



ADVENT STUDY

*Keeping Our Hearts
Focused on Jesus*

-for kids-

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Contents

How to use this e-book	4
Teaching the Bible to your children	5
Pre-teens and teenagers	8
Young Children	10
Tips	11
Ideas to help your children memorizing Scripture	13
Activities to help your children memorizing Scripture	15
Week 1- Hope	17
Week 2- Love	25
Week 3- Joy	30
Week 4- Peace	40
GMG Children's Resources Team	42

How to use this e-book

This e-book has been created to help you share your **Advent: Keeping Our Hearts Focused on Jesus** daily SOAP with your children. For each week you have:

1. Weekly SOAP chart –

The SOAP chart in this e-book is the same as the one in the GMG Study Guide.

2. Memory verse –

You and your children can memorize the weekly verses together using our lovely cards in the NIV translation. You can print out the verse and use it as an extra activity by having your kids to decorate it. You can also make additional copies and display them in various places around your home to help you and your children memorize them..

3. Activity-

We have provided fun activities and crafts for each day of the week to give you some ideas of how you can make spending time in God's Word a special time with your children and help them remember what they have learned.

4. Activity for Toddlers –

Alternate activities to do if you have toddlers around.

5. Prayer –

End your activity with a prayer related to the SOAP and lesson.

It shouldn't take you more than 30 minutes each day to go through the SOAP and the activities with your children. You can have your own quiet time before you have devotions with your children, and then plan some special time for digging in the Scripture with your kids.

Teaching the Bible to your children

Proverbs 22:6

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

We moms have a joyful responsibility to transmit our faith to our children. God says that *faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17). Our children will not always have us around to guide them. We must instill in them the understanding and practice of choosing the right path, so they will glorify God when they make their own decisions. How can we help them do that? By teaching them God's Word.

Numerous things are commanded of Christian mothers in God's Word:

1. **Availability** – morning, noon, and night (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)
2. **Involvement** – interacting, discussing, thinking, and processing life together (Ephesians 6:4)
3. **Discipline** – teaching the fear of the Lord, drawing the line consistently, lovingly, firmly (Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews 12:5-11; Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15-17)
4. **Training** – helping a child to develop skills and discover his/her strengths (Proverbs 22:6) and spiritual gifts (Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12)
5. **Teaching** – the Scriptures and a biblical worldview (Psalm 78:5-6; Deuteronomy 4:10; Ephesians 6:4)

So, how do we, as moms, start to teach our children the Bible?

1. Live the Bible Out Loud - It is impossible to give away something you do not have. Start with simple things, like showing love, kindness, and generosity. If your kids see you finding ways to "be a blessing," it will become a natural and normal way of life for them also.

2. Be their model – Allow them to see you reading and studying God's Word. Have some children's Bibles next to your own Bible so you can read together. Memorize Scripture; tell them about your meditations in the Word.

3. Be intentional – look for times to be in the Word. When you set an actual schedule, it adds significance to your Bible moments. Look for occasions to put the Bible into action as well.

4. Design a family Bible study routine – it is as easy as sharing your quiet time with them. They will surprise you! Having a schedule makes it predictable for them and they will be waiting for the moment they study with mommy.

5. Relax and be natural - You don't have to be the all-knowing teacher. You are just a regular mom talking to your kids about Jesus.

6. Be a good story teller – Be faithful to the events in the Bible because they really did happen, but also remember to make them fun for your children: Act the stories out, put voices, use puppets, visuals, dress up...

7. Open and close your time around the Bible with a prayer. This gives you an opportunity to teach your children how to pray. Allow them to lead in prayer and take turns if you have more than one child. Do not force a child to lead if he or she isn't comfortable in doing so.

8. Be creative - personalize this special time to fit your individual family. Do your kids have a favorite meal or restaurant? Do they like ice cream or fruit smoothies? Go to these places sometimes and discuss what you've learned together. Turn your Bible time into a pajama party or an inside home camp.

9. Repeat, repeat, repeat – This is an excellent way to have children learn something, especially with younger children. Build on what they already know. Children learn from what they are familiar with and add to the familiar area.

10. Use (well) the media – Look for godly websites that can help you grow as a mom who wants to teach God’s Word to your kids. Compile some research to find videos, movies, songs... appropriate for your child’s age that are full of Scripture and encourage a godly lifestyle. We will provide you with some resources at the end of this e-book.

11. Make it short and concise – Remember the rule of one minute of full attention for each year: if your child is 7 years old he will give you 7 minutes of undivided attention, 2 minutes if he is 2 years old, 12 minutes if he is 12 years old... Focus on the key point you are encouraging them to learn and begin there. Focusing and setting reasonable goals is wise when learning/teaching God's word.

12. Use crafts and activities - This really helps to fix in their minds what they are learning. Sometimes crafts are as easy as drawing a picture to illustrate the reading. Not a crafty mom? Do not worry; we will help you with that!

Pre-teens and teenagers

Make no mistake it can be a difficult task to persuade our pre-teens and teenagers to remain or become interested in learning the word of God. Here are a few tips that may help when encouraging you older children to participate in The Dig!

1. **Allow them to have choices.** At this age they are competent in learning to make an appropriate and accountable choice. As a child develops educational skills such as math, reading, science, they too must be allowed to experience God first hand. They need to be encouraged to develop a personal relationship with Christ. They must learn to broaden their own private prayer life. Request they pray to be lead by God, through the Dig, in what they can do to help with their direct community; such as, walk an elderly persons dog, take a teen with special needs to the mall, baby-sit for a stressed out mother, help grandpa clean the barn or feed the animals, or visit a nursing facility. Some of these things they may need your assistance but keep that undercover. If you make a few suggestions to a pre-teen or teenager they will be enthusiastic in letting you know their ideas.

2. Once they have prayed and ask for the Lords guidance **honor any reasonable request** even if you believe you had better ideas. Remember they are developing ears to hear God and just as we have made mistakes in hearing God so will they. They may not make the most proficient choice, but they need to see you energized and positive about their choice. We encourage you to trust the seeds, you have already planted, have begun to take Godly roots and watch them grow!

3. **Make the Scriptures become alive!** All teens love action whether it be video games, movies, dancing, singing, or leading they love to take direct action. Transmit the scripture of the Dig to zone in on something that is particularly personal to them. Something that is currently going on in their life, in doing so, this allows them to see a book and God who is alive! Let them know God's word isn't boring, nor is our God! Teens and pre-teens may question everything you have taught them. Yes, even the authenticity of the word of God

and Jesus Christ himself! The more real God's word becomes in their lives the more positive the outcome. Live Gods word out loud, it will have an everlasting outcome!

4. You may be a homeschooling parent of children at various ages. Rather than make a preteen or teenager participate in making a craft that he/she deems primary **ask them to help find resources to instill this scripture in the younger children in your home.** They will learn more than you could imagine by the research. They also could experience leadership roles/teaching assistant skills by allowing them to create a lesson plan, once a week, over their favorite scripture. Another idea may be to allow your teen to plan a celebration upon the completion of the study.

Young children

Young children can be taught the same Bible truths we teach older children, just in smaller pieces. Young children learn by repetition and in small pieces (Isaiah 28:9-10). Repeat one simple Bible truth in every activity during a lesson. The gateway to a young child's heart is through the five senses. The goal is to introduce the Bible through their outward person to their heart. Visual images will command a child's attention. Touch, expresses love and comfort. Something that tastes good will satisfy their hunger and thirst. The use of a pleasant scent, is an unusual and effective way to demonstrate a verbal message.

The most wonderful part about teaching the Bible to young children is that we have a great and mighty Helper, the Holy Spirit. He will bear witness to the Bible truths you teach. He will gently speak to the hearts of your children. So, make prayer a crucial part of your teaching skills. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. **John 14:26~NIV**

Teaching preschoolers is challenging but it is FUN! Realize that **each child is different**, and do not expect them to sit down for an hour without moving. It won't happen. Love is the number one important ingredient in teaching them. They will know that you love them.

When **telling a story**, do it wholeheartedly, do not use monotones with children. Use your imagination and live the story with them as you tell it. **DO NOT READ IT DIRECTLY FROM A PAPER. BORING!** As you tell a story, look at your children. You can discern if you have captivated their attention. If you are a passionate storyteller they will be passionate listeners. Remember you are modeling a life, God is entrusting you with an awesome responsibility! A Godly mother is the most significant person that will ever be in the life of a child.

Crafts are a wonderful way to teach children. It gives them an opportunity to do something with what you have just taught them. Whether it is stringing beads for a necklace, or coloring a picture, what they do will reinforce what you are teaching them.

Tips

1. Vary the activities – Many short activities are better than lengthy ones, and altering types of activities, such as stories, and then crafts. Another idea is to change locations of activities, such as at a table, on the floor, outside on a bench, or in chairs. You will have the rest of the day to talk to your children, about what they have been learning, and memorize the Bible verse(s) for the week. Help them remember, in as few words as possible, how they can apply the Bible truths to their lives. Pray for opportunity to arise that you can apply the scripture throughout your daily routine.

2. Center in on characters, more than facts – Children this age remember names and people more than mere facts. So, center the story in the characters, who said what, how they were feeling, how they answered, why were they feeling happy/sad/upset/excited, etc...

3. Use picture Bibles and story related children's books when available –They always need something to see while they are listening. Use as many visual resources as you can: drawings, flannel boards, cards...

4. Play - Toddlers love to play, so incorporating imagination and excitement into your Bible time helps little ones develop a desire to learn. Use action figures to reenact the story of David and Goliath, or homemade musical instruments when study the Psalms. Make simple and easy games to draw their attention into the Bible truth you are attempting to convey.

5. Illustrate the memory verse - Make a simple card of the verse and put it on display in a place where your kids can see it all the time: in the family room, next to the bed/crib, at the play room... You can alternate text and drawings. Read the verses out loud and let them repeat the words.

6. Do not push! – They are very young!!! It is acceptable if there is a time, your child is not interested in learning. Let them find their own pace. With encouragement, your child, will gain interest.

7. Listen to Scripture Set to Music – There are heaps of Christian songs and resources for young children. Just look for the ones your children will enjoy most. If they enjoy what they are listening to they usually retain it quickly..

Ideas to help your children memorizing scripture

Recite

Repeat

Remember

Retain

1. Begin by dividing the Scripture into manageable portions; Starting small and building not only teaches your child God's Word but encourages self confidence.
2. It is important to keep it fun and enjoyable. If your child experiences defeat or becomes overwhelmed, do not force them at that moment to go any further. Stop and try again a bit later.
3. Keep in mind if you have more than one child not to compare their progress. Learning anything should be individualized. Acknowledge the fact children learn at different paces.
4. Reward each child by his own progress measured by his/her own ability.
5. It is essential to show the child where the passage is in their Bible. Buy them a multicolored pack of highlighters. Allow them to highlight each memorization verse. As they learn it you may want to write in the date of memorization.
6. Speak the verse in the child's presence throughout your day. While waiting or in transport are excellent times to practice the Scripture with your child. As you are preparing meals have the Scripture written on large index cards and go over it a few times. Keep it on the fridge or if you have a chalk board painted spot, wall, or frame keep it written on it.
7. God's Word is faultless and there is no need to reduce it to bare bones. Quote and learn it as it is written. If there are words that the child does not understand Google it or look it up in a Bible dictionary.
8. Recite the book, chapter and verse before and after reciting the memorization verse.

9. Buy an index card box and let each child decorate their own. It will be gratifying for them the more cards they accumulate. As each card is memorized reward them with a prize. Something as simple as a sticker is exciting to a child if he/she has earned it. Maybe after they have memorized 5 verses take them to get ice cream or to something special at your local library.

Activities to help your children memorize scripture

1. Act out the verse

Have your children help you come up with movements to act out the words of the Bible verse as they say them.

2. Write a Song Using the Verse

It can be as easy as you want, use a melody that your children know.

3. Take Away

Write one word of the verse on index cards. Display all the cards in order. Remove one card and have your children say the verse by turns. Then take away two, three... until they can say it without the cards.

4. Missing Word

Write each word of the verse on separate index cards. To make it harder you can include some words that don't belong in the verse. Tape the word cards to a wall or door in random order so that the words can be seen by the children. Write the Bible verse in large letters with some words missing. Draw lines where the missing words belong.

Have your children take turns picking a word from the board and placing it where they think the word might belong. Once the whole verse has been revealed, you can start again, but leave out different words.

5. "What's the Verse?"

Write each word of the verse on an index card. Make sure that the writing doesn't show through to the other side. Mix up the cards and divide them between your children. They take turns running up to the front of the room, taping their cards in order to spell out the verse. If there is only one child you can make 3 piles of cards and let him/her choose one each time.

6. "Words in Order" (for younger children)

Cut your index cards into different sizes each a little bigger than the other. Write the Bible verse on the cards in order, either from smallest to largest or largest to smallest.

Depending on your children's age you can use the same size cards and just number each card in order of the words in the verse. Have them place the cards in order to figure out the verse.

7. Hide and Seek

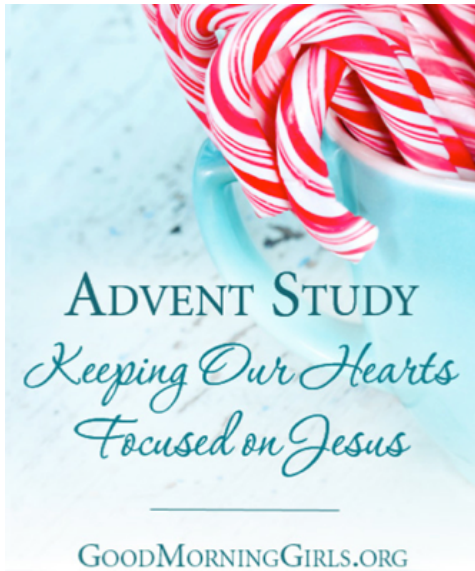
Write all the words from the Bible verse on separate index cards and hide them around the room. (Tape them under chairs and tables, hang them from the ceiling with thread, etc.) On the word "go" have your children look for the cards. Help them place them in the correct order and say the verse.


8. Drinking Straws and Word Cards Bible Verse Review Game

Write all the words from the Bible verse on separate index cards. Give each child a straw and have them spread out the cards in front of them so that all the cards are showing. Children have to place the straw in their mouths and try to put all the cards in order to make the verse without using their hands.

Week 1

Week 1 Reading Plan:



Week 1	Hope	
Sunday	Luke	1:26-38
SOAP		
Monday	John	1:1-4
Tuesday	John	1:9-12
Wednesday	Jeremiah	33:14-15
Thursday	Isaiah	60:19-20
 Friday	Romans	15:12-13

Memory Verse:



Monday- Starting at the Beginning

When you read any story, the best place to start is at the beginning! We learn so much about the people, places, and things that the author wants us to know by starting there. The same is true when it comes to the story of Christmas. We want to start at the beginning! God was in the beginning, for He is the beginning. God was not created—He just was! His Word spoke creation into being. He said, “Let there be light” —and with HIS WORD—it was. He spoke the whole universe into place. All life began with God, because He is the beginning. Today, as we focus our hearts on the reason for the season, Jesus’ birthday, we must start at the beginning. We can have hope because, just as God was in the beginning of time, He is in our beginning too.... and our middle... and our end! He is the author of our lives, writing a story far better than we ever could, and because of that we can KNOW that our ending can be “Happily Ever After” in the arms of our King—when we allow Him to become the Savior of our lives.

Activity-

Use today’s activity time to simply explain the concept of this Advent study to your children. Make sure to share your EXCITEMENT to be doing this Christmas study together as a family to help focus your hearts on the REAL meaning of the Christmas season: Jesus! If you haven’t already, make a family activity out of assembling your advent wreath/candles.

*Recommended reading for young children: What is Christmas? By Michelle Medlock Adams

Toddler Activity -

Activity- Children can participate in the Advent activity above with assistance!

Prayer-

Lord, thank you so much that you are the beginning. Thank you that you have my best interest in mind and that you will always be with me. Help me to trust you with the story of my life, knowing that you will write an amazing story using me!

Tuesday – A Hope We Can Count On

Jesus came to the world that He had made, and the world did not want Him. How sad it would be, to love someone so much, and yet not be wanted by them. He didn't just come to the world; He died on the cross for the world. The world includes you and me. There is great hope in today's verses though! They say that anyone who will receive Him, that is Jesus, that they will be God's children. It is so simple. We have to know that we are sinners and we can't be with God because of our sin. We believe that Jesus is God's son, and that He died for us! That is us receiving what He did for us! When we do that, we can be God's children! God gives us great Moms and Dads here on Earth—but HE is the BEST DADDY in the whole, wide world, and He wants YOU to belong to HIM! That is a HOPE we can COUNT on! That is why we celebrate Christmas: Jesus had to come to Earth as a baby in a manger, so that He would grow up and NEVER MAKE A WRONG CHOICE, and then He would die on the cross for the sins of the whole world. It is the best gift anyone could ever get, and He offers it to EVERYONE!

Activity-

Hand Print Earth

Materials:

- Blue construction paper
- Green paint and paintbrush
- Scissors

Instructions:

Cut a circle out of a piece of blue construction paper. You can make a circle by tracing a plate onto blue construction paper. Put a green handprint in the center of the blue construction paper circle by painting your child's hand green and pressing it onto the paper. Use the paintbrush to paint a few sections of green onto the blue construction paper circle, around the handprint to make it look more like earth. Have your child write John 3:16 around the edge of the "earth" to remind them why Jesus came!

Prayer-

God, thank you for loving me so much that you gave your life for mine. Thank you for giving me Hope that I can live with you for eternity.

Toddler Activity -

Children can do the above Advent Activity with assistance.

Wednesday- God Keeps His Promises

People make all kinds of promises. Sometimes a promise isn't kept, and that can make us very sad. However, God made us a promise all the way back in the Old Testament that He was going to send us Jesus. He even gave us clues, like a game of "Guess Who" so that we would know when His promise was happening. God never breaks a promise! We know that if God says He is going to do something in His Word, He will do it. We know this to be true because we see so many promises of Jesus in scripture—and Jesus really came! We can have hope that God will do all the things He promised, because He has kept so many promises to us, especially that of sending His son Jesus.

Activity-

Pocket Promises

Supplies:

- 2 paper plates
- Glue or tape
- Markers or crayons
- Small pieces of paper

Have your child cut one of the paper plates in half; they will only use one of the halves. Place glue just around the edges of one half paper plate (do not put glue on the cut edge) to the other whole paper plate to form a "pocket". They can also tape their pocket on if this is easier than waiting for the glue to dry. Have your child decorate their plate pocket with markers, crayons and stickers. Write "Keeping My Promises" on the plate. Then have them think of promises that they would like to keep. Parents can help your child write these promises on slips of paper and place them in their pockets. Let your child draw a promise out from time to time so they will be reminded to keep their promises. Tell them that even though sometimes we forget to keep our promises, God always keeps His. You can also take this a step further for older children and let them think of promises that God has made and write these on slips of paper as well. They can make a second plate pocket and label it "God's Promises". They can then be reminded that God always keeps His promises.

Prayer-

Thank you, God, for keeping your promises. Thank you for sending your son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Thank you for giving us hope in all the promises of Your Word. Amen.

Toddler Activity-

Activity: Toddlers can do the pocket craft too even if they don't fully understand what a promise is, they will still enjoy pulling pieces of paper out of their pocket. Parents can write short promises like smile, be kind, and share on their pieces of paper.

Thursday – Jesus is the Light of Christmas

Christmas is filled with lights! We have lights for our trees, on our houses, on the bushes—everywhere we look, there are LIGHTS! Some white, some colorful! Each day this week, we have lit our very first candle for Advent, the candle that represents Jesus being the light to men. Our lives are so dark without Jesus! He is a light that is everlasting—that means FOREVER! When we have Jesus in our lives, He lightens our path, helping to keep us out of sin and darkness. He helps us shine His light to others, so that their lives might be lighter too! How can we shine the light of Jesus into the dark world of those around us?

Activity-

Light of the World Candles

Supplies for each Candle

- Small to medium wide-mouthed jar such as a baby food, salsa, or canning jar
- Glitter
- Tissue paper (assorted colors)
- White craft glue
- Small piece of sponge (around 1/2 to 1 inch square) or sponge paintbrush
- Clothespin (optional)
- Tea candle or votive candle (depending on size of jar)
- Ribbon

Cut ribbons long enough to tie around the neck of the jar for each of the children's candles. Write "Light of the World" or "Everlasting Light" on the ribbon where it can be read after tied around the jar. Set aside so children can add them after their candles are completed. Tear or cut small pieces of the tissue paper. Since the glue will be used with a decoupage sort of technique, thin it first by mixing in a plastic cup with a little water. Clip the piece of sponge with a clothespin. Using the "sponge brush," cover the outside of the jar with the thinned glue. Before glue dries, cover this with bits of colored

tissue paper. Keep the tissue paper layering thin so that the light shines through well. While the tissue paper is still wet with the glue, roll the jar in a plate of glitter. Add the candle, light, and enjoy.

Prayer-

Jesus, help us to shine and reflect your light to those around us! As we look at all the twinkling lights of Christmas, let us remember that you are the true light of the world!

Toddler Activity-

Activity- Toddlers can do the Advent activity listed above with assistance.

Friday- Jesus had a Family Tree- Just Like You and Me!

Who is in your family tree? Families are filled with lots of different people. Jesus also had a family tree! Jesus could track his family all the way back to the beginning, and his family included some really neat people! One of those was King David and his Father Jesse! It was so important that people would know that Jesus was the great, great, great, great, great, great (well, you get it!) grandson of Jesse! It showed that He was the Savior, the one who would come and save us from our sins! Many prophets told that the Messiah would come from this family—and because Jesus did, we can be filled with HOPE knowing that Jesus is who He said He was!

Activity-

Family Tree

Supplies:

- White paper
- Shades of green paper
- Glue
- Markers or Crayons

Help your child draw a tree with branches on the white paper and color. Next cut out small leaf shapes about 2" long from green paper. Have your child write their family members names on the leaves and then glue them on the tree. Don't worry about putting the names in any kind of order like a real family tree. The idea is to just help the children think about how many people are related to them. Help them to imagine how big Jesus' family tree must be.

Prayer-

Jesus, thank you that you gave us proof of who you are in ways that we can understand like your family tree. Help us to believe in you and thank you for the hope that we can have in you.

Toddler Activity-

Activity- Toddlers can make a family tree as well, with help from their parents in writing. Then allow little ones to glue the leaves on the tree.

Christmas around the World

Week One- Merry Christmas Around the World!

Did you know that Christians celebrate Christmas all around the world? There are lots of different countries where Jesus' birth is celebrated. Do you know how to say "Merry Christmas" in another language? Maybe you know someone from another country who could teach you how to say "Merry Christmas" in his language. If you don't, here are some!

Spanish: Feliz Navidad

Portuguese: Feliz Natal

Croatian: Sretan Božić

Danish: Glædelig Jul

French: Joyeux Noël

Greek: Kala Christougenna!

Italian: Buon Natale

German: Frohe Weihnachten

Latvian: Priecīgs Ziemassvētkus

Afrikaans: Geseende Kersfees

Dutch: Vrolijk Kerstfeest

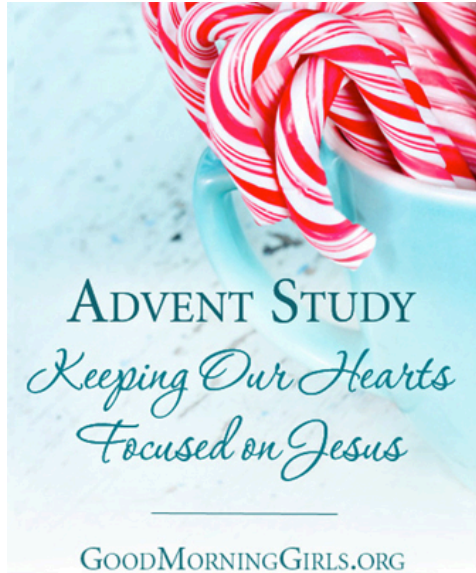
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Can you place in a map where these languages are spoken? Look up the flags of 2-3 of these countries and write how they say Merry Christmas. Now... try to say it! Have some fun!

Let's pray for the countries that can't celebrate Christmas. Pray for the children who will have no hope nor joy this Christmas because they don't know about Jesus. Could you pray also for missionaries who serve in foreign countries? Christmas can be quite a lonesome time when you are away from your family and friends!


Week 2

Week 2 Reading Plan:



Week 2	Love	
Sunday	Matthew	1:18-25
	Luke	2:1-7

SOAP

Monday	1 John	4:7-8
Tuesday	Mark	12:28-30
Wednesday	Psalm	119:105-106
Thursday	Zephaniah	3:17
 Friday	John	12:35-36

Memory Verse:

THE LORD YOUR GOD IS WITH YOU,
THE MIGHTY WARRIOR WHO SAVES.
He will take great delight in you;
IN HIS LOVE HE WILL NO LONGER REBUKE YOU,
BUT WILL REJOICE OVER YOU
with singing.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17 

Monday- God is Love

God is love, and He is what allows us to love others. It is through His love that He sent Jesus to come to this earth. God is our example of what love really is. It is giving and not selfish. Jesus helps us love others this way, because we don't often want to treat others that way. It is hard to give and to think of others before ourselves. Yet, Jesus lived in Heaven, and chose to come to Earth for us because He loved us! Even though it is hard, we need to love others the way God has shown us to love: by giving and thinking of others before ourselves. Love is a choice. Other people will know that we are Christians by the way we love!

Activity-

Encouragement Cards

You will need card stock or construction paper, a fine-tip Sharpie marker, and paint. Fold your paper in half. Open to the center. Help your child paint their hand the color of their choosing and put a handprint on the right-hand side of the paper. At the top of the paper write, "My hand may be small, but my heart is FULL of love for you." Then at the bottom have your child write their own prayer for the person they are gifting the card to. If older children would like to write a longer prayer, they may need to put the hand on the left, and write their prayer on the right. Once the hand dries; decorate the front of the card as desired.

Prayer-

God, thank you for loving me so much, that you would choose to send Jesus to come and die for me. Help to me to choose to love others, so that they might come to know Jesus.

Toddler Activity-

Activity- Small children can do this activity too.

Tuesday – Love God with ALL of You!

The greatest command that God has ever given was for us to love Him. He doesn't just want us to love Him a little, like we might a favorite toy, show, or meal. He wants us to love Him with EVERYTHING we have—ALL of our HEART, SOUL, MIND, and STRENGTH. Sometimes, it is hard to make choices in life, and even harder when we are trying to please God. However, we can ask ourselves: will doing this show God that I love Him? Today, we want to honor and love God through our thoughts, decisions, words, and actions. What can you do today that will show others that you love God first and above all else?

Activity-

Jesus Name Paper Chain- You will need construction paper in either purple and silver or red and green. You will also need tape. Cut your paper into stripes to make a paper chain. Have older children research the various names of Jesus and write them on their chains. They may like to try writing in calligraphy. When you are done making the paper chain, say a prayer using all of His names expressing your love for Him.

*Note if you are looking for a good resource for the names of Jesus, check out <http://www.easyfunschool.com/article1679.html>. Here you will find the names of Jesus along with the corresponding verse.

Prayer-

God, we love you. Help us to love you first, before anything or anyone else. Help us to choose you first in our lives.

Toddler Activity-

Activity- Smaller children can do the above Advent activity with assistance.

Wednesday – A Map and A Lamp

Let's pretend we are going on a camping trip. It takes us a long time to get to our camp site, and darkness has settled in. It would be important that someone would remember to bring a lantern, or a lamp, to help us see in the dark. Lots of bad things can happen when you walk in complete darkness—you could hurt yourself, you might not see something dangerous, you might lose your group—the possibilities are endless! However, if you are walking with a lamp, your path will be lit! You will know where you are going—maybe just the next step—but you will be able to see in front of you. This world can be a lot like a dark forest where we are on a trip. If we don't carry a lamp, we won't be able to see where we are going! God loves us so much that He gave us a light to see, and that is through His Bible. We should make a promise with God that we will use His Word to light our path, and that we will share His light with others so that they might be able to see how to get through this dark world, too. We also have to follow the instructions in the Bible to help us go the right way. The Bible is like a map and a lamp—it tells us where to go and lights the way to get there! When we read God's Word, He lights up our lives and we don't get lost!

Activity-

Bible Scavenger Hunt

Before the hunt, write out today's Bible verse. Then cut the words apart. You might want to write each word on an index card or cut paper into rectangles. You will also be hiding a family Bible. Give your child clues to find the cards. They should not be found in order. Have them find the Bible last. Once the bible is found they can look up the verse and use it as a map to put the words in order.

Prayer-

God, thank you for loving me enough to give me a light to help me see in this dark world. I want to promise to read your word, and follow the instructions you give me in the Bible. Help me to share the words you wrote with others so that they can have a lamp and map in their lives, too.

Toddler Activity- Hide your nativity pieces around your house. I'd keep it to one room with toddlers and keep it to their eye level. Hide their Children's Bible in another room. Once the nativity is found, help them locate their Children's Bible. Tell them that God gave us our Bibles as our guide. Read to them the story of His birth. We know of His great love because of this gift.

Thursday – He Loves You and is Always With You!

God is with us. All the time, He is with us. When we are happy, He is there and happy too! When we are sad, He is there to comfort us. He will protect us, He will be happy for us! When we are scared and worried, today's verse says that He will quiet us with His love. Think about a time when you were sad, and someone you loved wrapped you in their arms, held you close, and comforted you. Maybe they spoke soft, encouraging words to you and told you they would be with you. That is what God is like. He pulls us up into His lap and can quiet us on the inside when the world is screaming at us on the outside. This verse even says that God rejoices over us in singing. The next time you are worried, scared, or even happy, think about God taking you up in his lap, and whispering how much He loves you, and singing you your favorite song. He loves you THAT MUCH!

Activity-

You will need a photo of your child, markers or paint, Popsicle sticks, ribbon, music note stickers (or you can shape pipe cleaners into music notes). Glue four Popsicle sticks end-to-end at 90-degree right angles to create a square. (An adult may need to hot glue these to make them sturdy.) Paint the sticks or use markers to color them. Once dry, glue the photo to the underside. Have your child add music notes to the front and maybe the words "God rejoices over us in song." Add a ribbon to the back so that you can hang your ornament as a reminder of His deep love.

Prayer-

Jesus, thank you for loving me. Thank you for helping me when I am scared and being with me when I am happy. I am so glad you are always there. You are such a great God.

Toddler Activity Send a Hug to Jesus- Trace your child's hands on paper or use paint and put down their handprints. Cut out the hands. Use yarn and measure the length of your child's arm-span from wrist to wrist. Glue or tape a hand to each end of the ribbon. Have your little one leave Jesus a hug. Leave it under the nativity or in their Bible.

Friday- **Be a Light!**

Jesus was only with His disciples for a little while, and the Bible tells us that He is the light of the World. We can have Jesus living in our hearts if we ask Him to save us from our sins. When Jesus makes our heart His home, then we have the light living in us. We can share that light with others who don't have the light. Living in darkness all the time would be scary, and so many people don't know they are living in darkness without Christ! The moon reflects the light of the sun and shines the sun's light into our dark world each night. Like the moon, we can reflect the Son's light, Jesus' light, into a dark world. Each night, the moon is a reminder to us of the example we should be to others, showing Jesus' light and His love to a world that is dark.

Activity-

Paper towel roll candle- You will need paint, paper towel roll, glue, salt, and red or yellow construction paper. Cut your paper towel to the desired candle height. Paint the roll and then roll it in salt. Have child (or parent if help is needed) cut out a flame shape from the construction paper and glue it to the inside of your candle. Talk about how just like a candle shines light into a dark room, we can shine Jesus' light into a dark world.

Prayer-

Thank you for giving us the moon each night that helps us remember to be a light in the dark world. Help us to reflect your light and love to all of those that we meet, so that they won't be walking in a dark world, but that they can have THE LIGHT living in their hearts.

Toddler Activity- Toddlers can participate in the same activity with assistance.

Christmas Around the World

Week Two- Christmas in Australia

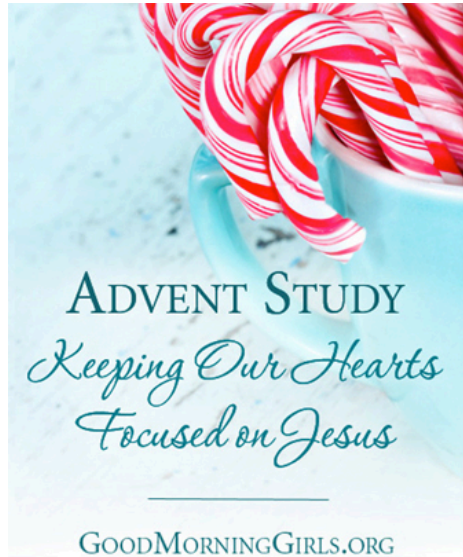
Week 2 – Christmas in Australia

In Australia, December 25 falls during summer vacation, so many of the country's Christmas festivities take place outdoors. The most popular event of the Christmas season is called Carols by Candlelight. People come together at night to light candles and sing Christmas carols outside. The stars shining above add to the sights and sounds of this wonderful outdoor concert. Oh! And don't forget to taste a Pavlova for dessert!

Do you like caroling? Grab your scarf and go with your family to sing Christmas carols to your neighbors. You can gather some of your friends too to sing together. If it is too cold outside, why don't you just play some Christmas music at home? Learn some new carols with your family and practice to sing them on Christmas Eve.

Week 3

Week 3 Reading Plan:



Week 3	Joy	
Sunday	Matthew	2:1-12
SOAP		
Monday	1 John	1:4-7
Tuesday	Nehemiah	8:10
Wednesday	Psalm	16:11
Thursday	Luke	2:10-14
GMG Friday	Hebrews	12:1-2

Memory Verse:

Luke 2:10

But the angel said to them,

Do not be afraid.

I bring you

good news

that will cause

great joy for

all the people.

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Monday – Big God- Big Joy!

If you have ever been to a big amusement park, mall, or store, it is easy to become scared. There is so much to see and do, and yet the place is SO BIG! It is so good to know that you are there with a grown-up, who is big enough to help you navigate your way through. The same is true about this world—it is a big place, and sometimes, might seem a little scary. However, we have an even BIGGER God, who is helping us get through this world. Sometimes, it is hard to be happy in a scary situation. Yet, we can have joy even when we are scared. Joy does not come from the happy things around us, but the BIG GOD that lives within us. Since He is love, and because we can love others through His love, we can have joy even when we are scared, because we can know that He will take care of us. Then, we can share that joy with others by loving them the way God loves us.

Activity-

Spreading the Joy of Jesus Activity

Distribute the chestnuts you and your children make with the recipe below.

Craft

Entire Family can Participate

Roast chestnuts, and your kids can decorate boxes or jars with the phrase "Jesus is Our Joy," and give them to neighbors, friends, or teachers. You can print this phrase and color-coordinate with matching ribbon.

"These chestnuts are roasted in the oven, not over an open fire...but they're still a scrumptious Christmas snack!"

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound chestnuts

1/4 cup butter

1 Tablespoon of Sugar

¼ teaspoon of cinnamon

DIRECTIONS:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).

Cut a 1/2 inch crisscross on the flat side of each nut. Be sure to cut through the shell to avoid the nut from exploding.

Place the nuts on a cookie sheet or in baking pan and bake for 25 to 30 minutes.

Allow to cool and peel off the shell.

Place nuts in a skillet with butter and sauté over high heat until the butter is melted and the chestnuts are well-coated. Place skillet in oven and roast until they are golden on top. Sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon.

Prayer-

Thank you, God for giving me joy, even when I might not be happy. Help me to love others and show them the joy that I have in my heart.

Toddler Activity-

Toddlers can do the Advent activity listed above with help.

Tuesday – Giving Out of What We Have Been Given

God has given us so much! We should be filled with joy because the Lord is Holy and He is in this day. We should not be sad- God is our strength and our joy! This verse talks about giving to others out of what he has given you, and by giving to others, we are filled with joy. God is full of giving- and that brings Him joy! We should also be givers! This is a season where many people are in need, and so many of us have so much that we can give. Think of something that you have that might be a blessing to someone else, and ask Jesus how you should give. When we follow God's example, we can be filled with His Joy.

Activity-

Spreading the Joy of Jesus

When we give thanks, we gain joy. Have your child choose a toy that makes them happy, and ask them to donate it to a charity or another child less fortunate to share the joy of Jesus, reinforcing once again the difference between Joy and Happiness. Whoever they share the item with, it will make the other child happy (for a short while), but the Joy in serving others lasts forever.

Encourage your child to smile while shopping. Smiles really are contagious! This doesn't seem like much, but it is a way of showing the lonely we care and Jesus cares that they exist.

Sing and have a Karaoke Night! I haven't seen a child yet who doesn't like to sing into a microphone, even a fake one!

Craft

Entire Family Can Help

String popcorn and dried cranberries, then place on tree or mantle.

Prayer-

Jesus, you are my strength and you are my joy. Help me to share your joy by giving to others out of what you have blessed me with.

Toddler Activity-

Toddlers can do this activity.

Wednesday – Joy Forever

There are some people that bring us so much joy simply by being with them! God is one of those people. God shows us the way that we should go, and when we are with Him, in His presence, we can have full joy- not just a little bit of joy, but FULL joy! True joy is so much better than happiness! We can feel joy even in our deepest sadness. It lasts because God is present with us- and God never leaves us. As we learn more about God, and know more about God – we find more and more joy, because we now realize He is with us all the time. We have joy FOREVER when we are one of God's children!

Activity-

Spreading the Joy of Jesus Activity

Encourage your child to surprise someone and do their chore. Allow your child to call his grandparents and sing “Joy to the World” to them. This is sure Joy on both parties! Nothing brings Joy like music—play Christmas music during your advent study. Don't forget to dance like David danced; your kids will love it and remember the joy of Jesus you shared with them!

Craft ~All Ages!

Make J-O-Y Cinnamon Ornaments

How to Make Cinnamon Ornaments:

What You will need:

- 3/4 cup of Applesauce
- 1 bottle (4.12 ounces) of Cinnamon

Just put it all in a bowl and mix it up. Spoon-mixing doesn't work—you must mix this with your hands and make sure it's completely mixed into a stiff, workable ball of dough. Then, on a large flat cookie sheet, roll it with a rolling pin until it is about 1/4-inch to 1/3-inch thickness. Use J-O-Y cookie cutter to make your shapes and use a wooden skewer to jab holes in the top (where they'll put their ribbon). If you

do not have letter cookie cutters you can assist them in shaping the letters by free-handing them with a plastic butter knife.

- Bake 2 1/2 hours at 200°F or lay the ornaments gently on a wire rack where they should be completely air dried in about 2 days.

- Once they're dry you can decorate them by gluing ribbon, sequins, etc, or you can leave them all natural and place a plaid ribbon or strip of burlap through the top for hanging.

Prayer-

Thank you, Jesus, that you are with us all the time, and that we can have your joy all the time. Thank you that joy is not about what we are going through, but about whom we are walking through it with—and that is always You, because You are always with us.

Toddler Activity-

Toddlers can do the Advent activity listed above.

Thursday – Good News that Brings Great Joy!

When the angels visited the shepherds, they had a message that was filled with GREAT JOY! The greatest thing to EVER happen had happened, and the angels were singing and sharing joy! The shepherds were so afraid when they saw the angels, but the fear quickly turned to joy! The joy in their hearts made them want to go and see and spend time with Jesus, and to see what God had shown them. Spending time with Jesus should bring you joy! This joy should be overflowing in your heart, so that you can be like the angels and go tell others about the good news!

Activity-

Spreading the Joy of Jesus Activity

Go Christmas Caroling!

Visit a nursing home and bring small gifts.

Sing: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

Craft~Entire Family Can Participate

Paint small canvases with Joy, Jesus, or scripture on them. Give them as gifts.

Prayer-

Thank you, God, for the joy of Jesus' birth. Help me to spend time with Jesus, and to share the joy that He brings to me with others.

Toddler Activity-

They can do the Advent Activity listed above.

Toddlers can also finger paint this project. Use Painters tape and spell the word JOY. Have them paint all around the tape. When it dries, peel the tape, and then give the painting to a friend or family member.

Friday- Running Our Race

The Christian life is like a race. It takes work and training to be able to run any race well. But, we have a cheerleading section of angels and saints in heaven who are cheering us on! Runners try to make sure they are light before a race; they practice and wear special clothes so that they can be as quick as possible. They don't carry around heavy backpacks filled with things they don't need! The same is true for our Christian life. We need to take off things, like sin, that keep us from running the race that God has set before us. Jesus is at the end of the race waiting for us! He planned the race, just like an author writes a book. He has run the race already, so He is the first place finisher! He is our joy and He is our ultimate prize!

Activity-

Make Christmas cards and hand deliver them. Don't forget the postman, the garbage collectors, firefighters, military, bus driver, cab driver, flight attendant, waitress, doctors...etc. Let your child decide who they would like to take their card to.

Activity ~Entire Family Can Participate!

Go on a winter nature walk and collect items for a nature table. Have your child or children race to certain items, such as acorns, nuts, pine cones, sticks, or whatever is available in your area. Create a winter nature table. Talk about the prizes they have collected during their walk, then take time to compare the activity to the GREATER race we run when we live for Jesus, and the ETERNAL prize that is available for those who believe

Prayer- Jesus, I thank you for running to the cross. Help me to keep my eyes on you as I run the race you have set before me.

Toddler Activity

Toddlers can do the Advent activity listed above.

Christmas Around the World

Week Three: Christmas in Europe

There are many countries in Europe. Let's take a look to some of their traditions for celebrating Christmas.

Ireland: Children go caroling on Christmas Eve...or even several evenings before...and stockings are hung by the fireplace or at the foot of the bed to be filled with toys and treats. On December 24th families place candles in the windows of their homes to show that they would have welcomed Mary and Joseph to their home. The light remains lighted until the 25th morning. December 26th is called "Boxing Day." It is when most families give gifts, also known as a "Christmas Boxes," in the form of money or food to trades people, such as milkmen or postmen or others who have served them during the year. This custom is unique to Great Britain.

Finland: .Natives of all Scandinavian Countries give food to birds at Christmas, since all the seeds, nuts and insects are covered with snow. Extra grain is left in the yard or garden for birds on Christmas Eve, and a sheaf containing an additional supply of nuts and seeds is often tied to a pole. Families celebrate the 24th eating ham, carrot, swede, and potato casserole, with a pickled beet salad called "Rosolli". They drink a mulled wine called Glögi and have a dessert called tortut (pinwheels). They visit the cemetery to show their respects and lay down candles. The view is serene and beautiful. They also attend the Christmas sauna, as sauna is Finnish!

Denmark: Each Sunday in Advent, guests are invited to join in the lighting of the candles on the Advent Crown. Adults drink a warming mixture of red wine, spices and raisins, and children drink a sweet fruit juice, something like strawberry. Everyone eats small cakes of batter which have been cooked over the fire in a special pan and dusted with icing sugar. The traditional Christmas dinner is: roast pork or duck with crackling; stewed red cabbage and small boiled potatoes fried in butter and sugar. For dessert they have a rice pudding mixed with chopped almonds and whipping cream. The cook also puts one whole almond into the serving bowl. The person who gets that wins a candy pig or a piece of chocolate.

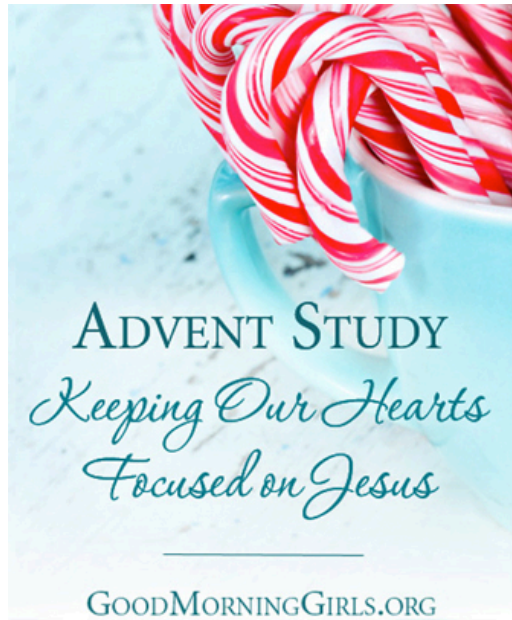
France: In Alsace tradition is to eat roasted turkey. They celebrate Christmas with breads, lots of cookies and Christmas tree. In Provence, an area of southern France, they don't have a Christmas tree, but a big Nativity set with a lot of "santons", Christmas clay figures and prepare the "crèche", the Christmas crib or manger. It represents a village with a manger where stays the Christ child. He is surrounded by a donkey and an ox. Shepherds and even the wise men are represented as well. The entire family helps bring in the Yule Log, which must be large enough to burn from Christmas Eve until New Year's Day. They have the tradition to eat 12 desserts at Christmas Eve, including nougats, and varied dried fruits (walnuts, hazelnuts, raisins & dried figs).

Hungary: The main celebrations take place on Christmas Eve. The evening is known as *Szent-este*, or "Holy Evening." Children do not hang up stockings to be filled. Instead, they get their best boot, polish it, and then put it on the windowsill be filled up with sweets and small presents. In the countryside, children dress up in traditional folk costumes and go from house to house, knocking on the door. They ask to be allowed to tell the Christmas story. They are rewarded with a toys, sweets, or small instruments as a gift.

Make a passport! Cut one construction paper sheet in half. Fold them to form 4 "pages". Put your name in the first one along with the words CHRISTMAS PASSPORT. Write out their Christmas traditions in your passport, one per day: Ireland in Monday, Finland on Tuesday, Denmark on Wednesday, France on Thursday and Hungary on Friday. Is there something from these countries that you could do in your home too?

Week 4

Week 4 Reading Plan:



Week 4	Peace	
Sunday	Luke	2:8-21
SOAP		
Monday	Isaiah	9:6
	Zephaniah	3:14-15
	Philippians	4:4-7
Tuesday	Matthew	1:20-21
	John	14:27

Memory Verse:

*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

A circular logo with the letters "GMG" in a teal font, surrounded by a decorative border.

Monday – God’s Name is Peace

Do you have a favorite nickname? Lots of times, people we love will give us nicknames that characterize us. We might get one because of something we like, a personality trait, or even something about our physical appearance. Jesus has many names, and each one is special, because it tells us something new and different about Him. In this passage, we see five names that describe Jesus: Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. With each of these names, we learn something new about Him. This verse was given to us before Jesus lived, and He fulfilled each of these names. The one that we want to talk about today is Peace. Jesus is the one who brings us peace. When we know Jesus, we can know peace. True peace does not come from the world; it comes from God. The world gives us so many things to worry about, but through prayer and thanksgiving, we can tell God our problems, and He will give us peace from Him! The more we are in His presence, the more of His peace we can know! The more things that we have that trouble us, the more we should pray! The more we pray, the more peace we will have! We can let God's peace protect our hearts from getting overwhelmed and anxious with worry and fear.

Activity-

Names of Jesus Wreath

Since Jesus has many names, make a Names of Jesus Wreath. Here is where you can get creative. Pick any material you want to use to make the wreath. It can be made from a paper plate, craft foam, Styrofoam, or even wood. Decorate the wreath. Make 5 stars that you can write the names of Jesus on from today's devotion. Attach them to the wreath.

Prayer-

Jesus, thank you that because we can know you, we can know peace. Thank you for being the peace that is in our lives, even when the world does not seem peaceful. We

know that we can trust in you. Thank you, God, that peace comes from You, and that you don't give us worry or fear. Help us to turn to you in prayer in times when we are anxious and afraid, and let you guard and protect our hearts in Your perfect peace.

Toddler Activity- Help the kids by writing the names of Jesus on the stars but let them decorate the wreath all on their own while supervising.

Tuesday – Happy Birthday Jesus!

Even before Jesus was born, the angels were proclaiming peace in the life of His “here on Earth dad.” Joseph was going to be a new daddy, and not just to any baby, but to the Son of God! All new dads are a little nervous, but I bet Joseph was even more nervous! Yet, the angel told him not to fear. Jesus echoed this thought before His death on the cross. He said that even after He was gone, He would send the Comforter to work in our lives and bring us lasting peace. The world’s idea of peace comes and goes, but God’s peace stays in our hearts forever. The world thinks peace means nothing is going wrong, but God’s peace means even when things are going wrong, we can KNOW God is with us. We need to focus on this peace, not just during Christmas, but each and every day of our lives. Let God’s peace rule in your heart.

Activity-

Away in the Manger Cookies

Supplies Needed to make Baby Jesus Cookies:

- Nutter Butter Cookies
- Powdered Sugar
- Little tubes of colored icing
- Coconut
- Yellow food coloring
- Graham crackers (optional)
- Peanut butter (optional)
- Paper plates (optional)

Start by mixing some powdered sugar with water until it’s thicker than whipping cream, but much thinner than conventional icing.

Dip the Nutter Butter cookies into the frosting, but not all the way. The white part is supposed to look like Baby Jesus’ swaddling clothes, so leave some blank cookie at the top for his head.

Next, draw on a halo with yellow icing, and a face with blue.

I also put some sweetened coconut shreds in a ziplock bag, shook with some yellow food color, and served these on beds of “straw”.

Give everyone a paper plate with a blob of peanut butter on it

Give each child 2 sections of graham cracker to stand up like a manger in the peanut butter.

Put your yellow coconut on a plate, and set it beside your cup of powdered sugar glaze.

Let each child dip their nutter butter in the icing, then stick the back of the cookie in the coconut. Because the icing is wet, the coconut will stick, acting as your straw in Baby Jesus' manger. Place the cookie in the manger, and let the kids draw on Baby Jesus' face themselves.

Prayer-

Thank you, God, for the gift of your Son and the lasting peace that He brings us each day of our lives. Help us to walk daily with you, so that we can have your peace ruling and reigning in our hearts.

Toddler Activity-

Toddlers can participate in the Advent Activity listed above.

Christmas Around the World

Week 4- Christmas in Latin America

A very popular Latin American tradition--the "portal"--is a nativity scene constructed of mosses and grass, colored sawdust, cypress twigs, black paper, silver glitter and figurines representing the birth of Jesus in the manger. Along with the traditional figures of Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, shepherds, the three wise men and the ox and mule, they commonly add extra embellishments like dolls, little farm animals, tiny toys, fruits and berries, and lights.

Many families light diamond-shaped paper balloons called "globos" on Christmas Eve and release them into the night sky. Others cut designs in paper bags to make lanterns, or "farolitos". Candles are placed inside the "farolitos", which line the sidewalks, windows, and rooftops

There are many yummy foods for Christmas too! They eat tamales in Central America, which are made with cornmeal, meat and vegetables and are wrapped in plantain leaves. In Venezuela they eat "pan de jamón" (ham bread) which is a bread filled with ham, bacon, olives and raisins. In Argentina they eat Christmas bread ("Pan de Navidad"), sweet bread baked with raisins, almonds and walnuts.

Tamales



Pan de jamón



Pan de Navidad



Flowers are typically used for Christmas decorations instead of evergreens in most Latin American countries where Christmas is celebrated during the warm season. The Poinsettia and Noche-Buena are in full bloom in Mexico during Christmastime.

Let's cook! Ask your mom to help you make some Christmas cookies or any other goodie you like. Put them in bags or boxes and make a verse to join the cookies. Then share them with your neighbors, your family and friends. It would be nice also to take some to people you know will be working on Christmas Eve like police men, doctors or firefighters. Let's share love this Christmas!

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