

# With

ADVENT 2019



**Spiritual Practices &  
Small Group Resources**





## **It's easy to get swept up into the busyness of the Holiday season.**

We're surrounded by messages claiming that true happiness comes from receiving the perfect gift. And that is true, except our perfect gift cannot be purchased. At Christmas we celebrate and remember this gift of God with us—Emmanuel.

Advent—the weeks leading up to Christmas Day—offers us an invitation to redirect our focus to Christ. To remember that he really was born. To remember that he really cares for us. And finally, to remember that because of his heart for us, he chooses to be with us. *With.*

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This weekly devotional offers content from December 1 through January 5, to accompany the *With* series at Bethany Community Church. Each week includes a New Testament Bible passage, a short devotional, a reflection question, a shared activity, and a prayer—all of which should take 5-10 minutes. The Bible passages are not printed in this booklet—if you don't have a Bible available, find an online option to use as part of your devotional time.

### **WITH OTHERS**

This devotional is created to be engaged together with—your family, your small group, your co-workers, your neighbors, etc. It is written so that children and families can participate, but is appropriate for adults as well. Christmas can be an incredibly lonely season, so you may want to take this opportunity to invite someone to join you in this devotional practice.

### **CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS**

The Christmas season is filled with traditions and opportunities to create memories with loved ones. Similarly, allow this devotional to be an opportunity to craft a new tradition. Each week has a simple structure, which allows you space to add in your own unique touches. You may want to light a candle each time, or share a special treat together. Or, create a special, decorated place where you can read this devotional together. Find what works for your group and have some fun!

### **“WITH US” GIFT ACTIVITY**

Each week's devotional asks you to think of a way that you have experienced Christ with you in your daily life. To engage in this activity, find a box or container. You can wrap the box like a Christmas present, cutting out a hole in the top, or you can find a container and decorate it as you see fit. Each week you will need small slips of paper, pens, and crayons. Creating this gift box can be a fun way to kick off your first week of the devotional!

### **GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

This booklet is written so that children can join in and learn that Jesus is with them. You may want to use the prayer of the week each night as you put your children to bed.



## **Week of December 1**

### ***God With Us***

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** John 1:1-14

### **DEVOTIONAL**

The opening verses of John actually connect the amazing truth that Jesus is “God-with-Us” (translation of the name Emmanuel!) and that has been a reality that has always been part of God’s story for us—even before creation! In Jesus, the Word was life that brought light (repeated themes in John’s Gospel) from the beginning. And then 2,000 years ago, God came to be WITH us as Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Some versions of the Bible say that he “moved into the neighborhood.” He literally pitched his tent among us, the divine wrapped in flesh and blood, as a baby in a manger! The Gospel writers were witness to the “with-ness” of God through Jesus, and want us to experience God’s very presence, too!

And so, consider creating space during this Advent season to celebrate the WITH-ness of God in our lives still. Reflect on that straw-filled-barn-smelly manger and rejoice that, by our gratitude, Jesus can again be “born in us today” (a great lyric from “O Little Town of Bethlehem”). May the habit of returning to the “WITH US” Gift be a delightful way to see the reminders of the presence of God in your life in many, many ways.

### **REFLECTION QUESTION**

- What is one way that you can create space in your life for God this Advent season?

### **“WITH US” GIFT ACTIVITY**

Find a box or container to use for your “WITH US” Gift Activity. You can wrap the box like a Christmas present, cutting out a small hole in the top, or you can find a container and decorate it as you see fit. This can be a fun way to kick off your first week of the devotional. Each week you will need small slips of paper, pens, and crayons. For this opening week, put on some Christmas music—and definitely include “Joy to the World” on your playlist!

What reminded you today that Jesus is with you? Have each person write their answer down or draw it on a piece of paper. When everyone is finished, put the papers in your gift box or container.

### **PRAYER**

*Dear Jesus, we declare the good news, the best news that you have come to us to be WITH us always! Give us in this Advent season eyes to see that reality, and hearts that are grateful for that truth. And let our hearts always rejoice in this chorus: Joy to the world, the Lord, YOU have come, Let earth receive her King, Let every heart prepare You room, And heaven, and heaven and nature sing. Amen.*



## **Week of December 8**

### ***Holding Space for God***

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Luke 2:25-38

#### **DEVOTIONAL**

What's the longest you've ever waited for something or someone? Maybe you waited so long that you tried to take matters into your own hands— like peeking ahead at your Christmas presents before it's time to open them.

We're not always the best at waiting patiently, especially for really good things. Hoping for those good things only builds our excitement, and it can be hard to keep waiting when it feels like we've already waited forever.

The Bible doesn't tell us how long Simeon waited for Jesus, but we know Anna waited for decades. In those long years of waiting, neither of them stopped worshipping and listening to God.

When it was time to stop waiting, Simeon and Anna were ready and excited to finally meet Baby Jesus! Like Anna and Simeon, we can trust that God takes care of us even while we're waiting for Him.

#### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- Where in your life do you find yourself waiting right now?
- How can you see God's presence with you right now, even as you wait?

### **“WITH US” GIFT ACTIVITY**

What reminded you today that Jesus is with you? Have each person write their answers down or draw it on a piece of paper. When everyone is finished, put the papers in your gift box or container.

### **PRAYER**

*God, it can be hard to wait patiently to see you at work around us.  
Thank you for being with us even while we wait to see you. Amen.*





## **Week of December 15**

### ***Longing For Home***

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Matthew 2:13-23

### **DEVOTIONAL**

This passage finds Mary, Joseph, and Jesus on the move from Bethlehem to Egypt, then Egypt to Israel, and finally to the city of Nazareth in Galilee.

Joseph was in tune with the voice of God. He paid attention to God's prompting, even trusting what was revealed to him through dreams. He responded in trust as God led them from place to place.

Joseph knew that God was with them no matter where they traveled as a family. No physical place was beyond the reach of God's mighty hand and faithful presence. Might we embrace that truth in our own lives: no place—be it physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual—is beyond the reach of God's mighty hand and faithful presence.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What places in your life feel beyond the reach of God?
- How can you trust God's faithful presence in those spaces?

### **"WITH US" GIFT ACTIVITY**

What reminded you today that Jesus is with you? Have each person write their answer down or draw it on a piece of paper. When everyone is finished, put the papers in your gift box or container.

## **PRAYER**

*God, we thank you for being with us wherever we go. Remind us this week of your faithful presence in our life. Amen.*



## **Week of December 22**

### ***Amazing Things Happen When You Remove Your Roof***

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Luke 5:17-26

#### **DEVOTIONAL**

*“They were looking for a way to get into the house and set him before Jesus.” - Luke 5:18, The Message*

This group of friends was going to do anything they could to get their friend to Jesus. Jesus was the best thing and the only thing their sick friend needed. Not even a roof was going to get in their way! Imagine these friends carrying the sick man through town—past the doctors, healers, fortune tellers, friends, and family. Most likely they had already tried so many things to help their sick friend, but the only presence that really mattered was Jesus.

As they raised the roof and lowered him down, how relieved they must have been to set him in front of the healing power of God—the presence of Jesus.

#### **REFLECTION QUESTION**

- What do you need to bring into the presence of Jesus today? Sickness, fear, worry, perfectionism, loneliness or anger? He loves to heal and restore.

### **“WITH US” GIFT ACTIVITY**

What reminded you today that Jesus is with you? Have each person write their answer down or draw this on a piece of paper. When everyone is finished, put the papers in your gift box or container.

### **PRAYER**

*God, thank you for your presence in our world and in our lives. And thank you that you want to heal us and help us. We set our lives before you. Amen.*



## **Christmas Eve** *God's First Home*

*Note: Since it's Christmas Eve, you may want to find a way to make this devotional time a little more special. Maybe put a candle in cake or cookie and sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, or share hot cocoa and treats together. You also may want to incorporate any existing traditions into this time.*

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Luke 2:1-21

### **DEVOTIONAL**

Everyone has a birthday—even Jesus. Jesus' birth was different, though. He wasn't born in a hospital or a home, but instead was born surrounded by animals and wrapped up in old rags. We don't celebrate him because of where he was born or what he was wearing, though. We celebrate him because he is God's son who came to be with us. Yes, us!

That's very good news and God didn't keep it to himself. He let the whole world know about Jesus' birth by sending Angels to proclaim this good news. Can you imagine looking up into the sky and seeing it full of singing Angels? And two thousand years later, we still celebrate this important moment on Christmas—Jesus' birthday. Happy Birthday Jesus!

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What would it be like to look outside your window and witness a choir of Angels celebrating Jesus' birth?
- What is one way that you can join in on the celebration this year?

### **“WITH US” GIFT ACTIVITY**

What reminded you today that Jesus is with you? Have each person write their answer down or draw it on a piece of paper. When everyone is finished, put the papers in your gift box or container.

### **PRAYER**

*Happy Birthday Jesus! Thank you that you loved us so much that you came here to be with us. Help us to join in and celebrate who you are. Amen.*



## **Week of December 29**

### ***Oh the Places You'll Go!***

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Luke 10:1-10

### **DEVOTIONAL**

Now that we have prepared for and experienced the miracle of the birth of Jesus, what do we do next? In this passage, when Jesus is doing his ministry as an adult, he sends out 70 people to “go ahead of him.” They were to proclaim the good news that Jesus was coming, and prepare that place for his arrival.

Jesus trusted them to go ahead of Him and be his “representatives” in the town before he made it there. Now that we are Christ’s representatives on earth, he sends us out to places as well, even in our everyday lives. We are now called to look like Christ and continue his work in the world today.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- How are you like Christ in the places you go?
- Is it sometimes hard to always try to do what Jesus would do?
- Do you trust that Jesus is with you as he sends you out?

### **“WITH US” GIFT ACTIVITY**

What reminded you today that Jesus is with you? Have each person write their answer down or draw it on a piece of paper. When everyone is finished, put the papers in your gift box or container.

## PRAYER

*Lord, thank you for going with us in the world. Teach us how to act, talk, and love like you. We want to continue to be your presence in our daily lives. We love you. Amen.*





## **Week of January 5** ***God is Using Us All***

*Note: Today you'll be opening up your "WITH US" gift box/container. You may want to find a way to celebrate and make this a special moment for your group or family.*

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Ephesians 2:14-22

### **DEVOTIONAL**

You made it! Maybe it seems like you started this a while ago, or maybe the holiday season flew by for you. Either way, we're at the very end of Advent! As we look back and reflect on this journey, there are so many ways that God has moved in our lives. And yet, maybe you haven't seen God move. This is where this passage from Ephesians is a helpful reminder of the reality that God is changing us day by day to build us into participants in the Kingdom of God. We are all a part of a larger story that God is writing each and every day.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What was your favorite moment this Advent season?
- What moment did you find to be frustrating or disappointing?
- What would it look like to invite God into both your best and worst Christmas moments?

### **"WITH US" GIFT ACTIVITY**

You have been co-builders with God as you have been working on

your boxes this Advent season. NOW is the time to look back and reflect on what God has built you up this past season. Today, open your boxes and read the papers aloud with each other.

## PRAYER

*God, help me to see my life within the larger story you are writing. Thank you for inviting me to be a participant—not just an observer—with you in your Kingdom. Amen.*

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The content of this booklet was thoughtfully written and curated by pastoral staff from the Children, Youth, and Family Ministries across Bethany's locations.

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