

A FAMILY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

THE  
LIGHT



BEFORE  
CHRISTMAS

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"THE PEOPLE WALKING  
IN DARKNESS HAVE  
SEEN A GREAT LIGHT;  
ON THOSE LIVING IN  
THE LAND OF DEEP  
DARKNESS A LIGHT  
HAS DAWNED."

ISAIAH 9:2 NIV

# INTRODUCTION

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The prophet Isaiah foretold of a day he would never see. A day when the light of God would pierce the darkness of the night sky and announce the coming of God's Son. Isaiah prophesied of that day to Israel saying, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." So, long before the light of the star over Bethlehem shown bright, the prophets foretold the dawning of the light.

The Advent devotional you are about to read tells the story of the true Christmas light. From before the dawn of creation through the eternal light of God's glorious throne, God's light has always shone bright. Long before the twinkle of a star directed the wise men to Jesus, God planned to send his only son to rescue God's children from the darkness of sin and bring them all into the glorious light of his presence.

Light is the most amazing element of God's creation and people have long celebrated its beauty at Christmas time. Christmas lights decorate our windows and doorways, our houses, and trees. Though many have lost the meaning behind the light, they marvel at the twinkle of Christmas lights as they shine forth in the darkness in beautiful arrays of color. Children celebrate when they see a well-lit Christmas

decoration and the lights of Christmas on a dark night cheer up the weariest soul.

Once you know the story of light and its place in the Christmas story, the lights that decorate homes at Christmas will bring a deeper joy to you. So read through these pages during the Advent season and take your family on a light filled journey through the Bible. Allow the Scriptures you read to warm your heart at the fire of God's amazing grace. Your children will look forward to reading the family Christmas story, "The Light Before Christmas," that marks the beginning of each week's devotion.

Read through a section of this book for each week of Advent. We've provided devotions, activities, and suggested prayers. Let the words of Isaiah's prophecy shine forth in your family—so that upon your family God's light may shine.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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This book includes thirteen family Advent devotionals—three for each of the four weeks of Advent and one more for Christmas. Over the course of Advent, you will learn what the Bible says about light and see how the theme of light weaves its way through the Christmas story and God's plan of salvation.

To plan your Advent celebration, after Thanksgiving look at the calendar and take note of the four Sundays before Christmas. These

mark the start of the four weeks of Advent. There are three family Bible devotionals for each of these four weeks.

Prior to Advent, purchase an Advent wreath or the supplies to make your own following the instructions provided below. The Advent wreath consists of a simple circle of evergreens. It represents our hope of eternal life in Christ. The four outer candles mark the four Sundays of Advent. These four candles represent the light of God reaching the world through the birth of his son Jesus. In the center of the wreath is placed a fifth, larger, candle that represents the Savior, marking his place at the center of God's plan.

Beginning with the first Sunday of Advent, start your celebration by lighting the first Advent candle and reading the first chapter of the story, "The Light Before Christmas." In the week that follows, take your family through the three devotions provided for the week.

Each day's devotion starts with an opening activity. This may be an object lesson, a fun fact to explore, or a song to sing. In addition, there are four traditional Christmas hymns to learn and sing, one for each week of Advent. Close each devotional with prayer, and then have one of your children blow out the Advent wreath candle(s).

Follow the same pattern for each of the four weeks of Advent. On Christmas Eve, light all the Advent candles and read the closing chapter of "The Light Before Christmas" story. On Christmas Day, relight all the Advent candles, read the Christmas Scripture from Luke's gospel, and sing "Joy to the World."

BEFORE YOU BEGIN



# MAKE AN ADVENT WREATH

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### SUPPLIES:

- \* 96 inches (8 feet) evergreen roping—real or artificial
- \* 16-inch diameter green foam ring
- \* three 10-inch purple (or white) taper candles
- \* one 10-inch pink (or red) taper candle
- \* one 2-in x 6-in white pillar candle with holder or white jar candle.
- \* aluminum foil, heavy duty
- \* knife or apple corer
- \* hot glue gun

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Lay the foam ring on a protected work surface. With the sharp knife or apple corer, cut out four holes in the ring equal distances apart to accept the four taper candles. Be careful to cut the holes slightly smaller than the candle diameter. Hot glue the candles into the holes making sure they are perfectly vertical. Wrap the evergreen roping along the foam ring, gluing it to the ring as you go. The 8-foot length should be plenty to cover the outer and inner circumferences of the foam ring. The goal is to cover the ring completely. Set the wreath on a table and place the pillar candle in the center. Remember to protect the surface of the table underneath the wreath from dripping wax.



ADVENT WEEK 1



# LIGHT

*Light the first Advent candle before reading chapter one of “The Light Before Christmas” story and before beginning each day’s devotion.*

– THE LIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS –

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# A VISIT WITH GRANDMA

**J**ust like on Christmases past, the little brick church on Maple Avenue was packed shoulder to shoulder with people. Joyful voices sang out—spilling into the streets and through the neighborhood. Long robes swayed as the choir danced and clapped their hands to the beat. Children and adults joined together in singing the season’s first Christmas carols—welcoming the town to listen and sing along. Together they sang the words:

I once lived in darkness, deep as the night,  
Then God sent his Spirit to open my eyes.  
The Light of the World gave me back my sight.  
All heaven rejoiced when I saw the light.

Shout joyful tidings, salvation has come,  
The Light of Christmas in Bethlehem born.  
The babe in a manger is God's only Son;  
Good news of great joy, he is Christ the Lord.

Inside the sanctuary, on a wooden pew, sat eleven-year-old Mia with her grandmother. She was spending the entire month of December helping her grandma prepare for Christmas. Mia loved her grandmother very much and looked forward to their time together all year long. She was thrilled to leave her home in the south to enjoy the brisk snowy mountains.

Today was the first Sunday of Advent, and in several weeks, Mia's parents would join them for Christmas. As she listened to the melodious chorus of carols, she began humming along. Everything felt warm and festive—until she noticed tears on Grandma's face.

Mia listened more closely to the words of the song and realized it was about seeing the light—and of sight being restored. *How could they be so insensitive to Grandma's blindness,* thought Mia. *It's no wonder she's crying!* Mia put her arm around Grandma and hugged her gently. She was relieved when the song finally ended, and especially eager to walk back home for lunch. She tried to be patient while her grandmother greeted nearly every person in the church.

When they finally stepped outside, the bright sun forced Mia to squint. A warm glow shone on their faces, and the snow crunched under their boots. Mia's thick braids bobbed and bounced in the brisk air, as she walked to the beat of Grandma's long white and red cane tapping the sidewalk ahead. Though Grandma couldn't see the road before her, she knew exactly where they were going. But Mia wished her grandmother could appreciate the beautiful scene.

"Grandma," said Mia, "the town is all decorated for Christmas! The

trees are covered in snow, it is all so beautiful.”

“Yes, this is Doctor Jones’s place,” Grandma replied. “He always decorates his white fence with red ribbons, and they match the cardinal at his feeder.” The spry woman lifted her cane and pointed right at the bird.

Mia was astonished. “How did you know that, Grandma?”

“I heard the flutter of his wings and the chirp of his call,” she answered. “You can always tell a cardinal. I just guessed it was a bright red male to match the ribbon. Was I right?”

“Yes,” Mia answered. “But how did you know this was Doctor Jones’s place?”

“I count the steps. It’s sixty-two paces from the church to Doc’s place. He has been hanging red ribbons on his fence since before you were born. It’s one of his Christmas traditions.”



Then the cardinal danced on the branch of the pine, dusted the fence with snow, and called out a sharp high-pitched tweet.

“Cardinals must be so beautiful,” Grandma remarked. “Everyone seems so excited to see them, especially in the snow.”

Mia wished Grandma could see. Then she remembered the song—and Grandma’s tears.

“I’m sorry about that song at church,” said Mia. “They should have known it would hurt your feelings.”

“Oh, I wasn’t sad, dear! I actually love that song!” replied Grandma. “Pastor Jake knows it’s one of my favorite carols. Those were happy tears!”

Mia pulled away, shocked. “But Grandma,” she exclaimed, “The whole song is about being blind! How could that possibly make you happy!”

“I might be blind on the outside, but inside I can see.” Grandma paused. She lifted her cane and pointed it right at the sun. “I might not be able to see the sun with my eyes, but I can feel its rays on my face. See how I can point it out to you?”

Mia nodded, “Uh-huh.”

“Light is that strong, my dear. When sighted folk look up toward that sun, the brightness blinds them. Forces you all to close your eyes. But we all stand blind before the light. And there is no better season to celebrate the coming of God’s light than at Christmastime. In the Bible, the prophet Isaiah says that all people walk in darkness until they see a great light—until a new light has dawned.”

“I’m not sure I understand,” replied Mia.

Grandma smiled. “Even though I was born blind, God opened the eyes of my heart to see him. While I might not be able to see the beautiful pine trees and the ribbons on the fence, I can see God and experience his light.”

Mia still didn't quite understand, but she was relieved that Grandma was no longer crying.

Grandma then took Mia's hand and said, "I have a present for you—a special book I want us to read together to celebrate Advent. You can open it after lunch."

Mia beamed for she loved opening presents. "But, Grandma," she asked, "How are you going to read a book to me? Is it written in Braille? Is that why it's special?"

"Actually, you are going to read it to me!" said Grandma. "We'll enjoy it together—like I did with my father when I was your age, back when I was double blind."

"Double blind?" Mia asked, for she had never heard that term before.

"Yes, dear. I was blind on the outside and the inside. You see, inside we are all born blind. The eyes of our heart are blind with sin. But once God shines his light into our hearts, we can see. It was in listening to Daddy read that book, that God opened my eyes to first see the light."

Intrigued, Mia asked, "What's the book called?"

"You'll have to wait until after lunch," smiled Grandma. Then she led the way home, up the snow-covered path.

The two said nothing more. As they neared the house, Grandma tapped her cane on the front porch and lifted her foot right in time to take the first step up. It was as though her grandmother could see the steps in front of her. The weathered cedar planks filled the front porch with the familiar smell of Grandma's house, even in the cold. Mia stepped forward and pulled open the wooden screen door. The long spring screwed to the door broke the silence as it creaked and sounded their arrival. Grandma passed Mia the key, which she inserted into the center of the knob and turned, giving the door a

shove. A burst of warm air greeted them as the two came in out of the cold. Mia took in a deep breath; she loved the smell of Grandma's house.

Inside, Mia helped set the table for lunch. As she did, her grandmother looked up and offered a silent prayer to heaven. Mia was so busy with the dishes, she didn't notice another tear roll down her grandmother's wrinkled cheek.

After lunch, Grandma invited Mia to open her present. They would read it together while enjoying a slice of apple pie. Grandma baked a pie each Saturday afternoon and Mia loved her pies! She wondered which would be better: the pie or the book. She noticed the book sitting nearby, wrapped in red paper with white snowflakes.

Mia wasted no time; she tore right through the wrapping paper and read aloud the book's title, *The Light Before Christmas*. The elegant letters surrounded an image of a beautiful starburst.

Mia gave her grandmother a big hug. "Thank you, Grandma!" she said. "I can't wait to begin!"

Grandma laughed. "Well, go on, let's do it!"

Mia flipped eagerly past the first few pages until she reached chapter one. She snuggled in close to Grandma and proceeded to read.

# God Created Light

## WARM-UP

SUPPLIES:

- ★ A lamp with a clear bulb so you can see the filament or LED

Start by having everyone close their eyes. Ask them to imagine what it would be like to be blind like the grandmother in the story. Talk about the ways their life would change if they couldn't see. Have them open their eyes and discuss how it feels to see again.

## READ THE WORD

*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. Genesis 1:3-5*

## THINK ABOUT IT

Long before he made the earth, God lived in unapproachable light—a light so bright, no one could come near his throne (1 Timothy 6:16).

Then, according to his plan God created the earth out of nothing at all and left it floating in the darkness of space. It was into this darkness that God spoke his first command. His first words were, "Let there be light." The instant he finished, "there was light" (Genesis 1:3). The light of the world burst forth at his command. Then "God



separated the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:4).

Next God created the stars to shine bright light for all to see. God ordered them “to give light upon the earth” (Genesis 1:15). From the moment of God’s command the stars lit up the sky. If you go outside on a clear night you can still see the very same stars he first created that day.

Then, God set a special star near the earth and he called it the “the greater light to rule the day” (Genesis 1:16). People have given our special star a name. We call it the sun and the light that shines out, we call sunshine and daylight. God placed the sun perfectly close to our planet. If the sun was much closer our world would heat up and the water turn to vapor; too far away and the oceans would freeze. But, by God’s design he located our star just where it needed to be to provide light for the life he created and we now enjoy. Without light, everything we know would die.

When God was finished making the lights of the heavens he looked at all that he made “and God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:18).

### **TALK ABOUT IT**

God created the light by speaking it into being. God created trillions of stars and knows each one by name (Psalm 147:4). What does that kind of creative power teach us about our amazing God?

### **SING TOGETHER**

The Christmas hymn “O Come, O Come, Immanuel” was first written in Latin and sung in the early 1700’s. The word Immanuel means “God with us” and comes from Isaiah’s amazing prophecy that foretold the coming of the Christ child: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Notice

how verse six weaves the theme of light into the promise of hope of a coming Savior. Isaiah foretold of a bright morning star. Jesus said that he is the one Isaiah spoke of. Jesus said, “I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16).

## **O Come, O Come, Immanuel**

(verses 1 and 6)

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### **VERSE 1**

O come, O come, Immanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.

### **VERSE 6**

O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!  
Dispel the shadows of the night  
and turn our darkness into light.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.

## **PRAY**

Thank God for his amazing power and for creating light.