



SOUTHSIDE
Advent

Weekly Advent Devotional

WAITING IN THE DARK

A Deep Dive Devotional for Advent

Four Weeks of Scripture, Reflection & Prayer

December 2025

Southside Church

Introduction

Advent doesn't begin with twinkling lights or warm nostalgia. It starts in the dark—honestly, quietly, without pretending that everything is okay. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "arrival" or "coming." It is a season of waiting, of longing, of preparing our hearts for the Light that breaks through darkness.

This devotional is designed to take you deeper into the themes you experienced during the "Waiting in the Dark" Advent Walk. Each week, you'll find extended Scripture passages, theological reflections, guided prayer exercises, and journaling prompts to help you sit with the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Use this guide alongside your daily email devotionals, or work through it at your own pace. Light your Advent candle as you begin each week's reading, and let the growing light remind you that even in the dark, God is at work.

Even here, in the dark, the Light is coming.

How to Use This Guide

Weekly Rhythm

Sunday: Light your Advent candle(s) and read the week's opening reflection and Scripture.

Monday–Friday: Work through the daily email devotionals, using the journaling prompts in this guide to go deeper.

Saturday: Complete the Lectio Divina exercise and the Watchman's Prayer.

Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

Each week includes a Lectio Divina exercise. Lectio Divina is an ancient practice of prayerful Scripture reading. The steps are simple:

- **Read** (Lectio): Read the passage slowly, aloud if possible.
- **Reflect** (Meditatio): Notice a word or phrase that stands out. Sit with it.
- **Respond** (Oratio): Talk to God about what you noticed. What is He saying to you?
- **Rest** (Contemplatio): Simply be present with God. Let go of words.

The Watchman's Prayer

Throughout Scripture, watchmen stood guard through the night, waiting for the morning. In Psalm 130, the psalmist says his soul waits for the Lord "more than watchmen wait for the morning." Each week, you'll find a Watchman's Prayer, a prayer for those who wait in the dark, watching for the dawn.

WEEK ONE: HOPE

Hope Begins in the Dark

Light the First Candle

As you light the first candle on your Advent wreath, sit in the near-darkness for a moment. Let your eyes adjust. Notice how this little flame changes the room. This week, we begin where Advent always begins: in the dark, with hope.

Opening Scripture

"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine." — Isaiah 9:2 (NLT)

Theological Reflection: The Architecture of Silence

Between the prophet Malachi and the birth of John the Baptist, four hundred years of prophetic silence stretched across Israel. No new words from God. No miraculous signs. Just generation after generation living under the weight of unfulfilled promises.

But that silence wasn't abandonment, it was architecture. While Israel heard nothing, God was laying the groundwork for the gospel: Roman roads for the apostles to travel, Greek as a universal language, and a diaspora spreading synagogues across the known world. Silence often precedes something that requires preparation.

The Hebrew words most often translated as "hope"—*qavah* and *yakhal*—are also translated as "wait." To hope in God means to wait with patient expectation, trusting that He will fulfill His promises. This kind of waiting leans forward, anticipating the day when Jesus will return to make all things new.

Instead of seeing your silent season as wasted time, know God is likely arranging things you cannot yet see.

Extended Reading

- ☐ **Isaiah 8:11-17:** Isaiah chooses hope in the midst of a national crisis
- ☐ **Psalms 130:** A song of waiting from the depths
- ☐ **Romans 8:18-25:** All creation groans, waiting in hope
- ☐ **1 Peter 1:3-9:** A living hope through the resurrection

Prompts for Journaling

- Does God seem silent right now? Notice where that is. What might He be preparing that you cannot yet see?
- What promises of God are you clinging to this Advent? Write them down.
- Complete this sentence: "This is where hope begins for me: _____."
- How has God used seasons of waiting to shape you in the past?

Lectio Divina: Psalm 130:5-6

"I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."

- ☐ **Read** the passage slowly, three times.
- ☐ **Reflect:** What word or phrase draws your attention? Why?
- ☐ **Respond:** What do you want to say to God about what you've noticed?
- ☐ **Rest:** Sit in silence for two minutes. Let God speak.

The Watchman's Prayer

Lord, I am watching. I am waiting. The night is long, but I have not given up hope. You have been faithful before, and You will be faithful again. Give me eyes to see Your light even in the slightest flicker. Give me patience to trust Your timing. Give me the courage to believe that the morning will come. Even here, in the dark, I will watch for You. Amen.

Even here, in the dark, the Light is coming.

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WEEK TWO: PEACE

A Peace That Comes Before the Circumstances Change

Light the Second Candle

Light two candles now. Notice how the room grows brighter. This week, we turn to peace. Not the peace the world offers, which depends on circumstances, but the peace of God, which guards our hearts even when nothing around us has changed.

Opening Scripture

"Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us—to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace." — Luke 1:78-79 (NLT)

Theological Reflection: Peace in the Presence

Most of us imagine peace as the moment when everything finally cooperates, when schedules settle, bills are paid, and life just works. But biblical peace (shalom) is rarely tied to circumstances. It's anchored in presence.

Isaiah says God keeps us in "perfect peace" not when life gets easier, but when our minds return to Him (Isaiah 26:3). Peace doesn't come when the darkness disappears. It comes when God shows up. He doesn't always change our circumstances right away. He changes us by drawing near.

Consider Joseph. He had a plan, and it was simple, straightforward, honorable. Then life broke open in a way he never asked for. His story was disrupted, and with it, his sense of peace. Yet Joseph's peace didn't come from understanding what God was doing. It came from trusting the One who was doing it.

Mary's response to the angel wasn't naïve surrender. It was a courageous acceptance. "Let it be to me according to your word." Her "yes" became the doorway for God's peace to enter the world. Peace often grows when we stop resisting and start releasing.

Extended Reading

- ☐ **Isaiah 9:6-7:** The Prince of Peace who ends all violence
- ☐ **Colossians 1:19-23:** Christ reconciles all things through His blood
- ☐ **Ephesians 2:14-18:** Christ Himself is our peace
- ☐ **John 14:27:** A peace the world cannot give

Prompts for Journaling

- Where is your life disrupted right now? What would it look like to trust God with what you cannot control?
- When peace feels fragile, what do you tend to grasp for? What would it mean to return instead?
- Pray Mary's words slowly: "Lord, I am Yours. Let it be to me as You desire." Which phrase is hardest to say? Why?
- What "voice" is leading you right now? Is it urgency, fear, pressure, or peace?

Lectio Divina: Isaiah 26:3

"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!"

- ☐ **Read** the passage slowly, three times.
- ☐ **Reflect:** Identify what "perfect peace" looks like for you right now.
- ☐ **Respond:** What do you need to release to God today? How do you take a step in that?
- ☐ **Rest:** Take three slow breaths. Inhale: "Be still." Exhale: "And know that I am God."

The Watchman's Prayer

Lord, the night is not yet over, my heart still races and my mind still churns, but You are near, and even closer than my next breath. Settle the chaos inside me. Not by changing my circumstances, but by changing me. Let Your presence be the peace I cannot manufacture. I release what I cannot hold. I trust what I cannot see. Guide my feet into the way of peace. Amen.

Even here, in the dark, the Light is coming.

WEEK THREE: JOY

Joy That Grows Slowly, Even Here

Light the Third Candle

Light three candles. The room is noticeably brighter now. Joy is arriving. It's not coming with fanfare, but slowly, quietly, the way dawn does. This week, we pay attention to the small sparks of God's goodness, even in heavy seasons.

Opening Scripture

"Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!" — Luke 2:10-11 (NLT)

Theological Reflection: Joy in the Wilderness

Joy is not the same as excitement. It's not loud or flashy. In Scripture, joy (chara in Greek) often arrives the way dawn does—quietly, gradually, almost unnoticed until it fills the whole sky.

When the angel declared "great joy," the world was still dark. Rome still ruled, and Herod still threatened. And when the angel made their declaration, Mary and Joseph still faced uncertainty. But joy had already begun its slow work. We tend to think joy shows up after everything gets better. Advent tells us the opposite: joy is the seed pushing through cold soil, a flicker of warmth in a long winter, a whispered reminder that God has not forgotten you.

The first people to hear about Jesus weren't the influential or the polished. They were shepherds. Ordinary, overlooked, pulling the night shift while the rest of the world slept, shepherds. They weren't looking for joy. Joy came looking for them. God wanted the world to know: joy is for the weary. Joy is for the ordinary. Joy is for the people who feel like they're just trying to get through the night.

Nehemiah told weeping, exhausted people, "The joy of the LORD is your strength." Joy didn't deny their pain. Joy steadied them in it. Biblical joy isn't an escape from reality. Instead, it's the strength to face reality with a deeper confidence.

Extended Reading

- ☐ **Isaiah 35:1-10:** The wilderness will rejoice and blossom
- ☐ **John 15:9-17:** Abide in love, and your joy will be complete
- ☐ **Philippians 4:4-7:** Rejoice in the Lord always
- ☐ **Nehemiah 8:10:** The joy of the Lord is your strength

Prompts for Journaling

- Where did you see even a small spark of God's goodness this week? Let that be enough.
- What "wilderness place" in your life needs to hear that God can bring joy even there?
- Who in your life strengthens your faith? How has God used their presence to bring you joy?
- What's been quietly stealing your joy lately? Name it. Then let it go.

Lectio Divina: Isaiah 35:1-2

"Even the wilderness and desert will be glad in those days. The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with spring crocuses. Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers and singing and joy!"

- ☐ **Read** the passage slowly, three times.
- ☐ **Reflect:** What "wasteland" in your life might God be preparing to make bloom?
- ☐ **Respond:** Ask God to show you one thing He is doing, even now.
- ☐ **Rest:** Sit in silence. Let gratitude rise.

The Watchman's Prayer

Lord, I confess that joy has felt distant. I have been looking for it in the wrong places and waiting for circumstances to change before I let it in. But You say joy comes in the morning, and I know morning is coming. Open my eyes to the small graces You have scattered through this day. Let gratitude rise like a slow dawn. Let joy grow in hidden places. Even in the wilderness, even in the waiting, let something begin to blossom. Amen.

Even here, in the dark, the Light is coming.

WEEK FOUR: LOVE

Love That Comes Close

Light All Four Candles

Light all four candles. The room is full of light now. This week, we arrive at the heart of Advent: Love came close. God didn't love us from a distance. He entered our world, our darkness, our pain. Emmanuel: God with us.

Opening Scripture

"So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son." — John 1:14 (NLT)

Theological Reflection: Love That Stoops Low

If you want to understand God's heart, don't start with power. Instead, start with proximity. Love doesn't shout from far away; it draws near. It steps into the room. It sits beside you in the dark.

When John says Jesus "made his home among us," the Greek literally means He "pitched his tent in our neighborhood." God didn't love us from a distance. He came close enough to touch, close enough to hear, close enough to weep with us. This is the miracle at the center of Advent: God doesn't wait for us to climb our way to Him. He descends all the way down to us.

When God chose to reveal the fullness of His love, He didn't come as a king or a warrior. He came as a baby. He came fragile, dependent, wrapped in cloths, and lay in a feeding trough. Love stooped. The Incarnation is not just God visiting humanity.

The Incarnation is God entering our vulnerability. Our limits. Our confusion. Our need.

This means something important: there is no place you can be that is "beneath" God's love. No failure too deep. No fear too heavy. No sadness too hidden. Love goes lower still. Love enters the places you avoid. Love kneels beside what feels unredeemable.

Extended Reading

- ☐ **Philippians 2:5-11:** Christ emptied Himself and took the form of a servant
- ☐ **1 John 4:7-21:** God is love, and His love casts out fear
- ☐ **John 1:1-18:** The Word became flesh and dwelt among us
- ☐ **1 Corinthians 13:** The greatest of these is love

Prompts for Journaling

- Where in your life do you most need to know that God has come close?
- What place in your heart feels "beneath" God's love? Invite Jesus into that exact space.
- How might you carry Christ's light into your world this week—your family, your friendships, your fears?
- Complete this prayer: "Jesus, shine Your light through me into _____."

Lectio Divina: John 1:4-5

"The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."

- ☐ **Read** the passage slowly, three times.
- ☐ **Reflect:** What does it mean that darkness can never extinguish the light?
- ☐ **Respond:** Thank God for entering your darkness.
- ☐ **Rest:** Light a candle. Sit with Emmanuel.

The Watchman's Prayer

Lord, the waiting is almost over. The light is almost here. Thank You for not staying far away. Thank You for entering my darkness, my weakness, my need. You came as love, and not as an idea or a feeling, but as a Person. Emmanuel. God with us. As I carry this light into my world, let it not be my own. Let it be Yours. As I know, Yours is gentle and warm, and unextinguishable. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Love has come. Amen.

Even here, in the dark, the Light is coming.

CHRISTMAS EVE: THE LIGHT HAS COME

Light the Christ Candle

Tonight, light all of the candles. The room is full of light. The waiting is over. The story reaches its turning point: the Light has come. Quietly. Gently. In the arms of a young mother.

Scripture

"The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." — John 1:4-5 (NLT)

Reflection

Christmas Eve always feels like a deep breath being just held. The waiting isn't quite over, but you can begin to sense it. Something is about to break open. Something is about to shine.

Jesus enters the world not with overwhelming power but with overwhelming love. And that love begins undoing the darkness, one human heart at a time. The darkness does not win. The silence does not last. The longing is not wasted. The Light is here, and the darkness cannot put it out.

Whatever this year has held for you: joy, grief, questions, fear, hope, exhaustion. God has been moving toward you the whole time, and the manger is proof.

A Closing Blessing

May the light of Christ go before you, surround you, and shine within you, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your heart. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Love has come, and it is for you. Go in peace.

Even here, in the dark, the Light has come.