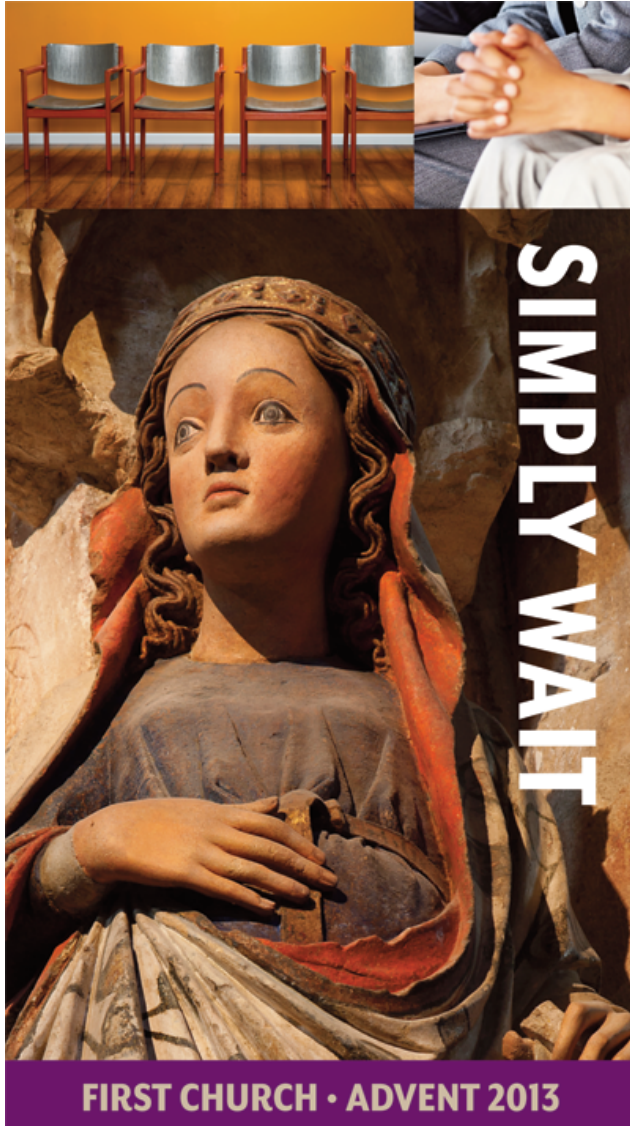


BRINGING ADVENT HOME

A Candle-Lighting Liturgy for Families



Parents often ask for suggestions on how to bring faith home; how the stories and rituals experienced at church can be integrated into busy family life. *Bringing Faith Home: A Candle-Lighting Liturgy for Families* is a response to this request.

Advent is a wonderful time for at-home spiritual practice. The stories, songs and images of the season are compelling for children (and adults!) and the short-term nature of Advent makes integrating a regular ritual seem do-able.

This liturgy involves lighting candles on an Advent wreath. The tradition of the Advent wreath reaches back to pre-Christian northern Europeans. During the darkest days of winter as many as twenty-four candles were lit on an evergreen-covered wheel or wreath. By lighting a candle a day, they marked time, anticipating the return of the sun's light. By the 1500s, Christians adapted the wreath as a devotional way to prepare for Christmas. The candles are lit to represent the anticipation of the birth of the one Christians call the Light of the world, Jesus Christ.

The symbols of the Advent wreath are interpreted in many ways. The circle of evergreens reminds us of the never-ending love of God. The daily lighting of candles acknowledges the deepening of our preparation and the increasing light that bursts forth at Christmas. The colors of the candles (usually purple or blue) note the season's expectations of royalty, liberation, redemption, and hope. The white candle in the center, lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, is known as the Christ candle.

As with all traditions, however, this one also evolves and you can find Advent wreaths made of materials and symbols from many different climates and cultures.

Suggestions for using this liturgy:

- Choose a time when the family can be together (e.g., dinner time, first thing in the morning, before bedtime)
- Light the appropriate number of candles on the Advent wreath. (If you don't have a wreath, four candles placed in a circle on a table will work just as well!)
- Read the scripture reading or sing together the suggested song for the day. The scripture selections are from the Revised Common Lectionary for Advent using *The Message* Bible translation unless otherwise noted. Feel free to use whatever Bible your family prefers.
- Consider together the reflection questions.
- Close the time with a prayer.

Please adapt this guide in any way that meets the needs of your family.

- If a weekly, rather than daily, ritual works better for you –great!
- If you are not familiar with the suggested hymns or would like some musical accompaniment, type the hymn title into you-tube and you will find many delightful versions to play.
- Because this guide is for families of all shapes, sizes and ages – some of the reflection questions will need to be adapted to fit your needs.
- Or you may simply prefer to light the candle in silence.

However you choose to use this resource, may Advent be for you and your family a time of hope, peace and love for one another and for the world. And may these four weeks of intentional waiting open all of us to the Christ who is born anew, again and again, each day.



Sunday, December 1

Light one candle

Read Isaiah 2:1-5:

The Message Isaiah got regarding Judah and Jerusalem:

There's a day coming
when the mountain of God's House
Will be The Mountain—
solid, towering over all mountains.
All nations will river toward it,
people from all over set out for it.
They'll say, "Come,
let's climb God's Mountain,
go to the House of the God of Jacob.
God will show us the way God works
so we can live the way we're made."
Zion's the source of the revelation.
God's Message comes from Jerusalem.
God will settle things fairly between nations.
God will make things right between many peoples.
They'll turn their swords into shovels,
their spears into hoes.
No more will nation fight nation;
they won't play war anymore.
Come, family of Jacob,
let's live in the light of God.

Reflection Question:

What does living in the light of God mean to you?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Monday, December 2
Light one candle

Read Genesis 8: 1-3, 6-12

Then God turned his attention to Noah and all the animals with him on the ship. God caused the wind to blow and the floodwaters began to go down. The underground springs were shut off, the windows of Heaven closed and the rain quit. Inch by inch the water lowered. After 150 days the worst was over. After forty days Noah opened the window that he had built into the ship.

He sent out a raven; it flew back and forth waiting for the floodwaters to dry up. Then he sent a dove to check on the flood conditions, but it couldn't even find a place to perch—water still covered the Earth. Noah reached out and caught it, brought it back into the ship. He waited seven more days and sent out the dove again. It came back in the evening with a freshly picked olive leaf in its beak. Noah knew that the flood was about finished. He waited another seven days and sent the dove out a third time. This time it didn't come back.

Reflection Questions:

What do you think it was like for Noah and the animals to wait for the flood to stop? What is waiting like for you? What helps you wait?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Tuesday, December 3
Light one candle

Sing Together: 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.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight. (Refrain)

O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
and order all things, far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge of show,
and cause us in her ways to go. (Refrain)

O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;
fill the whole world with heaven's peace. (Refrain)

-translation by John Mason Neale and Henry Sloane Coffin

Reflection Question:

What does it mean to rejoice? For what do you rejoice today?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Wednesday, December 4
Light one candle

Read Genesis 9: 8-17

Then God spoke to Noah and his sons: “I’m setting up my covenant with you including your children who will come after you, along with everything alive around you—birds, farm animals, wild animals—that came out of the ship with you. I’m setting up my covenant with you that never again will everything living be destroyed by floodwaters; no, never again will a flood destroy the Earth.”

God continued, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and everything living around you and everyone living after you. I’m putting my rainbow in the clouds, a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth. From now on, when I form a cloud over the Earth and the rainbow appears in the cloud, I’ll remember my covenant between me and you and everything living, that never again will floodwaters destroy all life. When the rainbow appears in the cloud, I’ll see it and remember the eternal covenant between God and everything living, every last living creature on Earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I’ve set up between me and everything living on the Earth.”

Reflection Question:

What do you think of when you see a rainbow?
What helps you remember God’s presence with you?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Thursday, December 5
Light one candle

Sing Together: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

-written by Charles Wesley

Reflection Questions:

What words or images from this song stand out for you?
How might this season of Advent waiting and preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus, bring strength, consolation or hope to you?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Friday, December 6
Light one candle

Read Isaiah 54: 7-10

Your Redeemer God says:

“I left you, but only for a moment.

Now, with enormous compassion, I’m bringing you back.

In an outburst of anger I turned my back on you—
 but only for a moment.

It’s with lasting love
 that I’m tenderly caring for you.

“This exile is just like the days of Noah for me:
 I promised then that the waters of Noah
 would never again flood the earth.

I’m promising now no more anger,
 no more dressing you down.

For even if the mountains walk away
 and the hills fall to pieces,
 My love won’t walk away from you,
 my covenant commitment of peace
 won’t fall apart.”

The God who has compassion on you says so.

Reflection Question:

Have you ever felt that God left you, even for a moment?

What was that like?

Have you felt God’s compassion? What is that like?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Saturday, December 7
Light one candle

Read Psalm 72: 1-7

Bring justice to the peoples,

O Beloved,

and your mercy to all
 generations!

May the people be known
 for mercy,

rendering justice to the poor!

Let their spirits sour as the eagle,
 let joy abide in every heart!

May we heed the cry of the poor –
 the young and the old,
 Helping to free those in need,

Awakening the souls of oppressors!

May we know oneness with You
 As long as the sun endures,

As long as the stars shine,
 throughout all generations!

May we acknowledge You in the rain falling on the fields,
 like showers that water the earth!

In our day may justice flourish, and peace abound,
 throughout all the nations!

*-from Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness
 by Nan C. Merrill*

Reflection Questions:

What is your favorite word or image from this Psalm?

How do the words and images speak to you of Advent?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Sunday, December 8
Light two candles

Read Matthew 3: 1-12

While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called “the Baptizer,” was preaching in the desert country of Judea. His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.” John and his message were authorized by Isaiah’s prophecy: Thunder in the desert! Prepare for God’s arrival! Make the road smooth and straight! John dressed in a camel-hair habit tied at the waist by a leather strap. He lived on a diet of locusts and wild field honey. People poured out of Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordanian countryside to hear and see him in action. There at the Jordan River those who came to confess their sins were baptized into a changed life.

“I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama—compared to him I’m a mere stagehand—will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.”

Reflection Question:

John’s message was meant to prepare people for Jesus. Is there some change we could make to help us follow Jesus more closely?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Monday, December 9
Light two candles

Read I Thessalonians 4: 1-3, 9-10

One final word, friends. We ask you—urge is more like it—that you keep on doing what we told you to do to please God, not in a dogged religious plod, but in a living, spirited dance. You know the guidelines we laid out for you from the Master Jesus. God wants you to live a pure life.

Regarding life together and getting along with each other, you don’t need me to tell you what to do. You’re God-taught in these matters. Just love one another! You’re already good at it; your friends all over the province of Macedonia are the evidence. Keep it up; get better and better at it.

Reflection Question:

What might a “living, spirited dance” look like? How might this kind of living (and loving) please God?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Tuesday, December 10
Light two candles

Sing together: Hark the Harold Angels 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!"

Christ, by highest heaven adored;
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th' incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King!"

-text by Charles Wesley

Reflection Question:

What is a "herald"? In what ways might we serve as "herald" of Jesus' teachings and way of living?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Wednesday, December 11
Light two candles

Read Psalm 21

In your strength I rejoice, O my Beloved,
and in your Presence my heart finds rest!
You heed the heart's desire, answering the cry of the soul,
and You bestow blessing upon blessing;
Your Love is a crown of fine gold upon my head.
I asked for life; and life you did provide,
eternal life comes through your Love.
All glory be yours, O Loving Presence,
Splendor and majesty are your raiment.
Yes, your blessings are forever;
You delight me with the joy of your Presence.
Forever I will put my trust in You;
and as I abandon myself to You in love,
I am assured of peace.
You root out my fears; standing firm beside me as I face
the shadows within.
Like a blazing sun your light shines.
My fears flee from your sight; your fire consumes them.
Generations to come will sing to your glory
In gratitude and joy for creation's bountiful gifts of life.
For You put fears to flight, that love and justice might reign.
All praise be yours, O Wondrous One!
Forever I will be grateful and give witness
to your peace and love that frees us.

*-from Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness
by Nan C. Merrill*

Reflection Question:

How does God's peace and love free us? How might we be witnesses to this in the world?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Thursday, December 12
Light two candles

Sing together: O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of
wondering love.

O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the king, and peace to all on earth!

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given;
so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still
the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
o come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!
-text by Phillips Brooks, 1835-1893

Reflection Questions:

What are your hopes and fears this Advent season?
What hope does the approach of Christmas – of Christ
coming into the world – bring for you?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Friday, December 13
Light two candles

Read Psalm 146: 5-10

Put not your trust in riches, in illusory things that fade away.

For when our day comes to depart this world,
at that very time, we carry
only the love imprinted upon our soul.

Blessed are those whose strength is in the Beloved,
whose trust is in You, O Divine Lover.

Who gave birth to the universe –
the heavens, earth, and sea-and all that is within
them.

You are ever-faithful, bringing
balance and harmony to earth,
nourishment to body and soul.

You free us from the bonds of fear;

You give insight to those who would see.

You lift up the faint-hearted, giving succor to those who
weep.

You watch over those on journey,
sending guides and angels to lead the way;

O, that we might become beacons of light
to those in darkness.

May You, who live forever in our hearts,
loose the fetters of fear that bind us,

that we might praise You always

with free and joyful song! May it be so!

*-from Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness
by Nan C. Merrill*

Reflection Question:

What is your favorite image or thought from this Psalm?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Saturday, December 14
Light two candles

Read Luke 1: 47b-55

And Mary said,
I'm bursting with God-news;
 I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what happened—
 I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
 the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all
others. His mercy flows in wave after wave
 on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength,
 scattered the bluffing braggarts. He knocked tyrants
off their high horses,
 pulled victims out of the mud. The starving poor sat
down to a banquet;
 the callous rich were left out in the cold. He
embraced his chosen child, Israel;
 he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled
them high. It's exactly what he promised,
 beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

Reflection Question:

What does Mary's song suggest about God's character?
About the type of world God desires?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Sunday, December 15
Light three candles

Read Matthew 11: 2-11

John, meanwhile, had been locked up in prison. When he got wind of what Jesus was doing, he sent his own disciples to ask, "Are you the One we've been expecting, or are we still waiting?"

Jesus told them, "Go back and tell John what's going on:

 The blind see,
 The lame walk,
 Lepers are cleansed,
 The deaf hear,
 The dead are raised,
 The wretched of the earth learn that God is on their
 side.

"Is this what you were expecting? Then count yourselves most blessed!"

Reflection Questions:

What does it mean to have an expectation? Do you think John's disciples believed that Jesus was the one they had expected? Do you think they were disappointed? Relieved? Surprised? Does Jesus ever surprise you? What about God? How are you expecting (needing?) God to show up this Christmas?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Monday, December 16
Light three candles

Read Isaiah 11: 6-9

The wolf will romp with the lamb, the leopard sleep with the kid. Calf and lion will eat from the same trough, and a little child will tend them.

Cow and bear will graze the same pasture, their calves and cubs grow up together, and the lion eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child will crawl over rattlesnake dens, the toddler stick his hand down the hole of a serpent.

Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill on my holy mountain.

The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.

Reflection Question:

The prophet Isaiah is expressing what he believes to be God's dream for the world. What do you imagine is God's dream for the world? What do you imagine is God's dream for you?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Tuesday, December 17
Light three candles

Sing together: Away in a Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes;
I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky
and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
close by me forever, and love me, I pray;
bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

- text Anonymous

Reflection Questions:

Singing is another way to pray. What prayers are being offered in this song? What prayers would you include in a song to God this Advent season?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Wednesday, December 18
Light three candles

Read Galatians 3: 28-29

In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's famous "descendant," heirs according to the covenant promises.

Reflection Questions:

What does "you all are equal" mean for you? What was the type of equality that Jesus practiced? When and where is it easy for you to practice the type of inclusion that Jesus modeled? When and where is that more challenging for you?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Thursday, December 19
Light three candles

Sing together: The First Noel

The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Refrain: Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star
shining in the east, beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night. (Refrain)

And by the light of that same star
three Wise Men came from country far;
to seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went. (Refrain)

This star drew nigh to the northwest,
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest;
and there it did both stop and stay,
right over the place where Jesus lay. (Refrain)

Then entered in those Wise Men three,
full reverently upon the knee,
and offered there, in his presence,
gold and myrrh and frankincense. (Refrain)

Reflection Question:

The angels and the star pointed the way to Jesus for the shepherds and the Wise Men. What helps you find Jesus?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Friday, December 20
Light three candles

Read John 1: 1-5, 14

In the beginning was the one
 who is called the Word. The Word was with God
and was truly God. From the very beginning
 the Word was with God.
And with this Word,
 God created all things.
Nothing was made
 without the Word.
Everything that was created
 received its life from him,
and his life gave light
 to everyone.
The light keeps shining
 in the dark,
and darkness has never
 put it out.
The Word became a human being
 and lived here with us.
We saw his true glory,
 the glory of the only Son of the Father.
From him all the kindness and all the truth of God
 have come down to us.

-from The Contemporary English Version

Reflection Question:

This is how the *Gospel According to John* describes the coming of Jesus into the world. What do you think of this vision? What words or images stand out for you? Why?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Saturday, December 21
Light three candles

Read Psalm 80: 1-7

Eternal Listener, give heed to your people,
 You who are our Guide and our Light!
You who dwell amidst the angels,
 shine forth into the heart of all nations!
Enliven your people with compassion
 that peace and justice might flourish.
Restore us, O Holy One; let your face shine upon us,
 teach us to love!
Gentle Teacher, help us to turn to You in prayer,
 Fasting from our negative thoughts.
In your steadfast Love, You weep with our tears,
 tears that rise from fear, doubt and illusion.
Restore us, O Holy one; let your face shine upon us,
 teach us to love!

*-from Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness
 by Nan C. Merrill*

Reflection Question:

Which part of this prayer for help speaks to you today?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Sunday, December 22
Light four candles

Sing together: Candle, Candle, Burning Bright

Light the Advent Candle one
Now the waiting has begun
We have started on our way
Time to think of Christmas Day

Refrain: Candle, candle, burning bright
Shining in the cold winter night
Candle, candle, burning bright
Fill our hearts with Christmas Light

Light the Advent Candle two
Think of humble shepherds who
Filled with wonder at the sight
Of the child on Christmas night (Refrain)

Light the Advent Candle three
Think of heavenly harmony
Angels singing "Peace on Earth"
At the Blessed Saviour's birth (Refrain)

Light the Advent Candle four
Think of joy forever more
Christchild in a stable born
Gift of love that Christmas morn

Reflection Question:

What has this Advent season of waiting been like for you?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Monday, December 23
Light four candles

Read Luke 2: 1-5

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for.

So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

Reflection Question:

What do you think Joseph was thinking and feeling as he made this journey? What about Mary? Do you think they had any idea about what was about to happen? What God was about to do?

What about you? Christmas day is almost here! What are you thinking and feeling? What unexpected thing might God be doing among us (and within you) this Christmas?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Tuesday, December 24
Christmas Eve
Light four candles

Sing together: Silent Night

Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin
mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!

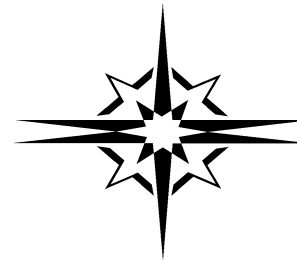
Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light;
radiant beams from thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Silent night, holy night,
wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing,
Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!

Reflection Question:

What does holy mean? What has been holy for you this Advent season?

Closing Prayer and extinguishing the candle



Wednesday, December 25
Christmas Day
*Light four candles
and the white Christ Candle*

Read Luke 2: 6-30

The time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights and peace to all on earth who please him.

Merry Christmas! May Christ be born again today - among and within us. And may God's peace come to the world.