

Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Worship for Small Assemblies

Advent through Christmas Year B - Dec 2023 through January 2024

Planning Notes for Leaders

Season and Lectionary

The season of Advent begins a new church year and begins the cycle of telling the story of Jesus' life and ministry. Advent takes on a more subdued tone than one might expect of a new year. Rather than beginning the new year as a race, Advent is about waiting and waiting along with the people of Israel for the Messiah.

The four Sundays of Advent, regardless of the lectionary year, follow the same pattern of readings. The first Sunday focuses on the end of time and God's promise to make a new creation. The second Sunday tells the first half of the story of John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of the One coming after him. The third Sunday is John the Baptist again and his preaching to the crowds and religious authorities. The fourth Sunday tells the story of the annunciation, the angel visiting Mary (and Joseph) to tell her that she has been chosen by God to bear the Messiah.

The Advent collects or prayers of the day also follow an unusual pattern compared to the rest of the church year. Each prayer begins with 'Stir up...' and implore Christ's coming to God's people. The rest of the year, prayers are addressed to God the Father, rather than to Christ and it is good to make note of these unique prayers of the day.

As we turn to Christmas, the readings shift to the coming of Christ in the incarnation. Each year we hear the family stories from Luke and John. However, Sundays in Christmas are opportunities to hear some of the lesser-known stories that surround the familiar Christmas story. The first Sunday focuses on the Holy Family's flight to Egypt avoiding the slaughter of the Holy Innocents. The second Sunday we hear the expanded incarnation narrative from John 1.

Seasonal visuals and music

The colour for Advent is normally blue, while sometimes purple is still used. Blue distinguishes Advent from the penitential nature of Lent by turning our focus toward hopeful anticipation of Messiah's coming. Much like the early morning sky just before sunrise, the blue of Advent evokes the sense that light is about dawn on the world.

In Advent, the rich canon of Advent hymns allows the assembly to sing with the people of Israel in anticipation of Messiah. While tempting to sing Christmas Carols as they blast on the radio and in the malls, hymns like "Light One Candle" (ELW 240) call us to prepare for Messiah's coming. This hymn or others could be used each week to sing along with the lighting of the Advent wreath.

Finally, the Advent wreath symbolizes our growing expectation of the Messiah. As each candle is lit the light increases signifying the coming dawn of the incarnation. Advent isn't merely a countdown to Christmas, but the practice of waiting. Advent shows us the tension that we live in each day, being people of faith waiting for Messiah who is both here now and still coming.

Seasonal variations on the liturgy

Consider beginning each liturgy by gathering around the advent wreath. Have someone light the appropriate number of candles, the prayer for lighting the advent wreath is prayed by the presider or leader. ELW 240 Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah or another appropriate hymn can be sung after the wreath is lit, beginning with verse 1 on week 1. Each week another verse is added until all four verses are sung on the fourth week.

Like in Lent omit the hymn of praise. The Kyrie on its own is heard as an expression of our longing for Messiah.

Unlike in Lent, use the Nicene Creed, as its language speaks to the incarnation which we anticipate during the season.

If any readings are omitted in the liturgy, retain the Old Testament reading and Gospel, in order to be reminded of the longing of the people of Israel for the coming of Messiah.

During the season of Christmas, most communities have established long-held traditions when it comes to Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. However, there are some occasions during the 12 days of Christmas, or during the Sundays in Christmas when a simple or alternative for worship is desirable. A service for Lessons and Carols can be an easy order to follow during the season of Christmas, one is provided after the orders for Advent.

Below you will find the appointed readings, some hymn suggestions and the prayer of the day for each Sunday in Advent. There is also **a short order for the lighting of the advent wreath** each week. Finally, there is an order for lessons and carols for use during the Christmas Season, Sunday, December 31st for example.

First Sunday in Advent December 3rd, 2023

Lectionary:

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37 (Blue)

Hymn Suggestions:

Come, thou long-expected Jesus ELW 254

Awake, Awake, and Greet the New Morn ELW 242

Wake, awake, for Night is Flying ELW 436

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection awaken us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of your new day, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Second Sunday in Advent December 10th, 2023

Lectionary:

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8 (Blue)

Hymn Suggestions:

Comfort, Comfort now my people ELW 256

On Jordan's Banks the Baptist's Cry ELW 249

Come now, O Prince of peace ELW 247

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming strengthen us to serve you with purified lives; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Third Sunday in Advent December 17th, 2023

Lectionary:

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; Luke 1:46b-55 (alternate); 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28 (Blue)

Hymn Suggestions:

Light dawns on weary world ELW 726

Lost in the night ELW 243

People, look east ELW 248

Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Fourth Sunday in Advent December 24th, 2023

Lectionary:

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 (alternate); Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38 (Blue)

Hymn Suggestions:

The angel Gabriel from heaven came ELW 265

He came down ELW 253

My soul does magnify the Lord ELW 882

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Comfort, Comfort, O My People

Rite for Lighting the Advent Wreath by Rev. Erik Parker Week 1

In Advent, the Church is called to join again with the people of Israel,
our ancestors in faith in waiting for Messiah.

We gather around the wreath,
lighting a new candle each week
as a sign of the growing light of God's promise among us
and Messiah's come near.

Comfort, Comfort, O my people,
Says your God.

(Week 1)

They will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds'

with great power and glory.

Then he will send out the angels,

and gather his elect from the four winds,
from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

On this first Sunday of Advent,
we light the first candle of the wreath.
A sign of God's promised Messiah coming near.

The first candle is lit.

We await your promise O God,
Of the One coming to bring light in our darkness
Who reveals hope in our suffering
Who proclaims to us Good News
Stir us up to receive Messiah among us
And prepare us to be your Advent people.
Amen.

Comfort, Comfort, O My People
Rite for Lighting the Advent Wreath by Rev. Erik Parker
Week 2

In Advent, the Church is called to join again with the people of Israel,
our ancestors in faith in waiting for Messiah.
We gather around the wreath,
lighting a new candle each week
as a sign of the growing light of God's promise among us
and Messiah's come near.

Comfort, Comfort, O my people,
Says your God.

(Week 2)

A voice cries out:

**"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
**the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.**

On this second Sunday of Advent,
we light the first and second candles of the wreath.
Signs of God's promised Messiah proclaimed by John.

The first and second candles are lit.

We await your promise O God,
Of the One coming to bring light in our darkness
Who was foretold by Isaiah
And who was prophesied by John
Stir us up to receive Messiah among us
And prepare us to be your Advent people.
Amen.

Comfort, Comfort, O My People
Rite for Lighting the Advent Wreath by Rev. Erik Parker
Week 3

In Advent, the Church is called to join again with the people of Israel,
our ancestors in faith in waiting for Messiah.
We gather around the wreath,
lighting a new candle each week
as a sign of the growing light of God's promise among us
and Messiah's come near.

Comfort, Comfort, O my people,
Says your God.

(Week 3)

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,

On this third Sunday of Advent,
we light the first, second and third candles of the wreath.
Signs of God's promised Messiah announced in the assembly.

The first, second, and third candles are lit.

We await your promise O God,
Of the One coming to bring light in our darkness
Who was anointed by the Spirit
To bring about the year of the Lord's favour

Stir us up to receive Messiah among us
And prepare us to be your Advent people.
Amen.

Comfort, Comfort, O My People
Rite for Lighting the Advent Wreath by Rev. Erik Parker
Week 4

In Advent, the Church is called to join again with the people of Israel,
our ancestors in faith in waiting for Messiah.
We gather around the wreath,
lighting a new candle each week
as a sign of the growing light of God's promise among us
and Messiah's come near.

Comfort, Comfort, O my people,
Says your God.

(Week 4)
My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name
The promise God made to our mothers and fathers,
to Sarah and Abraham and their children forever.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent,
we light the first, second, third and fourth candles of the wreath.
Signs of God's promised Messiah promised to virgin mother.

The first, second, third and fourth candles are lit.

We await your promise O God,
Of the One coming to bring light in our darkness
Who was foretold by the Angel
Who was welcomed by a servant of the Lord
Stir us up to receive Messiah among us
And prepare us to be your Advent people.
Amen.

Suggested Order for Holy Communion for Advent

Gathering

Gathering around the Wreath - Comfort, Comfort O My People

Rite for the Lighting the Advent Wreath

Light the Candle(s)

Greeting

Kyrie

Prayer of the Day

Word

First Reading

Psalm

Second Reading

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel Readings

Sermon

Hymn of the Day

Nicene Creed

Prayers of Intercession

ELW p. 105 offers helpful guidelines for crafting prayers from the assembly

Peace

Offering

Meal

Eucharistic Prayer

(ELW p. 110 Form III for Advent - Epiphany)

Lord's Prayer

Communion

Prayer after Communion:

Let's us pray,

God, for whom we wait, in this meal you give us a foretaste of that day when the hungry will be fed with good things. Send us forth to make known your deeds and to proclaim the greatness of your name, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen. (ELW p. 65 Advent)

Sending

Blessing
God the eternal Word,
who dwells with us in Jesus,
and who holds us in the grace of the Holy Spirit,
✝ bless you now and forever.

Amen.

(From SundaysandSeasons.com)

Sending Hymn

Dismissal

Suggested Order for Service of the Word

Gathering

Gathering around the Wreath - Comfort, Comfort O My People

Rite for the Lighting the Advent Wreath

Greeting

Kyrie

Prayer of the Day

Word

First Reading

Psalm

Second Reading

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel Readings

Sermon

Hymn of the Day

Nicene Creed

Prayers of Intercession

ELW p. 105 offers helpful guidelines for crafting prayers from the assembly

Peace

Offering

THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD adapted by Rev. Erik from ELW Service of the Word

Let us pray.

Blessed are you O Lord our God, King of the Universe: Into the darkness and void of creation you spoke light and life into being. For your Word of Life, O God.

we give you thanks and praise.

Blessed are you O Lord our God: By your covenant and command you called Sarah and Abraham to go. You gave hope to people living in oppression. You brought light to those trapped by darkness. For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

Blessed are you O Lord our God: In John the Baptist you prepared the way for the Messiah.
You called your people to repent and promised them new life in the waters of rebirth. For your
Word of life, O God,
we give you thanks and praise.

Stir up your Spirit O Lord, our God: rouse us to faith, grant us hope in Messiah's coming, and
help us to care for our neighbour in need. Through the word of Faith first given to our
ancestors, you prepare the way of our salvation and come near: through Jesus the Messiah, our
Saviour and Lord, to whom with God the Father, and the spirit of truth, be blessing and praise
forever.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Sending

Blessing

God the eternal Word,
who dwells with us in Jesus,
and who holds us in the grace of the Holy Spirit,
✠ bless you now and forever.

Amen.

(From SundaysandSeasons.com)

Sending Hymn

Dismissal

Lessons and Carols for Christmas

Gathering Song: O Come, All Ye Faithful (ELW 283)

Litany of light

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.

We have beheld Christ's glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given.

In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Opening Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Gracious God of heaven and earth,
you have thrown a lifeline to us in our darkness—
a beam of light that shines through Jesus.

Though born in a manger, he is the firstborn of all creation.

Though crucified on a cross, he is the Lord of life.

Fill us with the wonder and joy of his presence in the world
and in our hearts.

Amen.

First Reading: Genesis 1:1-5, 14-18

It came upon the Midnight Clear (ELW 282)

Second Reading: Micah 5:2-5a

O little town of Bethlehem ELW 279, LBW 41

Third Reading: Luke 1:26-35, 38

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming ELW 272

Fourth Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Your Little one, Dear Lord (ELW 286)

Fifth Reading: Luke 2:8-20

Angles, from the Realms of Glory (ELW 275)

Sixth Reading: Matthew 2:1-11

Away in a Manger (ELW 277)

Seventh Reading: John 1:1-14

What Child is This (ELW 296)

Responsive Prayer

It is you, loving God, who lights our path with truth.

Your Word, Jesus, is truth.

In his light, draw all to the manger

to gather in wonder with the shepherds.

In his light, draw all to the manger

to kneel in reverence with the wise ones.

In his light, draw all to the manger

to sing for joy with the angels.

In the brightness of his life

**cast away the darkness of injustice, poverty,
and hunger in the world.**

It is you, loving God, who meets us on our way.

In the light of Jesus, show the world the way of life.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,

forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

Almighty God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Sending Song: *Joy to the World* (ELW 267)

(with some resources adapted from SundaysAndSeasons.com)