



Hope – 2023 Advent Devotional

By: Nick Kyrouac

All together... deep breath... inhale... now exhale. Feel better? Maybe you are by yourself, with your family, or with your friends. Turn on some relaxing holiday music and sit near your Advent candles.

Light your first PURPLE advent candle, the candle of HOPE.

As you sit and breath, reflect on why you're taking some time away from your busy schedule to refocus your mind.

What are you hoping for from this time? What is burdening you? What is distracting you?

PRAY

Lord,

Thank you for the opportunity to spend time with You. Help us block out the distractions we have created around the holiday season and allow us to focus our minds and hearts on the truths of your word. In this time, grant us hearts of gratitude for the many blessings that you have given us. Refresh our spirits as we read of your promises and gifts. Empower us through your Spirit as we celebrate your arrival and await your return. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Read God's Word

² The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.
For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.

Isaiah 9:2 (NLT)

⁶ For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor,[Ⓜ] Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ His government and its peace
will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.
The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NLT)

Something to Consider.

“I just want them to be happy.” This is a phrase we hear frequently throughout our life when someone is talking about another person they care about. A parent says it about their child when they sign up for another extracurricular activity, when that child grows up and moves out to college or a career, or when their child gets engaged. We hear people use the phrase when they have a civil and mutual break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend. People use the phrase when a family member takes a job that moves them far away. It is a phrase we hear frequently, and rightly so; after all, happiness is a wonderful thing to wish upon someone we love.

When it comes to the Christmas season, happiness also tends to be the sentiment we wish for others as well as crave for ourselves. However, the major problem with happiness is that it is fleeting. Our happiness is determined by multiple factors and often if any of those factors is missing, it robs us of our goal of being happy. For many people, happiness just isn't in the cards during the Christmas season. This might be their first Christmas without a grandparent, mom, dad, brother, sister, child, or even spouse. For others this Christmas is their first Christmas while being unemployed, and they can't buy their child everything they want to. For some, this year will be the last Christmas they celebrate on this side of eternity, or it will be the last Christmas they celebrate with someone who is fading from this life. Needless to say, for many, wishing them happiness this Christmas season is simply an empty sentiment. It is however, in those places where happiness is absent that we find the beauty of **HOPE**.

God's redemptive story through Christ Jesus gives us HOPE that is provided to us through His LOVE that then produces JOY and PEACE for those who follow Him.

This **HOPE** is not a cheap hope like the hope we have in our favorite sports team or a hope we have in receiving the perfect Christmas gift. This **HOPE** is what allows the lonely, the grieving, the mourning, and the marginalized, to celebrate what God has done regardless of their burdensome circumstances.

The prophet Isaiah, the one who authored the passage we read earlier, wrote his prophecies to the nation of Israel, God's chosen people in the Old Testament. From the very beginning of the Bible, we hear about how mankind had been cursed by sin, the consequence being eternal separation from God. However, we also hear from the very beginning of God's story, that God himself made a promise that one day He would send a savior who would release mankind from the bondage of sin.

For the entire history of the nation of Israel, they had been waiting for this promised savior to arrive, and the waiting had not been easy. They had seen their nation go through famine, slavery, defeat, exile, and loss. Then for 400 years, God was silent. Then finally, when all **HOPE** seemed lost, a baby was born, miraculously, in the town of Bethlehem, and he was called Emmanuel. This was the savior the prophet Isaiah was talking about hundreds of years prior to Jesus' birth!

The savior had at last. The **HOPE** of his arrival had finally been fulfilled, but the **HOPE** didn't stop there. Jesus went on to pay for mankind's sin through a brutal death on a cross, and 3 days later, he rose from the grave; proving he was indeed the savior of the world. He told us that one day he would return, and would eradicate all evil and pain. He then told us that whoever "believes in Him" would dwell with Him in paradise for eternity. This is the **HOPE** that inspires followers of Jesus today. This is the **HOPE** that allows the lonely, the grieving, the mourning, and the marginalized to celebrate what God has done, regardless of their burdensome circumstances; a **HOPE** that one day he will return, heal all pain and suffering, and will dwell with us for all of eternity.

Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

¹⁷For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

As you use this time to slow down and refocus your mind on Jesus, take a deep breath and recognize the many blessings the Lord has given you. Then, recognize the circumstances that are weighing on you. Finally, embrace the **HOPE** that God will see you through these circumstances; either in this lifetime or in eternity with Him.

PRAY

Lord,

Thank you for your many promises. Thank you for the **HOPE** that one day we will dwell with you in a place where there is no sin, no pain, no fear, and no sadness. We ask that during this time of waiting and anticipation for your return grant us strength and perseverance that is only possible through your Holy Spirit. Fill us with this gift of **HOPE** and grant us opportunities to share it with those who have not yet heard about it.

⁹ “Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

Matthew 6:9-13