

# FROM THE MANGER



ADVENT for FAMILIES





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## CONTRIBUTORS

Writing: Lauren Gibbs-Beadle, Amanda Meisenheimer

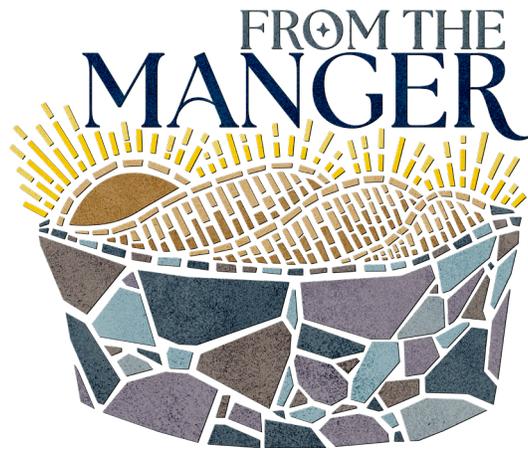
Editing: Arianne Braithwaite Lehn

Layout: Adam Walker Cleaveland

Director of Product & Operations: Rebekah Lowe

Founder: Adam Walker Cleaveland

Illustrated Ministry, LLC.  
829 Wisconsin Ave  
Racine, Wisconsin 53403  
[illustratedministry.com](http://illustratedministry.com)  
[info@illustratedministry.com](mailto:info@illustratedministry.com)



## ***FROM THE MANGER ADVENT FOR FAMILIES***

Hunger is a universal human experience, drawing attention to our most basic needs for food and nourishment and our more complex needs—peace, liberation, and meaning in this life. So, it’s no wonder that the story of Jesus—the one who came to feed the hungry—begins, ends, and centers around food.

*From the Manger* gathers around the birth story in Luke 2, embracing the playful symbolism of a newborn Jesus being laid down to sleep in a feeding trough in a town called “House of Bread.”

Our *From the Manger Advent for Families* resource invites you to reflect on the life-giving hope, peace, joy, and love that Jesus brings, and consider how the baby born in Bethlehem—literally a “bread town”—continues to feed a hungry world today.

These devotions are designed for families with children, youth, and adults of all ages. Feel free to adapt the content and questions to fit your family’s needs, and remember, you don’t need to complete every activity to have a meaningful experience. We encourage you to explore the material, decide what works best for your family, and find time each week to gather for a devotion. Each devotion includes the following elements:

**Scripture:** Look up each scripture and read it out loud together.

**Reflection:** A devotional-like reflection that connects the scripture and theme to the Advent season. It might make sense for you to read this section to your family, or you may want to read it yourself and see what questions or themes best resonate.

**Discussion:** This is a chance for family discussion with open-ended questions to engage your creative minds.

**Family Memory-Making Activity:** Take time with your family to do each week’s suggested activity. Each activity offers a way to prepare for Advent and Christmas while connecting with the weekly scripture reading to what you already do in your everyday lives.

**Prayer:** Finally, each week’s devotion ends with a short prayer. You can read the prayer or invite your children to repeat after you. This prayer is a simple ritual for ending your family’s weekly devotion time. You might also choose to repeat the prayer throughout the week.

**Audio Recordings:** Life is busy! Play the podcast of the reflection, questions, and prayer on your family drives, while making meals, settling in for the evening, or whenever works within your busy schedule. Available near the beginning of Advent.

Find it here: <https://illstrtdm.in/FromTheMangerPodcast> or by scanning this QR code.



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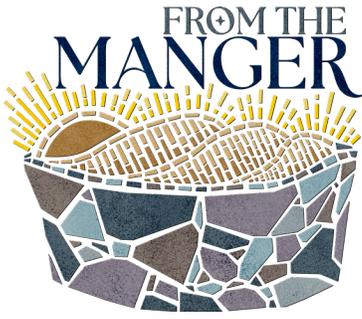
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## ADVENT ONE: HOPE GROWS

Luke 2:1-7 and Matthew 14:13-21

*How does your body tell you when it is ready to eat? Let's name some ways your body says, "I'm hungry!"*

When you see, smell, or imagine food, your body automatically responds! Your stomach rumbles, and your mouth salivates to prepare for the food you are anticipating. This is the work of your sympathetic nervous system. You do not have to say, "Mouth, get ready to eat!" Your brain already sent the signals. We feel hope when we prepare to enjoy a meal. Even our stomachs are hoping to eat! When our bellies are full, we are re-energized.

But what happens when your mouth waters, your stomach rumbles, and you do not have food to eat? Many people, both near and far, know this feeling of hunger. When they do not have access to food, they lose energy and hope. They may not believe things can get better. Maybe you know how that feels. Access to and eating healthy foods help everyone live well and have hope.

***Hope is believing things can get better with compassion and imagination!*** The good news of Advent is that Jesus is coming to bring hope! Jesus knew feeding people was one of the best ways to give people hope because a full belly is connected to the hope in their hearts. From the manger where the animals found their food, Jesus began his journey to feed all people. There are so many connections to food and meals throughout the story of God. Did you know Jesus was born in a town called, "House of Bread"? God knew feeding people was much more than bread or vegetables—Jesus came to fill bellies *and* hearts.

### Questions

1. What does hunger feel like in your body?
2. When you are hungry, what foods give you the most hope for the future?
3. Hope is believing things can get better with compassion and imagination. How might you imagine people can do a better job of feeding everyone? What does or can your family do?

### Prayer

Creator God, you created a world where every living thing has what it needs. Plants, animals, humans—we all play a role in this amazing system! We have hope because we believe that with compassion and imagination, this world can feed everyone.  
*Amen.*

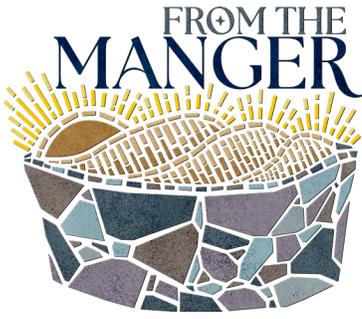
## Family Meal from Start to Finish

Feeding people requires a lot of work! When Jesus fed people, even he did not do all the tasks on his own. Someone caught the fish and baked the bread. Disciples brought baskets, distributed the food, collected leftovers, and performed other tasks. When we see food on the table, we appreciate all the time, work, and energy that go into making a meal. Make a list or drawing of all those steps. Start and finish your list/drawing anywhere in the process—from planting a seed to doing the dishes!

Create a plan to make a meal together this week. Look at the list/drawing you made and decide who can do each task. Also, think about how you can ease the burden of the person or people in your family who usually do the most for family meals.

When you have a plan and time set for a family meal, have some fun! Pretend to have a family restaurant! Team up while gathering groceries, design a menu, play music while you chop vegetables, decorate or set the table, ask silly questions while eating, and have a dance party while you clean up.

When you are finished putting the last dish away, think about the roles everyone played in making your family meal happen. Instead of saying a blessing at the beginning of your meal, say it at the end: take turns giving thanks to God for someone, something, or some part of creation that brought your family to this moment after your meal!



## ADVENT TWO: PEACE GROWS

Luke 2:8-16 and Luke 10

*What are the benefits of starting a school day with a healthy breakfast? Brainstorm together or investigate online—why is breakfast helpful to students?*

Scientists and educators have discovered it is difficult for students to concentrate when they are hungry. Hunger distracts people, and it is uncomfortable to be hungry. Your body keeps reminding you to feed yourself, and you can't think about anything else! Hunger also slows down our thinking. Without adequate nutrition, our minds are a bit fuzzier. We are not as sharp or curious.

But, when we eat a meal like breakfast, our body starts making energy. This process is called metabolism. That energy helps us concentrate, fuels our curiosity, and even helps to regulate our mood. We have a sense of peace when we're not worrying about satisfying our hunger. ***Peace happens when everyone treats each other, themselves, and the world kindly;*** that includes providing our bodies with healthy things.

The Advent season reminds us that from the manger, Jesus came to bring peace. When he was born, the angels proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!" Another way of saying that is, "Let there be peace among God's children!"

God wants everyone to have the food they need. When people have what they need, they are likely to have peace. During this Advent season, be on the lookout for ways this world might be more peaceful.

### Questions

1. How can you be a part of sharing peace?
2. How might God respond to a place or system where people do not have enough to eat?
3. What does a "peaceful meal" look like to you? How do you feel when you eat a "peaceful meal"?

### Prayer

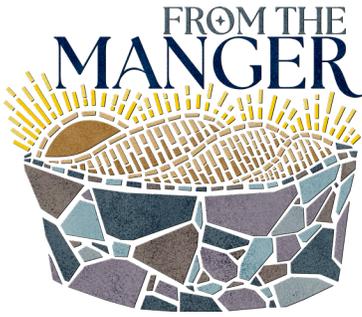
God of peace, we hunger for a world where everyone and everything is treated kindly. When peace grows, nutritious food grows. And when access to nutritious food grows, minds and bodies grow. May we plant peace wherever we go. *Amen.*

## Share a Center-Peace

What does peace mean in your family? When we first think of peace, we might think of quiet, stillness, and a world with no fighting. But, most homes are not very quiet, totally still, or completely conflict-free. Many families have cultures where being noisy and full of movement is the norm. What may feel peaceful to one family might not to another.

When Jesus walked into a room and said, “Peace to this house,” he didn’t mean for everyone to be quiet and hold still; he was blessing and challenging every home to be a part of creating peace. Peace is when everyone treats each other, themselves, and the world with kindness so everyone feels they belong. What makes you feel “at home” where you live? What makes you feel welcome and safe in other people’s homes?

This week, when it is time to eat or gather with family and friends or at church, bring, “peace to this house” by sharing an item cultivating belonging. Think of everyone who will be there, and bring something to the table or gathering space that centers their peace. Do they like flowers, shiny decorations, handwritten notes, or poems? Do they have a favorite animal, toy, or color? Is there something they need you can provide: food, napkins, or decorations? Bring or create something from what you already have at home and arrange your items as a center-peace for your table. Then, as you go to your gathering, share what you brought, for whom, and why.



## ADVENT THREE: JOY GROWS

Luke 2:8-20 and Luke 10

*What are the differences between taste and flavor?* Before reading on, consider this question as a family.

Your tongue tastes something as sweet, salty, bitter, sour, or umami. Flavor comes together when those tastes are combined with two other senses: smell and touch. That's why you can't "taste" very well when your nose is congested or if you have anosmia (the inability to smell).

Flavor is part of what makes meals together joyful. We don't always agree on what flavors are best, and that is okay! We all have a different set of flavor preferences. This is called your "palate." Our diverse palates make eating more interesting, colorful, and adventurous. Some people find joy in cheese. Some people love spicy foods. Some people are ice cream experts. ***Joy is when you feel so thankful you could burst with excitement and gratitude.*** Finding joy in different foods helps us understand each other better, both in our homes and across the world!

Jesus knew food brings people together, and when we eat with people unlike us, our lives are changed. When Jesus went to eat a meal at the home of a man named Zacchaeus, he knew Zacchaeus was a tax collector. Tax collectors were known for being greedy and cruel to poor people. People grumbled when Jesus announced he would join Zacchaeus for dinner, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner!" They must not have known Jesus very well! Jesus loved to bring hope and love to sinners. Of course, the story of Zacchaeus is about a person who chose to live differently by caring for his community. Zacchaeus shows us that everyone—even tax collectors—can live lives of generosity and kindness. Who wouldn't want to have a meal with someone like that?

### Questions

1. When have you eaten with people outside of your family? What did you learn? What differences can you name?
2. What new foods have you tried because a friend introduced you to them?
3. Have you ever eaten a meal that changed your life? Share about it!

### Prayer

Joyful God, the diversity of food in this world is incredible! You created every flavor, color, texture, scent, and sound to be enjoyed. May we care for creation with wisdom and generosity so everyone has what they need to eat joyfully. *Amen.*

FAMILY MEMORY-MAKING ACTIVITY

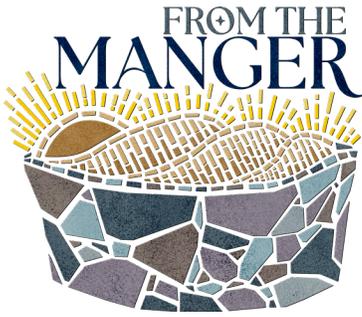
## Taste Test Challenge: Discover Your Family's Favorites

While we must eat to live, enjoying delicious foods together is a special part of being human. Everyone deserves to eat foods they enjoy, and gets to decide what foods go into their body. Our tastebuds—and the foods we give them—determine what foods we like. This is called our palate.

How well do you know the palates of your family members? List your favorite food categories in the top of each column, and then fill out the chart with everyone's favorites.

Choose categories that make sense with the foods your family eats. Now compare answers. Did you know one another's favorites? Did any foods surprise you? Now that you know your family's palates better, think of new foods you can try together, or surprise someone with their favorite food! Watch your family's reactions when each person enjoys their favorite food. Notice how you feel when you see their response. When we are a part of helping others feel joy, we feel that joy, too!

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## ADVENT FOUR: LOVE GROWS

Luke 2:25-35 and Matthew 9:35-37

*Have you ever wondered how baby animals get the food and nutrients they need to grow?* As a family, talk about the different ways you know that baby animals, also called offspring, find their food. Every species of life on earth has a system to ensure their offspring will be fed. Trees drop their seeds to grow in nourishing soil. Dandelions release seeds into the wind to be carried to fresh soil elsewhere. Bees lay their eggs in cells where they bring the growing larvae honey, pollen, and nectar. Many kinds of fish lay their eggs in seagrasses so they find food around them when the new fish hatch.

Sometimes, the offspring finds food on its own, like a fish does when it is born. Sometimes, the offspring grow up under the care of adults, just like people and all mammals. When Jesus was born, his mother, Mary, held him close, nursed him, and laid him down in a place where food was found, while he slept. Throughout the rest of Jesus' life, there are stories about how he loved and had compassion for people, making sure they found the food they needed.

***Love is the care and connection that binds us together with each other and God.*** Every child needs and deserves to be cared for by loving adults who take care of their needs, speak loving words to them, and teach them how to gain skills to feed themselves as they grow older. Love is the care and connection binding us together with each other and God. One way grown-ups love children is to feed them nutritious food and teach them about preparing food.

This isn't always easy. Food can be expensive. Sometimes, families do not agree on what foods taste good. Finding time to prepare meals and clean up after them may be difficult. That's okay. Sometimes, we show love with fancy food. Sometimes, we show love with a simple meal. You may usually eat on the run or eat a full meal together. What matters most is the love and care your family puts into these meals for each other.

### Questions

1. How does your family show love through food and meal times?
2. Who cares for you and takes care of your food needs? If you are a grown-up, who cared for you when you were a child?
3. How do you show love to someone else by taking care of their needs?

### Prayer

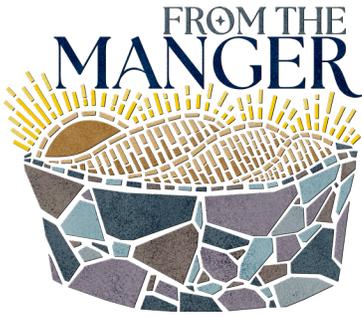
God, our Loving Parent, we do not exist alone. We are rooted in the gardens of our ancestors and nourished by generations of recipes, traditions, and love. May we continue to prepare and share food with love each day. *Amen.*

## Recipe Roots: Crafting Family Traditions

Before the internet and computers, families kept records of their recipes, passed down through generations. This is one way families show love, remember loved ones, and pass wisdom to future descendants.

If your family has recipes like this, cook one or more of them together. Talk about the people who originated the recipes, call up older relatives to learn more, and enjoy them together.

If your family does not have a box of old recipes or books from ancestors (or even if you do!), choose a recipe of your own to customize and make your own. Give it a fun name, add your customizations to the recipe directions, draw illustrations or visual directions, and send copies to your relatives. Maybe even make this meal at the same time. Even if you're not sitting at the same table, this shared recipe connects and binds you together in love. You just invented a new family tradition!



## CHRISTMAS: GOOD NEWS HAS COME

Luke 2:10-12 and Luke 4:18-19

*What were you born to do?* People might look at a swimmer and say, “She was born to swim!” Or you might say someone was “born to bake,” “born to read,” or “born to be a good friend.” Take a few minutes and talk about what you might say you were born to do.

After you have shared your thoughts about yourself, answer the same question about your family members. Say one kind thing they were “born to do.”

All babies are born reflecting God’s image and showing God’s love. You don’t have to do anything or be anything in particular—you just have to be YOU. And as you learn and grow, you will discover more about who you were born to be. When you choose to love God, others, and yourself, you become exactly the person God created you to be. And you will continue to grow and change over time.

Throughout the Advent season, we have considered how Jesus was born to feed the world. From the manger to all the places Jesus traveled, he fed people physically and spiritually. When people were around Jesus, their bellies and hearts were full of goodness. The Bible tells us a lot about what Jesus was born to do. Here are a few examples:

- Set people free
- Heal people
- Bring good news to the poor
- Give life to people
- Show God’s love for all creation

On Christmas, we celebrate Jesus’ birth for all those reasons and many more!

### Questions

1. Think about the stories you know about Jesus. What else was Jesus born to do?
2. What might you tell someone unsure of what they are born to do?
3. What is your favorite memory from this Advent season?

### Prayer

God of celebration, let us remember the good news of your love: through Jesus, the Bread of Life, everyone is fed! May we continue learning to love like Jesus so all creation can experience your hope, peace, joy, and love. *Amen.*

## An Advent Reflection for Next Christmas

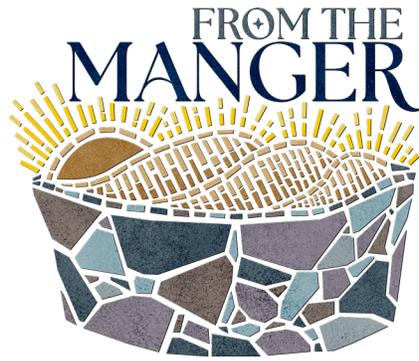
This Advent, you filled your bellies and hearts with the real and spiritual food Jesus offered to people around him and the homes he entered. This fuel that feeds our hunger also helps us continue the work Jesus was born to do, now and beyond Advent.

Write a family Christmas card to your “future family” to be read next Christmas Day. Use these sentence starters to create a letter you will read together in 365 days, remembering your Advent experience and how you are learning to love and grow together.

Sentence starters:

- During Advent, we learned...
- We showed God’s love by...
- We will always remember...
- We are thankful for...
- In the upcoming year, we hope...

Pack it up carefully with your Christmas decorations so you can find it next Christmas.



## CONTRIBUTORS

WRITING

**AMANDA MEISENHEIMER** is the pastor of Church on the Hill in Flushing, New York. With a focus on intragenerational and therapeutic approaches to ministry and curriculum, Amanda is passionate about blending spirituality and creativity. She also dabbles in music, poetry, and watercolor. Amanda and her two children make their home in Flushing.

WRITING

**LAUREN GIBBS-BEADLE** is an educator, creative, and parent. She draws upon her Filipino heritage, radical educators, and her experiences as a queer, biracial, neurodivergent woman of color. She has a B.A. in Asian American Studies/Education from Wellesley and an M.Ed. in Social Justice Education from UCLA. Lauren has over 20 years of experience in schools and churches and is currently the Director of Children's Ministries at FirstPres Hayward. She lives in Castro Valley, CA with her partner, four kids, and a menagerie of animals.

EDITING

**ARIANNE BRAITHWAITE LEHN** is a parent, writer, artist, creator, and ordained minister with the Presbyterian Church (USA). She is the author of *Ash and Starlight: Prayers for the Chaos and Grace of Daily Life*. Arianne regularly writes at her Substack newsletter, [Monday Manna](#). She and her family live in Chicagoland.

EDITING  
director of  
product &  
operations

**REBEKAH LOWE** develops and cultivates Illustrated Ministry's ever-growing library of resources. She earned a BA in Biblical Studies from Azusa Pacific University and served as the Director of Children's Ministry at Brentwood Presbyterian Church (USA) in Los Angeles, California. She resides in Austin, Texas with her husband and their two children.

LAYOUT  
founder

**ADAM WALKER CLEVELAND** is an artist, pastor, pastor's spouse, and father of four (two living). Adam is ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and after doing youth ministry for over 15 years, he founded Illustrated Ministry in 2015. He resides in Racine, Wisconsin with his wife and their two children.