

Hope Dares to Celebrate

Week four



We Continue our Journey Through the 2026 Advent Season!

For centuries, Christians around the world have marked the weeks leading up to Christmas with the lighting of an Advent wreath, a simple circle of candles that reminds us of God's presence breaking into the world.

Each week, we pause to light one more candle — symbols of hope, peace, joy, and love — until, on Christmas Eve, the Christ Candle shines at the center, reminding us that God's light has come and still shines among us.

We encourage you to make this Advent season your own. Your Advent wreath can be as traditional or as simple as you want. The traditional version uses three purple candles and one pink, with a white candle in the center. You can do this or simply use whatever candles you have on hand. What matters most isn't the color or the type of candles you use; it's the moment: the pause, the breath, the intention.

These devotions are meant to guide you through our Advent season journey, which this year will center on the theme *When Hope Dares...* You can use these weekly devotions on your own, with family or friends, or with your fellow FBC church community family. Read them when it works for you — that could be in the morning with coffee, or in the evening by candlelight. There's no wrong way to create space for God.

Our hope is that these reflections will help you slow down, notice the light already around you, and prepare room — in your heart, your home, and your life — for the coming of Christ.

WEEK FOUR | Hope Dares to Celebrate

This is week four of our Advent season together.

As Christmas draws near, it's easy for our minds to jump ahead — to the gifts still unwrapped, the errands unfinished, and the long list of "to-dos" waiting for our attention.

But for now, *pause*.

Breathe.

Let this be a moment to rest in *the why* behind it all.

Advent is, at its heart, a season of celebration and togetherness, a time to remember that God's love is drawing near – not only in the story we read, but in our own lives, too.

In the midst of the rush, let yourself be still enough to notice the joy that's already here.

Read & Reflect

Luke 2 8-20

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying: *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Sentiments from Rev. Daniel Johnson's sermon on Sunday, Dec 21

No, the shepherds did not understand what was happening in a sophisticated theological sense, and yet they celebrated. And their celebration was rooted in something far more profound and life-giving and world-transforming than mere intellectual understanding. It was rooted in hope. In a deep, deep hope. The kind of hope that dares to dance around dark corners seeking out the light of a better tomorrow. The kind of hope that dares to trust in the promises of a God who clearly loves the world so dearly. The kind of hope that does not fear or shrink away from change but dares instead to embrace it. The kind of hope that dares to celebrate when it catches glimpses of that change breaking upon the world.

Reflect:

- The angels' message begins with, "Do not be afraid." What fears might be making it hard for you to rejoice right now? How might choosing joy become an act of courage for you?
- Once they saw the child, the shepherds made known what had been told them. How can you share joy or encouragement with others this week?

Carols of the Season

Let these carols guide your thoughts this week. Choose joy and have a heart ready to celebrate as we inch closer and closer to Christmas.

- Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn!
- Joy to the World!
- People Look East

Take-Home Devotion: Hope Dares to Celebrate

Some might say celebration is best saved for the big moments – a birthday, an anniversary, or a milestone at school or work. While those occasions are certainly worthy of celebration, they aren't the only ones that matter.

The “little things” in our days are just as important to recognize. It's those small moments that add up quietly, infusing a constant sense of joy simmering in the background of our days. Even when the world around us feels darker than we'd like, our own joy and gratitude become a kind of counter-light, a reflection of the hope that is still alive.

When the angels appeared to the shepherds, their message was simple: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy.” That joy wasn't reserved for the powerful or privileged; it was shared first with ordinary people in a dark field. They didn't wait for the perfect moment, they celebrated right where they were.

Celebration itself is a daring act of hope, a choice to find the light, to notice it, to respond to it, and to share it. This week is all about encouraging a celebratory, hopeful heart. Be intentional with your thoughts, with seeking those “little things” in your day, those silver linings that bring a smile and an extra spring in your step.

Take the dare: *choose hope, choose celebration.*

Take-Home Tangible Element: Tiny Party Hats

We often mark moments of great joy by changing something about the way we look or act: wearing party hats, singing louder, gathering together. These small, joyful changes help us notice that something special is happening.

At Christmas, God did something similar. God changed the sky, sent angels to sing, and placed a star in the heavens, all to draw our attention to a moment worth celebrating: the birth of love into the world.

Let these tiny party hats bring a smile to your face this week every time you spy them sitting on your kitchen table or counter. Keep them ever-present to encourage a celebratory heart. Consider taking a moment each day this week to celebrate the big and little wins that made your week good. It could be as simple as sharing “three things” that were good in your day with a friend or loved one before you end your day.

Prayer for This Week

Dear Lord, help us to celebrate you, the gifts you've given us, and the path you've put us on. Help us to remain hopeful even if we face a roadblock or moment of frustration this week. Because it's those moments where we choose hope, where we see the good, that matter far more than whatever negative thing threatens to pull us down. Thank you for the opportunity to see it this way.