



LOVE IS HERE

AN ADVENT GUIDE

by Sarah
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INTRODUCTION

Love Is Here

Have you ever felt that you've blown through yet another Christmas season without taking the time to seek the "withness" of the One who has promised His loving presence to all who seek Him?

It's all too easy to get sucked into the undertow of the mistletoe and miss the inspiration of the Incarnation. And even though we often heap guilt and shame on ourselves for getting too caught up in the trimmings, our Emmanuel continues to stand at the door eagerly awaiting our company—like a longing parent anticipating the return of a deeply missed child. And when we walk through the door, road weary, beaten down, and disoriented, we become entrenched in the undeniable reality that *Love Is Here*. This is where we long to be. This is where we find rest and restoration. This is where our hope is renewed. This is where we belong.

Sometimes all we need is a guiding hand to ease us back in. This is what Sarah Bourns Crosby offers us in this volume of Advent poems, passages, and prompts. Set aside some time each week to sit before your "God with you" as you reflect on these "withness" meditations. Resist the distractions. Resist the lies that tell you you may not be worthy to enter in. But don't resist the invitation back to where you truly belong.

Advent, from the Latin *adventus* meaning "coming," represents the period of preparation for the birth of our Emmanuel at Christmas—and also of preparation for His imminent return at the end of the age. Meanwhile, dwelling here in the in-between, we are assured of His presence among us as we linger in His love and extend it to those longing to know that *Love Is Here*.

Emmanuel. God be with you.

Sarah Bourns Crosby writes poetry around themes of hope, waiting, lament, love, and God's faithfulness. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her husband, Paul, and twin sons. You can read more of her work at sarahbournscrosby.com.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Christian tradition of Advent is a season of both remembrance and looking ahead, of waiting and stillness. Advent spans the four weeks leading up to Christmas, and the passing of each week is represented by lighting a candle with a specific meaning each Sunday.

Week 1: Hope

Week 2: Peace

Week 3: Joy

Week 4: Love

A fifth and final candle—called the Christ candle—is lit on Christmas Eve. The light of these candles is symbolic of the light of Christ, which pushes back the darkness.

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. . . . 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 9:2, 6

Each devotional includes an Old Testament and New Testament reading along with a Psalm. Additional passages are included for Christmas Eve. Every Sunday during Advent, and on Christmas Eve, meditate on the passages listed, ponder the poem by Sarah, and discuss or pray through the prompt. Whether you use this devotional guide over the dinner table, with a small group, or individually, we pray it will enrich your life in Christ this Advent season. For those who wait, wander, and weep, for those experiencing loss, longing, and love this Christmas—may you come to know afresh that He is with you.



ADVENT WEEK ONE
THE CANDLE OF HOPE

READ

Genesis 18:9-15, 21:1; Luke 1:26-45; Psalm 27

BLESSED IS SHE

A poem for those who wait

I am Sarah
Bitter and barren
Burnt out by this promise that never came
Worn out from waiting
Laughing to hide the aching
Longing for these empty arms to hold a baby
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Tamar
Tired of trying so hard
Pushed away, cast aside
Left with no one to provide
Longing for these wrongs to be made right
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Rahab
Used and abused
Body broken, soul bruised
Working late into the night

Weary, just trying to survive
Longing for some good to come from this tattered life
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Ruth
Grieved and alone
Left with nothing, far from home
Back, breaking
Heart, aching
Leaving so much behind
Longing to start a new life
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Bathsheba
Angry and ashamed
It was never supposed to be this way
Years of resentment
Tears of regret
Longing for this story to be redeemed
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Elizabeth
Washed up and nearing the end
Disappointed, again and again and again
Wanting things to finally change
Wondering if it's just too late
Longing for faith to still believe
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Mary
Overwhelmed and afraid
Young and small and anything but brave
I had plans, I had dreams,
But now everything has changed
And I don't know if I'll have what it takes

But I do know I'll trust you anyway.

Oh Abba,
Why me?
Oh Abba,
How will this be?

The Holy Spirit will come upon you
And the power of the Most High will overshadow you
So this child to be born of you
Will be the Savior of the world.

For behold,
She who was said to be barren has conceived
And she who nearly lost hope still believed
And she who was worn out from waiting, held a baby
And she who was grieved, her story was redeemed
And she who was broken, was honored and healed.

For nothing
Is impossible
With God.

Blessed is she
Who believed
That there would be
A fulfillment
Of the promise
Yet to be seen.

*(And,
Blessed are you
Who still believe
That there will be
A fulfillment
Of the promise
Yet to be seen).*

A PROMPT

What are you currently longing and trusting for with radical hope? What are you believing that you have yet to see? About what have you found yourself saying, “How could that be?”

Would you now speak, out loud, over your disbelief, doubt, or fear the same words Mary said, “May it be to me **just as You say**” . . . even if it comes in a very unexpected way?



ADVENT WEEK TWO
THE CANDLE OF PEACE

READ

Isaiah 40; Psalm 23; Mark 1:1-8

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

A poem for those who wander

Dry and dusty, vast and empty
This is a desolate place
Wandering in circles
Weakening every day.

Feet stumbling with each step
Voices grumbling, under breath.

How did we ever get here?
Why did we leave what we knew?
When will we ever get there?
What will we find if we do?

How long, O Lord? Will you forget us?
How long will we lack what we need?
How long will we wander this wilderness?
How long will we search for peace?

But . . .
Into the darkness
Over the stillness
A voice
Crying
In the wilderness:

Prepare.
His.
Way.
Make these desert paths
Straight.

These dark mountains, made low
These bleak valleys, raised high
This hard soil, new growth
This dry ground, fresh life.

And the glory of the Lord
Will be revealed
And all people
Will see it.

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God
Creator of the ends of the earth.

Yes, your Shepherd is coming
You shall want no more,
Leading you by still waters
Restoring your soul.

Though you walk through the valley
He'll stay right beside you
His rod and His staff
Gently comfort and guide you.

He prepares an abundance
In your enemy's presence
Sets a table before you
Brimming with blessing.

And your cup
Overflows
And goodness and mercy
Follow

You

(Yes you)

All the days of your life.

And you shall dwell,
No more in the desert,
But in the house of the Lord
Forever.

A PROMPT

Picture the Good Shepherd walking beside you in the wilderness. He puts His arm around you and asks some honest questions. How would you answer right now as His beloved one?

What do you lack?

What do you need?

What do you want?

What do you dream?

And how does He respond to you?



ADVENT WEEK THREE
THE CANDLE OF JOY

READ

Psalm 126; Jeremiah 31; Matthew 2:1-18

MOURNING MERCIES

A poem for those who weep

There were tears that first Christmas
too

The loud wailing and heaving kind
The deep groaning and grieving kind

Voices heard in Ramah,
Lamentation and bitter weeping,
Rachel grieving,
Refusing to be comforted,
For her children are no more.*

A collective cry
That filled Bethlehem with despair

Oh, how could Jesus be there
too?

How could such pain exist
At the same time
In the same town
As Peace?

How could this overwhelming grief
Leave any room leftover
For Joy?

How could their sorrow
Not overshadow
This bright Hope for tomorrow?

How could lament
Live alongside
Love?

But it did.

And it does.



So, too,
Your cries are not a contradiction
To the coming
Of the Christ.

Your fears are not an affront
To the faithfulness
Of the Father.

Your tears need not
Steal away
Your trust.

This Christmas
You have permission to have a broken heart
You are welcome to weep and to wail,
You are allowed to lament your losses,
Your sorrow is safe in the hands of the Savior.

Heartache is simply a given in this broken world.
But joy is given
By a good good Giver.

May He give you this Christmas
Grace in the wilderness**
Gladness for sorrow**
Joy for your mourning**
Bright hope for tomorrow.**

*Jeremiah 31

** Also Jeremiah 31—because grief and joy can exist at the exact same time.

A PROMPT

As Psalm 26 describes, sometimes our tears water the seeds that lead to new life. How have you seen your grief give way to joy?

Or if you haven't yet, how might your sorrow begin to bring forth greater strength and new hope for tomorrow?

Where could you look for flourishing from what you thought was dead?

How could your weeping lead to a great harvest for reaping instead?



ADVENT WEEK FOUR
THE CANDLE OF LOVE

READ

Exodus 29:44-46; Psalm 139; John 1:14

WITH

A love poem

Love wants to be with
Love needs to be near
Love can't stay away
Love has to be here.

Love comes close
Love holds tight
Love moves over
Love sits beside.

Love pours out
Love leans in
Love goes first
Love tries again.

Love leaps over hurdles
Love jumps through hoops
Love stays despite struggles
Love still chooses you.

Love looks for the lonely
Love lives on the margins
Love crosses all boundaries
Love seeks the forgotten.

Love becomes flesh
Love moves in
Love is here
Love dwells among.

Love is within us
Close by us
Around us
Beside us.

The very definition of LOVE is: WITH.

Near enough to touch
His presence here to dwell
God. With. Us.
Our Immanuel.

A PROMPT

When you love someone, you want to be near them. You like being around them. You think about them when you're apart and make plans to be together again.

How have you experienced God's love for you in these ways?

When was the last time you sensed the WITH-ness of Jesus?

How was He present to you? How were you present to Him?



CHRISTMAS EVE
THE CANDLE OF CHRIST

READ

Genesis 1:1-3; Exodus 10:21-23; Isaiah 9:2; Luke 1:26-33; John 1:1-5; Revelation 21:1-6, 22-26

LET THERE BE LIGHT

A poem to dispel the darkness

Christmas began
In the beginning

In stillness, in emptiness,
In nothingness

A blanket of silence, an overpowering absence
A void, a vacuum, the universe a blank canvas

But where darkness covered
The Spirit hovered

His Fullness filled the stillness
His Voice broke the silence

And into the night, He spoke,
Let there be Light.

The people of Egypt, enveloped
In a thick cloud of darkness
The long night of the ninth plague
A blanket of blackness

While the Hebrew slaves
Sang in the daylight,
Their desert land
Bathed in bright white

With a cloud by day, and fire by night
Yaweh led them, out of the darkness
And into the Light

The prophet saw his people
Walking in a land of deep darkness
Wandering, lost, broken and blind
Watching for a glimmer of hope
Waiting for the sun to shine

And into the night, he spoke,
Wait, just wait, for the Light.

The angel appeared to Mary
In a time of oppression, injustice, unrest.
Her people yearning and aching
For someone to save them from their distress.

He announced this way of salvation
A strange declaration
Good news of peace and great joy
A virgin girl to deliver the Light of the World
God—as a baby boy.

And over the darkness, he said,
It is done.

Behold,
Your Light has come.

And at the end of time
There will be no night
And no more need for the sun.
For the Son of God
The Messiah King
Will be our Eternal Light.

A PROMPT

As you light the Christ candle, look back over your life (like the people of Israel rehearsed and remembered their history). Pick a memory or two when you saw Jesus meet you in the darkness. How did He bring light?

Wherever it may be dark for you today, unknown or unclear, blurry or bleak, would you invite Jesus to shine bright as Christmas morning dawns?