

Where Two or Three are Gathered: Worship for Small Assemblies

Advent through Christmas Year A
November 30, 2025 to January 4, 2026
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Planning Notes for Leaders

Season and Lectionary

Following the long season of Ordinary Time, Advent transitions us to a new liturgical year where the church begins again telling the story of Jesus' birth, ministry, journey to Jerusalem, crucifixion, death and resurrection. However, Advent is not disconnected from what has come before. Advent picks up the themes of All Saints and Christ the King Sunday by beginning with the fulfillment of God's promises to make all things new. In many ways, the first Sunday of Advent is a lens through which we see all that comes after for the remainder of the church year.

Advent as an entire season continues to hold the tension of God's promises to make the world anew, with the waiting of God's people for that 'making-right' to materialize. In Advent, we join all the people of God who have waited before us and who will wait after. Particularly, we recall the waiting of the people of Ancient Israel in scripture and still today. We also recall the waiting of the early church for Christ's imminent return.

The four Sundays of Advent, regardless of 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 implores 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, the 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 the Messiah's coming. Much like the early morning sky just before the sunrise, the blue of Advent evokes the sense that light is about to dawn on the world.

In Advent, the rich canon of Advent hymns allows the assembly to sing with the people of Ancient Israel in anticipation of the Messiah. While tempting to sing Christmas Carols, hymns like O Come, O Come (ELW 240) call us to prepare for the 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 increasing light signifies 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 the Messiah who is both here now and still coming.

Seasonal variations on the liturgy

Consider beginning each liturgy by gathering around the Advent wreath. A particular prayer or hymn might be chosen to use for each of the 4 weeks, adding verses as additional candles are lit. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, ELW 257 or Blessed be the One ACS 929 repeating more verses each week, could be used along with the prayer of the day.

In Advent, the hymn of praise is omitted. 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 and 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 used for the Sundays of the Season of Christmas.

First Sunday in Advent, November 30th, 2025

Lectionary:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalms 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

(Blue)

Hymn Suggestions:

Come, thou long-expected Jesus ELW 254

Awake, Awake, and Greet the New Morn ELW 242

Keep your lamps trimmed and burning ACS 949

Wake, awake, for Night is Flying ELW 436

Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers ELW 244

Blessed is the one ACS 929

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection save us from the threatening dangers of our sins, and enlighten our walk in the way of your salvation, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, Now and forever.

Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent, December 7th, 2025

Lectionary:

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

(Blue)

Hymn Suggestions:

Blessed Be the God of Israel ELW 250

Comfort, Comfort now my people ELW 256

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

We are waiting for Jesus ACS 905

Come now, O Prince of peace ELW 247

Hark! A trilling voice is sounding! ELW 246

Come to be our hope, O Jesus / Tú, Jesús, nuestra esperanza / Vem, Jesus, nossa esperança
ACS 904

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God to prepare the way of our only Son. By his coming nature our growth as people of repentance and peace; 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 14th, 2025

Lectionary:

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:5-10

Luke 1:46b-55 (alternate)

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

(Blue)

Hymn Suggestions:

Hark, the glad sound! ELW 239

Now the heavens start to whisper ACS 901

Prepare the royal highway ELW 264

Light dawns on weary world ELW 726

We are waiting for Jesus ACS 905

People, look east ELW 248

Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of all who look to you, Lord God, and strengthen our faith in your coming that, transformed by grace, we may walk in your way; 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 21st, 2025

Lectionary:

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-25

(Blue)

Hymn Suggestions:

O come, O come, Emmanuel ELW 257

We are waiting for Jesus ACS 905

Savior of the nations, come ELW 263
The angel Gabriel from heaven came ELW 265
o wind at the window ACS 906
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 hinders our faith, that eagerly we may receive your promises, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Order for Holy Communion

Gathering

Gathering around the Wreath

Light one, two, three, or four Candles, depending on week of Advent

Blessed is the one ACS 929

Greeting

Kyrie

Prayer of the Day

Word

First Reading

Psalm

Second Reading

Gospel Acclamation

ELW 175 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

May God who comes among us,

Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit,

grant you patience in waiting, peace in the darkness,

and good news to share today and always.

Amen.

(From SundaysandSeasons.com)

Sending Hymn

Dismissal

Order for Service of the Word

Gathering

Gathering around the Wreath

Light one, two, three, or four Candles, depending on week of Advent

Blessed is the one ACS 929

Greeting

Kyrie

Prayer of the Day

Word

First Reading

Psalm

Second Reading

Gospel Acclamation

ELW 175 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

May God who comes among us,
Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit,
grant you patience in waiting, peace in the darkness,
and good news to share today and always.

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)