45
	Song	Luke 1:46-50	46
	Scripture – Gospel	John 16:33	47
	Scripture – Epistle	2 Thessalonians 3:16	48
Love	Rest	Third Sunday of Advent	53
	Scripture – Old Testament	Leviticus 19:18	54
	Scripture – Psalm	Psalm 59:16	55
	Story	Matthew 1:18-25	56
	Song	Luke 1:68-79	58
	Scripture – Gospel	John 13:34-35	60
	Scripture – Epistle	1 Corinthians 13:4-8	61
Joy	Rest	Fourth Sunday of Advent	66
	Scripture – Old Testament	Nehemiah 8:10	67
	Scripture – Psalm	Psalm 30:5	68
	Story	Luke 2:1, 2:4-14	69
	Song	Luke 2:29-32	71
	Scripture – Gospel	Matthew 2:9-11	72
	Scripture – Epistle	1 Peter 1:8-9	73

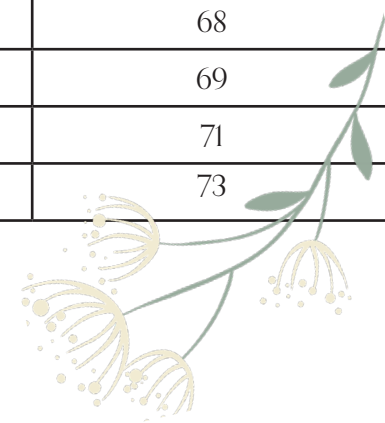


SCHEDULE

The Cedar Plan



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Hope	Rest	First Sunday of Advent	30
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	Scripture – Psalm	Psalms 30:5	68
	Story	Luke 2:1, 2:4-14	69
	Song	Luke 2:29-32	71
	Scripture – Epistle	1 Peter 1:8-9	73

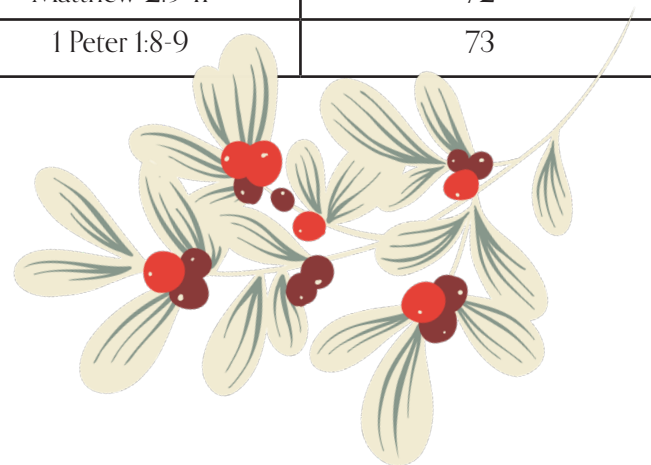


SCHEDULE

The Laurel Plan



WEEK THEME	DAY	READING	PAGE NUMBER
Hope	Rest	First Sunday of Advent	30
	Story	Isaiah 9:6	33
	Song	Psalms 130	34
	Scripture – Gospel	John 8:12	35
	Scripture – Epistle	Romans 15:13	36
Peace	Rest	Second Sunday of Advent	42
	Story	Luke 1:30-33	45
	Song	Luke 1:46-50	46
	Scripture – Gospel	John 16:33	47
	Scripture – Epistle	2 Thessalonians 3:16	48
Love	Rest	Third Sunday of Advent	53
	Story	Matthew 1:18-25	56
	Song	Luke 1:68-79	58
	Scripture – Gospel	John 13:34-35	60
	Scripture – Epistle	1 Corinthians 13:4-8	61
Joy	Rest	Fourth Sunday of Advent	66
	Story	Luke 2:1, 2:4-14	69
	Song	Luke 2:29-32	71
	Scripture – Gospel	Matthew 2:9-11	72
	Scripture – Epistle	1 Peter 1:8-9	73



SCHEDULE

The Holly Plan

WEEK THEME	DAY	READING	PAGE NUMBER
Hope	Rest	First Sunday of Advent	30
	Scripture – Old Testament	Isaiah 9:2	31
	Story	Isaiah 9:6	33
	Scripture – Gospel	John 8:12	35
Peace	Rest	Second Sunday of Advent	42
	Scripture – Old Testament	Isaiah 54:10	43
	Story	Luke 1:30-33	45
	Scripture – Gospel	John 16:33	47
Love	Rest	Third Sunday of Advent	53
	Scripture – Old Testament	Leviticus 19:18	54
	Story	Matthew 1:18-25	56
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	Scripture – Old Testament	Nehemiah 8:10	67
	Story	Luke 2:1, 2:4-14	69
	Scripture – Gospel	Matthew 2:9-11	72

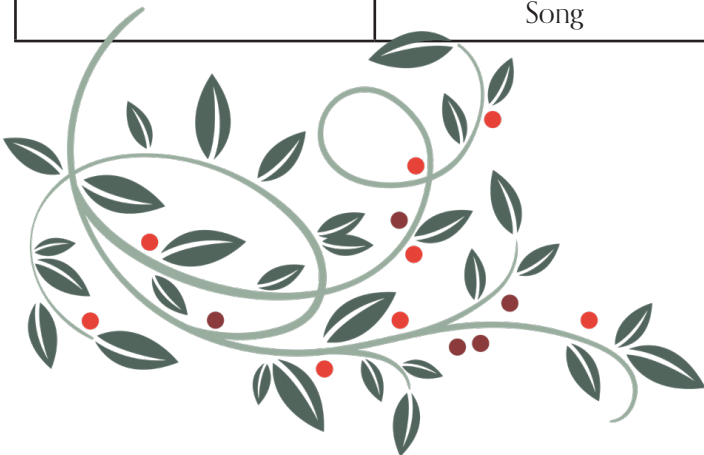


SCHEDULE

The Ivy Plan

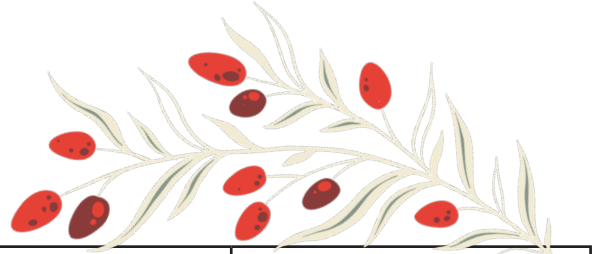


WEEK THEME	DAY	READING	PAGE NUMBER
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	Story	Isaiah 9:6	33
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Peace	Rest	Second Sunday of Advent	42
	Story	Luke 1:30-33	45
	Song	Luke 1:46-50	46
Love	Rest	Third Sunday of Advent	53
	Story	Matthew 1:18-25	56
	Song	Luke 1:68-79	58
Joy	Rest	Fourth Sunday of Advent	66
	Story	Luke 2:1, 2:4-14	69
	Song	Luke 2:29-32	71

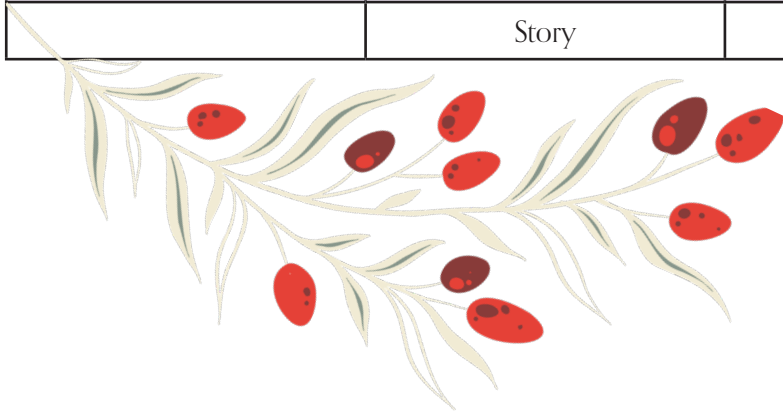


SCHEDULE

The Rosemary Plan



WEEK THEME	DAY	READING	PAGE NUMBER
Hope	Rest	First Sunday of Advent	30
	Story	Isaiah 9:6	33
Peace	Rest	Second Sunday of Advent	42
	Story	Luke 1:30-33	45
Love	Rest	Third Sunday of Advent	53
	Story	Matthew 1:18-25	56
Joy	Rest	Fourth Sunday of Advent	66
	Story	Luke 2:1, 2:4-14	69





Scan me for
the Week 1
video

OR GO TO
sara.lol/advent1

Candlelight blessing for *hope*

Gracious God,

who spoke light into being

who keeps our lamps burning, and turns darkness to light:

we find our hope in you.

As we walk through seasons of darkness,

hungry for hope, starving for peace,

waiting for deliverance,

we remember your promises.

As we strike this match and light this candle,

we remind ourselves that,

just as it takes only one flame to light a room,

it takes only a flicker of hope to bring grace into graceless situations.

Fill us this week with a holy expectancy, O God.

Show us new ways to be a light to others;

and let the hope that is in Christ come into our lives in a new way

in this, the first week of Advent.

Amen.



REST DAY

The First Sunday *of* Advent

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. For some of us, it is a welcome change; today marks the beginning of a new season, a new start, and a new year in the Christian calendar. But for others, the time leading up to Christmas is not a joy, but a stressor. Especially for many parents and grandparents, the holidays are a time when we are tasked with managing the world around us; between church events, school projects, gift-shopping, and keeping the house in one piece, devotional time can feel like yet another item on our daily list of tasks, instead of a welcome break from the rush of the outside world.

For that reason, we begin this week of Advent with a day of rest. Every Sunday, instead of a journaling prompt, we will come together to experience a moment of peace in the midst of this busy and exciting season. If you are eager to jump right in, today is the perfect day to prep your pages for Bible journaling, or to explore this guide and become familiar with the verses that we will be journaling this week. If, on the other hand, you need a moment to take a deep breath before getting started, then this is your invitation.

In this first week of Advent, we light the first purple candle in our wreath, symbolizing Hope. In doing this challenge, this week you will also be journaling and experiencing the hope of the Advent season. Each week in this study seeks to be a journey in itself, from a place of difficulty to a place of hope, peace, love, and joy. As we walk through our scriptural selections and the opening verses of the Nativity story, we will focus on the theme of hopefulness in the dark, and the hope embodied in the life and story Jesus.

I am so happy to have you joining us this week. Welcome to Advent!

SCRIPTURE — OLD TESTAMENT

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

Isaiah 9:2

Advent is the story of a new beginning. At the time of Jesus' birth, God's people are living under occupation by the Romans. They live in darkness, waiting for freedom from political oppression and for spiritual liberation through the coming of the Messiah. In the midst of that difficult wait, a child is born to a virgin in Bethlehem: Jesus, who is Emmanuel, God with Us.

We so often rush to make it to that part of the story. But this week, we focus instead on hope in the waiting. Today's verse is taken from the Old Testament book of Isaiah; the darkness referred to here is the hiding of the Lord's face during the rule of a corrupt king. But, in part because it is quoted in the Gospel of Matthew (4:15), and in part because it seems to fit so well into our understanding of the setting of the Christmas story, Christians often relate this verse to the coming and ministry of Jesus.

God's people walked in darkness, living in a time when God and God's presence felt neither tangible nor present. Not only that, but they lived in a land of that darkness; it encompassed and surrounded them. I don't know about you, but in some ways I understand that feeling now more than ever.

But in the midst of that difficult time, they saw the light. And as we are reminded in John 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

As you journal the Isaiah verse today, consider the image of the light shining in the darkness. You might choose to illustrate fireflies in a mason jar, or a bonfire on a cold night, or even the first candle in the Advent wreath on a cozy evening. You could also letter the word "light," or write out the verse in warm yellows and oranges. Remember that there is no wrong way to do this; just pick up your pen and get started!

SCRIPTURE — PSALM

For God alone,
O my soul,
wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

Psalm 62:5

Advent comes to us in winter. As the nights grow longer and the cold fog of December sets in, many of us retreat into our homes and ourselves. We struggle with the darkness and gloom of the winter season, in which the bare branches of the trees scratch at the sky, and blankets of snow seem to cloak the world in silence. In that time, the excitement of Christmas — twinkle lights, holiday music, and seasonal celebrations — brings us anticipation for the joy around the corner.

This is Advent: the season of waiting, of not-yet, of things to come.

In the same way excitement and anticipation bring warmth to cold winter nights, the hope of the Christmas story gives us a taste of the joy that is to come. We sit in expectant hope, waiting for the coming of Christ, waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises. As we make peace with the discomfort of waiting, we find hope in our God.

As you journal today's verse, focus on the feeling of waiting. What does it feel like for you? Is it a child itching to open her Christmas presents? Or is it a moment of sitting alone in the darkness, praying for good news? A chair in a doctor's office? Or sitting on your porch, waiting for the sun to rise? How you choose to illustrate this verse is up to you; but whether you illustrate it with the examples above, or simply letter the words of this verse, remind yourself as you journal today that God provides a hope, even in the darkness.

STORY

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Long before the Christ child, long before the Nativity, long before the visitation of the angel Gabriel to Mary, there was hope. Generations before Jesus came to the world, there were already people praying, waiting, and hoping for the fulfillment of the promise and the coming of the Prince of Peace. Today is a Story day, in which we journal the story of the Nativity, and so some might expect us to begin with the moment that a young girl living in Galilee learns that she will bear the son of God. But the story of the Nativity doesn't begin with Mary. It begins with that hopeful and expectant wait.

This verse falls in the first portion of the Book of Isaiah, which focuses on the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem; but for Christians, it is a prophecy about the birth of Jesus. Though the verses are in the past-tense, they actually refer to what is to come; they are written in the past-tense to indicate the author's certainty that this child will be born, that the son will be given, and that he will be the Prince of Peace.

While we sometimes wait in fear, or angst, or with a wish that we think may not be fulfilled, Christians today can hope with the same certainty of Isaiah. The child was born, the son was given, and he is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Our expectant wait this Advent is one of both hope and celebration.

As you journal this verse today, reflect on the certainty and celebration that comes with waiting in Advent. What are your hopes for this season, and for Christmas? What burdens are you carrying that you hope may be eased? For today's page, you may wish to show someone in darkness, envisioning the birth of Jesus, or a child falling asleep and imagining Christmas Day. You could also letter the words of the verse "For to us a child is born," or simply illustrate the baby Jesus lying in the manger. Whatever you choose to journal today, let the spirit of hopeful certainty guide you!

SONG

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for
the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful
redemption. And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

Psalm 130:5-8

Psalm 130, often referred to as *De Profundis* when set to music, is a song of hope and anticipation. Unlike our other three Song selections, it is not sung by a figure in the Nativity story; but it is an example of the expectant and hopeful waiting that we are focusing on this week.

When we wait in Advent, we are not just waiting for the Christ child to be born. We are also waiting for God's kingdom; for it to be on earth as it is in heaven. In the difficult times in which we live, it is easy to feel discouraged or overwhelmed by all the work that remains to be done. But we are called to be agents of Jesus' goodness in the world, just as we are called to remember that God is the restorer and redeemer of all things. This psalm calls us to wait for the Lord, and remember his steadfast love and redemption.

As you journal this verse today, I encourage you to focus on this theme of love and redemption. What does it mean to you? You may wish to draw a heart, or the arms of God sweeping you up. You may also wish to combine the imagery of the Nativity and the Easter story, to highlight the 'reason for the season.' You could even choose to letter the words "the reason for the season" over this psalm and its focus on love and redemption. Whichever direction you take this verse in, let yourself be guided by a spirit of devotion and not of self-consciousness. This is a devotional practice: experiment with letting yourself worship as you draw or paint today.

Scan the green code in Spotify to hear a traditional version of *De Profundis*. For a modern take, scan the red code. If you don't have Spotify, you can type the titles into your music player app.



DE PROFUNDIS
Josquin des Prez, Amarcord



I WILL WAIT FOR YOU (PSALM 130)
Shane & Shane