

ALMOST Christmas

What Are You Waiting For?

A FAMILY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

FOOTHILLS CHURCH

Contents

Welcome 3

WEEK ONE
Waiting for Hope
Isaiah 9:1–7 4

WEEK TWO
Waiting for an Answer
Luke 1:5–25 10

WEEK THREE
Waiting for God to Make Sense
Luke 1:26–38 16

WEEK FOUR
Waiting for a Savior
Luke 2:1–20 21

A Prayer for Your Family 27

Welcome

Christmas is a season of waiting. Each week of our Almost Christmas series follows someone in the Christmas story who was waiting on God and didn't fully understand what was coming. This devotional helps your household carry that week's message home.

You don't need to prepare anything. Pick a night, gather whoever is home, and read it out loud. Every week follows the same rhythm:

THEME	what the week is about
SCRIPTURE	read the passage together (ESV)
READ TOGETHER	a short devotional for everyone
TALK ABOUT IT	questions for every age; use the ones that fit your home
ACTIVITY	something hands-on, especially for little ones
CARRY IT THROUGH THE WEEK	a one- or two-minute practice to keep the theme alive between Sundays

Every household looks different. You may have toddlers who won't sit still, teenagers who would rather be anywhere else, or it may just be you at the kitchen table. Christmas may feel joyful this year, or it may feel harder than usual. Use what helps and skip what doesn't. The goal isn't to finish the page. It's to meet Jesus together.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

WEEK ONE



WAITING FOR

Hope

“The light is coming, and darkness won’t win.”

ISAIAH 9:1–7

THEME

Have you ever had one of those days when nothing seems to go right? You know, the kind of day that makes you want to crawl back into bed and try again tomorrow? Sometimes that feeling lasts longer than a day, and waiting for things to get better can be hard for kids and grown-ups alike. Isaiah spoke to people who knew what darkness and discouragement felt like, but he gave them an incredible promise: a Light was coming, a King who would bring hope, joy, and peace. At Christmas, we celebrate that Jesus has come, and as we wait for Him to return, we remember that the darkness doesn't get the final word.

ISAIAH 9:1–7 (ESV)

1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time
he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land be-
yond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who
dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice
before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the
spoil.

4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his
oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every gar-
ment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

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

7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on
the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

READ TOGETHER

Have you noticed that Christmas seems to show up everywhere before we're quite ready for it? The decorations are up, the music is playing, and someone in the family has probably already started asking, "How many more days until Christmas?" Waiting can be hard, whether you're counting down to presents, hoping to make the team, worrying about a friendship, or waiting for news that could change your life.

God's people knew that feeling, too. Isaiah promised them that their darkness wouldn't last forever. A great Light was coming, a King who would bring joy, break the power of sin, and bring peace that would never end. That King is Jesus! He came as a baby, gave His life for us, and rose again to rescue us from sin. Now we celebrate His first coming and look forward to the day He returns and makes all things right, knowing that even while we wait, our hope is in Him.

TALK ABOUT IT

LITTLE ONES AGES 4–7

What's the hardest thing about waiting for Christmas? What do you think it means that Jesus is like a light in the darkness?

KIDS AGES 8–12

Sometimes life feels like a cloudy day that just won't end. What are some things that can make life feel dark or discouraging for you? How does knowing Jesus came to bring us hope help you when you feel that way?

TEENS AND ADULTS

Waiting can look different at every stage of life. Maybe you're waiting for an opportunity, an answer, healing, or a difficult season to pass. Where are you struggling to see the light right now, and what would it look like to trust Jesus in that waiting?

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

If Jesus is the Light who brings hope, what is one way our family can share His light with someone who might be having a hard time this Christmas?

ACTIVITY

Light in the Dark

YOU'LL NEED Paper, markers or crayons, and a flashlight (or a lamp).

WHAT TO DO

1. Turn off the lights in the room, leaving just enough light for everyone to be safe.
2. Ask everyone to name something that can make life feel dark or difficult. It might be being left out, struggling at school, worrying about someone we love, or feeling lonely.
3. Turn on the flashlight and let each family member take a turn holding it while sharing one thing that gives them hope.
4. On a piece of paper, draw a big star or a beam of light. Inside it, write: "Jesus is our hope!" Let younger children decorate it and put it somewhere the family will see it throughout the week.

WHY IT MATTERS *Darkness can feel overwhelming, but Jesus came into our world to rescue us from sin and bring us lasting hope, even when our circumstances haven't changed yet.*

ANOTHER OPTION

The Hope Hunt

YOU'LL NEED Paper, markers or crayons, and a few small paper stars (cut them out ahead of time or let the kids make them).

WHAT TO DO

1. Hide the paper stars around a room or throughout the house. On each star, write a word or short phrase connected to hope, such as peace, joy, love, God's promises, or Jesus is coming.
2. Let the kids hunt for the stars. Once everyone has found a few, gather together and read Isaiah 9:6: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given."

3 Talk about how the people in Isaiah's day were waiting for God's promised King. They didn't yet know everything about how God would fulfill His promise, but God had not forgotten them.

4 Bring all the stars together and place them around a larger star labeled JESUS. Remind everyone that Jesus is at the center of our hope because He came to save us through His death and resurrection, and He will come again.

WHY IT MATTERS *Just as the children search for hidden stars, we can look for reminders of God's faithfulness while we wait for Jesus to return and make all things right.*

CARRY IT THROUGH THE WEEK

Find the Light

Once a day, perhaps at dinner or bedtime, ask everyone: "What was one hard thing about today, and where did you see a little light?" The light might be a friend who was kind, a moment of courage, a prayer, or a reminder that Jesus is with us. Finish by saying together, "Jesus, thank You for being our hope while we wait."

NOTES

NOTES & PRAYERS

WEEK TWO



WAITING FOR

an Answer

"God hears every prayer, even the long ones."

LUKE 1:5–25

THEME

Zechariah and Elizabeth loved God and obeyed Him, but for many years their biggest prayer, to have a baby, seemed to go unanswered. They grew old, and still they kept trusting and serving God. Then one ordinary day, while Zechariah was working in the temple, an angel appeared with amazing news: God had heard their prayer, and their son John would help get the world ready for Jesus. Zechariah found it hard to believe, so he was unable to speak until God's promise came true. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, we all wait for answers, and this week reminds us that when God seems quiet, He has not forgotten us. He is still at work.

LUKE 1:5–25 (ESV)

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,
of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron,
and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God,
walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.
7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on
duty, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to
enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude
of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of
incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell
upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for
your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,
and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness,
and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord.
And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the
Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the
children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the

spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,
and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a
people prepared."

18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old
man, and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And the angel answered him, "I
am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you
and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you will be silent and un-
able to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did
not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." 21 And the peo-
ple were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in
the temple. 22 And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and
they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making
signs to them and remained mute. 23 And when his time of service was
ended, he went to his home.

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she
kept herself hidden, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days
when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

READ TOGETHER

Have you ever waited for something for so long that you started to wonder if it would ever happen? Maybe it was an exciting trip, a birthday, Christmas, or the last day of school. Zechariah and Elizabeth knew exactly how that feels. They prayed for years, and it seemed like nothing was happening at all. But God was listening the whole time, and He was getting ready to do something even bigger than they had asked for. Their baby, John, would point people to Jesus, the greatest answer God has ever given to the world.

God doesn't always answer our prayers when or how we hope, and that can hurt. So when you are waiting and God seems quiet, you can trust this: He hears you, He loves you, and in Jesus He has already shown that He keeps every promise.

TALK ABOUT IT

LITTLE ONES AGES 4–7

What is something that is really hard to wait for? What can we do to help us while we wait?

KIDS AGES 8–12

When the angel brought good news, Zechariah asked, "How shall I know this?" Why do you think it was hard for him to believe, even though it was the very thing he had prayed for?

TEENS AND ADULTS

Zechariah and Elizabeth stayed faithful through years of unanswered prayer (v. 6). Where are you waiting right now, and what would faithful waiting look like for you this week?

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

What is one thing our family is waiting for or praying about right now? Let's pray for it together and trust God with the answer.

ACTIVITY

The Waiting Bean

YOU'LL NEED 2–3 dry beans from the pantry (pinto, lima, or black beans work great), a paper towel, a zip-top sandwich bag, a little water, tape, and a permanent marker.

WHAT TO DO

1. Fold the paper towel to fit inside the bag, then dampen it with water (wet, but not dripping).
2. Lay the beans on the paper towel and gently slide it into the bag. Leave the bag open just a little so air can get in. (Grown-ups, help little ones with the beans.)
3. With the marker, write "God hears me!" on the bag. Kids can draw a picture of something they are praying for.
4. Tape the bag to a sunny window or set it on a windowsill where everyone can see it.

5 Check on your bean each day. At first, it will look like nothing is happening, but keep watching! In a few days, tiny roots and a sprout will appear.

WHY IT MATTERS *For the first few days, it will look like your bean isn't doing anything at all. But deep inside, God is already making it grow. That's just like Zechariah and Elizabeth: for years it looked like nothing was happening with their prayer, but God was working the whole time. When we wait, we can remember the bean. God is always at work, even when we can't see it yet.*

CARRY IT THROUGH THE WEEK

A Quiet Hope

Zechariah had to be quiet while he waited for God's promise. Each day, have the whole family sit in silence for 30 seconds: no talking, just listening. Then let each person name one thing they are waiting for or hoping for (a word or two is plenty). Close by praying together: "God, thank You for hearing us. Help us trust You while we wait. Amen."

BONUS If you made the Waiting Bean, check on it right before your Quiet Hope as a reminder that God is working even when we can't see it.

NOTES

NOTES & PRAYERS

WEEK THREE



WAITING FOR

God to Make Sense

"Trusting God when the plan doesn't make sense."

LUKE 1:26–38

THEME

Trusting God can seem confusing sometimes. He promises us good things, but the circumstances in our lives don't always seem "good." Mary knew that feeling. She was a young woman engaged to be married when God interrupted her plans with news that seemed impossible. How do we keep trusting His promise when the plan doesn't seem to make sense?

LUKE 1:26–38 (ESV)

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of
Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name
was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And
he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"
29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what
sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be
afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will
conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.
32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the
Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will
reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no
end."

34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and
the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be
born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative
Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth
month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible
with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be
to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

READ TOGETHER

Have you ever experienced something that made no sense? No matter how much you wrestled with it, did you find yourself wondering, "Why or how is this happening to me?" Maybe it was something wonderful: a promotion at work, an award, or a prize you never expected to win. Or maybe it was something painful: a difficult diagnosis, the unexpected loss of a loved one, or the weight of everyday life. We can all relate to not understanding some of the things God allows in our lives.

Mary faced that same confusion when the angel told her she would give birth to Jesus. How could she, a virgin, give birth? Even today, that seems impossible, because for anyone but God, it is. But Mary responded in two important ways: she asked, and she trusted. Mary wasn't afraid to ask the angel, "How will this be?" Even in our doubts and confusion, we can always feel safe bringing our questions to God. He already knows them anyway.

The angel gave Mary an answer, but that answer still left room for faith. Unlike Zechariah, who asked for proof, Mary asked how, and then she said yes. She trusted the promise without getting all the details of the plan. And the baby she carried is the reason we can trust God too: Jesus is the proof that God keeps His word. This is how we can respond to God's work in our lives: Ask and Trust.

TALK ABOUT IT

LITTLE ONES AGES 4–7

If an angel gave you a surprising message from God, what would you want to ask?

KIDS AGES 8–12

Mary asked, "How will this be?" What is something confusing or difficult that you would like to ask God about?

TEENS AND ADULTS

Where in your life are you waiting for God's plan to make sense, and what would it look like to trust God even without knowing how it will unfold?

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Which part of Mary's response do you want to practice this week: honestly asking God your questions, or trusting God's promises? Why?

ACTIVITY

Questions and Promises Jar

YOU'LL NEED A jar or bowl, small pieces of paper, and crayons or markers.

WHAT TO DO

1. Give everyone two pieces of paper.
2. On the first piece, write or draw something you don't understand or a question you want to ask God. Place it in the jar.
3. On the second piece, write or draw a promise from today's passage, such as "Nothing will be impossible with God." Place that in the jar too.
4. Take turns pulling out the papers. Read or describe each one, then pray together: "God, we bring You our questions and trust Your promises, even when we don't understand."

WHY IT MATTERS *Mary honestly asked her question and then trusted God's promise; this jar reminds us that we can do both.*

CARRY IT THROUGH THE WEEK

Ask and Trust

At dinner each day, invite everyone to share one thing they don't understand or feel worried about. Then say together, "Nothing will be impossible with God," and ask God to help you trust Him.

NOTES & PRAYERS

WEEK FOUR



WAITING FOR

a Savior

"The greatest gift has already arrived."

LUKE 2:1–20

THEME

The waiting is almost over. We've been counting down for weeks, and some of us have been waiting on something much bigger than Christmas morning, like an answer to a prayer. For hundreds of years, God's people had been waiting for the Savior He promised to send. They didn't know exactly when He would come, but on an ordinary night in Bethlehem, God fulfilled His promise in the most extraordinary way: Jesus was born. And the first people to hear the news were ordinary shepherds working the night shift.

LUKE 2:1–20 (ESV)

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world
should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was
governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town.
4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to
Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of
the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his be-
trothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came
for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped
him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no
place for them in the inn.

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping
watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to
them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled
with great fear. 10 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. 11 For unto you is
born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And
this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling
cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a
multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with
whom he is pleased!"

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said
to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has
happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they went with
haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And
when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them
concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shep-
herds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering
them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising
God for all they had heard and seen, as it was told them.



“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

LUKE 2:11

READ TOGETHER

Imagine being one of the shepherds that night. You were simply doing your job, watching over sheep, when suddenly an angel appeared with the greatest news the world had ever heard: the Savior had been born!

But here’s what makes that news so incredible. Jesus didn’t come just to give us another holiday to celebrate or a story to remember. He came because every one of us has sinned and needs to be rescued.

Jesus came to live the perfect life we couldn’t live, die on the cross for our sins, and rise again so that everyone who turns from their sin and trusts in Him can be forgiven and have eternal life. Christmas reminds us that God didn’t just promise to send a Savior. He kept His promise.

TALK ABOUT IT

LITTLE ONES AGES 4–7

What do you think the shepherds felt when they saw the angel and heard that Jesus had been born?

KIDS AGES 8–12

Why do you think the angel called Jesus a "Savior" instead of just telling the shepherds that a baby had been born? What does Jesus save us from?

TEENS AND ADULTS

It's easy to celebrate Jesus at Christmas without thinking much about why He came. How would your life look different if you truly lived every day remembering that Jesus came to save you?

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

What's one reason we can thank God for sending Jesus this Christmas?

ACTIVITY

The Greatest Gift

YOU'LL NEED Paper, markers or crayons, and a small gift bag or box (optional).

WHAT TO DO

1. Give everyone a piece of paper and ask them to draw or write down a gift they would love to receive for Christmas.
2. Let everyone share what they drew and why they would love that gift.
3. Now ask everyone to turn their paper over and write the word JESUS in big letters. Younger children can draw a manger or a cross.
4. Explain that Christmas gifts can be exciting, but even the greatest present will eventually get old, break, or be forgotten. Jesus offers us something no other gift can: forgiveness of our sins and eternal life with God.
5. Finish by having everyone share one reason Jesus is greater than anything they could find under the Christmas tree. If you have a gift bag or box, place everyone's papers inside and set it under the tree.

WHY IT MATTERS *The shepherds hurried to find the gift God promised, and Jesus is the one gift that will never wear out, break, or be forgotten.*

CARRY IT THROUGH THE WEEK

Remember the Gift

Each day this week, when your family sees a Christmas present, a Christmas tree, or Christmas lights, take a moment to remember why Jesus came. Have someone in your family say, "Jesus is the greatest gift because He came to save us." Then take a few seconds to thank God for keeping His promise and sending His Son.

NOTES

NOTES & PRAYERS



A PRAYER FOR YOUR FAMILY

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us enough to send Jesus. Thank You for keeping Your promises and making a way for our sins to be forgiven. Help us remember that Christmas isn't just about the gifts we receive, but about the Savior You sent. Help our family trust You, follow You, and share the good news of Jesus with others. In Jesus' name, amen.



ALMOST CHRISTMAS

What Are You Waiting For?

FOOTHILLS
CHURCH