

# THE *Star*

A JOURNEY TO CHRISTMAS

DEVOTIONS THROUGH THE SEASON OF ADVENT  
ON HOPE, LOVE, JOY, AND PEACE



*The Star: A Journey to Christmas*

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Written by Jeremy Jones

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# INTRODUCTION

More than two thousand years ago, a star burst through the darkness and signaled the long-awaited but still unexpected birth of a Savior. Today another star shines, piercing the darkness of our lives with hope, love, joy, and peace. His name is Jesus and His light shines, drawing us into the journey of following Him.

This Advent season, you are invited to follow the star on a journey to Christmas. It's not just about the destination but about a journey of discovery that leads us toward hope, love, joy, and peace as we draw near to Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Advent is a season that is officially observed in many churches. The four weeks before Christmas are set aside as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of Jesus's birth. The term *advent* is a version of the Latin word that means "coming." But Advent is not just an extension of Christmas; it is a season that links the past, present, and future. Advent offers us the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah, to celebrate His birth, and to be alert for His second coming.

There are some differences in the way people celebrate Advent. While the core concept is the same, some of the traditions and practices vary. This book is based on common practices, and we invite you to adapt it to match the traditions of your own church. One of the main traditions of Advent is the lighting of the candles on an Advent wreath. A circular evergreen wreath represents God's unending love for us. And the lighting of five candles throughout the season represents Jesus's coming to a world lost in darkness. Isaiah 9:2 says, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."

This book contains devotions for each of the four weeks before Christmas. Based around the weekly Advent themes of hope, love, joy, and peace, there are seven devotions for each theme. There is also a devotion for Christmas Eve and one for Christmas Day. In addition, each of the sections contains an introduction page with a song to sing, verses to memorize, a question to ponder, and a verse to focus on throughout the week. We encourage you to use these sections as a guide for a weekly lighting of your own Advent wreath. Whether you do this alone, as a family, with friends, or as a small group, taking the time to practice the tradition

of the lighting of the candles will add to the richness of your Advent experience. And singing the songs can make the experience especially fun and meaningful if you have kids. You'll also find a final section called "A Celebration of Christmas" filled with fun, creative ideas and activities to start some new family traditions or enhance your own celebration of Jesus's birth.

In a season often marked by frenzied busyness, Advent is an opportunity to set aside time to prepare our hearts. The tradition and the devotions in this book are designed to help us place our focus on a far greater story than our own—the story of God's redeeming love for our world.

So no matter what the department stores try to tell you, Christmas has not yet arrived. There is value as well as excitement in patient and expectant waiting. May this be a season of wonder for you. Just as the star led the Magi to Jesus so many years ago, may the Holy Spirit lead you as you embark on a journey of hope, love, joy, and peace.

A bright sun with rays shining down on the word 'Hope'. The sun is positioned at the top center, with rays extending downwards and outwards. The word 'Hope' is written in a white, cursive script font, centered below the sun. The background is a solid blue color.

*Hope*

# THE STAR LEADS TO HOPE

The first Sunday of Advent signifies the hope people felt in their hearts for a Savior to lead them out of dark and hard times. As we begin this season of Advent, we will spend the next seven days on a journey, following the star as it leads us to hope. In addition to the daily devotions, take time this week to light the first candle in your Advent wreath. (See Introduction for instructions.) Remember the prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus's coming, express your desires for this season, and place your hope in the light of the world who was born as a baby in Bethlehem and who is coming again.

## SING:

"Away in a Manger"

## TELL:

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." —Isaiah 7:14

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God." —Romans 5:1-2

## ANSWER:

What do you hope for this season?

## REMEMBER:

"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

# 1

## HOPE'S LONG JOURNEY

*I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.*  
—Psalm 130:5

In an age when drone delivery is a reality and information is constantly at our fingertips, we've become accustomed to immediate gratification. We get impatient with slow Internet connections and microwave ovens. So the idea of a long wait or a lengthy journey doesn't hold much appeal on the surface. But perhaps it is the journey, the process of the long wait, that is exactly what we need. We need time to recognize the depth of our need and to allow hope to build in our hearts. We need space to block out the many distractions of our lives. We need to quiet ourselves in the darkness so that we won't miss the arrival of the light of the world.

We need to wait and watch for the miracle of the birth of Jesus—when the God of the universe entered our world in order to transform us through His love.

Advent is just that—a long period of waiting, expecting, and looking forward to the coming of Jesus. In a rushed world, Advent is a deep breath that allows us to pause and then take each purposeful step on the journey as we follow the star toward Bethlehem. So we begin this season of waiting with hope in our hearts. Maybe your sense of hope is only the faintest glimmer right now or a mere spark. It's okay. Allow the long wait to be a place where hope grows—where it can build with each passing day and create space in your heart to receive the light of the world.

*How do you feel about the idea of a long wait?*

*What choices can you make to carve out the  
time and space needed to engage the journey  
toward Christmas this Advent season?*

*Who can you invite to join you?*



## 2

# HOPE SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

*The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*

—Matthew 4:16

We typically think that light helps us see better, but sometimes we need the darkness in order to better see the light. When it comes to seeing the night sky, light is actually pollution. *National Geographic* reports that while about 2,500 individual stars are usually visible to the naked eye in the night sky, we can only see about 200 to 300 in a typical city today. Our city lights get in the way of us seeing the light of the stars. We have to go where it is dark to get a clearer vision of the light.

Hope works the same way. Only when we face the true darkness of our world, and of our own hearts, can we see the light of hope clearly. Jesus was born into a

dark world full of hatred and fear. That same hatred and fear are present in countries, cities, churches, and families today. But our hope lies in the fact that God showed up unexpectedly in the midst of the darkest night. He shone His light into the world through a baby, and He invites us into that light.

Do you feel like you are living in darkness? Do the news headlines make you feel like you are living in the land of the shadow of death? Holiday glitz can artificially light our lives, but stepping into and facing the darkness allow us to see the true light of Christmas. Darkness can feel all consuming, but the darker it is, the brighter the smallest light seems to shine. Even in your deepest darkness, the light of hope shines, revealing the love of God, who is the source of all light.

*What causes you to feel overwhelmed with darkness?*

*What in your life might be causing spiritual light pollution and keeping you from seeing the light of Jesus?*

*How will you step toward the light?*

# 3

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## OUR ONLY HOPE

*Be strong and take heart,  
all you who hope in the LORD.*

—Psalm 31:24

“Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You’re my only hope.” Remember these epic words spoken by Princess Leia via a hologram message in *Star Wars*? In the midst of a hopeless situation, the princess of the Rebellion sends a desperate message. As she is about to be captured by the ruler of darkness, Darth Vader, she places a plea inside R2-D2, not knowing whether it will ever be seen or heard.

Do you ever feel like you’ve sent out your last desperate plea and now you wait and wonder if help will ever come? The good news of Advent is that help is on the way. Jesus is our only hope. There is nothing or no one else in this world that can win against the

powers of evil and darkness—but Jesus is coming. To a world bound by sin and suffering, God sent His Son as a Savior. By God’s perfect design, He showed up in Bethlehem as the fulfillment of the hope for a Messiah, and He will come again to complete the work He began, redeeming the world to Himself, setting everything right, and turning hope into reality once and for all. For now, in this Advent season, we can take heart and draw strength from the knowledge that our only hope has heard our plea and is coming to rescue and redeem us.

*Have you reached the point in life where you  
realize God is your only hope?*

*What does it look like to cry out to Him and  
then to be strong and take heart?*

# 4

## HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT

*Not only so, but we also glory in our  
sufferings, because we know that suffering produces  
perseverance; perseverance, character;  
and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame,  
because God's love has been poured  
out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has  
been given to us.*

—Romans 5:3–5

Do you ever wonder about those marriage proposals that get a “no” as an answer? Talk about disappointment! And probably an unexpected outcome. Or maybe you’ve been cut from a team, been fired from a job, or had a house contract fall through at the eleventh hour. You can fill in any number of your own examples. We’ve all felt the surprise and embarrassment of a situation where the result wasn’t anything like what we’d

expected or hoped for. Unfortunately, that’s the way things often go in our broken world.

It’s all the more reason we can rest and rely on the hope of Christ. His hope won’t put us to shame. It’s rooted in our eternally reliable God who won’t fail us or forsake us. He has promised to fulfill His work of restoration in our lives and in our world. Even in our difficulties and suffering, He is able to transform our struggles into perseverance, growth, and hope that draw us ever nearer to Himself. Jesus’s birth was the fulfillment of great hope. It also staked a beacon of hope within eternity for the completion of His return and ultimate work. As we purposefully wait and anticipate through the Advent season, we can also meet God in our struggles and allow Him to transform us through them. His hope will not disappoint us. He will not fail us.

*Is there a situation or area of life where you find  
it difficult to hope?*

*How can you step out with confident hope in  
God’s faithfulness?*

# 5

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## THE ANCHOR OF HOPE

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,  
firm and secure.*

—Hebrews 6:19

It's midnight, and the clear skies have turned dark and menacing. Your small boat that gently rocked you to sleep is now pitching and diving, thrown back and forth by surging swells and towering waves. The gentle breeze has turned into gale-force winds. Torrents of rain lash your craft, threatening to leave it battered and broken. Aboard that boat, you hope desperately for rescue. You hope for a sudden and miraculous change in the weather. You might even hope for a quick way out of the boat and onto dry land. In the metaphoric storms of our own lives, there is often no rescue, no miraculous change in situation, no quick escape—and that's where true hope comes in.

Hebrews tells us hope is an anchor for our souls—firm and secure. Hope doesn't remove the storm or remove us from the storm, but it holds us secure in the midst of it. It keeps us tethered and stable as the world pitches and boils around us. Hope is our anchor because we know the One who controls the storm. The same Child whose birth was announced by angels and marked by the light of a new star later demonstrated that He controlled the wind and the waves. And Jesus is more powerful than any storm we face in the world or within ourselves. He is our anchor, and He is secure. So we place our hope in Him and hold fast while the wind and rain and waves pound.

*What is the storm in your life right now?*

*Are you anchored and holding fast, or are you  
being tossed by the waves of life?*

*What does it look like to allow hope to be  
your anchor?*

# 6

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## UNRESOLVED HOPE

*But if we hope for what we do not yet have,  
we wait for it patiently.*  
—Romans 8:25

Do you ever listen to classical music? Odds are better that you listen more to the popular music of our times—those short, quick, often repetitive songs that fit into three-minute ditties just perfect for radio play. On the other end of the sound spectrum lies classical music. Classical music makes us wait in the ebb and flow of ever-building notes and movements and then finally provides resolution. It has an amazing way of creating desire as it builds and builds. Sometimes it contrasts its own melody, creating dissonance that causes us to long for and even expect resolution. The song or symphony would feel incomplete, unfinished, and even disturbing if that resolution never came. And yet there

is beauty in the whole song, not just the resolution, so we listen and wait patiently and let our emotions ride the notes until the music reaches its end.

Waiting for Christ's coming at Christmas, as well as living in the waiting for His second coming, can feel like listening to a classical symphony. We hope for what we don't yet have, but we wait patiently for it. We can enjoy even the dissonance, letting our emotions swell with hope and desire and uncertainty and promise, knowing and trusting that the end will be even more beautiful because of the expectation built throughout.

*What is your life's soundtrack in this season?*

*What promise can you cling to today that  
resolution is coming?*

# 7

## ACTIVE HOPE

*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation,  
be constant in prayer.*  
—Romans 12:12 (ESV)

You know that old saying “A watched pot never boils”? It’s not exactly true. Science proves that simply watching a pot actually does not change the speed with which water gets to the boiling point. But experience proves that watching can definitely change how long the process *feels*. Doing nothing but watching can make even a short wait feel like an eternity, tempting us to give up or give in to distractions. And while the waiting work of hope is good for our hearts and minds, even Advent can feel intolerably long if we don’t put hope into action.

How? Paul told us in Romans to rejoice in hope. Laugh. Tell stories with friends. Listen to music. Enjoy good food. Worship God. Be present to the people in your life and patient with the challenges and hardships

you face. Paul also told us to be constant in prayer. No matter what your season of waiting on hope looks like, talk to God about it. Listen for His voice. Spend time in prayer, seeking the wisdom and peace of God. And choose to rejoice, no matter how dark the night seems. Because as you do these things, you put hope into action—and that commitment helps to create and sustain an active hope that does not grow weary and does not give up.

*What can you do to transform your waiting  
into an active hope?*

*How can you rejoice in hope today?*

*What does it look like to be constant in prayer?*

*What are you praying for today?*