

## *Advent*

Christmas.

Candles flickering, houses aglow with Christmas lights, the smell of pine, festive decorations, tantalizing and spicy smells of home baked cookies, children's eyes dancing with excitement, warm comfort of family and friends.

Christmas.

Harried shopping and wrapping (often for people we don't even *really* know...or like!), expectations, loneliness, old hurts revisited, disappointments, overindulgence, financial stress, guilt.

How can one season represent such a gamut of feelings?!

It's all in our perspective...what our heart is focused on.

“Advent” means “coming”. It's a time traditionally that the Christian Church prepares her heart for the coming of her Savior. Reliving that long ago time, when the “weary world rejoiced” in the birth of Christ, the Son of God.

But sometimes, Advent preparations become just one more thing on our already busy calendars. Making us feel guilty that we can't at least keep up with this—the spiritual focus of the season to help us keep our equilibrium and not get carried away with celebrating just for the sake of celebrating (or putting on a “celebration” face even when we don't feel like it).

I have sometimes held on to our Advent readings with a desperate grip—desperate to not get sucked into the vortex of rampant commercialism and trivialism. Oh, of course we know why we're celebrating Christmas, but why is it so hard to take 20 minutes or so a night to slow down and “be still and know that He is God”?! To bask in the great Love Story of the ages and let it touch all I am and do?

My desire with this Advent devotional is to give you something doable—something to stay focused on “the reason for the season” but not feel guilty when life happens. So right up front—I give you permission to not feel guilty if you don't “get it all in” or if you decide to even finish things up the week *after* Christmas! You have my permission to use this in any way that suits your family and your time available.

If “all” you get done are the readings and maybe sing the hymns, but no time for the crafty part, that's

wonderful! Or if you read Sunday's reading and sing the hymn the other days, that's fine. If "all" you get done is the banner for the week—great!

One thing I have felt the Lord impress upon me over and over since 1998 is that I need to study His names. His names give us a clearer picture of His character and who He *really* is vs. who we *think* He is.

My prayer is that through studying these four names of Christ related to His birth, you may soak in His presence.....letting it permeate you and anoint all you touch in your daily life—especially your family and those closest to you.

I wanted something simple—and flexible! Although I have something on each day, you are free to rearrange the days as they suit you. I begin each week on Sunday with a short devotional based on the name of Christ for that week. The hymn, Scripture memory, character quality and plant/spice all correlate. Then at the end of the week you will (if you choose to) make a banner depicting His name for that week. You can make it small and use it as an ornament. Or you can make it bigger and decorate a wall with it. You can make it out of construction paper or foam shapes, especially if you have little ones, or you can use scrapbooking supplies or even fabric. *Your* creativity is the limit! :)

I've included some pictures to keep little hands busy while you read the Scriptures and stories, and I've tried to keep things short, but meaningful, for busy mamas of littles as well as busy families of all ages who may be involved in many Christmas activities and festivities!

A tradition in our family that might be fun to add is Secret Servants. On each Sunday we put everyone's names (or initials!) on little slips of paper. Everyone who is old enough chooses one, then they try to do things "secretly" without getting caught for the week! This gets to be lots of fun—sometimes one asks a trusted sibling to do something to throw the "chosen one" off the trail! They might buy some candy or little things for their "person" of the week. When they were younger I would buy some treats they could use. As soon as feasible, though, have them do something to "earn it" so they don't get lazy and just use the treats you bought!

It helped for each of us to make a list of things we liked our Secret Servant to do, such as chores, getting their bed ready for them at night, toothbrush ready, etc. This has been a fun addition to our Advent season! I got the idea from a story we read many years ago, and we have consistently done it now for at least 12 years!

We also have always had a Nativity set that the children could play with. In 1992 I bought a plaster set that is still around—and I believe we still have all the pieces! For the longest time they could only play with it in the living room, set up on what used to be the top of an old desk. Otherwise they were forever banging into the furniture when making the figures "walk"! :) Over the years the pieces have taken rides in play cars and become a part of the dollhouse scene, so when we take down the Christmas decorations, we try to make sure all pieces are accounted for. A few years we've had a stray lamb or Wise Man disappear, but when they were found, they had a special place on our decorative shelves in

the kitchen so they couldn't go wandering again! Although the set has lost its original luster and has a few chips, it is well-loved by my children because it's always been a part of Christmas!

A few years ago we bought the Fisher Price Nativity Set, which is a little more resilient—especially with little boys! Again, when it's time to put it away, we go on a treasure hunt for any missing pieces. We try to keep things together a bit better with that one, but the boys really like taking the camels and Baby Jesus for rides in their wagons and on their tractors!

So whether you purchase something or make it out of cloth or blocks of wood, having a Nativity Set the children can touch can be a wonderful memory-maker for them!

Above all, please make this a time of fun time focusing on relationships—first of all, with our Abba Father and our Beloved Savior, whose birth we celebrate. Secondly, your family relationships. Build memories! Then may the love of Christ so fill you to overflowing that you anoint all whose lives you touch with the fragrance of Him!

I pray that these studies will touch your heart and help you to slow down for a little while to focus on the One Who *loves* you so much that He sent His Son to die for you, to restore the Abba Father relationship He had with His children in the Garden of Eden.

May this Christmas be one of hope, love, joy, and peace from THE Prince of Peace permeating every nook and cranny of your heart!

For Him~

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## ~\*~*How the study is laid out*~\*~

There are Scriptures at the beginning of each day. You are free to read those to your family or just meditate on them for your personal use. This is *your* devotional! You can even switch around days if that suits you better. I did put the Scripture memory on Monday to give you the whole week to work on it, and Sunday's devotional sets the tone by introducing the name for the week.

I will be sharing insights from my studies of the name, character quality, hymn, or plant/spice. After my insights will be a short story to read to your family. It is geared more for younger children, but hopefully everyone can get something out of it! You could either read the first part (insights) as your own devotional and read the story to your children, or you can share the whole thing together as a family. Make it suit *your* needs!

**Sunday**--A devotional based on the "name of the week". First is the insights/devotional, then there is a Scripture reading and short devotional story geared more for children. Again—use this as it suits your family! There is also a copy of the hymn for the week with Sunday so you can start singing it.

**Monday**-- Scripture memory verse for the week, plus a "track" for memorizing the Luke 2:1-20 passage if you desire to. There is a reminder each day to work on Scripture memory, plus some handy charts you can print off to have fun keeping track of your progress!

We have developed some hand motions to go along with the Scripture memory which are available via a link in the e-book, if you'd like to use them. They are basically signs from American Sign Language—if you already know it, you might do better than we do!

**Tuesday**--A short history of the Christmas hymn for the week, along with a short story to go with it.

**Wednesday**-- A godly character quality devotional based on and tied in with the name of the week, followed by a story.

**Thursday**-- Facts on the plant or spice that correlates with the name for the week and a story as well.

**Friday**--Craft Day! You can make a "banner" which can be made of construction paper, foam pieces, scrapbooking papers, felt (for littles) or nicer fabric. There are patterns included, but if you want to embellish or tweak it—go for it!

**Saturday**-- "Catch up" day! :) A short Scripture reading and one of our favorite cookie recipes. If you have time, you could make some cookies together and make memories! Maybe recite your Scripture verse while working together, sing the hymn, and talk about what stood out to you this week.