

# DEVOTIONALS


## ADVENT SEASON

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy to you and to many, and he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. Many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be born before the Lord. He will drink fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Spirit of the Lord. He will be a prophet of the people of Israel, like Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, to turn the hearts of the righteous—to make ready a people for the Lord. Is this possible for me? I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years. The angel answered: I am Gabriel, and I have been sent to you, and you will be silent and not able to speak until the words I speak to you are fulfilled. The words, which will come true at their appointed time. The angel Gabriel went to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and found a woman named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. He greeted her and said: Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her: Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great


*Do not be afraid*

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE





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*What is Advent*



The season of Advent, which comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming” or “visit” begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year for Christmas.

During Advent, we prepare for, and anticipate, the coming of Christ in various meanings: the promised coming of the Messiah to the Jews, of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, the promised return of the risen Christ in final victory and the continual coming of Christ into the lives and hearts of believers. We remember the longing of Jews for a Messiah and our own longing for, and need of, forgiveness, salvation and a new beginning. Even as we look back and celebrate the birth of Jesus in a humble stable in Bethlehem, we also look forward to anticipating the second coming of Christ as the fulfillment of all that was promised by His first coming.




# *The Advent Wreath*




The Advent wreath, four candles on a wreath of evergreen, is shaped in a perfect circle to symbolize the eternity of God. In some churches, four purple candles, one for each week in Advent, are used with one larger white candle in the middle as the Christ candle. Other churches prefer three purple or blue candles with one candle being rose or pink, to represent joy.

While the Advent wreath, with its four candles, did bring light to churches, it was not to illuminate the interior as much as to symbolize the coming of Christ. The Advent wreath began in the time of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther.

During each Sunday of the Advent season, we focus on one of the four virtues Jesus brings us: Hope, Love, Joy and Peace. Others consider the lighting of the first candle to symbolize expectation, while the second symbolizes hope, the third joy and the fourth purity. The Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day reminding Christians that Jesus is the light of the world. The order and exact wording vary among churches, but the wreath continually reminds us of whom we are called to be as followers of Jesus.



*1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent*



“Anticipation” is predominantly a highly positive phenomenon which occurs in the human brain. The Christmas season optimizes that feeling as we “anticipate” blessings on many levels. Isaiah, in chapter 11, captivates us as he prophesied over 2000 years ago about the coming of Christ. From the promised “family tree” of King David, reduced by family failures from tree to Jesse’s stump, came a vital “Branch”. This new Branch from humble Jesse’s roots, would bear fruit exceeding all expectations. In verse 2, we read: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him; give Him wisdom and understanding, counsel and power; knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”

Following Israel’s destruction, Judah, too, was faced with great hardship. Spared by the skin of its teeth, Judah rejoiced with great anticipation at Isaiah’s prophesy of the rise of a “Messiah” who would bring salvation to their trodden nation. Isaiah prophesied that the “Branch” would bring justice to the needy, not from what he sees or hears, but through righteousness that he would wear as a belt, with faithfulness as a sash around his waist. Furthermore, the Branch will establish justice on the earth with “the rod of his mouth and the breath of his lips”.

From our position in history, we know the prophesied “Branch” has a name: Jesus Christ. Isaiah was correct when he said that Jesus would establish justice with his mouth. The mighty words of Jesus, the things He said and taught, brought justice, love, peace, hope and all the spiritual fruits from the Branch of the Lord. We continue to “anticipate” what Christ will do in our lives. He brings spiritual renewal that changes us. When this occurs, we can better understand Isaiah’s verse 11:9: “They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”. For Christians, the anticipation, excitement and richness of the Christmas season remains with us all the days of our lives.

- Debbie Carter


Prayer: Dear Father God, as we anticipate the celebration of the birth of Your Son, we ask that you show up in our Advent preparations. Meet us in the busy-ness and the silence. Interrupt our lives with your newness of life. Prepare us to be unsettled by your unconditional love. Amen.

# *Snowman Soup Recipe*




- Pour one packet of instant cocoa mix into a mug.
- Add 3 unwrapped chocolate kisses.
- Add 10 mini-marshmallows into the mug.
- Add hot water and stir with a candy cane.

*Enjoy!*



*2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent*



As the Old Testament comes to an end, we find God promising to send Elijah before the great day of the Lord. Zechariah, a descendant of Aaron, was a priest. While on duty at the temple, his name was drawn as the person to burn incense in the Most Holy place. This was a once in a lifetime event as no priest could do this twice. While Zechariah was at his task, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and announced that Zechariah's wife would have a son and they were to name him John. There, in the Most Holy place, in the presence of God and His angel Gabriel, Zechariah doubted God's power to accomplish what He had said He would do. Because of this, he was not allowed to speak until John was born. Much is said about Zechariah and Elizabeth's age. While we don't know their ages, we do know that a priest had to retire at age fifty, so Zechariah was not yet fifty.

When John was born, Zechariah regained his speech and he began to praise God because he sensed that John was going to do something great. Because Zechariah was a priest, John would also be a priest. John was also called to be a prophet in the mold of the Old Testament prophets and specifically like Elijah. There had not been a prophet in Israel for about four hundred years. He was given the task of preparing Israel for the coming of the Lord. We have every reason to believe that John carried out his task faithfully and never thought too highly of himself. Even though John was looking ahead, he remained rooted in the past. Jesus would say of him, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matthew 11: 11)

- Sam Furtick

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we praise you for your faithfulness. We praise you for your forgiveness and love. Teach us to be gentle and patient toward others and with ourselves. Help us always to serve You to the best of our abilities. Amen.



# *Candy Cane Placeholder*



## **INSTRUCTIONS**

- Hot glue three mini candy canes.
- Tie a pretty bow around the tops of the candy canes.

*Have Fun!*

  
*Mackinac Island Fudge*  





**40 minutes to prepare • 16-20 pieces**

### INGREDIENTS


- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup granulated white sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- Pinch of salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 cups confectioners sugar

### PREPARATION

1. Mix butter, milk, brown & white sugars in heavy pan on medium heat. Bring to a boil & stir continuously for 6 minutes.
2. Remove from heat & cool briefly, then add vanilla, cocoa powder, & confectioners sugar. Beat with electric mixer until fudge is smooth & thick.
3. Pour onto buttered baking pan. When cool to touch, use spatula to help roll mixture into log form. Wrap in plastic-wrap & place in freezer for 20 minutes. Slice to serve. Enjoy!



*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent*



Our scripture is the familiar story of the Annunciation of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. Gabriel tells Mary that she is “highly favored, the Lord is with her, and blessed among women.” Mary is very confused, frightened, troubled, worried and in denial. Gabriel informs Mary that Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, is also pregnant, and Mary visits with her cousin to receive comfort, peace and understanding. Mary’s song in verses 46–54 is a beautiful proclamation of her faith, courage, willingness to serve God, and acceptance of God’s plan.

Advent is the best time of the year. Christians have multiple opportunities to spread joy, cheer, and the good news of salvation to the world. Jesus expects us to feed the hungry, care for the lonely, love the abused, provide shelter for the homeless, give medical assistance to the sick, comfort and guidance for children and blessings to all. We need to respond like Mary and accept the invitation with the same spirit of Mary who said, “My soul doth magnify the Lord.”

Mary could have made excuses we often hear today. She was young, inexperienced, poor, and “lowly.” However, Mary rejoiced with her opportunity and trusted, obeyed, and honored the Lord’s decision. Mary’s attitude was to “magnify the Lord, rejoice in God Her Savior,” and trust that God would lead, guide and abide with her always. Sometimes Christians believe that someone else will volunteer to help with seasonal projects and church activities. Instead, we need to embrace the spirit of Mary and join in the many programs, projects and mission opportunities.

God chose an unknown teenager to bear His Son. He has chosen us to be His disciples in today’s world. We have all found favor in the Lord, and He will use us to “fill the hungry with good things.” The blessings you bring to others will honor the Lord and bring good tidings to a world in need of love, grace and peace.

- Bob Cribbs


Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we praise you for your faithfulness. We praise you for your forgiveness and love. Teach us to be gentle and patient toward others and with ourselves. Help us always to serve You to the best of our abilities. Amen.

# Magic Reindeer Food




## MIX TOGETHER:

- 2 cups raw oats
- 1 tablespoon each red & green sprinkles or edible glitter
  - 2 tablespoons birdseed (optional)
- On Christmas Eve, put your Magic Reindeer Food in a bowl by the door for the reindeer!



*4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent*



“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

When was the last time you got some really great news? Today’s world is inundated with a constant feed of news clamoring for our attention. It can quickly become overwhelming and exhausting. But two thousand years ago, this was not the case. News traveled by word of mouth and speed of foot. People were eager to hear news.

Imagine the shock of the lowly shepherds tending their flocks on that seemingly ordinary night. An angel of the Lord appeared before them to announce the great news of a Savior being born in their midst!

The Good News that would bring great joy to all people had been told to them, the least among the least. And then, as if Heaven wanted to join in the excitement, the starry skies burst forth with a great company of heavenly hosts proclaiming God’s glory and goodness! What great news, indeed!

What did the shepherds do with this great news? They hurried off to see for themselves, and then returned, telling everyone what they had seen and heard. Forever changed, they spread the news, praising God and thanking Him for this special gift.

Isn’t it the same for us? Once we have experienced the joy of knowing Jesus, we just can’t keep it to ourselves. Like the shepherds, we must hurry off and share the Good News that brings such great joy!

- Becky Johnson

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for letting us help share the Good News of Jesus. There will never, ever be any better news to share. Amen.

# *Christmas Morning Casserole*



## **INGREDIENTS**

- 1 16-ounce package pork sausage
- 10 eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 6 cups cubed bread\*
- 2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 cup diced red pepper, optional

## **DIRECTIONS**

1. Butter a 9x13x2-inch casserole dish.
2. In large skillet, cook sausage over medium-high heat, stirring frequently until thoroughly cooked & no longer pink.
3. In large bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, & salt until thoroughly combined.
4. Evenly distribute half the bread into the prepared casserole dish. Sprinkle with half the cheese, half the black pepper, half the red pepper, and half the sausage. Repeat layers.
5. Pour egg mixture evenly over casserole.
6. Cover and refrigerate overnight or bake immediately.
7. When ready to bake, preheat oven to 325 degrees. Bake uncovered for 55-60 minutes, or until eggs are set. If the top begins to brown too quickly, loosely cover the casserole dish with foil. Serve warm.



*Fun Family Activities  
for Advent*



- Have a picnic beside the Christmas tree
- Put out photos of past Christmas celebrations & reminisce
- Pop popcorn to string along with cranberries
- Make mini-wreaths out of handprints
- Call a distant relative and sing Christmas songs to them
- Make a donation to the S.E. Gwinnett Co-Op, Angel Tree or Mitten Tree
- Have a birthday party for Baby Jesus
- Invite a friend and enjoy the Journey to Bethlehem production

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