

REFLECTIONS

C3Women - Christ-Centered, Connected, Called

For to Us a Child Is Born

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

-Isaiah 9:6-7



"...And then, just when everything is bearing down on us to such an extent that we can scarcely withstand it, the Christmas message comes to tell us that all our ideas are wrong, and that what we take to be evil and dark is really good and light because it comes from God. Our eyes are at fault, that is all. God is in the manger, wealth in poverty, light in darkness, succor in abandonment. No evil can befall us; whatever men may do to us, they cannot but serve the God who is secretly revealed as love and rules the world and our lives."

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God Is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas*



As 2020 draws to a close, we look back on a year that none of us could have imagined. Coronavirus, social distancing, pandemic, Zoom meetings, mandatory masks, schools closed, worship in parking lots, more than 1.25 million Covid-19 deaths worldwide, travel bans, herd immunity, racial unrest, ongoing riots, record breaking hurricanes...; words and events that would have seemed more at home in a Hollywood script than our everyday vocabulary! These months have surely been "bearing down on us to such an extent that we can scarcely withstand it." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer) We groan under the weight, we long for relief and day by day, week by week we wait and hope and pray realizing anew just how desperately we need a Savior!

IN THIS ISSUE

For to Us a Child Is Born - p.1

C3Women's Ministry Survey - p.4

Resources for Advent
and Christmas - pp.5 & 6

Keeping Christmas:
Christ-Centered Christmas
Traditions by Knox Women -
scattered throughout

Advent and Christmas Crafts -
scattered throughout

And into our longing and waiting we hear again the words of the prophet, "For unto us a child is born..." and hope is rekindled by the One who has come! God Himself has entered our sin ravaged world as a newborn baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, the first stop on His journey to the Cross where all has been made right! In faith we strike the matches and light the candles in our Advent wreath knowing that though in this world we will have trouble, Jesus invites us to "take heart because He has overcome the world!" (John 16:33)

Nativity
Stained Glass
Craft



For to Us..., *continued*

And so, amid the turmoil that is the year 2020, we celebrate our Savior's birth and long for His return. In this Advent issue of Reflections, we want to help you enter this season with fresh eyes to see the glory of Jesus. We have asked a number of women to share a meaningful Advent/Christmas tradition that has helped them keep their eyes focused on Jesus throughout the season. We hope that you will be encouraged by these glimpses into your Knox sisters' celebrations and be inspired to try something new yourself. We will be sharing some new Advent devotionals (as well as links to some of our old favorites). We will sprinkle crafts for adults and children throughout the newsletter; just click on the pictures to go to the templates and directions. Since we aren't able to have our annual Advent Gathering, use the links below to access past Advent Gatherings. We'll also share the results of the survey we sent out this fall and provide you with ministry plans and opportunities to sign up for the future based on what you told us interested you most. May you be blessed by these resources and may your Advent and Christmas celebrations be richly Christ-centered!

Your C3Women's Ministry Team

[Click here for past Advent Gatherings:
2017 - 2018 - 2019](#)



Keeping Christmas: Family Worship - Janet Chen

Not having grown up in a Christian home, I first learned about Advent when my husband Peter and I started coming to Knox. I loved the tradition and symbolism of lighting an advent candle each of the 4 Sundays before Christmas. I wanted to bring this into my home in a meaningful way and eventually put together a little booklet with a collection of Advent and Christmas songs and readings which can be used on a weekly basis or enjoyed all in one sitting.

Now, with young adult children living in various states, we have enjoyed coming together one evening a year to light candles, read, sing, worship, and anticipate Christmas together.



[Click here for Janet's Advent Worship booklet.](#)

Keeping Christmas: Picture Book Advent - Natalie Thompson



Over the years we've experimented with a few traditions but have found the paradigm to what keeps Advent sacred (and sane) to us:

- 1) Less is more
- 2) Prepare Him room
- 3) Be the gift

Any invitations that pop up (which happen more often now given that the kids are active in their school, church, community, etc.) are considered as an entire family within that rubric. Is this costing/taxing us more than necessary? Financially or emotionally? And does this allow more room for Christ, or less? It's not to say that we don't visit Santa, set out cookies, etc. but it just means that we try to keep our focus on Him, our gifts on others and our schedules open-yet-protected for lots of simmering soup nights, family devotionals by the fire, cookie baking and of course, picture book opening.

When the kids were very young, many of the picture books were short and sweet. As the kids have gotten older, our Advent booklist has changed as well...they don't all have to be nativity-focused, but ones whose themes include generosity, serving others, and belief in something bigger than ourselves. My husband David and I usually take an evening after Thanksgiving to wrap up 25 picture books (a mix of ones we own and library ones—many from the Knox library as well!) and at the beginning of Advent, the kids are excited to find them all under the tree. It's sweet to look forward to a time to read them each day (when they were little it was often in the morning, now that they are bigger it's been either after school or in the evening after dinner).

Keeping Christmas: Happy Birthday, Jesus!

- Christy Gregory

We love to be reminded that Christmas is the best birthday celebration of the year, so every year on Christmas Eve we bake and decorate a birthday cake for Jesus. Most years the decorations include an embarrassing amount of frosting, sprinkles, and candy—the brighter and sillier the better. Some years have involved candles, birthday decorations and party favors. Then, on

Christmas morning, we have cake for breakfast (along with some protein and fruit of course). This sets the tone for a fun day of celebrating the real reason for the season. When our kids were little they looked forward to cake for breakfast all year.



[Click here for words and music to a fun "Happy Birthday, Jesus" song.](#)



Paper Angel Craft

- Heidi Lemmerhirt

• A tradition that has taken root in our family – particularly as we have shared Christmas with our Knox community group – has been to make a birthday cake for Jesus. It is something our kids look forward to each year. Because we traditionally celebrate with our community group, it hasn't been done on Christmas day, but at some point in the week or two before. Each part of the cake has some meaning and tells part of the story:.

- 1. The bottom layer is a dark chocolate cake. This reminds us of our sin. (Romans 3:23)
- 2. The middle layer is a red cake. This reminds us that Jesus' blood covers our sin. (I John 1:7)
- 3. The top layer is a green cake. This reminds us of the new life we have in Jesus. (Colossians 2:13).
- 4. The entire cake is covered in white frosting. This reminds us that we are covered in Christ's righteousness and our sins are as white as snow. (Isaiah 1:18 and 61:10)
- 5. A large red taper candle completes the cake. This reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world. (John 8:12)

We light the candle together and sing "Happy Birthday to Jesus" before cutting the cake and examining each of the layers -- using them to remember the gift that WE receive on JESUS' birthday. I love the visual theological truths that are represented in this cake, and the look of astonishment on a child's face when the cake is cut for the first time. When I stop to reflect, it is even more astounding that the purity of Christ covers me in such a way that when God looks at me, He sees the righteousness of Christ. That is a gift worth remembering and celebrating!

Note – *This activity is made much easier by using boxed cake mix (chocolate, red velvet, and white with green food coloring - sometimes you can even find pre-dyed mixes at Christmas). I also use generous amounts of cool whip for an easy white covering! The birthday theme can be elaborated as desired, with gifts being brought to Jesus (tangible gifts for a food bank, etc.) or time for reflection on how we can express our love for Him.*



Keeping Christmas: Advent Wreaths and Angel Chimes

– Jessica Cropsey

Celebrating Jesus’s birth and delighting in family have both been central themes that were impressed upon me as a child during the Advent/Christmas season. The Advent wreath has always been an important part of our family celebration, both as a child and now with my own kids. Turning the lights down every night during Advent and reading prayers and Scripture together in the glow of the candles has always been a special time. I also have sweet memories of being mesmerized by a set of small golden angels that would chime as the heat of the candles underneath caused them to spin. As older kids, we would stay up late on Christmas Eve to talk and tell stories while listening to the quiet tinkling of the chimes. Another tradition that I always enjoyed and have tried to continue with my own family is having a small group of close friends or family over on Christmas Eve for a nice dinner followed by a time of focused worship and Scripture reading. In recent years, I often wrap a family present that we open together on Christmas Eve, usually a new game that we can play together that night. Christmas morning has always involved a big breakfast (pounds of bacon and cinnamon buns absolutely essential) followed by a reading of the Christmas story before diving into presents. Some years, we have gone to the hospital on Christmas day to give small gifts to the children on the pediatrics ward or do some caroling. John’s saxophone last year was a big hit! We often look for ways to bless the less fortunate around us with needed items (usually food).



C3W Fall Ministry Survey Results

We had 60+ responses to our fall C3W ministry survey. Thanks to all who had a chance to fill that out. We are using it to shape our ministry during the continuing Covid restrictions. We received almost 40 prayer requests and have assigned teams of two to pray for those requests through the end of the year on a regular basis. We consider it such a privilege to be invited to pray with you in these ways and one of our most important ministry initiatives! You can see a chart below that summarizes the responses.

We asked you specifically about two ministry opportunities, Watch Parties and Book Club groups. Enough women expressed interest in these that we are moving forward to implement both. We will begin with several Advent Watch Parties. Some will be in person, others via Zoom.

[Click here to sign up for Advent Watch Parties.](#)

We will also host several “Women Encouraging Women” book clubs in early 2021. These will take the place of our T2 groups and are open to everyone. We are recommending three books - *Rhythms of Rest* by Shelly Miller, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* by Rosario Butterfield and *God Does His Best Work with Empty* by Nancy Guthrie. To help us plan for these groups, we would like to ascertain your interest in a particular book and whether you would prefer to meet in person or via Zoom. By signing up, you are only expressing interest not making a commitment.

[Click here to express interest in C3W book clubs.](#)

QUESTION	ANSWER	RESPONSES
How are you doing?	I wish things would go back to normal sooner than later, but I find that I'm handling things pretty well.	62
	I'm feeling fairly stressed and could use some help.	1
How are you connecting with others at Knox in this season of isolation?	I'm connected at Knox through Sunday worship.	51
	I'm connecting at Knox as part of a Knox small group.	39
	I'm part of a Knox Bible study (Wednesday morning or evening, MTB, other)	33
	I serve on a committee at Knox	11
Sunday worship connection	I mostly stream the worship service.	35
	I go to outdoor or indoor worship at Knox whenever it's offered.	15
How might the C3W ministry at Knox engage you?	I'd be interested in joining a "watch party"	22
	I'd be comfortable meeting in person with others while observing recommended safety precautions like distancing and wearing a mask.	25
	I'd be interested in a book club where we would read a book and meet regularly via Zoom to discuss it.	11
Meeting in person	At a coffee shop/restaurant	22
	At my home or in someone else's	22
	Outside at a park	26
What would be helpful	I would love to have a prayer partner to share mutual support and prayer.	1
Prayer Requests Shared		37



Resources for Advent and Christmas

Join Pastor Bryan for a series of Advent/Christmas sermons from 2016 as he leads us to ponder with Mary God's goodness in sending His Son!

THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTMAS - Luke 1:46-49

THE WONDER OF CHRISTMAS - Luke 1:50-53

GLORY TO GOD, PEACE ON EARTH - Luke 2:1-20

THE FULLNESS OF CHRISTMAS - Luke 1:54-55



The Christmas We Didn't Expect by David Mathis

In the Advent devotional, *The Christmas We Didn't Expect*, David Mathis explores the "surprising twists and stunning turns of God himself being born as a man...From the way Jesus came, to who he really is, to the details of his arrival, the first visitors, and then the life that would follow, and how we are called to respond – it was all so unexpected." Moving between scriptures from Jesus' birth story and the rest of the New Testament Mathis invites us to see the full meaning of Jesus birth and invites us to respond in faith. Geared towards adults, this devotional would provide great discussions for older children and teens when read together as a family.

Click here to see a brief video introduction to this devotional by the author.

Joy to the World- Daily Readings for Advent by Charles Spurgeon

This collection of brief sermon excerpts from beloved 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, focuses on the joy of the incarnation. Reflecting on both the humility and magnificence of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us, Spurgeon invites us to marvel and respond with wonder to the glorious Christmas story. This collection includes 25 very short meditations appropriate for individual or family use.

An Even Better Christmas by Matt Chandler

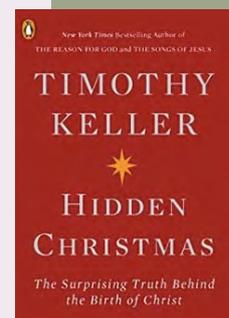
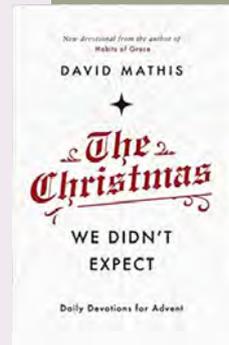
Matt Chandler, pastor of The Village Church in Texas, wrote *An Even Better Christmas* in 2018, but it feels like it was tailor-made for 2020! "Maybe you're feeling beat up and banged up.... [or] something happened this year that has made you aware of how fragile things are." A bit prophetic, don't you think! In this little book (only 60 pages), we are taken through the Christmas story in five chapters that call us to see Jesus as God's intervention in history to save us and give us eternal hope and joy.

It's an easy, warm and personal read sharing both Matt's story and God's story.

This would be a great little book to give to friends or to read with the family on the Sundays of Advent. It's even stocking stuffer size.

Hidden Christmas by Timothy Keller

This Advent meditation by renowned pastor and author Tim Keller is full of his characteristically simple yet insightful biblical teaching. Keller explores how the coming of Jesus is the only solution that is possible for our broken world. The Christmas message is that "on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." It has come from outside. There is light outside of this world, and Jesus has brought that light to save us; indeed, he is the Light (John 8:12)" This is a book that brings great hope to a hurting world. It would be excellent for personal Advent reading, a Community Group, or sharing with a friend or family member grappling with the claims of Christianity.



Resources, *continued*

The Innkeeper by John Piper

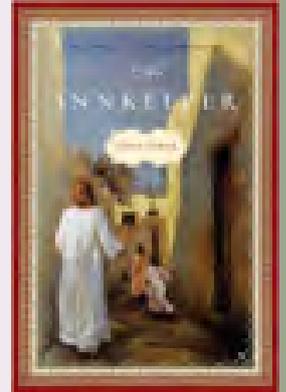
This poem by John Piper about Herod's order to kill all the children 2 years old and younger in Bethlehem is told by Jesus, going back to visit his birthplace just two weeks before his crucifixion. Arriving, he encounters Jacob, the innkeeper who gave Mary and Joseph room that night when he was born. Striking up a conversation, Jesus discovers the high price this man paid when Herod sent his destroying soldiers. Through tears, Jesus assures Jacob that because of what he is about to do at the Cross, all Jacob's losses will be swallowed up in victory and all that was lost will be restored forever. This book powerfully weaves Jesus' birth narrative with his crucifixion, beautifully written but not sentimental as it enters into the grisly reality of Herod's obsession to kill the one who was born King of the Jews! Even more, it's about the purpose of Jesus' coming – not to remain in a manger but to fully enter into the darkness of our world and bring healing and light!

Click here to see a video of John Piper reading this poem. Recommended for older children.

A Series of Short Advent Videos by Paul David Tripp

Addressing topics including holiday loneliness, sharing your faith at Christmas, centering your celebrations on Christ, slowing down during Christmas, these eight short (between 2-3 minutes) Advent videos by Paul Tripp are designed to both encourage and equip you as you celebrate Jesus' birth with your family, neighbors and church family.

Paul Tripp has also written an Advent devotional, ***Come Let Us Adore Him***.



Resources Especially for Families with Younger Children

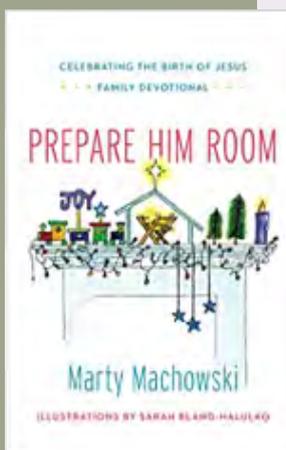
The Jesus Storybook Bible - A Christmas Collection: Stories, Songs, and Reflections for the Advent Season by Sally Lloyd-Jones

This new Advent devotional from Sally Lloyd-Jones weaves together the Old Testament expectations of the coming Messiah with the story of Jesus birth. It's an interactive story, sound and song collection that is tailored to a family with young children. **Click here to download a set of ornaments for each day of Advent that your children can cut out and color to go along with the daily devotional.**

Prepare Him Room - Celebrating the Birth of Jesus by Marty Machowski

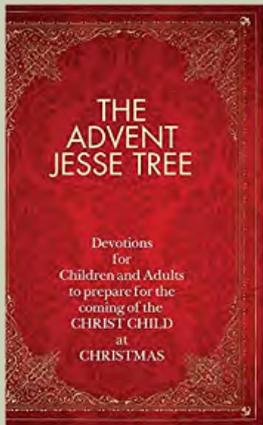
This rich family Advent devotional skillfully weaves together Scripture, songs, activities, and an original story called "Bartimaeus: A Christmas Story." Each week offers three devotionals: an Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah, an announcement of its fulfillment, and fulfillment in Jesus' life and ministry.

Each week also includes a story chapter about Christopher, a homeless child who comes to live at Bartimaeus House, a warm and welcoming refuge for orphans. From discussion prompts, to popcorn garlands, to recipes for Christmas cookies, this devotional will bring your family into the wonder of the Incarnation revealed to us in God's Word, and you'll have lots of fun along the way! Recommended for families with preschool and school age children or for anyone wanting to creatively enter the Advent season. **Click here to purchase the companion music CD by Sovereign Grace Music.**



The Jesse Tree - An Advent Tradition

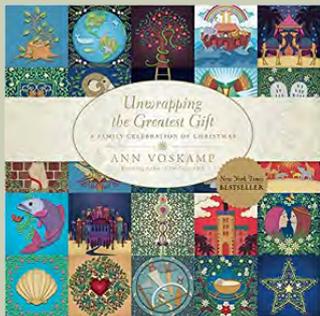
Inspired by Isaiah 11:1-4, "a shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse," the Jesse Tree tradition traces the fulfillment of this promise from Genesis 1:1 through the birth of Jesus. Using simple symbols for each of the daily stories the gospel unfolds progressively through Old Testament types, stories and prophecies culminating in the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. Here are two Jesse Tree devotionals that you could use this Advent season plus a beautiful Advent pop-up calendar by Ann Voskamp. **Click here for a PDF of simple Jesse tree symbols that you can cut out and color.**



The Advent Jesse Tree by Dean Lambert Smith offers 25 devotions, each tracing the heritage of Jesus through Old Testament stories and prophecies. Devotions are written in two versions (one for children, one for adults) and each is paired with a symbol such as a lamb, a dove, a heart, a star. Children and parents can use the line art to craft meaningful ornaments.

Unwrapping the Greatest Gift: A Family Celebration of Christmas

by Ann Voskamp
With vivid, full-color illustrations, downloadable ornaments, and moving scenes from the Bible, this book is a gift your whole family can experience each day leading up to Christmas. Families can read the



provided Scripture passage, engage with a devotion to help children of all ages understand the Advent theme for the day, and participate in suggested activities to apply the theme.

Note: These Jesse Tree devotionals, as well as **additional Advent resources**, were recommended by Melissa Kruger on The Gospel Coalition website but have not been personally reviewed by anyone on the Knox C3W team.

Keeping Christmas: A Family Nativity Play

- Jennifer Donovan

When our oldest granddaughter was about 4, I began to be concerned that our Christmas Day celebrations would give her the idea that Christmas was primarily about getting presents. So I wrote a Nativity play. Every year since then, after Christmas morning breakfast, we all get into our costumes and put on the play. There's no audience, we all have a part! When the play is finished and before we open our gifts, we each bring a gift of money and put it in the manger as our gift to Jesus. We donate this to World Vision or a similar organization to help with their efforts in Jesus' name on behalf of the poor around the world.



Click here for the play script.



Advent
Paper Chain
Craft



Stained Glass
Pictures
Craft



Christmas Banners Craft

Keeping Christmas: An Advent Prayer Calendar

- Josephine Tsai

For the past 15 years, I've been involved in a ministry to international women called Coffee Break. One lovely aspect of this for me is growing close to and learning from the women I'm working alongside. Because many are a generation ahead, I've tapped into their wisdom to help me form spiritual traditions and rhythms for my own family. My co-teacher the first year shared about an Advent prayer calendar made when her kids were young, offering to help me make one while she made another for her grandkids. I happily agreed, not realizing it would be a wall-sized felt banner, embellished with 30 hand-sewn felt ornaments hanging from a Christmas tree and manger scene. We met with another friend once a week for over a year to work on the banners. Even now the memories are vivid of us sewing, laughing and talking about ministry and raising kids; my baby Holden alternated between playing with their grandkids' toys and demanding attention from all 3 of us. When my banner was finally finished with considerable help, I stepped back to look at the final product-



the best part: a large sequined, felt gift box under the tree that would hold baby Jesus inside until Dec 25. That Advent, my family lit a candle each night and took turns choosing an ornament to hang, explaining why we chose it and offering a prayer to God as we waited for the birth of His baby. Holden couldn't talk then so it was simply Bill and me praying and him pointing. Ever since then, a small leather notebook records this tradition: each year's ornament order, explanation and prayers. The ornaments on the tree recounting the memories of each year are always in different order; the ornaments on the manger reminding us of the nativity story are always the same. We delight in seeing how each child has gone from pointing, explaining, and now offering their own prayers each candlelit night. They in turn witness us parents doing the same—anticipating Jesus' birth and trusting in God's faithfulness year after year.



Keeping Christmas: An Advent Fabric Nativity – Blair Gerdes

While we often end up with a 'chocolate' advent calendar as well, our main advent calendar is a fabric nativity with small 'pillow' figures including the angels who appeared to Joseph and Mary, the donkey she rode to Bethlehem, the shepherds and their sheep, the star leading wise men and their camels toward Bethlehem, animals in the stable, and, of course, the Holy family. Each day as we add a figure to the scene, we recount the holy story - taking a moment to focus on the reason for the season and be thankful for Jesus' birth, Emmanuel, God with us.



Christmas
Star
Craft



Christmas
Wreath
Craft



Christmas
Tree
Craft

Advent & Christmas Crafts on the Web

Tissue Paper Wreath

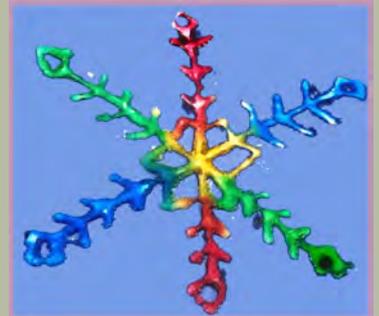


Handprint Wreath



Cut Paper Snowflakes

Watercolor and Salt Snowflakes



Mitten Suncatcher

*Note: This craft can also be done with wax paper and thinned glue. See directions for the **Stained Glass Nativity** for more details..*



Paint Stick Three Wise Men



Paper Plate Angels



Plastic Cup Angel Luminaries



Paper Angel Chains

