
Advent Conspiracy

Family Guide

Let's conspire to change the way we celebrate Christmas. Invite your world into a better Christmas story. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest for more ideas and to share what you're doing with others.

#AdventConspiracy

Welcome

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Long ago Christmas changed the world and we believe that can happen again.

For many of us, Christmas is not the happiest time of the year. We lament at seeing the holiday push start earlier and earlier each year. The holidays brings anxiety over busy schedules, and spending money we don't have for things no one really needs. It's full of expectations that aren't met, pressure to find the right gifts, finding the right decorations, and the season not feeling spiritual enough.

Many of us reach the end of each Advent season with an aching emptiness. Something deep inside tells us we missed it--whatever it is our soul longs for this time of year.

If Christmas is about gifts, decorations, parties, spending and buying, then these feelings make sense. Nothing will ever be enough and there will always be disappointment. Thankfully, that's not what Christmas is about.

Christmas is not about us, it's all Jesus.

This guide was written for families who are ready to experience Christmas the way it was meant to be--a joyous celebration of Jesus' birth that enriches our hearts and the world around us. This guide is simply a tool to help lead your family in that direction. We aren't saying stop giving gifts, get rid of the tree, no decorations and forget those Christmas stockings. We're saying Christmas is so much more.

Use this guide in a way that works best for your family. You'll find lots of activities to do together. Use as little or as much as you want. Do each lesson in a single day or stretch it out over the week. Have fun, enjoy each other, and open your hearts to experience all that God has to offer when we focus our attention gift that was given to us in Jesus.

This Christmas we invite you to:

Worship Fully- because Christmas begins and ends with Jesus!

Spend Less- and free your resources for things that truly matter.

Give More- of your presence: your hands, your words, your time, your heart!

Love All- the poor, the forgotten, the marginalized, the sick, in ways that
make a difference.

The Story Begins Here

The story of Christmas is the story of God's love for all people. From the beginning, God created us to have a relationship with Him but because of sin, the relationship was broken.

When Adam and Eve chose their own way, instead of being obedient to God, He could have said, "Too bad, you messed up and that was your only chance," but He didn't. God already had a plan in place and His plan was something so big and so amazing, His love for us would be undeniable.

Imagine what it must have been like for God's people. Long before Jesus was born, they had been told that a Savior, the Messiah and King, would be coming. For hundreds and hundreds of years they waited, wondering when He would come.

The word "advent" actually means "the coming or arrival." As we prepare for the coming of Christmas this year, let's consider what this celebration is all about, and whether the manner in which we celebrate it is worthy of who we are celebrating.

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What if Christmas was no longer about stuff? What if this Christmas we could spend less, give more, worship fully, and love all? What if Christmas could, once again, change the world?

Week 1:

God's Gift

Materials

- Envelope and piece of paper
- Bibles
- Candle (to be used throughout the four weeks), matches
- Option 1: Materials to make bracelets (embroidery floss, string, fabric, beads, etc.)
- Option 2: Small rocks (one per person), paint, paint brushes

Adults: Before you start week one, come up with a promise you can make to your kids that you will be able to carry out during this week. You can follow through on that promise at any time, but this is to help them experience the anticipation and excitement of a promise being fulfilled. You could promise to go out for hot chocolate, watch a special movie together, bake and decorate cookies, or have a special family game night. Write your promise on a piece of paper and put it in an envelope. Put the envelope on the table and don't open it until you've worked through the lesson.

Getting Started

Talk as a family about what Christmas is and why you celebrate it. Share some of your favorite things about Christmas and what each of you are looking forward to this year.

We celebrate Christmas to remember the very special gift that God gave to us long long ago. Long before Jesus was born, God told His people He'd be sending them a really special gift. Both of the passages below tell us a bit about what this gift would be and why it was going to be so special. Read the verse together and then discuss the Talking Points.

Readings

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 9:6

Talking Points

1. What names were used to describe the One God would be sending? What do they mean?
2. The name Immanuel means “God with us.” Why would having God with us be worth celebrating? What would you want to do with Him or talk to Him about?
3. At Christmas we remember that God came to Earth to be with us and that’s such a huge gift it definitely deserves all our worship. But if you look around in the stores, on TV and on the internet, you’ll see that Christmas has become a worship of things. In what ways might we worship things and how do we get back to remembering that Christmas is about worshiping Jesus?

Put It Into Practice

To be reminded that God is with us always, spend some time making a special bracelet that you can wear through this Advent season. When you feel it or look down at it, remember the gift God gave us was His presence and that He is always with us. Another option is to find a small rock and paint it. Every morning put it in your pocket and just like the bracelet, when you feel it, be reminded of God’s special gift to us.

Things To Do This Week

Isaiah 7:14 said Jesus would be called Immanuel, which means “God with us”. When God gave us His Son Jesus, He gave us a really special gift. He gave us His physical presence. Over the next four weeks, when you get together at

meals, when you work through this guide, or while you're just spending time together, light a candle to be reminded that God is present with you.

Create an advent chain to countdown the days until Christmas. On each chain, consider writing either the name of a person to pray for each day, or write down a daily activity. Take turns getting to tear off the chain each day.

Look for opportunities to talk about and practice worshiping God for what He has done and is doing throughout your day. Using a large container, jar, or vase, write down the times you saw or experienced God, or things you are thankful for. Get in the habit recognizing God's presence in your daily life. On Christmas day, pull out all the pieces of paper and read them together. Celebrate God's active presence in your lives. Consider continuing this practice throughout the year. What an amazing thing it would be to read all the ways you saw God working throughout the year.

Wrap It Up

Before you close, talk about the envelope on the table. Explain that just as God promised to send His Son, you will be making a promise that you will fulfill sometime this week. Have one of your children open the envelope and read what is written on the paper. You can explain that you won't tell them when you will fulfill your promise, but it will happen this week. They just need to watch and be ready.

Spend some time praising and thanking God for choosing to love us enough to send us His Son, our Immanuel. Ask that He would give you a new understanding of what it means to have "God with us" this week, and let Him know how excited you are about celebrating this season as you get ready for His arrival.

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Our hearts are formed by what we worship and at Christmas our worship belongs to God. After all, it was God, not the shopping mall, that gave us the greatest gift, Jesus Christ.

Week 2:

understanding what's important

Materials

- Candle (to be used throughout the four weeks), matches
- Bibles
- Paper and something to write with

Light the candle and recognize God's presence with you.

Getting Started

Let's talk about birthdays. What was your favorite birthday and what made it so special?

When it's someone's birthday we give our attention to that person, we do special things for them. Sometimes we give them gifts, we might throw them a party, but we let them know how important they are to us and that we love them. Since Christmas is Jesus' birthday, how do you think we should celebrate? What do you think would make Him happy?

Read through the passages below and then discuss the Talking Points.

Readings

Matthew 6:24

Matthew 6:19-21

Talking Points

1. Matthew 6:24 talks about serving two masters. When Christmas becomes all about gifts and spending money, who becomes our master, and who or what is getting all of our worship? Is it possible to serve both God and money?
2. What does Matthew 6:19-21 say about putting value on earthly things? What happens to them and what does it say about our heart when that's what is important to us? What kind of "things" are more valuable?
3. The way we celebrate Christmas reflects who we are celebrating. How can we celebrate Christmas so that it is actually about worshiping God and not earthly things?

Put It Into Practice

As a family, begin to plan a real birthday party for Jesus, allowing the kids to do most of the planning. Give everyone a job to get the party ready. Make it as simple or elaborate as you chose, and have fun! Think about what kind of gift you'd want to give Him. Write Jesus a card or a letter telling Him what your gift is, and bring it to the party. After Christmas is over, keep your card as a reminder to yourself throughout the year.

Things To Do This Week

As a family consider cutting back on spending and/or presents this year. When God gave the gift of His Son Jesus, His gift was relational. Work together to come up with meaningful, personal and relational gifts you can give others this year. That could mean giving a homemade gift. As God showed us by giving His Son, giving relationally is worth so much more than any store bought gift could ever be.

If you decide to spend less this Christmas, consider how you can use the money you save to help others. Living Water International is an organization Advent

Conspiracy has partnered with, helping communities around the world access desperately needed clean water. By providing funds to help build wells, not only are communities transformed, but lives are changed and people experience the true Living Water, which is Jesus. As a family, discuss how choosing to withhold from buying gifts that will be forgotten in a few months, you could give a gift that will be remembered for years. For more information, go to their website at <http://www.water.cc/advent/>

Throughout the week and the rest of Advent, look for opportunities to talk about spending less so that you can give more and help others. Come up with ways everyone can contribute to making this happen.

Spending less doesn't mean don't spend anything. With the gifts that you do buy, consider your purchases and who or what it is supporting. Be mindful of what you purchase.

Wrap It Up

Spend some time thanking God for giving us a gift that wouldn't break or easily get thrown in the garbage, but for giving us His Son. Ask Him for help as you continue through the Advent season not get caught up in the way the world celebrates Christmas, focused on stuff and money, but to keep your focus on Him and remembering that Christmas is about Jesus.

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We can spend less at Christmas because Christmas isn't about stuff, it's about Jesus. Let your celebration reflect the one you worship.

Week 3:

Giving Like Jesus

Materials

- Candle (to be used throughout the four weeks), matches
- Bibles
- Paper and something to write with

Light the candle and recognize God's presence with you.

Getting Started

Think about the greatest gift you've ever been given. Remember, a gift doesn't always have to be something bought with money. What was it and why was it so important to you? Now think about the best gift you've ever given someone else? Why was it your favorite?

Giving someone a gift tells them how we feel about them. At Christmas time we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the greatest gift God ever gave to us. When we learn how to give like Jesus did, we give others a picture of who Jesus is. What an awesome gift that would be.

The passages below help us understand how to give to others the way Jesus gave to us. Read the passages and then discuss the Talking Points

Readings

1 John 1:1-2,14

John 3:16-17

Matthew 24:34-40

1 John 3:17

Talking Points

1. Reread John 1:1-2, 14, and as you read it, replace “the Word” with “Jesus.” What does this say His gift to us was? How can you give the gift of your presence to others this Christmas? Talk about what that could be for different people in your family.
2. After reading John 3:16-17, talk about whether God sending Jesus to earth might have been no big deal, or whether it was a huge sacrifice that demonstrated how much God loved us. When we give gifts that are meaningful and personal, as God’s gift was to us, it demonstrates to the recipient that you value them. Have you ever received a gift like that?
3. Matthew 24 and 1 John 3 tell us how Jesus calls us to act towards others. Loving “the least of these” is something He calls us to do if we say we love Him. Doing this isn’t always easy. Talk about why it might feel hard and how to overcome that.
4. How would giving like this change Christmas? How could it change people’s lives?

Put It Into Practice

Write down everyone’s name on a small piece of paper. Put them in a bowl and let everyone take a turn grabbing someone else’s name. Sometime this week, spend some time with the person whose name you chose, showing them love like God showed us, by giving them your presence and your time. Go on an outing to a place they like, work on an activity together that they enjoy, play their favorite game or read their favorite books together. Maybe even consider doing something that shows love to others. The length of time is not as important as the quality of time. At the end of the week, share as a family about your time together.

Things To Do This Week

Go through the stuff you own, your clothes, your toys and whatever else you might have piled or packed up around the house. You probably have a lot of things you rarely use or play with. Do you think it makes sense to get more? Get some bags and pack up nice things that you don't use and can give away. Collect blankets, warm clothes, jackets, hats, gloves and even shoes. Drop them off at a homeless shelter or find a collection site. Don't use this as an excuse to replace what you've given, use it as an opportunity to give from the abundance you have and really think about whether more stuff is what you need this Christmas. Set the tone for this as being a time of gratitude for what you have, and compassion on those you are giving to.

As a family, talk about some of the people you'll be giving gifts to this Christmas. If you were to give each of these people a gift that was personal and costly, what kinds of gifts would you give? Remember, these kinds of gifts aren't always easy, and sometimes they take a bit more work. Think about how you would feel knowing someone took the time to know what's important to you and to give you something that cost them their time and their energy.

Read through Matthew 25:34-40 again. When you get to verses 35-36 and 37-39, think of examples that you might see in your school or in your community of the kinds of things Jesus is talking about. For example, "I was naked and you clothed me," could be, "There is a girl at school who doesn't have warm clothes and I brought an extra pair of gloves and a hat for her to use." Use the second part of that statement to describe ways that you can show love and kindness in ways that demonstrate the kind of love God has for all of us.

Come up with different people you could give homemade Christmas cards to this year that could be considered "the least of these". If you need ideas, you might consider making unaddressed Christmas cards and giving them to homeless folks you see around your community. Spend the evening as a family making and decorating cards, writing personal messages inside, and then praying for the

people you will be giving them to. If you will be hand delivering your cards, be sure to pray for that interaction as well, that you would have courage as you need it and that God would bless your moments together. If you'd like to take this a step further, consider making gift bag to give them along with your card. In the bags you could put a pair of socks, toothbrush and toothpaste, deodorant, chapstick, a bottle of water, a few snacks, etc.

As you go about each day, be intentional about looking for opportunities to help people who are truly in need. Giving to them might mean buying a cup of coffee to keep them warm, getting them a meal or gift card to a fast food restaurant, providing a pair of new socks or gloves, or even just sitting with them and talking. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, that when we give to the least of these, we give to Him.

Wrap It Up

Take turns praying for the people you'll be giving to this Christmas, that they'll see your gift as an act of love. Pray also for those who are poor, alone and forgotten, that through you and others, they would know of Jesus' love for them this Christmas.

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When we spend less, not only are we able to give to others who are truly in need, but we are able to give more of ourselves the way Jesus gave to us. When we spend less, we can give more, and then really love all.

Week 4:

worshiping What Matters

Materials

- Candle (to be used throughout the four weeks), matches
- Bibles
- Read through *Putting It Into Practice* to figure out what supplies you will need

Light the candle and recognize God's presence with you.

Getting Started

Think about a time you were so excited about something you danced, cried, screamed or maybe went a little crazy. What were you excited about and why did you react that way?

This week we're going to look at the Christmas story and read about some people who responded to some very exciting news in a really special and meaningful way.

Read the passages below and then discuss the Talking Points together.

Readings

Luke 2:1-20

Matthew 2:1-12

Psalms 100

Talking Points

1. During the time of Jesus' birth, shepherds were looked down upon and not given much attention or respect, yet in Luke 2 we see that God chose to give them the message of Jesus' birth before anyone else. Why do you think God did that instead of telling people who might have been considered more important? How did the shepherd respond to the news?
2. In Matthew 2 we read about the wise men's journey to worship Jesus. The wise men traveled from very far away, and they came to worship someone who wasn't their king. These men knew that Jesus was worth worshiping and they took a lot of risks to do so. What risks do you think they took and when they found Jesus, how did they worship Him?
3. Even while Jesus was just a baby, the shepherds and the wise men knew that He was worthy to be worshiped. Because we have the Bible, we know how Jesus lived and how much He loved us. How much more do you think Jesus deserves our worship?
4. Worship can be different for every person and can happen in many different ways. What forms of worship do you read about in Psalm 100? When you celebrate Christmas this week, how will you worship Jesus?

Put It Into Practice

Pull out whatever instruments you play or want to make, and have a night of worship, singing your favorite Christmas carols. Talk about the different songs you choose and celebrate God's gift to us. Another idea is to get out your art supplies and create art together. If your family likes to dance, dance. If writing poetry is what you prefer, write. Whatever form it is, take some time together and worship God for sending us Jesus all those many many years ago.

Things To Do This Week

Are you all ready for Jesus' birthday party? If not, get ready because it's almost here!

Work together to retell the Christmas story in a fun and creative way. A few possible ways include: musical, play, puppet show, write a story book, write a song or poem, or create a mural. Have fun and if you do a performance, be sure to record it so you can watch it all together.

When the shepherds heard the good news from the angels, they went out and told others all about it. Sharing God's love with others is a form of worship. Who can you share God's love with this week? What might be some fun ways to do this?

Look for opportunities to talk about and practice worship throughout your day with your kids. Learn to make worship a regular part of your life. Brainstorm together what a life of worship would look like.

Wrap It Up

Take turns praising and thanking God for giving us the greatest gift we could have ever received. Tell Him what Jesus means to you and ask God to help you live in a way that worships Him in all ways, all the time.

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At Christmas we worship because it's all about Jesus. He gave to us the greatest gift, and our response should forever be worship and praise.

What If?

What if this wasn't just a practice for Advent?

What if we spent less so we could give more, worshipped fully and loved all people, all year long? Imagine what could happen! Talk as a family about ways you can continue what you've practiced the past four weeks. What might we begin to forgo as a family that allows us to set aside resources in anticipation of future giving? What would it look like for us to regularly practice worship as a family?

Just as it did that night Jesus was born,
Christmas can still change the world.