



CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY TEXAS

Advent Devotionals



Welcome to Advent

As we enter this sacred season of Advent, we pause to remember the hope, peace, joy, and love that Christ brings into the world. Advent invites us to slow down, to prepare our hearts, and to look with anticipation toward the coming of our Savior.

This devotional is designed to guide you through that journey—day by day, reflection by reflection—as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Whether you're spending this season near or far, may these words draw you closer to the light of Christ and remind you that His presence is always with you.

Week 1: Hope

Walking in the Light of Hope
Dr. Grant Carey

School of Ministry Director,
Concordia University Texas

Week 2: Peace

Unlikely Friends, Unshakable Peace
Haley Zimmerman, M.A.

Director of Youth and Children's
Ministries, Trinity Downtown
Lutheran Church, Houston, TX
CTX Class of '17

Week 3: Joy

When Joy Turns You Upside Down
Deaconess Noemí Guerra

Districtwide Evangelist Development
Ministry Director,
Parent of a Current CTX Student

Week 4: God With Us

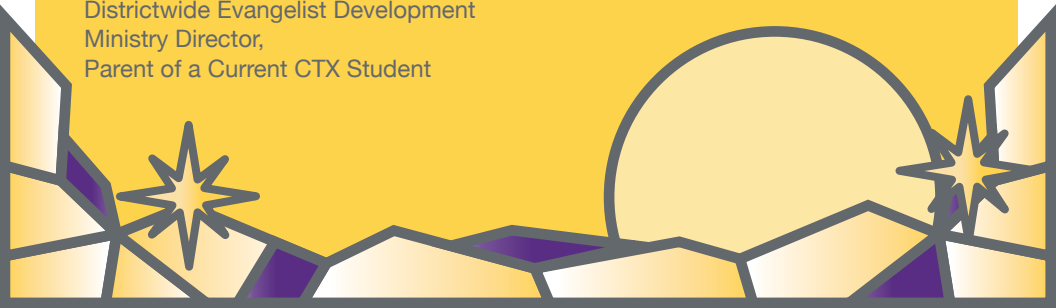
**The Presence That
Changes Everything**
Rev. Dr. Jim Marriott

School of Ministry Associate Professor of
Theology, Concordia University Texas

Christmas Eve

Hope, Peace, and Love in a Manger
Rev. Dr. Jake Boessling

Vice President of Faith Identity and
Culture, Concordia University Texas





Week 1: Hope

WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF HOPE



Scripture (Isaiah 2:2-5 NIV):

"In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord." Please read the rest of the passage."

Devotion:

Pause for a moment and reflect on these questions:

- Do you feel like our world is in a constant state of chaos and uncertainty?
- How does it make you feel right now?
- Do you have hope, even in the midst of it all?

This year, our freshmen are reading Viktor Frankl's, *Man's Search for Meaning*, his powerful memoir of surviving a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. Frankl observed a heartbreaking truth: many prisoners died not just from physical suffering, but from losing hope.

*"Yet we can endure through
love, hope and faith"*



“The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed.”
So how did Frankl survive?

He wrote:

“In our search for meaning, we may find ourselves confronted with harsh realities, yet we can endure through love, hope, and faith.”

Frankl—a Jewish man enduring one of history’s darkest moments—held on to a sliver of hope.

I imagine the people of Israel in the Old Testament felt something similar. They too lived through destruction, war, exile, and immense loss. But Isaiah’s words, the very ones we read today, offered them a promise: that one day, God would restore peace; that one day, justice and righteousness would reign.

They didn’t yet know when or how the Messiah would come, but they held on to hope. Then, on that unexpected night in Bethlehem, Jesus came into the world. Born in humility, destined for the cross, He came to conquer sin, death, and the devil, and to offer the fullness of hope to a chaotic and uncertain world.

Hope is one of the most powerful things a person can possess. And Jesus gives us hope that is beyond our comprehension.

So—

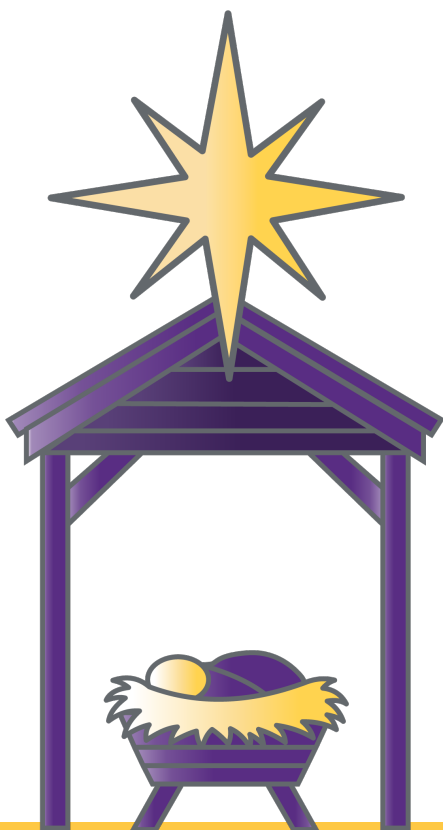
- When you feel the weight of the world,
remember that Jesus has overcome the world.
- When you feel uncertain about your future,
remember that Jesus has already
prepared a place for you.
- When you feel lost or far from God,
remember that He has already claimed
you in baptism—you are chosen and loved.

That is the hope our world so desperately needs.
Who can you share that hope with this season?

PRAYER

*Lord, thank you for being the hope of the world.
In our times of worry, stress, and uncertainty, give
us hope and peace, which surpasses all human
understanding. Help us to celebrate this season with
the hope, joy, peace, and love that only You can give.*

In Jesus' name. Amen





Week 2: Peace

UNLIKELY FRIENDS, UNSHAKABLE PEACE



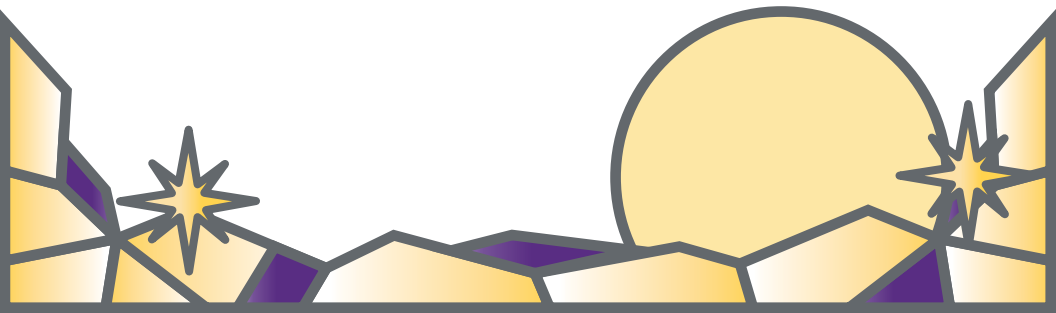
Scripture (Isaiah 11:1-9 NIV):

“1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord. He will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears. With righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.”

Devotion:

You might be asking yourself, what do these verses have to do with transformation and peace? Well, to answer that, I have to tell you a story about Sam and Corky. Corky was my grandpa's dog and a typical boxer: protective, goofy, slobbery, and quick to chase anything in the yard. Sam was a stray cat my grandma brought home from the tennis club. Sam had lived on the street his whole life, yet he made himself at home wherever he went. At first glance, these two should behave like typical cats and dogs, yet somehow they became best friends in my grandparents' home. Corky would get up on my grandma's blue and white couch to lie down, and Sam would curl up with him. They were unlikely friends transformed by their environment.

God's Word speaks to us about this kind of security. We have rock-solid security in Christ that someday all of the brokenness between us will be gone. None of these pairs in the text should go together in our sinful, broken world. Could you imagine a baby playing in a cobra's den? It would be madness.



But Jesus came to destroy all enmity between us, and experiencing the gospel alters us. In a way, we become unlikely friends. I'll bet you have some unlikely friends, people who have brought you more peace than you could have ever imagined. With Jesus, all things will be in harmony—people and creation will finally come together perfectly.

This scripture brings peace for the future, but what about today? What does it do for all the anxiety that comes with deadlines, broken relationships, jobs, and all the other mundane things that draw us away from that security? As brothers and sisters in Christ, we don't have to face these struggles and anxieties alone. Even though there is a broad range of cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds among the people in our lives, we are united in the common love of Jesus. Even if it's a bit messy, it's a beautiful picture of the larger body of believers around the world and a reminder of the party in heaven we will experience one day! In all of this, we always have the peace of Jesus.



*"In all of this, we always
have the peace of Jesus"*

My challenge to you is this: pray that God would show you more of these friends who defy the brokenness of the world and exemplify His Kingdom come. Watch God bring inexplicable peace and transformation into your life.

PRAYER

Lord, today I ask that You help us rest in the confidence that, because of Your sacrifice and resurrection, our sins are truly forgiven and we've been brought back into right relationship with You. Fill us with that peace You give and with the kind of love at the heart of the Gospel, a love that even reaches out to unlikely friends. Strengthen our trust in Your perfect plan, and keep us abiding in the richness of Your mercy and the life-changing power of Your Spirit.

In Jesus' name. Amen





Week 3: Joy

WHEN JOY TURNS YOU UPSIDE DOWN



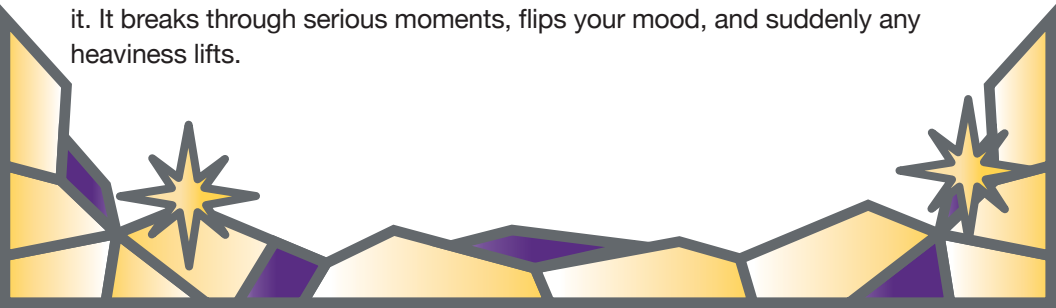
Scripture (Isaiah 35:1-7 ESV):

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.”

Devotion:

My son Kai is a student at Concordia University Texas. One night, we were watching one of those creepy documentaries he loves when I realized my new ear piercing felt strange. I asked him to help because I couldn't see it, so we paused the show to check. We discovered the problem—it was upside down. I know, that doesn't sound like stand-up comedy material, but for some reason, we lost it. We laughed until we couldn't breathe. Everyone else in the room said, “It's not that deep, it's not even funny,” which made us laugh even harder. I forgot all about the creepy show. Joy had turned us upside down. Have you ever had one of those moments when you're laughing so hard you can't explain why—and honestly, you don't even care?

That's the thing about joy. It can turn you upside down when you least expect it. It breaks through serious moments, flips your mood, and suddenly any heaviness lifts.



Isaiah 35 talks about that kind of joy—the kind that shows up where it shouldn't. "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad." That's not normal. Deserts don't bloom, and dead places don't sing. But God says they will. That's what happens when His light shines into our sometimes dry, tired hearts.

The people Isaiah wrote to were going through a desert season, both literally and spiritually. Everything felt hopeless. But God made a promise: "I'm coming for you. I'm going to save you." And He did.

Jesus showed up as light in the darkness, laughter in the silence, and life in the middle of death. Everywhere He went, things flipped upside down. Blind people saw, the lame danced, the broken were healed, and joy broke through.



"Jesus showed up as a light in the darkness, laughter in the silence"

That's what Advent reminds us of—God still shines a joyful light into the dark. No matter what you're going through this Advent season, God still meets you. He shines His light. He brings joy. He turns things upside down. Isaiah reminds us that joy doesn't wait for everything to be perfect. Joy happens because Jesus is already here. He meets you right where you are, shines His light into your desert, and brings life again.

That night with Kai, we couldn't stop laughing. The whole piercing thing was ridiculous, but somehow it was also sacred. In that moment, joy reminded us of something bigger: God shows up in ordinary life. He turns simple moments into laughter, heaviness into hope, and even upside-down piercings into joy. So, if joy shows up this week and turns you upside down, let it. Laugh. Breathe. Remember that Jesus is the reason deserts bloom and hearts sing. That's what His light does—it shines, it surprises, and it turns things upside down.

PRAYER

Jesus, Light of the world, thank You for the kind of joy that shows up when we least expect it. Thank You for laughter, for friendship, and for reminders that You are near. When life feels heavy, shine Your light on us and turn us upside down with joy. Help us share that light wherever we go.

In Jesus' name. Amen





Week 4: God with Us

THE PRESENCE THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING



Scripture (Matthew 1:21 NIV):

“And you will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

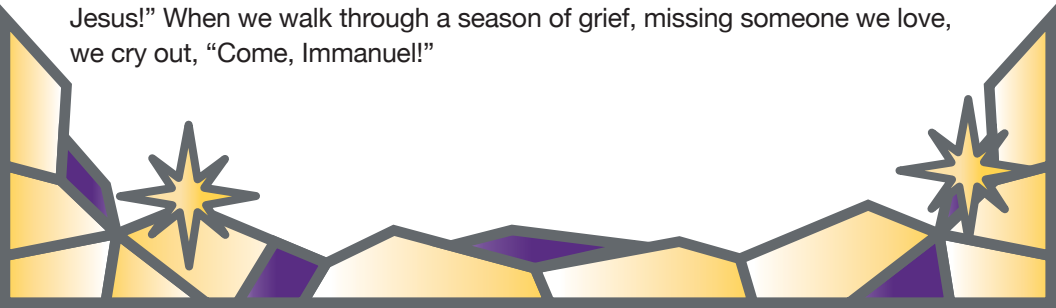
Devotion:

God comes to us in His Son to save us. He doesn't send a substitute, a quick fix, or a distant answer. He comes Himself. God doesn't whisk us away from the troubles of this world. Instead, He enters into them. He takes on our flesh, our pain, and our suffering, and ultimately, He takes on our sin and death on the cross. He is love personified—love made flesh, love that empties Himself so that we might be filled. Jesus redeems. Jesus forgives. Jesus saves.

This is why we need Advent. It reminds us that Jesus came as a baby into our cold, sin-filled world. Advent recalls that Jesus lived, died, and rose again so that we might receive forgiveness, life, and salvation. And Advent also looks forward to His return. One day, Jesus will come again to fulfill all things, to make all things new—a new heaven and a new earth. On that day, He will reign forever as triumphant King and Lord of all.

Immanuel, God with us—yesterday, today, and forever. When we understand God in this way, it reshapes how we live and how we endure life's hardships. Knowing that Immanuel is with us gives us courage to face pain and brokenness with renewed hope. The sufferings of this world are not meant to drive us to despair but to draw us into deeper prayer for Christ's return.

When we face cancer, we cry out, “Come, Immanuel!” When we watch a loved one suffer from dementia, we cry out, “Come, God with us!” When we wrestle with our own failures and weaknesses, we cry out, “Come, Lord Jesus!” When we walk through a season of grief, missing someone we love, we cry out, “Come, Immanuel!”



The life of a Christian is a continual Advent. We rejoice in Christ's first coming, which saves us from sin and death. We wait with hope for His second coming, which will bring renewal and restoration. And even now, we cling to His promise that He is with us. In every trial, He is present. In every act of love and service, He shines through us. We suffer together, serve together, and hope together—because God is with us.

*"In every act of love and service,
He shines through us."*

Happy Advent, dear Christian friends! Your Immanuel has come, is with you now, and will come again in glory. Amen.

PRAYER

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lowly exile here
Until the Son of God appears
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

In Jesus' name. Amen





Christmas Eve

HOPE, PEACE, JOY, AND LOVE IN A MANGER



Scripture (Luke 2: 1-7 NIV):

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”

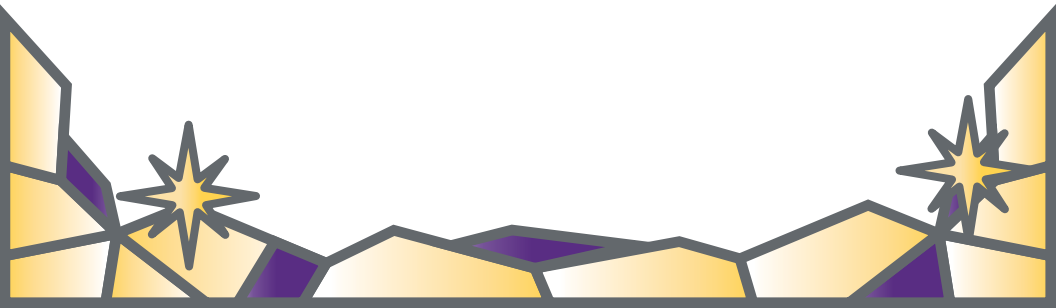
Devotion:

Merry Christmas from Concordia University Texas!

What words capture the spirit of Christmas for you? Maybe it's gift-giving, delicious treats, or family and friends gathered around the table. Maybe it's worship at your church, candles raised high as you sing Silent Night.

For others, the words of Christmas may feel very different. Maybe this night carries pain or sadness, despair or depression. Maybe loneliness, guilt, worry, or insecurity weigh heavy on your heart.

No matter how this message finds you this Christmas Eve, we want to encourage you with four words: **Hope. Peace. Joy. Love.**



Luke's Gospel tells us that during a season of census and chaos, Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. The inns were full, and the noise of the crowds was loud. Yet in the stillness of the night, the Savior of the world was born. Mary wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in a manger. There in that humble place, God gave His greatest gift. Hope came in the form of a baby. Peace was swaddled and placed in a feeding trough. Joy entered a weary world. Love took on flesh and made His dwelling among us.

These words—hope, peace, joy, and love—are not just sentiments for a greeting card. They are gifts that Jesus Himself brings.

- **Hope** in the baby born to save the world.
- **Peace** in the man who secured salvation by dying in our place.
- **Joy** in His Spirit that lives within us through all circumstances.
- **Love** as a way to live on mission in the world with Jesus.

Whether tonight feels bright and full or dark and heavy, remember this: the same Jesus who lay in the manger is the One who reigns on the throne. His presence meets you exactly where you are.

Hope. Peace. Joy. Love. All are found in Him.
Merry Christmas!

PRAYER

*Father, on this holy night You sent Your Son,
born as a baby and laid in a manger, who grew in
wisdom and stature and gave His life for ours. We
thank You for the hope, peace, joy, and love we
receive through Him. Bless our celebration and
center our hearts on Jesus.*

In Jesus' name. Amen



Merry Christmas

"This Advent, we give thanks for students who bring Christ's hope into their communities through acts of service and leadership"

Thank you for joining us in this Advent journey. We hope these reflections have brought you moments of peace and renewed faith during this season. As you move into the coming year, may the lessons of Advent continue to guide and encourage you.

To help you carry these reminders forward, flip over your spiral Advent devotional to find a 2026 calendar.

May it serve as a daily reminder of Christ's enduring love, hope, joy, and peace—not only during Advent, but throughout every season of the year.

