

Advent Invitation

During Advent, we light candles to shine light into a dark and weary world. Cultural rhythms often reduced Christmas to a silent night when a passive baby was born, tender and mild. On the surface, this may feel like a comforting hope for a weary world. But it is not.

Advent interrupts passivity through rhythms of active participation in a revolutionary story prophesied by Isaiah: *God, if only you would tear open the heavenly realm and come down!*

Advent invites us into Mary's expectant pregnant pause felt in her own body: that God would *tear open the heavenly realm and come down!* Magnificent!

Advent invites hope for the second arrival of Jesus. By pacifying the first arrival of Jesus, we sedate our hope for His second coming. Let us light our candles and watch for Him to *tear open the heavenly realm and come down!*

Advent reminds us that Jesus is king now. In pacifying God's present kingdom, we miss the ways in which He is tearing open heaven and arriving in our present moments.

*Advent invites active Kingdom participation
that offers hope to a weary world.*

On each Sunday through Advent you are invited to light a candle, meditate on art & scripture, and reflect on the theme for the week.

Traditionally, three purple candles correspond to the liturgical colors for repentance and fasting in preparation for the Christmas feast! A single rose candle is lit on the third Sunday to signify joy and a white candle on Christmas. This guide follows the rhythm of

Hope, Preparation, Joy, Love and Peace.

Consider ringing a bell and beginning each meditation with the words: *We ring this bell to announce the good news: the kingdom of God is at hand!*

Watch with Hope

Keep watch, stay awake. . . because you don't know when the master of the house is going to come. Mark 13:33, 35

SAY At Advent, we light candles to remind ourselves to watch for the light. Jesus called himself the Light of the World who brought hope to people lost in darkness. This candle reminds us to watch with hope.

LIGHT the first purple candle.

ASK What is hope?

SHARE Hope is looking forward to something good against the odds. Hope is a shining light in the darkness.

READ Isaiah 64:1-4 (*The Passion Translation*)

*God, if only you would tear open
the heavenly realm and come down!
How the mountains would tremble
in your awesome presence!*

*In the same way that fire sets kindling to blaze
and causes water to boil,*

*let the fire of your presence come down.
Reveal to your enemies your mighty name
and cause the nations to tremble before you!*

*When you did amazing wonders we didn't expect,
you came down, and mountains shuddered in your
presence!*

*These amazing things had never been heard of before;
you did things never dreamed of!*

*No one perceived your greatness.
No eye has ever seen a God like you,
who intervenes for those
who wait and long for you!*

ART Look at the picture of Mary. What do you notice about this image? How does hope reveal itself to you in this image?

DISCUSS What does Isaiah's prophecy reveal about Mary's hope? What's so hopeful about Jesus coming into the world? What are some things you hope for? What are some ways our family can give hope to others?

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

PRAY

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come.
Rescue and protect us from the threatening perils
of our sins by your might; for you live and reign with the Father and
the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

*(Historic Collect for the First Sunday in Advent, Gregorian, 10th
Century)*

Additional Readings:

Isaiah 64:5-8, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37

Prepare the Way

In those days John the Baptist appeared. He was preaching in the Judaean wilderness. 'Repent!' he was saying. 'The kingdom of heaven is coming!' John, you see, is the person spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, when he said, The voice of someone shouting in the desert: 'Prepare the route that the Lord will take, straighten out his paths!' Matt 3:1-3

SAY These candles remind us to watch with hope and to prepare ourselves for the coming Kingdom of God. John prepared the way for Jesus by announcing the coming Kingdom of Heaven.

LIGHT two purple candles.

ASK What does it mean to prepare?

SHARE To prepare means to get ready for something important; to clean up and get organized so you're ready for what's coming.

READ Isaiah 40:1-5, 11 (*The Passion Translation*)

Your God says to you: "Comfort, comfort my people with gentle, compassionate words. Speak tenderly from the heart to revive those in Jerusalem, and proclaim that their warfare is over. Her debt of sin is paid for and she will not be treated as guilty. Prophecy to her that she has received from the hand of Yahweh twice as many blessings as all her sins."

A thunderous voice cries out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way for Yahweh's arrival! Make a highway straight through the desert for our God!

Every valley will be raised up, every mountain brought low. The rugged terrain will become level ground and the rough places a plain.

Then Yahweh's radiant glory will be unveiled, and all humanity will experience it together. Believe it, for Yahweh has spoken his decree!"

ART Look at the picture of Mary traveling through the wilderness to announce her pregnancy to Elizabeth. What do you notice about the image? How do you think Mary was prepared for the coming of Messiah? What comfort do you see in this image?

DISCUSS Why is repentance a way to prepare for God's kingdom? How is God's forgiveness comforting to you? How can we join John in preparing for God's coming kingdom? How can you join Mary in announcing God's kingdom?

CONFESSION

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

PRAYER

Stir up our hearts, O Lord,
to make ready the way of your only Son,
so that by his coming we may worship you with pure minds;
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
*(Historic Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, Gelasian, 8th
Century)*

Additional Readings: Isaiah 40:5-11, Mark 1:1-8, 2 Peter 3:8-15a,
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-1, Isaiah 7:10-14

Joy

And those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah 35:10

SAY These candles represent hope, preparation, and joy. Jesus is the joy of our salvation. On this *Gaudete* Sunday, we move from hope to joyous praise because God is making all things new!

LIGHT three candles: two purple and one rose.

ASK What is joy?

SHARE Joy is happiness. It's excitement and bliss. It's gladness and laughter overflowing from inside of you.

READ Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-10 (*The Passion Translation*)

The mighty Spirit of Lord Yahweh is wrapped around me because Yahweh has anointed me, as a messenger to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to heal the wounds of the brokenhearted, to tell captives, "You are free," and to tell prisoners, "Be free from your darkness."

I am sent to announce a new season of Yahweh's grace and a time of God's recompense on his enemies, to comfort all who are in sorrow, to strengthen those crushed by despair who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful bouquet in the place of ashes, the oil of bliss instead of tears, and the mantle of joyous praise instead of the spirit of heaviness. Because of this, they will be known as Mighty Oaks of Righteousness, planted by Yahweh as a living display of his glory.

They will restore ruins from long ago and rebuild what was long devastated. They will renew ruined cities and desolations of past generations. I will sing and greatly rejoice in Yahweh! My whole being vibrates with shouts of joy in my God! For he has dressed me with salvation and wrapped me in the robe of his righteousness! I appear like a bridegroom on his wedding day, decked out with a beautiful sash, or like a radiant bride adorned with sparkling jewels.

ART Look at the picture of Mary. What do you notice about this image? Where do you see joy radiating through this image? How do you imagine she felt holding the promised renewer of all things within her own body?

DISCUSS What brings you joy? How do you experience joy in your body? What stands out to you most from Isaiah's prophecy? What part of the Christmas story makes you most glad? What are some ways that you can bring joy to others this Christmas?

SING 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.

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.

PRAYER

Lord, hear our prayers,
and lighten the darkness of our hearts
by your gracious appearing;
for you live and reign
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

(Historic Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent, Gregorian, 10th Century)

Additional Readings:

Psalm 126, I Thess 5:16-24, John 1:6-8, 19-34, Isaiah 11:1-10

Love

For this is how much God loved the world—he gave his one and only, unique Son as a gift. So now everyone who believes in him will never perish but experience everlasting life. John 3:16

SAY These candles represent hope, preparation, joy, and love. Jesus is God’s gift of love. God’s love takes everything that is oriented toward death and reorients it toward life.

LIGHT four candles: purple, purple, rose, purple.

ASK What is love?

SHARE Love is caring more about others than yourself. Love gives up and gives away. God is love.

READ Luke 1:40-56 *Magnificat (New Testament for Everyone)*

*Mary said, ‘My soul declares that the Lord is great,
my spirit exults in my saviour, my God.
He saw his servant-girl in her humility;
from now, I’ll be blessed by all peoples to come.
The Powerful One, whose name is Holy,
has done great things for me, for me.
His mercy extends from father to son,
from mother to daughter for those who fear him.
Powerful things he has done with his arm:
he routed the arrogant through their own cunning.
Down from their thrones he hurled the rulers,
up from the earth he raised the humble.
The hungry he filled with the fat of the land,
but the rich he sent off with nothing to eat.
He has rescued his servant, Israel his child,
because he remembered his mercy of old,
just as he said to our long-ago ancestors –
Abraham and his descendants forever.’*

Mary stayed with Elisabeth for three months, and then returned home.

ART Look at the picture of Mary. What do you notice about this image? Where do you see love? How does the serpent's curse of Genesis 3 reflect in this image and in Mary's song?

"I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." Gen 3:15

DISCUSS How does Mary's "Yes!" to God begin to unravel the curse of Genesis 3? How does this reveal God's love? How do you think Mary experienced God's love? How do you experience God's love? In what ways can we show God's love?

COLLECT *New Zealand Prayer Book*

God of love, you chose the blessed virgin Mary
to be the mother of your only Son;
grant that we who have been redeemed by his blood,
may share with her the glory of your eternal kingdom;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord
who is alive with with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.
Amen.

PRAYER

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come.

Help us by your great might,

that whatever is hindered by our sins

may be speedily accomplished for your glory;

for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and forever.

(Historic Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent, Gelasian, 8th Century)

Additional Readings:

II Samuel 7:1-11, 16, Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38

Peace

“I leave the gift of peace with you—my peace. Not the kind of fragile peace given by the world, but my perfect peace. Don’t yield to fear or be troubled in your hearts—instead, be courageous!” John 14:27

SAY These candles represent hope, preparation, joy, love and peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. On Christmas Day, we light candles to remember the peace that Jesus brings to a troubled world.

LIGHT the preceding candles and then the center white candle.

ASK What is peace?

SHARE Peace is when there is no fighting or war. It’s the harmony, security, and calm we experience when things are put right and in order.

READ Isaiah 9:2-7 A Son is Born! *(The Living Bible)*

The people who walk in darkness shall see a great Light—a Light that will shine on all those who live in the land of the shadow of death. For Israel will again be great, filled with joy like that of reapers when the harvest time has come, and like that of men dividing up the plunder they have won.

For God will break the chains that bind his people and the whip that scourges them, just as he did when he destroyed the vast host of the Midianites by Gideon’s little band. In that glorious day of peace there will no longer be the issuing of battle gear; no more the bloodstained uniforms of war; all such will be burned.

For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. These will be his royal titles: “Wonderful,” “Counselor,” “The Mighty God,” “The Everlasting Father,” “The Prince of Peace.”

His ever-expanding, peaceful government will never end. He will rule with perfect fairness and justice from the throne of his father David. He will bring true justice and peace to all the nations of the world. This is going to happen because the Lord of heaven’s armies has dedicated himself to do it!

ART Look at the picture of Mary. What do you notice about this image? What do you notice about the way light shines in darkness and the land of shadow and death? How does peace reveal itself to you in this image?

DISCUSS On this Christmas day, full of gift-giving, we are reminded that Jesus has given us the gift of peace. How do you experience the peace of Christ? Can you think of ways you refuse his gift of peace? Isaiah announces the child will establish an ever-expanding government of peace. What do you imagine that will look like? What are some ways that you can be a peacemaker?

SING

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"

Hail! the heaven-born Prince of peace!
Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, Risen with healing in his wings
Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die:
Born to raise the son of earth, Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"

PRAYER

Let the just rejoice, for their justifier is born.
Let the sick and infirm rejoice, For their saviour is born.
Let the captives rejoice, For their Redeemer is born.
Let slaves rejoice, for their Master is born.
Let free men rejoice, For their Liberator is born.
Let All Christians rejoice, For Jesus Christ is born.
St. Augustine of Hippo

Additional Reading:

Read the Christmas Story from Luke chapters 1-2:1-40

As on a Day of Festival

Call it
the waters of salvation
or the garlands of gladness.

Call it
the grave-clothes
falling away
or call it the loosing
of the chains.

Call it
what binds us together:
fierce but
fragile but
fierce.

Call it
*he will rejoice over you
with gladness;*
call it

*he will renew you
in his love;*
call it

*he will exult over you
with loud singing
as on a day
of festival.*

Call it
the thin, thin place
where the veil
gives way.
Or call it this:
the path we make
when we go deep
and deeper still
into the dark
and look behind to see
the way has been lit
by our rejoicing.
—Jan Richardson

"Blessing the Way" appears in Jan's new book *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*. © Jan Richardson; used with permission.