

CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

DECEMBER 2023

#GRACEANDPEACEONEARTH

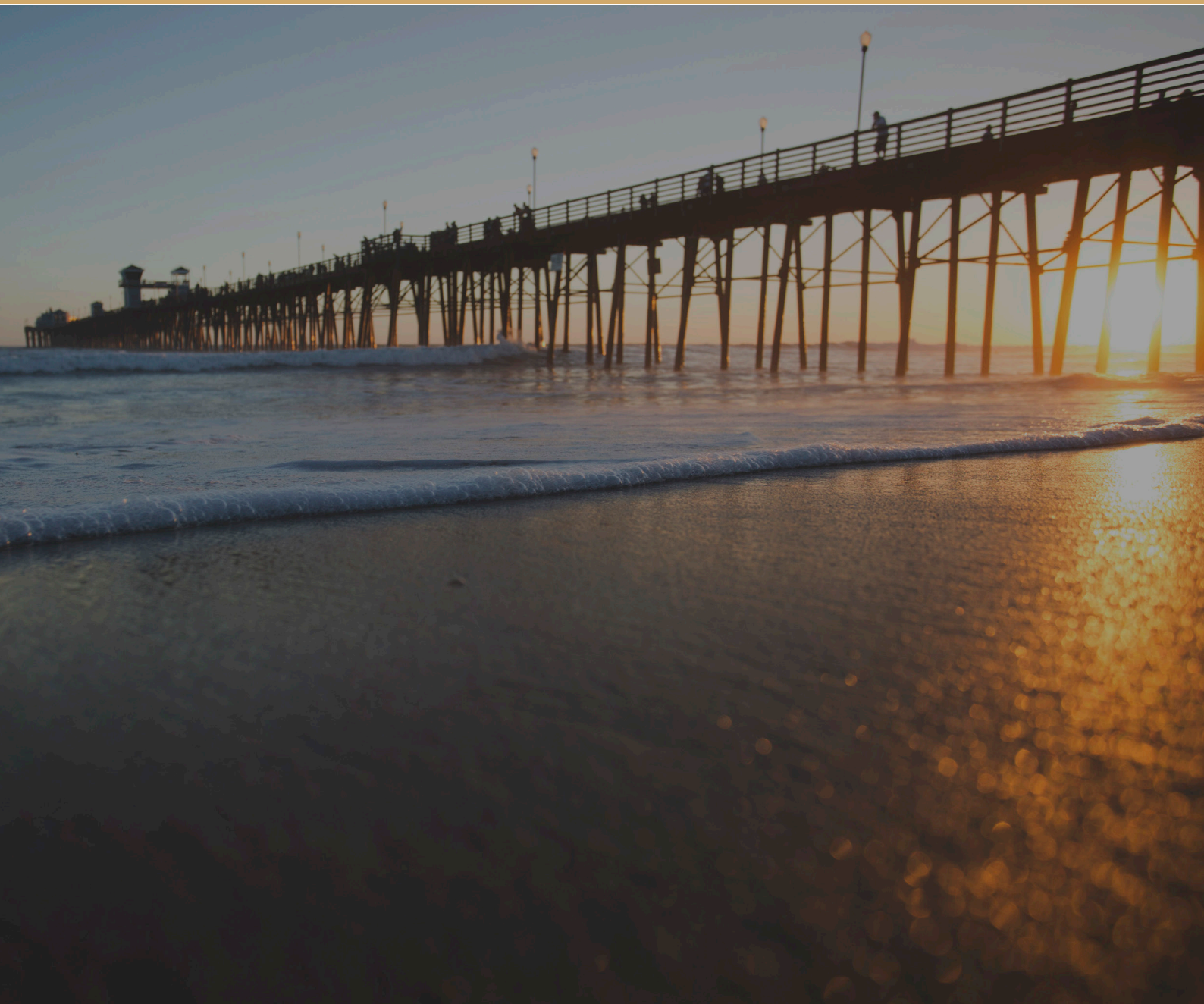


# ADVENT GUIDE

LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING

## GRACE & PEACE CHURCH

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# THE CANDLES + DEVO

## STAY CONNECTED

As Grace & Peace continues to live as a church without walls, it is important to have ways to feel connected to one another, to feel like we belong, that we are still a community together. The season of Advent invites us to immerse ourselves in the story of God's people as they eagerly awaited their coming King. It also challenges us in the present to cast our imaginations forward to the day when Jesus finally brings His kingdom here to Earth in its fullness.

## SCRIPTURE READING

These selected scriptures and action steps can help us establish rhythms and habits that shape us inwardly as well as outwardly in our walk with God. We recommend marking specific times in your day to light the candles, read and meditate on the scripture, and live out the action steps throughout your week.

## SETTING UP YOUR ADVENT WREATH

- Find five candles - ideally one candle should be larger than the other four, but any candles will do.
- Arrange the candles in a circle with the larger candle in the center
- For each night of Advent, light one candle corresponding to each theme
- The final candle gets lit on Christmas eve as a community.

## DEVOTIONAL

Each week includes one theme verse for the entire week as well as suggested daily readings.

**Begin with Prayer.** Before reading the scriptures or doing the action steps -- acknowledge and invite God through prayer. If you're unsure what to pray -- you can use the following prayer as a guide:

Our Father in Heaven, thank You for the gift of scripture.  
Use it to open the eyes of our hearts,  
so that we would not only hear these words,  
but allow them to transform our lives, inside and out.  
In reading Your word, help us to feel a deeper sense  
of the unfathomable love You have for us,  
and help us to share that love with everyone around us.  
We pray these things in the name of Your Son, Jesus, by the power of Your Holy Spirit,  
Amen



Warning! Do not leave candles unattended when lit.

If you want to get creative with family or friends, color your candle box or write the four themes on each side to help remember them.

Have fun!

## ...CONTINUED

### Guided Questions

After reading each verse, take time to reflect and discuss the following questions:

- What has this scripture taught you about who God is?
- What did this scripture teach you about yourself in the story of God?
- What would it look like to begin living this out in my daily life?

These questions are just a jumping off point. Feel free to let the conversations around these scriptures and actions steps grow as you feel lead.

## SHARE

In order to inspire and encourage our broader community, be sure to follow Grace and Peace Church on Instagram and Facebook and post photos of your Advent Wreath, or you and your family spending time together participating in either the devotionals or the action steps!

Be sure to use the hashtag [#graceandpeaceearth](https://www.instagram.com/graceandpeaceearth) and tag [@graceandpeacechurch](https://www.instagram.com/graceandpeacechurch)



# ADVENT WEEK 1: HOPE

## THE PROPHETS' CANDLE

For the First Week of Advent, we focus on Hope, and the prophecies of the Old Testament through which God gave the people of Israel the promise of a savior.

Hope is more than merely "looking on the bright side." Biblical Hope looks specifically at God's faithfulness throughout the narratives of scripture and believes that God will continue to remain faithful into the future.

As we anticipate the birth of Jesus. We begin to reshape our lives, anticipating God's kingdom not as some fantasy future that may come one day, but as a reality that impacts us in the present tense.

## DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

SUNDAY, NOV. 27 — Isaiah 40:28-31

Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.  
He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.  
Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

MONDAY, NOV 28 — Jeremiah 17:7-8

TUESDAY, NOV 29 — Titus 2:11-14

WEDNESDAY, NOV 30 — Is 7:14 & Mt. 1:23

THURSDAY, DEC 1 — Jeremiah 29:10-12

FRIDAY, DEC 2 — Luke 1:46-56

SATURDAY, DEC 3 — Romans 15:13

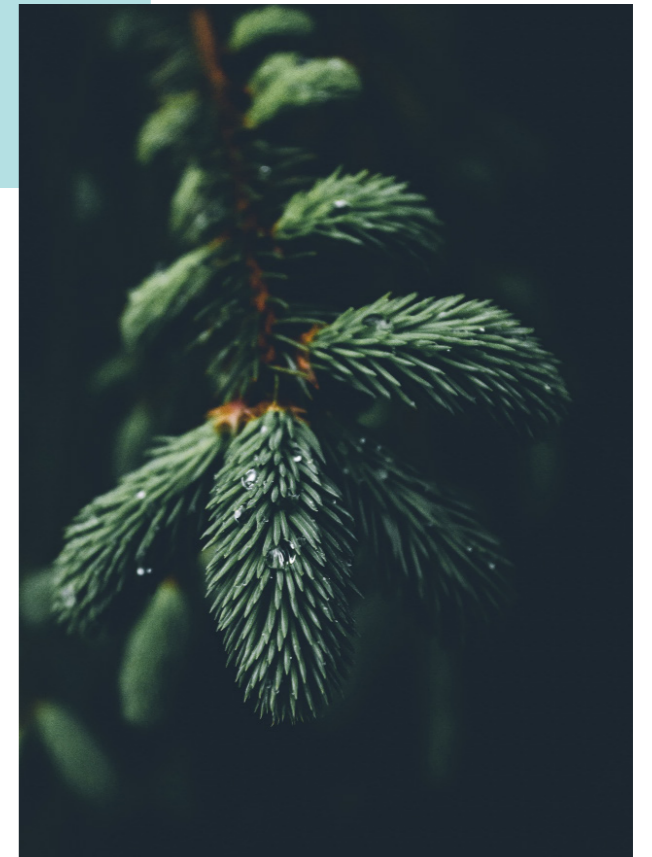
*practices and disciplines shape our faith*

## ACTION STEPS

**Simplify** - One way to identify Christ in the midst of the busyness of the season is to reduce some of the clutter that eats up so much of our precious space physically, mentally, spiritually.

**Simplifying Meals** - Use up leftovers. Plan and cook meals at the start of the week. Free up time, energy, and mental space by removing the worry of food. Begin to recognize and appreciate God's provision and reflect on the idea of simply allowing food to provide nourishment for our bodies.

**Simplifying Schedule** - Be intentional about how you invest your time this week. Carve out time each day to read through the daily scriptures. Block off breathing room in the midst of a season that often leads to frantic busyness. Decide at the beginning of the week what you are going to say "yes" and "no" to.



Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me? Put  
your hope in God, for I will yet  
praise him, my savior and my  
God.  
- Psalm 42:11

## QUESTIONS

1. What areas of your life seem hopeless?
2. What would you like God to do in your life this season?
3. How have you seen God work in the past?
4. What does it mean for your hope to be anchored in Christ?

# ADVENT WEEK 2: PEACE

## THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE

The Second Week of Advent focuses on Peace, and the birthplace of Jesus -- Bethlehem.

Earthly peace usually means the absence of conflict. Biblical peace, however, means something slightly different. Rooted in the Hebrew word "Shalom," Christ's Peace reaches farther -- not just eliminating conflict, but actively pursuing restoration and healing. It's the idea of "wholeness," or "completeness," like a wall of perfectly laid bricks, showing no cracks or crevices.

Jesus's birth didn't eliminate conflict, but brought a completeness, a wholeness, to the centuries of God's prophecies and promises. In this season, we can learn to recognize God's presence WITH US. We can be still before Him, allowing all of our anxiety to melt away in the warmth of his love and grace. We are also charged with a pivotal task -- to BE peacemakers, ACTIVELY ushering in God's kingdom of peace here on Earth.

## DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

SUNDAY, DEC 4 — Isaiah 11:1-9

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, and 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; but 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; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

MONDAY, DEC 5 — Colossians 3:15

TUESDAY, DEC 6 — Eph. 2:11-18

WEDNESDAY, DEC 7 — Col. 3:12-15

THURSDAY, DEC 8 — John 16:32-33

FRIDAY, DEC 9 — Philippians 4:6-7

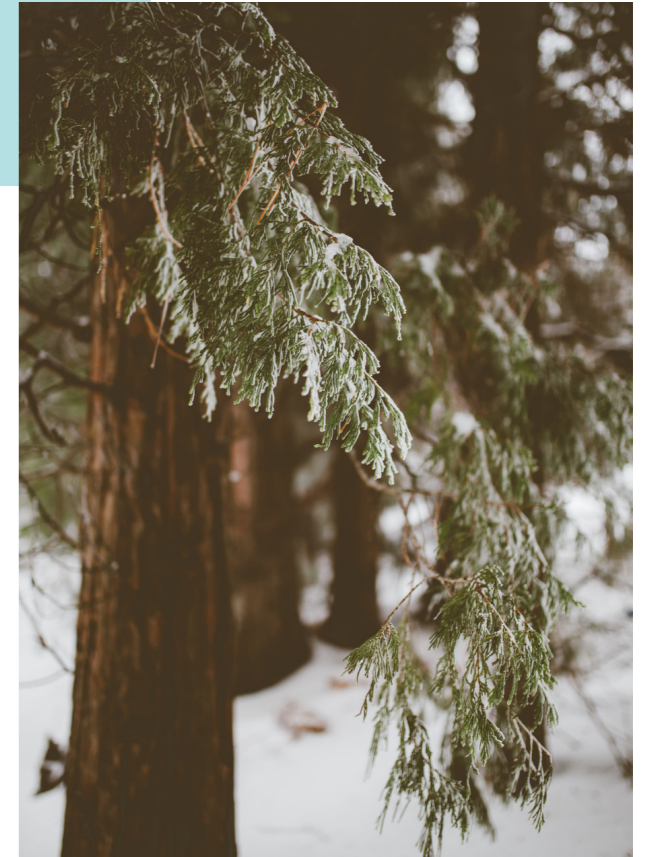
SATURDAY, DEC 10 — James 3:17-18

*practices and disciplines shape our faith*

## ACTION STEPS

REACH - Look around in our own lives and communities for ways we can remove barriers and create a sense of "Shalom." Who can you REACH this week?

BE STILL - Take time to simply be still and silent in the presence of God, allowing His peace to reign in your heart.



Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

- John 14:27

## QUESTIONS

1. What are the primary obstacles to your experiencing peace right now?
2. What daily rhythms in your life need to change to allow peace to come?
3. Who in your life exemplifies true peace?
4. What does it mean for your peace to be found in Christ?



# ADVENT WEEK 3: JOY

## THE SHEPHERD'S CANDLE

This week we dive into the third theme of Advent — Joy as well as light the third candle, The Shepherd's Candle!

When God finished Creation, He declared it to be very good. It stands to reason that God's people find joy in things that are good, beautiful, pure, and life-giving. Weddings, celebrations, friendship, childbirth, tasty food, victory over struggle -- all of these things and more are named as sources of joy in scripture.

We act sometimes like joy and sorrow are two poles on a light switch -- one negating the other. Biblical joy takes a radical shift. It isn't tied to circumstances, but lives in God's love and promise. When things get rough, we remember all that God has done in the past or look ahead to a day when God's promise of salvation is fulfilled. When our focus shifts from us to God, we can truly and honestly rejoice!

Biblical joy doesn't ignore or suppress sorrow -- that is neither wise nor healthy. Rather, to have joy in Christ is to understand that joy not only lives, but truly thrives even in the very presence of sorrow.

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## DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

SUNDAY, DEC. 11 — Luke 2:10-11

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

MONDAY, DEC 12 — Galatians 5:22-23

TUESDAY, DEC 13 — 1 Chron. 16:32-34

WEDNESDAY, DEC 14 — Psalm 16:8-11

THURSDAY, DEC 15 — Hebrews 12:1-3

FRIDAY, DEC 16 — Isaiah 61:6-8

SATURDAY, DEC 17 — John 16:21-24

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## ACTION STEPS

Discover Joy -- List things in your life that bring you joy and reflect on this list throughout the week!

Share Joy -- Send out Christmas cards to people who may not typically be in your circle - let your joy infiltrate their lives! Share without them knowing or feeling obligated to return the favor!

Spend Time with Littles! - Children are masters of joy! If you have kiddos, find time to experience their joy! If you don't have kiddos, find a friend or family member who does and schedule time to hang out with them!

Mini Dance Party! -- Choose a time and place to blast your favorite tunes and dance like a buffoon for at least one full song!

Laugh! -- Get together with friends, family, ANYONE -- and experience joy together

## QUESTIONS

1. In what way is joy different than happiness?
2. What has been your greatest source for joy this season? Express the gratitude with someone
3. Who do you know that needs to experience some joy this season? How can you help them?
4. Is it possible to experience joy in spite of our circumstances? How?



"Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again... I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and Pleasure often is."

- C.S. Lewis Surprised by Joy

# ADVENT WEEK 4: LOVE

## THE ANGEL'S CANDLE

Love is a complicated word. In our culture, Love is often viewed as a feeling. But the Love we find in Christ is something so much deeper.

Love originates in God and emanates from God, an essential element of God's own character. God loves his creation -- in particular humanity -- not because we do anything to earn it, but simply because of who God is. For God, love is feeling -- a genuine affection he has for us -- like the love between spouses, or the love of a parent to a child -- but it's also action-- creating, sustaining, restoring, redeeming -- and sometimes even rebuking.

We are designed for the purpose of receiving God's love. However, scripture tells us that our purpose is fulfilled when we also reflect God's love back to him -- by walking with him, honoring him, and humbly abiding by his words. We also reflect Christ's love in the way we love the rest of creation, including other humans. We're called not just to love those who treat us well, but in the same way God showed us selfless love when we were lost in our own sin, we are called to love those who we consider to be our enemies.

## DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

SUNDAY, DEC. 18 -- John 13:2-5

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

MONDAY, DEC 19 — John 3:16-17

TUESDAY, DEC 20 — 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

WEDNESDAY, DEC 21 — Romans 5:7-8

THURSDAY, DEC 22 — 1 John 4:7-12

*"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*  
-- Luke 1:26-38

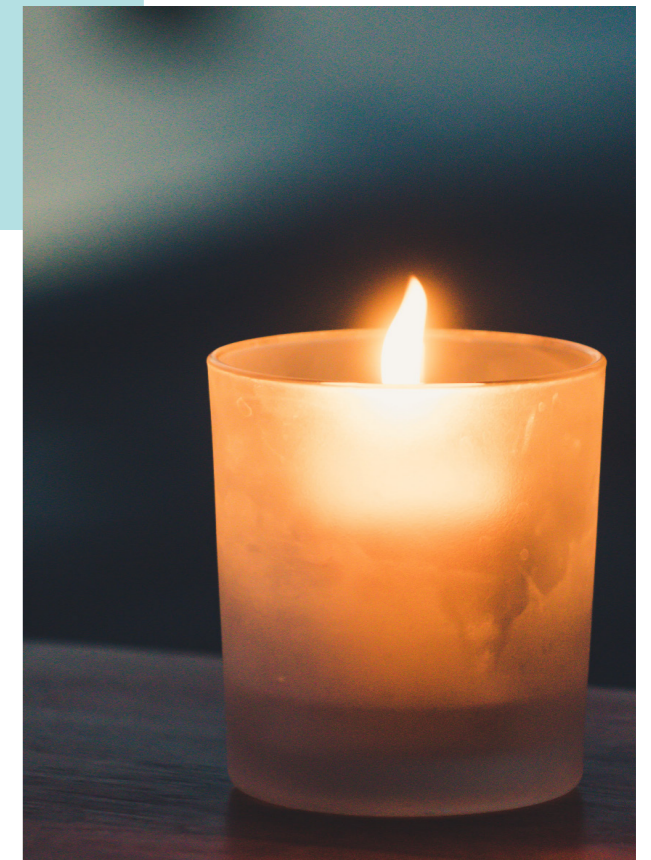
*practices and disciplines shape our faith*

## ACTION STEPS

Remember the Heart of the Season --

As we enter into the main celebrations of the season, may we be filled with the Peace, Hope, Joy, and Love that can only be found in Christ, and may we be bringers of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love throughout the remainder of the season.

These questions were developed by missionaries in places where it is illegal and even dangerous to openly share. They are simple reminders that Jesus IS Emmanuel -- God With Us, and that we can carry his presence with us everywhere we go in a variety of ways.



*Jesus isn't just a teacher who informs your intellect but forms our very loves. He isn't content to simply deposit new ideas into your mind; he is after nothing less than your wants, your loves, your longings.*

*- James K.A. Smith  
You Are What You Love*

## QUESTIONS

1. Why am I here? This helps us be mindful of our purpose
2. Who do I see? This helps us grow in awareness of those we share space with.
3. What do I have in my hands? This helps us remain aware of what God has equipped us with that can be used to bring his name a good reputation.
4. Do I look to Christ as my own source of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love?
5. What if everyone shared the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love of Christ the way I do?



CHRISTMAS DEVO

A LIFE-GIVING COMMUNITY

#GRACEANDPEACEONEARTH

# GOD WITH US

LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING

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SUNDAY DECEMBER 24th 10:30AM

DIGITAL GUIDE TO SHARE AVAILABLE AT [WWW.GRACEANDPEACECHURCH.ORG/ADVENT](http://WWW.GRACEANDPEACECHURCH.ORG/ADVENT)

