

HOPE IS BORN ANEW

Welcome to a new year! Advent is not just the Christian preparation for Christmas—it is the beginning of a new year in the church. The theme for the first Sunday of Advent is hope. These last few weeks before the birth of Christ, as Mary and Joseph made their difficult and long journey to Bethlehem for the census, they could not yet imagine all that waited ahead for them. They too had to wait for God to reveal power and salvation in the world. They too had to face hardships, fear, and doubt. They too were looking for signs of hope.

Hope Never Dies

We think our situations, world events, and sufferings are unique and devastating. But our Israelite and Christian ancestors knew suffering too. When Israel was destroyed, and all hope seemed lost, God still had a plan to bring hope and salvation to the world. Jesus' birth was the coming of the long-awaited Christ, and many people wanted him to solve everything by force—to destroy evil empires and set the world right. But there is no return to the garden of Eden, and God's plan for salvation was not meant for one nation at one time; it was for all people for all time.

Hope Stands

Most of us would prefer to hide from our problems, deny them, or let others work out solutions. But Jesus calls us to respond differently. We are called to stand together in a community of believers who are willing to pray, willing to follow Jesus, and willing to fight for hope. We are called to stand up and fight the injustices we see in our world, to stand up and love the unlovable, to stand up and heal brokenness, to stand up and shine light into darkness, to stand up and be the hope our world needs. In the days ahead, during Advent Season, don't just wait for Christ to be born. Stand up to proclaim and be the hope Christ brings to the world.

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who are willing to pray, willing to follow Jesus,
and willing to fight for hope.*

**We are called to stand up and shine
LIGHT INTO DARKNESS.**



TIP FOR THIS ISSUE

The focal Scripture for this week comes from the Lectionary (Year C), and the topic reflects the traditional first week of Advent: Hope. It also aligns with The United Methodist Church theme of “Stand,” if your church is using the UMC worship planning resources. Obviously, this topic can stand on its own if you are not United Methodist or using the Advent resources.

TEACHER BIBLE PREP

LIVING IN HOPE

Question of the Day: In the past few weeks, where have you seen signs of hope in the world?

Purpose: To help teens stand in hope during this Advent Season.

Cultural Connection: First Sunday in Advent

Topic: Hope in a Dark World

STAND

Luke 21:25-36

Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near.

—Luke 21:28

Commentary:

Many people have been watching the natural disasters and the tragic world events in the last year or more and claiming that the end is near. And many people want Jesus to come again soon to fix everything. But this Scripture indicates that even more cataclysmic events will occur in the universe. What is so amazing about this passage is that Jesus directs people to stand up tall with their heads raised instead of running in fear for their lives! The point is that the events we are experiencing currently are nothing compared to what lies ahead. Yet, how many of us live out of insecurity, fear, and a desire to isolate or protect only ourselves? We are living between the time of Jesus' first arrival, whose birth we are preparing to celebrate in a few weeks, and Jesus' second coming. It's a time for living courageously and hopefully and standing up to respond in hope.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ What do verses 25–26 mention as signs?
- ▶ What anxieties of day-to-day life do we experience?
- ▶ As end times draw near, what should we do instead of hiding or protecting ourselves in a bunker?
- ▶ If this is not the end times, what are we called to do until the end times arrive?

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PRAY

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Night and day, we pray more than ever to see all of you in person and to complete whatever you still need for your faith.

—1 Thessalonians 3:10

Commentary:

Paul wrote this letter to a group of believers encouraging them not to give in to the pagan world around them. He knew they faced hardships for being Christian and that some would stumble and want to give up. He also sent Timothy to check on them and help them stay strong. Paul's message was to stand together and to stand firm as Christians, while loving one another. Paul knew the power of Christians in community versus isolation. He also knew some were concerned about end times and the afterlife. So he reminded them (and us) to keep praying together, to keep loving one another the way Jesus taught, and to keep following Jesus' teachings and the Holy Spirit.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ How easy or difficult is it for you to maintain a sense of hope and optimism in our world?
- ▶ How do prayer and connecting with other Christians help you remain hopeful and faithful?

TEACHER BIBLE PREP

BE LIGHT

Jeremiah 33:14-17

In those days and at that time, I will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is just and right in the land. —Jeremiah 33:15

Commentary:

During Jeremiah's imprisonment, God spoke to Jeremiah of hope and the restoration of Israel. God chose the lowest point in Jeremiah's life to share a plan of freedom and future glory—a plan of hope. It not only provided comfort but also specific information for Jeremiah to share with the remnants of Israel to spread that hope and help people look forward. We are never alone in experiencing dark times, fear, doubt, and struggle. But we must remember to stand on the hope of God's promises from the past, stand up to the fears of the moment, and stand in the light of hope of God's promises for the future.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ What does Matthew 1:1-17 say about the importance of Jesus' genealogy? (*fulfillment of prophecy, proof of God's promises kept, and God's plan through history*)
- ▶ Do you think God's message of hope would have been less effective if given during a prosperous time?
- ▶ How can you offer messages and actions of hope during this Advent season?



DEVOTION: STANDING

Stand up (if you are able) as you work through this devotion. Look up the words to the hymn "Standing on the Promises" and reflect on God's past and future promises.

Spend a few minutes reading and thinking about Romans 12:9-21.

Simply standing on God's promises is not enough. As followers of Christ, we are called to act in Christlike ways with all people and in all situations. That is standing in hope and love. During this Advent season, reflect on how you can offer hope to those around you.

Use the prompts on Youth Page 6 to write a prayer of hope for the season and keep it with you as a picture on your phone. Keep standing as you pray and remember that hope (like standing) takes energy, discipline, commitment, and sometimes support.



As followers of Christ, we are called to act in Christlike ways with all people and in all situations.

NEXT WEEK: Everyone has individualized favorite traditions at Christmas. Next week in LINC we'll take a look at the significance of our traditions and maybe even where and how a few of them originated.

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LINC
LIVING IN CHRIST

Getting Ready: You will need copies of Youth Page 6, pens or pencils, Bibles; a familiarity with *Family Feud*, survey list, index cards with scenarios from Talk Topic 1 prepared ahead of time; 4 sturdy platforms, steps or step stools; 4 sheets of paper with the words, *Jesus, Faith, Hope,* and *Love* written one word per sheet, and tape.

OPEN

What Would You Stand On? (15 minutes)

Keep the following survey list handy, but without anyone seeing it: (Survey: 1. step stool, 2. chair, 3. floor/ground, 4. counter/table, 5. ladder, 6. a stage, 7. shoes, 8. another person). As teens arrive, form two teams and instruct each team to quickly decide on a name.

Announce that teens will play a *Family-Feud*-style game, and invite one person from each team to come to a table at the front of the room. Explain that the first person to tap the table can answer and, if the answer is on your list, his or her team may choose to play or pass. Ask, “What are the top 8 things you would use to stand on?” If the first person to tap gets one correct answer, allow that team to continue. If an incorrect answer is offered, record as a strike (3 strikes and the team is out). After one round, thank everyone for playing and introduce today’s topic from Page 1.

EXPLORE

Talk Topic 1: Stand in Hope Not Fear (15 minutes)

Middle School Option

Ask teens to find and read Luke 21:25-36. Use the commentary and questions in Teacher Bible Prep to discuss the passage. Next, assign pairs and instruct each pair to stand in a different location around the room.

Hand out the following scenarios (prepared ahead of time, one per index card):

- (1) Your bus breaks down on the way to your championship game/meet and you don’t know if you’ll make it on time.
- (2) You’ve read the wrong chapters for your test and don’t know the answers.
- (3) Your neighborhood is in the path of a dangerous storm.
- (4) The fire alarms at school go off first thing in the morning and you find out it was not a drill.
- (5) On a group hike, part of your group gets lost.
- (6) Your teammate is injured and has to go to the ER.
- (7) You lose your pet.
- (8) You just learned you are moving.

Ask teens to think about their immediate responses. Are they positive or negative, fearful or hopeful? Ask, “Why is our first reaction to trouble often fearful?”

High School Option

Use the Question of the Day to discuss current events and evidence of hope in the world. Invite teens to read Luke 21:25-36. Use the commentary and questions in Teacher Bible Prep to continue your discussion.

Ask teens to imagine the universe being shaken so dramatically that the natural world is out of order and people become so frightened that they faint. Say, “In those moments, our first response would be fight or flight. But what does Jesus ask us to do? How do you think we are called to respond to events in the world today?”

BONUS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Read aloud Psalm 40, or ask several teens to take turns doing so, then ask and talk about:

- ▶ What is your source for hope?
- ▶ What takes away our hope?
- ▶ How can the Christian community help you regain hope?
- ▶ How can the Christian community share hope and its source?

Talk Topic 2: Standing Together (15 minutes)

Middle School Option

Ask a teen to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13. Lead a brief discussion about the Christian community and its





prayer habits during fearful times. Hand out copies of Youth Page 6 and ask teens to complete “My Prayer of Hope.” After several minutes, ask a few teens to read what they wrote. Ask, “How does meeting together and praying together help us move past fear and claim hope?” If teens are willing to share their prayers with one another and they have smartphones with them, invite them to take pictures of one another’s prayers and keep them in a gallery named, “Hope” that they can view anytime for encouragement.

High School Option

Invite teens to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13, one or two verses at a time. Use the commentary and questions in Teacher Bible Prep to discuss living in Christian community. Then ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ What are some things you think can put pressure on or try to separate Christian groups?
- ▶ How can Christians help one another stay strong and hopeful when others are negative, divisive, or hateful?

Talk Topic 3: Stand with Light (15 minutes)

Middle School Option

Ahead of time prepare signs for steps/platforms as follows: Design one sign per platform that says, “Jesus”; one that says “Faith”; another that says “Hope”; and one that says “Love.” Use tape to attach signs to steps/platforms, then position steps around the room. Also, on index cards, write one of the Scripture references from the “In the Bible” daily devotions on Youth Page 6 (repeating references if necessary).

Ask teens to look up and read the Scriptures from “In the Bible” on the Youth Page. Using the situations you wrote on index cards earlier, ask pairs or small groups to match a situation with a Scripture verse in terms of how that passage might inform their response. Encourage teens to discuss how their response to the situation directly reflects

the Scripture, or how their response to the situation is influenced by following the Scripture passage. Suggest teens take home the index card with the Scripture reference they want to use.

Now ask pairs or small groups to locate a platform that reflects or relates to their Scripture passage and situation and to go stand on it and around it. (It is OK if more than one pair chooses the same platform.)

When everyone is in position, ask each pair to tell about its situation, Scripture passage (reading from a Bible), and how its response to the situation is based on the Scripture and how it relates to the platform on which they are standing.

When everyone has shared, form a circle and remind teens that bad, tragic, and evil things will always happen in the world but, as Christ-followers, we are called to be sources of comfort, love, hope, and light. We are not meant to hide under the covers while waiting for Jesus to return and fix everything for us. During the Advent Season, we are called to stand on God’s promises—to stand on faith, hope, and love. Close in prayer.

High School Option

Say: “We’ve talked about how it can be overwhelming to live in a world so full of hate, violence, natural disasters, crime, and suffering. We’ve talked about reacting from a place of hope instead of fear, and we’ve talked about standing in community instead of isolation. Now let’s talk about what that hope looks like during this Advent Season.” Ask:

- ▶ What are some specific actions that will inspire others to have hope?
- ▶ What can you do to contribute to a sense of hopefulness in your church this Advent? in your school? in your community?

Call on teens to read aloud Jeremiah 33:14-16 and use the commentary and questions in Teacher Bible Prep to wrap up your discussion. Close in prayer.

TAKE AWAY

During this new year of faith, instead of thinking about what Jesus can do for you, try to be more like Jesus and hand out healing, forgiveness, love, and hope. You have everything you need to stand as a beacon of Hope (with Jesus at your side) during this Advent Season.

PRAYER OF HOPE

Write a free-form prayer of hope below, or use the writing prompts (in any order) to help create your prayer. Also, look up and read the Scriptures provided below for inspiration.

MY PRAYER OF HOPE

When I fear . . .

I ask God . . .

I know that . . .

Because God is bigger than any fear, I can . . .

I will bring Hope to the world . . .

Psalm 25, 33, 71

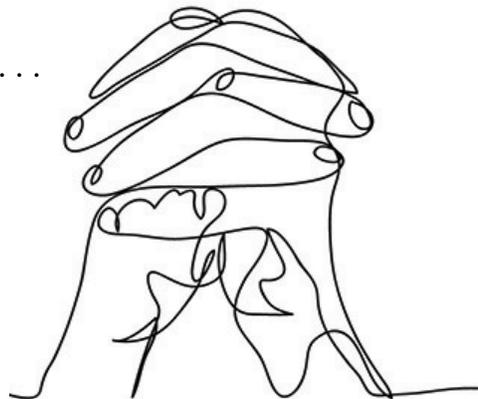
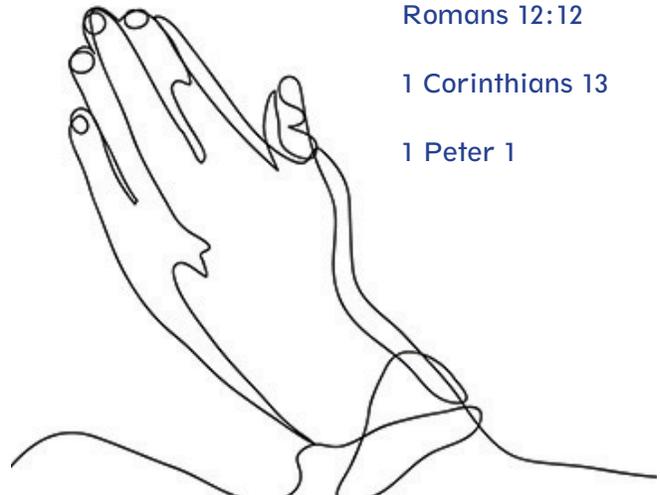
Isaiah 40:31

Jeremiah 29:11

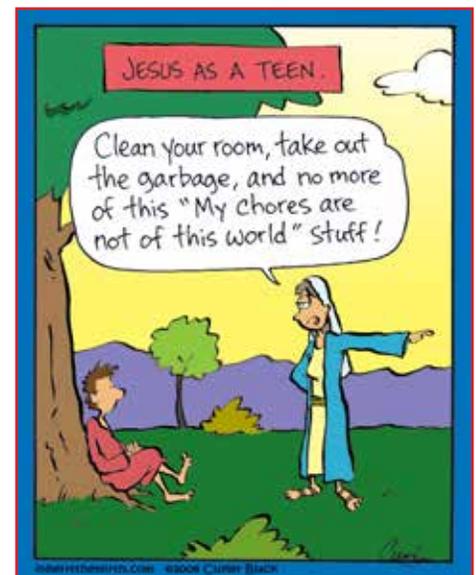
Romans 12:12

1 Corinthians 13

1 Peter 1



Inherit the Mirth



In the Bible: Readings for the Week

MONDAY: Read Jeremiah 29:11.

Why was this message so important for Jeremiah to hear?

TUESDAY: Read Psalm 25.

What do you relate to and how can you hope in God all day?

WEDNESDAY: Read James 5:13-18.

How can prayer help Christian communities stay strong?

THURSDAY: Read Ephesians 6:10-20.

Continue to fight for goodness, love, and hope.

FRIDAY: Read 1 Corinthians 13:13.

How are faith, hope, and love connected for you?

SATURDAY: Read Psalm 40:1-10.

Connect with your source of hope this week and share it.

WHAT'S TRENDING?

What excites you about Advent? Tweet or post your response with the hashtag #Advent on Twitter to @YMPartners or on facebook.com/youthministypartners