

FAITH @ HOME

Week of December 22, 2019

Fourth Sunday in Advent

ADULT AND SMALL CHILD

READ: Matthew 1:18-25

REFLECT: If your child is in worship this Sunday, they'll hear that "the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way." (Matthew 1:18, NRSV) The Gospel of Matthew has one version of the story where the Gospel of Luke has another. Most versions of this story, including those in children's Bibles, combine the two stories into one. Share this story from your child's Bible at bedtime each night. If your child has more than one Bible, read a different version each night. Talk about what both Mary and Joseph did to welcome their baby Jesus, including that they named him Emmanuel, which means "God with us."

Ponder together: What does it feel like when God is with us? Does it feel like joy? Or peace? What does that feel like in our bodies? How does it feel in or bodies when we're not sure God is here? Notice that it may feel differently for each child or even each adult. Encourage your child to be curious about this feeling of closeness to God. Invite them to ask grandparents, Sunday School teachers and church friends how it feels for them.

RESPOND: Remember way back to the beginning of Advent when we wondered what we could do live honorably and fill other people with joy and peace. Reflect on what your child or your family did that made it feel like God is with us. Pray that each person felt the peace, joy and harmony in their bodies. Even if you didn't choose the simpler practice suggested in the first week of Advent, focus part of your dinner conversation as a family each night on the question, "What could we do tomorrow that might help someone feel like God is with them?" You may even choose as a family to carry this practice into the twelve days of Christmas.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ELSA ANDERS COOK



Elsa Anders Cook is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ who has served churches in New York, Maine, Washington, and Pennsylvania. She volunteers at church now while supporting her husband in his service as a Major in the United States Army. Together, they have two little ones. She blogs at cookingwithelsa.org.

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ADULT AND ELEMENTARY

READ: Matthew 1:18-25

REFLECT: Sometimes the most important and best things in our lives don't happen in the way people expect them to. Last week we talked some about time, and how we can feel like we want God to hurry up, to fix things, to come and be with us right now. Mary and Joseph are definitely feeling this way when they find out about Jesus' coming into their family. And just like God always does, God comes to soothe their hearts and minds--especially Joseph's, in a really special way.

God knows what our hearts need to hear and when to speak. God is always looking for ways to tell us how loved we are, that things are going to be ok, that we don't have to be afraid. Dreams are one way God does that. The stories in the Bible are another. The way our family and friends love us and support us is even one more way God loves us.

When things happen in unexpected ways or when life seems to go upside down for a minute--- or for a while--trust and believe that God is right beside you in all of it, and is looking for ways large and small, ordinary and extraordinary, to speak peace to your heart.

RESPOND: Talk about a time when your family has navigated the unexpected and how God showed up in the midst of it.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: RACHEL JONES



Rachel Jones is the associate editor for Forward Movement. She and her husband live on a farm with a dog, too many cats, several rabbits, and a flock of very opinionated chickens.

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Fourth Sunday in Advent

ADULT AND YOUTH

READ: Matthew 1:18-25

REFLECT: Like we talked about in last week's devotion, leaning into the season of Advent also includes a fair amount of waiting – and waiting isn't something we humans are necessarily good at all of the time. Even though you're probably out of school by this point (and relishing in the glory of winter break), it doesn't mean the rest of life has stopped. Perhaps you recently lost a loved one. Perhaps you're overwhelmed by injustice in the world around you. Perhaps you just don't understand how or why you're supposed to hold onto hope when darkness seems to suck up every ounce of light. But as Matthew reminds us in this passage of Jesus' birth, the name Emmanuel means "God is with us." And just as God was with Mary and Joseph when they didn't understand the specifics of being conceived by the Holy Spirit, God is with us today when we don't understand the specifics of our situations. God is with us and God cares. God is with us and God calms. God is with us and God brings peace, even when the world feels topsy-turvy around us.

RESPOND: Light and place a candle in the center of your table to remember that God is with you, then answer the following questions as a group: 1. What are you waiting on right now in your life? What are we waiting on as a family, as a nation, as followers of Christ? 2. If Jesus really is Emmanuel – God is with us – then how would realizing that God is with you change a hard situation? How, if at all, would it look different?

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: CARA MEREDITH



Cara Meredith is a writer and speaker from Seattle, Washington. Her memoir, *The Color of Life: A White Woman's Journey Toward Love and Justice*, released in 2019 (Zondervan). You can connect with her on her website at <https://www.carameredith.com/>.

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Fourth Sunday in Advent

ADULT AND ADULT

READ: Romans 1:1-7

REFLECT: Just as Paul called himself a servant of Jesus Christ, we are servants of Jesus Christ too. And just like Paul, we have been set apart for the Gospel of God to tell the world about Jesus. We are called to tell the world that our Lord and Savior was born precisely as prophesied in the scriptures. Jesus is the son of God, the word of God, wrapped in flesh. Through Jesus' birth we are empowered to share his testimony with others, so that they too can accept and love Jesus. The Gospel is good news to all people as all of us are called by God to be saints. Unfortunately, while many are called many won't accept the call to salvation. Some will reject the good news Jesus came to give. However, that doesn't negate our responsibility, our call, to share the Lord Jesus Christ to unbelievers.

RESPOND: When is the last time you shared Jesus Christ with an unbeliever? Unfortunately, many Christians are too intimidated to tell others about the Lord. Yet, we don't have to be intimidated or afraid. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit empowers us to share the Gospel. Ask the Holy Spirit to open opportunities to share Jesus with someone this week. Maybe you can invite one of your neighbors to dinner or invite a co-worker to lunch. If you ask the Holy Spirit for an opportunity to share the Gospel, God is faithful and just and will answer that prayer. Are you ready to share the Gospel this week? Go forth and tell the story.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ARETHA L. GRANT



Aretha Grant serves her local church as a Bible teacher and elder. She loves writing and is the author of *Overcomer: 25 Keys to Walking Victoriously*. Aretha resides in Hagerstown, MD with her husband and two youngest children. You can read Aretha's blog at www.arethagrants.com.

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