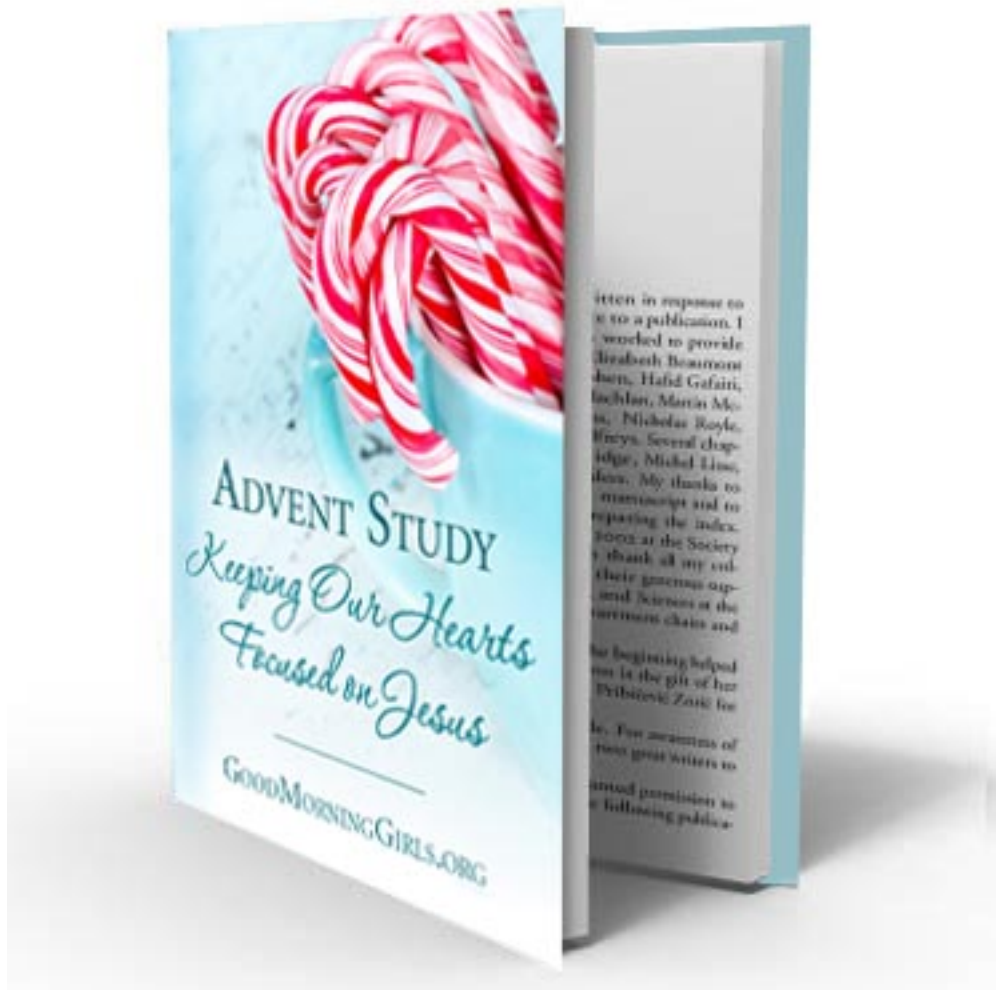




ADVENT STUDY

*Keeping Our Hearts
Focused on Jesus*

GOODMORNINGGIRLS.ORG



by
GoodMorningGirls

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How to use this ebook:

Christmas time can be one of the busiest times of the whole year! With gifts to get, Christmas parties to attend and traveling to see our families and friends.....our hearts can sometimes become focused on everything but Jesus.....the “reason for the season.” As you go about preparing for Christmas, we hope you will also join us in “Keeping Our Hearts Focused on Jesus” this Christmas season.

In this ebook you’ll see daily readings to read to and with your children. We’ve also provided simple daily family activities to help us remember who and why we are celebrating Christmas!

Please remember all family activities are **optional** and are only listed to help provide you with ideas of things to do with your family this Christmas!

Everyday:

- Read the daily morning passage listed on each page. You can do this alone or with your children.
- Light a candle- one candle for the first week, two candles for the second week etc.
- Play Christmas music in your house.

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{Week 1}- *Hope* Scripture

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called[a] the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.



{Week 1}- *Hope* Devotional

We live in a day where people are searching for hope in their lives.

Some turn to money, thinking possessions like having the right house, right car, right clothes or large bank account will give them the hope, peace and stability they are seeking. Some turn to politicians with their promises of hope and a better life only to be later disappointed in the outcome. While others seek relationships or drugs to fulfill the void that God's hope offers. What they don't realize is hope is here.

Our hope came wrapped in swaddling clothes and was placed in a manger that very first Christmas. The Christmas story is more than just a story about the birth of a child into our world, but about the birth of the world's Savior, the birth of hope entering our world that long awaited night so many thousand of years ago.

What was God's gift to us that very first Christmas? The gift of His precious Son.....our Redeemer.....our Savior.....our hope for a better tomorrow. God gave the hopeless world the gift of hope that first Christmas.....and He continues to every year after.

Looking at the story of Christ's birth we see hope came even when our world wasn't perfect, and it still does. Even when things don't seem to be going our way.....the gift of hope that only Christ can offer is still here.

Take a peak with me at the night our sweet Lord was born. What do you see? A husband and his young wife, nine months pregnant and about to have a baby, both of them tired from traveling late into the night. Poor Mary and Joseph....nothing seemed to be going their way. Traveling nine months pregnant I'm sure wasn't on Mary's list of things to do before she delivered Jesus.....especially riding on a donkey. Giving birth in a stable with "no where to lay His head"not exactly what she had envisioned either when the angel appeared to her that special nights nine months earlier.

Mary's life was messy.

But God loves to do His greatest miracles in the middle of our messes, and that's exactly what He did that special night thousands of years ago.

Hope came into our world!

Hope.....that God can still use this broken life and make something beautiful out of it.

Hope.....that we don't have to be perfect to be loved by Him.

Hope.....that the best is yet to come.

"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

Join me this Christmas season and focus on the beautiful gift of hope we have through the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

Love God Greatly!

-Angela

{Week 1}- Family Activities

Keeping Our Hearts Focused on Jesus

Monday- Light the first candle representing Jesus is the “Light” of men. Explain to your children that when we follow Jesus, the true Light, we can avoid walking blindly and falling into sin. Jesus lights the path ahead of us so we can see how to live. What ways can we allow Jesus’s light to shine through us?

Tuesday- Light one candle- Talk about how as Christians, we are to reflect Jesus’s light to the world. What are some ways we can do that? Use a mirror to show your children how we are to reflect Jesus’s light to those around us.

Wednesday- Light one candle- Not only is Jesus the Light of the world, but His arrival was planned by God thousands of years before. What does that tell us about God?

Thursday- Light one candle- Sing the song **Jesus, Light of the Word** (<http://www.lyricstime.com/third-day-jesus-light-of-the-world-lyrics.html>) or **Here I am to Worship.** (<http://www.lyricstime.com/i-r-here-i-am-to-worship-lyrics.html>)

Friday- Light one candle- How does Jesus’s light in our world give us hope?

- **Read the book:** The Legend of the Candy Cane by Lori Walburg and James Bernardin

Or

- Read the story about the Candy Cane:
<http://www.noelnoel.com/trad/candycane.html>



{Week 1}- Peppermint Bark Recipe


As a family, make Peppermint Bark .

Discuss the meaning behind candy canes.

Peppermint Bark

Prep time: 30 mins Cook time: 2 mins Total time: 32 mins Serves: 15

★★★★★
5.0 from 3 reviews

 [Print](#)

Ingredients

- 24 oz of white chocolate chips
- 24 oz semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 2 boxes of candy canes

Instructions

1. In a microwave safe bowl melt semi-sweet chocolate chips in the microwave for 60 seconds, stir and repeat for an additional 60 seconds.
2. Place parchment paper on top of a cookie sheet and spread melted chocolate over top.
3. Place in refrigerator until set and hardened (appx 20 mins).
4. Melt white chocolate chips the same way.
5. Unwrap candy canes and place in a large Ziploc bag and crush with a mallet.
6. Place 1 cup of crushed candy canes into the melted white chocolate.
7. Pour white chocolate on top of hardened dark chocolate and sprinkle with the left over crushed candy cane.
8. Place in refrigerator for 2 hours until well set and hardened.
9. Take out and break into pieces. Enjoy!

<http://comfyinthekitchen.com/2011/12/peppermint-bark-2/>

Week 1: Monday

Read: John 1:1-4

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 1: Tuesday

Read: John 1:9-12

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 1: Wednesday

Read: Jeremiah 33:14-15

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 1: Thursday

Read: Isaiah 60:19-20

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 1: Friday

Read: Romans 15:12-13

S- Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O- Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A- Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P- **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

{Week 2}- *Love* Scripture

-Matthew 1:18-25-

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

-Luke 2:1-7-

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.



{Week 2}- *Love* Devotional

*L*ove Christmas. It always takes me back to my childhood in Germany. I

can still envision downtown Frankfurt decorated with lights and Christmas trees, the smell of roasted almonds and chestnuts, and the sight of gigantic gingerbread cookies in the shape of hearts brightly decorated with different colored frosting. I remember walking home from the Christmas market feeling the snow lightly falling on the quiet streets of Frankfurt. All of this somehow intensified the sense of peace and awe that came as I anticipated the most important birthday of all times; when we celebrated God himself becoming man. This was, in a real sense, the birth of love.

This baby that we sing about came for a very specific, dark and yet beautiful, reason. He was born to die. He who was holy came to save the soiled and sinful. He who would live a perfect life did so for those who can not take one breath without sinning.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)

While the celebration of Christmas really is the celebration of the most important birthday to ever happen, our focus should not stop at the cute little baby in the manger. We need to always keep the cross in our mind because this is where God's greatest act of love unfolded.

God's heart was so overwhelmingly filled with love for us, his people, that he chose to become like those he created, a needy baby completely dependent on sinful humans to care for and raise him. As he grew into a perfectly kind and compassionate man he would face the ugliness of betrayal, loneliness, suffering and pain in order to rescue a people who didn't even care. This is love.

His love continues beyond the cross. In his love he pursues us with a tender passion not found in this world. He gives us new hearts and new desires. He never leaves us alone. He comforts us when we need it most, he hears our prayers, he causes us to grow in godliness and works all things for our good (Rom 8). All of this reflects his everlasting love.

But we can't even stop here. Who Christ is and what he has done for us should cause us to act. We need to be generous to those around us because God is generous to us. We must show compassion to those who are suffering (even if it is at their own hands) because Christ is compassionate towards us. We must find ways to love the unlovely and to care for the needy because when we do this for others we are fulfilling the law and pointing to Christ.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

Advent is a great time for introspection. To look back on all the things that God has done in and through us. It is also a time to look for opportunities for us to share this divine and awesome love of God with others. But such introspection will only bear fruit as it stems from our gazing upon the Son of God.

Looking to Jesus,

Jen

{Week 2}- Family Activities

Keeping Our Hearts Focused on Jesus

Monday- Light 2 candles. Jesus Jar- random acts of kindness

Tuesday- Light 2 candles. Jesus Jar- random acts of kindness

Wednesday- Light 2 candles. Jesus Jar- random acts of kindness

Thursday- Light 2 candles. Jesus Jar- random acts of kindness

Friday- Light 2 candles.

- **Christmas cookies-** Retell the story of Christmas with your kids by making Christmas cookies that represent the nativity story- Great idea from our GMG Leadership Encourager- Shonda
- Give cookies to neighbors, family or friends.

What is a “Jesus Jar”?

Use any jar that you have around your house and fill it with little slips of paper, each slip containing one random act.

Monday-Thursday, have a child pull out one slip of paper and do the random act of kindness with them that day.

This is a great way to help our children actively look for ways to help people they come in contact with through out their day!

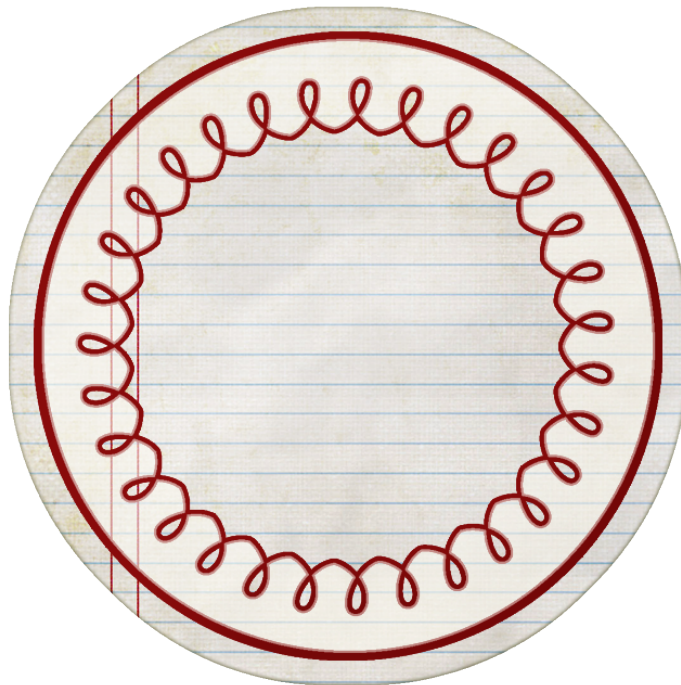
A list of random acts of kindness are provided on the following page.

{Random Acts of Kindness}

Here are a few suggestions! Feel free to add to this list and use the best ones that fit your family!

List of Random Acts of Kindness List:

- Write someone a note and tell him or her how much you love them.
- Give a stranger a sincere compliment.
- Pay for someone's breakfast/lunch/dinner without him/her knowing who did it.
- Stop by the police or fire department with treats to thank them for their service.
- Adopt a soldier and send a care package to him/her thanking that individual for their service to our country.
- Surprise a friend or family member with flowers.
- Hold the door open for someone behind you.
- Babysit for the single parent down the street.
- Donate used clothes or toys to local charity.
- Help someone load their groceries.



{Week 2: Sugar Cookie Recipe}

Sugar Cookie Cut Outs



Prep time: 2 hours 15 mins Cook time: 9 mins Total time: 2 hours 24 mins Serves: 36

Alton Brown's Sugar Cookie Cut Outs <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/alton-brown/sugar-cookies-recipe/index.html>

Ingredients

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 3/4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tablespoon milk
- Powdered sugar, for rolling out dough
- Frosting:
 - 4 cups confectioners' sugar
 - 1/2 cup shortening
 - 5 tablespoons milk
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - food coloring

Instructions

1. Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.
2. Place butter and sugar in large bowl of electric stand mixer and beat until light in color.
3. Add egg and milk and beat to combine.
4. Put mixer on low speed, gradually add flour, and beat until mixture pulls away from the side of the bowl.
5. Divide the dough in half, wrap in waxed paper, and refrigerate for 2 hours.
6. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.
7. Sprinkle surface where you will roll out dough with powdered sugar.
8. Remove 1 wrapped pack of dough from refrigerator at a time, sprinkle rolling pin with powdered sugar, and roll out dough to 1/4-inch thick.
9. Move the dough around and check underneath frequently to make sure it is not sticking.
10. If dough has warmed during rolling, place cold cookie sheet on top for 10 minutes to chill.
11. Cut into desired shape, place at least 1-inch apart on parchment paper and bake for 7 to 9 minutes or until cookies are just beginning to turn brown around the edges.
12. Let sit on baking sheet for 2 minutes after removal from oven and then move to complete cooling on wire rack.
13. Serve as is or ice as desired. Store in airtight container for up to 1 week.

<http://comfyinthekitchen.com/2011/12/sugar-cookie-cut-outs/>

Week 2: Monday

Read: 1 John 4:7-8

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 2: Tuesday

Read: Mark 12:28-30

S- Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O- Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A- Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P- **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 2: Wednesday

Read: Psalm 119:105-106

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 2: Thursday

Read: Zephaniah 3:17

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 2: Friday

Read: John 12:35-36

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.



{Week 3}- *Joy* Scripture

-Matthew 2:1-12-

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

{Week 3}- *Joy* Devotional

***"When they saw the star they were overjoyed.
On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary and
they bowed down and worshipped him."***

*E*very year our family piles into the car to drive around looking at

Christmas lights. Before we leave the house I have the children color a few pictures of baby Jesus. Then I write a little note on the picture and have the kid's sign it. As we drive by the houses, we look for nativity scenes. We have to search hard because nativities are not a frequent sight! But when we find one –oh the excitement! The kids clap and cheer as they anticipate putting their picture in the newspaper box with the note that says, "*thank you for displaying our first love - Jesus!*"

But on the night that Jesus was born there were no loud claps and cheers. He was born in a humble stable. In a humble stable, God became flesh.

*"The Word became **flesh** and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only."~ John 1:14*

Think about the word "flesh" - my children regularly have boo boos where they scrape their flesh - it's their flesh that bleeds.

"Immanuel – God with us" ~Matthew 1:23

This is the real meaning of Christmas. It's not about the holiday ham and cookies, Christmas lights and decorations, Santa and reindeer, or Barbies and Legos! It's about Jesus - coming in the flesh - he dwelt among us - that boggles my brain! And he went from the stable to the cross because of his love for you and me.

Isn't life sometimes a battle for joy? The reality is life can be hard and joy is not our natural reaction to the stress of life.

John Piper says "*By nature, we get more pleasure from God's gifts than from himself.*"

It's tempting to try to find our joy within the celebrations and traditions of Christmas rather than in God himself. But let's not wait to get our to-do lists done or to receive the perfect gift from our husband.

Crank up your Christmas music Girls!

God is with us!!!

Have a Merry Christmas!

Walk with the King!

Courtney,

WomenLivingWell.org

{Week 3}- Family Activities

Keeping Our Hearts Focused on Jesus -

"It's a Wrap!" a head of time, wrap up the Wise Men, the Nativity star, Mary and Baby Jesus from one of your nativities and have your children unwrap one of the items each day and discuss the importance of that individual(s) to the Christmas story.

Monday- Light 3 candles. Wrap up some wise men and have your children unwrap them....talk about the importance of the wise men in the birth of Jesus.

Tuesday- Light 3 candles. Have your children unwrap a star. Talk about the importance the star played in the story of Jesus's birth.

Wednesday- Light 3 candles. Unwrap Mary. Why is it important to have a heart and a response in life like Mary? Why do you think God chose her?

Thursday- Light 3 candles. Unwrap baby Jesus. Why is He so important to this story?

** A special thank you to Rosilind, our GMG Croatian translator, for this great idea!*

Friday- Light 3 candles.

Take a drive with your family to look at Christmas lights. Ahead of time, have your children write notes or color pictures that say: *"Thank you for displaying our first love - Jesus!"* and place the cards or pictures in the houses displaying nativity scenes.

{Week 3}- Pecan Rolls with Warm Caramel Recipe



EASY Pecan Rolls with Warm Caramel



Prep time: 15 mins Cook time: 15 mins Total time: 30 mins Serves: 10

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1/4 cup corn syrup
- 1 8 oz tube Pillsbury crescent rolls (Grands)
- 2/3 cup chopped pecans
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Instructions

1. In a small bowl combine brown sugar, butter and corn syrup- pour into a buttered 8x8 glass pan.
2. In another small bowl combine sugar, cinnamon and pecans
3. Lay out crescent roll in a rectangle (you will see triangular seams)
4. Pinch seams together and roll out into a workable rectangle
5. Sprinkle with pecans, sugar and cinnamon
6. Roll up into a long cylinder
7. Slice into 10 rolls and place cut side down into prepared pan.
8. Bake in a 375 oven for appx 15 mins or until golden brown.
9. Turn upside down onto a plate and serve hot! YUM!

<http://comfyinthekitchen.com/2012/01/easy-pecan-rolls-with-warm-caramel/>

Week 3: Monday

Read: 1 John 1:4-7

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 3: Tuesday

Read: Nehemiah 8:10

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 3: Wednesday

Read: Psalm 16:11

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 3: Thursday

Read: Luke 2:10-14

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 3: Friday

Read: Hebrews 12:1-2

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.



{Week 4}- *Peace* Scripture

-Luke 2:8-21-

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.



{Week 4}- *Peace* Devotional

Finding peace in the midst of the chaos this Christmas...

*“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*s I study the nativity on my mantle, I giggle just a bit as I think about

our popular misconceptions on how that first Christmas in the Bible actually came to be. My nativity set screams a clean, quiet and cooperative scene, with bright white linens and animals on their best behavior. The angel hovers overhead, and I can almost hear the soft, peaceful harp music playing in the background.

But wait.

The Bible reminds us that there are moments of chaos in the Christmas story. A story that - from the world's perspective - is *anything* but peaceful in the events leading up to Christ's birth:

At a young age, Mary's world is turned upside down as she accepts her role as the mother of the Son of God. She says yes to God on a whole lot of faith and without a whole lot of information to go on.

Joseph is taken off-guard with a visit by an angel, telling him to go ahead and take Mary as his wife, even though they will most certainly face the scorn of an “unplanned” pregnancy.

After traveling (in a not-so-comfortable method of transportation) for days, a very pregnant Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem to find that they have no proper place to stay, so they settle on the only shelter they

can find: a stinky animal stable. Here Jesus – sent by God to be the Savior of the world - is born in the most humble, unexpected of ways.

Angels showing up to shepherds in fields. Visitors coming from lands far away. This story is anything but typical.

Peace and Christmas. It doesn't seem like these words always go together, does it?

Fast forward to present day, and practically speaking, the days and weeks surrounding the holidays can be filled with all kinds of peace-challenging moments. Parking lots are crowded. People and schedules get demanding. Families sometimes get too close for comfort. Money gets tight, and sweet children can even become ungrateful. While we outwardly sing of “Peace on Earth, good will toward men,” all too often we’re inwardly too frazzled and too distracted to remember just what it is – *Who* it is - we’re celebrating in the first place.

But Mary. Sweet, trusting Mary. The Bible says that she “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” While her life couldn’t get any more unpredictable, she chose to trust, be still, and fully experience the indescribable miracles that God was working all around her.

When I ponder these things – like Mary, I realize that true, lasting peace does not depend on my circumstances.

Peace is learning to trust in God, even in the midst of the chaos. Peace comes when I set my heart on what’s lasting and true, not on temporary earthly things. Peace is having confidence in a God who loved me so much He was willing to send his precious Son to Earth as helpless babe, to save a wretched sinner like me. Peace is saying no to the world, and yes to God. That is the kind of peace that I need in my life during the chaos of Christmas and all year long!

This holiday season, I want to intentionally spread that peace to those around me. I want others to *see* Jesus in me as I humbly serve. I want them to *hear* about Jesus as I tell the story of His birth, and as I worship Him for coming to save a broken world. I want them to *feel* Jesus' love through me, as I love with that same patience, compassion and grace. No matter what chaos the world throws my way.

As followers of Christ, together we can be messengers of peace this Christmas. *Grace and peace to you from God our Father...*

At His Feet,

Whitney

“And Mary said: ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.’” Luke 1:47

{A special thanks to Amanda Buhler, fellow GMG leader, whose sweet thoughts contributed to this post.}

{Week 4}- Family Activities

Keeping Our Hearts Focused on Jesus -

Monday- Light 4 candles. Have a “Happy Birthday Jesus” party with your children and some of their friends! Before the party, encourage the children to bring a gently used or new gift to give to children in need. A great time to host this party is during the when kids are out of school for their Christmas break. During the party read stories about the true meaning of Christmas, sing Christmas songs and share with them the importance of Christ’s birth.

Tuesday- Light 4 candles. Have your children act out Luke 2:8-21 or have them create a movie with a playable nativity scene using your video camera on your phone and send it to family and friends.

Wednesday- Light 4 candles. Take time to pray together as a family and rejoice for God’s wonderful gift of Jesus!

Thursday- Light 4 candles. Take time to be still and thank Jesus for all that He has done in your life.

Friday- Light 4 candles. Write a thank you letter to Jesus, you’re your children, thanking Him for how He has worked in your life this past year. Thank Him for loving us enough to save us from our sins.

Christmas Day

One of my all time favorite Christmas memories, as a little girl, is celebrating Jesus’s birthday with a birthday cake Christmas morning! I know that’s not the healthiest breakfast but we are called to celebrate! In my family we made the cake the night before and then sang “Happy Birthday” to Jesus, Christmas morning before eating the cake!

Need a few more Christmas morning breakfast ideas? Here you go!

<http://womenlivingwell.org/2011/12/christmas-breakfast-ideas/>

{Week 4}- Classic French Toast



Classic French Toast

★★★★★
4.5 from 2 reviews

 [Print](#)

Prep time: 10 mins Cook time: 8 mins Total time: 18 mins Serves: 6-8

Ingredients

- 12 slices Texas-style bread
- 12 eggs
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 tsp vanilla
- butter {for melting in skillet}
- cinnamon {for sprinkling}
- {butter, syrup, and powdered sugar for topping}

Instructions

1. In a 9×13 pan beat eggs, milk and vanilla together.
2. Coat both sides of each piece of bread with egg mixture.
3. Melt butter in a skillet or on a griddle heated to medium-medium/high heat.
4. Place coated bread on skillet and sprinkle with cinnamon. Let cook for appx 4 mins until golden brown. Flip and repeat.
5. Serve with butter and warm syrup!

Week 4: Monday

Read: Isaiah 9:6

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 4: Tuesday

Read: Zephaniah 3:14-15

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 4: Wednesday

Read: Philippians 4:4-7

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 4: Thursday

Read: Matthew 1:20-21

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

Week 4: Friday

Read: John 14:27

S - Write out the **scripture** passage for the day.

O - Write down 1 or 2 **observations** from the passage.

A - Write down 1-2 **applications** from the passage.

P - **Pray** over what you learned from today's passage.

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