

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS  
EVENTS



THE DAWN  
CHORUS



AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL ON  
THE WONDERS OF BIRDS



# INTRODUCTION

Each year in the Northern Hemisphere, as the days get shorter and the nights get longer and colder, the season of Advent arrives. In the four weeks leading up to Christmas, we pray and light candles and tell the truth about a world full of shadows. We confront the realities of conflict and injustice – and we take responsibility. And then we raise up our voices and sing straight into those shadows, calling on Jesus to come again with light and peace and healing in his wings.

Songbirds all over the world know a thing or two about singing into the dark. In the wee hours of the morning, before the sun appears over the horizon, they begin a great symphony that scientists call the “dawn chorus.” Birds can sing at any time of day, of course, but in that deep blue space between darkness and light, their songs are louder, livelier, and passionately clear. Dawn choruses usually begin quietly, with only a few singers (listen for robins and thrushes) – and soon, thanks be to God, these early birds are joined by others, and then still others, until the morning fills up with sound and glory.

Advent is the church’s dawn chorus. It starts in the silence, in the shadows, and looks to the light. Each week, we gather together to listen and sing (sometimes quietly at first) straight into the deepening darkness, proclaiming that in the end, the night will give way to the day; winter will give way to spring; despair to hope, war to peace, grief to joy, violence to love – and God will come again, like the morning star in the east, or a mother hen gathering in her brood.

Like birds, the Magi navigated by the stars (songbirds migrate at night, too, using the stars as a guide), step by step, a journey of courageous love.

And like a bird, somewhere near that manger there must have been the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, sitting quietly up in the rafters, looking down on the One who comes to seek and serve and save – long ago and far away, and also right here, right now, on this sweet and silent night.

## A BIRD FOR YOUR TREE

Cut out the mourning dove (in the “Ornaments” collection included with this devotional), decorate it with live greens and twigs, write the word “SPIRIT” on it in big bold letters. Collect all five birds (the cardinal, the bluebird, the sparrow, the chicken, and the dove), and then take turns placing them on the Christmas tree (or in some other prominent spot) as you pray this prayer:



*God of light and wings, we pray for everyone who feels discouraged. Help us become cardinals of hope for a weary world.*

*God of light and wings, we pray for everyone who suffers in the midst of conflict. Help us become bluebirds of peace for a war-torn world.*

*God of light and wings, we pray for everyone who’s overwhelmed by sorrow. Help us become sparrows of joy for a broken-hearted world.*

*God of light and wings, we pray for everyone who’s hurt by hate. Help us become brave roosters and hens who tenderly, fiercely fight for love.*

*God of Mary and Joseph, angels and shepherds, thank you for coming to live with us, for gathering us together under your wings. Thank you for Christmas! Help us become birds of a feather with you and with our neighbors, near and far. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

## SING

“Silent Night”

“The First Noel”

“Go Tell It On the Mountain”

*Close by singing one verse (or two!) of each person’s favorite Christmas carol*



# CHRISTMAS EVE



## LIGHT

Four Candles, plus the Christ Candle

## READ

Luke 2:1-14

## REFLECT

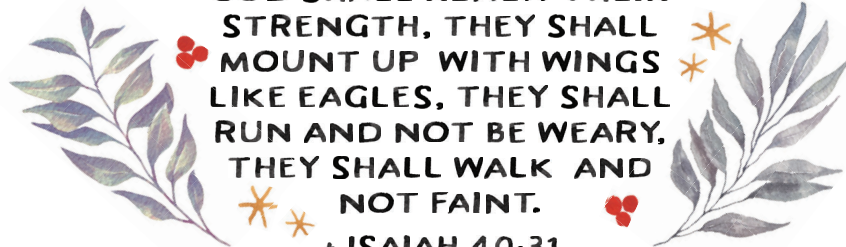
Like birds, on that first Christmas, Mary and Joseph and Jesus had to travel a long way, from one kind of home to another, vulnerable and brave, seeking safety and refuge, the night wrapped around them like a cloak of protection.

Like birds, they made a nest for Jesus out of straw (and if they could have, no doubt they would have lined it with soft feathers from their own "brood patch"). With the other animals there that night, the scene was a glimpse of the Peaceable Kingdom.

Like birds, the angels that night filled the skies over the shepherds and their flocks, singing for at least three reasons: to clarify territory (*All creation belongs to the God of love!*), to invite a relationship (*God loves us all, and calls us to love God and neighbor!*), and above all, to sing for its own sake – to sing for joy!

THOSE WHO WAIT FOR  
GOD SHALL RENEW THEIR  
STRENGTH, THEY SHALL  
MOUNT UP WITH WINGS  
LIKE EAGLES, THEY SHALL  
RUN AND NOT BE WEARY,  
THEY SHALL WALK AND  
NOT FAINT.

+ ISAIAH 40:31



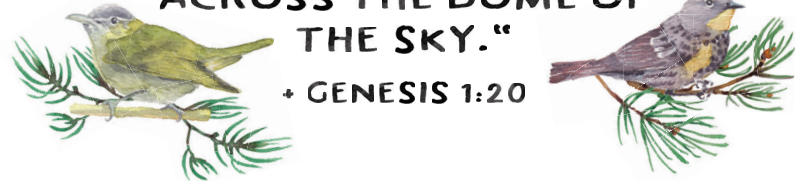
## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Think of this devotional as a kind of bird feeder: pick and choose the activities that work best for you and your family or friends. Each week includes a simple candlelight service (light a candle, read a passage from scripture and a short reflection, and sing a dawn chorus song or two); a few bird-related fun facts to share (try taking turns reading them around the table!); some provocative conversation starters; a handful of ideas for service during the week; and a lovely, simple bird ornament to cut out, decorate, and hang on your tree or around your home.

Sprinkle these activities throughout the week, or choose a weekly night for gathering around the table for some reading, learning, and art. And of course, throughout the season, keep your eyes and ears open for our fine feathered friends! As the prophet Isaiah put it long ago, those who "wait on God" will find renewed strength for the journey, rising "with wings like eagles" as we go (Isaiah 40:31).

AND GOD SAID, "LET THE  
WATERS BRING FORTH SWARMS  
OF LIVING CREATURES, AND LET  
BIRDS FLY ABOVE THE EARTH  
ACROSS THE DOME OF  
THE SKY."

+ GENESIS 1:20



# WEEK ONE HOPE



## LIGHT

One Candle

## READ

Romans 13:11-12

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near.

## REFLECT

Scientists have long wondered why birds wake so early, choosing the hours before and during dawn to break out into song. There are many theories; one is that the early morning shadows provide a cloak of protection, making it harder for predators to see them as they lift their voices.

For our part, when night falls, we sometimes feel afraid. But what if we reframed the shadows of night as a cloak of protection, a kind of sanctuary as we do the slow, quiet work of bringing more hope into the world: praying, studying, connecting, organizing, building relationships, and doing the things that lift our spirits and bring us hope? What if we woke up, put on the armor of God's love and justice, and lifted up our voices to sing that the "night is far gone and the day is near"?



## A BIRD FOR YOUR TREE

Cut out the cardinal of hope (in the "Ornaments" collection included with this devotional), decorate it with live greens and twigs, write the word "HOPE" on it in big bold letters, and put it up on your Christmas tree (or in some other prominent spot) as you pray this prayer:

*God of light and wings, we pray for everyone who feels discouraged. Help us become cardinals of hope for a weary world. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## SING

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"  
"Morning Has Broken"

## NAMES MATTER

Everyone knows the power of names. That's why the National Audubon Society, known primarily for its important work of environmental advocacy and the protection of birds, is considering a name change at the national level, while some local chapters of the organization, including the one in Seattle, have already made the decision to change.

The Society was founded by groups of women coming together in 1905 to end the practice of killing birds for their feathers (mostly for fancy hats!), but the group's namesake – John James Audubon – enslaved people and contributed to a culture of white supremacy. Accordingly, this influential organization is joining the broader American conversation about how history is portrayed in organization names, bird names, monuments, and so on. Keep your eyes and ears peeled for new names that help to bring about a more just, loving, inclusive future.



As the philosopher and advocate Cornel West has put it: "Justice is what love looks like in public."

post-it notes (extra points of they're rooster colors!) and write down three "rooster crows" you're hearing these days, three ways you want to "wake up." They could be personal or communal, big picture or little picture: from "patience" to "joy," "climate action" to "welcoming refugees." Post them somewhere you'll see them every day – ideally when you wake up (bathroom mirror). A bonus benefit is that you can also see what other people in your household are longing for and waking up to – roosters all around!

- Birds are amazing travelers, migrants who circle the planet every year. Make a list of songbirds (even two or three will do!) who spend the summers near you and have flown south for the winter. Research where they go, and what it looks like in that corner of creation. Draw a picture of them in their summer homes, and put it up on the fridge so you can keep them in mind, imagine their journey – and welcome them back in the spring!

- Did you know that roosters don't need the light of a new day to know when it's dawn? They have an internal clock that alerts them to start crowing two hours before the onset of light. It's called "anticipatory predawn crowing." Another kind of "dawn chorus"!
- The same gene that determines the color of a chicken's earlobe also determines the color of her egg. Red earlobes means brown eggs, blue earlobes means blue eggs, and white earlobes means white eggs.
- Chickens experience a rainbow of feelings. For example, they mourn when another chicken in the flock dies, and they show signs of depression if they are removed from the flock and have to live alone.
- Chickens (all birds, really!) experience REM sleep, which means they dream. The question now is: what do chickens dream about? Are they working out social problems as they sleep? Consorting with angels, like Joseph? Reliving a pleasant memory? Or soaring like an eagle, since, during waking hours, they can only fly for a few seconds at a time?

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

- When does love need an extra dose of courage? What examples can you think of?
- Do you believe that dreams can give us clues about our lives? Why or why not?
- Where in your life do you wish you had more courageous love?
- Does your name (or nickname) have a meaning? Does it fit your personality or life story so far?

## SERVE

- Act more like a chicken this week! Look for opportunities to be brave: speaking up for someone who's being mistreated; reaching out to apologize to someone with whom you've had a conflict; or trying to learn a new skill. Tap into your inner chicken! And share what you do with family or friends, in person or online.
- In a way, Christians are called to be roosters for the world: announcing the coming dawn, calling on all of us to wake up to the most important issues of the day, and just as important, listening to other "roosters" from other faiths or backgrounds. Grab some



## WINTER BIRDING BY EAR

Sometimes a birdwatcher's best strategy is not to look but to listen! One tried-and-true trick is to use simple memory devices to remember a bird song. Here's a list of a few handy mnemonics for some common winter birds:

### BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

"Here, Sweetie" or "Chicka-dee-dee-dee"



### TUFTED TITMOUSE

"Peter-Peter-Peter"



### BLUE JAY

"Jay! Jay! Jay! Jay!"

### AMERICAN CROW

"Caw! Caw! Caw!"

### NORTHERN CARDINAL

"Cheer-cheer-cheer-purty-purty-purty"

### BARRED OWL

"Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you?  
Who cooks for you aaalllllllll!"

### WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

"Yank-yank-yank"

### AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

"Po-ta-to chip. Po-ta-to chip."



## FUN FACTS

- For centuries, scientists have thought that only male birds sing. A recent study of over 1,000 songbird species around the world, however, has found that over 64% of species have both male and female singers. Rejoice! Narrow-minded, sexist shadows are being put to flight!

- In fact, female cardinals sing more elaborate songs than males do – up to two dozen different tunes! The female typically sings to signal the male to bring food to the nestlings; and sometimes male and female cardinals sing duets.



- During the winter months, cardinals forgo their territorial ways in order to flock together, since a group looking for food collectively is more successful than a single cardinal or pair. These flocks are called a college, a radiance, or a Vatican of cardinals. If you're going to church this Sunday, wear some cardinal red to show the world that we are better together than we are apart!

- There are almost 18,000 bird species around the world, and their diversity is astounding! They can be as small as the Rufous hummingbird (3 inches long), or as tall as an ostrich (up to 9 feet).

- You might think that to be a bird, you'd need to fly. The Rufous hummingbird, for example, migrates back and forth from its northern breeding grounds in Alaska to its winter home in Mexico, a distance of over 3000 miles (4800 kilometers). Ostriches, however, aren't able to fly – but they sure can run! With their long legs, an ostrich can run up to 45 miles per hour (70 kilometers per hour), making the ostrich one of the fastest animals on the African savannah. God loves diversity!

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What are you feeling most hopeful about these days (for yourself and for the world)?
- What song gives you a sense of hope when you hear it (or sing it!)?
- What's your favorite bird song, and why?
- Cardinals are non-migratory birds, which means they stick around all year; in fact, they like to live within a mile or two of where they were born. When you look at your life ahead, do you think you'll be migratory or non-migratory? Can you imagine living your whole life within a mile or two of where you live now? Why or why not?

## SERVE

- In much of North America, winter can be a difficult time for birds. The days are short, the nights are long and cold, and a lot of their natural food supply is covered by snow. Since birds use a lot of their energy staying warm



## REFLECT

The Christmas story – the story of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us – is a story of courageous love. A love that emboldens Mary to say "Yes!" to a mysterious God promising the impossible; a love that emboldens Joseph to trust that he has a role to play in making a nest with Mary and bringing the Child of God more fully into the world; and a love that would later embolden the one Joseph named "Jesus" (a name that means, "God saves") to follow the Holy Spirit – in the form of dove! – into the wilderness to begin his ministry (Matthew 3:16 - 4:1).

This courageous love – a love that emboldens, that lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry with good things, trusts the impossible, and protects the vulnerable – is the love at the heart of Christmas. And it's the same love we wait for, and call for, to inspire our hearts and change our lives.



## A BIRD FOR YOUR TREE

Cut out the hen of love (in the "Ornaments" collection included with this devotional), decorate it with live greens and twigs, write the word "LOVE" on it in big bold letters, and put it up on your Christmas tree (or in some other prominent spot) as you pray this prayer:

*God of light and wings, we pray for everyone who's hurt by hate. Help us become brave roosters and hens who tenderly, fiercely fight for love. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## SING

"Hark the Herald Angels Sing"  
"Rise Up Shepherd"

## FUN FACTS

- Turns out calling someone a "chicken" as a shorthand for "coward" is completely backwards. Chickens are legendary for their bravery – so much so that in the ancient world, roosters were symbols of military valor. Mother hens will fight tenaciously (against foxes, hawks, you name it!) to defend their chicks. All this puts a whole new spin on Jesus comparing himself to a "mother hen," gathering Jerusalem under his wings: not only tender nurturing, but also fierce courage!



## SERVE

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a deep respect for music as an instrument of change. In a speech he gave at the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival, here's what he said about the role of music in our lives: "God has wrought many things out of oppression, endowing God's creatures with the capacity to create – and from this capacity has flowed the sweet songs of sorrow and joy that have allowed humanity to cope with our environment and many different situations."
- Music played an indispensable role in the civil rights movement, and King considered the Impressions' song, "People Get Ready," to be the movement's unofficial anthem. Give that song a listen this week, and see if you can hear the sorrow of the world being transformed into joy.
- This week, plan a Christmas Caroling Party! Have everyone wear their most impressive Christmas sweaters; bring some sleigh bells, kazoos, or tambourines; then pick a street or hallway to head down and start ringing some doorbells and spreading some joy!



## WEEK FOUR LOVE

### LIGHT

Four Candles

### READ

Matthew 1:18-21

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

overnight, they love to eat immediately in the morning. This week, consider putting out a bird feeder with lots of tasty, high energy food (think: peanuts, sunflower seeds, and suet). You could even wake up early to see who comes for a visit!

- Try covering some pinecones in peanut butter, rolling them around in bird seed, and tying them up in trees at a local park or along a sidewalk nearby. Think of them as little ornaments of hope. The cardinals and squirrels alike will thank you!
- What's difficult for birds is also difficult for humans. Find out more about the resources for unsheltered neighbors in your town or city, including how you can help with time or treasure. Remember: when Jesus arrives, he doesn't have a home – and sleeps with the animals!
- This week, choose a favorite Advent hymn or Christmas carol to sing when you "wake from sleep," singing with hope and thanksgiving that "the day is near."



### LIGHT

Two Candles

### READ

Isaiah 11:6,9

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them... They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

### REFLECT

In this week's passage of scripture, God gives Isaiah a poetic vision of a world where wolves and lambs, lions and calves, predator and prey, live together in peace. This poetic vision is commonly called, "The Peaceable Kingdom," an evocative portrait of a world without enemies and violence. We often interpret the natural world in terms of predatory competition, but Isaiah's poetry invites us to look again, and notice the various ways that creation – even now – also includes cooperation and teamwork. During Advent, we're encouraged to stay alert and watch for signs of God's peace poetically breaking into the world.

The nesting behavior of western bluebirds can help us to catch a glimpse of this kind of vision. When a bluebird couple is raising a clutch of babies, sometimes one of the adult sons will return to his parents' nest to act as a helper. Similarly, a male bluebird who has his own clutch will sometimes nest close by his parents and help them manage theirs. This brilliant, blue-and-peach-colored cooperation not only helps protect the baby birds from predators (such as hawks and snakes), but also helps usher in God's "Peaceable Kingdom," one sunflower seed at a time.



### A BIRD FOR YOUR TREE

Cut out the bluebird of peace (in the "Ornaments" collection included with this devotional), decorate it with live greens and twigs, write the word "PEACE" on it in big bold letters, and put it up on your Christmas tree (or in some other prominent spot) as you pray this prayer:

*God of light and wings, we pray for everyone who suffers in the midst of conflict. Help us become bluebirds of peace for a war-torn world. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

### SING

"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"  
 "Peace Like a River"

### FUN FACTS

- A bluebird can spot caterpillars and insects from over 50 yards (46 meters) away, and can fly at speeds of up to 45 miles an hour (72 kilometers an hour).
- Woodpeckers relocate and build a new nest cavity every year – and bluebirds often move into the old cavities the woodpeckers leave behind.
- Ravens are highly cooperative birds: with each other during winter as they share scarce food; and with other species as well, collaborating with wolves, for example, as they hunt, play, and socialize.
- Hawks have the best eyesight in the entire animal kingdom – and they can also see in color (so can chickens!).
- Birds' nests come in all kinds of shapes and sizes: some can be as big and heavy as a car (like an eagle's nest after generations of use and expansion), while others are as tiny as a thimble (like the nest of a Bee Hummingbird, the smallest living bird!)



### SING

"Joy to the World"  
 "Angels We Have Heard on High"

### FUN FACTS

- Geographically distant groups of a single bird species often make small tweaks to their songs over time, eventually resulting in a new "dialect." Scientists consider these dialects to be analogous to different accents within human populations.
- Northern Mockingbirds can imitate the songs of up to 200 birds (they can also imitate car alarms and squeaking gates!).
- Did you know that blue jays do great impressions of red-tailed hawks? Some scientists believe that one of the reasons they do this is to warn other birds about predators nearby.
- Bird diversity is amazing! It's greater than that of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. So many colors, shapes and sizes; so many different kinds of songs. And some birds don't sing at all (like vultures and storks, who are largely silent), or cedar waxwings, who don't "sing" but rather make simple "calls" during courtship, nest-building, flocking, and so on.
- A choir in India, consisting of 121,440 people, won the Guinness World Record as the largest choir in the world. The choir only sang for five minutes – but just imagine the endorphins, the amount of oxytocin produced as they sang. And the joy!



### CONVERSATION STARTERS



- What's an activity or experience that gives you joy? Makes you smile? Lifts your spirits?
- When was the last time you couldn't stop laughing? What was happening?
- What's a song that, for you, is connected to the struggle for a more just, loving world? Is it a song of sorrow, a song of joy, or both?



## \*❄️ BROOD PATCHES

### HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF A BROOD PATCH?



When some birds are getting ready to have a clutch of eggs, the feathers on their tummies get loose, and in some species fall out. In other species, such as ducks and geese, the birds themselves actually pull these feathers out and use them to insulate the nest.

The result is a brood patch, an oval of bare, tender skin on the underside of the bird, all wrinkled with purple and pink folds.

Why do they do this? It turns out that those tummy feathers, otherwise used to keep the bird's body heat in, become barriers that keep that heat away from their young. And so, during breeding season, the better to conduct warmth to speckled eggs and then to newborns, songbirds develop a brood patch. They lose their feathers for the sake of intimacy and new life. They wiggle down into their nest and bring their young close and warm, right up alongside their purple and pink skin.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew. How often I long to gather your children together, as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings, as a songbird gathers her eggs under her tender, warm, purple and pink brood patch.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, God says to all of us, even now, I will make myself vulnerable for you, so you might be close and warm, so you might live – and thrive, and sing!



## \*❄️ LANGUAGE IS FOR THE BIRDS

The wonders of birds are part of our everyday language, in human cultures around the world. Do you recognize any of the sayings below? What others would you add to the list?



- Free as a bird
- Proud as a peacock
- Happy as a lark
- Graceful as a swan
- Take someone under your wing
- A birds-eye view
- Birds of a feather flock together
- The early bird gets the worm
- As scarce as hen's teeth
- Like water off a duck's back
- Like a duck to water
- Night owl
- Eagle eye

- Bird nests are made with lots of different materials: twigs, grass, human hair, cobwebs, mud, lichen, and more. No two nests are the same, but most nest-building birds like to put soft things inside their nests to bring comfort to their young. And some birds even weave herbs and spices into their nests, to help fight off bacteria in a way scientists are still trying to understand.

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

- We've all seen conflict "break out," both between people and between groups or nations. Where have you seen peace "break out" lately?
- Why do you think making peace (between people, between groups) is so hard? What are the key obstacles in the way? And what are some ways around those obstacles?
- What's a way you cooperated this week? What parts of cooperation are you good at? What parts do you want to improve?
- Pick an object (any object!) around your home. What many forms of cooperation made the object possible?

## SERVE

- Bluebirds are not endangered in North America, but their habitat is threatened by extensive logging and deforestation for the sake of grazing animals. As “cavity nesters,” bluebirds love living and raising chicks inside of old or dead trees – but there are fewer and fewer old or dead trees around for them to call home. The next time you see a dead tree, think of it as a bluebird hotel!



- One way to help bluebirds (and all nest-building birds!) is to gather together and provide natural, bird-friendly nesting materials: dead twigs and leaves, dry grass free of pesticides, cattail fluff, pine needles, etc. This week, try collecting suitable nest materials from your backyard or local park: gathering them together in little piles, or gently tucking them into little nooks in trees, for nest-building birds to discover this coming spring. Or collect them into a little basket that you can store prominently in your house throughout the colder months (a beautiful reminder and anticipation of spring!), and then bring it outside once the weather gets warmer.
- At our best, people are great cooperators, too! Find an opportunity this week for community cooperation: clean up a roadside, park, or playground; contribute to a food or clothing drive; volunteer at a local nonprofit; give blood; help shovel snow (or do some yard work) at a neighbor’s house down the street; bring a plate of cookies to someone who might be feeling lonely. Every day is filled with chances to cooperate!

**JESUS PUT BEFORE THEM ANOTHER PARABLE:  
“THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A MUSTARD  
SEED THAT SOMEONE TOOK AND SOWED IN  
HER FIELD; IT IS THE SMALLEST OF ALL THE  
SEEDS, BUT WHEN IT HAS GROWN IT IS THE  
GREATEST OF SHRUBS AND BECOMES A TREE,  
SO THAT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR COME AND  
MAKE NESTS IN ITS BRANCHES.”**



**+ MATTHEW 13:31-32**



## LIGHT

Three Candles

## READ

Isaiah 35:1-2

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing!

## REFLECT

When birds break into song and begin their glorious dawn chorus, you might wonder: Why do they sing in the first place? Here’s what we know. Birds sing for two big reasons: first, to mark their territories (*This is my house!*); and second, to attract a mate (*Want to make a home together?*). But some scientists believe birds also sing for the sake of delight. Charles Darwin, for example, wrote that birds sing “for their own amusement.” A third big reason, then, may be just that: birds sing because it gives them joy!

The same is true for humans. Especially when we sing with others, our brains release endorphins and oxytocin (the “bonding” or “love” hormone), which is known to reduce stress and increase feelings of trust and gladness. It’s no wonder Isaiah’s vision of a new world features the wilderness singing for joy!



## A BIRD FOR YOUR TREE

Cut out the sparrow of joy (in the “Ornaments” collection included with this devotional), decorate it with live greens and twigs, write the word “JOY” on it in big bold letters, and put it up on your Christmas tree (or in some other prominent spot) as you pray this prayer:



*God of light and wings, we pray for everyone who’s overwhelmed by sorrow. Help us become sparrows of joy for a broken-hearted world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*