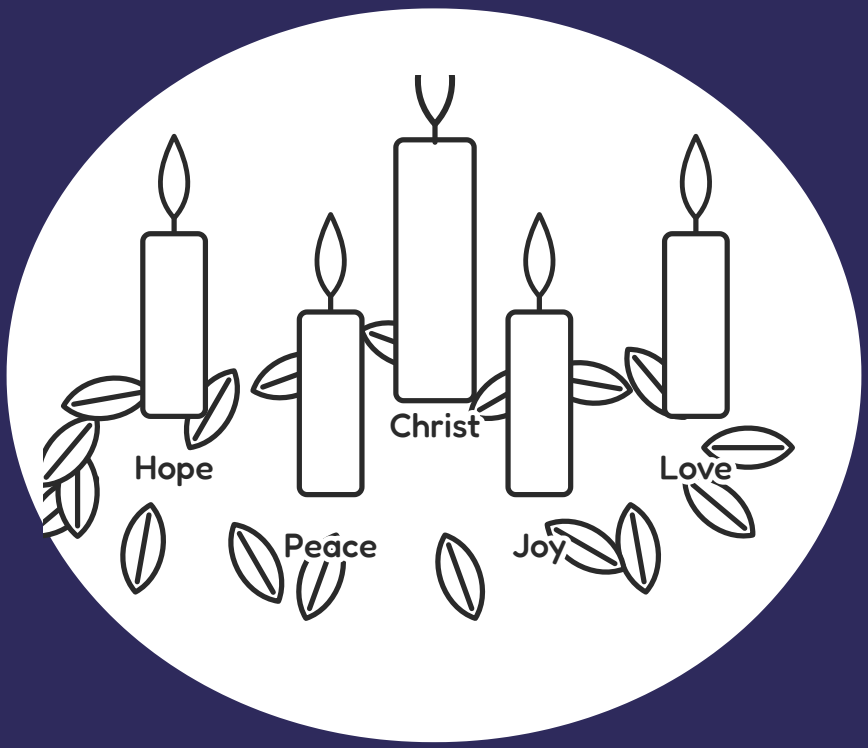
A YOUTH ADVENT DEVOTIONAL · AGES 13–17

Still, God Comes Near

27 days of hope, peace, joy, and love



Read • Reflect • Real Talk • Try It • Pray

Tuckahoe Presbyterian Church
November 29 – December 25, 2026

Welcome to Advent

Hey there,

Advent is the four weeks before Christmas when Christians get ready to celebrate Jesus' birth. It's a season of waiting, hoping, and paying attention to how God shows up in ordinary life.

Let's be honest: December can be a lot. Finals, practices, concerts, family plans, and a feed that never stops. This devotional is a chance to slow down for a few minutes a day and remember that God doesn't wait for life to calm down before coming near.

Each day has a short Bible passage, a reflection, a Real Talk question, space to write, a Try It challenge, and a short prayer. It takes about 10 minutes. Do it on your own, with a friend, or in youth group. Miss a day? No guilt. Just pick back up.

Your questions are welcome here. Your doubts are welcome here. You are welcome here.

See you on the journey,
Jillian Gatewood, Director of Christian Formation

How to Use This

Read Look up the day's Bible passage on your phone or in a Bible.

Reflect A short reflection, about a two-minute read.

Real Talk One honest question to think about.

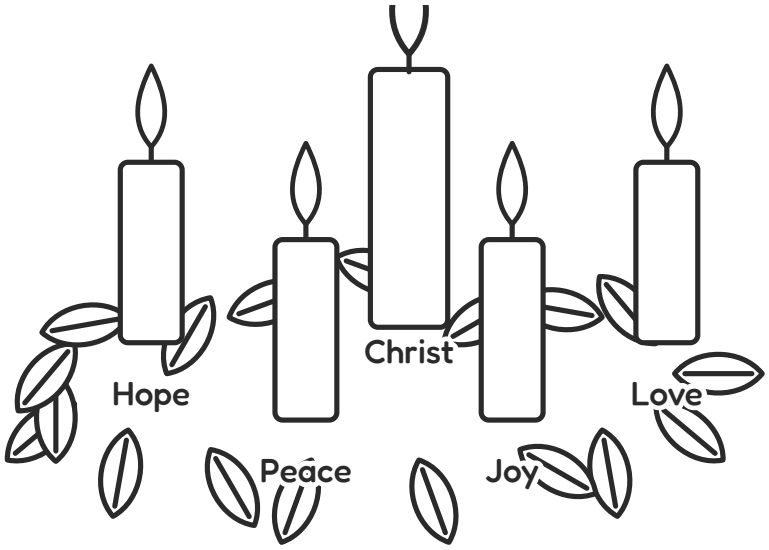
Write Use the lines to journal, doodle, or pray.

Try It A small challenge for the day.

Pray A short prayer to start or end your day.

The Advent Wreath

Each Sunday we light one more candle. Color one in each week.



Week 1: Hope. *Hope does not require us to know what happens next. It invites us to trust that God is present even when the way forward is unclear.*

Hope Begins Here

READ Isaiah 9:2

Advent starts in the dark. Before the manger and the angels, there was just a world waiting. Maybe that feels familiar: school pressure, family stuff, news you can't stop scrolling. Isaiah describes people walking in darkness who see a great light. Not after the dark is over. While they're still walking. Hope isn't pretending everything is fine. It's trusting that God hasn't left the room.

REAL TALK

Where do you most need hope right now?

Light the first Advent candle, the candle of Hope.

Try It: Put your phone in another room for 10 minutes tonight. Sit with one light on and name what you're hoping for.

Pray: *God of light, I can't see very far right now. Be the light anyway. Amen.*

When the Future Feels Unclear

READ Romans 15:13

College, careers, friendships, the world your generation is inheriting. People keep asking what's next, and sometimes you have no idea. That's okay. The people of the Bible waited without knowing how God's promises would come true. Paul prays for a God of hope to fill people with joy and peace, not certainty. You don't need the whole map. You need to remember who's walking with you.

REAL TALK

What question about your future is weighing on you, and how could you bring it to God?

Try It: Write down one worry about the future. Fold it up and pray over it each morning this week.

Pray: *God of hope, I don't know what's next. Walk the next step with me. Amen.*

Faithful in the Small Things

READ Micah 6:8

It's easy to feel like the world's problems are too big for one teenager to touch. But Micah keeps it simple: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God. Sitting with the new kid. Standing up when someone gets roasted in the group chat. Saying thank you to the custodian. None of that goes viral. All of it matters to God.

REAL TALK

What small act of kindness or justice can you do today?

Try It: Do one kind thing today that nobody will see or post about.

Pray: *God, when the world feels too big, show me the next good thing I can do. Amen.*

There Is Room for Questions

READ Luke 1:26–38

When the angel gave Mary huge news, her first response was a question: "How can this be?" Her question is part of the Christmas story. Sometimes church can feel like a place where you're supposed to already have answers. You don't. Doubts and questions aren't the opposite of faith. They often mean you care enough to take God seriously.

REAL TALK

What question about God, faith, or church are you carrying right now?

Try It: Ask a youth leader, pastor, or parent one real question you have about faith. Ask them about one of theirs too.

Pray: *God, thank you that I can bring you my questions. Help me keep listening. Amen.*

The Courage to Begin Again

READ Isaiah 43:19

New school, new team, new friend group, a fresh start after a rough semester. New things can be exciting and terrifying at the same time. In Isaiah, God says, "I am about to do a new thing." God isn't done with you or with the world. You can be grateful for what's been and still open to what God is doing next.

REAL TALK

Where might God be inviting you to start something new?

Try It: Try one new thing this week: a new song, a new route, a conversation with someone you don't usually talk to.

Pray: *God of new beginnings, give me courage to try again. Amen.*

Hope Is Something We Practice

READ Romans 12:12

You don't always feel hopeful. Some days you just feel tired. Paul says to rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and keep praying. Hope is less like a mood and more like a muscle. You build it by showing up: praying for a friend who's struggling, helping someone, being kind when it's hard. Sometimes the feeling of hope shows up after you start practicing it.

REAL TALK

How can you practice hope today, even if you don't feel hopeful?

Try It: Text a friend who's having a hard time and tell them you're praying for them. Then actually pray.

Pray: *God, I don't always feel it. Teach my hands to hope anyway. Amen.*

We Do Not Walk Alone

READ Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

Ecclesiastes says two are better than one, because if one falls, the other can help them up. You weren't made to figure life out alone. Mary had Joseph and Elizabeth. You have friends, family, youth leaders, a church that's rooting for you. Belonging doesn't mean everyone agrees. It means people show up for each other.

REAL TALK

Who has helped you feel like you belong? Who might need you to do that for them?

Try It: Thank someone who's been there for you, in person or with a real message, not just a like.

Pray: *God, thank you for the people who walk with me. Help me be that person for someone else. Amen.*

Week 2: Peace. *Peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is the work of making room for one another and honoring human dignity.*

A Different Kind of Peace

READ Isaiah 11:1–10

Isaiah imagines a wolf and a lamb living together, and a little child leading them. Enemies becoming neighbors. That's God's kind of peace: not just quiet, but things being made right. You see a lot of division online and maybe at school. Peace starts small: how you talk about people, how you handle disagreement, whether you make room for someone different.

REAL TALK

What would practicing peace look like in one relationship this week?

Light the second Advent candle, the candle of Peace.

Try It: Take one small step toward peace with someone you've been at odds with.

Pray: *God of peace, help me build understanding instead of walls. Amen.*

Loving People We Disagree With

READ Matthew 5:1–12

Politics, social media, sports, the lunch table. Disagreement is everywhere, and it's easy to only follow people who think like you. Jesus says peacemakers are blessed. Peacemaking doesn't mean giving up what you believe. It means remembering that the person you disagree with is made in God's image, with fears and hopes you might not see.

REAL TALK

How could your faith shape the way you respond to someone you disagree with?

Try It: Before you reply to a comment or argument this week, ask one honest question first.

Pray: *God, give me courage to stand for what's right and humility to listen. Amen.*

The Tables We Set

READ Luke 14:12–14

Jesus said when you throw a party, invite the people who usually get left out. Every school has tables, literal and social. Who sits where? Who's always on the outside? Most of us don't mean to exclude anyone. We just stick with who we know. Jesus invites us to widen the circle.

REAL TALK

Who might be waiting for someone to invite them in?

Try It: Invite someone new to sit with you, join your group, or hang out this week.

Pray: *Welcoming God, widen my table and my heart. Amen.*

Grace Is Not Always Fair

READ Matthew 20:1–16

In Jesus' story, workers who showed up late got paid the same as those who worked all day. It doesn't seem fair. But God's grace isn't a grade you earn. It's a gift. It's easy to want grace for ourselves and justice for everyone else. Someone else getting a second chance doesn't mean there's less for you.

REAL TALK

Whose second chance or good news is hard for you to celebrate?

Try It: When you catch yourself comparing this week, stop and thank God for that person's good news.

Pray: *Generous God, forgive me for keeping score. Teach me to give the grace I've received. Amen.*

Peace Begins With Listening

READ James 1:19

Have you ever told someone something important while they were clearly just waiting for their turn to talk? James says be quick to listen and slow to speak. Listening is one of the simplest ways to love someone. It tells them: you matter. In a world this loud, really listening is a kind of peace.

REAL TALK

Who in your life needs you to listen without fixing anything?

Try It: In your next real conversation, don't give advice. Just listen and ask one follow-up question.

Pray: *God, quiet the noise in me. Help me listen well. Amen.*

Making Room for Rest

READ Matthew 11:28–30

December is packed: finals, practices, concerts, parties, family plans. Even fun things can wear you out. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary." Not just the ones who finished their to-do list. Rest isn't lazy. It's a reminder that you're human, you're loved, and you don't have to hold the whole world together.

REAL TALK

What could you set aside this week to actually rest?

Try It: Pick one night to go to bed on time with no screens for the last 30 minutes.

Pray: *Gentle God, I'm tired. Help me rest in you. Amen.*

Peace in Our Own Homes

READ Colossians 3:12–15

It's often hardest to be kind to the people we live with. Siblings, parents, the whole crew. We're tired, we snap, we say things we don't mean. Paul says to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, patience, and forgiveness. Peace at home doesn't mean never arguing. It means choosing each other again when it's messy.

REAL TALK

What would bring more kindness or patience into your home this week?

Try It: Say “I'm sorry” or “thank you” to someone at home this week and mean it.

Pray: *God of peace, help me love the people I live with. Amen.*

Week 3: Joy. *Joy is not constant happiness. It is discovering God's goodness amid ordinary, imperfect life.*

Joy Does Not Require a Perfect Life

READ Philippians 4:4–9

Paul wrote "Rejoice!" while he was in prison. Joy isn't the same as being happy all the time. It's noticing God's goodness even when life is complicated: a friend's laugh, a song that hits right, a good meal. Joy and sadness can live in the same heart. You don't have to wait until everything is perfect to find joy.

REAL TALK

What small moment of joy have you had recently?

Light the third Advent candle, the candle of Joy.

Try It: Write down three moments of joy from this past week.

Pray: *God of joy, help me notice your goodness, even on hard days. Amen.*

The Gift of Being Together

READ Acts 2:42–47

The first Christians ate together, prayed together, and took care of each other. Church isn't just a building or an hour on Sunday. It's people who belong to each other. Group chats are great, but there's something about being in the same room, sharing food and laughing together, that phones can't replace.

REAL TALK

What gathering has brought you joy? Who could you invite next time?

Try It: Plan a hangout, game night, or meal with friends or family this week, phones down.

Pray: *God, thank you for the people I belong to. Help me make room for others. Amen.*

Your Faith Matters Now

READ Matthew 18:1–5

When Jesus' disciples argued about who was the greatest, Jesus put a child in the middle of them. Young people aren't just the future of the church. You're the church right now. Your questions, ideas, and honesty can help adults see faith with fresh eyes. Don't let anyone tell you that your faith has to wait until you're older.

REAL TALK

What is one thing you wish adults in the church understood about your generation's faith?

Try It: Share one of your faith questions or ideas with an adult at church this week.

Pray: *God, help me believe my faith matters now, and help me use my voice. Amen.*

Joy in Unexpected Places

READ Luke 1:39–45

When Mary visited Elizabeth, they celebrated, even though neither knew what would happen next. We usually wait to celebrate until everything's figured out: after the test, after the season, after the drama ends. Mary and Elizabeth didn't wait. Joy can show up in the middle of uncertainty. Sometimes it's what keeps us going.

REAL TALK

What good thing deserves to be celebrated, even if life feels unsettled?

Try It: Hype someone up this week. Celebrate a friend's win out loud.

Pray: *God of joy, help me celebrate your gifts along the way. Amen.*

The Joy of Giving

READ 2 Corinthians 9:6–12

Giving isn't only about money or presents. You can give your time, your skills, your attention, your encouragement. Paul says God loves a cheerful giver. Serving at a food pantry, helping a younger kid with homework, writing someone a note: every gift helps someone know they're loved. And giving often brings more joy than getting.

REAL TALK

What time, talent, or encouragement can you give someone this season?

Try It: Give one gift this week that can't be bought.

Pray: *Generous God, help me share what I have with a happy heart. Amen.*

When Joy Feels Far Away

READ Psalm 34:18

Not everyone feels merry at Christmas. Maybe you're missing someone, dealing with anxiety, or carrying something heavy. That's real, and it's okay. The Psalms are full of people being honest with God about pain. God is close to the brokenhearted. You don't have to fake joy. Sometimes being honest is the prayer. If you're struggling, tell a parent, youth leader, school counselor, or another adult you trust. If you're ever in crisis, call or text 988.

REAL TALK

What feeling do you need to bring honestly to God?

Try It: Reach out to someone who might be having a hard time this season. Or let someone reach out to you.

Pray: *God, be near to everyone who is hurting this Christmas, including me. Amen.*

Notice What Is Good

READ Psalm 118:24

Your feed is designed to grab your attention with what's wrong. Good things don't fight that hard for attention, so you have to look for them. A sunrise. A teacher who believes in you. Your dog being ridiculous. Gratitude doesn't ignore the hard stuff. It reminds you that the hard stuff isn't the whole story.

REAL TALK

What three small things can you thank God for today?

Try It: Take a walk without headphones and notice three good things around you.

Pray: *God, slow me down enough to notice beauty, kindness, and goodness. Amen.*

Week 4: Love. *God's love enters our world, crosses boundaries, and invites us to love beyond the limits we create.*

Love Makes Room

READ Luke 2:1–7

We know the Christmas story so well that we forget how wild it is. God came into the world as a baby, born to a young mom far from home, laid in a feeding trough because there was no room. God's love doesn't wait for perfect conditions. It shows up in ordinary, messy life. And it asks us to make room for others too.

REAL TALK

Where might God be asking you to make room for someone?

Light the fourth Advent candle, the candle of Love.

Try It: Make room for someone who might feel left out.

Pray: *Loving God, thank you for coming close in Jesus. Help me make room. Amen.*

Love Beyond Our Comfort Zones

READ Matthew 22:34–40

Love God. Love your neighbor. Simple to say, hard to do, especially when your neighbor is annoying, different from you, or not your type of person. Jesus doesn't say love the neighbors you like. Love isn't just a feeling. It's something you practice: listening, showing respect, seeing the dignity in every person.

REAL TALK

Where is God asking you to love beyond your comfort zone?

Try It: Do one kind thing for someone whose life looks really different from yours.

Pray: *God, help me love my neighbors with patience, compassion, and courage. Amen.*

The People We Overlook

READ Luke 2:8–14

God announced Jesus' birth first to shepherds, people working the night shift who most people ignored. Who gets overlooked at your school or in your town? The cafeteria staff, the quiet kid, the person who always eats alone. Every person matters to God. Sometimes love starts with simply noticing someone.

REAL TALK

Who might feel overlooked this Christmas, and how can you help them feel seen?

Try It: Thank someone whose work usually goes unnoticed: a bus driver, custodian, or cafeteria worker.

Pray: *God, open my eyes to the people around me. Amen.*

The Love We Carry Forward

READ 1 John 4:7–12

Another year is almost over. Some things went the way you hoped. Some didn't. First John says that when we love one another, God's love becomes visible. The Christmas decorations will come down, but kindness, patience, forgiveness, and courage don't have to get packed away. What you learned about love this year can come with you.

REAL TALK

What lesson about love do you want to carry into the new year?

Try It: Write down one thing you learned about love this year. Put it somewhere you'll see it in January.

Pray: *God, thank you for the love I've received. Help me carry it forward. Amen.*

God With Us

READ Matthew 1:22–23

Tonight we remember the whole story: Mary and Joseph, shepherds and angels, a baby in Bethlehem. Emmanuel means "God with us." God didn't stay far away from our mess. God showed up in a world full of uncertainty and beauty, a lot like ours. You don't have to have it all together. God meets you exactly where you are.

REAL TALK

What does Emmanuel, "God with us," mean to you tonight?

Try It: Find a quiet moment tonight, even 60 seconds, and just say: "God is with us."

Pray: *Emmanuel, meet me right where I am. Help me carry your light. Amen.*

Christmas Day. *The Word became flesh and lived among us.*

Still, God Comes Near

READ John 1:1–5, 14

Merry Christmas! For some, today is loud and full. For others, it's quiet or hard. Whatever today holds, the promise holds too: God comes near. Not only when life is good. Not only when you're sure. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Whatever next year brings, you won't face it alone.

REAL TALK

How will you carry hope, peace, joy, and love into the new year?

Light the Christ candle.

Try It: Share some hope, peace, joy, or love with someone today.

Pray: *Loving God, thank you for Jesus. Help me carry your light into every day. Amen.*

Talk It Over

Questions for youth group, a small group, or a few friends. Pick one or two each week.

Week 1 · Hope

- What's something you're waiting or hoping for right now?
- Where have you seen a little light in a dark place?

Week 2 · Peace

- How do you handle disagreements with friends or family?
- What would make your school a more welcoming place?

Week 3 · Joy

- What's the difference between happiness and joy?
- How can we support friends who don't feel joyful this season?

Week 4 · Love

- Who is easy to overlook, and how can we notice them?
- What does “God with us” mean to you?

Carry It Forward

How will you carry hope, peace, joy, and love into the new year?

Hope

Peace

Joy

Love

Need to talk? Reach out to a parent, youth leader, school counselor, or another adult you trust. In a crisis, call or text 988.

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