

Advent Candle Lighting at Home

Week 1: Hope

Read: Jeremiah 33:14-16 – *The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”*

Light the first candle, the candle of hope.

Reflect: Having hope is not being overly positive that everything will turn out all right. Nor is it just a wish list of what we want to receive this Christmas. Hope comes from our trust in God. Whenever I am overwhelmed with all the problems around the world, I remind myself that God is near. I look for the ways I see God at work in, around, and through others. I see the way people bring those who cannot drive to church. I feel the compassion from a friend when I am having a tough day. I listen for stories of human goodness, both locally and globally. All that gives me hope. Christmas comes during the darker times, shorter days, in the Northern hemisphere. Amid all the darkness, both literally and figuratively, we prepare to celebrate that Jesus is the Light of the World.

Pray: God of hope, you are steadfast and remain with us. Help us to turn to you in our moments of sadness. Fill us with your spirit so that we are not only hopeful, but ready and willing to do the work to make our hopes a reality. Prepare our hearts this Advent to receive the gift of Jesus. Fill us with your light of hope. Amen.

Week 2: PEACE

Read: Matthew 1:18-25- *Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

²³ *“Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”*

which means, “God is with us.” ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Light the second candle, the candle of Peace.

Reflect: There are many names for Jesus, including Prince of Peace. Peace can mean many things: quiet, harmony, security, calm, serenity. The peace Jesus offers encompasses all those meanings. Jesus, by offering us the light of life, offers us a peace that cannot be put into words. Some call it the peace that passes understanding. It is a feeling of inner calm and security despite what is going on around us. Our faith keeps us strong and resolute. “Peace on earth, good will to all” is a common refrain in Christmas songs, to remind us that peace is gift. May you accept the peace that only God can give.

Pray: O Holy God, we pray for peace. Peace within ourselves, peace in our relationships, peace in our community, and peace around the world. Give us courage to be peacemakers, and help us choose compassion over fear. Amen.

Week 3: JOY

Read: Luke 1:46-55 The Magnificat – Mary’s Song of Praise - *And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed: for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His Mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”*

Light the third candle, the candle of Joy. (This candle is often Pink, but may be the same as the others.)

Reflect: Mary has traveled to be with her aunt, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Even though Mary has been told by the angel Gabriel that she will be the

mother of the Son of the Most High, I can only imagine that she is scared. What does being the mother of the “Son of the Most High” even mean? Will Joseph believe her? What do her parents and other family and friends think? Despite all those questions she may have had, Mary sings a song of praise to God.

Joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is a result of a situation, or a mood, but being joyful is deeper than that. Joy is not just about present circumstances, but it is a state of being or relating to the world. Despite any of the fears Mary may have had, she chooses joy. She sings praise to God.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It is evidence of living out our faith. Joy is a movement of the heart, easy and playful, full of love and delight. Choosing joy is a spiritual practice.

Pray: Joyful God, we thank you for the gift of joy. So much about this time of year fills our hearts with joy. Help us to keep that feeling all year long. We pray for all those who are feeling less than joyful. May they be touched by your joy today. Amen.

Week 4: LOVE

Read: John 1:1-9 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.*

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Light the fourth candle, the candle of Love.

Reflect: Emmanuel means “God with us.” What a gift of love: Jesus is God with us! Jesus has experienced the aches and pains of being in a human body. Jesus witnessed the desperation and deprivation of humans. He still chose to see the belovedness in each one he met, and he treated them with love and compassion.

For those of us who are Jesus followers, we work at living like Jesus. We can choose to see the belovedness in each person, and choose to act with love and compassion toward every person. Choosing to love may not always be easy, but it is always right.

Pray: O God who is Love, help us to be loving and kind this holiday season. Give us hearts full of patience and generosity. Give us eyes to see those who are hurting around

us, and the courage to respond to them. Fill us with your unconditional love, so that we cannot help but share it. In the name of Emmanuel we pray, Amen

Christmas Eve/Day: Christ candle

Read: Luke 2:8-20 *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest of heaven, and on earth peace among those who he favors!"*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in a manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Light the white/center candle, to represent Christ's light coming into the world.

Sing with the angels! Sing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" or another favorite Christmas hymn.

Pray: Gracious God, thank you for giving us the best gift of all, which is Jesus. Thank you for the Christmas story that reminds us once again that you are with us. Thank you for loving us so much, and giving us this day to celebrate. May we be filled with your Spirit so we may share our hope, love, joy, and peace with the hurting world. O Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord! Amen.