

Advent Devotions

**Bible Devotions and Activities for Each Week
of the Christmas Season**



Joy to the world! The Lord is come.

These devotions and activities are designed to help the elders in your care to engage with the Advent season – the four weeks before Christmas – and its traditional themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

The prayers, meditations, and activities are especially designed to meet the spiritual needs of older adults with dementia (though anyone may enjoy them). Feel free to pick and choose the elements that work for you.

If possible, have a simple advent wreath and candles (electric if appropriate) to light during each of the devotions and activities.

Access easy-to-sing versions of the Christmas carols on [youtube.com/spiritualeldercare](https://www.youtube.com/spiritualeldercare). Simply search for the song name.

Bless you during this time of hope.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisa". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Elisa Bosley
Chaplain and Founder
Spiritual Eldercare

Advent Week 1: Hope

Sing: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Light the first (hope) advent candle.

Opening Prayer:

Father of hope, who brought love into this world, be the love that dwells among us.

Son of hope, who brought peace into this world, be the peace that dwells among us.

Spirit of hope, who brought joy into this world, be the joy that dwells among us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon, be the center, the focus of our lives always, and particularly this Advent time. Amen.¹

Discussion or Private Reflection:

- Name or write down three things that you wait for. (Examples: birthdays, a baby to be born, a visit from a loved one, your next meal)
- Say or think about: How might you feel while you're waiting? (Examples: excited, nervous, impatient)
- In the Bible, hope is much more than optimism or wishing; hope is waiting in faith for a future *certainty*. We don't say that we wish the sun would come up tomorrow, because we *know* it will. That's the biblical sense of hope!

¹ http://faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm

- We hope *in someone who is the same yesterday, today, and forever*²: We trust God and his goodness and mercy.
- Advent is all about waiting in hope: looking back to when people awaited the birth of Jesus, and looking forward to Jesus' return to establish God's kingdom of goodness and justice.
- As you fix your eyes on God, complete this sentence: "In hope, today I look forward to ..."

Closing Prayer:

May the Father of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Jesus, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.³ Go in peace. Amen.

Sing: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Activity: Leaves of Hope

Supplies:

- Leaf cutouts, printed on colored paper (especially green and red).
- Black pens for residents (or be ready to write down each response on a leaf).

Activity Meditation:

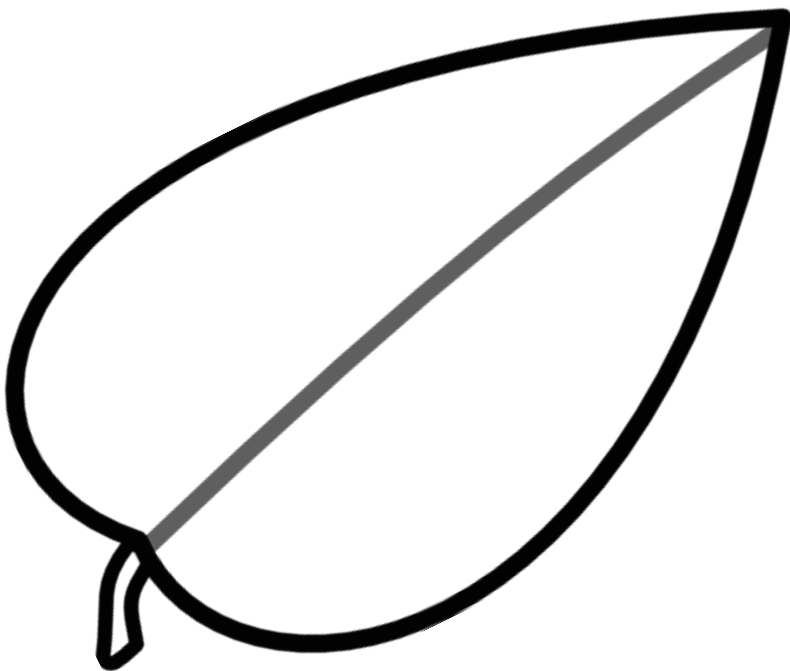
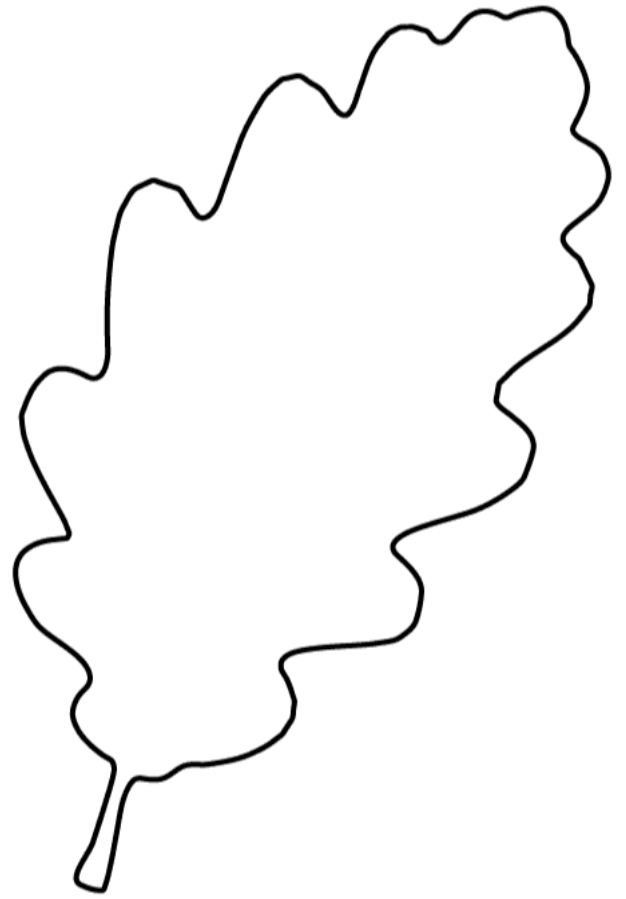
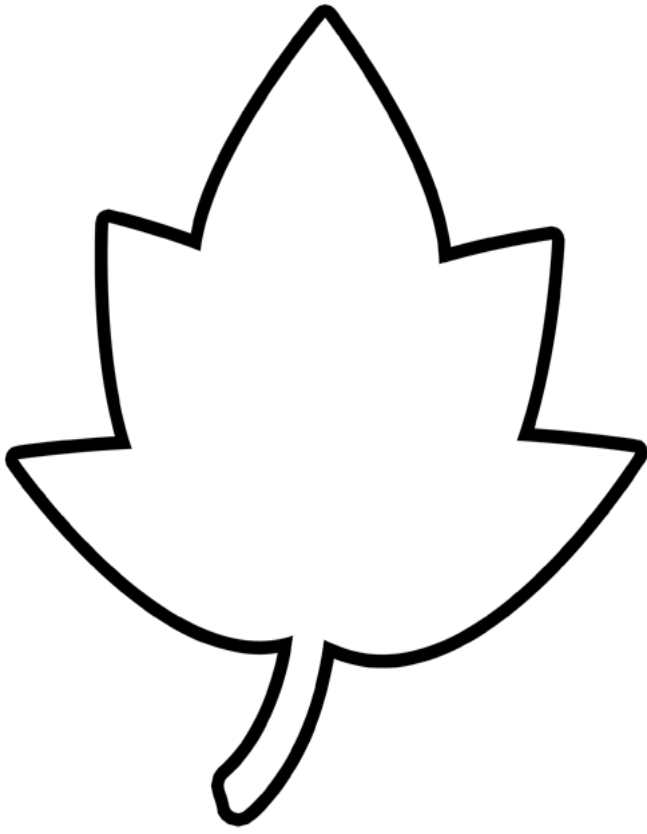
Every spring, what do you expect to see on bare trees? Leaves! You know they will sprout and grow, year after year. That's

² Hebrews 13:7

³ See Romans 15:13

what hope is like in the Bible: we know that God's promises will be fulfilled at the right time.

On these paper leaves, write down hopes you have today for yourself, your loved ones, and the world. String, tape, or staple them together to make a banner. Hang it in a place where you'll see it every day. Put your trust in God to fulfill these hopes in the right way and at the right time.



Advent Week 2: PEACE

Sing: It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Light the first (hope) and second (peace) advent candles.

Opening Prayer:

In this season of expectation

We prepare to welcome you, Christ Jesus, Messiah

Into the bustle of our lives

and the hard to find moments of solitude.

We prepare to welcome you, Christ Jesus, Messiah

Into our homes and situations.

We prepare to welcome you, Christ Jesus, Messiah

Into our hearts.

Yours, O God, is the presence that brings peace,

the peace that comforts,

the peace that gives us strength to carry on.

Yours is the voice we long to hear,

the persistent whisper in our ear,

“Be still, and know that I am God.” Amen.⁴

Discussion or Private Reflection:

- Write down or discuss: What makes life peaceful?
(Examples: inner calm and well-being; lack of violence; cooperation among people; forgiveness; lack of worry)

⁴ http://faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm

- The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, means “whole” or “well-being.” It captures God’s beautiful plan for people and creation to thrive, inside and out.
 - Peace = Shalom with all people and shalom with God.
 - At Christ’s birth, the angels sing “Peace on earth, good will to humankind,” and Christ is often called the Prince of Peace. Peace is God’s promise in Jesus!
- Write down or discuss: What can you do today to foster peace in yourself and harmony between people?
 - Name some peaceful thoughts and actions. Take your time and be creative! (Examples: sitting by the fireside; having a cup of tea; watching snow fall; gazing at a candle; smiling and shaking someone’s hand in greeting; saying “thank you”; considering others’ burdens instead of judging them; praying; journaling; giving to the needy)
- Today and every day, soak in the knowledge that you are loved by God, no matter what. In the words of priest Henri Nouwen: “Nothing is more important in peacemaking than that it flow from a deep and undeniable experience of love. Only those who know deeply that they are loved and rejoice in that love can be true peacemakers.”

Closing Prayer:

As the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah,⁵ “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over

⁵ Isaiah 43:1-2

you.” We put our trust in the presence and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sing: Away in a Manger

Activity: Scents of Christmas

Supplies: Different objects that have pleasant scents of the season, such as:

- Fresh orange or tangerine (score the peel to release the scent)
- Pine boughs or rosemary (gently rub between hands to release the scent)
- Fresh sage (gently rub between hands to release the scent)
- Cinnamon
- Cloves
- Peppermint oil
- Vanilla extract

Keep each item hidden in a clean tea cloth, unlabeled jar, or paper bag. Go around the room and have people smell the object, then try to guess what it is.

Activity Meditation:

Certain smells can take us right back to a peaceful memory: an ocean breeze, rain in the desert, your mother’s perfume, your father’s pipe, your grandmother’s kitchen. When you smell the items in this activity, talk about something you connect with that smell. What does each scent remind you of? How does it make you feel?

Advent Week 3: JOY

Sing: Go Tell It on the Mountain

Light the first (hope), second (peace), and third (joy) advent candles.

Opening Prayer:

Shout for joy

the whole earth,

and everything in it.

Rejoice!

For Light has come into the world.

The mountains sing,

the seas resound

to the praise of your name.

Salvation once promised is here on earth.

The angels' song

rings in the air,

a child has been born.

Hallelujah!

The Savior of the world is here. Amen.⁶

Discussion or Private Reflection:

- Let's think about joy: What are some things, events, and people that make you feel joyful?
- Let's reflect on a story that seems the opposite of joy. When Mary was pregnant with Jesus, what were her

⁶ http://faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm

circumstances? (poor, young, female, unmarried, pregnant)

- What were Joseph's circumstances? (poor, unmarried, with his fiancée pregnant)
- If you were in Mary or Joseph's situation, how might you feel?
- Even though some of Mary's circumstances were troubling, what was her response? Joy! "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."⁷
- What was Mary focused on that enabled her to have joy? (Certainty and trust in God, not in her circumstances.)
- Write down or discuss: What helps you to focus on God and trust him? (Examples: prayer, singing, reading the Bible, talking to others about God)
- What are some ways that you can cultivate more joy during the Advent season?

Closing Prayer:

Father of joy, who sent your Son to Earth for us, we praise you for your everlasting love, your endless patience, and for the greatest gift you could possibly give us, salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Fill us with your Spirit, the source of all joy. Amen.

Sing: Joy to the World

Activity: Stained glass coloring page

⁷ Luke 1:46-47

Supplies:

- Printout of stained-glass nativity scene
- Colored pens, crayons

Activity Meditation:

Coloring pages for adults can be a creative way to pray and reflect. Consider this page your own stained-glass window, which you can color however you like.

As you fill in the picture, ponder the faces of Joseph, Mary, and the Baby Jesus. Think about how they may have felt at this moment.

Remember how you felt when you or friend got to experience the joy of a new baby. What memories do you have of welcoming a new baby into the world?



Advent Week 4: LOVE

Sing: O Come All Ye Faithful

Light the first (hope), second (peace), third (joy), and fourth (love) advent candles.

Opening Prayer:

Dearest Lord,

You are the peace of all things calm

You are the place to hide from harm

You are the light that shines in the dark

You are the heart's eternal spark

You are the door that's open wide

You are the guest who waits inside

You are the stranger at the door

You are the calling of the poor

You are my Lord and with me still

You are my love, keep me from ill

You are the light, the truth, the way

You are my Savior this very day. Amen.⁸

Discussion or Private Reflection:

- Think about how love differs depending on its object. Discuss or write down how these different situations feel and how you might act in each:
 - Loving nature
 - Loving a pet

⁸ Celtic oral tradition, first millennium

- Loving a friend
- Loving a family member
- Loving God
- Christmas is often marked by giving and receiving gifts. Think about what you do when giving a gift.
 - What do you ask yourself about the person who's receiving the gift? (What's my relationship with them, what do they like, what do they need ... "it's the thought that counts.")
 - What tasks are involved in giving a gift? (Examples: find a shop, buy it or materials to make it, use money, figure out how to mail or deliver it.) Giving a gift involves cost, effort, thought and attention.
- What response do you hope the person has to your gift?
 - Gladness, delight, gratitude
- The gospel writer John described God's love for the world as wrapped up in a gift: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)
- What was God thinking about when he gave the world the gift of his Son? (His love for us!)
- What can you do to receive Jesus as God's gift to you this Advent?

Closing Prayer:

Father in heaven,
our hearts desire the warmth of your love
and our minds are searching for the light of your Word.
Increase our longing for Jesus Christ our Savior

and give us the strength to grow in love,
that the dawn of his coming
may find us rejoicing in his presence
and welcoming the light of his truth.
We ask this in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the
Holy Spirit. Amen.⁹

Sing:

Hark, the Herald Angels Sing

Activity: Love in Action

Supplies: Printed “I Love You Because” and “I Appreciate You Because” cards

Write the name of a loved one or someone you appreciate – relative, friend, postal worker, caregiver – at the top of the card. Then list specific reasons why you love or appreciate that person. Slip the note into a Christmas card or gift, or simply give it to the person.

If you’re in a group, have everyone sit in a circle, take a card and write their name at the top. Then, have everyone pass the card to the person on the left. As each person looks at the name at the top of the card, have them write something they love about that person. Keep passing the cards until they’ve been all the way around the circle.

⁹ International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)



I LOVE YOU BECAUSE ...

Thank you and Merry Christmas!



**I APPRECIATE YOU
BECAUSE ...**

Thank You and Happy Holidays!