

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: We light the first candle to remind us of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. We light this first candle and recall that hundreds of years before Jesus was born the prophets foretold His coming as light in the darkness of sin and evil.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:1-7

MEDITATION: We have all experienced the fear and anxiety of darkness. Perhaps the result of a power outage or simply a dark night, we understand how disorienting and frightening darkness can be. Spiritual darkness is no less the case. Isaiah writes of people wandering in spiritual darkness—people who have forgotten the promises of God, people who have not been taught the truth of God, people who have rejected the love of God. Isaiah’s promise is that these people who for whatever reason find themselves trying to exist in darkness will be flooded with light: God’s holy, loving, peace-giving light. The prophet says that this light will come from a child who will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Christ is born the Light of the world. In this Advent season, hear once again His call to embrace His love and walk out of darkness into His glorious light.

CAROL: “Silent Night”

PRAYER: Our heavenly Father, as we prepare for the celebration of Christ’s birth, lead us out of the darkness of our sin and selfishness and into the joy and blessing of your glorious Light. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: *Relight the first candle.* We light the second candle to remind us that we must prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child.

SCRIPTURE: Micah 5:1-5a

MEDITATION: We live in a world of violence and war, but we are not the first generation to experience such things. In fact, from the moment sin entered human beings have been hurting each other, causing great pain and anguish of spirit and soul. This pain and suffering grieved the heart of God; His love for us was too great to stand by and do nothing. So, into the brutality and cruelty of our world, stepped the Savior, His One and Only Son. The prophet tells us that this little child born in this little village will lead His people with the strength and majesty of God. And the result of His presence will be security and peace that reaches to the ends of the earth. We do not yet experience the fullness of Christ’s peace—this will be r

evealed when Christ comes again—but until that day, we have the peace of soul and spirit because we know that whatever happens in this world or to us, God is still in control: Christ reigns victorious over all and “of His kingdom there shall be no end!” So, we rejoice and sing His praise.

CAROL: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

PRAYER: Dear God, we grieve for the pain and agony of our world. We know that your heart breaks even more than ours. Thank you for sending Your Son as the answer to our struggle. During this season in which we celebrate His birth, fill us and our world with the peace of Christ. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: *Relight the first and second candles.* The third candle is lit as a proclamation and affirmation that shepherds, of all people, are the first to hear of the Holy Birth.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:8-20

MEDITATION: We have a tendency to glamorize the profession of shepherd which simply tells us that we understand very little of what it means to be one. It is anything but glamorous. Because of the nature of their work, shepherds are considered very low on the scales of social acceptability. Their work keeps them busy 24 hours a day so they have few opportunities to attend worship which puts them in poor standing with the religious leaders. They don’t smell so good and they are uneducated among poorly educated people. They are the least likely choice to hear the first announcement of Messiah’s birth, yet they are! This event is a precursor to the life of Jesus who welcomes to His table and to His ministry the least likely. No one need feel an outcast with Jesus. His welcoming arms embrace children, prostitutes, tax collectors, unclean, and yes, shepherds. It is certainly no coincidence that when Jesus looks for a metaphor to describe His coming, His ministry, His feelings for human beings, He chooses a shepherd! Christmas is a celebration that the Christ Child comes not for the spiritually elite but for the least and lowly—for you and me—for everyone.

CAROL: “Angels We Have Heard On High”

PRAYER: O Lord our God, thank you that angels spoke to shepherds first. Help us see that Christ is born to remove the barriers between us and You and between You and all the world. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: *Relight the three candles.* The fourth candle is lit as sign of God's sovereignty over all people and all things. God uses devout people like Mary and Joseph and God uses wicked people like Caesar Augustus to carry out His plans and purposes for His people.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-7

MEDITATION: When God chooses Mary and Joseph from Nazareth for this monumental task, He is not taken by surprise that the prophets have proclaimed that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem. Enter Caesar Augustus who just *happens* to get the idea in his head that a census right then might be a good idea! The Bible presents us with many examples in which God uses rulers with no connection with Him to carry out His purposes. Caesar's census is one more example of God's unlimited power on this earth: nothing can prevent His purposes from being fulfilled. We celebrate this Advent season because the Christ whose power over all is unquestioned is the same One whose unquestioned power is at work in our lives and in our world today. He is still the Almighty God for whom nothing is impossible...even when all seems to declare that it is.

CAROL: "Joy to the World"

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, we rejoice that in Christ we see clearly that nothing is impossible for you. Help us to trust You and Your unlimited power in the difficult situations of our lives and in the difficult situations of our world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE OR CHRISTMAS DAY

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: *Relight the first four candles.* We light the Christ Candle and recall the proclamation of Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." The light of the world is Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:9-20

MEDITATION: What an amazing experience for the shepherds! It must have been both the most frightening experience and the most exciting experience of their lives! You want to run in fear but at the same time you don't want to miss this unbelievable event. I suspect that as the angels sing the shepherds stand their, mouths agape, frozen in time. As the angels and their song fades into the night, the shock of what they have seen and heard begins to wear off. They look at each other wonder what they should do. What do you do when angels appear? How do you respond? Luke tells us that these practical men decide to head into town and see for themselves. And when they arrive, they find things exactly as the angel told them. And leaving the baby, they give glory to God, telling everyone they can find and the whole place is in awe of what God has done. As this Christmas season reaches its climax, let's join the shepherds in giving praise and glory to God for this Child who is born the Savior of the world; let's sing with joyous hearts a song of glory to our God for His gracious gift.

CAROL: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

PRAYER: Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for the song of the angels. May our response mirror the shepherds, giving glory and praise for all that You have done in Christ. Amen.



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