

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: As the first candle is lit, say, “The light of the Advent candles reminds us that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. I light this first candle and recall that hundreds of years before Jesus is born the prophets tell of His coming. God’s people wait for centuries for the Messiah to appear.”

SCRIPTURE: *The Christmas Prophecy*
Isaiah 9:1-7

MEDITATION: The prophet Isaiah paints a dark and gloomy picture of Israel’s spiritual condition. The people turn their backs on God, ignoring His loving invitation. As a result of their sin, they face heartache and despair. But in the ninth chapter the picture changes. Isaiah announces that a child will be born who will bring radiant light to the darkness of the nation. This child will bear the nation and the world upon His shoulders and His kingdom will never end. He will be God’s messenger of hope and power, of love and peace. The coming of this child will change the world. We celebrate the coming of this Child at Christmas and during Advent we anticipate His coming to the world and to our hearts—dissipating the darkness with his wondrous light.

CAROL: “Come Thou-Long Expected Jesus”

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christ’s birth, fill us with the hope that Christ comes to give and make us people who rejoice in His light amid the darkness of our world. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: Relight the first candle. As the second is lighted, say, “The second candle is the Bethlehem candle. I light this candle to remember that we must prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child.”

SCRIPTURE: *Christ is Born in Bethlehem*
Luke 2:1-7

MEDITATION: Bethlehem is not a great city in Israel. The prophet Micah calls Bethlehem “small among the clans of Judah” (5:2). The birthplace of Jesus is significant to the culmination of God sending his Son. Most people expect a king to be born in a palace and to enjoy a life of luxury, pleasure, and ease. But Jesus is born in a Bethlehem stable, far from the places of power and comfort and ease. The Bethlehem stable reminds us that Jesus is not born for one class of people; that Jesus does not come to earth to be served but to serve; that Jesus knows life on this earth as we know it. As we remember the insignificance of Bethlehem, let us give thanks to God that this “little town” presents one more opportunity for us to see that God comes to us where we are, as we are. And may we too, rejoice in the gift of love given to all humankind on that long ago night.

CAROL: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

PRAYER: Dear God, we know that we have not always understood Your great goodness and love. We thank you for giving us the Redeemer and pray that your Holy Spirit will enable us to accept the gift of love. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: Relight the first and second candles. As the third is lighted say, “The third candle is the Shepherd Candle. I light this candle remembering that the shepherds are given the first news of the Holy Birth.”

SCRIPTURE: *The Story of the Shepherds*
Luke 2:8-20

MEDITATION: We find it difficult to imagine what it means that shepherds are the first human beings to hear of Jesus’ birth. Because we have heard the story so often and seen them in pageants so many times, we take for granted the presence of the shepherds in the Christmas story. But shepherds are unwanted people in Israel. The constant care of the sheep makes it difficult for them to participate in the worship life of Israel. They are dirty and most people try to avoid them. If we were to guess to whom the news of Christ’s birth would be first announced, shepherds would not be at the top of the list—they might not even be on the list at all. Yet, the Gospel of Luke tells us that the angels appear to the shepherds and through their heavenly song break the news to these lowly shepherds that the Messiah has been born. Whatever our social status or religious standing, the shepherds’ part in the story of Christ’s birth makes it clear that Jesus comes for everyone. Knowing this, let us rejoice, give thanks, and worship Christ, who is our Savior.

CAROL: “Away In a Manger”

PRAYER: Our heavenly Father, thank you for including the shepherds as recipients of your Good News. Help us to rejoice in knowing that we are important to you and that Jesus is born for us and for everyone. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: Relight the first three candles. As the fourth candle is lighted, say, “The fourth candle is the Wise Men candle. Wise Men came from afar to see God’s gift of His Son. They bowed down in worship and adoration.”

SCRIPTURE: *The Wise Men*
Matthew 2:1-12

MEDITATION: Christmas is not just an event for a certain chosen group of people; the inclusion of the Wise Men makes this perfectly clear. The Wise Men or Magi are not trained in the Jewish faith. These men are not from anywhere near Israel. They do not know of the prophecies announcing the Messiah’s birth. But in their study of God’s creation, they see a star and something stirs within them. They put their lives on hold for at least two years and invest an enormous amount of time and wealth in order to have the opportunity to meet this newborn King. And when they meet Him their immediate response is to worship. The Wise Men remind us that Jesus is born for everyone—in every country, of every race, in every generation. All people are invited to call Him king and bow in worship. As we draw closer to Christmas Day, let us join with people around the world in worship and adoration of Jesus Christ. And in our worship, may God fill us with His love for the whole world and help us share His love with whole world.

CAROL: “Joy to the World”

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the gift of Your Son and the promise of eternity. Grant that we may carry this hope with us into Christmas, into every day of our lives and into every nation of the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY

CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY: Relight the first, second, third and fourth candles. As you light the tall white candle, say, “I light the Christ Candle. This candle reminds us that Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.”

SCRIPTURE: *The Song of the Angels*
Luke 2:1-20

MEDITATION: Luke implies that while the angelic choir is a large one, it consists of only some of the angels. We do not know which angels or how these angels are chosen, but it must have been exciting to be one of the angels chosen for this glorious task of singing the song of the ages that Jesus is born! The song of the angels is a song of glory and joy. Luke’s account of their heavenly chorus gives the impression that they can hardly contain themselves. Their song fills the night sky with a fever-pitch level of excitement no one had ever seen before, and surely no one has seen since. It is the greatest and most exciting night in the history of the world. As the Christmas season reaches its fulfillment on this day, let us add our voices to those of the angels and sing with joyous hearts a song of glory and praise to our God. Let us ask God to fill us with the excitement of the angels—an excitement not just for today, but for every day as we celebrate the birth of God’s Son, our Savior, and our reigning and returning King.

CAROL: “O Come, All Ye Faithful”

PRAYER: Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for the song of the angels. May this be our song every day we live upon the earth. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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