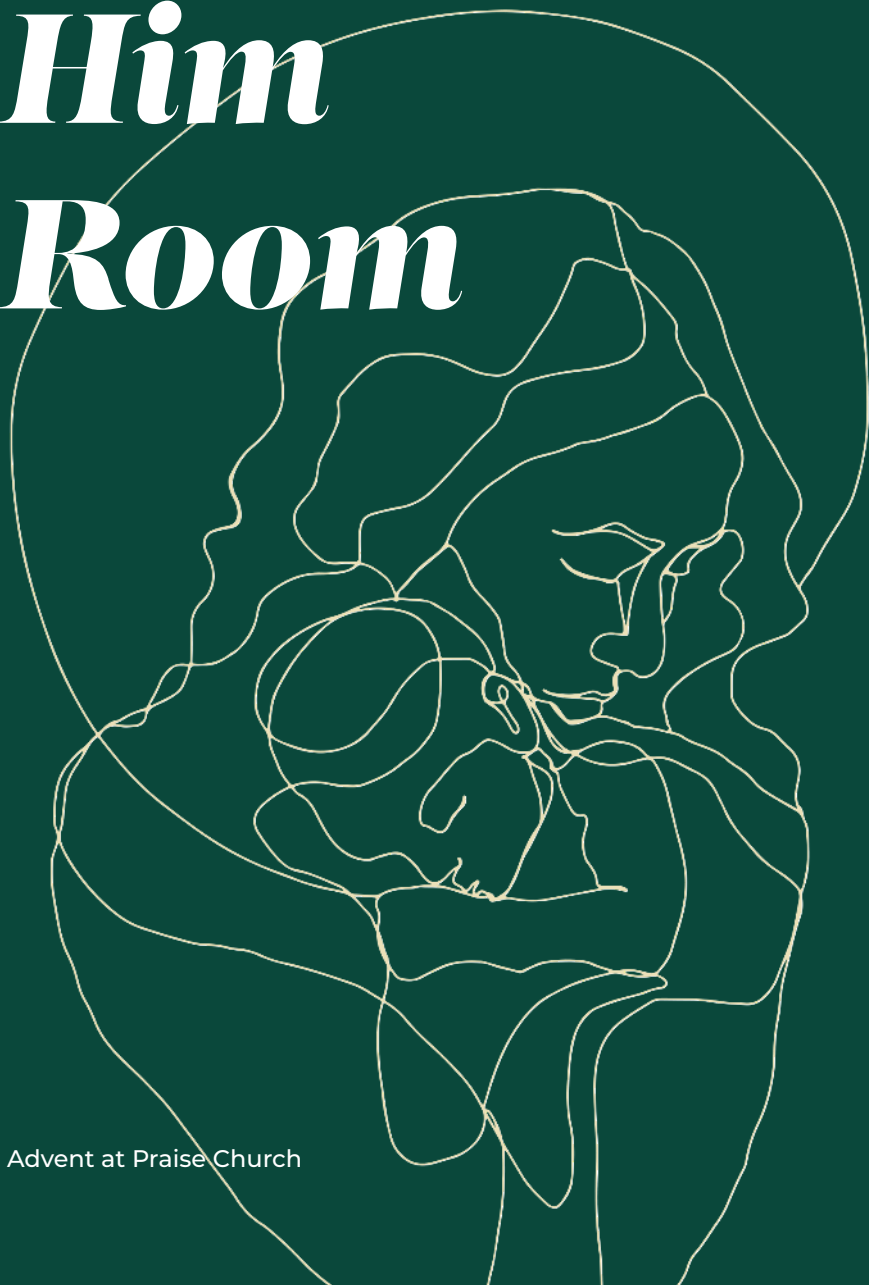


*Prepare
Him
Room*



Advent at Praise Church

Hope
Peace
Joy
Love



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WHAT IS ADVENT?

“You ruined Christmas” were the frightful words from a young girl after dad knocked over the Christmas tree. Have you ever felt like Christmas was ruined? Have you ever had a Christmas that didn’t feel like Christmas? Let’s make sure that doesn’t happen this year. This Christmas can be the most meaningful Christmas ever!

This Advent guide is meant to help you and those close to you prepare Him room. If children are participating in Advent with you, feel free to customize the content to maximize engagement. This is a wonderful time of the year and what we’re celebrating should create awe and wonder.

As Lent is to Easter, Advent is to Christmas. Both are meant to help us respond to God’s intervention with awe and wonder! Using words from the classic Christmas carol “Joy to the World”, Advent helps our heart “prepare Him room”. And in what can be a very crowded season, room for Jesus is what we need. Do you think that Jesus gets crowded out by the commercialization of the season? Do you think Jesus gets crowded out by the busyness of the season? Let’s make sure this doesn’t happen! Observing Advent can help.

Will you prepare Him room?

The word “Advent” comes from a Latin word that means coming or arrival (Adventus). Although not a super common word today, we could talk about the advent of a new technology, presidential election or winter. In Christian history, Advent has a dual focus. Advent celebrates the historic event that God has already come to us in the person of Jesus (The incarnation) while creating anticipation that He will come again to establish His rule on this earth (The second coming). As Israel once longed for Jesus their Messiah to come the first time, we today look for Him to come a second.

Advent always begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and introduces a new theme each week. The four traditional themes are hope, peace, joy, and love. And when you celebrate Advent, you’re not just joining those in your local church family, but with the family of God around the world. Because of Jesus...we are family!



HOW TO PREPARE

If the idea of celebrating Advent is new to you, you're in good hands. This book will guide you through weekly Advent gatherings and a series of Advent candle-lighting liturgies (liturgy is just a word for a thoughtful order of worship).

WEEKLY GATHERING. Participants are encouraged to share in Advent with others (friends or family) once a week. Sunday evenings are a great time to gather with family and friends.

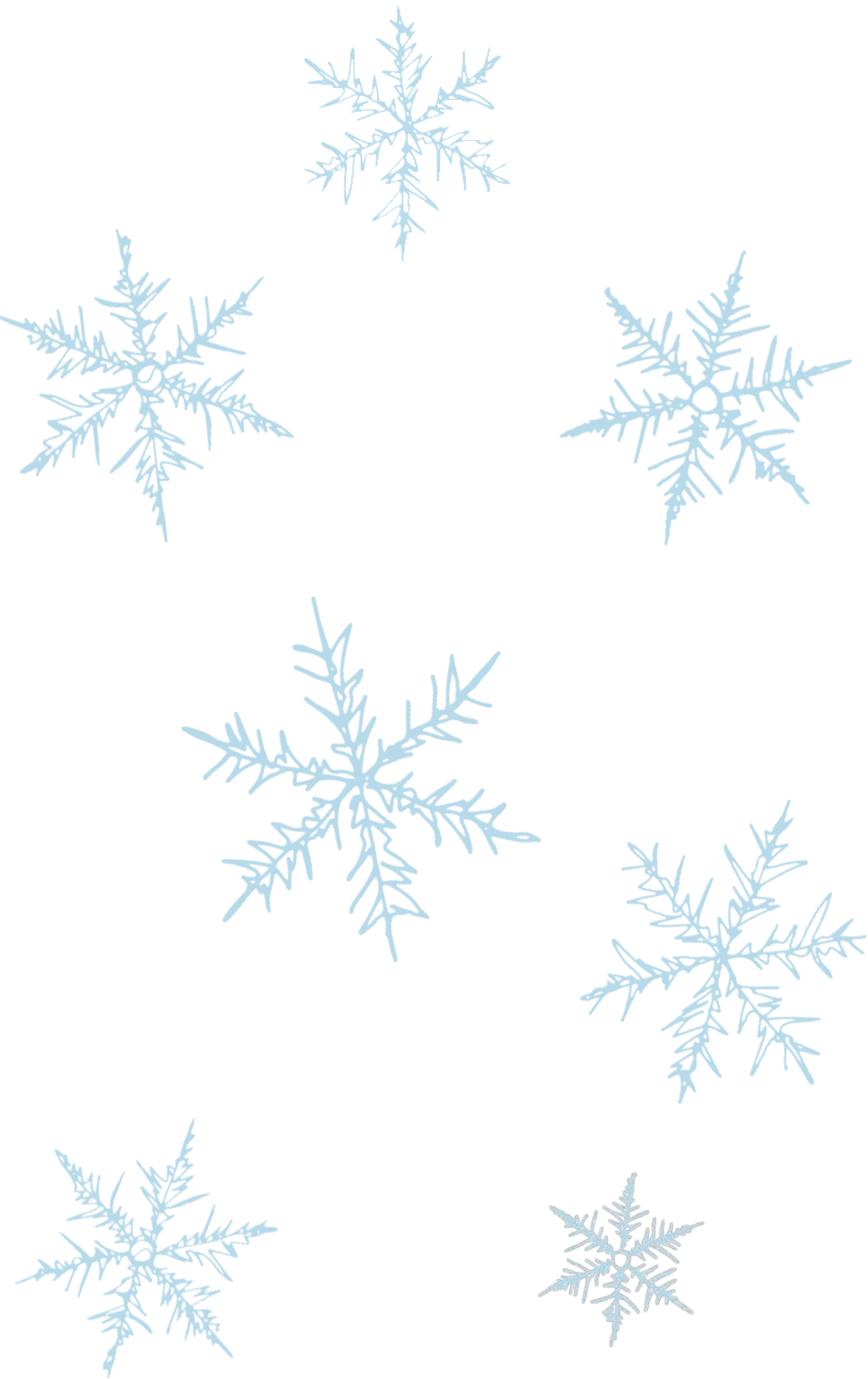
SUPPLIES. Create an Advent wreath or candle display to use during Advent. It can be as simple or elaborate as you want. At the least you'll need four colored candles (3 purples and 1 pink), one larger white candle at the center (Christmas Eve), and a candelabra/candle holder. You can find both creative and traditional ideas online, or purchase a pre-made Advent wreath to use.

FOOD. Food is optional, but sharing a meal together is a great way to enjoy company.

CHILDREN. If children are involved, you may want to prepare a fun activity to enjoy. Memorable moments become memories that are talked about for a lifetime.

MUSIC. Each week a Christmas song will be included in the devotional. The song is meant to help with reflection. Be prepared to access the song through your means of listening to music.

PARTICIPATION. Increase engagement by involving everyone that's around the table. For example, allow different people to read sections of the content.



Week One

December 3

BRIGHT HOPE

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

“The best we can hope for in
this life is a knothole peek
at the shining realities ahead.
Yet a glimpse is enough.
It’s enough to convince our
hearts that whatever sufferings
and sorrows currently assail us
aren’t worthy of comparison to
that which waits over the horizon.”

-Joni Eareckson Tada

Light the first purple Advent candle (let a child light) and announce that the first theme of Advent is hope.

I hope it doesn't rain today. I hope I don't run out of gas. I hope my package arrives on time. Have you ever used the word "hope" like this?

Q: How would you define hope (allow others to answer)?

For us, it's not uncommon to use the word "hope" in place of the word "wish". For example, we might say "I hope it snows this Christmas". But since a white Christmas is rare in Southeast Texas, our "hope" for the fluffy stuff is more like a wish. Besides, most of us would settle for just sweater weather. But that shouldn't stop us from "wishing" for a white Christmas.

Biblical hope is more than a wish! Biblical hope is the confident anticipation that what God said would happen will happen. And the reason for that hope is His faithfulness to His word in the past. True hope is not without reason!

Read Hebrews 6:19 and answer the question, "What is 'hope' called in this passage?" ("an anchor of the soul")

Q: Why do you think the author described hope as "an anchor for the soul"?

Considering First Coming Advent

At one time in history the first coming of Jesus was just a hope of the Jews and not a physical reality. It's similar to the gift you've asked for and anticipate getting this Christmas. It's in your thoughts but your eyes haven't seen. Although they didn't know the time of His coming, they talked about it with great anticipation. Isaiah, one of the major prophets of his day, spoke of the future coming of Jesus 700 years before His arrival. Seven hundred long years! Seven hundred years is a long time to wait!

To give perspective, 700 years from today would be the year 2723. For 700 years the idea of God sending the Messiah was rumbling through generations.

Song

Listen to the song “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” and feel the tension of the wait (search “Chris Tomlin O Come, O Come Emmanuel” on YouTube)

Read Isaiah 9:2-7 (involve children if available)

- Isaiah was a man that spoke for God to the people (prophet). In Isaiah 9:2-7, God was informing the people through Isaiah about the future first coming of Jesus.
- Remember, Biblical hope is the confident anticipation that God will do what He said He'd do because of His faithfulness in the past. What are some of the events in the Jews past that would have built their faith that God will do what He said He'd do (Delivering them from Egypt, providing manna in the wilderness, leading them to the Promised Land).

Read Galatians 4:4-5

- Galatians 4:4-5 tells of hope fulfilled. After 700 years, what was once hoped for became the reality.
- What is something that you waited a long time for? Can you remember what it felt like when what you hoped for became a reality?

The Second Advent

Just as the Jews waited with hope for Jesus' first coming, we today can wait in confident anticipation for His second coming. Their hope in Jesus' first coming was anchored in God's past faithfulness (good to His word). Our hope today is also anchored to His past faithfulness.

Q: What is a past event that should build hope in us that He will come again?

A: Christmas (Incarnation).

Christmas, the first coming is a faith building reminder of God being faithful to His word that should build hope that He will come again to make everything right. He will. He did. He will again. Yes, King Jesus will come again!

Read Revelation 21:4 (speaking of Jesus' second coming)

The Blessing

(If meeting with others) To end the time together, speak this priestly blessing over your friends or family. The Blessing is found in Numbers 6:24-26 and has been spoken over the people of God for the last 3,500 years.

"May the Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen!"

(End of Candle-Lighting Liturgy)

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Adonai, Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Week Two

December 10

THE PROMISE OF PEACE

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

“Peace comes when there is no
cloud between us and God.
Peace is the consequence of
forgiveness, God’s removal of
that which obscures His face
and so breaks union with Him.”

-Charles Brent

*Light both the first and second purple Advent candles
(let a child light).*

Last week we began the Advent season by talking about hope. Do you remember what Biblical hope is (confident anticipation that God will do what He said He'd do)? Do you remember what Hebrews 6:19 called hope ("an anchor for the soul")?

This week we're talking about peace.

Q: Do you know the Hebrew word for "peace"
(hint: we say it every Sunday during The Blessing)?

The Hebrew (Old Testament original language) word for peace is shalom. The word shalom was used when saying "hello" and "goodbye". For example, when two people would pass each other on the street, shalom would have been spoken. What were they saying to the other person when greeting with "shalom"? While we often think of peace as the absence of conflict, shalom implies so much more. When someone greeted another with shalom, they were saying, "May you experience completeness and welfare in all areas of life."

Read Isaiah 9:6 (involve children if available)

- This was the prophesy given by God through Isaiah 700 years before Jesus' first coming (birth). It gives several titles for the coming messiah, with one being "the Prince of Peace". This verse says that Jesus is the prince of completeness and welfare. Jesus is the peace promise.

Read Luke 2:8-14 (involve children if available)

To end this week's discussion, let's look at the dual focus of Advent through the lens of peace.

- The first advent (coming) of Jesus made it possible for us to have peace with God. Although we live in a broken world, we don't have to live with a broken relationship with God. Jesus offers us peace with God. Read Ephesians 2:13-14.
- When Jesus returns for His second coming (advent), He will then establish His rule on this earth and peace (shalom) will be in all creation. Read Revelation 21:4 (yes, we read it last week)

Jesus' first advent saves us from the penalty of sin and offers us a complete life with God. Jesus' second advent will do away with the presence of sin and offer completeness in all creation. We will forever live with SHALOM! Jesus is our promise of peace.

Song

Listen to the song "Peace Has Come" by Hillsong Worship

The Blessing

(If meeting with others) To end the time together, speak this priestly blessing over your friends or family. The Blessing is found in Numbers 6:24-26 and has been spoken over the people of God for the last 3,500 years.

"May the Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen!"

(End of Candle-Lighting Liturgy)





“Peace Has Come”

Behold the star of Bethlehem
The Word of God has become flesh
Unto us a child is born
The Savior of this broken world

Hear the angel voices
Sing come let us adore Him
Peace has come, for our King is with us

Fully God and fully man
He comes for all with open hands
He rules with love on David’s throne
All praise belongs to Christ alone

Hear the angel voices
Sing come let us adore Him
Peace has come, for our King is with us
Holy, Holy, Holy
Jesus we adore thee
Peace has come, for our King is with us

Oh come let us adore Him
Oh come let us adore Him
Oh come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

Week Three

December 17

NEWS THAT BRINGS JOY

Psalms 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

“ Joy is distinctly a Christian word and a Christian thing. It is the reverse of happiness. Happiness is the result of what happens of an agreeable sort. Joy has its springs deep down inside. And that spring never runs dry, no matter what happens. Only Jesus gives that joy. He had joy, singing its music within, even under the shadow of the cross.

”

-S.D. Gordon

Light the two purple candles and the “Shepherd’s Candle” (pink) (let a child light).

Do you remember the themes of week one and two (hope and peace)? This week our theme is joy.

Q: What is the difference between joy and happiness?

Because of Jesus we can have resident joy despite circumstances. Unlike happiness, joy is not dependent upon circumstance, but is connected and anchored to the birth of our Savior and the hope that He will come again. Isn’t that great news? Can you believe it? We can have joy because Jesus has come and He will come again.

Read Luke 2:8-12

Q: What is news?

A: What has already happened! It is history that has happened.

The birth of Jesus brought “good news of great joy”. The good news didn’t bring great joy because everything was now right with the world. Herod would continue to be cruel to the Jews and life would still be difficult. Great joy was brought because God had done what he said He would do. God sent Jesus to be with us just like He said he would. Because of Jesus and despite our circumstances, we can have resident joy now!

But what about the sadness and grief we still experience? Scripture gives the acknowledgement and permission for lament during our struggles on earth. No one understands grief more than Jesus. He was a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”.

Read Hebrews 12:2

- Jesus had joy even while enduring the suffering that came with His trial and crucifixion. What do you think it means when Hebrews 12:2 says, “for the joy set before Him”?

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9

This passage acknowledges that we get to look to Jesus while we live in the reality of difficult times. Our joy doesn't have to waver and comes from knowing that our time in-between His first and second coming can be lived in Him. The life of the in-between can be informed by the “good news that brought great joy” and anchored in the hope that Jesus will come back to make all things right...just as He said He would.

Song

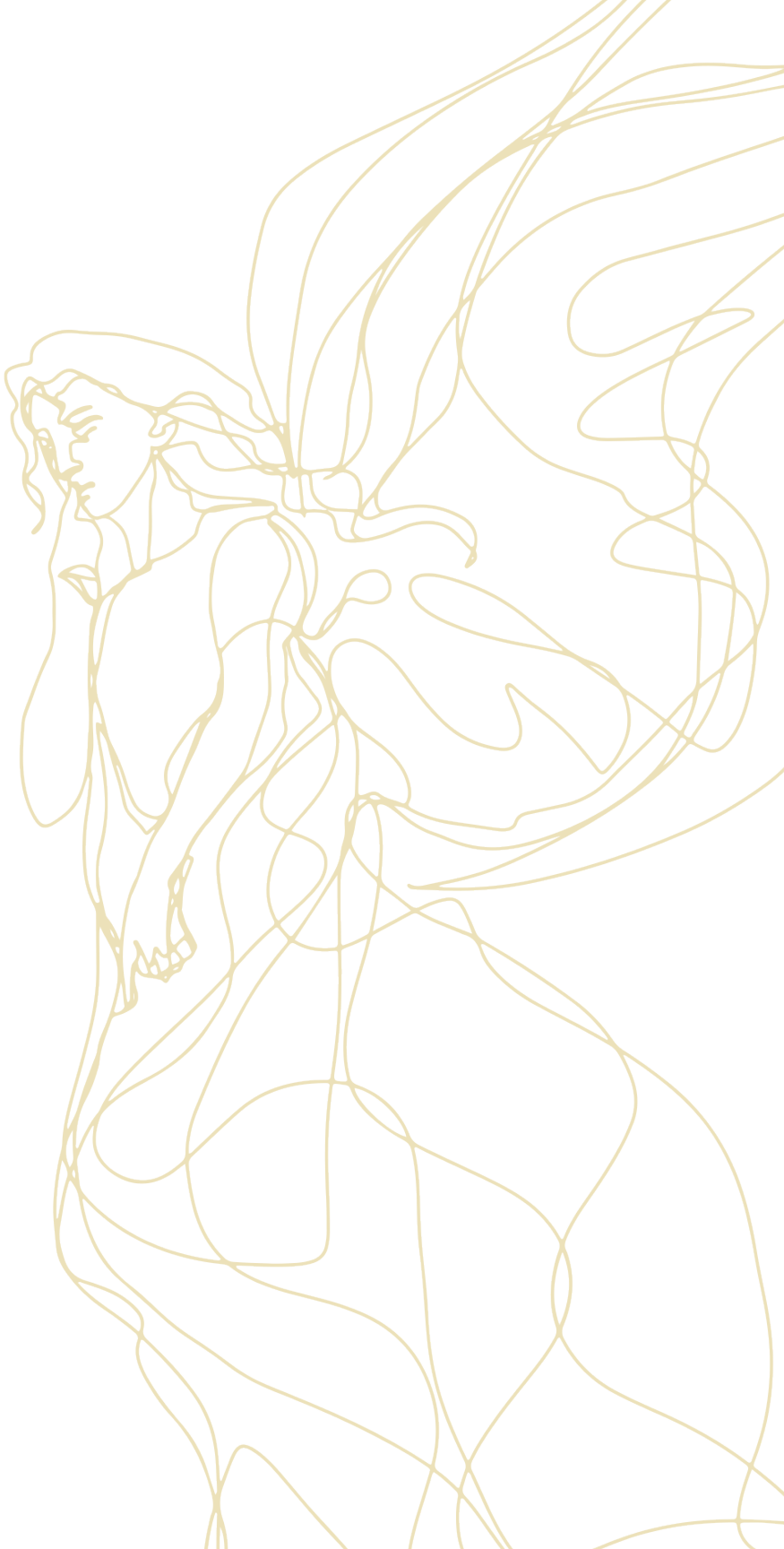
Listen to the song, “Joy to the World”

The Blessing

(If meeting with others) To end the time together, speak this priestly blessing over your friends or family. The Blessing is found in Numbers 6:24-26 and has been spoken over the people of God for the last 3,500 years.

“May the Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen!”

(End of Candle-Lighting Liturgy)





“Joy to the World”

Joy to the world! The Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Week Four

December 24

*LOVE
HAS
COME*

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

“The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity—hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory—because at the Father’s will Jesus became poor, and was born in a stable so that thirty years later He might hang on a cross.”

-J.I. Packer

Light the two purple candles, the pink candle, and the last purple candle (let a child light).

Today, on Christmas Eve, we light the “Love” candle. Since the first week of Advent on December 3rd, we have been building up to this moment. We are one day away from celebrating the day when love came down!

Read John 4:9-11 (involve children if available)

Love has come! Ever since the Garden of Eden rebellion that separated us from God, humanity has been marching towards the day when Jesus would come to us to be the bridge back to God. Although difficult to see with the human eye, tiny steps were being made to provide shalom with our Creator once again. But shalom with God would require an act of love that is unequalled.

Read Philippians 2:5-8

Tomorrow is the day that we have set aside to celebrate love coming down to us. It’s a day that was a part of God’s plan to reconcile the world back to Him. His birth was necessary because His death was necessary. He was born so that He could offer Himself up for you. Merry Christmas!

Song

Listen to the song, “O Come, All Ye Faithful”

The purpose of our final reading is to turn our hearts from what has happened (the first-coming) and awaken our hopes for what is to come (the second-coming).

Read Revelation 21:1-4

- What do you look forward to the most in knowing that one day all things will be restored?

Complete shalom secured by an act of unequalled love. One day everything will be made right. This is the hope that we hold on to. It is the anchor of our soul. This is why the birth of Jesus was “good news that brought great joy”.

The Blessing

(If meeting with others) To end the time together, speak this priestly blessing over your friends or family. The Blessing is found in Numbers 6:24-26 and has been spoken over the people of God for the last 3,500 years.

“May the Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen!”

(End of Candle-Lighting Liturgy)



“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him
Born the King of Angels
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
All glory in the highest
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him Christ the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning
Jesus, to Thee be glory given
Word of the Father
Now in flesh appearing
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!





Advent is something that happened and Advent will happen again. Jesus is coming back. At His first coming, the future kingdom of God burst into the present with Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Because of what Jesus has done, sin and death have been disarmed and we've been invited to walk in a new kind of life. Yet we know our world is not what it will be as we await the reign of our good king. We live in the "already but not yet" of Jesus' kingdom. During Advent, we give voice to "kingdom come" prayers of our own— looking expectantly for Jesus' return. In that way, this is a season of both celebration and anticipation. Advent allows us to be honest about what's wrong with our world and to freely celebrate Christmas as good news— King Jesus has come; King Jesus will come again!

