

A green door with a Christmas wreath featuring pine branches, red tinsel, a heart, and a star.

Our Dear CHRIST Enters In

Devotions for Advent

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Lift up your heads,
O gates! And be lifted up,
O ancient doors, that the
King of glory may come in.

Psalm 24:7

Introduction

No matter where life takes us, many of us see home as the place where we are always wanted, a place of warmth, mutuality and welcome. It's more than a structure, it's people, relationships, memories. It's an intangible connection to a tangible place. As we prepare our hearts and homes during Advent, we'll explore how our dear Christ enters in and is the connection between our home here and our forever home to come.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Home Is Where the Heart Is

...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

EPHESIANS 3:17

Imagine you are asked to finish this sentence: Home is where (you fill in the blank). You might automatically answer, “the heart is.” Home may mean different things to different people. It might mean a place, perhaps where you grew up or where you currently live—that physical space filled with love, growth and safety. Or it might mean a relationship that makes you feel seen, heard and understood.

Whatever your definition, Advent is a time for preparing our home(s) for the coming of Christ. He has already come as God made man, born to take our sins to the cross, and he is coming again to usher in a new heaven and a new earth. No matter what form our Advent preparations take, it’s essential to keep Christ at the center.

That will lead us to finish the sentence this way: “Home is where Christ is.”

Dear Lord, make our homes a sanctuary of faith, hope and love. Draw us ever closer to you as the celebration of your birth on earth draws near. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Hebrews 3:1-6. What connections do you see?

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Person, Place or Thing?

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

PSALM 90:1

When asking someone to define home, you might ask, “Is it a person, place or thing?” The answer could be “yes” because home can be any of these or all three. After all, home is an essence unique to everyone.

Emily Dickinson wrote, “Where thou art—that—is home.” She was conveying that the very presence of one you love creates a sense of home. Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses who, even as he wandered the desert for 40 years, considered God his refuge, his home.

Is God your refuge? Through him, are you a refuge for others? This season is a hectic continuum of people, places and things. Perhaps it’s time to slow the pace and focus on God, the Father who loves us so much he sent his Son. Then the other people, places and things will all fall into place.

Heavenly Father, we’re pulled in so many directions this time of year. Help us focus on those things that place you at the center of it all. In Jesus I pray. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Psalm 46:10. What can you set aside as not necessary this season?

TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

What's in a Home?

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

EPHESIANS 2:4-5

You've heard the question, "What's in a name?" Today I ask, "What's in a home?" Is it just the basics—the rooms, the furniture, the appliances, the food in the fridge? Or is it all that and more? Let's look beyond the basics.

Our desire is to place God at the center of our home. Yet, how do we—and others—know he is present? God the Father has bestowed upon us his mercy, grace and forgiveness through Christ. In response, we show mercy, grace and forgiveness within our home and to those who consider us their home.

Even as we prepare to come face-to-face with God's gift of grace, expectations of the "perfect Christmas" create pressure. When patience snaps and frustrations flare, may grace, mercy and forgiveness be in your home this Christmas.

Lord Jesus Christ, we do not deserve your gifts of grace, mercy and forgiveness. Forgive us when we fail, and fill our homes with your love. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. What can you strive to do differently this year?

WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Yearning for Home

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

MATTHEW 6:21

“There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home.” Can’t you just picture Dorothy tapping the heels of her ruby slippers together, yearning for home? Why did she want to leave the wonders of Oz? The answer lies in the sense of belonging, something for which we all yearn.

Home is where we can be ourselves and still be loved. Where we can hurt and be forgiven and be hurt and forgive. Where we can cry and pout and laugh and dance. Where we know we are loved unconditionally. Home is where we feel a sense of belonging, foibles and all.

Our homes aren’t perfect, because we aren’t perfect. Christ came to live the perfect life we cannot and to take the punishment we deserve. As believers, we now belong to the family of Christ and yearn for our eternal home in heaven. After all, Christ came to call us home.

Heavenly Father, your promise to overcome sin and death was fulfilled in your Son, Jesus Christ. Because of your great love, we yearn for life in our eternal home. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read John 14:1-4. What do you yearn for most when you think of heaven?

THURSDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Anticipating Home

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

PSALM 18:2

Anticipation. It's what Advent is all about—anticipating the celebration of Christ's birth and looking forward to his final coming. Living 500 miles away for many years, I experienced a different type of anticipation each December, the anticipation of coming home to family.

Many definitions for home can be found online, with the word “refuge” popping up often. Safety, security and shelter describe what I experienced growing up in a home with Christ at the center. I remember pretending to fall asleep in the back seat of the car so that my dad would carry me inside. Too old to be carried, I still felt that invisible bond with my father.

Excitement tinged my anticipation, making walking through the front door memorable. Is someone you know yearning to be home for Christmas? Are you yearning for someone to come home? Now is the time to set the stage. Open your arms; issue an invitation. Cultivate anticipation, and ask Christ to be in every interaction.

Dear Jesus, instill in us the attitudes and actions that reflect the grace, mercy and love found only in you. Help us to be a source of refuge to others. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Colossians 3:12-14, 17. What will you put into practice?

FRIDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Welcome Home

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

1 PETER 4:8, 10

Welcome home, you belong here. That's what the welcome home hug or handshake or pat on the back conveys. When you are away, we miss you. When you come home, we treasure our time together. The Christmas lights, the array of treats, the stories told, the laughter shared and the presents under the tree serve as reminders of what anchors us to home. The sights, the tastes, the smells, the sounds of home.

What are the living reminders that our home is in Christ? The baptism font where the Holy Spirit plants faith in our hearts through water and the Word. The bread and wine of the Eucharist, where we receive the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Joining voices to sing "Silent Night, Holy Night" and "Joy to the World." Knowing that praises and prayers are being lifted across the world.

Nothing, however, compares to the welcome home we will receive when God calls us to himself. Christ has come, and he is coming again.

Loving Father, fill our homes with love. Open our eyes to opportunities for serving others with a spirit of welcome and belonging. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Romans 15:5-7. What does "living in harmony" look like in your home?

SATURDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

An Unwelcoming Home

A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.

PROVERBS 15:13

It would be remiss not to acknowledge that not everyone holds memories that make them yearn for home. While our desire is for home to evoke feelings of shelter and safety, some live with memories of conflict instead of compassion, hurt instead of harmony, loathing instead of loving.

Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Sin is inescapable in every environment, even at home. It’s why God the Father sent Jesus from heaven to earth, and it is only through him that we are forgiven and in him that we can forgive. Jesus put us before himself, so let us resolve to reflect his sacrificial love to others, especially now.

God’s greatest gift to us was restoration and reconciliation through Christ Jesus. Let that be our gift to others.

Dear Jesus, forgive us for the scars we have caused, and help us forgive others whose scars we carry. Bring peace and hope into our Advent preparations. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Ephesians 4:25—5:1. Are there behaviors and relationships that need extra attention in the coming days?

Establishing Roots

...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...

EPHESIANS 3:17B-19A

While in college, I found this wonderful plaque to give my parents that read: “The only lasting things we can leave our children are roots and wings.” Even though my parents have gone on to live eternity with Christ, I still have the plaque tucked away. What binds me to it is this intangible sense that it speaks truth.

We knew without a doubt that Christ was at the center of our home. Another plaque from my childhood hangs in my own home, and it reads: “Christ is the Head of this house, the Unseen Guest at every meal, the Silent Listener to every conversation.” A crack runs through it, reminding me that I am indeed a sinner and that Christ, born for me, died and rose for me.

No, our home was not perfect, but Christ’s love was lived every day. As you prepare for the coming of Christ, what tangible things might you do to establish the intangible?

Lord Jesus Christ, be in our words and in our actions, so that others might see us as firmly rooted and established in your love. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Deuteronomy 11:18-21. What are you teaching others about our roots along the way?

MONDAY, SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Curb Appeal

For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

1 SAMUEL 16:7B

Curb appeal. It refers to giving attention to how others perceive your home. From lawn and landscaping to paint color and the style of your front door, curb appeal serves to set the mood and creates an expectation for what you might see and feel when you step inside.

Imagine a beautiful nativity scene adorns the front yard of a home. You walk inside but find no hint of Christ. Christmas carols play, but no “O Come All Ye Faithful.” There’s an elf on the shelf, but no angel on the tree. *’Twas the Night Before Christmas* is set out, but no Bible is in sight. It’s not at all what you expected.

That sounds like me—not my home—but me, focused too much on appearance and not enough on what’s inside. God’s Law serves as a curb—its boundaries reveal my sin. But thanks be to God for the Gospel—the Good News that I am forgiven through Christ. That is the greatest appeal of all.

O God, create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Psalm 51. What comes to mind as you read these words?

TUESDAY, SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Getting the Foundation Right

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:11

Water leaks that go unnoticed, monster tree roots that crowd the foundation, scorching heat that dries the soil and makes it settle. These problems and others can lead to shifting foundations, and shifting foundations lead to cracks, and the cracks will only get worse if you do not find the right fix. Can you relate?

Shifts happen. A medical diagnosis, a lost job, a failing relationship, fear for the future. This season of the year seems to magnify shifts that already exist. Tensions heighten, schedules overwhelm, expectations are replaced with disappointments, spending goes into overdrive, and soon the cracks begin to show. The Currier and Ives Christmas is simply not going to happen.

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus tells the parable of two builders: one who builds his house upon the rock; the other who builds his house on the sand. Which one remained intact when the rain fell, and the floods came, and the wind blew? Take a deep breath, and shift your focus back to Jesus, your refuge, your rock, your foundation.

Dear Jesus, slow us down and shift our focus to you, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Rock and our Foundation. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Matthew 7:24-27. Take an honest look at the cracks in your foundation.

A Fixer-Upper

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

The proverbial fixer-upper. Sometimes a house needs renovation because of age or neglect, or maybe it is no longer functional. First on the list is to find a contractor, hopefully one who sees possibilities and potential. If the foundation is stable, amazing transformations can happen.

There's a parallel here to us and Christ. Sin took the perfectly designed world God created and thrust it into disrepair. God promised to send a Savior who would bring the ultimate renovation through restoration and reconciliation. That Savior is Jesus Christ. He was born for us, gave his life for us and rose for us. Through him we are made new, full of possibilities and potential. We can barely believe the transformation.

This Advent let's give thanks for God's amazing work in us as we resolve to live a life that brings honor and glory to him and him alone.

God our Father, you brought restoration and reconciliation into our crumbling, broken world. Fill us with your Spirit so that all we say and do may be to your glory. In Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Galatians 5:22-24. What connects the fruit of the Spirit with being made new in Christ?

THURSDAY, SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Is It a House or a Home?

By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

PROVERBS 24:3-4

My husband and I moved 15 years ago. Who built our house? Bob the Builder (really, the company owner's name was Bob). Who built our home? We did. We unpacked, arranged and rearranged, finding just the right spot for everything. That made it into a lovely house, but it was in the living and the loving that it became a home.

A house is filled with stuff, but a home is filled with security, warmth and comfort. It's where relationships are nurtured through meaningful conversation and shared meals. It's where mistakes are made and forgiveness is practiced. It's where we can be ourselves and be loved for who we are. It's a place of vulnerability and trust, of being present for each other. This type of presence is much more valuable than the presents under the tree, especially if it is modeled after the presence of Christ—always there, always listening, always loving, always forgiving.

This Advent, promise yourself that every person who sets foot in your house will, above all else, feel at home in Christ's love.

Dear Jesus, as we prepare to celebrate your birth, help us prioritize the little things that make a house a home. Show your love to us and through us. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Psalm 127. How is the Lord seen and felt in your home?

FRIDAY, SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

If These Walls Could Talk

O, LORD, you have searched me and known me!

PSALM 139:1

In my travels, I've stepped into many centuries-old buildings and thought, "If these walls could talk, think of the stories they'd tell." Today, I wonder, "What if someone stepped into my home and thought the same thing? What stories might my walls tell?" It's as if my walls know the real me, warts and all.

Our walls don't really see every angry word spoken, every tear shed, every slammed door or every stone wall of silence. But there is someone who does—our Heavenly Father. He knows us inside and out—every thought, every intention, everything done and everything said. As we prepare our homes for the coming of Christ, it is even more essential that we prepare our hearts. It's the perfect time to ask ourselves, "Are we one kind of person inside these walls and a completely different one on the outside?"

Whatever our answer, we can know without a shred of doubt that God loves us. He sent his one and only Son to be our Savior. He knows everything about us, including our sin, and through Christ, he forgives us. Let us live as if it's so.

Dear Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to serve you by serving others, inside our walls and out. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Psalm 139. How can these words help you prepare your heart for Christ's coming?

SATURDAY, SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Cleaning Up the Mess

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning,
that we should love one another.

1 JOHN 3:11

If only creating a loving home came with instructions. Relationships are messy, and the holidays only seem to make it worse. One moment we sing with joy, and the next we snap, stomp and slam the door. We say, “Lord, give me patience” more than once.

Perhaps it would help to consider two biblical families for a bit of perspective. Jacob and Esau were brothers who parted ways for years because of a deception. Jacob went on to have 12 sons but showed obvious favor to Joseph, and Joseph’s older brothers sold him into slavery. Rough stuff, but here’s the thing: Both stories end in forgiveness. Jacob and Esau come together to embrace; Joseph ends up forgiving his brothers and protecting them from drought.

Now it’s our turn. When it’s hard to communicate and we’re tempted to push the ones we love away, let’s turn toward them in forgiveness. Every time we sin, we push Christ away, but in love, he stretches the arms he spread on the cross toward us in forgiveness. No mess is too big for love.

Dear Jesus, give us eyes to see when we are in the middle of a mess and an extra measure of your love so that we can forgive as you have forgiven us. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Genesis 45:4-15. What would you have done?

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Inviting Others In

Let love be genuine. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

ROMANS 12:9, 13

Things to do, people to see, places to go. It's easy to become so laser-focused we don't notice others who are far from family and home, either physically or emotionally. Neighbors, coworkers, people from church. What if we put ourselves in their shoes? What might it be like to have no one to see, no places to go?

Stop for a moment. Look around. Is there someone you can invite into your space? It's been said that sharing a meal fosters connection. The Bible gives us many examples: Abraham and Sarah hosted three strangers, Jesus cooked fish on the beach after his resurrection, the early Christians looked out for each other through hospitality. Invite others into your home, or meet for lunch or coffee. What's important is helping them feel seen, valued and invited.

A welcoming spirit may be exactly what others need right now. As Jesus opened his heart to us, let's open ours to others.

Dear Lord, work in us to see the needs of others. Help us be gracious, as you have been gracious to us. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Ephesians 2:4-10. How does gracious hospitality tie into being God's "workmanship"?

MONDAY, THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

The Gift of Hospitality

...give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.

LUKE 6:38

Remember learning about root words? The root word for hospitality is hospital, originally derived from the Latin word *hospes*. At its core, hospitality means caring for the needs of others.

In digging a bit deeper, we must ask ourselves if we hoard hospitality for those with whom we already feel comfortable or if we are willing to break out of our comfort zones and welcome those who are different, or even difficult. After all, everyone has the need to feel respected and cared for.

The greatest gift we have ever received is Christ, born to be our Savior. It was a gift for everyone, not just a chosen few. Hospitality rooted in love is a gift. Not a tangible gift that can be unwrapped, but one that gets internalized and lasts well beyond the moment. It's not accidental—it's intentional, and it's filled with blessings. For it is in giving that we also receive.

Dear Lord, help us grow in hospitality, sharing your love with others, both at home and beyond. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Matthew 25:35-40. Is there something new you can do this Advent to share hospitality with others?

TUESDAY, THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Safe Space, Safe Place

In peace, I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD,
make me dwell in safety.

PSALM 4:8

Occasionally, I see a sign posted in the front window of a house indicating that it is a safe place. I imagine that for children walking by it's comforting to know that it is there, just in case they need it.

That begs the question: "Have I created a safe space for others?" This is a tough one because it goes deeper than locks on the doors. It's more than just physical safety; it's emotional safety. And it's complicated. It involves listening without judgment, knowing if or when consequences for behavior are involved, being open to taking risks and knowing there's a safe place to fall. It's about authenticity, acceptance and trust. And it can be exhausting, because we, too, need a safe space where we can air our frustrations, share our fears and grow from our failures.

We can rest in the reassurance that God's love for us in Christ will always be there. He fiercely holds onto us, and he will never let go. He is the ultimate safe space.

Heavenly Father, give us the words to say and guide us in how we treat others, so others might see your love through us. In Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Psalm 91. In what, or in whom, do you find refuge?

WEDNESDAY, THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

A Lasting Legacy

But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

JOSHUA 24:15B

A lot goes into transforming a house into a home. We tend to focus on the here and now, but what about the lasting impact of home? What will be remembered when we or others move on? It won't be the things—it will be how we and others felt in the comings and goings, the welcoming and the goodbyes.

The true essence of home is the emotional attachment it holds. It's not one thing; it's nurtured and cultivated over time. The feeling of connection lives on in memories. It's what pulls us home and what pushes us out the door with the reassurance that we will always be welcome.

Homes without Christ at the center may stir warm memories, but the ones rooted in Christ stand apart because they are where we also learn that what we experience here is part of a much larger picture. It's where Christ's love is reflected in what we say and what we do. It's where we learned that Christ came that first Christmas to prepare a place for us in a forever-lasting home.

Heavenly Father, bless our homes so that they may be places where your mercy, grace and love are lived every day. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Colossians 3:12-17. How can you put these words into practice today?

THURSDAY, THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Temporary Housing

...as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient; but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18-19

Floods. Earthquakes. Fires. Hurricanes. Tornadoes. One can hardly go for a day without seeing images of people whose homes have been destroyed and demolished, often leaving nothing except their foundations. What do survivors search for in the rubble? Reminders of what lasts when the physical is taken away.

It's important to remember that we are only stewards of what we, today, call home. It will not last forever, but what happens inside its walls will. Remembering this urges us to focus less on stuff and more on meaning. I know people who give their children and grandchildren experiences as gifts at Christmas rather than something that will eventually be used up or thrown away. It's important to hold onto what we have, but let's hold it loosely, for it's not our eternal home.

That's what Advent is all about. We prepare our homes for Christ's coming now because we know he will come again. Today's home is temporary; our heavenly home will last forever.

Lord, help us to make the most of the home provided for us, even as we long for our eternal home in heaven. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Job 1:21. What do these words of Job say to you?

FRIDAY, THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Leaving Home

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:9

Remember the earlier devotion about roots and wings? We've already covered roots, so today let's talk about wings. Eagle parents protect and feed, but they also involve their eaglets in branching and fledgling. Branching entails short flights back and forth to the nest, while fledgling is when the young eagle leaves, staying close until comfortable enough to go out on their own.

For us, this entails equipping our children to navigate the challenges of life. Not just learning the ABCs, but developing life skills like problem solving, conflict resolution and resilience. The depth of their roots will determine how high they can soar, so we must also provide for spiritual grounding in Christ. Their connection to Christ will keep them connected to you.

This Christmas, there will be concerts and parties, but scheduling them around (not instead of) worship sets the foundation for how your children celebrate Christ's birth once they leave your nest.

Heavenly Father, help us instill in our children the trust that you will always be with them every step of the way. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Matthew 7:13-14. What does this say about equipping your children for the paths ahead?

SATURDAY, THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

The Ultimate Home-Going

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power of that enables him to even to subject all things to himself.

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

There is a hymn written by Rev. Thomas Rawson Taylor that starts, “I’m but a stranger here, heav’n is my home.” He died at age 27 and wrote these words during his final illness. The text was first published in his book, *Memoirs and Select Remains*, and later set to music. It reminds us that we are but pilgrims on a journey to our forever home. Because of the temporary nature of our travel, the challenges faced today pale in comparison to the hope that waits for us in heaven.

I learned this hymn in my childhood, sang it in church and was reinforced it at home. I was privileged to witness my parents and sister face their final days on earth with steadfast faith and trust that God would ease their suffering by calling them home. My cousins have a tradition that when they gather, they light a candle in memory of those who are gone but remain in their hearts.

As a friend recently said, “We are only walking each other home.”

Dear Jesus, you came to earth as God and man to redeem us, reclaim us and lead us home. Bless those facing this transition with the peace that only you can give. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Hebrews 11:14-16. How do you show others that you are seeking a heavenly homeland?

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Homes Filled With Presence

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:14

And the countdown begins. It is just days until Christmas. It's time to wrap the presents and unwrap your presence. Whether you will enjoy time with a few or with many, decide today that you will be present for the moments you spend together.

This may seem obvious, yet it isn't. Of course, you can be present by merely being there, but to be present means intentionally fostering togetherness. Instead of one person baking cookies, make it a group experience. When sharing a meal, listen with intention to the conversation, make comments or ask questions. Put your phones away and watch movies, build snowmen or sing carols. Prioritize presence over presents.

Find time to read Luke 2:1-20 together. There is no greater demonstration of God's presence than his incarnation—when God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, who lived and walked among humanity and became our substitute on the cross. His presence was our present.

Lord God, heavenly Father, fill our hearts and our homes with your presence. May all that we do and say reflect your great love for us in Jesus. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Joshua 1:1-6. How are these words relevant to you today?

MONDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Homes Filled With Joy

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

LUKE 2:10

I live in the North, where on occasion we can see the aurora borealis, or more commonly called the northern lights. It’s as if the heavens are bursting with color, and to see them is to be speechless. It’s the closest I’ve come to what the shepherds must have felt when the sky was filled with angels on the night Jesus was born.

What happened next was almost as amazing. The startled shepherds were filled with such awe and excitement that they hurried to Bethlehem to see for themselves. It’s as if their hearts were bursting with joy, but instead of being left speechless, they told everyone what they had seen and heard.

Jesus’ birth was not grand or resplendent. It was a humble birth in humble circumstances. Let’s not be lured into thinking that the only way to experience joy at Christmas is with over-the-top celebrating. Joy is found in simple things and in the people gathered around. Most especially, it is found in Jesus.

Dear Jesus, you came in humility, and your suffering led to the joy of salvation for all who believe. Lead us to experience true joy this Christmas and to share it with others. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Hebrews 12:1-2. How is it possible that Jesus endured joy for our sake?

TUESDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Homes Filled With Peace

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

ISAIAH 9:6

Ask 10 people to define peace, and you'll likely get 10 different answers. Some might comment on ending war; others might refer to the value of peace and quiet. Today, we look at peace in our homes, using this phrase as food for thought: No God, no peace. Know God, know peace.

The days surrounding Christmas can be rife with stress. Busy schedules, financial pressures, strained relationships can wreak havoc in the very home where we seek sanctuary. Molehills become mountains, and drama ensues. When that happens, it's time to take a collective deep breath and remember that Jesus came to conquer every conflict. Amid every challenging circumstance, he invites us to bring our burdens to him who is the source of peace.

When it comes to strained relationships, there is power in forgiveness—seeking God's forgiveness and forgiving others as we have been forgiven. On our own, we cannot achieve peace; true peace can only be ours through Christ. To know Christ is to know peace.

Prince of Peace, thank you for coming as our Savior and for the gift of your peace. Fill our homes with peace beyond understanding. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Matthew 11:28-30. What is weighing heavy upon you today that you can bring to Jesus as you seek peace?

Homes Filled With Hope

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

LUKE 2:19

Why do we sometimes struggle at Christmas? There can be many reasons—financial limitations, strained relationships, shattered expectations, grief and loss. The days get dark early, and gloom darkens our hearts and sometimes our homes. Everyone else's Christmas does not match our own.

This is no surprise in a world where pain and struggle are a reality. Sin exists, and even as Christians, we are not promised a reprieve from sin and suffering. The promise we hold onto, which becomes our hope, is the reason Jesus came. It doesn't depend on circumstances but is grounded in the Savior who was born for us, understands our pain because he experienced his own, conquered sin and is coming again to make all things new.

After the shepherds left, Mary considered everything that had happened and pondered them as treasure in her heart. Take time today to ponder how, even in the darkness, Jesus is our treasure and our source of hope in what's to come.

Dear Savior, grant us courage and strength to abound in true and lasting hope found only in you. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Romans 8:28-39. What does it mean to be more than conquerors through Christ?

THURSDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Homes Filled With Love

We love because he first loved us.

1 JOHN 4:19

Why do we give gifts at Christmas? Because God gave his Son to be our Savior. As an expression of his love for us, we give gifts to each other. Gifts can come in all shapes and sizes and sometimes, even, without wrapping.

Love in our homes at Christmas might look like showing appreciation, decorating together, respecting differing views, giving our full attention when listening, letting others decide what activities should be on the schedule, baking people's favorite cookies and so much more. However, the most extravagant gift we can give is unconditional love.

Unconditional love is God's extravagant gift to us through Christ. We do not deserve, nor can we ever earn his love, mercy and grace. His love knows no bounds and remains steady throughout all ages and stages. In response, we strive to love in a manner that is not based on conditions or restrictions or whether someone loves us back. We love because God first loved us.

Gracious God, thank you for loving us with an unconditional love. In the name of Jesus, our Savior, help us to be vessels of your love to others. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read John 15:9-17. What does it mean to love as Christ has loved us.

FRIDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Homes Filled With Music

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

LUKE 2:13-14

I don’t know if the multitude of the heavenly host was singing (the Bible says “saying”) the night Jesus was born, but how could they not when it was the most glorious news ever proclaimed? It’s like Christmas was made for music.

Music is powerful. We’re moved by its ability to evoke emotions and transcend time. As an avenue for expression and connection, it speaks a universal language and is a shared experience. God’s love does too. No wonder music is so prevalent at Christmas.

Music also connects us to memories. I cannot sing “Silent Night” without seeing my mom’s face or “Joy to the World” without hearing the harmonizing of my dad and siblings. Which songs at Christmas connect you to those you love and connect you to God and his love through Christ? Play them, sing them, share them. Fill your home with music that heralds the most glorious news ever proclaimed: Jesus came to be our Savior, and he is coming again. Make music a prayer of your heart.

Heavenly Father, our hearts burst with songs of gratitude for your Son, our Savior, entering in to our broken world. Bless our homes and all within them. Through Jesus. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read Psalm 150. What is your favorite music that gives glory to God?

SATURDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Home Sweet Home

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

Think back to what makes a home a home? It's where we feel loved and accepted, where we find solace and comfort, where we experience forgiveness and where we know we belong. There's another home we have not mentioned—our place of worship. Within the family of believers, church is where God comes to us through Word and Sacrament and where he connects us to himself and to each other.

Christmas can be crowded, but let's not let our crowded schedules crowd out attending church to celebrate as a faith community. It's where God reveals himself to us and where we lift our hearts and voices to him in thanks and praise. It's where God's presence is seen in prophecies fulfilled and the promise of eternal life to come. And it is where we, as saints on earth, rejoice in the promise that we will one day join the company of saints in heaven, glorifying and praising God together.

Jesus came to call us home, and he is coming again. Home Sweet Home.

Heavenly Father, your love brought Jesus to earth, and your love will bring us to our eternal home. Draw us closer to you and be in every aspect of our celebrations. In Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Expanding the thought: Read John 16:16-23. Which parts of these words of Jesus bring the most comfort to you?

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Home means different things to different people. In these devotions, we'll explore what gives home its place of importance, from what we see to what we experience. Walking through the pages will be an exercise in walking through our own homes and realizing the blessing home can be to everyone who finds sanctuary within. Throughout, we will see that what sets a home apart is placing Christ at the center, because true blessing comes to every home where Christ has entered and is centered.

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