

# ADVENT AT THE CREEK



**THE CREEK**  
CHURCH



People around the world have observed Advent since at least 480 A.D. Advent links us with generations upon generations of Christians who have observed this very same season and focused on the promise Jesus' birth fulfilled. It's a powerful connection.

This is an opportunity to renew our faith and devotion as we approach Christmas.

Candles are a visual reminder for us of the light that was promised throughout the Old Testament scripture and was born in the New Testament. A set of Advent candles usually includes three purple candles and one pink candle. Each week you light one more candle to illustrate how this light became closer and closer until that first Christmas night finally arrived.

- Week 1: Light only the first purple candle. This is the Hope Candle.
- Week 2: Light the first candle (Hope) as well a second purple candle. This is the Peace Candle.
- Week 3: For the third week, light the first candle (Hope), the second candle (Peace), as well as the third purple candle. This is the Joy Candle.
- Christmas Eve: On the final Sunday of Advent, light all three purple candles (Hope, Peace, and Joy) as well as the pink candle. The pink candle is the Love Candle.

## Week 1: God Promised a Savior (Hope)

### Nov 28 // Day 1: The Weight of Waiting



*"In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious."*  
— Isaiah 11:10

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*  
— Romans 15:13



Advent begins in the silence — the long pause between promise and fulfillment.

For four hundred years, heaven said nothing. No prophets. No miracles. No new words from God. Just generations of people trying to believe that the story wasn't over. The ache of waiting pressed on the world like a winter sky, heavy and still.

Waiting is never easy. But it's the place where faith is tested — not by storms, but by silence. It's one thing to trust God when the sea splits in front of you; it's another to trust Him when nothing moves at all.

Maybe you know that feeling — the long pause where your prayers echo back unanswered, where it feels like God is still writing the next line but hasn't turned the page yet. The space between what He promised and what you can see can feel unbearable.

But Advent tells us the silence was never empty. God was still moving— in wombs, in whispers, in the hidden soil of time. Isaiah saw it long before it broke the surface: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse." Out of what looked dead, life was already growing.

That's what Advent means — God is faithful in the waiting. He's not late. He's precise. Every pause is on purpose. And even when we try to rush Him, He reminds us that the roots of redemption run deep beneath what we can see. The first Advent came to a people who were tired of waiting, but Hope still came — not fast, but full. And that same Hope still comes to us today. So our waiting is not in vain, our waiting, our pauses prepare us for the hope.



**Light your first Advent candle and let the quiet settle. Ask yourself honestly:**

Where am I waiting on God right now?

Where am I trying to rush Him?

What would it look like to trust His timing more than my own desire for control?

*Then whisper this truth into your silence: "God, I trust You in the pause."*





## **Prayer:**

Jesus, You are faithful even when heaven feels still. Teach me to trust You in the silence, to believe that You are working in unseen ways. When I grow restless, slow my heart to match Your rhythm. Let my waiting become worship, and my pause become peace. Amen.



## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. The Star Box of Waiting**

Find a small box or jar and set it in the center of your table. This week, talk about what each person is waiting or hoping for — healing, peace, direction, reconciliation. Write each one on a slip of paper and place it in the box. Each evening, light a candle and read one slip aloud. Pray, “God, we trust You in the waiting.”

As you add more slips, tape or hang a small paper star nearby — a quiet reminder that even when the world feels still, His light still shines.

### **2. Candlelight Quiet Night**

Choose one night this week to unplug everything. Light a single candle. Read Isaiah 11:10 or Romans 15:13 aloud, then sit in silence together for a minute or two. Ask aloud, Where are we waiting on God? Where are we tempted to rush Him?

Let the stillness linger before praying together, “Lord, meet us in the pause.”

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Waiting Cocoa (Simple Recipe)**

Warm 3 cups milk (or almond milk) in a saucepan.

Stir in 2 Tbsp cocoa powder, 2 Tbsp sugar, and a pinch of salt.

Whisk slowly until it begins to steam — not boil.

Pour into mugs and add a small marshmallow or cinnamon sprinkle.

While you wait for the milk to heat, read Romans 15:13 and talk about how even small moments of waiting can become invitations to hope. As you sip, share one thing you’re trusting God to do in His timing.

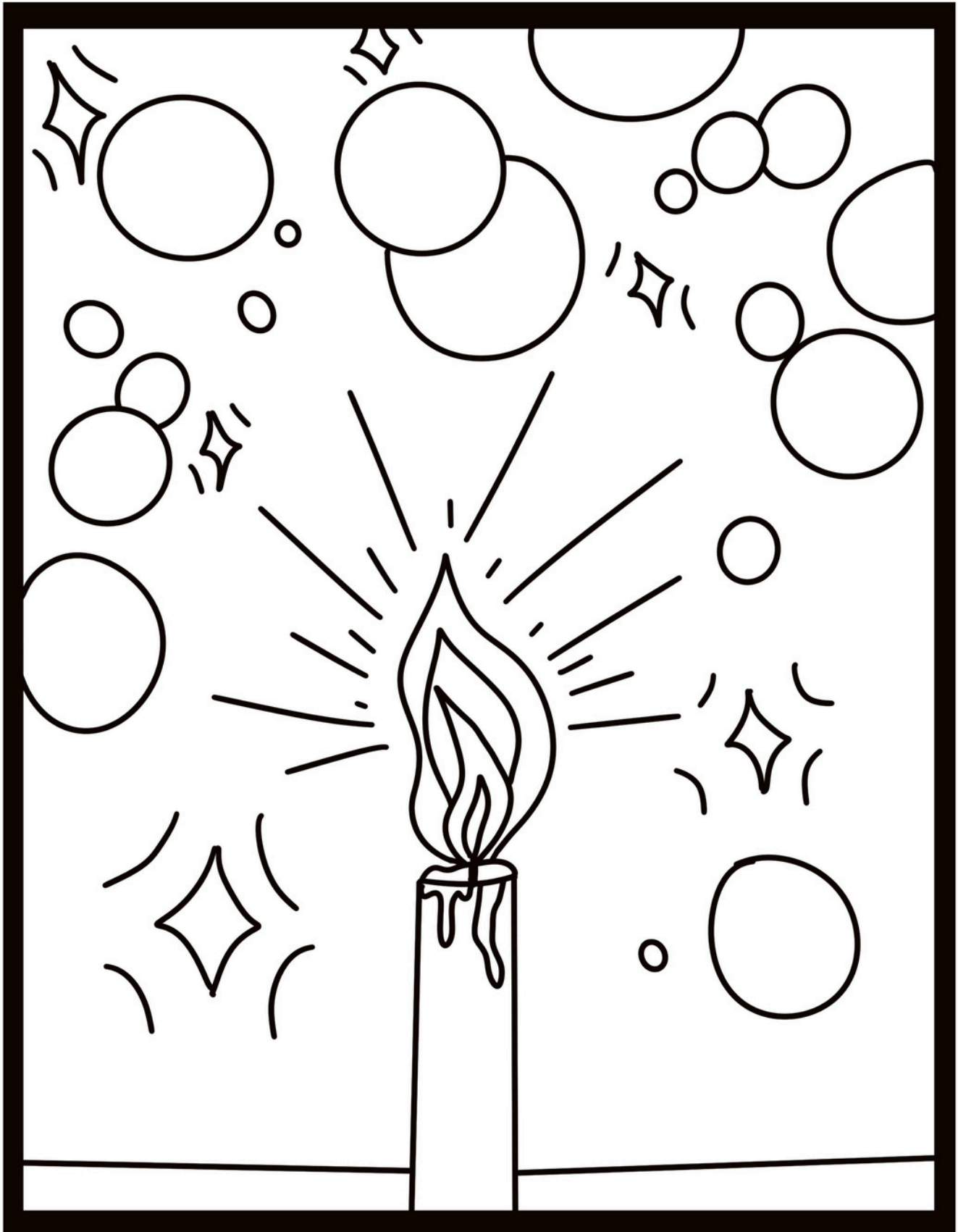
### **2. Rising Bread of Hope**

Use any simple frozen or canned bread dough (or refrigerated rolls).

Watch it rise before baking, then read Isaiah 11:1-10 together.

As the bread bakes, talk about how hope also rises slowly — unseen but certain. Break bread warm from the oven and thank God for what He’s growing in silence.





## Week 1: God Promised a Savior (Hope)

### Nov 29 // Day 2: God's Promise of Hope



*"He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*  
— Genesis 3:15

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."*  
— Isaiah 9:2



The story of Christmas doesn't begin in Bethlehem with a manger. It begins in a garden — a perfect place, filled with God's presence, where Adam and Eve walked in joy and freedom. But then, in one moment of disobedience, everything shattered. Sin slithered in like a snake, wrapping the world in darkness. What once was whole became broken: hearts, families, creation itself.

But here's the breathtaking part: God did not walk away. Right there, in the middle of the mess, He spoke a promise. One day, a Rescuer would come. One day, evil would be crushed under His heel. One day, hope would rise again.

From that moment on, every generation carried this promise like a torch in the night. Prophets spoke of a coming King. Isaiah painted the picture of a great light piercing the deepest darkness. People waited, year after year, longing, aching, hoping. And then — in the silence of a Bethlehem night — the promise became flesh. Jesus was born.

Hope is not wishful thinking or a happy feeling. Hope is an anchor tied to God's character. It is the certainty that He keeps His promises even when everything around us looks broken. Our deepest longings are homesickness for the world as it should be — a world Jesus came to restore. God's hope is not fragile; it is strong enough to hold us when life feels unbearable. Hope is a steady rope when everything else shakes.

At Advent, we remember: Jesus is that hope. He is God's "yes" to every longing, His light in every darkness, His promise that the story doesn't end in the garden — it ends with restoration.



#### Think about it:

Where do you feel the "darkness" most — in your own life, or in the world around you?

How does the birth of Jesus bring light and hope into that very place?



#### Prayer:

"Lord, thank You that You never gave up on us. Thank You for making a promise in the very moment we broke Your heart. Thank You for sending Jesus, the Light of the world, to crush evil and bring hope that never dies. Help me to look for Your light, even in the dark places of my life, and to trust that every promise You make will come true. Amen."





## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Hope Candle Jar**

Tear yellow, orange, and white tissue paper.

Glue pieces onto a glass jar to look like glowing light.

Place a battery tea light inside.

Say: "Even in the dark, God's promise shines bright."

### **2. Promise Chain**

Cut strips of paper in Christmas colors.

On each strip, write "HOPE" or a short promise of God.

Loop them into a chain and hang it up.

Say: "Every link reminds us that God always keeps His word."

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Hope Cookies**

Decorate sugar cookies with stars or candles in icing.

Say: "These lights remind us Jesus is the hope God promised."

### **2. Sunrise Toast**

Spread cream cheese on toast.

Use orange or yellow jam to make a sunrise.

Say: "Jesus is the sunrise of hope in the darkest night."

HE IS THE *Light*  
OF THE *World*



## Week 1: God Promised a Savior (Hope)

### Nov 30 // Day 3: A King to Come



*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."  
— Isaiah 9:6*



All through history, kings have risen and fallen. Some built castles, armies, and kingdoms, but their power always faded. Their crowns tarnished. Their thrones eventually crumbled. People longed for a ruler who would not only reign but also love.

Into that longing, Isaiah spoke a promise: A King is coming. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He will carry the weight of the world, and unlike every other king before Him, He will never fail.

But when this King came, He did not come in the way anyone expected. He wasn't born in a palace. He wasn't laid on silk sheets or wrapped in royal robes. He was born in the dirty stable, in an animal filled stable, to a poor teenage girl. His first throne was a feeding trough. His first worshipers were shepherds. His crown would one day be twisted thorns.

Why? Because this King had come not to be served, but to serve. Not to demand loyalty, but to give His life. He is the King who would bleed for His people, the King who would carry our sin on His shoulders, the King who rules not by fear but by love.

Jesus is the only King whose reign will never end and whose crown will never fade. He is the King who bends down to wipe away our tears. His throne was a cross before it was ever a crown of glory. The manger is the paradox of Christmas: the infinite God became small, so we could belong to Him forever.

This is the King who has come for you. Not distant. Not demanding. But present. Loving. Eternal. A King who will never walk away.



#### **Think about it:**

How is Jesus different from the kings and leaders of this world?

What does it mean to you that this King came for you personally?



#### **Prayer:**

"Jesus, You are my forever King. You are mighty, but You are also gentle. You hold the universe, but You also hold me. Thank You for wearing a crown of thorns so I could one day share in Your crown of life. Help me to bow my heart to You every day. Amen."





## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Crown Ornament**

Cut out a crown from gold or yellow paper.

Let kids decorate with sequins, stickers, or gems.

Write “Jesus, My King” in the center and hang it up.

Tie-in: “Every crown in this world fades, but Jesus’ crown lasts forever.”

### **2. Royal Scepter Craft**

Wrap a paper towel tube in foil or paper.

Add a foil or pom-pom ball at the top for a “jewel.”

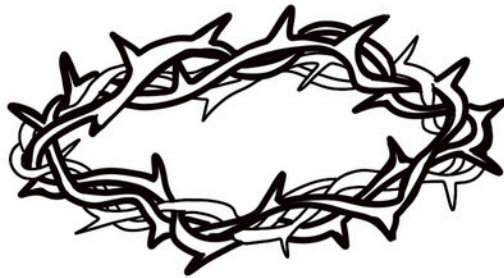
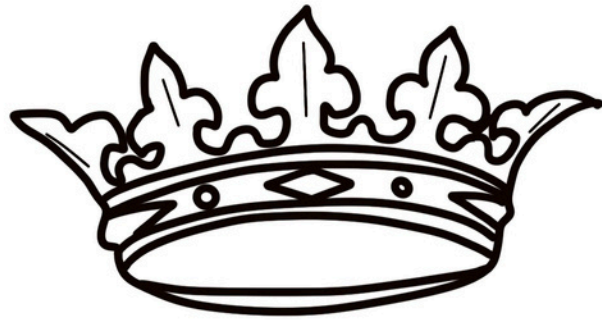
Tie-in: “Jesus is the King who rules with love, not power or fear.”

### **Recipe Option:**

#### **Crown Crackers**

Round crackers topped with cheese triangles and a grape or raisin “jewel.”

Tie-in: “Jesus is the true King who wears the crown of love.”





## Week 1: God Promised a Savior (Hope)

### Dec 1 // Day 4: The Star Will Shine



*"We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*  
— Matthew 2:2

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light."*  
— Isaiah 9:2



The world was dark the night Jesus was born. Silent hills, quiet skies, waiting hearts. But then — God split the darkness with a star. Not just any star, but one so bright it grabbed the attention of men hundreds of miles away. They had been searching, and now the heavens were pointing the way: "Here is the One you've been waiting for. Follow this light, and you'll find Him."

The wise men didn't stay home and admire it from a distance. They moved. They packed their treasures, left behind what was comfortable, and followed that star across deserts and mountains until it led them to the feet of Jesus. And when they saw Him, they bowed down and worshiped.

The star tells us something incredible about God's heart: He doesn't leave us wandering. He doesn't hide Himself. He shines His light so clearly that even people far away can find Him. That light isn't just a star in the sky. That light is Jesus Himself. He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness."

Sometimes our lives feel dark too — confusing, lonely, or scary. But Christmas reminds us that God's light always breaks through. He gives us enough light for the next step. And if we seek Him, just like the wise men, the seeking will always lead us to Jesus.

The question for us is simple: will we just look at the light, or will we follow it?



#### **Think about it:**

The wise men saw the star and followed it. What does it mean for you to follow Jesus instead of just knowing about Him?

Where do you need God's light in your life right now?



#### **Prayer:**

"Jesus, You are the Light that never goes out. Just like the star led the wise men, lead me closer to You. I don't just want to see the light — I want to follow it. Amen."



## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Fingerprint Star Ornament (Quiet Craft)**

Cut out a star. Stamp fingerprints with gold/yellow paint around the edges.

Write “Jesus is my Light” in the middle.

Hang it where you can see it each day.

### **2. Star Walk Path (Active Play)**

Cut out paper stars and tape them across the floor.

Children must step only on the stars until they reach the last one, where you place a nativity figure or cross.

When they arrive, say together: “We followed the star and found Jesus!”

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Star Toast**

Cut bread with a star-shaped cookie cutter. Toast it, spread with butter and honey or cinnamon sugar.

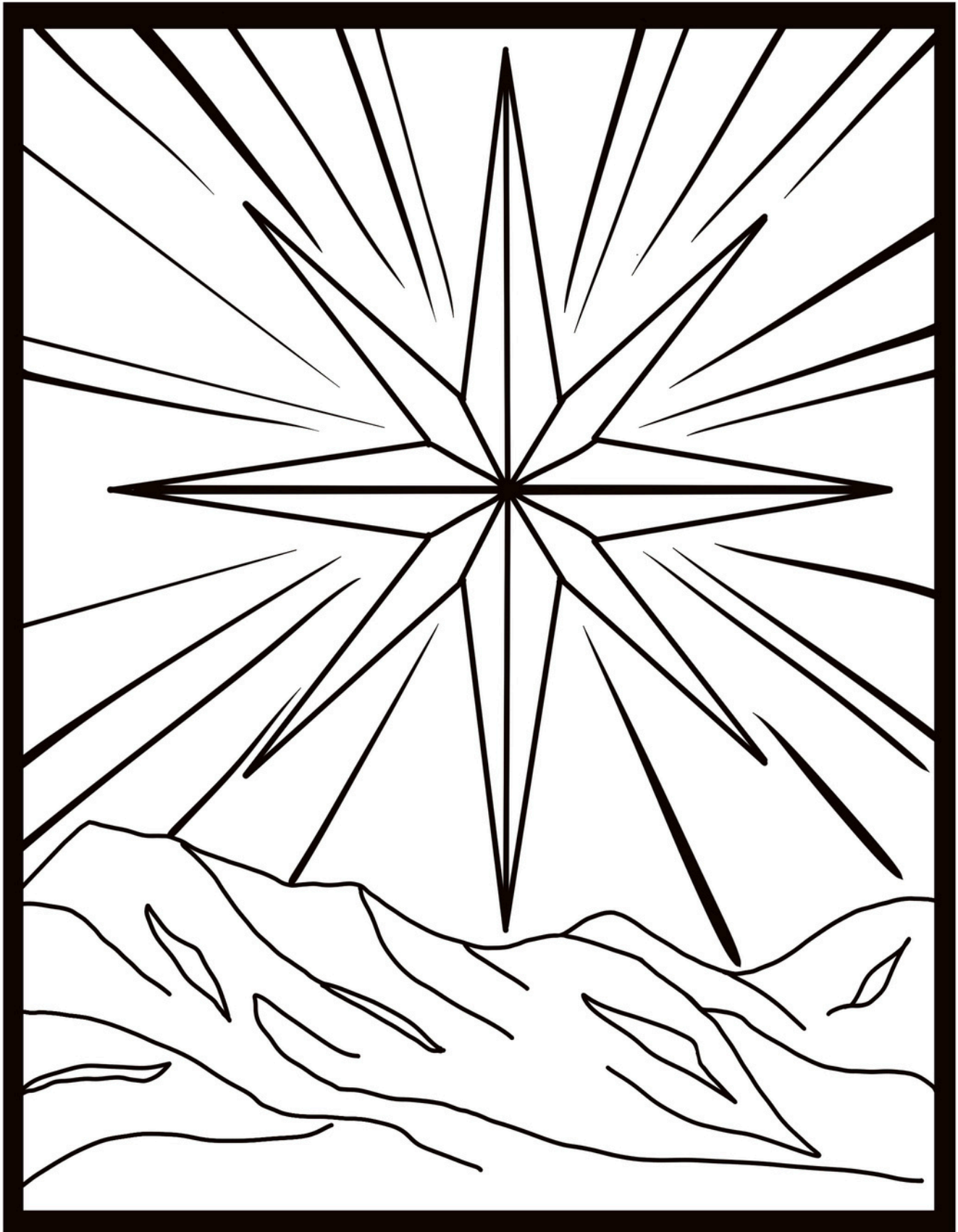
### **2. Guiding Star Cookies**

Frost sugar cookies white and decorate with gold sprinkles in a star shape.

### **3. Royal Fruit Cups**

Layer colorful fruit (red strawberries, yellow pineapple, green grapes, blueberries) in clear cups to look like jewels in a treasure chest.

Tie-in: “Jesus is our greatest treasure — more valuable than any crown or jewels.”



## Week 1: God Promised a Savior (Hope)

### Dec 2 // Day 5: The Angel's Visit



*"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High... his kingdom will never end.'"*

— Luke 1:30-33



Mary was just an ordinary girl in a small town. She wasn't powerful or famous, but she loved God. One night, her quiet world was shattered by the appearance of an angel. Gabriel's first words must have startled her heart: "Do not be afraid."

Then came the message that changed everything: she would give birth to the Son of God. The Savior of the world — the one people had been waiting for — would come through her.

Mary could have said no. She could have let fear win. But instead, she chose trust. With faith that was stronger than her fear, she said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

That's the power of saying yes to God. He doesn't wait for us to be perfect. He looks for hearts that are willing. Just as He chose Mary, He chooses us to be part of His plan. He whispers to us, just as He did through Gabriel: "Do not be afraid. Trust Me. Say yes."

The angel's message wasn't just for Mary — it's for you too. Will you trust Him enough to say yes?



#### Think about it:

How do you think Mary felt when she saw the angel and heard God's plan? What is one way you can say yes to God today, even if it feels scary?

Where do you need God's light in your life right now?



#### Prayer:

"Lord, thank You for sending Gabriel to Mary with the good news of Jesus. Thank You for showing me that You use ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Help me to trust You, even when I am afraid, and to say yes to You with my whole heart. Amen."



#### Activity Options

##### 1. Paper Plate Angel with Handprint Wings (Quiet Craft)

Cut a paper plate in half for the angel's body.

Trace the child's hands on white paper; cut them out as wings.

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Glue the wings to the plate and decorate with glitter, stickers, or crayons.

Add a pipe cleaner halo. Write “Do Not Be Afraid” on the angel’s robe.

Tie-in: “Gabriel told Mary not to be afraid. This angel reminds us that God’s plan is always good.”

## **2. Angel Message Relay (Active Play)**

Write parts of the angel’s message (“Do not be afraid... Jesus is coming”) on index cards.

Hide the cards around the room.

Kids run to collect them one by one, then arrange them in order.

When the message is complete, read it aloud together in joy.

Tie-in: “Gabriel carried God’s good news to Mary. We can share the good news of Jesus too.”

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Angel Cookies**

Use sugar cookie dough and an angel-shaped cookie cutter.

Decorate with white or yellow icing and sprinkles.

As you enjoy them, say: “The angel brought Mary good news — Jesus has come!”

### **2. Angel Wings Pretzels**

Dip pretzel twists in white chocolate or yogurt coating.

Place two together to look like angel wings.



## Week 1: God Promised a Savior (Hope)

### Dec 3 // Day 6: Mary Trusted God



*"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."*  
— Luke 1:38



When Gabriel spoke God's plan to Mary, she faced a choice. She was young, poor, and ordinary. The angel's words meant her life would change forever. There would be whispers, doubts, and struggles. Mary could have clung to safety. She could have asked for another way.

Instead, she whispered one of the greatest responses of faith in history: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

Mary trusted God. She didn't have all the answers, but she knew the One who had spoken. And that was enough. Her yes opened the door for Jesus to step into the world.

This is the invitation of Advent — God still comes to us with His promises. He still asks us to trust Him, to surrender our plans and say yes. The question is: will fear hold us back, or will faith move us forward?



#### **Think about it:**

What is one place in your life where God is asking you to trust Him more fully?

How can Mary's yes encourage you to surrender with courage and faith?



#### **Prayer:**

"Lord, thank You for Mary's trust and surrender. Give me the same courage to say yes to You, even when I don't understand. Help me to believe Your promises are always good and true. Amen."



#### **Family Advent Activities:**

##### **1. Mary's Yes Prayer Pouch (Quiet Craft)**

Give each child a small envelope or fold a piece of paper into a pocket.

On the front, write: "I Will Trust God."

Let kids decorate it with crayons, markers, or stickers.

Give them slips of paper where they can draw (or write with help) things they want to trust God with.

Place the slips inside the pouch and keep it somewhere visible during Advent.

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Tie-in: “Mary trusted God with her whole life. We can trust Him with our worries and prayers too.”

## **2. Step of Trust Path (Active Play)**

Cut out paper footprints and place them in a line across the room, leading to a picture of Jesus, a manger, or a cross.

On each footprint, write simple words: “Trust,” “Yes,” “God,” “Love.”

Children walk the path, saying each word as they step until they reach the end.

Tie-in: “Mary took a step of trust when she said yes to God. Every step we take toward Jesus shows we trust Him too.”

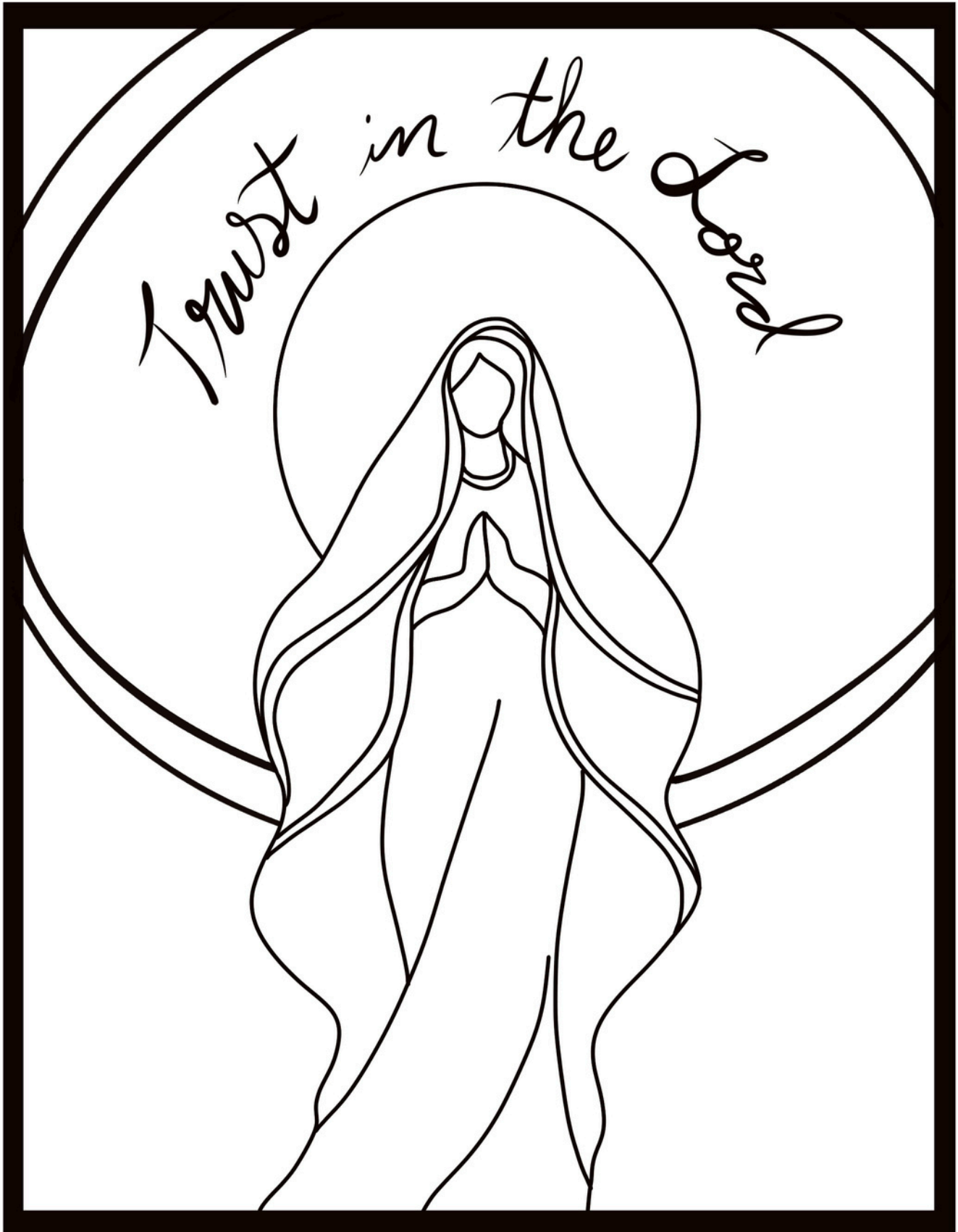
### **Recipe Option:**

#### **Mary’s Yes Heart Cookies**

Bake or buy heart-shaped sugar cookies.

Frost with white icing and use red or gold gel to write “YES” on each cookie.

Tie-in: “Mary’s yes changed the world. These cookies remind us that our yes to God matters too.”



## Week 1: God Promised a Savior (Hope)

### Dec 4 // Day 7: Leaping for Joy



*“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!’”*  
— Luke 1:41-42



Mary had just said yes to God, but she carried that yes with trembling. Who could understand her? Who would believe her? Alone, the weight might have been too much. So she hurried to her cousin Elizabeth.

The moment Mary spoke, something holy happened. Elizabeth felt her baby leap inside her. The Spirit filled her, and she shouted blessing: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!”

Can you imagine Mary’s relief? All her quiet fears met with confirmation: she wasn’t abandoned, she wasn’t imagining things — God’s promise was real. And Elizabeth’s joy was the reminder Mary needed: You are blessed. You are not alone.

This is the beauty of God’s kindness. He gives us not only promises, but people to remind us those promises are true. Sometimes we’re Mary — longing for encouragement. Sometimes we’re Elizabeth — called to speak life into someone else. Either way, the story reminds us: when Jesus draws near, joy leaps, faith rises, and blessings overflow.



#### **Think about it:**

Who has been an “Elizabeth” in your life — confirming God’s promises when you felt uncertain?

Who could you encourage this week with Spirit-filled words of blessing?



#### **Prayer:**

“Lord, thank You for the joy Mary and Elizabeth shared. Thank You for the gift of encouragement through others. Give me eyes to see who needs a word of blessing from me today, and let my words strengthen their faith. Amen.”



#### **Family Advent Activities:**

##### **1. Mary & Elizabeth Puppets (Quiet Craft)**

Use simple Mary & Elizabeth cut-out templates (many on Pinterest).

Kids color and tape them to craft sticks.

Retell the story: Mary greets Elizabeth, John leaps, and Elizabeth blesses her.

Tie-in: “Mary and Elizabeth shared joy together. We can share joy too.”

## **2. Leap for Joy Contest (Active Play)**

Say: “When Mary greeted Elizabeth, her baby leaped for joy!”

Kids have a “jump for joy” contest — tallest jump, silliest jump, happiest jump.

After each round, they shout together: “Jesus brings us joy!”

Tie-in: “John leaped for joy because Jesus was near. We can celebrate Him with joy too.”

### **Recipe Option:**

#### **Leaping Popcorn**

Pop a bowl of popcorn together.

As the kernels pop and leap, say: “Just like the popcorn jumps, Elizabeth’s baby leaped for joy when Mary came in — because Jesus was near!”

Optional: sprinkle lightly with cinnamon sugar or drizzle with a bit of melted chocolate for a treat.

Tie-in: “Every pop reminds us of the joy that comes when Jesus is close.”



## Week 2: God Sent a Savior (Joy)

### Dec 5 // Day 8: Mary's Song



*"And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.'"*  
— Luke 1:46-49



Mary's song burst forth not because her problems disappeared, but because her eyes were lifted higher. She was still a young girl in a complicated situation, still carrying a child the world wouldn't understand. Yet her heart overflowed with worship. Why? Because worship changes perspective. It anchors us in who God is, not in what we can see.

Her words reveal a God who notices the overlooked, who lifts up the humble, and who never forgets His promises. Though her path ahead was filled with whispers and uncertainty, Mary sang because she trusted the faithfulness of the Mighty One. She remembered that His mercy stretches from generation to generation, and His strength is never shaken.

This is the miracle of worship. It doesn't erase the struggle, but it reshapes our hearts. It silences fear by magnifying God's faithfulness. Mary's trembling turned into trust, her fear into a song. And her song wasn't just hers — it became the anthem of all who believe: "The Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is His name."



#### Think about it:

Where do you need to lift your eyes from fear to worship this Advent?

What "great things" has God done for you that you need to praise Him for?



#### Prayer:

"Lord, turn my fear into faith and my questions into praise. Like Mary, let my soul magnify You. Remind me of the great things You have done so that my heart overflows in gratitude. Holy is Your name, now and forever. Amen."



#### Family Advent Activities:

##### 1. Mary's Praise Shakers (Craft)

Fill a small plastic container (like an empty water bottle) with rice, pasta, or beads.

Decorate with stickers or markers. Write: "Praise God!"

Kids can use them while singing or shouting praise.

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Tie-in: “Mary praised God with her song. We can make music to praise Him too.”

## **2. Freeze Praise Game (Active)**

Play a Christmas carol (“Joy to the World,” “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” etc.).

Kids dance or spin with joy while the music plays.

When the music stops, they freeze and shout: “God has done great things!”

Tie-in: “Mary sang her praise. We can praise with our voices and actions too.”

## **Recipe Option**

### **Magnificat Muffins**

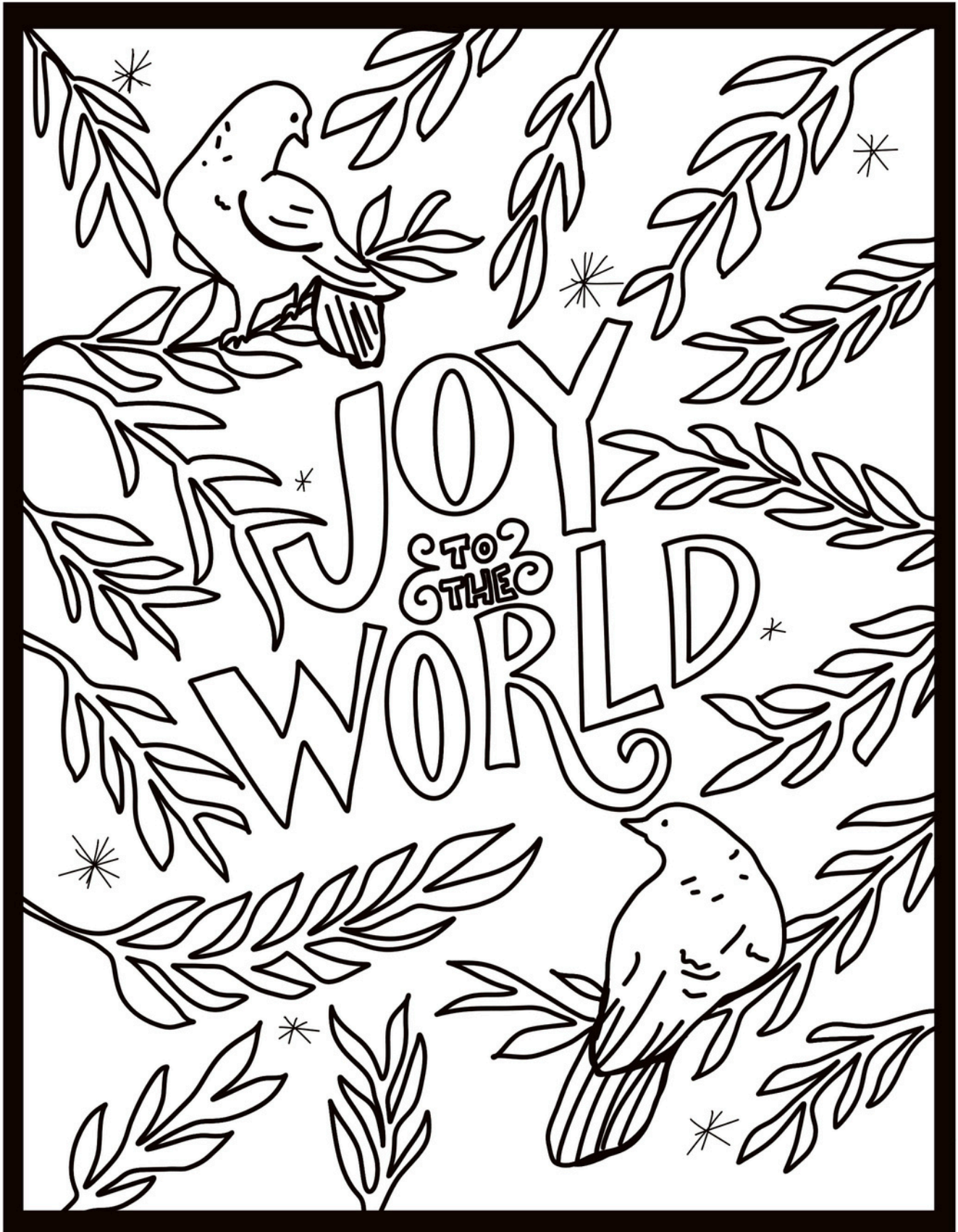
Bake or buy mini muffins.

Drizzle with icing or add sprinkles.

As you enjoy them, say: “God has done great things for us.”

Tie-in: “Mary sang because she saw God’s goodness. This sweet treat reminds us to be thankful for His blessings.”





## Week 2: God Sent a Savior (Joy)

### Dec 6 // Day 9: The Journey to Bethlehem



*"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ... And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child."*  
— Luke 2:1-5



Imagine the scene: Mary, heavy with child, sways gently on the back of a donkey, the rough road pressing into her tired body. Joseph walks beside her, guiding them along hills and valleys, dust rising from each weary step. Seventy miles lay between Nazareth and Bethlehem, and every mile must have felt endless. To human eyes, this journey looked like bad timing, even cruel. Why would God allow the mother of Jesus to endure such hardship on the eve of her child's birth?

But what looked inconvenient was actually the unfolding of prophecy. Centuries earlier, Micah declared that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. The emperor's decree may have appeared to come from political power, but in reality, every weary step of Mary and Joseph was ordered by the hand of God. What felt exhausting was actually carrying them deeper into God's plan.

This is the beauty of Advent: even when the road is long, God's promises are sure. Mary's tears, Joseph's calloused feet, and their faithful obedience were not wasted. They were walking straight into the miracle of salvation's story.

And so it is with us. The journeys we would never choose — the detours, the disappointments, the delays — can become the very roads where God fulfills His promises. He does not waste our steps. When life feels heavy and uncertain, remember Bethlehem: the hardest road often leads to the deepest joy.



#### **Think about it:**

What journey are you on right now that feels heavy or uncertain?

How might God be fulfilling His promises through it, even when you cannot see it?



#### **Prayer:**

"Lord, when my road feels long and my strength is gone, remind me that every step is held by You. Give me courage to trust Your plan and faith to believe that You are leading me to Your promises. Amen."



## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Journey Jar (Quiet Craft)**

Decorate a jar with the word “Faith.”

Each night, add slips of paper with moments your family has seen God provide or guide.

Watch it fill as a reminder that God is faithful in every step of the journey.

Tie-in: “Mary and Joseph’s steps were hard, but God was guiding them. God guides our family, too.”

### **2. Bethlehem Path (Active Play)**

Make a path across a room with pillows, chairs, or blankets.

Let kids carry something light but a little heavy (like a bag of books or toys) as they walk the path to a manger or nativity.

Tie-in: “The road was hard for Mary and Joseph, but God’s promise was waiting at the end.”

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Journey Trail Mix**

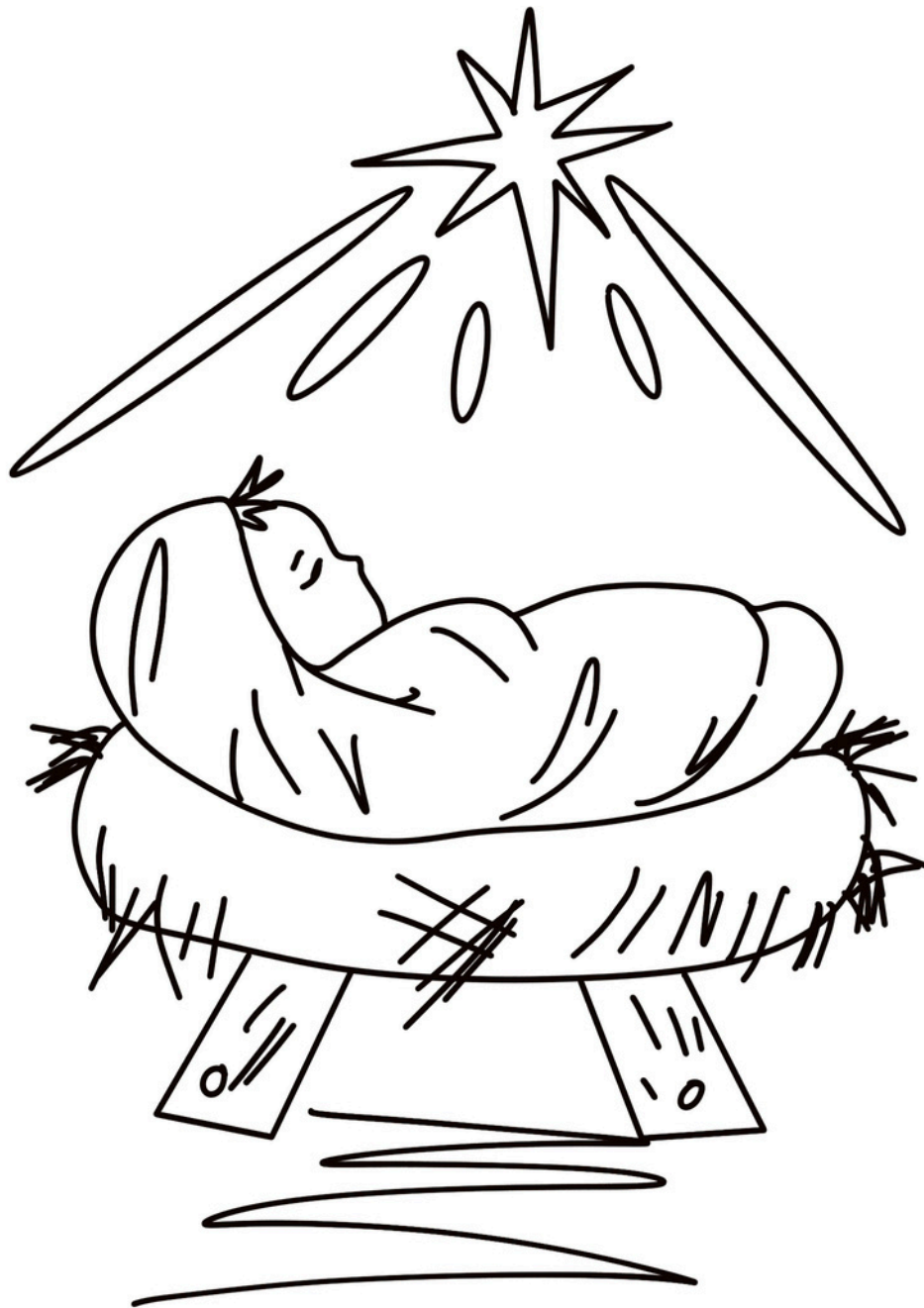
Combine raisins, pretzels, nuts, and chocolate pieces into small snack bags.

Share them as “travel food,” and talk about how God gives strength for every step of our journey.

### **2. Simple Flatbread Wraps**

Make or buy flatbread/tortillas and fill them with easy toppings.

Remember that Mary and Joseph likely ate simple bread as they traveled.



## Week 2: God Sent a Savior (Joy)

### Dec 7 // Day 10: Born in a Manger



*"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."  
— Luke 2:6-7*



The world barely noticed the night salvation arrived. No red carpet. No royal palace. No trumpets announcing a King. Just a stable. Just straw. Just the smell of animals and the quiet cries of a newborn.

Mary's body trembled as she wrapped her baby in cloths — the Son of God cradled in her arms. Joseph looked around for a place to lay Him, settling on a rough feeding trough filled with hay. The Messiah — the long-awaited Savior — was placed where animals ate.

This was not how anyone imagined God's arrival. Surely the King of Kings deserved a throne, not a manger. Yet this was no mistake. The manger was God's message: I am not afraid of your low places. No heart is too broken, no life too messy, no circumstance too humble for His presence. The manger shows us that God comes close to the ordinary, the overlooked, and the undeserving.

The wonder of Christmas is not just that Jesus came, but how He came. He chose the lowest place so that no one could ever say they were too far gone, too unworthy, too small for His love. He entered the world in weakness so He could meet us in ours.

If the King of Glory was willing to rest in a manger, then He is willing to enter every corner of your life. He comes not only into the beautiful moments but also into the broken ones. He comes to redeem what we'd rather hide, to bring light into the darkest corners, to turn straw into glory. The manger may have been small, but it held the hope of the world. And tonight, it still whispers: He has come for you.



#### Think about it:

Why do you think God chose for Jesus to be born in such humble circumstances?

What part of your life feels too small, ordinary, or messy for God to enter?



#### Prayer:

"Jesus, thank You for choosing the manger. Thank You for showing me that no place is too humble for Your presence. Come into the small and broken places of my life, and fill them with Your glory. Amen."





## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Popsicle Stick or Pretzel Stick Manger (Quiet Craft)**

Glue popsicle sticks (or pretzel rods) into a simple manger shape.

Add shredded paper or yellow tissue for “hay.”

Wrap a marshmallow or small paper baby in tissue for Jesus.

Tie-in: “Jesus was laid in a manger. God chose the humblest place to show His love is for everyone.”

### **2. Stable Play (Active Play)**

Set up a blanket “stable” in the living room.

Let kids bring stuffed animals or toy sheep.

Dim the lights, shine a flashlight for the “star,” and read Luke 2:6–7 together in the “stable.”

Tie-in: “The King of Kings was born in a stable — God came close in the most ordinary place.”

## **Recipe Options:**

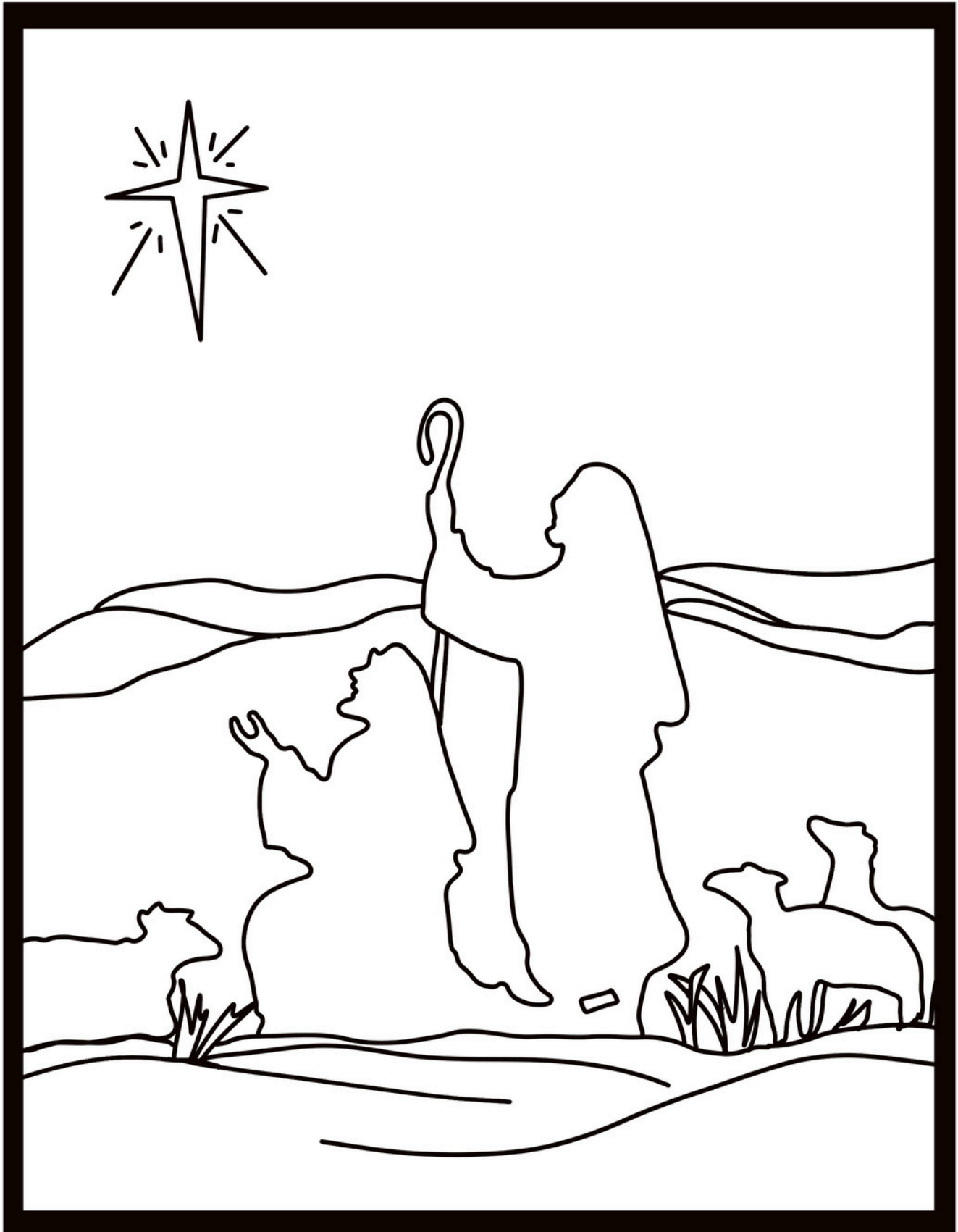
### **1. “Straw in the Manger” Haystacks**

Melt butterscotch chips and mix with chow mein noodles or pretzel sticks to form little “haystacks.”

Place a small candy (like a white chocolate drop) in the center to represent baby Jesus.

### **2. Mini Bread Loaves**

Bake small loaves of bread, remembering that Bethlehem means “House of Bread” and that Jesus would one day call Himself the Bread of Life.





## Week 2: God Sent a Savior (Joy)

### Dec 8 // Day 11: Shepherds in the Night



*“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”*  
— Luke 2:8-9



The night was still and ordinary. Shepherds huddled around a small fire, guarding sheep that were never truly safe. These were men on the margins — poor, unclean, overlooked. They lived in shadows, unnoticed by the world.

But God noticed them.

In an instant, their dark night exploded with light. The sky blazed, and an angel stood before them. The glory of the Lord poured over them like fire, and terror filled their hearts. What had been ordinary turned holy. What had been hidden was flooded with heaven’s presence.

Why shepherds? Why not kings, priests, or scholars? Because from the very beginning, God was showing us who the gospel is for. The Savior did not come first to the powerful or the privileged — He came to the ordinary. To the forgotten. To those who never imagined heaven would speak their name.

This is Advent: God breaking into the ordinary, the unnoticed, the dark places of our lives. The shepherds remind us that God does not wait for us to be worthy of His presence. He comes to us in the dirt and the dark. His glory doesn’t bypass the forgotten — it finds them.

And the same is true for you. You may feel small, unseen, or stuck in the same routine. But the God who lit up the shepherds’ night can light up yours. His presence may startle you at first — because holiness always exposes our smallness — but His message is never condemnation. It is invitation. Do not be afraid. Good news has come — for you.

The shepherds’ story is our story: God sees us in the night and breaks in with His light.



#### **Think about it:**

Why do you think God chose shepherds to receive the first announcement of Jesus’ birth?

Where in your life do you feel ordinary or overlooked — and how does it change things to know God sees you there?



#### **Prayer:**

“Lord, thank You for seeing the shepherds, and thank You for seeing me. Shine Your light into my ordinary life and remind me that Your good news is for me too. Amen.”



## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Angel & Shepherd Scene (Quiet Craft)**

Give kids black construction paper and cotton balls for “sheep.”

Add simple stick figures or shepherd cutouts.

Use yellow crayon or glitter to make the angel and shining light in the sky.

Tie-in: “The shepherds were in the dark until God’s light shone all around them.”

### **2. Flashlight Shepherd Game (Active Play)**

Turn off the lights.

One child plays “the angel” with a flashlight.

When the light shines on someone, everyone shouts together: “Do not be afraid — good news!”

Tie-in: “The shepherds were afraid at first, but God’s good news brought joy.”

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Sheep Cupcakes**

Frost cupcakes with white icing and cover with mini marshmallows to look like sheep.

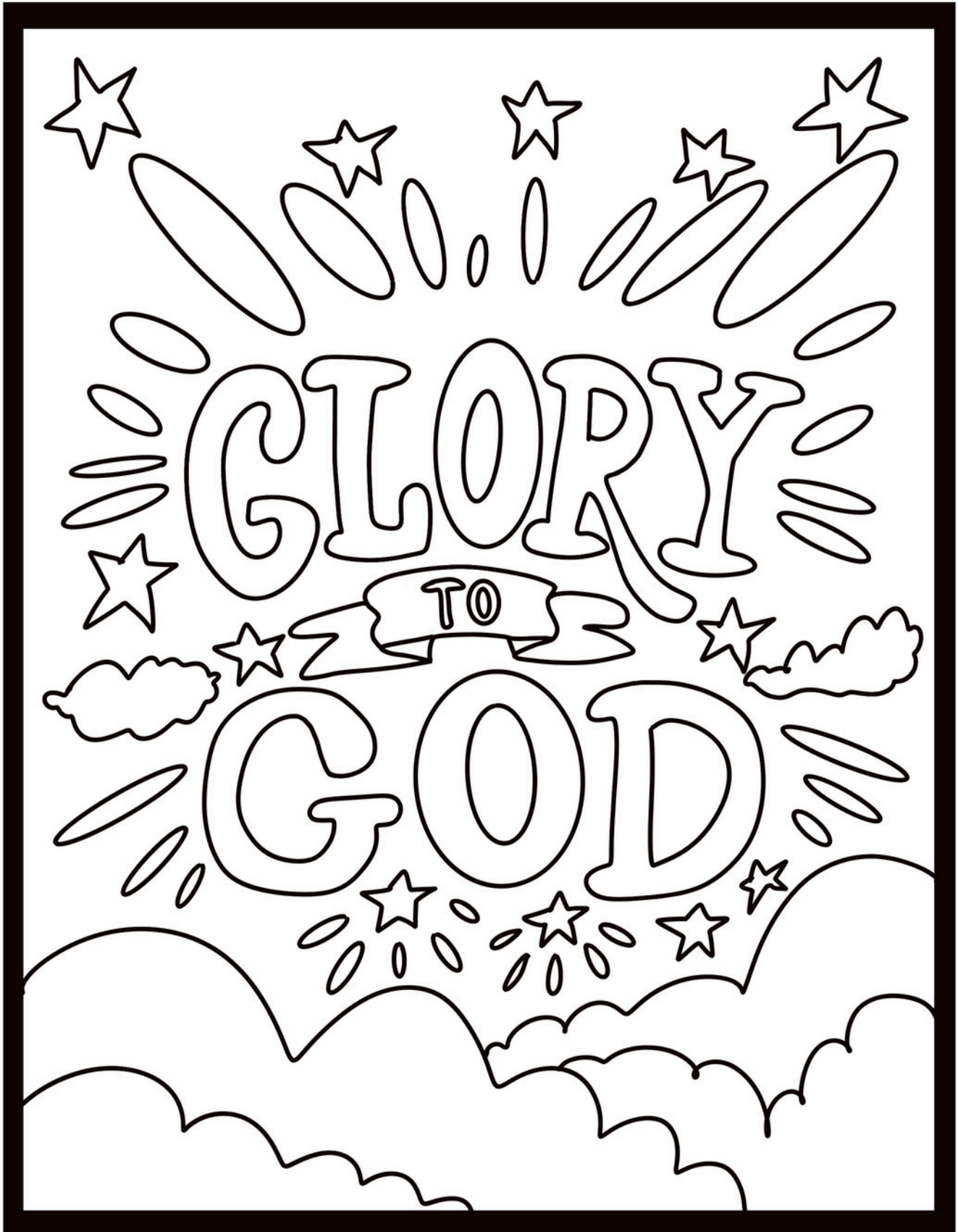
Add chocolate chips or candy eyes for faces.

Tie-in: “The shepherds were watching their sheep when God sent His angels to announce good news.”

### **2. Angel Sugar Cookies**

Bake sugar cookies in angel shapes.

Decorate with white or gold icing.



## Week 2: God Sent a Savior (Joy)

### Dec 9 // Day 12: Heaven Breaks In



*"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'"*  
— Luke 2:10



For four hundred years, heaven had been silent. No prophets thundered with God's voice. No visions pierced the darkness. God's people waited, clinging to promises that felt ancient, fragile.

Then, in the middle of a field, in the middle of an ordinary night, silence was shattered.

An angel appeared, and the glory of the Lord lit up the sky. Light blazed into darkness, and the shepherds dropped to the ground in terror. Holiness had come close. The weight of glory pressed in, and fear was their first response. But listen to heaven's first word: "Do not be afraid."

The angels did not arrive with condemnation. They came with comfort. Their message was not judgment but joy. This was not advice about what the shepherds must do; it was news about what God had already done. "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

Think about that: centuries of waiting, generations aching for rescue, and when heaven finally spoke, the first word was peace. God was saying, "You don't have to be afraid anymore." Why? Because the Savior had come.

And the scope of this message? For all the people. Not just for kings or priests, not just for the powerful or privileged — but for shepherds in the fields. For ordinary men in the dark. For the overlooked and the unworthy. The joy of Christ's birth would not be locked away in a palace. It was breaking into the world for everyone.

This is Advent's gift: the same God who sent angels to terrified shepherds sends His word to us today. He comes to our fear with peace. He meets our darkness with light. He speaks into our trembling with joy. The glory that once broke into Bethlehem now breaks into our lives, whispering the same promise: Do not be afraid. Good news has come. Joy is yours.



#### Think about it:

Why do you think God chose angels to announce the news?

What fear in your life needs to hear heaven's words: "Do not be afraid"?



#### Prayer:

"Lord, thank You for sending Your angels with good news of great joy. Speak the same words over my heart today: Do not be afraid. Replace my fear with peace and fill me with Your joy. Amen."



## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Glitter Angels (Quiet Craft)**

Cut angel shapes from cardstock.

Let kids decorate with glitter, foil, or cotton.

Write “Do Not Be Afraid” across the angel’s robe.

Tie-in: “God sent angels to announce that Jesus was born. Their message was joy, not fear.”

### **2. Angel Freeze Dance (Active Play)**

Play Christmas music.

When the music stops, kids freeze like angels with arms lifted high.

Shout together: “Good news! Great joy!”

Tie-in: “The angels filled the night with joy and praise when they announced Jesus’ birth.”

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Angel Wings Pastries**

Use puff pastry (or crescent roll dough), cut into strips, twist them, sprinkle with cinnamon sugar, and bake until golden. They look like angel wings.

Tie-in: “The angels were God’s messengers, spreading the good news that Jesus had come.”

### **2. Halo Donuts**

Use plain donuts or donut holes. Dip in white glaze and cover with gold or silver sprinkles to shine like halos.

Tie-in: “The angels’ halos remind us of God’s glory shining the night Jesus was born.”





## Week 2: God Sent a Savior (Joy)

### Dec 10 // Day 13: Glory to God in the Highest



*“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’”*  
— Luke 2:13-14



The night sky split open. What had been quiet and ordinary suddenly roared with worship. One angel’s announcement was not enough. An army of heaven filled the darkness, and their song rose like a tidal wave: “Glory to God in the highest!”

This is the first Christmas carol, sung not by men, but by angels. And it tells us something vital: Christmas is first about God’s glory. Before we hear about our peace, before we feel the warmth of good news, the angels lift our eyes upward. Glory belongs to God alone.

Why? Because in the manger, His character shines brighter than ever. Here is the humility of God — the Infinite wrapped in infant skin, the Almighty lying in straw. Here is the mercy of God — a King who doesn’t come to crush, but to save. Here is the faithfulness of God — every promise kept, every prophecy fulfilled, every shadow now illuminated by the Light of the world.

The angels could not stay silent. They had witnessed creation. They had seen the Red Sea split and fire fall on Mount Carmel. But nothing made heaven erupt like this: God Himself stepping into flesh. Glory to God, because He has done what no one else could do. Glory to God, because salvation is here.

And when heaven shouts glory, earth receives peace. Notice the order: God’s glory first, then our peace. We don’t start with our comfort — we start with His worth. The more we give Him glory, the more our hearts taste His peace.

This is Advent’s invitation: join the angels. Don’t let Christmas slip by as a story you only admire — let it be a song you embody. Lift your voice, lift your life, and echo heaven’s cry: Glory to God in the highest.



#### **Think about it:**

Why do you think the angels put glory to God before peace on earth?

How can your Christmas this year be centered more on God’s glory than on comfort or tradition?



#### **Prayer:**

“God, You deserve all praise for sending Jesus to us. Teach me to put Your glory first, trusting that peace will follow. May my life be a reflection of the song the angels sang that night. Amen.”





## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Angel Choir Craft (Quiet Craft)**

Make angels from coffee filters or cupcake liners for wings and paper cutouts for bodies.

Glue them together as a group choir.

Write Glory to God! across the top.

Tie-in: "The angels sang together in the sky, worshiping God. We can join their song."

### **2. Pin the Wings on the Angel (Active Play)**

Draw or print a large angel on poster board.

Cut out paper "wings" (use doilies, paper, or coffee filters).

Blindfold kids and let them try to pin or tape the wings onto the angel.

Tie-in: "The angels used their wings to serve God and worship Him. We can lift our lives in worship too."

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Angel Choir Cupcakes**

Frost cupcakes with white icing and add toothpick flags that say Glory! or Peace!

Tie-in: "The angels sang a song of praise to God the night Jesus was born."

### **2. Halo Donuts**

Dip donuts or donut holes in white glaze and sprinkle with gold or silver to shine like halos.

Tie-in: "The angels' halos remind us of God's glory shining bright in the sky."



## Week 2: God Sent a Savior (Joy)

### Dec 11 // Day 14: Let's Go to Bethlehem



*"When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger."*  
— Luke 2:15-16



Bethlehem. A town so small that most maps left it out. Nothing about it looked extraordinary — yet God had been writing His story there all along. It was in Bethlehem's fields that Ruth, a widowed outsider, gleaned for scraps to survive. And it was in those same fields that Boaz extended kindness, redemption, and a future that would one day lead to the birth of Christ.

Bethlehem was also David's town — the place where a forgotten shepherd boy was called to be king. The one everyone overlooked became the one God anointed. From Bethlehem's hills, David sang psalms of trust and hope that still carry our prayers today.

And now, in the same town, the greatest promise of all was unfolding. The Bread of Life came to the House of Bread. The Son of David, the true Shepherd-King, was cradled in a manger. Bethlehem, the town of redemption and unlikely kings, became the birthplace of the Savior of the world.

Imagine the shepherds hearing the angel's announcement. They could have doubted. They could have stayed in the fields, clinging to the familiar. But their hearts burned with urgency. "Let's go to Bethlehem," they said — because they knew something holy was happening there. They ran, not to a palace or throne room, but to a stable. And what they found in that quiet place was everything their souls had ever longed for: God with us.

Bethlehem reminds us of this: God often chooses the places and people the world overlooks. Out of loss, He brings redemption. Out of obscurity, He raises kings. Out of a manger, He gives us His Son. And like the shepherds, we are invited not to linger in hesitation but to run to Him with everything we have.

This Advent, don't stand at a distance. Don't let the miracle pass you by. Hurry to Bethlehem. Because in that small town, hope was born — and in Him, every longing heart is finally satisfied.



#### **Think about it:**

Ruth, Boaz, David, and Jesus all point to Bethlehem as a place of promise. How does that history stir your faith that God is weaving your story too?

Where in your life do you sense God inviting you to "hurry to Bethlehem" — to draw close to Him with urgency?



### **Prayer:**

“Lord, thank You for Bethlehem — a town that tells the story of redemption through Ruth and Boaz, the story of promise through David, and the story of salvation through Jesus. Teach me not to linger in comfort or distraction, but to run to You like the shepherds did. Satisfy my soul with the Bread of Life. Amen.”



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. Bethlehem Star Mosaic (Quiet Craft)**

Cut a large star or Bethlehem skyline from black paper.

Have kids glue gold, silver, or yellow tissue paper squares inside to create a glowing mosaic.

Hang it on a window so light shines through.

Tie-in: “Bethlehem was small, but God’s light shone there. Jesus is the true Light who shines for the world.”

#### **2. Shepherds’ Journey Relay (Active)**

Set up a relay course.

Kids carry stuffed sheep or soft toys, hurrying across the room to a manger scene.

Tie-in: “The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see Jesus. We can hurry to Him too.”

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Bethlehem Breadsticks**

Bake breadsticks or use refrigerated dough. Serve with butter or honey.

Tie-in: “Bethlehem means House of Bread — and the Bread of Life was born there.”

#### **2. Ruth’s Harvest Mix**

Combine pretzels (staffs), dried fruit (harvest), cereal (grains), and chocolate chips (sweetness of God’s promises).

Tie-in: “Ruth found redemption in Bethlehem’s fields. Jesus was born there to redeem us too.”





## Week 3: God Drew Near to Us (Peace)

### Dec 12 // Day 15: Hurry to the Manger



*“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.”*  
— Luke 2:15-16



The sky had just been ripped open. Moments earlier, heaven’s armies had filled the night with blazing light and thunderous song. Then — silence. The angels returned to heaven, and the darkness of night settled again. Imagine standing in that stillness, the echo of glory fading, the bleating of sheep the only sound left.

The shepherds had a choice. They could stay in the fields, chalking it up to a strange dream, or they could run to Bethlehem to see for themselves. Their response was urgent and united: “Let’s go.” They didn’t wait until morning. They didn’t debate whether they were worthy to see the Messiah. They didn’t cling to their flocks, their source of livelihood. They left everything behind because what waited in Bethlehem mattered more than anything they had ever known.

And when they arrived, what they found was not what the world would have expected. Not a throne, but a manger. Not a crown, but swaddling cloths. Not majesty as the world defines it, but majesty wrapped in humility. God had kept His word. The Savior had come. And the shepherds’ haste was not in vain — they stood face-to-face with the hope of the world.

This moment asks something of us, too. How often do we linger in the fields, content with the ordinary, when God is inviting us to the extraordinary? How often do we hesitate, waiting for perfect clarity, when He has already spoken? The shepherds remind us that when God calls, the right response is movement. Faith doesn’t sit still; it hurries to Jesus.

Advent is not just about remembering what the shepherds saw — it’s about imitating what they did. Don’t stay where it’s safe. Don’t let the noise of life convince you to stay in the fields. Run. Hurry to the manger. Because in Jesus, every longing heart finds its answer.



#### **Think about it:**

What might you need to leave behind in order to “hurry” to Jesus?

How can you take intentional steps toward Him this Advent instead of lingering in your fields?



### **Prayer:**

“Lord, give me the faith of the shepherds. Help me not to hesitate or stay in my fields of comfort, but to run toward You with all that I am. Meet me in my steps of obedience, and let me find in You everything my soul has been longing for. Amen.”



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. Sheep Ornament Craft (Quiet Craft)**

Make simple sheep ornaments with cardstock circles or wooden discs as the body.

Glue cotton balls for wool, add googly eyes, and tie a string for hanging.

Tie-in: “The shepherds left their sheep to find Jesus — and He is the Lamb of God who takes away our sin.”

#### **2. Shepherds’ Footprints Path (Active Play)**

Cut out large paper footprints and place them leading across the room to a small manger picture or nativity.

Kids follow the footprints, calling out, “Let’s go to Bethlehem!” as they move.

Tie-in: “The shepherds hurried with their feet to see Jesus. We can walk toward Him too.”

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Sheep Cupcakes**

Frost cupcakes white, cover with mini marshmallows for “wool,” and add candy eyes.

Tie-in: “The shepherds left their sheep behind to meet the Savior — who would become the Good Shepherd.”

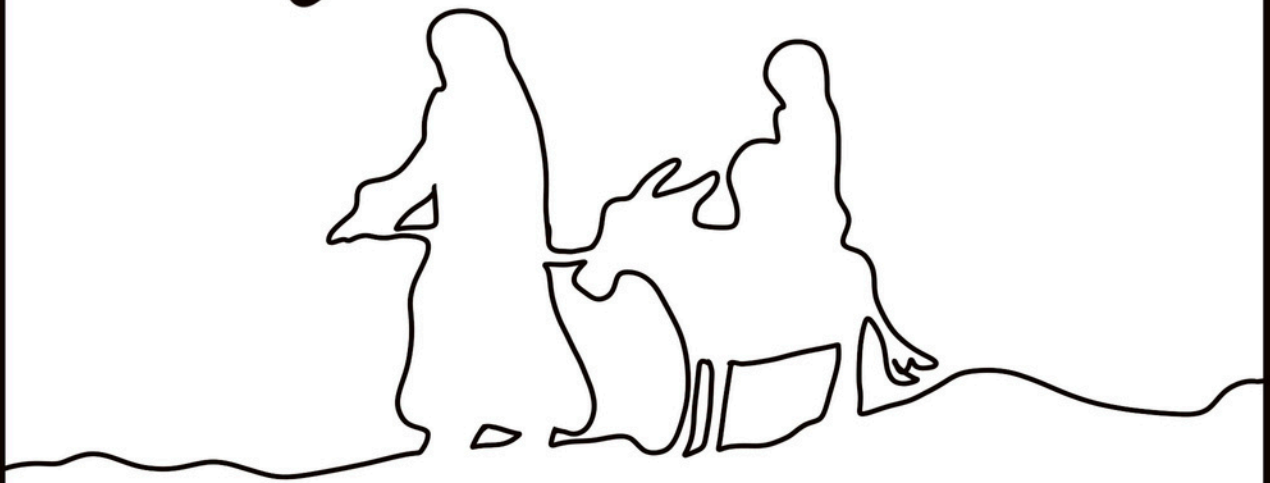
#### **2. Starry Night Krispies**

Make Rice Krispie treats, cut into star shapes with a cookie cutter, and sprinkle with edible glitter or gold sugar.

Tie-in: “The star over Bethlehem led the way to Jesus, the Light of the world.”



Glad  
tidings of  
great joy



## Week 3: God Drew Near to Us (Peace)

### Dec 13 // Day 16: The Road That Leads to Wonder



*"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'"*

— Matthew 2:1-2



Every story of faith begins with a stirring—a moment when the familiar is no longer enough and the heart aches for something more.

For the wise men, it began with a star. A light so different it demanded their attention. They were scholars of mystery, men used to patterns and logic, yet this star broke every rule they knew. It wasn't just a sign; it was an invitation.

So they packed what they could not understand and set out on a road without a map. They left comfort for curiosity, reputation for revelation. They didn't know the distance, the danger, or the destination. They only knew they couldn't stay where they were.

That's the secret pulse of faith—it rarely starts with clarity. It starts with a whisper that says, "There's more. Follow Me."

Their journey led them through the shadows of power and fear. Herod's palace was filled with political tension and religious pretense, yet no one inside was looking for a King. The light was shining, but the scholars had stopped seeking. Only these strangers kept moving.

When they finally reached Bethlehem, what they found was not what they expected. No throne. No crown. Just a child wrapped in the quiet humility of God made small. Yet they fell to their knees. They had found the One their souls had been longing for.

And isn't that how faith often works? God leads us through deserts, detours, and disappointments—not to test our endurance but to deepen our worship. He uses the long road to teach us that He's not just the destination; He's the companion on the way.

The Magi's story isn't about finding the right coordinates—it's about following the right light. They remind us that the greatest act of worship isn't at the end of the journey; it's every step that says, "Still, I will follow."



#### **Think about it:**

Where is God asking you to follow when the way feels uncertain?

You don't need the full picture—just the next light. Obedience is often the doorway to wonder. Take one step this week and watch how He meets you on the road.



### **Prayer:**

“Jesus, You are the light that breaks my routine and calls me to wonder. When the road feels long, keep my eyes lifted. Teach me to follow with faith, to worship with every step, and to find joy not just in arriving—but in seeking You. Amen.”



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. Follow the Light**

Turn off all the lights and guide your family with a single candle or flashlight from room to room. Take turns leading and following.

Talk about how the wise men followed a light they didn’t fully understand—and how faith often means trusting God one step at a time.

#### **2. Wise Men’s Gifts**

Prepare three boxes or jars labeled Time, Talent, and Treasure.

Together, choose how your family can “bring gifts” to Jesus this week—maybe serving a neighbor (time), using creativity to bless someone (talent), or giving generously to someone in need (treasure).

Pray together, “Jesus, we bring You our best.”

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Golden Star Cookies**

Bake star-shaped cookies and decorate them with gold shimmer or sprinkles.

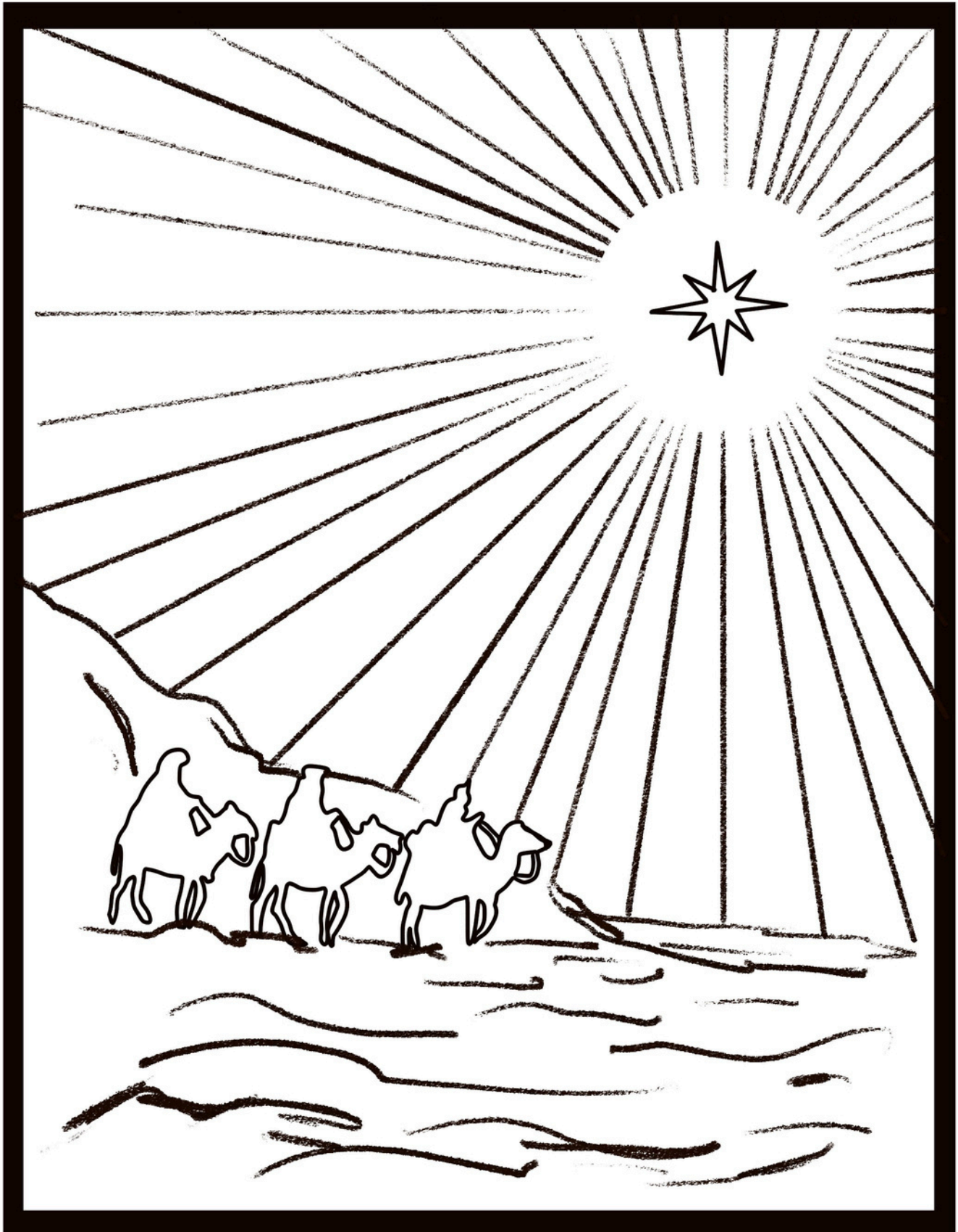
As you work, talk about the star that led the wise men—and how God still leads us today through His Word, His Spirit, and small moments of light that guide our hearts home.

#### **2. “Journey Mix” Snack Bags**

Create a snack mix that symbolizes the road to Jesus:

Pretzels for the long road,  
Golden raisins for the star,  
Dried fruit for endurance,  
Chocolate chips for moments of joy.

Eat together while reading Matthew 2:1-2 and thanking God for guiding every seeker who dares to follow.



## Week 3: God Drew Near to Us (Peace)

### Dec 14 // Day 17: When You've Seen Him



*"When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them."*  
— Luke 2:17-18



The shepherds were the first to tell the story of Jesus.

Before there were wise men or disciples, before sermons or churches, there were shepherds—unpolished, unseen, unimportant. They were doing what they always did: keeping watch in the dark. But on that night, heaven interrupted the ordinary.

A sky full of angels declared what the world had waited to hear: "A Savior has been born to you." Not to kings or priests, but to them—to people who smelled of sheep and soil, whose names no one knew.

They didn't debate or delay; they ran. They had to see for themselves. And when they did—when they saw the baby wrapped in cloth and lying in the manger—they didn't stay silent. They couldn't.

The same men who once sat quietly under the stars became the first messengers of the gospel. "When they had seen Him, they spread the word." Their voices carried the story into the streets of Bethlehem, into homes and markets, into the ears of anyone who would listen. And everyone who heard it was amazed.

This is what happens when ordinary people encounter an extraordinary Savior—God turns watchers into witnesses. He takes those who feel unseen and makes them storytellers of His glory.

That's still what He does today. You don't have to have perfect words, only a willing heart. The same God who trusted the message of His Son to shepherds now entrusts it to us. The story of Jesus isn't meant to stay in our hearts—it's meant to move through our lives.

Someone near you is waiting to be amazed again. Tell them what you've seen.



#### **Think about it:**

Who needs to hear your story?

Ask God to put one name on your heart, then reach out this week. Tell them what Jesus has done for you. Your words could carry the same hope the shepherds carried that night.



### **Prayer:**

“Jesus, You trusted shepherds to tell Your story. Now trust me with mine. Give me courage to speak and a heart that burns with what I’ve seen. Use my words to awaken wonder again. Amen.”



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. Follow the Light**

Take an evening walk or drive to see Christmas lights.

As you go, talk about how the shepherds carried what they’d seen out into the darkness. Ask, “Where can we bring light this week?”

Pray together before bed: “Jesus, help us shine Your light wherever we go.”

#### **2. Tell the Story Tree**

Each family member writes one way they’ve seen God’s goodness this year—big or small—on a slip of paper.

Fold and hang them on the Christmas tree with ribbon. By Christmas morning, your tree will hold a story of His faithfulness.

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Shepherds’ Trail Mix**

Combine pretzels (staffs), popcorn (flocks), chocolate chips (sweetness), and mini marshmallows (light).

Snack together while reading Luke 2:17-18 and talking about how the shepherds took their story everywhere they went.

#### **2. “Spread the Joy” Sugar Cookies**

Bake a simple batch of sugar cookies—round like little lights.

As you frost them together, talk about how the shepherds spread the good news, and how you can “spread joy” this week—through kindness, invitation, or encouragement.

Package a few and deliver them to a neighbor, teacher, or friend as your family’s way of sharing light.







## Week 3: God Drew Near to Us (Peace)

### Dec 15 // Day 18: The God Who Draws the Distant



*“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”*

— Matthew 2:1-2



The Magi weren't from Israel. They weren't raised knowing the promises of God or the prophecies of a Messiah. They came from far-off lands — from cultures that looked to the stars instead of the Scriptures.

And yet... God wrote them a message in the language they understood: light. He met them where they were.

Long before they ever knelt before the Christ child, God was already drawing them in. Their journey began not with a command, but with an invitation — a light breaking through the darkness of their ordinary nights.

That's the heart of the gospel: God comes for those who seem farthest away. He speaks in ways we can recognize, through the moments that stir our hearts — a sunset, a song, a whisper of hope. He finds us in our searching and says, “Come closer.”

By the time the Magi arrived in Bethlehem, they had crossed deserts, endured silence, and ignored doubters. Yet every step of that long road was proof of one truth: God draws the distant near.

Maybe you feel far off today — unsure, unseen, or unworthy. But like the Magi, your distance doesn't disqualify you. It might be the very space where God is already sending His light.



#### **Think about it:**

Where in your life do you feel far from God — in trust, in time, in heart?

Ask Him to meet you there, to speak in a way you'll recognize. And when He does, follow. Don't worry about the distance — He's already bridging it.



#### **Prayer:**

“Jesus, thank You for coming after hearts that wander far. You are the light that breaks through my hesitation and draws me close. When I feel distant, remind me You've already come near. Teach me to follow Your light, step by step, until wonder finds me on my knees. Amen.”



## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Follow the Light**

Turn off all the lights and guide your family through the house with one flashlight. Take turns leading and following.

Talk about how the Magi followed the light God gave them — and how God still guides our hearts today through His Word and His Spirit.

### **2. World of Worship**

Look up a map and point to places “far off.”

Talk about how God’s love reaches every land and every person.

Pray together for someone you know who may feel far from God right now — ask Him to draw them close.

### **Recipe Option:**

#### **“Far-Off Lands” Chickpea Stew**

Ingredients:

2 cans chickpeas (drained & rinsed)  
1 onion (chopped)  
2 cloves garlic (minced)  
1 red bell pepper (chopped)  
1 can diced tomatoes  
1 tsp cumin • 1 tsp paprika • ½ tsp cinnamon  
1½ cups vegetable broth  
Salt & pepper • Olive oil • Fresh parsley

Steps:

Heat olive oil in a pot. Sauté onion, garlic, and bell pepper for 3–4 minutes. Add spices; stir until fragrant. Add tomatoes, broth, and chickpeas. Simmer 20 minutes until thickened. Top with parsley. Serve with rice or pita bread.

As you eat, talk about how the Magi traveled from distant lands — and how God’s love still calls people from every nation and neighborhood.



## Week 3: God Drew Near to Us (Peace)

### Dec 16 // Day 19: The King Who Disturbs the Comfortable



*“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*  
— Matthew 2:3-6



The same news that drew the wise men to worship made Herod tremble. That’s what the true King does—He brings peace to the humble and unrest to the proud. His presence always reveals what we worship most.

Herod had built his life on control. His kingdom looked secure, but it was fragile—propped up by fear, reputation, and the illusion of power. When word reached him that a child had been born who might take his throne, he panicked. But not because the manger threatened his crown—because the truth threatened his heart.

The arrival of Jesus exposes the kingdoms we’ve built in His place. He disturbs what’s comfortable, not to destroy us, but to deliver us.

And then there were the religious leaders. They knew exactly where to find Him. They quoted the prophecy like scholars reciting a formula. Bethlehem. They could pinpoint God’s promise on a map, yet they never bothered to take the short road to see Him for themselves.

Six miles. That’s all that stood between knowledge and encounter.

It’s a haunting picture of spiritual apathy: people who know all about God but never meet Him face-to-face. It’s easier to discuss the Messiah than to bow before Him. Easier to study light than to walk in it.

Meanwhile, foreigners from a far land crossed deserts to find what priests ignored. The wise men didn’t have the Scriptures, but they had hunger—and hunger always finds Him.

This is the dividing line of Advent: when Jesus comes close, everyone must respond. Herod resists. The priests remain unmoved. The wise men worship. So which are we?

Sometimes we’re all three. There’s a Herod in us that fears losing control, a scribe that prefers knowing over doing, and—thank God—a seeker that still believes following the light is worth it.

Bethlehem reminds us that God often moves quietly, close enough to reach, but humble enough to miss. The King of kings was born not to take thrones, but to topple idols—and sometimes the idol is our need to stay in charge.

If His presence unsettles you, don’t run from it. That shaking is mercy. It’s the sound of false kings falling.



### **Think about it:**

Where is Jesus confronting your comfort? Where has He drawn near only for you to keep your distance?

Don't be like those who knew the truth but never moved. Let the light disturb you enough to follow it.



### **Prayer:**

"Jesus, You are the King who breaks my illusions of control. When Your presence shakes my comfort, don't let me retreat—draw me near. Tear down every false throne in my heart until only Yours remains. Amen."



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. The Six-Mile Walk**

Mark six steps—or sixty—to represent the distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Walk it together as a family, reading Matthew 2:3–6 aloud.

With each step, whisper: "Jesus, don't let me stay close and still miss You."

End by lighting a candle to symbolize moving toward His light.

Talk about it: "What small step can we take toward Jesus this week?"

#### **2. Lay-Down-Your-Crown Ornament**

Cut crown shapes from cardboard or heavy paper. Decorate with gold markers or foil.

On each crown, write something you want to lay down before Jesus—control, hurry, fear, comparison.

Hang them low on your tree or near your nativity scene.

Talk about it: "What happens when we let Jesus rule instead of us?"

## **Recipe Option:**

### **Bethlehem Crumb Cake**

Because God still does His best work in small, quiet places.

#### **Ingredients:**

1½ cups flour

¾ cup sugar

½ cup milk

¼ cup melted butter

1 egg

1½ tsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

1 tsp vanilla

#### **Crumb topping:**

½ cup brown sugar, ½ cup flour, ½ tsp cinnamon, ¼ cup cold butter

#### **Directions:**

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease an 8x8 pan.

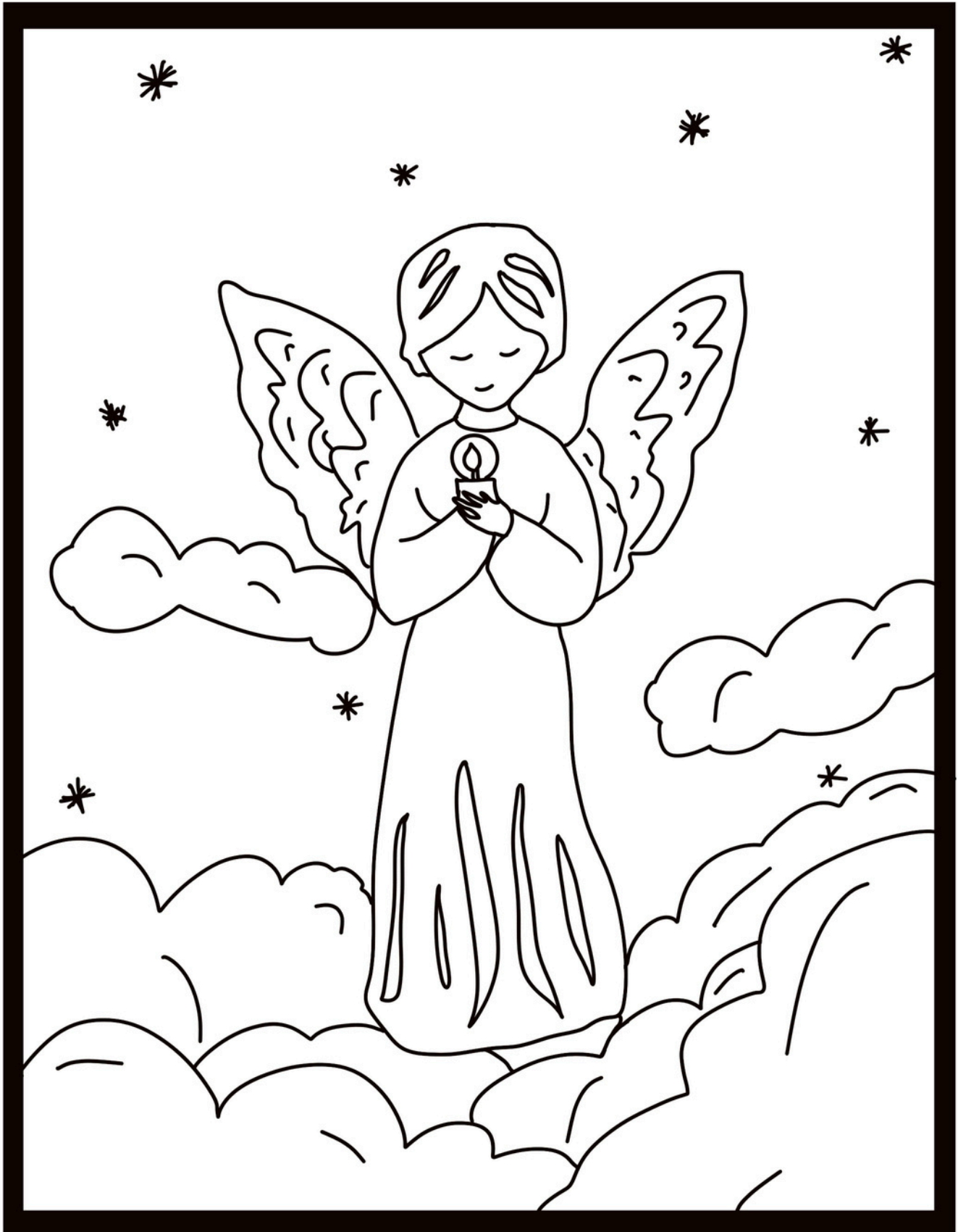
Mix cake ingredients; pour into pan.

Combine crumb topping, cut in butter, sprinkle over batter.

Bake 25–30 min or until golden.

As you bake: read Matthew 2:6 and talk about how God chose a small town to change the world.

Prompt: “What small place in your life could God be using for something big?”





## Week 3: God Drew Near to Us (Peace)

### Dec 17 // Day 20: When the Light Stands Still



*“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”*  
— Matthew 2:9-10



The star stopped.

For so long, it had moved—beckoning, guiding, leading them through deserts and silence. But now, for the first time, it rested. The long road of faith ended not in motion, but in stillness. And in that stillness, joy broke loose.

The wise men didn’t rejoice because the journey was easy—they rejoiced because the light had led them home. Every detour, every delay, every night beneath a dim sky now made sense. The same God who guided them across unknown miles had stopped right where they needed Him to.

There’s a holiness in that moment when heaven pauses—when God says, “Here. Stop here. I’m already here.”

It’s what every restless heart longs for: to know the search isn’t wasted, that the light was never random, that the story was always leading to Him. The star didn’t stop over a throne, or a temple, or a city. It stopped over a child. Over humility. Over grace wrapped in flesh.

And that’s still where His light rests—on the lowly, the hungry, the surrendered.

The wise men’s joy was the kind that comes when striving finally gives way to worship—when faith turns into sight, and the soul whispers, “This is what I’ve been searching for all along.”

Maybe the miracle of Christmas isn’t just that the light came—it’s that it stopped. Because when God’s glory rests somewhere, it’s not to keep us moving—it’s to invite us to kneel.



#### Think about it:

Where is God asking you to stop running, to rest, to stand still beneath His light?

What if the peace you’re looking for isn’t ahead—but right here, where He’s already stopped?



#### Prayer:

“Jesus, You are the end of my searching. When the world pushes me to move faster, teach me to stop where You are. Let my restless heart find joy in Your stillness.”





## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. Star Lantern Glow Night**

Cut a large star shape from cardstock or thin cardboard and trim out the center, leaving a star-shaped frame. Glue gold, white, or yellow tissue paper behind the opening so it glows softly when lit.

Place a battery tea light behind it, turn off other lights, and read Matthew 2:9–10 together. Sit quietly as the light shines through the paper and talk about how God’s light sometimes stops right where He wants us to rest.

Talk about it: “Where do you sense God asking you to pause and simply be still with Him?”

### **2. Stillness Blessing Jar**

Find a mason jar or clear container and label it “Blessings in the Stillness.” Cut small strips of paper and let each family member write moments where they’ve seen God’s presence, peace, or guidance—especially in quiet or waiting seasons. Fold the slips and place them in the jar.

Once a week, pull one out, read it aloud, and thank God for what He revealed in stillness. Keep the jar somewhere visible to remind you that His quiet work is still holy.

Talk about it: “What has God been showing us in the slower, quieter moments this season?”

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Star-Glow Cookies**

Bake simple sugar cookies and cut them into star shapes. After they cool, cover them with white or golden frosting and add one small edible pearl or shimmer sprinkle in the center to represent the light resting over Jesus.

Enjoy them by candlelight while reading the verse again, remembering that real joy begins when we stop and see Him.

### **2. Silent Night Cocoa**

Warm milk in a saucepan, add two tablespoons of cocoa powder and sugar to taste, and stir until smooth. Pour into mugs, top with whipped cream or a few marshmallows, and sit together quietly as you sip.

Dim the lights and let everyone share one thing they’re thankful for tonight. Let the warmth remind you of the peace that comes when the world slows and His light rests near.



## Week 3: God Drew Near to Us (Peace)

### Dec 18 // Day 21: What We Bring to the King



*“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”*

— Matthew 2:11-12



The wise men finally arrived.

After months of travel and miles of uncertainty, their long pursuit ended — not in a palace or before a throne, but in a small home filled with the scent of hay and hope. The journey that began with a light in the sky ended with light wrapped in flesh.

They entered quietly, hearts pounding, and saw the child. No crown, no guards, no grandeur. Just the ordinary — and in it, divinity. They bowed, not because the scene demanded it, but because their souls did. This was no ordinary child. This was the One their restless hearts had been chasing all along.

Their worship wasn't polite; it was total. The word “bowed” here means to fall completely prostrate — face to the ground. Before the Creator who had stepped into creation, pride had no room left to breathe.

Then they opened their treasures — gold, frankincense, and myrrh — gifts chosen with intention, not impulse. Each one whispered a story of who He was and what He would one day do.

Gold spoke of His royalty — the King of heaven born in humility.  
Frankincense spoke of His divinity — the true High Priest who would stand between heaven and earth.  
Myrrh spoke of His suffering — the One who would die to bring life.

Every gift pointed toward the cross. Their worship wasn't about what they saw, but what they believed. They saw a child — and gave as if standing before a King.

Worship has always been the moment where seeing and believing collide. It's not about what's visible — it's about what's true. The wise men didn't bring their leftovers; they brought their best. They didn't offer convenience; they offered cost. True worship is never casual. It's love made visible.

And when it was over, they left differently. The text says they returned “by another route.” It wasn't just a change in direction — it was a change in heart. When you've truly encountered Jesus, you can't go back the same way. His presence rearranges your priorities, reorders your loves, and redirects your path.

Advent calls us to that same kind of response. The King has come — not to take from you, but to receive what only you can give: your worship, your wonder, your heart. The question is not if we'll bring Him something, but what.

Will we give Him what's easy—or what's costly? What's left—or what's loved? Because when you finally see Jesus for who He is, holding back stops making sense.



### **Think about it:**

What treasure is God asking you to lay at His feet this season—your time, your pride, your control, your plans? How could you worship not out of obligation, but out of awe?



### **Prayer:**

“Jesus, You are my greatest treasure. Teach me to bring You what costs something—to give, to kneel, to love with open hands. Change my heart so that I never walk away the same. Amen.”



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. Gifts for the King Painting**

Spread out paper or small canvases and let each family member paint their “gift” to Jesus. It could be an image, a word, or even just colors that express love, gratitude, or surrender.

On the back, write a short prayer offering that gift to Him. When finished, display them near your nativity or tree as your family's gifts for the King.

Talk about it: “If you could give Jesus one thing from your heart today, what would it be?”

#### **2. Treasure Ornament**

Use a clear ornament and fill it with gold paper, glitter, or ribbon. On a small slip of paper, each person writes what they want to give Jesus this season—time, forgiveness, patience, generosity—and places it inside. Hang it on the tree as your family's symbol of worship and devotion.

Talk about it: “Why do you think the wise men brought their best gifts to Jesus instead of something easy?”

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Honey-Gold Cookies**

Bake soft sugar cookies, replacing a few tablespoons of sugar with honey for a warm, golden flavor. After baking, drizzle lightly with a simple honey glaze made from powdered sugar, honey, and a touch of milk. The golden color reminds us of the wise men's gift—something precious, sweet, and offered with love.

Talk about it: “How can our words and actions this week be a sweet gift to God?”

## 2. Orange-Spice Tea Bread

Mix together 1½ cups flour, ½ cup sugar, ½ tsp baking soda, ½ tsp salt, ½ tsp cinnamon, 1 egg, ¾ cup orange juice, ¼ cup melted butter, and orange zest.

Pour into a loaf pan and bake at 350°F for 30–35 minutes.

The fragrance fills your home like frankincense — a reminder that worship rises to God like a pleasing aroma.

Talk about it: “How can our words, prayers, and actions be like a sweet fragrance to God this week?”





## Week 4: God Gave His Son (Love)

### Dec 19 // Day 22: Love That Leads



*"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*  
— John 3:16



We end this Advent season where it all began — with love.

Not the gentle, sentimental kind we see on Christmas cards, but the fierce, protective love of God that moves. The love that crossed heaven's distance and took on flesh. The love that wrapped itself in swaddling cloth to reach a broken world.

Bethlehem was quiet again. The shepherds had gone home. The angels' song had faded into memory. But in the stillness, God was still at work.

Joseph woke to a startling dream: "Get up. Take the child and His mother. Go." There was danger coming. The tiny life sleeping beside him — the very Son of God — was now the target of earthly kings.

So Joseph obeyed. No time to plan. No light of dawn. Just a step of trust into the darkness.

Can you picture it? Mary clutching the Child, Joseph leading them along the narrow road out of Bethlehem — tired, afraid, but held together by one thing: love. Because "God so loved the world."

That same love led them to Egypt. That same love guarded the Messiah. And that same love still leads us today — through uncertainty, through fear, through every night road we can't yet see the end of.

Christmas is not only the story of love arriving. It's the story of love leading — a God who doesn't just send us His Son, but walks with us every step of the way.



#### **Think about it:**

Where do you need to trust that God's love is leading you — even when you don't understand the path?



#### **Prayer:**

"Father, thank You for loving the world enough to give Jesus. Help me to trust that Your love never leaves, never loses its way, and always leads me home."



## **Family Advent Activities:**

### **1. “Journey to Egypt” Map Craft**

Draw or print a simple map showing Bethlehem, Egypt, and a path between. Use yarn, stickers, or dotted lines to trace the journey Joseph and Mary took.

As you create it, talk about times your family has had to move, change plans, or trust God in the unknown. End by writing across the map: “God’s Love Leads.”

### **2. “Footsteps of Faith” Walk**

Bundle up and take an evening walk by flashlight or candlelight. Each person names one place or season where they’ve seen God’s love guide them.

End the walk by reading John 3:16 aloud and praying together, thanking God for leading your family through every step.

## **Recipe Options:**

### **1. Trail Mix of Trust**

Mix together honey-roasted nuts, pretzels, mini marshmallows, dried fruit, and a handful of gold-wrapped candies.

As you stir, talk about how every ingredient represents a piece of Joseph’s journey: sweet, salty, hard, and good — all guided by God’s love.

### **2. Star Path Pastries**

Use crescent-roll dough or puff pastry strips; twist each into a star shape. Sprinkle with cinnamon sugar and bake until golden.

As you eat, remember the star that led the wise men and the same God who led Joseph by night — the God whose love still lights our way.



## Week 4: God Gave His Son (Love)

### Dec 20 // Day 23: Love That Shines



*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*  
— John 1:5

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*  
— John 3:16



Before Bethlehem glowed with lamplight, the world was heavy with silence. Four hundred years had passed since God had spoken. Kingdoms had risen and fallen. Hope flickered like the last candle in a storm.

And then—quietly, almost hidden—the Word took a breath.

Light entered lungs.

The Infinite became an infant.

No star could compete with that brilliance. It wasn't the light above the manger that changed the world; it was the Light inside it.

The One who spoke galaxies into motion now cooed against His mother's chest. The hands that had flung constellations into space grasped Joseph's finger. Heaven's radiance was small enough to fit in human arms.

That's how God breaks darkness—not with a shout, but with a heartbeat. Love wrapped itself in skin and moved into our shadows.

When John wrote, “The light shines in the darkness,” he was describing that first cry—a declaration that sin's night was ending, that death's grip was loosening, that the world would never be the same.

And why? Because “God so loved the world.”  
Love didn't stay distant. It came close enough to touch.

Every flicker of Christmas light, every glow on your tree, every candle burning in a window is just a small echo of that first great flame—God's love shining through the face of Jesus Christ.

The darkness hasn't won. It never will. Because Love has already turned on the light.



#### **Think about it:**

Where have you grown used to the dark—fear, cynicism, doubt? Ask Jesus to shine there, to warm what's grown cold, to bring morning where you've stopped expecting it.



### **Prayer:**

“Jesus, You are the Light that no darkness can overcome. Let Your presence flood my heart tonight. Burn bright in me until others see Your love through my life.”



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. Yarn-Wrapped Star Ornaments**

Cut star shapes out of cardboard or heavy cardstock. Wrap each one with different colors of yarn—white, gold, silver, or red—until the center glows with texture and color. Add a bit of glitter glue or metallic thread for sparkle.

Talk about how love isn’t just felt—it’s seen when we wrap our actions in kindness. As you wind the yarn, thank God for the way His love wraps around you and lights your life.

#### **2. “Light of the World” Luminary Bags**

Use white or kraft paper lunch bags. Cut small shapes—stars, hearts, crosses—into the front. On each bag, write someone’s name or place that needs Jesus’ light (e.g., “Grandma,” “school,” “our town”). Place a battery tea light inside and line them along a windowsill or porch at night.

As they glow, pray as a family: “Jesus, let Your love shine here.”

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Stained-Glass Jam Cookies**

Use a simple sugar-cookie or shortbread dough. Cut out shapes (stars, hearts, circles), then use a smaller cutter to create a “window” in the center. Spoon a bit of red or golden jam (strawberry, raspberry, or apricot) into the opening and bake until the jam melts into a shining, glass-like center.

As you bake, read John 1:5 together and talk about how Jesus’ love shines through us—just like light through these cookies.

Serve them by candlelight and watch how they glow.

#### **2. Light-in-the-Dark Brownie Bites**

Bake mini brownie cups, then press a white chocolate melt or yellow caramel candy in the center while still warm. The middle gleams when cooled.

As you enjoy them, say together, “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”





## Week 4: God Gave His Son (Love)

### Dec 21 // Day 24: Love Came Close



*“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”*  
— Luke 2:16-19

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*  
— John 3:16



The shepherds didn't walk that night—they ran.

Their feet pounded against the dirt roads of Bethlehem, hearts still echoing the song of angels: “Glory to God in the highest.” And when they arrived, everything was still again. No choir. No glow. Just the sound of a baby breathing.

They found Him there—God, here.

The promise of the ages wrapped in human skin. The Word who once spoke the universe into being now resting against His mother's chest. The Light of the world blinking beneath the stars He'd hung in place.

That's what “God with us” really means. Not that He watches from a distance, but that He stepped into our dust and our tears.

He knows hunger and loneliness, laughter and loss. He knows what it's like to be one of us. And in that tiny stable, love finally looked us in the eye.

The same God who thundered on Sinai now whispered through a newborn's cry. He came not to overwhelm, but to dwell—to share our story from the inside out. Mary held Him close, her heart stretched wide with wonder. She didn't rush to speak; she simply stayed near. Some moments are too holy for words.

Maybe tonight, that's what God wants from us—not more striving or noise, but stillness. To stop long enough to feel His presence in the ordinary. To remember that the miracle of Christmas isn't just that Jesus came; it's that He stayed.

Love has come close. And He is still here.



#### **Think about it:**

Where do you need to remember that God is with you right now—in your waiting, your questions, your daily life?



### **Prayer:**

“Emmanuel, You are God with us. In my joy and in my weariness, You stay near. Let me slow down long enough to notice Your presence and treasure it. Amen.”



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. “God With Us” Handprint Ornaments**

Use air-dry clay, salt dough, or oven-bake clay. Press each family member’s hand into a small round or heart-shaped piece. Before it hardens, use a toothpick or straw to make a small hole for hanging.

After it dries, paint the print and write “Emmanuel – God With Us” or the person’s name inside the palm. Thread with ribbon and hang it on the tree. As you make them, talk about how God’s hands now hold ours — that “God with us” means He never lets go.

#### **2. Nativity Stick Puppets**

Cut out simple paper or felt shapes for Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, a sheep, and a star. Glue them onto craft sticks, then gather around to retell Luke 2 together.

Let everyone take a turn and end by saying together: “God is with us!”

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Graham Cracker Nativity Snack**

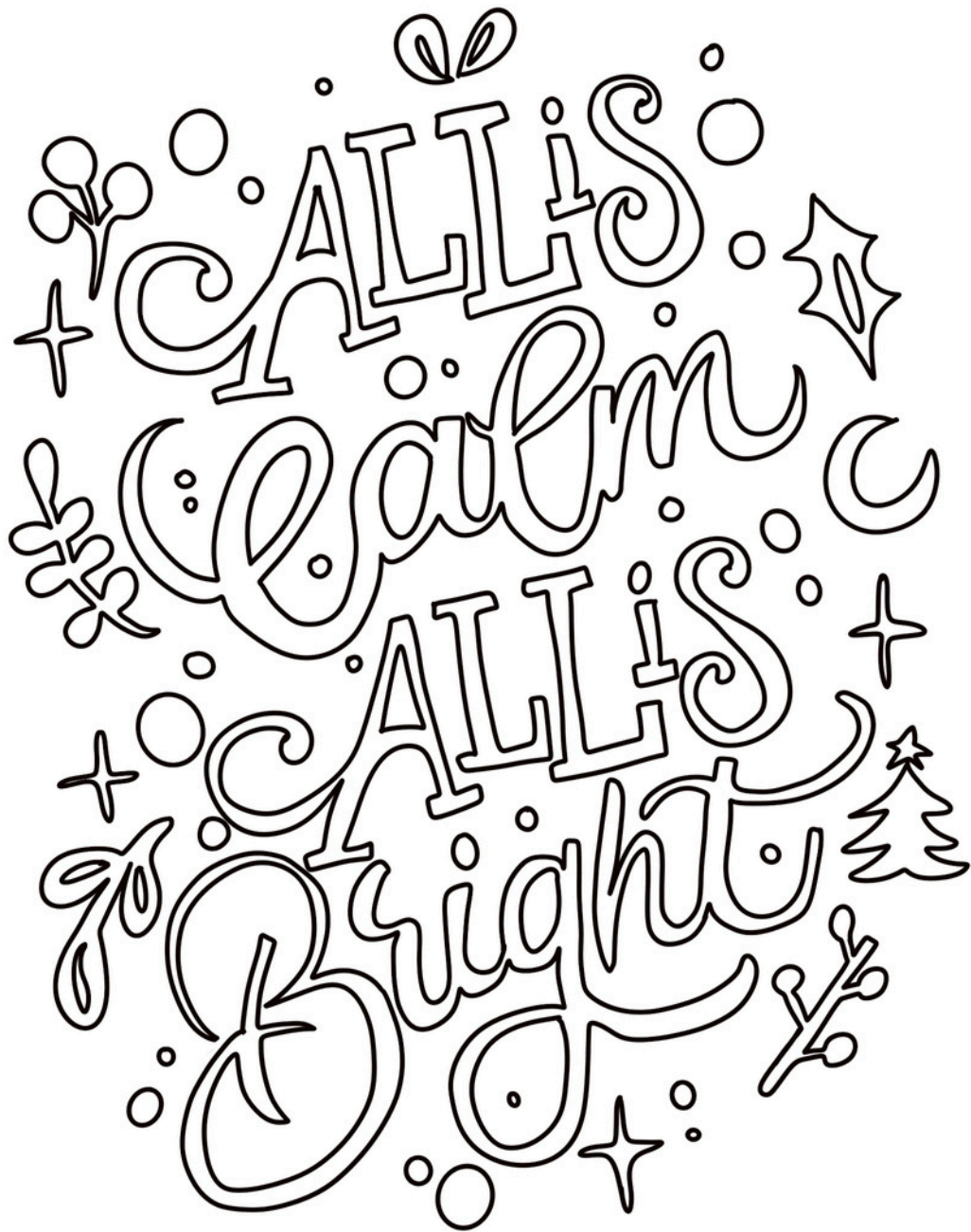
Give everyone a few graham crackers and a little frosting as “glue.” Build a small manger or stable on a plate using pretzels, mini marshmallows, or candy figures.

As you build, talk about how God made His home among us that night — not in a palace, but in a simple place.

#### **2. “Prince of Peace” Cookies**

Make sugar cookies using any shape you have — stars, crosses, hearts, or doves. Frost them white, then drizzle with a thin line of gold icing or edible glitter.

While decorating, say together: “Jesus, You are our Prince of Peace — God with us.”



## Week 4: God Gave His Son (Love)

### Dec 22 // Day 25: Love That Gives



*“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”*  
— Matthew 2:11

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*  
— John 3:16



By the time the wise men found Him, the night sky was still. The star that had led them so far now rested above a humble home — no palace, no fanfare, only quiet. And inside, a young mother, a tired carpenter, and a child who carried eternity in His eyes.

They had traveled hundreds of miles, crossing deserts and kingdoms, following light through darkness — not knowing exactly where it would lead, only who it would lead them to. And when they saw Him, they didn't speak. They fell.

These men of wisdom, wealth, and rank lowered themselves to the dirt before a toddler. Because love will make you kneel.

They opened their chests of treasure — gold for a King, frankincense for a God, myrrh for a Savior who would one day die. But before they gave those things, they gave something greater: their hearts. Their worship was more costly than their gifts.

When John wrote, “For God so loved the world that He gave...” this was the rhythm he meant — love that doesn't hold back, love that crosses distances, love that gives what it treasures most.

That's what Christmas has always been about: the God who gives first. And when we truly see Him — when we realize how far His love came for us — generosity becomes our natural language.

So this week, maybe your offering isn't wrapped in gold but in grace — a listening ear, an apology, an act of kindness. Maybe the most beautiful gift you can give is your worship, your time, your “yes.”

Because love that has been found will always find a way to give.



#### **Think about it:**

What could generosity look like for you this week — not out of pressure, but out of love? How might you give back to the One who gave everything?



### **Prayer:**

“Jesus, You gave Yourself freely. You held nothing back. Teach me to love like that — with open hands and a willing heart. Let every gift I give point back to You, the greatest Giver. Amen.”



### **Family Advent Activities:**

#### **1. “Follow the Star” Giving Jars**

Place three empty jars on your counter labeled “Time,” “Words,” and “Kindness.” Each day this week, family members fill the jars — a note describing something they’ll give: an hour spent helping, an encouraging word, a kind act.

On Christmas Eve, read them together as a family offering to Jesus.

#### **2. “Journey Map” Art**

On a piece of paper, draw your family’s own “journey to Jesus.” Start at one corner with a star, and along the path, write prayers, answered hopes, or ways you’ve seen God’s love this year.

End by drawing the manger and writing, “Love That Gives.”

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Star Path Pastries**

Use crescent roll dough, twist into star shapes, brush with butter, and sprinkle with cinnamon sugar.

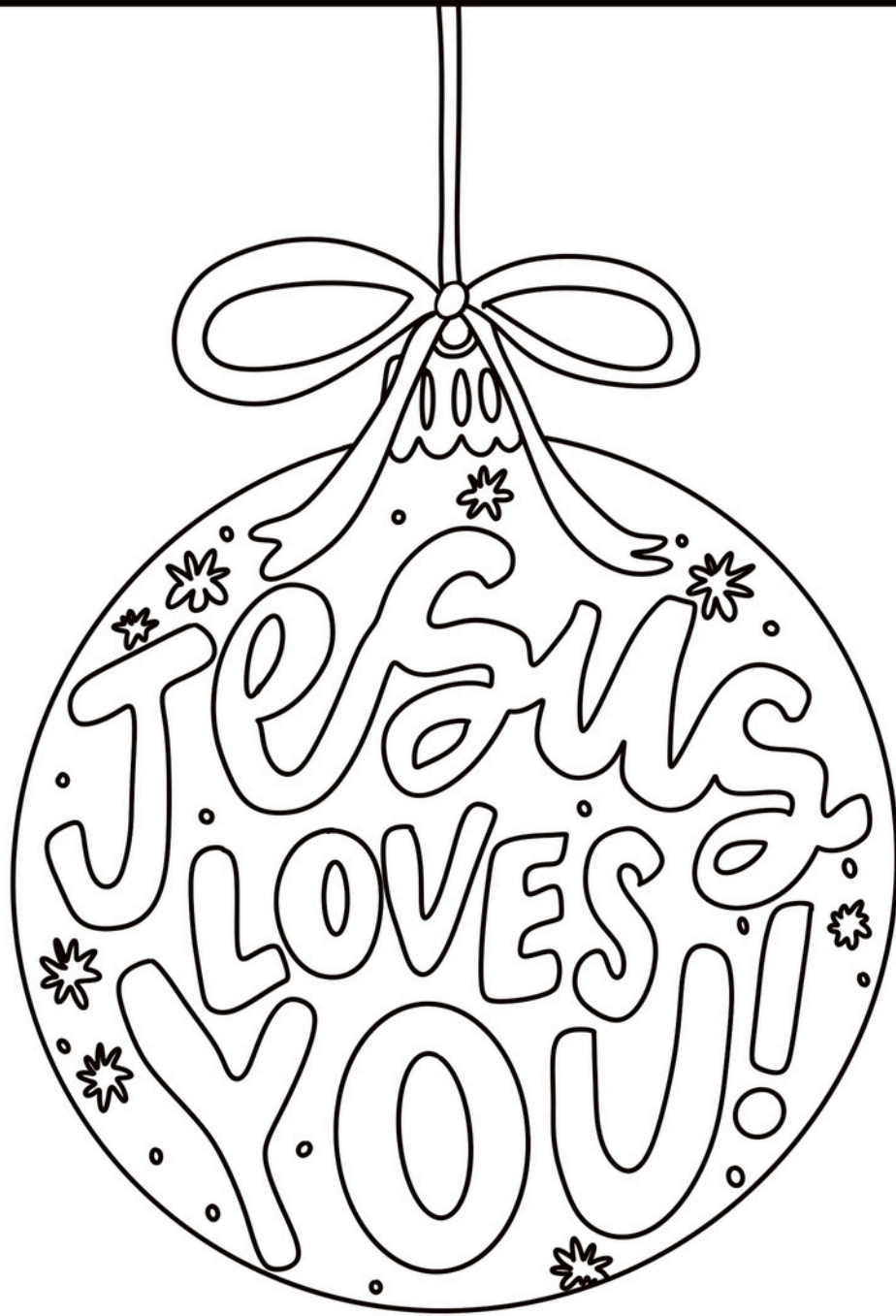
As they bake, talk about how God led the wise men — and how His love still leads our steps today.

#### **2. “Gifts of the Heart” Cocoa Bombs**

Fill hollow chocolate spheres with cocoa powder and tiny marshmallows. Seal and wrap them in foil labeled “gold,” “frankincense,” and “myrrh.” Drop one in warm milk and watch it burst open.

As you sip, remember how love gives — and melts open for others to taste its sweetness.





## Week 4: God Gave His Son (Love)

### Dec 23 // Day 26: Love That Stays



*"The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."*  
— Deuteronomy 31:8

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*  
— John 3:16



The stable is quiet now. The animals have settled. The straw still holds the shape where shepherds once knelt. The glow from the lantern flickers across a newborn's face.

To anyone passing by, it looks like an ordinary baby — small, helpless, wrapped tight against the cold. But heaven knows better.

This Child wasn't sent just to be born. He came to save.

The hands that curl around Mary's finger are the same hands that will one day stretch out on a cross. The cry that fills this dark night will one day echo through an empty tomb. He didn't come only to bring comfort — He came to conquer.

But before the miracles and the multitudes, before Calvary or the crown, He came to stay.

To breathe our air.

To enter our pain.

To walk every mile between the manger and the cross — and every mile after, right beside us.

That's what Love does. It doesn't visit; it dwells.

The story of Christmas is not just that God became a baby, but that He became our Savior — and He never left that role. The manger wasn't the end of His humility or His nearness; it was only the beginning of His rescue.

So tonight, look again at the manger.

It's not just a cradle — it's a cross in waiting.

And it whispers the same truth Deuteronomy once promised:

He will never leave you nor forsake you.

The Child who came has stayed.

The Savior who saves still does.



#### Think about it:

When you picture the manger, do you see just a baby — or the Savior who still stays with you? What does it mean for you that the One who began in straw never stopped saving?



### **Prayer:**

“Jesus, You came small so You could meet me where I am. You stayed close so You could save me completely. Let me never forget that the manger led to the cross — and the cross to Your presence with me now. Amen.”



### **Family Advent Activity:**

#### **Freeze & Find**

Play Christmas music and let everyone move around—dancing, walking, pretending to travel like the shepherds or wise men. When the music stops, everyone freezes exactly where they are.

Choose one person as the Seeker. During each freeze, the Seeker quietly walks to someone, taps their shoulder, and says something simple but true—“I see you.” or “Still here.” or “You’re not alone.”

Then start the music again and keep playing—freezing, finding, moving, staying.

When you’re finished, gather up and talk: Even when life feels paused or uncertain, God’s love doesn’t leave. He finds us again and again.

### **Recipe Options:**

#### **1. Peaceful Pretzel Hearts**

Place pretzels on parchment, top each with a chocolate melt, and warm until soft. Press a red M&M or pecan in the center for a heart.

As you make them, talk about how Jesus’ love holds everything—and everyone—together.

#### **2. “Hearts That Stay Together” Cinnamon Ornaments**

Mix 1 cup applesauce + 1 cup cinnamon into a dough. Roll, cut heart shapes, bake at 200°F for 2 hours or air dry. Thread ribbon through the top and hang on the tree.

The scent lingers long after Christmas, a reminder that God’s love does too.



## Week 4: God Gave His Son (Love)

### Dec 24 // Day 27: Love Reigns



*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."  
— Isaiah 9:6*

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."  
— John 3:16*



The night is dense with silence. The wind slips through the narrow streets of Bethlehem, carrying the faint smell of dust and bread. Overhead, a single star seems to burn with purpose.

Inside a crude stable, the air hums with something unseen. Mary, exhausted and trembling, cradles a newborn. Joseph kneels beside her, eyes wide with a reverence too deep for words. The animals shift softly, their breath rising in little clouds of warmth. And there — upon the straw — lies the eternal Word of God.

The voice that spoke galaxies into being has gone quiet. The Creator of all things now breathes with borrowed lungs. The hands that flung stars across the cosmos now rest against His mother's chest.

The Infinite has become intimate. This is not merely a birth. It is the collision of heaven and earth — the moment the Author of history writes Himself into His own story. The One who said, "Let there be light," has entered our darkness. The King of kings has traded His throne for a feeding trough.

Isaiah's prophecy echoes through the cold night: "The government will rest on His shoulders." And somehow, impossibly, it does — the weight of the world already pressing on this Child's tiny frame.

He will carry it all: our sin, our sorrow, our shame. From the manger to the cross, His path is one long descent of love. This is the paradox of Christmas — omnipotence wrapped in weakness, eternity confined in time, sovereignty laid in a stable.

He did not come to rule through fear, but through forgiveness; not to demand allegiance, but to dwell among His people.

Here, in this quiet, Love takes the throne. No trumpet sounds, no crown gleams — only a cry that shatters the curse. He reigns not over nations tonight, but over hearts made new. The Kingdom of God has come, and it begins here — in straw and starlight.



#### Think about it:

When you picture the manger, do you see fragility or power? The humility of this moment isn't the absence of majesty — it's what true majesty looks like. Where does the reign of Christ need to begin anew in you tonight?

**Prayer:**

"Jesus, You are the Eternal Word made flesh, the King who stooped low to lift me high. Rule in my heart, reign over my fears, and let Your light govern every dark corner of my soul. On this holy night, I bow before the Child who is also my King. Amen."

**Family Advent Activity:****Crown Him with Praise**

Gather your family and make simple paper crowns using gold or yellow paper. On each one, write one of Jesus' names or titles from Isaiah 9:6 — Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father.

**Recipe Option:****Candy Nativity Scene**

Use simple candies and snacks to build your own edible nativity:

Pretzel sticks: stable walls

Graham crackers or caramels: manger

Mini marshmallows or white chocolate chips: baby Jesus

Truffles or Tootsie Rolls: Mary and Joseph

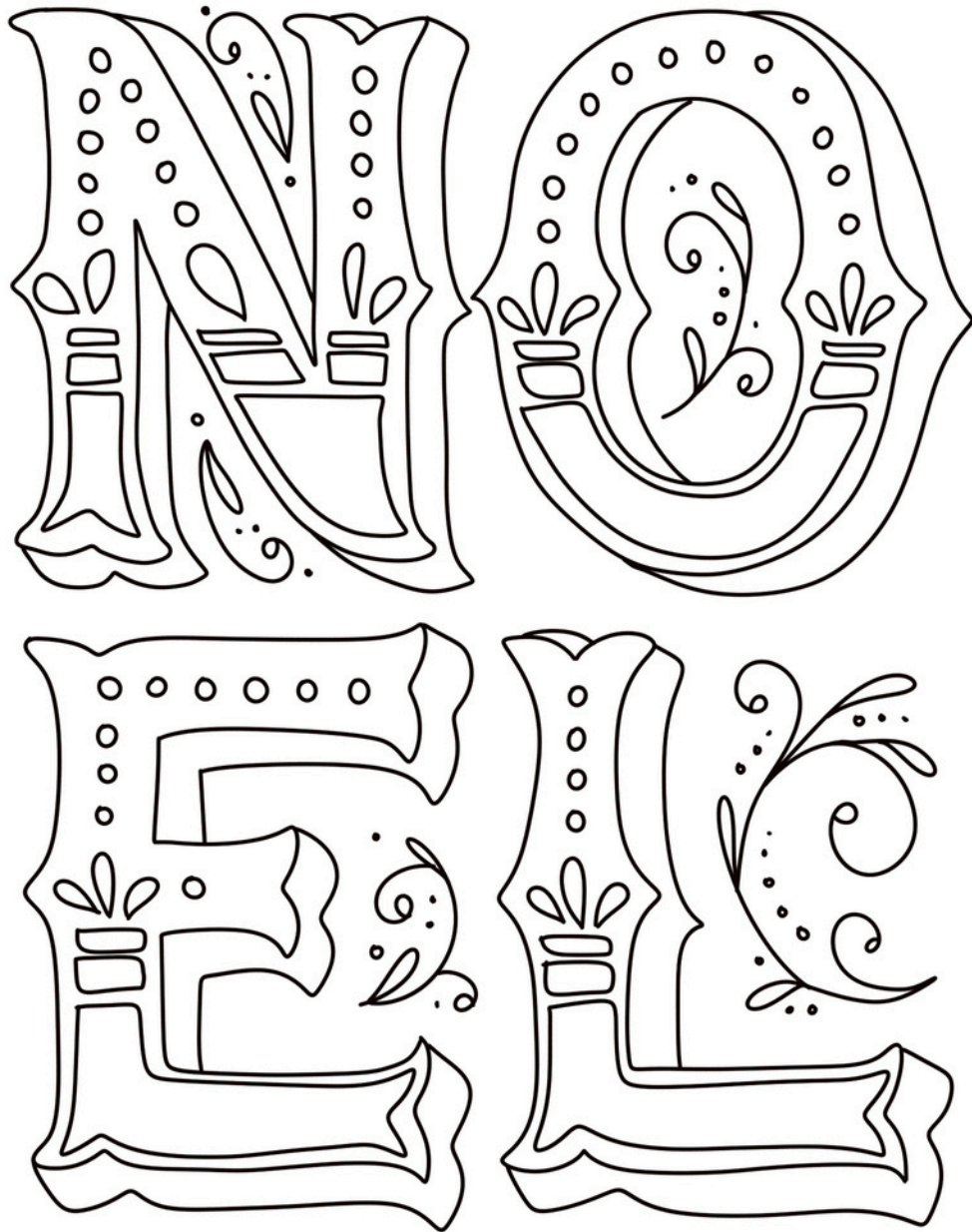
Gumdrops: shepherds and wise men

Coconut flakes or cereal: straw

A gold candy or yellow M&M: the star

Use frosting or melted chocolate as "glue."





## Week 4: God Gave His Son (Love)

### Dec 25 // Day 28: Love Lives



*"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*  
— John 3:16



Christmas morning glows with a stillness that feels almost holy. The house is quiet, the tree lights flicker against the window, and for one breathless moment the whole world seems to pause. The story we've waited for all Advent — the story of God wrapped in human skin — has arrived.

But Christmas isn't only the memory of what Love did; it's the miracle that Love still does. Love lives.

It was the coldest night of 1930 in Chicago. The streets were empty, except for a twelve-year-old newspaper boy standing on the corner, barefoot in the snow. His coat was thin, torn at the sleeves; his breath came in shaky clouds. Through a restaurant window, he could see families laughing over steaming bowls of soup. He pressed his hands to the glass, just to feel the warmth.

A policeman passing by slowed his step. "Son, you shouldn't be out here," he said gently. "You'll freeze to death. Why don't you go home?" The boy lowered his eyes. "Sir... I don't have a home."

The officer hesitated, then pointed down the street. "Do you see that big white house at the end? Go there. Knock on the door and say, John 3:16. They'll let you in."

The boy nodded, barely whispering a thank-you, and trudged through the snow. His fingers were stiff, his feet numb. When he reached the porch, he knocked. After a moment, the door creaked open and a woman — silver hair pulled back, eyes kind — looked out.

He managed to stammer, "John 3:16."

Her expression softened. "Oh, come in, dear," she said, her voice like music in the cold.

Warmth rushed at him as he stepped inside — firelight dancing across walls, the scent of bread and cinnamon filling the air. She led him to the hearth, wrapped him in a blanket, and handed him a steaming mug of cocoa. "You must be starving," she said.

He ate until he couldn't eat another bite. She drew him a bath with soap and bubbles, and left a pair of soft pajamas waiting on the chair. As he lowered himself into the water, the heat prickled his frozen skin. He whispered to himself, "John 3:16 — I don't understand it, but it sure makes a dirty boy clean."

Later, wrapped in flannel and tucked beneath a quilt, he felt tears slide down his cheeks. "John 3:16 — whatever it means, it makes a lonely boy feel loved." Morning came. The woman met him with breakfast and a smile. "Do you know what you said when you knocked on my door last night?"

“Yes, ma’am. John 3:16. But... I don’t know what it means.”

She opened her worn Bible and read, her voice trembling slightly:  
“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”

The boy stared at the words. They seemed too big, too beautiful. “You mean,” he said slowly, “that God loves me like that? Enough to give His Son?”

She nodded. “Yes, child. Enough to open every locked door — even the one to heaven itself.”

And in that moment, the light broke through. The same love that opened her house had opened his heart. The same love that warmed his hands was now warming his soul. He understood that this — this — was Christmas.

God had come looking for him.

The baby born in Bethlehem wasn’t just cradled in straw; He was the key to every heart that has ever stood shivering in the dark. The cradle led to the cross, the cross to the tomb, and the tomb to a love that cannot die.

Love didn’t stop at Bethlehem.  
Love didn’t end at Calvary.  
Love didn’t stay in the grave.  
Love lives.

It lives in homes that open, in hearts that forgive, in hands that give. It lives wherever light pierces the cold — wherever grace is spoken in Jesus’ name. And this morning, it lives in you.



### **Think about it:**

Whose life could be changed by the warmth of love through you today?

What door could you open that might let someone see Jesus?



### **Prayer:**

“Jesus, thank You for coming after us — for finding us in the cold and bringing us home. Let Your love live through me today. May my life be a doorway where others meet You. Amen.”

