

The 2015 Advent Devotional

"To You Is the Song"
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to this children's devotional resource created by The Fellowship Community. This is designed to be a way for families and others who minister to children to experience Christmas together. Activities for each week will help adults and children alike be involved with Scripture in a personal and tactile way. Feel free to adapt the activities to best fit your context. May this be a gift to you in this holy season.

Prepare by finding a special place to hold your weekly devotional times. Gather these items to create a fun "Devotional Kit."
> A Bible with pictures
> iPod or CD player
$>$ a computer or tablet for watching You Tube videos, (optional)
> Hymnal/children's hymn book
> pillows and large blanket for making a fort/tent
> flashlights
> instruments: noisemakers (spoons, sticks, whistles, any musical instruments, bells, pots and pans, wackadoodles, cardboard tubes, wrapping paper tubes, etc.)
> make an "Epiphany Box" - wrap an empty box like a gift, then cut a slit in the top for inserting pieces of paper
> blank paper and pens/markers/crayons
> paper towels
> snacks: a box of mini-shredded wheat, small pretzel sticks, mini-marshmallows, Pull and Peel Twizzlers, M\&M's, popped popcorn, and graham crackers
> Large package of Skittles to be used for closing Skittle prayers. The colors of the Skittles indicate prayers for different people:

- Yellow, pray for your friends at school
- Red, pray for people who are sick or suffering around the world
- Green, prayers of thanks
- Purple, pray for people at your church
- Orange, pray for your family
> Think by quietly writing or drawing something you learned. Place these papers in the Epiphany Box. You will see these again when you unwrap the box at the end of this season.
> Pray by taking a Skittle and praying based on its color. You can pray to yourself or out loud. This is an opportunity to help children be comfortable talking to God out loud
"Wonder Questions" have no definite answer. They are meant to be pondered by people of all ages. It's important that everyone has an opportunity to offer their thoughts. Sometimes a "Wonder Question" will lead to another question. See how the Holy Spirit can help us discover the meaning. If someone asks a question that you feel unable to answer, that's OK. You can respond by saying, "That's a good question. Let's see if we can discover the answer together." You can also say, "That's an interesting question, what do you think?" We hope these questions can take you deeper into Scripture in surprising ways.


## FirstWeek of Advent

Prepare Go to your gathering place and pray this prayer (or one of your own)
Dear God, you are all-powerful and all-loving.
Thank you for being the one true God who made the world, and who loves us.
Help us to understand what you want to say to us today.
We pray in Jesus' name, Amen
Sing the first verse of "O Worship the King"

Jeremiah 33:14-16
I made a wonderful promise to Israel and Judah, and the days are coming when I will keep it.

I promise that the time will come when I will appoint a king
from the family of David, a king who will be honest and rule with justice.
In those days, Judah will be safe;
Jerusalem will have peace and will be named, "The LORD Gives Justice."
Ask Wonder Questions:

1. What do you think God is telling us in these verses?
2. Does David's family have a king right now? Who do you think this verse is talking about?

Create Build a fort/tent and turn off all the lights. Hide under the blankets and be really, really quiet. Use a flashlight and read Luke 21:25-28. Act out the parts of the verses as best you can (see the suggestions in text).

Strange things will happen to the sun, moon, and stars. The nations on earth will be afraid of the roaring sea and tides, and they won't know what to do. People will be so frightened that they will faint because of what is happening to the world. (Act scared or pretend to faint) Every power in the sky will be shaken. (Shake the blankets) Then the Son of Man will be seen, coming in a cloud with great power and glory. When all of this starts happening, stand up straight and be brave. You will soon be set free. (Stand up inside the tent and knock it down)

Now sit in a story circle and use the marshmallows and pretzel sticks to make a tree while reading verses 29-36.

Then Jesus told them a story: When you see a fig tree or any other tree putting out leaves, you know that summer will soon come. So, when you see these things happening, you know that God's kingdom will soon be here. You can be sure that some of the people of this
generation will still be alive when all of this takes place. The sky and the earth won't last forever, but my words will. Don't spend all of your time thinking about eating or drinking or worrying about life. If you do, the final day will suddenly catch you like a trap. That day will surprise everyone on earth (Eat the "tree"). Watch out and keep praying that you can escape all that is going to happen and that the Son of Man will be pleased with you.

## Wonder Questions:

1. What did this story make you think about?
2. What are some stories in the Bible where the sun, moon, and stars did strange things?
3. Why do you think Jesus told the Fig Tree story?
4. What should we do instead of worrying?

## Think Quiet Thoughts:

Take a piece of paper and write or draw something you learned from our devotional time today, or something you would like God to know. Put it in the Epiphany Box.

## Pray Closing Skittle Prayers:

Reach into the bag of Skittles and pick one. Pray a prayer based on the color you have and then eat the Skittle!

## Second Week of Advent

Prepare Go to your gathering place and pray this prayer (or one of your own)
Dear God,
you made heaven and earth, and you created all the different seasons.
We know when the leaves fall, winter is coming, and we get ready for it.
Thank you for the Bible that gives us stories to prepare us for God's plan.
Thank you for loving us and forgiving us.
Help us understand what you are saying to us today.
We pray in Jesus' name, Amen
Sing the first verse of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

## Read Luke 3:1-6

For fifteen years Emperor Tiberius had ruled that part of the world. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was the ruler of Galilee. Herod's brother, Philip, was the ruler in the countries of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was the ruler of Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were the Jewish high priests. At that time God spoke to Zechariah's son John, who was living in the desert. So John went along the Jordan Valley, telling the people, "Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven." Isaiah the prophet wrote about John when he said, "In the desert someone is shouting, "Get the road ready for the Lord! Make a straight path for him. Fill up every valley and level every mountain and hill. Straighten the crooked paths and smooth out the rough roads. Then everyone will see the saving power of God.'"

## Create Listen to "Every Valley" from "The Messiah."

## httos://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NCO6UzZ2R8

Place the snacks in the center of the table in different piles. Give each person a large sheet of paper towel. Imagine the food pieces are your "art" supplies, and the paper towel is your canvas. Read the Scripture again and then play the Song "Every Valley." While listening to the song use the food to create a picture of what you are hearing. Play it more than once to get some ideas. Share what you "painted" and then enjoy the snacks.

Ask Wonder Questions:

1. When Mr. Handel wrote the music for this song, how did he show the words of the Bible in his music?
2. How did you show the words in your artwork?
3. The Bible says Jesus will make rough places plain, valleys high, and mountains low. What do you think that really means?

Take a piece of paper and write or draw something you learned from our devotional time today, or something you would like God to know. Put it in the Epiphany Box.

## or

Wonder Questions:

1. What do you think it might have sounded like when Zechariah spoke these words?
2. What did this "song" make you wonder about?
3. Does what Zechariah said remind you of another Bible story anywhere?
4. How might God help us live a life of peace?

## Think Quiet Thoughts:

Take a piece of paper and write or draw something you learned from our devotional time today, or something you would like God to know. Put it in the Epiphany Box.

## Pray Closing Skittle Prayers:

Reach into the bag of Skittles and pick one. Pray a prayer based on the color you have and then eat the Skittle!

## Third Week of Advent

Prepare Go to your gathering place and pray this prayer (or one of your own)
Dear God, thank you for coming to this world as Jesus.
As we get ready for Christmas,
help us to thank you and worship you.
Help us share your love with people who need to be loved.
We pray in Jesus' name, Amen

Luke 3:7-18
Crowds of people came out to be baptized, but John said to them, "You bunch of snakes! Who warned you to run from the coming judgment? Do something to show that you really have given up your sins. Don't start saying that you belong to Abraham's family. God can turn these stones into children for Abraham. An ax is ready to cut the trees down at their roots. Any tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into a fire."

The crowds asked John, "What should we do?" John told them, "If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share it with someone else."

When tax collectors came to be baptized, they asked John, "Teacher, what should we do?" John told them, "Don't make people pay more than they owe."
Some soldiers asked him, "And what about us? What do we have to do?" John told them, "Don't force people to pay money to make you leave them alone. Be satisfied with your pay." ${ }^{1}$

Everyone became excited and wondered, "Could John be the Messiah?" John said, "I am just baptizing with water. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His threshing fork is in his hand, and he is ready to separate the wheat from the husks. He will store the wheat in his barn and burn the husks with a fire that never goes out."

In many different ways John preached the good news to the people.

## Think

What does this mean?
After reading the story about John the Baptist, think together about what John might tell you to do if you wanted to be baptized and be ready for the Messiah. Wonder together: what should you do?

[^0]1. Should you give away some of your toys to children who don't have any?
2. Should you give away some of your clothes to people who need some?
3. Come up with something that each person could do and what you can do together, and then talk about how to do it.

## Read Isaiah 12:2-6

I trust you to save me, LORD God, and I won't be afraid.
My power and my strength come from you and you have saved me." With great joy, you people will get water from the well of victory. At that time you will say, "Our LORD, we are thankful, and we worship only you. We will tell the nations how glorious you are and what you have done. Because of your wonderful deeds we will sing your praises everywhere on earth." Sing, people of Zion! Celebrate the greatness of the holy LORD of Israel. God is here to help you.

## Sing Group Activity:

Scripture says that we will sing God's praises everywhere on earth. Pick a Christmas carol that you can sing and learn the first verse by heart. Take some of the noisemakers from your Devotional Kit and accompany yourself with them. Then go find someone who lives near you and sing it for them. Here are some suggestions.
"Away In a Manger"
"Silent Night"
"O Come, All Ye Faithful"
"Joy to the World"

## Think Quiet Thoughts:

Take a piece of paper and write or draw something you learned from our devotional time today, or something you would like God to know. Put it in the Epiphany Box.

Pray Closing Skittle Prayers:
Reach into the bag of Skittles and pick one. Pray a prayer based on the color you have and then eat the Skittle!

## Fourth Week of Advent

Prepare Go to your gathering place and pray this prayer (or one of your own)
Dear God, thank you for this season we call Advent.
Thank you that you love us so much you came to live with us and save us.
Holy Spirit, thank you for all you do in this world today.
Please help us to understand what you are saying to us today.
We believe that you will always keep your promises.
We pray in Jesus' name, Amen

## Read Luke 1:39-45

A short time later Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea. She went into Zechariah's home, where she greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, her baby moved within her. The Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth. Then in a loud voice she said to Mary: God has blessed you more than any other woman! He has also blessed the child you will have. Why should the mother of my Lord come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, my baby became happy and moved within me. The Lord has blessed you because you believed that he will keep his promise.

## Create Group Activity:

Give everyone a piece of paper. Hold the paper in the landscape position and divide the paper into 6 squares so it looks like this:

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 4 | 5 | 6 |

Mark the squares 1-3 on the top row and 4-6 on the bottom row. Working together, think through the story of Jesus' birth and draw pictures of what happened first in the first square, what happened next in the second and so on. Use your Bibles if you wish. Share your Story Boards with each other and compare the stories. Where does this part of the story with Mary and Elizabeth fit?

## Read

Luke 1: 46-55
Mary said: "With all my heart I praise the Lord, and I am glad because of God my Savior. He cares for me, his humble servant. From now on, all people will say God has blessed me. God All-Powerful has done great things for me, and his name is holy. He always shows mercy to everyone who worships him. The Lord has used his powerful arm to scatter those who are proud. He drags strong rulers from their thrones and puts humble people in
places of power. God gives the hungry good things to eat, and sends the rich away with nothing. He helps his servant Israel and is always merciful to his people. The Lord made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his family forever!"

Ask<br>Wonder Questions:<br>1. Why do you think Mary said all these things?<br>2. If you were to write a song/poem to God, what would you say?<br>Quite Thoughts: Write your song to God and place it in the Epiphany Box. Use whatever you want from your Devotional Kit to remember the activities you have done the past three weeks.<br>\section*{Pray Closing Skittle Prayers:}<br>Reach into the bag of Skittles and pick one. Pray a prayer based on the color you have and then eat the Skittle!

Prepare Go to your gathering place and pray this prayer (or one of your own)
Dear God, thank you for Christmas Eve.
Tonight is the night Jesus was born.
Help us celebrate your best gift ever.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.
the first verse of some Christmas carols. Here are three suggestions:
"Away in a Manger"
"Silent Night"
"O Come, All Ye Faithful"

## Read

Matthew 1:18-24
Joseph found out Mary was pregnant soon after she got home from her visit with Elizabeth. He knew he wasn't the father. Still, since he was a righteous man, he didn't want to make a public example of her. No, he decided to simply break off the engagement and put her away quietly.

He was deep in thought about this when an angel appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, don't be afraid to take Mary and make her your wife. The child she's carrying is from the Holy Spirit. When he's born, you're to name him Jesus. He's the Savior. He will save his people from their sins." Joseph didn't hesitate. He immediately made Mary his wife, but he wasn't intimate with her until after the child was born.

## Luke 2:1-20

They lived in Nazareth, which was in the northern part of Israel. Yet the Scripture said that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, which is near Jerusalem. At that time, the empire of Rome sent out an order requiring everyone to register in the city of their ancestry. Therefore, Joseph and his wife had to go to Bethlehem.

Soon after they got there, it came time for Mary to deliver her child. As soon as the baby was born, she wrapped him in strips of cloth, and laid him in a feeding trough because there was no room in the sleeping area.

That same night, shepherds were watching their flock in a nearby field. Suddenly an angel stood with them, and the area was flooded with the glory of the Lord. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to bring you great news!"
He then pointed toward the nearby town. "Tonight, the Savior was born in Bethlehem. He is Messiah. Go there, and look for a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." Suddenly the whole area was filled with angels who were praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest! Peace and goodwill to the earth." Then, they disappeared.

The shepherds immediately did as they were told. They went to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby, just as the angel had said. They told them what happened that night, and everyone was amazed. Afterwards, they went back to the field, praising God for what they had seen.

Eight days later Jesus' parents did for him what the Law of Moses commands. And they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told Mary when he promised she would have a baby.

## Wonder Questions:

1. What does this story make you wonder about?
2. Where in this story is a donkey? An Innkeeper?
3. Did the angels sing?
4. What would that have sounded like?

Watch Watch this version of "Sing we now of Christmas" https://www.youtube.com/watch? $\mathrm{v}=\mathrm{sK}$ KdaEd6Ths and follow along with the words. Sing along every time you hear the refrain.
First verse: $\quad$ Sing we now of Christmas, Noel, sing we here! Hear our grateful praises to the babe so dear.

Refrain: $\quad$ Sing we Noel, the King is born, Noel! Sing we now of Christmas, sing we now Noel!

Verse Two: Angels called to shepherds, "Leave your flocks at rest, journey forth to Bethlehem, find the child so blest." (Refrain)

Verse Three: In Bethlehem they found him; Joseph and Mary mild, seated by the manger, watching the holy child. (Refrain)

Verse Four: From the eastern country came the kings afar, bearing gifts to Bethlehem, guided by a star. (Refrain)
Verse Five: Gold and myrrh they took there, gifts of greatest price, there was never a stable so like paradise. (Refrain)

## Think Quiet thoughts:

How did the song make you feel? Write or draw something you thought about during the music or from the story that you want to put in the Epiphany Box.

## Pray Closing Skittle Prayers:

Reach into the bag of Skittles and pick one. Pray a prayer based on the color you have and then eat the Skittle!

Prepare Go to your gathering place and pray this prayer (or one of your own)

Happy birthday Jesus!
Thank you that we can celebrate your birth today.
Thank you that you came to this world to save us.
Help this be a very special Christmas
because we have learned more about you.
Help us to understand what you want to say to us today.
Amen!

Party! Along with exchanging gifts and all your particular traditions, today can be a birthday party for Jesus. Think about including a birthday cake and possibly make up a new birthday song. Get out all the noisemakers and make as much noise as you can. "Joy to the World" is really Psalm 98 dressed up like a hymn! Divide up the verses and have different people read the words. See if you can say the words like a rap while marching around the room.

## "Joy to the World" / Psalm 98

Joy to the world! the Lord is come: let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns: let all their songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,

No more let sin and sorrow grow nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found,

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,

## Eat Birthday cake!

## Pray Closing Skittle Prayers:

Reach into the bag of Skittles and pick one. Pray a prayer based on the color you have and then eat the Skittle!

## Dear God,

thank you that Jesus not only came to earth as a baby, but grew up just like any child.
Thank you that there were people who were looking for the Messiah and found him when they saw Jesus.
Thank you for every part of Christmas.
Help us understand what you want to say to us today.
We pray in Jesus' name, Amen

Sing Sing and dance along with this Song of Thankfulness: https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=wMHdXhLHBhM.
Copy the motions and have fun!
Read Luke 2:22-39
Forty-one days later, it was time for Joseph and Mary to take Jesus to the temple, and offer sacrifice to the Lord. So the three of them went to Jerusalem.

There was a man at the temple named Simeon. God had told him that he wouldn't die until he had seen the Promised One. The Spirit of God had prompted him to go to the temple that day. He saw Joseph and Mary and asked if he could hold the baby. Looking into the face of Jesus, he said, "Oh, praise be to God!" Looking toward heaven, he said, "Lord, you can now let me die. My eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon also told Mary that she was going to suffer heartache as the mother of the Messiah.

The prophet Anna was also there in the temple. In her youth she was married for just seven years, when her husband died. She was now eighty-four years old and she had spent all these years, day and night, serving the Lord in the temple by praying and often going without eating. When Anna came in and saw the baby Jesus she praised God and spoke about the child Jesus to everyone who hoped for Jerusalem to be set free.

## Wonder Questions:

1. What did this story make you wonder about?
2. How do you think Anna and Simeon could tell Jesus was the Messiah?
3. Why did Simeon say that Jesus was "your salvation."? What do you think that means?
4. Why do you think Simeon told Mary that she would suffer pain as Jesus' mother?
5. Imagine what it would be like to spend all day and night praying and serving God. What would you do?'

God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you. Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together.
Each one of you is part of the body of Christ, and you were chosen to live together in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts. And be grateful. Let the message about Christ completely fill your lives, while you use all your wisdom to teach and instruct each other. With thankful hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. Whatever you say or do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks to God the Father because of him.

## Create Group Activity:

Have everyone take a piece of paper and a pencil/marker. Make coupons for members of your family to show how much you love each other and how you will do things for each other. Suggestions:

- Give a back rub
- Serve you breakfast in bed
- Fold the laundry
- Vacuum a room
- Clean a room
- Wash dishes/put the dishes in the dishwasher
- Sweep the garage
- Give someone a foot massage
- Draw a picture as a gift to someone in your family

Exchange Coupons and say "I'm doing this for you in the name of the Lord."

## Think Quiet thoughts:

Write down things you are especially thankful for and place them in the Epiphany Box.

## Pray Closing Skittle Prayers:

Reach into the bag of Skittles and pick one. Pray a prayer based on the color you have and then eat the Skittle!

## Dear God,

thank you that Jesus did not just come for one group of people, but for the whole world.
Thank you that even the sky could show excitement that God had come to our world.
Thank you that people very far away from Bethlehem could see his star.
Help us to understand what you want to say to us today.
We pray in In Jesus' name, Amen

## Sing "What Child Is This?"

Watch a music video of this song at https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=GyyRLvOmFa4 This is a fun Christmas carol to dance to. Make up motions that tell the story.

## Read Matthew 2:1-12

While Jesus was still a young child, some men came from the east. Their research revealed that a royal redeemer would one day come to Israel. They studied the stars, and saw signs that indicated this king had finally been born. They went to Jerusalem and talked to Herod, the king who was appointed by the Romans to rule over Israel. They said, "Where's the child who has been born King of the Jews? We see his star, and we've come to worship him."

Herod was evil and cruel. He became angry when he heard the news of a different king born in his domain. Still, he controlled himself and told the men he'd look into the matter. He called for the priests and teachers and asked, "Where does your Scripture say Messiah is to be born?" They were quick to answer. "He's to be born in Bethlehem."
Herod went back to his visitors and asked to hear more about the heavenly signs and exactly when the royal star first appeared. He then told them, "Go to Bethlehem. Once you have found the child, report back to me. l'd like to go....uh... worship him as well."

The men traveled the few miles to Bethlehem and went right to the house where Joseph, Mary, and the young child lived. They bowed down before Jesus and worshiped him. They gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. God warned these men that they were not to return to Herod, so they avoided Jerusalem and traveled home a different way.

That night, an angel appeared to Joseph. "Get up! Herod will send soldiers to kill the child. Go to Egypt and stay there until I tell you to return." So Joseph got up in the night and took his family to Egypt.

Herod was angry when he realized the men from the east had disobeyed him. He sent soldiers to Bethlehem and had all the young boys killed-those under the age of two.

In time, Herod died, and the angel told Joseph it was safe to return to Israel. Still, he decided to move his family to Nazareth instead of going back to Bethlehem.

Jesus grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

## Ask Wonder Questions:

1. What does this story make you wonder about?
2. Do you think God still speaks to people in dreams?
3. What do you think God wants to tell you?
4. How old do you think Jesus was when the visitors arrived?
5. What do you think Joseph did with the gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

## Create Activity:

Make a fort/tent and gather under it. Open the Epiphany Box and look at all the things you have been putting in it over these weeks. Share your memories of all the things you did.

## Pray Closing Skittle Prayers:

Reach into the bag of Skittles and pick one. Pray a prayer based on the color you have and then eat the Skittle!


## Mickie O'Donnell

is a professional Christian Educator who has worked with congregations in the United States and Scotland since 1976. As one of the originators of the Multi-dimensional/rotational model of education, she has been involved with helping churches find ways to use creative methods to help children have authentic experiences of God. She is co-author of the book Workshop Wonders (2004) and is currently Director of Children's Ministries at Noroton Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Darien, CT. Mickie is also President of Family Ministries International.


[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ Explain to the children that we live in a very different time. Soldiers in Bible times would often force people to pay them for their protection.

