



Six ideas for celebrating Advent as a family

>> by Rhett Wilson Pastor, The Spring Church in Laurens, S.C.

Advent is the perfect time to focus on Jesus, the “reason for the season.”

Parents plan for it. Churches celebrate it. Stores open their doors early for it. Children long all year for it.

Dec. 25, the most anticipated day of the year.

The Historical Expectation and Anticipation of Christmas

Historically, believers in God are marked with expectation and anticipation.

- Abraham and Sarah waited for God to fulfill His promise to give them a son.

- David longed for a temple for Jehovah in Jerusalem.

- The magi followed a star, expect-

ing the celestial sign to take them to the King of the Jews.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ, believers have awaited His return. The Greek word *parousia* means “coming” or “arrival.” The New Testament uses the word 17 times to describe the second coming of Christ.

Advent: The Coming of Christ

For Christians, Advent specifically signifies the four weeks leading up to Christmas day.

W. T. Ellis said, “It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air.”

The Advent season can be a great time for families to celebrate “the reason for the season”—Jesus Christ. Look here for ways to create opportunities for your family to focus on Jesus amid all the holiday rush. Here are five ways



to help your family celebrate Advent.

1. Read Advent Family Devotions

Get a free downloadable Advent guide for your family from the web version of this article at lifeway.com by clicking on the embedded link. The PDF download includes:

- Weekly Devotionals
- Family Activities
- Connection Questions
- Daily Readings for the Family

2. Create an Advent Jesse Tree

This ancient tradition, based on Isa. 11:1, helps children learn the Christmas story and related Scripture.

Start with either a small live or artificial tree. If you prefer, cut a tree out of construction paper and tape it to a wall. Select 24 Bible stories and create small ornaments that correspond with each story. Use construction paper, scissors, markers and other art supplies.

Beginning Dec. 1, read and discuss the related Scripture, discuss the Bible account, and then place the ornament on the tree.

3. Make a Prayer Garland

Cut out 24 green and red construction paper strips. On each strip, write

the name of a family member, friend or ministry. Staple the strips as links into one long garland. Hang the garland in your apartment or house as a decoration.

Every day in December, have a family member remove one of the paper strips. As a family, pray for the person or ministry whose name is on that strip of paper.

4. Build (or Buy) an Advent Box

Several years ago, I purchased a wooden box, painted with beautiful nutcrackers all over the front. The box has 24 small doors, each opening to a hiding place. During the first week of Advent, I place small toys, candies and inexpensive gifts behind each door.

I divide the first 24 days of December by my three children and assign each child eight days of the month. Each morning, one child opens the door with the current date and finds the surprise. My children enjoy the fun and anticipate the surprise.

Create a similar type of box, or use small paper bags decorated on the outside with a surprise gift placed inside. No two Advent boxes are the

>> SEE ADVENT ON NEXT PAGE

Celebrate Jesus, the Expected One

>> by **Scott James** Elder at the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Ala.

Sometimes we forget that God didn't just send a child into the world; He sent a mighty Rescuer!

"He's coming!"

This shout of anticipation is the heart of Advent, the time of year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The weeks leading up to Christmas Day are a special time of reflection on God's gift to us: the child Jesus. Rejoicing in Jesus' birth certainly brings glory to God, but sometimes we can forget that God didn't just send a child into the world; He sent a mighty Rescuer! The image of the Child in the manger should fill our hearts with praise because we know what that Child would grow up to accomplish—He would save His people from their sins.

This story is not just for those of us who live after Jesus' time, though. The people of God have always known what Jesus' mission would be. How did they know about this divine rescue plan before Jesus actually came? Because God promised the whole plan to them, and every single part of it was designed to become true in Jesus.

No, God didn't just promise His people that a miracle child would be born. He also promised that this Child would grow up to be the loving Shepherd of His people, the place-switching Sacrifice, the resurrected Lord, and the righteous King Who reigns in glory forever. But there is yet another promise: this

Advent

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

same, so use your imagination when creating yours.

5. Use Christmas Cards as Prayer Reminders

As Christmas cards arrive during December, place them in a basket in a noticeable area. Once a day, pull out one card and pray for that person or family together. Keep the Christmas card basket out all year and pray regularly for other families.


You may want to write the person a note signed by your family that says, "We prayed for you today."

6. Create (or Buy) Your Own Advent Wreath with Candles

An Advent wreath is helpful and beautifully symbolic of the season. A basic Advent wreath consists of a circle with four candle holders with one candle in the middle. It may be garnished with holly or pine boughs.

The Advent wreath can serve as a perfect teaching moment too. Point out the colors to your children, and talk about what they mean. To learn more about the wreath, check out numbers 1-3 on this article.

Article courtesy of *HomeLife* magazine.

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King is coming back for His people!

As we celebrate the first coming of the Expected One during Advent, let's also look forward in hopeful anticipation of His second coming. Let's keep in mind the whole picture of who Jesus is, worshipping Him as the fulfillment of all of God's promises to us, "For every one of God's promises is 'Yes' in Him" (2 Cor. 1:20 HCSB).

The Old Testament passages laid out here are meant to guide you through the wide range of promises God gave us regarding His Son. They are by no means comprehensive, and not every one of them was a direct prophecy of Christ. Some were simply a sign of what was to come. All of them do, however, point to Jesus, collectively unfolding the promises of His long-awaited coming, His marvelous birth, His blameless life, His agonizing death, His glorious resurrection, and His reign as the eternal King of all.



Following is a sample Advent devotional from *The Expected One: Anticipating All of Jesus in the Advent*:

Dec. 1. Gen. 3:15 "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Although His perfect creation had just been corrupted by the arrival of sin, God promised that sin and Satan would not have the final victory. The Rescuer would come to crush Satan, ending his rebellion against God. His people may have been under the curse of sin, but God promised them that He would fight for them and win them back to Himself.

Review & Reflect

- Enmity means that two things are against each other. What set God and Satan against each other? (Satan turned against God, and then tempted man to do the same.)

- Who does this verse say will defeat Satan in the end? (The offspring of woman—this points to Jesus.)

- How does it make you feel knowing that God has already written the end of the story? (It gives us confidence that God is in control.)

- Christ is our great Victor, defeating an enemy that we never could. Knowing that He intercedes on our behalf, meditate on what this means to you.

Excerpted from *The Expected One* by Scott James. Copyright 2014 B&H Publishing Group.

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LMCO: Sharing God's love in Central Asia

>> by Laura Fielding IMB Writer

CENTRAL ASIA (BP)—Several years ago, Christian aid worker Gary Warrior* was sitting on the floor in a Central Asian village with a congregation of about 20 people, getting ready to share about “the cost of discipleship.”

Someone made the suggestion to go around the room and share their testimonies. One woman simply said, “Oh, I’m just very blessed, and I’m so thankful to be here.”

Her friend elbowed her: “Explain to him your testimony, tell him what’s happening in your life with God.” But the woman again said she was “blessed” and just thankful to sing songs and read the Bible together.

Her friend retorted, “You tell him the truth. You tell him that every night after you go to these meetings, your husband beats you, and last week he beat you with a hammer!”

Tears jumped to Warrior’s eyes as he thought, How can I tell these people to go out there and suffer for Christ’s sake?

“God just grabbed me by the collar and He said, ‘You’re not asking them, I am.’”

Gary and his family—wife, Ann,* and four children, two of whom are now adults—first arrived in this Central Asian country in 1997. The former Soviet republic was suffering, broken and poor after the end of a five-year civil war.

Though the Soviets tried to stamp out religion, the country did not lose its strong Muslim identity. But many of these Central Asians feel hopeless and overlooked by the world.



PHOTO:IMB

A young man shovels dirt for a well that will bring fresh water to his village in Central Asia. In 2009, Christian aid worker Gary Warrior (name changed) and his national partners began digging wells to provide clean water for villagers who are constantly sick with diseases like typhoid, hepatitis A and giardia because of dirty water.

“There’s a poem that says, ‘Oh people of grief, tears in their eyes like orphans, anger on their lips like captives. In a forgotten land they wept alone,’” Warrior says, fighting back tears. “So for us to be able to show up here now, in this point in history, and begin to tell them that God loves them—this is water on dry ground.”

Despite people’s thirst for truth and love, Christians are persecuted. Not necessarily from the communist government—Warrior estimates about 30 government-registered churches and 1,000 believers in the country—but from society. Leaving Islam brings great shame on a person’s family.

“Persecution comes every time the Gospel is proclaimed here, but if we’re able to do it in the context of families and in communities, we can minimize the effects of that persecution so people can stand together for the cause of Christ and not be chased out,” Warrior says.

Before moving to Central Asia, Warrior was pastor of Grandview, W.V., First Southern. The Warriors were the first family to be commissioned and sent out by the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists and the Mountain State Association. They are now part of North Little Rock, Ark., Park Hill.

As a pastor with a music degree and a master of divinity from Southwestern Seminary, Warrior wasn’t planning on focusing on human needs work. But after seeing that even numerous aid agencies couldn’t respond to the great number of disasters and people suffering in Central Asia, Warrior started a disaster response team of Christian workers and national believers in 1998.

During their first disaster response, he discovered being there for people on the day of disaster “gave us real access to share the Gospel.” The next year in that village, Warrior’s team planted their first church and baptized 13 people.

To help share the Gospel in a widespread way, Warrior’s team dubs gospel movies into local languages and gives them to people they encounter. Through Lottie Moon Christmas Offering funds, Warrior’s team has dubbed 12 films—including “The Gospel of John,” “Esther” and “Courageous”—and created worship songs in the local language.

“This is the Gospel presented in the local language in a way that I can’t speak it,” Warrior says. “It’s visually powerful.”

After Warrior’s team responded to disasters for 10 years, the country’s government also became better able to respond, which left him wondering, “What next?”

During one of their last disaster responses, the national team visited a Christian friend, Murod.* He craved Christian fellowship since he had not seen another believer for two-and-a-half years. The team wanted to help him somehow, and they discovered the village desperately needed clean water.

People were constantly sick with diseases like typhoid, hepatitis A and

giardia because of drinking dirty water from polluted irrigation canals and streams—the only sources of water to which many have access.

One villager told Warrior that his wife was discouraged—she had given birth to three babies in the past three years, and each one had died.

“If we can get them clean drinking water, we can change everything for them,” Warrior says.

With the help and training of a relief organization, Warrior’s disaster relief team transitioned to digging wells in 2009. It has been satisfying to “have the opportunity to make the connection between clean drinking water and the Water of Life,” he says.

Putting a well in Murod’s village was difficult—they had to dig 30 holes to find water—but today, there are nine wells. All that time spent digging provided many witnessing opportunities in the village.

Now, a small church meets at Murod’s house. Warrior’s team is encouraged by the continual strength and joy of Murod and his wife, Mubhabbat,* despite the persecution and ridicule they receive from their village.

Warrior is thankful for the U.S. churches—like Park Hill; West Monroe, La., First; Fort Smith, Ark., Grand Ave. and Clinton, Miss., Morrison Heights—that partner with him and his team to provide support and send volunteer teams.

“There are people who are followers of Jesus today who wouldn’t have been without those volunteers coming,” he says.

Warrior is also grateful the faithful givers to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and Cooperative Program have “stuck with him” during his 17 years overseas. Although Warrior’s team has made about 2,000 gospel presentations every year for the past three years, it takes a long time for someone to become a Christian.

But these are exciting times, he says: “I’m seeing people who are coming to faith in Christ. Not every day, but it’s happening.”

Warrior and his team have planted five house churches that still meet today. In the past two years, they distributed more than 6,000 gospel DVDs. Last year, with the assistance of the Lottie Moon offering and Cooperative Program funding, the well-digging team installed 19 wells and provided clean drinking water for about 10,000 people.

“God has done that because we’ve been faithful, and the peoples in the pews back in America have been faithful to keep giving and to keep sending ... and the result is there’s a church here, and there wasn’t when I came,” Warrior said, seeking prayer for:

- More opportunities to share the Gospel, and for the country’s key leaders to come to accept the truth of the Gospel of Christ.
- Protection on their team, and that they would keep loving, respecting and supporting each other.
- The Warrior family as they are separated by distance—their four children live in four different countries. Only their youngest is at home with them.

Find resources for churches at imb.org/offering to learn more about and promote the Lottie Moon offering.

*Names changed

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December 11, 12

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December 11, 12, 13

Baptist Children's Home, Owasso:

Drive-Thru Christmas Pageant, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Baptist Children's Home, Oklahoma City, will not have a Christmas Pageant this year.



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