

Face to Face



ADVENT GUIDE

Christmas in Community
PaulAnn Church 2025



INTRODUCTION

This Christmas we remember the story of a God who didn't love us from a distance, but instead stepped into our world.

Face to Face.

A God who saw our brokenness and didn't look away.

A God who became one of us.

A God who still meets us here, in kitchens and living rooms, around messy tables and half-wrapped gifts, right in the middle of our very real lives.

This guide is an invitation to slow down and make space for that kind of presence.

For the four weeks leading up to Christmas, we invite you to gather with a few people you love-friends, neighbors, maybe another family-and celebrate Christmas in community.

You'll light candles, share meals, tell stories, and make memories. You'll talk about Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love and discover that these aren't just nice Christmas words, but the heartbeat of God's story.

So set the table, light the first candle, and let's make room to meet Jesus and each other, face to face.

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness"
made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the
knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.
2 Corinthians 4:6



WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent reminds us:
Jesus came into a broken world to save us.
He is coming again to make everything right.

The word advent comes from the Latin “adventus” which means arrival. Advent is the coming, the arrival, of God Himself - God with us.

Advent is a season of both celebration and anticipation. We celebrate something that really happened, *Jesus came*, and something that will happen, *Jesus is coming again*.

Over the next several weeks we will explore four themes: hope, peace, joy and love. We'll look back at Jesus' birth over 2000 years ago, when God put on flesh and came to be with us. We will look forward with anticipation to His return, when He makes all things new and comes again for His people, God with us.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Advent guide is designed to help you experience the story of Jesus face to face, not in isolation, but in community.

Over four weeks, we invite you to gather with your people-friends, neighbors, or another family-to share meals, conversation, laughter, and reflection around the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

You don't need to be a Bible scholar, a gourmet cook, or an expert host. You just need a willing heart, an open home, and space on the calendar.

Each week includes:

1. A **Simple Reading** centered on the weekly theme.
2. **Conversation Starters** to guide meaningful connection.
3. A **Menu Suggestion** to make gathering fun.
4. **An Activity** to bring the theme to life.
5. A **Closing Prayer** to wrap up your time.

Use what fits your season. Skip what doesn't. The goal isn't perfection, it's presence. Presence with the people around your table, and with the One who came to be face to face with us.

Let's stay in touch! Sign up for the Face to Face email group. You will receive exclusive content right to your inbox! Weekly emails will include thoughts from our pastors, ideas for further study, even fun recipes and hosting ideas!

choose your people.
set the dates.
commit to community.



ADVENT



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HOPE

Life doesn't always move in straight lines. Plans change, doors close, and sometimes the things we thought were certain suddenly aren't. Maybe you're walking through a season that feels shaky, unsure what's next for your family, your future, or even your faith.

Uncertainty can leave us restless and questioning: Will things ever feel steady again? Will God really come through for me?

The season of Advent reminds us that we're not alone in that tension. God's people knew what it was to wait and wonder. For generations, they longed for a Savior, a promise that seemed to take forever to arrive. And when Jesus finally came, He didn't come the way anyone expected. Not as a powerful ruler or a political force, but as a baby in a manger.

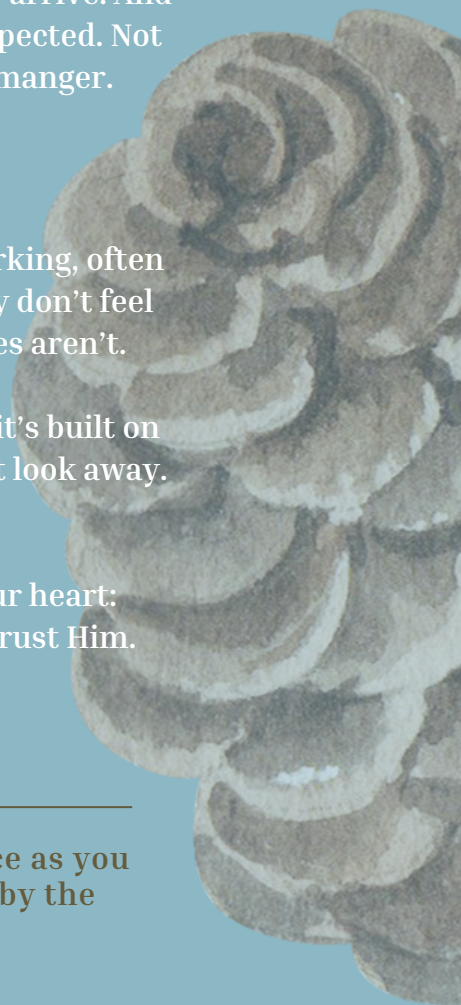
Quiet. Humble. Ordinary.

It's proof that even when life feels uncertain, God is still working, often in ways we can't see yet. His ways are good, even when they don't feel good. His promises are sure, even when our circumstances aren't.

As believers, our hope isn't built on everything going right, it's built on Jesus Himself. The One who sees us, draws near, and doesn't look away. He keeps His promises.

So when life feels unpredictable, let this truth steady your heart: King Jesus has come. King Jesus will come again. We can trust Him.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13



HOPE

GATHERING FOCUS

When you meet this week, keep things simple. This is about connection, not perfection. Let the focus be warmth and presence. Let it be a night where no one rushes, and everyone belongs.

FACE TO FACE MOMENT

Before you begin your meal, light the first candle and read aloud:

“Tonight we remember that Hope came near.
Jesus, be our hope in every place that still feels dark.”

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What’s something you’re hoping for right now?
When have you seen light show up in a dark place?
(For kids) What makes you feel hopeful?

MENU

Comfort Food. A simple, cozy dinner that invites everyone to linger.

Main: Slow Cooker Chicken and Dumplings

Dessert: Warm Apple Crisp with Vanilla Ice Cream

ACTIVITY

Invite each person to write one thing they’re hoping or praying for this season. Fold the paper and place it in a small bowl or jar. Keep it in the center of your table for the month as a reminder to pray for one another.

CLOSING PRAYER

“Jesus, You are our hope.

When we can’t see what’s ahead, we know we can trust You. You are light in the dark.
Thank You for coming close, for being our hope, here and now. Amen.”



PEACE

We often think of peace as something that happens when life finally calms down.

“When this season is over, I’ll feel at peace.”

“When I have a little more money, or a little more time, then I’ll be able to rest.”

“If things looked more like theirs, maybe I’d finally feel okay.”

But the peace God offers isn’t found in the absence of problems, it’s found in His presence right in the middle of them.

When Jesus was born, the angel said He would be called Immanuel, “God with us.” That name alone tells us something powerful: peace isn’t a place we arrive at; it’s a person we encounter.

God’s peace isn’t fragile or temporary. It doesn’t depend on perfect circumstances. It’s the steady calm that comes when we remember, we are not alone. The same God who stepped into the chaos of a broken world now meets us face to face in our own chaos, offering a peace that doesn’t make sense to the world but anchors us anyway.

This is what Advent invites us to remember, that through Jesus, peace came near. He came once to bring us peace with God, and He will come again to bring peace to the whole world.

So when life feels overwhelming, take a deep breath and remember: King Jesus has come. King Jesus will come again. And even now, He is with you.

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

John 14:27

PEACE

GATHERING FOCUS

This week's gathering can be cozy and slow. Think comfort, warmth, and simplicity. Maybe everyone comes in pajamas or brings a favorite blanket. Let it feel restful.

FACE TO FACE MOMENT

Before you begin your meal, light two candles and read aloud:

"Tonight we remember that Peace has come near.
Jesus, be our peace when life feels unsteady. Help us rest in You."

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What usually steals your peace this time of year?

What helps you slow down and find it again?

(For kids) What makes you feel calm or safe?

MENU

Soup Night - Keep it easy, nourishing, and warm.

Main: Soup and Salad Bar

Dessert: Peppermint Hot Chocolate with Whipped Cream

ACTIVITY

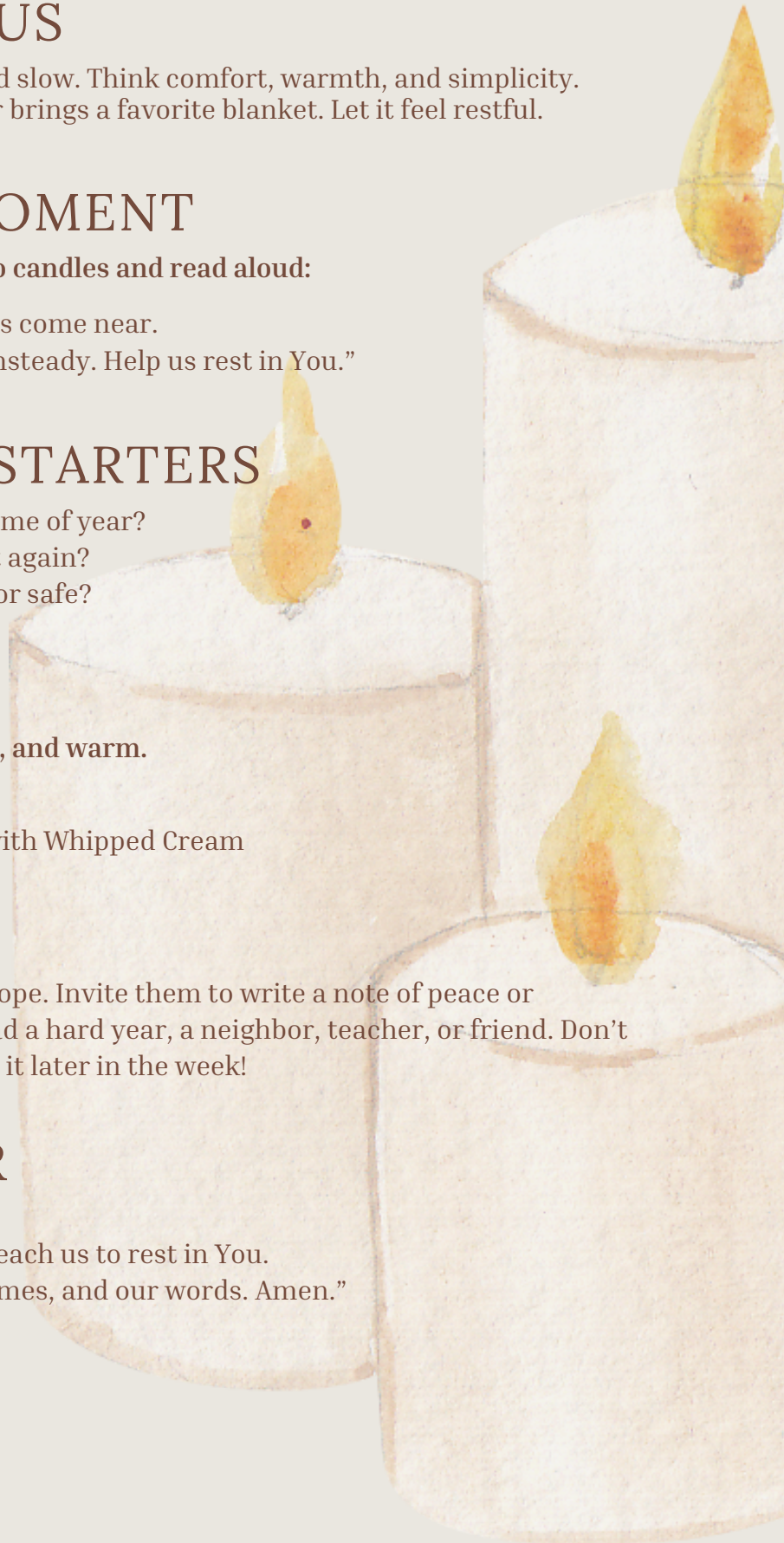
Give everyone a small card and envelope. Invite them to write a note of peace or encouragement to someone who's had a hard year, a neighbor, teacher, or friend. Don't forget to drop it in the mail or deliver it later in the week!

CLOSING PRAYER

"Jesus, You are our peace.

In a world that rushes and worries, teach us to rest in You.

Let Your peace fill our hearts, our homes, and our words. Amen."



JOY

Everyone loves joy. How could you not? But if we're honest, for many of us, joy is elusive. We catch glimpses of it, but the pressures and worries of life seem to swallow it up as quickly as it comes.

Joy, like peace, isn't found in the absence of hardship, it's found in the presence of Jesus. It's not something we can manufacture or fake our way into. Real joy grows from the inside out, the fruit of a life connected to Him.

If you've given your life to Jesus, His Spirit lives in you and joy is part of the very nature of God. The more time we spend with Him, the more His joy begins to spill out of us, even in hard or ordinary seasons.

The Bible says, "In His presence there is fullness of joy." (Psalm 16:11) That's not just poetic language, it's a promise. When we come face to face with Jesus, we find joy that circumstances can't steal and the world can't replace.

So even when life feels heavy, you can look up and remember:

King Jesus has come. King Jesus will come again.

And because of Him joy is possible.

**"You reveal the path of life to me;
in Your presence is abundant joy; at your
right hand are eternal pleasures."
Psalms 16:11**

JOY

GATHERING FOCUS

This week is all about celebration. Make it fun. Make it bright. Let everyone bring something to share — a favorite food, story, or memory. Turn on music, play a game, take photos. Let it be a night of laughter and light.

FACE TO FACE MOMENT

Before dinner, light three candles and read aloud:

“Tonight we remember that Joy has come near.
Jesus, fill our hearts and our homes with Your joy.”

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What’s something small that brought you joy this week?
What’s a memory that still makes you laugh out loud?
(For kids) What’s your favorite thing about Christmas time?

MENU

Breakfast for Dinner - joy and pancakes just go together!

Main: Buttermilk Pancakes or Waffles (set out toppings like berries, syrup, chocolate chips, whipped cream)

Side: Scrambled Eggs & Bacon

ACTIVITY

Set out a large jar or bowl and slips of paper. Invite everyone to write a “joy moment” from this year — big or small — and drop it in. Read them aloud and give thanks together. (You can save the jar to open again next Christmas and remember God’s faithfulness.)

CLOSING PRAYER

“Jesus, You are our joy.
Thank You for filling our hearts with laughter and light.
Help us carry this joy beyond tonight — into every place we go. Amen.”



LOVE

Christmas is a story of love. Not the kind we earn or deserve,
but the kind that comes looking for us.

God so loved the world that He sent His Son, Jesus, to rescue us.
Jesus willingly traded the perfection of heaven for the brokenness of
humanity. He came close, born to a young girl in a small town, fully God and
fully man. Love wrapped in flesh. He humbled Himself, lived among us, and
even chose the cross, all to bring us back into relationship with Him.

Who can comprehend a love like that? It's deeper than emotion and stronger
than circumstance. It's a love that sees us at our worst and still chooses us.

The story of Christmas reminds us that God's love isn't distant, it's personal.
Jesus came face to face with a world in need of saving, and He's still doing
that today.

He's still healing broken hearts.
Still bringing freedom to those who feel trapped.
Still offering forgiveness and hope to anyone who will receive it.
If you've never experienced the love of Christ, it's available to you,
right here, right now.

The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe
in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."
Romans 10:9

You don't have to have it all together. Just turn toward Him, the One who
came near, who loves you, and who is ready to meet you face to face.

King Jesus has come. King Jesus will come again.
And today, His love is here, face to face with you.

LOVE

GATHERING FOCUS

This week, let your table be full of warmth, stories, and gratitude. Maybe invite someone new to join — someone who could use a reminder that they're not forgotten.

FACE TO FACE MOMENT

Before dinner, light all four candles and read aloud:

"Tonight we remember that Love has come near.

Jesus, thank You for coming close. Teach us to love like You do."

CONVERSATION STARTERS

How have you seen God's love in your life this year?

Who has shown you love in a meaningful way recently?

(For kids) What does love look like or feel like to you?

MENU

A Feast of Favorites - end the season with a meal that feels like home.

Main: Roast Chicken or Ham

Sides: Family favorites — mac & cheese, green beans, mashed potatoes, whatever your people love most

Dessert: Christmas Cookies

ACTIVITY

Set out blank cards or simple paper slips. Have everyone write one short note to each person at the table — something they love or appreciate about them. Exchange and read them aloud. (You'll be amazed how meaningful this is, even for kids.)

CLOSING PRAYER

"Jesus, thank You for being Love in person.

Teach us to see others the way You do,

to love deeply, to forgive quickly, and to stay close.

May our homes reflect the love that came down to us. Amen."



CHRISTMAS EVE

You probably already have a few Christmas Eve traditions.

Maybe you bake cookies for Santa (and don't forget a carrot for Rudolph).

Maybe everyone opens one present before bed or wears matching pajamas for the big day.

Traditions are beautiful. They tell the story of who we are, the people we love, the things we value, and the memories that anchor us year after year.

But tonight, before the wrapping paper and the laughter and the rush of tomorrow, take a moment to create space for what this night is truly about.

Gather your people. Light a candle. Open your Bible to the Christmas story (we've included it on the next page). As you read, remember, these aren't just characters in a story. They were real people who encountered God face to face.

Mary - young, brave, and carrying a miracle she didn't fully understand.

Joseph - steady and obedient, walking into uncertainty with trust.

The shepherds - working the night shift when heaven suddenly broke through their ordinary.

The wise men - travelers who followed a light and found the Savior of the world.

They were everyday people, just like us, who God met in the middle of their real, complicated lives.

So wherever you find yourself this Christmas, surrounded by family, sitting in quiet, or carrying your own unanswered questions, take heart. The same God who met them meets us still.

He is Emmanuel, God with us.

Hope has come.

Peace has come.

Joy has come.

Love has come.

And tonight, He is here.

Face to face with you.





LUKE 2

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.

So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.

Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS

In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:
Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people he favors!

When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.



FOR THE KIDS

CRAFT IDEAS TO MAKE CHRISTMAS MEMORABLE
FOR THE LITTLE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE

The Hope Candle Jar

You'll need: Mason jars, tissue paper, glue, battery candles.

Have kids cover the jar with bits of colored tissue paper to make a "stained glass" look. Once dry, place the candle inside. Talk about how even small light shines bright in darkness — just like hope.

The Peace Dove

You'll need: White paper, scissors, crayons, string.

Trace each child's hand on white paper (the thumb becomes the dove's head, the fingers its feathers). Cut it out, color it, and write "Peace" or "Shalom" across the wings. Hang it somewhere visible as a reminder: "Jesus brings peace."

Joy Ornaments

You'll need: Clear plastic ornaments, strips of colored paper, markers.

Write things that bring you joy (people, places, moments) on the paper strips. Curl and place them inside the ornament. Hang them on the tree as reminders of joy that lasts.

Love Garland

You'll need: Red and pink paper, scissors, markers, tape or string.

Cut out heart shapes and write the names of people you love (family, friends, neighbors). String them together





A FINAL WORD

You've made it to the end of this Advent journey.

Four weeks of hope, peace, joy, and love, spent around tables, in kitchens, with laughter, stories, and prayers.

Face to Face.

But here's the truth: Advent isn't just a season on the calendar. It's a way of seeing the world. A way of noticing that God isn't distant. He's here. He's not waiting for the perfect moment or the perfect people. He comes close, face to face, in the ordinary, in the messy, in the pain and in the joy. He never looks away.

As you move into Christmas Day and beyond, remember: the story doesn't end when the candles go out. Jesus is our:

- Hope // when life feels uncertain.
- Peace // when the world feels heavy.
- Joy // when laughter feels far away.
- Love // that never leaves.

Keep choosing presence. Keep making room. Keep showing up, face to face.

This is your invitation: go and live it. In your home, your neighborhood, your work, your family. Let this face to face love ripple outward, because the world needs it.



CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS EVE WITH US!

Choose from four identical services, each one lasting around an hour. You can expect Christmas music, laughter, a message about Jesus, candle lighting, and celebration.

We do recommend arriving a few minutes early to guarantee a seat, these services tend to fill up quickly.

There is no preschool or children's classes during our Christmas Eve services. They will be family friendly services and we encourage you to bring the kids!

Dress however you feel most comfortable.
Some will be in their Christmas best and others in jeans and sneakers.
All are welcome.

Christmas Eve Service Times
December 24th // 1:30p + 3p + 4:30p + 6p

If you are unable to join us in person, we would love to have you join us online. You can stream our services at paulann.org/live or by searching PaulAnn Church on Youtube..

