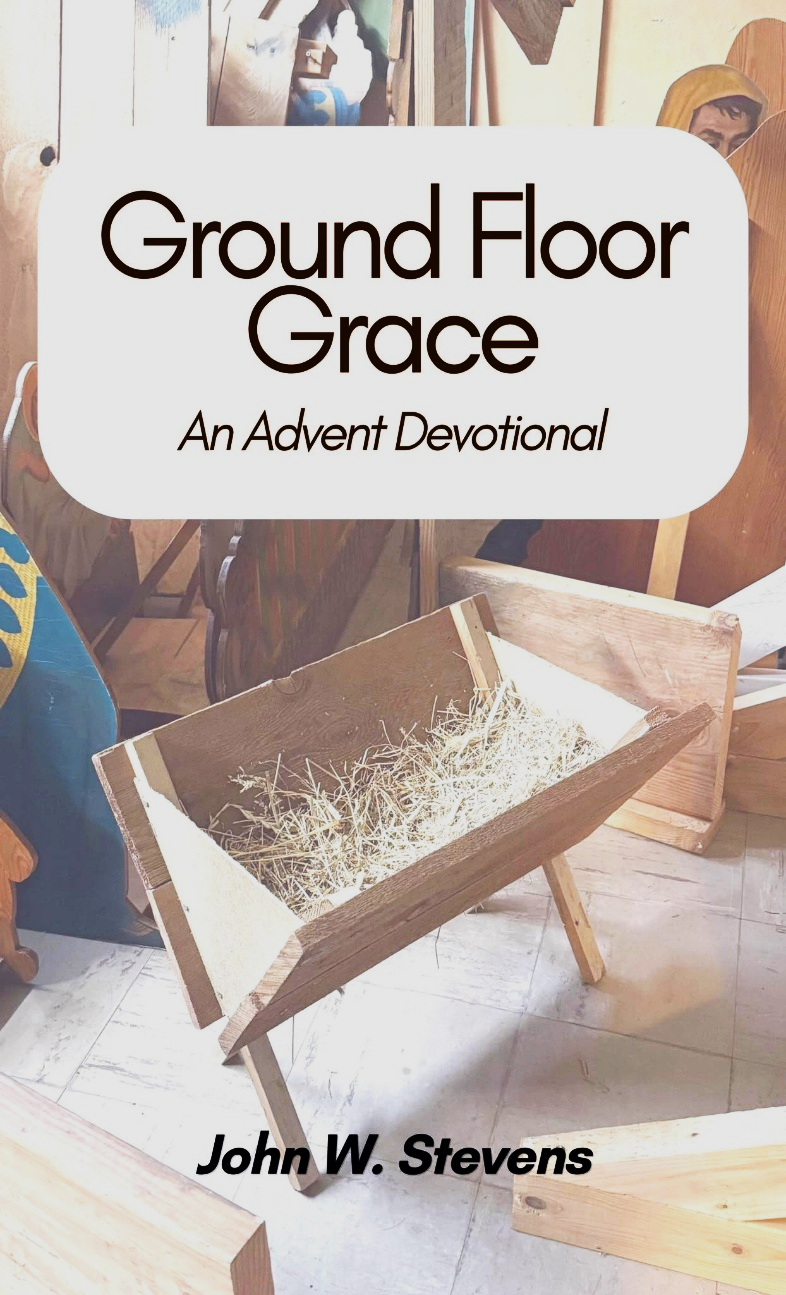
**Advent 2025 Worship Resources**

**based on**

**“Ground Floor Grace”**

**by John Stevens**



The Western North Dakota Synod “Why Statement” adapted by the Synod Council in 2022 includes the following: To encourage and equip the ministries of the Western North Dakota Synod-ELCA, so that the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, and all God’s children feel welcomed and included in the ministries to which God calls us. It is our hope that this resource will equip clergy, synod authorized ministers, worship leaders, councils, etc., to share the Good News of Jesus Christ during the season of Advent.

Feel free to use this resource or any parts of it with your own adaptations.

Please list the source as follows:

*Taken from “Advent 2025 Worship Resources based on ‘Ground Floor Grace’ by John Stevens” Western North Dakota Synod of the ELCA 2024*

If you haven’t already obtained a copy of “Ground Floor Grace: An Advent Devotional” by John Stevens, physical copies can be ordered from Blurb at this link:

[**https://www.blurb.com/b/12543256-ground-floor-grace**](https://www.blurb.com/b/12543256-ground-floor-grace?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAYnJpZBExTVh2SUFqZjlCbDhCTTk0QgEeGTCXFWBoG7FMA9mTQfyAVH88xg1ffYFAugzV71uTFi7bhldRgn-VTyvK_xQ_aem_wgBzidu3X89jx3cYr9wD_A)

PDF copies are available directly from Pastor John Stevens. You can contact him using his email address: john@giftofgrace.net

A single PDF copy is available for 6 dollars. To order a PDF copy and share with your congregation, you can place an order on a sliding scale:

1 - 30 members - 60 dollars

31 - 60 members - 90 dollars

61 - 100 members - 120 dollars

101 - ??? Members - 150 dollars

You get one copy of the PDF and can share with your congregation.

Special thanks to the contributors for this resource, who helped experiment with the possibility of creating a gift to the Western North Dakota Synod:

Rev. Brad Dokken, Associate with the Bishop for Leadership, Candidacy, and Call

Rev. Tera Kossow, Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM)

Rev. Kim Gifford, Pastor, Peace Lutheran, Burlington, ND

Rev. Russell Lambert, Pastor, North West United Lutheran Parish, Crosby, ND

Rev. Kathi Nygaard, Pastor, Zion Lutheran, Beulah, ND

Rev. Katie Rodriguez, Dunn County Lutheran Parish, Killdeer, ND

Rev. Emmy Swedlund, Pastor, Oak Valley Lutheran, Velva, ND

Rev. Mary Wiggins, St. John Lutheran, Dickinson, ND

and of course, to Rev. John Stevens, Pastor, Zion Lutheran, Oregon City, OR

**Table of Contents**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Worship Services | Page 2 |
| Advent Candle Lighting Songs | 13 |
| Sermon Ideas/Starters/Questions | 15 |
| Christmas Sermon | 22 |
| Prayers of Intercession | 24 |
| Song Suggestions | 28 |
| Songs Suggestions for Children | 30 |
| Sample Christmas Eve Services | 31 |
| Faith in the Home Ideas | 38 |
| Christmas Program “Getting Ready For Christmas” | 43 |
| Advent Wreath Christmas Program | 52 |

**WORSHIP SERVICES**

**PRELUDE**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS/WELCOME  
  
GATHERING HYMN**

**LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH***This can be led by one or two people and is a great way to get more individuals in the congregation involved in worship leading. Ask people who don’t usually get asked.*

**WEEK 1: HOPE**

Leader 1: We gather in the season of Advent, waiting and watching for the One who comes not in splendor, but in humility. The God of the universe has changed addresses—leaving heaven’s throne to dwell among us in a manger. This is grace: not earned, not expected, but freely given.

Leader 2: We light the candle of Hope, trusting that the God who moved into our neighborhood, who doesn’t pretend to be one of us, but really is one of us, brings light to our darkest places.

**All: Emmanuel, God with us, you chose a manger over a palace. Let your presence fill our longing hearts with hope.**

*Sing verse 1 of Advent Candle Lighting Song*

**PRAYER: God of hope, dwell among us. Set us upon the foundations of your grace. Let your humble birth remind us that no place is too lowly for your love to enter. Amen.**

**WEEK 2: PEACE**

Leader 1: We gather in the season of Advent, waiting and watching for the One who comes not in splendor, but in humility. The God of the universe has changed addresses—leaving heaven’s throne to dwell among us in a manger. This is grace: not earned, not expected, but freely given.

Leader 2: We light the candle of Peace, remembering that God invites us into restored relationship. We are invited to sit next to the babe in the manger, the one who comes as the prince of peace to restore all creation.

**ALL: O Prince of Peace, in our busyness settle our hearts and minds. Slow us down to see all that you give us. Let your peace reign in our hearts and minds.**

*Sing verse 2 of Advent Candle Lighting Song*

**PRAYER: God of peace, settle our restless spirits. Teach us that true peace is not found in control, but in surrender to your grace.**

**WEEK 3: JOY**

Leader 1: We gather in the season of Advent, waiting and watching for the One who comes not in splendor, but in humility. The God of the universe has changed addresses—leaving heaven’s throne to dwell among us in a manger. This is grace: not earned, not expected, but freely given.

Leader 2: We light the candle of Joy, rejoicing in the fact that God’s address is now among us.

**ALL: Jesus, you chose to be born among our mess, not our perfection. Let your joy rise in us, even when things seem unfinished.**

*Sing verse 3 of Advent Candle Lighting Song*

**PRAYER: God of joy, surprise us again in your presence. Let your Incarnation awaken laughter, song and celebration in our souls. Amen.**

**WEEK 4: LOVE**

Leader 1: We gather in the season of Advent, waiting and watching for the One who comes not in splendor, but in humility. The God of the universe has changed addresses—leaving heaven’s throne to dwell among us in a manger. This is grace: not earned, not expected, but freely given.

Leader 2: We light the candle of Love, marveling that the Creator of galaxies chose a manger as a cradle.

**All: Jesus, your love is not distant. It is near to us, flesh and bone, living and breathing. Let your love transform our lives.**

*Sing verse 4 of Advent Candle Lighting Song*

**PRAYER: God of love, you moved into our world with tenderness and truth. May we welcome you not just in our churches but in our hearts. Amen.**

**CHRISTMAS**

Leader 1:The God of the universe has changed addresses—leaving heaven’s throne to dwell among us in a manger. This is grace: not earned, not expected, but freely given.

Leader 2: We light the Christ Candle, astounded that the Word has become flesh and dwells among us.

*Sing verse 5 of Advent Candle Lighting Song*

**All: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth.**

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

**Week 1** *Based on Matthew 24:26–44*

People of God, Advent calls us to keep awake, to be ready, to lift our eyes for the coming of Christ. But we confess that our eyes are often heavy. Our hearts are distracted. Our faith grows weary.

Jesus tells us, *“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”* Let us come before God in honesty and hope, confessing our sin and our need for grace.

*(Silence for reflection)*

Merciful God,

**We confess that we have not stayed awake.**

We confess that we have ignored your signs and warnings.  
**We confess that we have trusted in ourselves more than in your promises.**

We have been consumed by worry, and we have missed the joy that is right before us.  
**We have let fear rule our decisions. We have allowed anger to divide us. We have grown tired of waiting for you.**

Forgive us, Lord.  
**Break into our lives with your mercy.**

Wake us up to your presence.  
**Set our feet on the ground floor of your grace.**

For Christ comes not to the high and mighty, but to the humble and the waiting.  
**Christ comes down to meet us where we are.**

People of God, hear the good news: You do not need to climb to heaven. You do not need to prove your worth. You do not need to find the right place or the right time. Grace has come down to you— to the ground floor of your daily life. To the place where you are most burdened, most weary, most in need. As a thief in the night surprises a household, so the Son of Man comes with mercy that cannot be stopped. In Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Your burdens are lifted. Your hope is renewed.

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

**Week 2** *Based on Matthew 3:1–12*

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”* The same voice cries out to us today, calling us to turn back, to prepare, to walk in God’s way.

Let us confess our sin and hear the promise of God’s mercy.

*(Silence for reflection)*

Merciful God,  
**We confess that our hearts are often far from you.**

Our paths are crooked.  
**Straighten them, Lord.**

Our words have been careless.  
**Purify them with your mercy.**

Our hands have clung to selfishness.  
**Open them to serve in love.**

We have relied on our strength.  
**Teach us to rely on your grace.**

We have resisted change.  
**Transform our journey, O God.**

We have grown weary of waiting.  
**Awaken us with your Spirit.**

Forgive us, Lord.  
**Renew us in hope. Shape us into people who bear fruit worthy of repentance.**

Hear the good news! John proclaimed, *“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me.”* That One is Jesus Christ.

He comes not to condemn but to save.  
**He comes with Spirit and fire.**

The fire of judgment becomes the fire of mercy.  
**The Spirit that convicts also restores.**

In Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Your burden is lifted. Your path is made new. Walk now in the light of Christ. Bear fruit in every step. For God’s grace is not far away— it has come near, and it transforms the journey.

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

**Week 3** *Based on Matthew 11:2–11*

John the Baptist asked, *“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”*  
We too bring our questions, our doubts, and our broken pieces before God.  
Let us confess our sins and trust in God’s promise of mercy.

*(Silence for reflection)*

Merciful God,  
**We confess that our lives feel unfinished.**

We hold puzzle pieces of sorrow and regret.  
**We cannot see how they fit together.**

We cling to pieces of anger and pride.  
**They leave gaps in our relationships.**

We hide pieces of fear and doubt.  
**They weigh us down and leave us restless.**

We have tried to complete the picture on our own.  
**But the picture is incomplete and broken without your grace.**

Forgive us, Lord.  
**Place the missing piece of your mercy into our lives.**

Transform us into people of hope.  
**Complete in us the good work you have begun.**

Hear the good news! Jesus answered John’s question not with arguments, but with signs of healing, life, and grace: *“The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”*  In Jesus Christ, the missing piece has been found.  
**In Jesus Christ, the picture is made whole.**

Your sins are forgiven. Your questions are held in God’s hands. Your broken pieces are gathered up in love. Walk now in the light of Christ. Live as people being made whole. For the puzzle of God’s kingdom is coming together in you.

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

**Week 4** *Based on Matthew 1:18–25*

Joseph was uncertain, afraid, and ready to walk away. Yet God’s grace met him in a dream. God’s grace gave him courage to say “yes.” We too wrestle with fear, doubt, and hesitation. We too need God’s grace to say “yes” to love. Let us confess our sin, opening our hearts to the mercy of Emmanuel— God with us.

*(Silence for reflection)*

Merciful God,  
**We confess that we have often said “no” to your call.**

We say “no” when your will surprises us.  
**We say “no” when your plan feels too hard.**

We doubt your grace is enough for us.  
**We cling to control instead of trust.**

We turn from your Spirit’s nudging.  
**We let fear silence our obedience.**

We forget that Jesus is Emmanuel—God with us.  
**Forgive us, Lord.**

Forgive us for the times we hide in shame.  
**Forgive us for the times we resist your mercy.**

Forgive us when we say “no” to our neighbor in need.  
**Forgive us when we say “no” to your call of love.**

Pour out your grace upon us.  
**Transform our fear into faith.**

Place your mercy deep within us.

Hear the good news: The angel said to Joseph, *“Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. You shall name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”* This is the promise of Advent: God’s grace comes close.  
**God’s grace meets us on the ground floor of our lives.**

Grace that forgives every “no.”  
**Grace that gives courage to say “yes.”**

Grace that carries us when we falter.  
**Grace that frees us to begin again.**

In Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. In Jesus Christ, our lives are made new. Walk now in grace, strengthened by the Spirit. Say “yes” to mercy, say “yes” to justice, say “yes” to love.  
**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!**

**Christmas Eve/Day**

On this holy night, we gather in the light of Christ, who was born not in a palace but on the ground floor of a crowded inn. He came into the dirt and straw, into the noise and the mess, to be God-with-us. We come, then, to confess our sins, trusting that God’s grace meets us right where we are.

Gracious God,  
**We confess that we have tried to climb ladders of success and worthiness, thinking that if we just get higher, we will be closer to you. We have forgotten that you came down, that you meet us in the lowest places of life.**

We confess that we hide the messy corners of our lives, ashamed of our brokenness.  
**Yet tonight/today, we remember that you chose the grime of a manger and the roughness of a stable. You are not afraid of our mess.**

We confess that we sometimes turn away from those who live on the ground floor of society—the poor, the forgotten, the ones the world overlooks.  
**Forgive us, Lord. Teach us again that Christmas begins in the straw, among shepherds and animals, in the places we often ignore.**

(Silent Reflection)

People of God, hear the good news of Christmas: From the ground floor of a Bethlehem stable, grace was born into the world. In Jesus Christ, God has come to you—not after you have cleaned up, not once you’ve climbed higher, but right here, right now. By the manger, by the cross, and by the empty tomb, you are forgiven. You are made new. You are held in God’s Ground Floor Grace.

The peace of Christ is with you tonight and always.  
**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

**Week 1:**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. You, O God, work through grace-filled beginnings. Open our eyes to your truth and lead us to your grace. In all things, help us to know that your grace is for us, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Week 2:**

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming give to all the people of the world knowledge of your salvation; prepare each of us to receive your grace through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Week 3:**

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our eyes and ears to your guidance. Help us to see the ways in which your grace draws us into a community of love and inclusion. Empower us to respond with your love to the needs of our neighbors; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Week 4:**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. We give you thanks, O God, for the gift of your grace that brings us joy. Free us from all that binds us, that we may receive your joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Christmas:**

All-powerful and unseen God, the coming of your light into our world has brightened weary hearts with peace. Call us out of darkness and empower us to proclaim the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**READINGS**

**Week 1:**

Isaiah 2:1-5

[Psalm 122](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources)

[Romans 13:11-14](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources)

**Week 2:**

Isaiah 11:1-10

[Psalm 72](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources):1-7, 18-19

[Romans 15:4-13](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources)

**Week 3:**

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:5-10

James 5:7-10

**Week 4:**  
Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Romans 1:1-7

**Christmas Eve/Day:**  
Isaiah 62:6-12

Psalm 97

Titus 3:4-7

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

**GOSPEL**  
Week 1: Matthew 24:36-44

Week 2: Matthew 3:1-12

Week 3: Matthew 11:2-11

Week 4: Matthew 1:18-25

Christmas Eve/Day: Luke 2:1-20

**CHILDRENS’ MESSAGE**

*For ideas, check out* [John Stevens | Dollar Store Children Sermons (dskidsermons.com)](https://dskidsermons.com/author/revjohn29/)

**MESSAGE**

**SONG/HYMN OF THE DAY**

**NICENE CREED**

Together, we profess our faith with the words of the Nicene Creed.

**We believe in one God,**

**the Father, the Almighty,**

**maker of heaven and earth,**

**of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,**

**the only Son of God,**

**eternally begotten of the Father,**

**God from God, Light from Light,**

**true God from true God,**

**begotten, not made,**

**of one Being with the Father;**

**through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation**

**he came down from heaven,**

**was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary**

**and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;**

**he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again**

**in accordance with the scriptures;**

**he ascended into heaven**

**and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,**

**and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,**

**who proceeds from the Father and the Son,**

**who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,**

**who has spoken through the prophets.**

**We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.**

**We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,**

**and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION** *see section for Prayers of Intercession*

Week 1: God’s Grace is for Us.

Week 2: God Prepares Us for Grace.

Week 3: Grace Pulls us Together.

Week 4: Grace Brings us Joy.

Christmas Eve/Day: Grace is Found in the Manger.

**PEACE/OFFERING/MUSIC SELECTION**

**OFFERING PRAYER**

**Option 1**Let us pray. **God of the manger and the mud, We give thanks that you are not a god at a distance but God who came to live with us. You have never been far off— from creation’s first breath to the cries in Bethlehem’s stable, you’ve chosen the ground floor, the messy places, the ordinary lives, to reveal your extraordinary grace. Receive these gifts as signs of our gratitude and trust. Take what we offer today— our coins, our commitments, our cracked hearts— and mold them with your holy hands. Infuse them with your mercy, multiply them with your love, and use them to build your kingdom right here, in the muck and miracle of everyday life. In Jesus’ name, who meets us where we are, Amen.**

**Option 2**

Let us pray.

**We pause to remember that you are God. All that we have comes as a gift from you.**

*Pause*

**Each breath we take, each item in our home, each dollar in our pocket, is only ours for the moment.  We pause and give thanks for all that you have provided, grace upon grace.**

*Pause*

**Now, we offer ourselves that we might do good in this world. We offer our money that it might be used for good in this world. Receive us and what we offer now, in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

**COMMUNION LITURGY/SONG**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Holy and gracious God, who shaped the stars and stooped to cradle dust, we give thanks that you meet us not in lofty heights, but on the ground floor—where life is raw, real, and aching for redemption. In this holy meal, You have fed us with mercy that took on flesh, with love that changed addresses and moved into a manger. You have entered our brokenness, not with distant judgment, but with hands dirtied by creation, by carpentry, by cross-bearing grace. You meet us there—again and again—with bread, with wine, with grace. Send us now, nourished and renewed, to be your people: to serve, to love, to lift, to listen. Let our lives echo your humility, and let our hands bear your healing.

In the name of Jesus, who came down to raise us up. **Amen.**

**BLESSING**

May God who comes down to meet us where we are,

Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit,

grant you patience in waiting, peace in the darkness,

and good news to share today and always.

**Amen.**

**SENDING SONG/HYMN**

**DISMISSAL**

**Weeks of Advent**

Go in joy. God’s grace meets you where you are.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Christmas Eve/Day**

Glory to God in the highest!

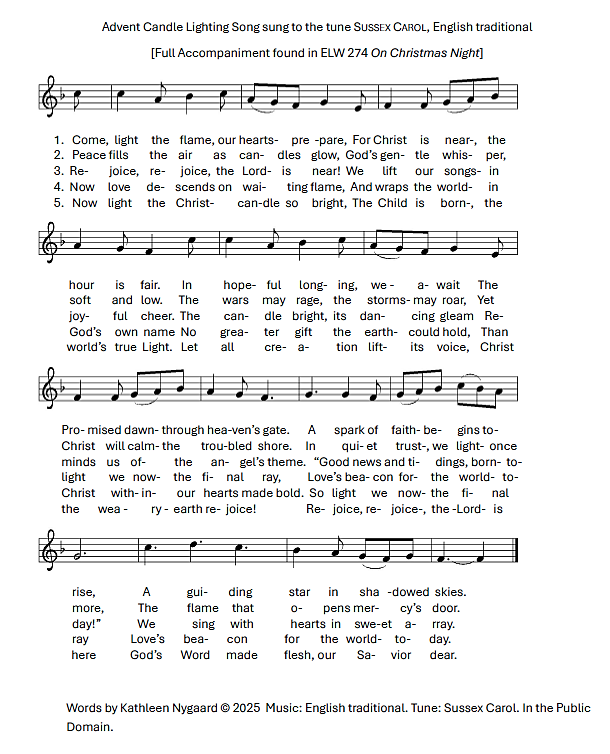
**And peace to God’s people on earth!**

Go in joy. God’s grace meets you where you are.

**Thanks be to God.**

**advent candle lighting songs**

*You can click on the graphic and save it to your computer.*

****

***Ground Floor Grace* (Advent Candle Song)**

*To the tune of “Away in a Manger”*

**Verse 1 – HOPE**

A candle is burning, its flickering light,

Proclaims that our Hope has pierced through the night.

The God of creation came close to our pain,

And dwells in the dust, where our sorrows remain.

**Verse 2 – PEACE**

A second flame dances, a whisper of Peace,

Not lofty or distant, but born in the least.

The manger, God’s dwelling, so humble, so low,

Is where Ground Floor Grace begins its soft glow.

**Verse 3 – JOY**

Now Joy joins the chorus, a bright, laughing flame,

For God took on flesh and bore our own name.

In straw and in struggle, in laughter and tears,

God molds us with mercy through all of our years.

**Verse 4 – LOVE**

The candle of Love now tenderly shines,

A sign that God’s heart beats close to our minds.

No throne, but a stable; no crown, but the hay—

Love stooped to the ground to show us the Way.

**Verse 5 – CHRIST**

All candles now burning, the Christ light is here,

Emmanuel dwelling in grime and in cheer.

From manger to cross, God’s grace never strays—

Still shaping our lives in Ground Floor ways.

(This song was generated using Microsoft CoPilot)

**Sermon Ideas/Starters/Questions**

**WEEK 1:** [**Matthew 24:36-44**](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/Index/2025-11-30/0)

* We live in a world that enjoys a good countdown, especially this time of year. Shopping days left, end-of-year deadlines, countdown to winter break. Maybe we enjoy the comfort it brings or the motivation that we need to get busy. Most of us like to have a timeline we can rely on.
* The season of Advent is not about a frantic countdown as much as it is about learning to live in God’s uncountable timeline. Perhaps this Advent season we need to be less about the countdown and more about living in the moment, knowing that preparation is continual but also never quite enough. Maybe this Advent season, we can focus on the hope we have in God’s abundant grace for God's people.
* When we see a bright orange sign announcing, “Road Work Ahead,” most of us don’t cheer. Construction zones usually mean delays, detours, hidden problems under the pavement, and the maddening sense that nothing is actually happening. We tap the steering wheel, mutter under our breath, or even shout out loud: “Why now? Why here?”

Advent reminds us that our lives are also under construction—and we don’t always like it. We want fast results, but faith doesn’t move on our timetable. Matthew 24 tells us that our relationship with God is an ongoing project—unfinished, sometimes frustrating, and often hidden from our view. We want God to be done already, to smooth out the road, to wrap things up neatly. Instead, God continues to work in ways we can’t always see and in places we’d rather avoid.

Faith, then, isn’t about getting to the finished product as quickly as possible. It’s about

learning to live in the dust of construction, to endure the noise of God’s unfinished

business, and to trust that the work will be worth it. Advent asks us to believe that the delays are not wasted, the detours are not meaningless, and the orange cones are signs not of abandonment but of God building something new.

* Interruption is at the heart of Advent. God doesn’t ask permission before showing up—before meeting us where we are, saying “Do not be afraid,” and disrupting life in ways we never planned.

We crave predictability, especially when we’re busy. We want things scheduled, efficient, on time. Anything that veers off-script feels like an inconvenience. Yet Advent tells us God enters precisely by breaking the script—with incarnation.

What if disruption isn’t a nuisance but a gift? As Frederick Buechner said, “The Gospel is bad news before it is good news.” The interruptions we resist may be the very places where grace breaks through—less to be dreaded, more to be welcomed.

* Doorways are fascinating things. They’re simple, ordinary structures, but they hold deep meaning. A doorway is both a boundary and an opening. It marks where we’ve been, and it leads to where we are going. Every doorway carries a kind of promise—sometimes it’s the promise of hope and joy, other times it’s the fear of the unknown.

Advent is a doorway. It invites us to pause at the threshold, to look back and see where we’ve come from—the scars and struggles we carry, the joys and beauty we’ve known, the fears we’ve endured. And it invites us to look forward, toward a future that hasn’t yet unfolded, a future that holds more mystery than certainty.

Jesus reminds us to be ready, not because we can predict what’s ahead, but because God is already there waiting. Advent doesn’t ask for certainty; it asks for trust. It calls us to step through the doorway with open hands and open hearts, ready to receive whatever meets us on the other side.

Frederick Buechner once said, “Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don’t be afraid.” That’s Advent in a nutshell. It doesn’t promise us an easy future, but it does promise us God’s presence in it. That should give us hope.

**WEEK 2: Matthew 3:1-12**

* For me, John embodies the season of Advent. He is unexpected, abrupt, speaks with urgency and doesn’t offer much in the way of apologies. He shows up in camel hair, unpolished, and probably feels sketchy to most people. Before the soft glow of the candlelight during “Silent Night,” we get a prophet yelling at anyone within ear shot to “WAKE UP!” He’s not a lullaby at bedtime, but the obnoxious alarm clock we want to throw out the window.   
    
  Advent reminds us that God doesn’t come to us like the perfectly curated playlist with the right mixture to satisfy all tastes, but into our chaos, into our brokenness, and into our doubt. John is telling us that in a world of broken promises and fragmented relationships, there exists a promise that God refuses to give up on us or to leave us at our most vulnerable. The voice that cries from the wilderness might sound like chaos but it speaks words of peace to all.

* You’re driving along — music cranked, coffee in hand, already ten minutes late, mind racing through the packed schedule ahead. Then out of nowhere, a bright red sign: STOP. You slam the brakes, mutter a few choice words, and narrowly avoid hitting another car.

John the Baptist is Advent’s stop sign — arms waving, voice rising, shouting about repentance. He’s the interruption none of us asked for but all of us need. Because in December, who has time to pump the brakes? We’d rather keep the pedal down, rushing from one thing to the next. But Advent is the holy traffic jam that forces us to notice what matters most.

What if this season wasn’t about how fast we get there, but how aware we are along the way? What if the interruptions became invitations — moments to notice what we’d otherwise miss? A baby in a manger. A friend’s quiet word of peace. A kingdom breaking through like sunrise on a clear morning.

* Almost all of us have received a gift we really didn’t want or appreciate at the time. As a kid, maybe it was socks, underwear, a sweater big enough to fit two of you and your siblings. As an adult, maybe it’s a gadget you’ll never use, a gift certificate to a restaurant you don’t like, a candle that smells horrendous. Yet, so often, those are the gifts that make the best memories, the stories we love to share.   
    
  John the Baptist is the Advent character many of us don’t realize we need. Why would we ever put a character like him in our Advent lineup? He doesn’t give off the same vibe as Rudolph, Charlie Brown, or Frosty. John comes off as loud, inconvenient, and offensive. He is abrupt in his presentation and unapologetic in his delivery.

But he’s the gift we need. Because before we can receive the Christ child, we need someone who tells us the truth: you can’t save yourself; you need help. That’s what makes Christmas more than a sentimental holiday. It’s rescue. And John, with his camel hair and wild honey, is the one pointing us toward it.

* In December, most of us rearrange our homes. We clear space for a tree, dig chairs out of the basement for extra guests, and clean up before company comes. Advent is the same invitation: prepare the way and clear the clutter to make room.

John is essentially saying, “The King is coming. And he’s not looking for space in the guest room of your life — he wants the whole house.” Preparing isn’t about perfection. It’s about expectation. What if Advent was less about getting everything right and more about clearing enough space that grace has somewhere to land?  
  
Maybe Advent is less about decorating the front porch of our souls and more about opening the door wide enough that light can spill in. We don’t have to sweep every corner or polish every surface — but we do need to create a little breathing room. Because when grace shows up, it rarely knocks politely. It tends to burst in, arms full of peace, hope, joy, and love, ready to set the table. The question is: will it find space to stay, or will it trip over all the clutter we’ve been holding onto?

**WEEK 3: Matthew 11:2-11**

* Think about the last time something didn’t turn out the way you expected. Maybe a vacation that looked amazing online but turned out to be a rainy mess. A Christmas gift you really wanted as a kid, only to unwrap something completely different. A meal that you’ve been anticipating, and it isn’t anything like you imagined or remembered. Expectations set us up for disappointment.

John the Baptist is sitting in prison, thinking about the promised Messiah that he told people about, the one who would come with a winnowing fork and would baptize with fire. This promised Messiah isn’t messing around!  Instead, reports about Jesus sound very different: blind people seeing, lepers healed, outcasts welcomed. This wasn’t the revolution John imagined. So, he sends messengers with the most honest question in Scripture: “Are you the one, or should we wait for another?” John’s expectations didn’t live up to the results he was hearing about.

Jesus’ response is telling: he doesn’t defend himself, he doesn’t shame John for doubting. He simply says, “Tell John what you see and hear.” The evidence of the kingdom is not in fireworks but in quiet, grace-filled reversals: healing, renewal; life where there was death.Advent is the season that teaches us to wait differently. We don’t wait for God to match our expectations. We wait with open hands for the grace that surprises us. God’s kingdom is breaking in, not through spectacle or political power, but through mercy, healing, and presence.

* Many of us have driven along a highway and seen a sign for an animal crossing, like a deer or a moose, maybe even cows! It doesn’t guarantee you will see the animals, but it might change how you drive because you know the possibility exists that something unexpected might appear. It’s all about awareness.

John’s disciples come looking for certainty: “Are you the one, or should we wait for another?” They want a clear road sign. Jesus points instead to the evidence already around them: “The blind see, the lame walk, the poor hear good news.” In other words, the signs are there—pay attention. We might not get what we expect, but we shouldn’t be surprised, either. Signs don’t predict the future, but they can make us aware of the present.

Advent is our deer crossing season. The lit candles, the scripture readings, the hymns—they’re not the destination, they’re signs along the way. They tell us: “Stay awake. Something holy is about to happen. God is closer than you think.” And just like a deer suddenly bounding across the road, Jesus shows up where we least expect him—healing the broken, lifting up the forgotten, entering the world as a baby in a manger.

* Remember the glossy pictures in catalogs that tempted us with the latest gadgets, toys, and clothes? The pictures always looked impressive and inviting, giving us anticipation about what the product will look like in person. Then, when the package arrives, it often doesn’t look like what we had dreamed it would. The colors aren’t as bright, the item not as sturdy, the flash not as long. We often find ourselves expecting one thing and getting something completely different.

John thought the Messiah would be a warrior, a judge, a firebrand. Instead, Jesus is preaching, healing, and befriending sinners. This isn’t what John ordered. Hence the question: “Are you really the one?” Jesus doesn’t fit John’s image of a Messiah, and, if we are honest, he often doesn’t fit ours either. Jesus won’t be crammed into our expectations and rarely appears as we imagined. He is a Savior who defies expectations and redefines salvation.

We come to Advent with our own wish lists—peace in the world, healing for our families, answers to our questions. But Jesus often shows up in ways we didn’t order: not in the halls of power but in a stable; not through force but through vulnerability. The good news is this: we don’t always get the Messiah we ordered, but we always get the Savior we need.

* How often have we thought that the punishment doesn’t fit the crime? About someone else, I mean. The punishments we receive are always harsher than we deserve, because we can explain our actions if people would listen. We want fairness for ourselves, but we get offended when it’s offered to others, especially those who don’t deserve it in our understanding of justice.

Jesus says, “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” Strange words. Who could be offended at healing the blind, raising the dead, and preaching good news? Yet people were. Because grace disrupts the way we think the world should work. We want swift and powerful justice against those we don’t like or agree with. None of this second chance nonsense.

John expected judgment; Jesus brought mercy. That kind of love is offensive to those who want control, fairness, or vengeance. The offensive nature of grace is that it includes all of us and not only the people we would choose. The kingdom of God is unfair because it doesn’t play favorites. That’s what a broken world often struggles to understand.

Advent reminds us that grace came as a baby, powerless and vulnerable. To a world built on strength and status, that notion is idiotic and hard to comprehend. Grace still offends us when it forgives people we’d rather condemn or includes those we’d rather exclude. But Jesus says blessed are those who can live with being scandalized by mercy—because in the end, that mercy is what saves us.

**WEEK 4: Matthew 1:18-25**

* *Detour Ahead.*  Nuts. This was not a part of the plan. None of the research about best routes to take for our journey said anything about a detour, and yet here we are. All detours seem to be unfamiliar, longer, and frustrating. Who has time for detours? Especially when we have our lives mapped out. Detours do nothing but slow us down and force us to go a way we would have never chosen.

Joseph had a plan. It was simple: marry Mary, start a family, live quietly. The ideal life. But when Mary turns up pregnant, the plan blows up. His solution is to divorce her quietly. No one needs to know about his plan.  Then an angel shows up with the ultimate detour: don’t walk away, Joseph. Take Mary as your wife. The child is from the Holy Spirit. Talk about an unforeseen path!

God’s story often begins where our road ends. Joseph thinks he knows the faithful path, but God interrupts with a new one. Salvation enters the world not through Joseph’s plan A, but through God’s holy detour.

Advent is the season of detours. The Word becomes flesh not through royalty or power but through scandal and disruption. The question isn’t whether God will reroute us—it’s whether we’ll trust the road signs enough to follow. What if the interruptions, the slowdowns, the reroutes in your life, are where Emmanuel is waiting to meet you?

* Have you ever watched a mural being painted? I’m not talking about a normal-sized one, but one that is huuuuuuuge - think the side of a building or a water tower. If you get close to it, you might not get a clear image. In fact, it might all look like random streaks of color, odd shapes, and squiggly lines. As you step back, however, the image becomes clearer, and the beauty of what’s happening is revealed. Sometimes, distance reveals the whole picture better than being up close.

Joseph is only seeing the brushstrokes and not the whole picture. He’s too close to the situation to fully understand. Mary is pregnant, shame hangs over them, and his future feels ruined. Up close, it looks like a scandal. But from God’s perspective, this is the start of a masterpiece. Matthew zooms out: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken… they shall call him Emmanuel, God with us.” Taking a step back can often make all the difference.

God is the artist, layering colors and stories that don’t always make sense in the moment. To Joseph, the brushstrokes of scandal and disruption look like a mess. But God is painting salvation—the incarnation of love itself.

Advent invites us to trust the Artist even when the brushstrokes don’t make sense. Maybe your life right now looks like a mess of mismatched colors. Step back: God is painting something bigger. The mural is not finished yet, but Emmanuel is already here, woven into the design.

* Who doesn’t love a good plot twist in a movie, TV show, or a book? Most of us love to be surprised by the unexpected. We begin to tense up as the music becomes more ominous, indicating that change is around the corner. In fact, we might even be disappointed if the plot twist we are expecting doesn’t actually happen or doesn’t land the way we wish that it did.

Matthew’s Gospel begins with the ultimate plot twist. The Messiah comes—not with power and thrones, but through a teenage girl and a confused carpenter in a scandalous pregnancy. Who saw that coming? I’m sure plenty of backseat theologians, but, honestly, who saw that happening the first time they heard the story? Yet, it’s exactly the sort of origin story that we should expect when God is involved. God could choose anyone to be the mother of the Savior of the world, and God chose a teenage girl and added a humble carpenter to be the earthly father.

The incarnation is God’s twist ending to humanity’s story. We expect God to work through kings, armies, and palaces. Instead, Emmanuel comes through the margins. The power of God is revealed not in might but in vulnerability.

Advent asks us to expect the unexpected. God is still writing twist endings into our lives, still breaking into the world in ways that don’t fit our scripts. What if the very place you thought the story was over is where God is setting up the twist of grace? Take time to allow Advent to surprise you and those around you.

* Most of us clean before company comes. What cleaning looks like might differ, but I think we all can say we make an effort to make ourselves, our home, and our family look like we are all put together. If our company opens the closet door, however, they might find laundry, pizza boxes, and a random pair of shoes that we are trying to hide to look perfect. We want to perpetuate the idea that we are neat and tidy. What if God doesn’t care about our mess and, in fact, is ok with it?

Matthew says Joseph was “unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace.” Translation: this story begins in the mess of scandal, whispers, and shame. The kind of mess that others love to gossip about and we try to hide from. Surprise! It is into *that* mess that Emmanuel comes. God with us doesn’t start in royal halls but in a family that most people side-eyed. God doesn’t choose the put-together but rather those whose flaws are on display. God meets us in our mess and says this is perfect!

This is the heart of the incarnation: God does not avoid our chaos but enters it. Salvation meets us where we are at and begins where life is most broken. Emmanuel doesn’t wait for the cleaned-up version of you but meets you in the unfiltered mess.  Advent reminds us that it isn’t, “Emmanuel, God with the perfect or polished”, but rather, “Emmanuel, God with us.”

**CHRISTMAS SERMON**

**Grace in the Manger**It always amazes me how ordinary the Christmas story sounds when you read it straight. Caesar gives an order. People travel. A baby is born. Shepherds are working the night shift. It could almost slip past us, like another scene from a historical drama. But then — angels break in, light floods the sky, and a choir of heaven belts out a song that makes Handel’s *Messiah* feel like background music. Suddenly, what looked like a simple census story becomes a grace story.

Grace always does that. It sneaks up on us when we least expect it, showing up in crowded inns, unremarkable towns, or in the middle of our own chaos. Grace is God’s unearned, undeserved, unconditional love. And the Christmas story is one long, holy interruption where grace insists: “I’m here. For you. Right here in the straw.”

If we were scripting this night for Netflix, the manger scene wouldn’t pass the pitch meeting. It’s too messy. The lighting is bad. The setting isn’t awe-inspiring. The wrong kind of people show up. Nobody would choose a cattle stall for their *Christmas Special.* And yet, this is where God decided to enter the world.

It’s a reminder that grace doesn’t need perfect conditions. Grace doesn’t wait for us to have our lives filtered, edited, or cleaned up. Grace is God saying, “You don’t have to be ready. I am.” Which, if we think about it, might be the craziest part of it all. In a culture where we always think we need to be ready, or at least it seems that way, God interrupts us and changes the game plan.

Think of it like the final scene of E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial — the kids, with all their scraped-up knees and BMX bikes, racing against impossible odds to protect this fragile, glowing little being. They’re ordinary, they’re outmatched, and yet the whole story tilts around this small, tender life they’re carrying. Strength and vulnerability together. It’s absurd and beautiful, all at once. That’s grace: God showing up small, fragile, and yet somehow the Savior of the world.

Grace also meets us in our fear. We think we will never be good enough, that no matter what we do, it won’t be perfect. If we only had 10 more minutes, we could make it better. The shepherds knew that fear. Out there in the dark, minds probably racing with what-ifs — wild animals, thieves, accidents, failure. And then suddenly: light. An angel saying the one thing we need to hear most, “Do not be afraid.” And not only one angel, but a multitude of angels. A MULTITUDE! Can you even imagine what that looks like? A multitude of angels singing of God’s love for God’s people. Do not be afraid because God has come into this world and you will never be the same. You don’t have to measure up, perform perfectly, or have everything together. God shows up anyway. God shows up here.  
  
The shepherds didn’t just peek into the manger and shrug. They *went back different.* They left glorifying and praising God. Grace does that — it doesn’t leave us the same. You can’t un-hear the angel song. You can’t unsee the Savior in a manger.

Christmas grace whispers that even in the ordinary — diapers, dishes, long drives, crowded schedules — God is with us. Emmanuel. And once you know that, once you’ve seen grace lying in a manger, you start looking for it everywhere.

Tonight, as you sing the carols, as you light candles in the shadows, as you go home to whatever awaits for you, remember this: Grace has already found you. In the manger, God made a home with us so that nothing, not fear, not failure, not even death, will ever separate us from love.  
  
May this blessing go with you as you enter a world that God loves:

*Blessed are you who came here tired, or hopeful, or just trying to hold it all together. Grace has already found you. Blessed are you who carry grief in one hand and joy in the other. You don’t have to choose. Grace is big enough to hold it all. Blessed are you who wonder if there’s really room for you in this story. There is. There always has been. The manger is for you. May you leave tonight knowing that the God who came small has already made you beloved. And may you carry this grace home, into your ordinary, extraordinary life. Amen.*

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

**Week 1 - Hope**

As we wait for you, O loving God, we place before you our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation.

*Silence for reflection.*

Hope comes from you, O Lord. Reawaken the church for new possibilities even though we face trouble daily, God of hope

**Receive our prayer.**

Hope comes from you, O Lord. You are a God of justice and peace. Guide leaders of the nations to beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. God of hope,

**Receive our prayer.**

Hope comes from you, O Lord. Your goodness is revealed in mountains, valleys, and prairies. Provide favorable weather to sustain all of creation. God of hope,

**Receive our prayer.**

Hope comes from you, O Lord. You stand for the afflicted. Help us bring hope to those who feel hopeless: people gripped by addictions, those incarcerated, those on the margins, and those facing chronic and terminal illness. God of hope,

**Receive our prayer.**

Hope comes from you, O Lord. Overwhelm us with your hope. As we live out faith in our daily life, let those we encounter feel your love through us. When we are weary, wash us in grace. God of hope,

**Receive our prayer.**

Hope comes from you, O Lord. For those who paved the way to your kingdom through hope, we are grateful. Teach us through their example. God of hope,

**Receive our prayer.**

Placing our hope in you, we offer these prayers, trusting your pure goodness.

**Amen.**

**Week 2 - (Promise and) Peace**

As we wait for you, O loving God, we place before you our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation.

*Silence for reflection.*

Peace comes from you, O Lord. As we face times of uncertainty, show us your path of peace. Enable the church to build bridges of peace. We especially pray for our partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Central African Republic. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Peace comes from you, O Lord. We marvel at the diversity of your creation, from sheep and wolves to coyotes and calves. Your hand of mercy is on all creation as we navigate life together. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Peace comes from you, O Lord. Enable world leaders to see that peace is possible. We pray for local, state, national, and international governments. Open their hearts and fill them with peace, hope, joy, and love in abundance. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Peace comes from you, O Lord. In times of depression and anxiety, walk beside us as only you can. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Peace comes from you, O Lord. We pray for the leadership of the church: especially SAMs, deacons, pastors, and bishops. We pray for each person connected to our congregation. Sustain and fill us with your peace that surpasses human understanding. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Peace comes from you, O Lord. Guided by your peace, our ancestors in the faith followed your path. Lead us in that same way so that we might join in their songs of praise. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Trusting in your promise of peace, we lay these prayers before you knowing that you will answer.

**Amen.**

**Week 3 - Joy**

As we wait for you, O loving God, we place before you our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation.

*Silence for reflection.*

God of joy, the church rejoices in the greatness of the Lord. You turn our hearts from fear to faith. Open your church to deep joy. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

God of joy, you made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them. We need water for life, yet we misuse what you have given us. Restore us to live in right relationship with all creation. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

God of joy, you toss the mighty off their thrones and raise up the lowly. You fill the bellies of those without enough to eat, and send the rich away hungry. You frustrate the ways of the wicked. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

God of joy, when we are weak in mind, body, or spirit, bring us strength. We pray for those in our community in need, both for those who have asked, and for those who have not. Help us to recognize the fragments of joy that surround us each day. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

God of joy, the fatigue of this season is real. You are at work through the ministry of our congregation. Meet us in our needs and open us to meet the needs of our neighbors. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

God of joy, our ancestors in the faith knew and passed along the joy they received from you. Guide us to pass it to future generations of your followers. Join us all together in praise at your heavenly throne. God of promise,

**Hear our prayer.**

Joyfully, we trust you wholly to answer our prayers.

**Amen.**

**Advent 4 - Love**

As we wait for you, O loving God, we place before you our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation.

*Silence for reflection.*

Love comes from you, O Lord. You come to us in unexpected ways and places. In these dark days, as the church celebrates your coming among us through the gift of the infant Jesus, make us mindful of the small ways in which you continue to break into our midst. No act is too small. No prayer is too insignificant. Infuse your love into the tiniest spaces and bring transformation. God ofpromise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Love comes from you, O Lord. In some places the snow is falling. In some places, people gather on sandy beaches. In some places creation groans in pain. From the tallest mountains to the tiniest creatures, you are Maker of it all. Hold your beautiful, broken, beloved world in your tender care. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Love comes from you, O Lord. We call you King of Kings and Lord of Lords, yet the nations remain in uproar.  Peace seems far off.  Sometimes, so do you. We cry out with those who cry out. We cry out with all who feel unsafe in their homes, neighborhoods, and nations. Hear our honest prayers. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Love comes from you, O Lord. Some of us are looking forward to the days ahead. Some of us have dreaded these days. We pray for families, for those that will gather and those that experience discord. We pray for people who feel lonely and people who are grieving. We pray for marriages and relationships of all kinds. Hold in your mercy all for whom we pray. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Love comes from you, O Lord. Bless the ministry of this congregation. Bless the friendship we have with one another. We are not perfect, and we pray that your love may show up in our ministry in spite of us. When we gather for our Christmas worship services, send your Holy Spirit so love will be born again in us. Join our voices with the angels, as together we sing of the good news of our Savior’s birth. God of promise,

**Receive our prayer.**

Love comes from you, O Lord. Neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, can separate us from your love. For the saints who have gone before us and for the heavenly home you have prepared for us, we give you thanks. God of promise,

**Receive our prayers.**

Trusting in your steadfast and abiding love, we place these petitions before you asking that your will be done.

**Amen.**

**SONG SUGGESTIONS**

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2025 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT HOPE**

**Gathering:** *Each Winter as the Year Grows Older* ELW 252/WOV 628

**Hymn of the Day:** *Come Now, O Prince of Peace* ELW 247

**Offering:** *Love Came Down at Christmas*(attached insert)Public Domain

**Communion:** *The King Shall Come* ELW 260/LBW 33

*O Day of Peace* ELW 711/WOV 762

**Sending:** *All Earth is Hopeful* ELW 266/WOV 629

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025 2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT PEACE**

**Gathering:** *Prepare the Royal Highway*ELW 264/LBW 26

**Hymn of the Day:** *Hark! A Thrilling Voice is Sounding*ELW 246/LBW 37

**Offering:** *Love Came Down at Christmas*(attached insert)Public Domain

**Communion:** *Blessed Be the God of Israel*ELW 250/WOV 725

*One Bread, One Body*ELW 497/LBW 33

**Sending:** *Light Dawns on a Weary World*ELW 726

*The King Shall Come*ELW 260/LBW 33

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2025    3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT           JOY**

**Gathering:** *The Angel Gabriel*ELW 265/WOV 632

**Hymn of the Day:** *Christ Be Our Light* ELW 715

*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* ELW 490/LBW 198

**Offering:** *Love Came Down at Christmas* (attached insert) Public Domain

**Communion:** *Canticle of the Turning* ELW 723

*My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness Lord* ELW251/WOV 730

**Sending:** *Heaven is Singing for Joy* ELW 664

*He Comes to Us as One Unknown* ELW 737/WOV 768

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025    4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT LOVE**

**Gathering:** *Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn*ELW 242/WOV 633

**Hymn of the Day:** *Savior of the Nations Come* ELW 263/LBW 28

**Offering:** *Love Came Down at Christmas*(attached insert) Public Domain

**Communion:** *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* ELW 257/LBW 34

*Peace Came to Earth*ELW285/WOV 641

**Sending:** *Joy to the World* ELW 267/LBW 39

**A sheet music with text and notes

AI-generated content may be incorrect.**

**SONG SUGGESTIONS FOR CHILDREN**

**Twinkle Twinkle Little Star**

Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are

Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky

Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are

**Away In A Manger**

Away in a manger no crib for a bed

The little lord Jesus lay down his sweet head

The stars in the sky look down where he lay

The little lord Jesus asleep on the hay

**Baby Jesus In the Barn (to Old McDonald)**

Baby Jesus in the barn  J E S U S

And in his barn he had a cow/donkey/sheep  J E S U S

With a moo moo/hee haw/baa baa here

And a moo moo/hee haw/baa baa there

Here a moo/hee haw/baa

There a moo/hee haw/baa

Everywhere a moo moo/hee haw/baa baa

Baby Jesus in the barn  J E S U S

**Go Tell It On the Mountain x2**

Go tell it on the mountain

Over the hills

And every where

Go tell it on the mountain

That Jesus Christ is born

**We Wish You a Merry Christmas x2**

We wish you a Merry Christmas x3

And a Happy New Year!

**SAMPLE CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE**

*This sample service is an example of how you can adapt the worship resources to your setting, and does not include a time for a sermon.*

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Welcome, and thank you for joining us for worship this evening. May all the blessings of the Christmas season follow you into the new year!

**Gathering Hymn:** ELW #271*I’m So Glad Each Christmas Eve*

**CALL TO WORSHIP** L: We come with wonder in our hearts at the mystery that God’s grace is for us.  
 **C: We wonder if God can really do all the work.** L: We come with wonder in our hearts at the mystery that God’s grace is for us.  
 **C: We are focused on getting everything accomplished by a deadline.** L: During this season of Wonder, let us remember that God, in love, brought salvation down to the ground floor for us.  
 **C: God’s grace is found in a manger.**

**LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE**L: God’s Grace is for Us.

**C: God says, “I will keep my promises.”**

L: God’s grace is for us.

**C: God is our righteousness.**

L: God’s grace is for us.

**C: God teaches us God’s way.**

L: We light Christ candle to bring light to the world that no darkness can overcome.

**C: God’s grace brings new beginnings to the world.**

**Song to Light the christ candle**

**Opening Prayer:**

Let us pray. **Almighty God, with love for your creation, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus’ presence, and in the last, by your grace, shine upon us the brightness of the glory of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.** **Amen.**

**Readings and Hymn Responses**

**Luke 2:1-5** In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

**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.

**Luke 2:6-7** 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

**Away in a Manger**

Away in a manger No crib for His bed

The little Lord Jesus Lay down His sweet head

The stars in the sky Look down where He lay

The little Lord Jesus Asleep on the hay

**Luke 2:8-14** 8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

**The First Noel**

The First Noel, the Angels 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

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, Born is the King of Israel!

**Luke 2:15-20** 15When 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.” 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**Go, Tell It On the Mountain**

Go, tell it on the mountain Over the hills and everywhere

Go, tell it on the mountain That Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching O'er silent flocks by night Behold throughout the heavens There shone a holy light

**Offering/Offertory Hymn:** *What Child Is This* #40

**The Prayers**

L: Glory to God in the highest,

**C: and peace to God’s people on earth.**

L: Blessed are you, Prince of Peace. You rule the earth with truth and justice.

**C: Send your gift of peace to all nations of the world.**

L: Blessed are you, Wonderful Counselor. You enlighten the heart with steadfast love.

C: **Enliven your church that it might bear good tidings of great joy to all people.**

L: Blessed are you, Emmanuel. You promise to be with us even to the end of the age.

**C: Open our eyes to see your presence in all who are hungry**, **lonely, or homeless.**

L: Blessed are you, Son of Mary. You share our humanity.

**C: Have mercy on the sick, the dying, and all who suffer this day.**

L: Blessed are you, Son of God.

**C: You dwell among us as the Word made flesh. Reveal yourself to us in word and sacrament that we may bear your light to all the world. Amen.**

**Holy Communion**

**POST COMMUNION PRAYER**

We thank you, wondrous God, for Jesus, God with us, in these gifts of bread and wine. As we have shared this feast of love, strengthen us to share your love with all the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Lighting of the Candles**

*The minister lights their candle from the center Advent candle, the Christ candle, which symbolizes Christ, the Light of the world of whom John’s gospel speaks, then their own candle. The ushers light their candles from the minister’s candle, then light the candle of each worshipper nearest the aisle.* ***The lighted candle is never tilted****, but is held upright when giving light to another.*

**The Gospel of the Incarnation: John 1:1-14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

**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 Al-le-lu-ia!

Christ the Savior is born!

Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night

Son of God, oh, 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

**Blessing**

May you be filled with the wonder of Mary,

and know that God’s grace is for all people.

May you follow with the obedience of Joseph,

believing that God is preparing us for grace.

May the joy of the angels pull us together

as a community of grace-filled people.

May the message of the shepherds give you joy

in the new beginnings that come to us this night.

And when you behold the child in the manger,

may you be blessed in knowing

the grace of God made flesh,

living among us so that we would know the wondrous power

of God: Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

*The candles are extinguished; lights are turned on.*

**JOY TO THE WORLD**

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her king

let ev'ry heart prepare him room

and heav'n and nature sing

and heav'n and nature sing

and heav'n, and heav’n and nature sing

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!

Let all their songs employ

while fields and floods

rocks, hills, and plains

repeat the sounding joy

repeat the sounding joy

repeat, repeat the sounding joy

No more let sin and sorrow grow

or 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, and wonders of his love

**SENDING**

God’s grace is for you! Go, share the good news.

**Jesus Christ is born. Alleluia!**

**LESSONS AND CAROLS FOR CHRISTMAS**

**Call to Worship**

**Come! Look upon the baby Jesus, cradled in the arms of his mother.**

Seeing this wondrous sight, may our hearts be comforted, and our spirits filled with peace.

**Come! Listen to choirs of angels announcing good news to all people.**

Hearing this marvelous song, may we too sing: Glory to God in the highest!

**Come! Receive this ancient story in your heart, not as history but as a gift.**

Opening our hearts to this great mystery, may Christ be born in us today.

**Lighting of the Advent Wreath**

*If using this service, on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, or the Sunday After Christmas also*

*light the Christ Candle at this time.*

**Hymn:** O Come All Ye Faithful

**Opening Prayer**

Let us pray. **We come to adore you, mighty God, who is not afraid to be small. Bless us in our celebration of your coming as the Christ child. Help us to look towards you always with wonder and awe towards you and your merciful love. Amen.**

**THE NATIVITY**

*Note: An interactive element can be incorporated into this service. Members of the*

*congregation can bring forward the figurines representing each character as the hymn in sung for characters section and place them in the congregation Nativity scene. For example: while the assembly sings Away in the Manger, someone brings forward Baby Jesus and places him in the congregations Nativity Scene. If adapting this service: a pageant or children’s program when the reading is read for each figure students dressed as each character can come forward.*

**Reading:** Luke 1: 26-38

**Hymn:** Lo’ How a Rose is Blooming

**Reading:** Matthew 1: 11-25

**Hymn:** Once in Royal David’s City

**Reading:** Luke 2: 1-8

Hymn: Away in a Manger

**Sharing the Peace**

The peace of the Christ child be with you always. **And also, with You!**

**Reading:** Luke 2: 8-20

**Hymn:** Angels from the Realms of Glory

**Reading:** Matthew 2: 1, 9-12

**Hymn:** The First Noel

**Offering**

**Offering Hymn: What Child is This?**

**Offering Prayer**

Loving God, you came among the poor to bring the riches of your grace. As you have blessed us with your many gifts, let them be blessing for others as heaven and earth rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

**CANDLELIGHTING**

*Note: If you do not wish to deal with the mess of candles, consider using glow sticks or battery-operated candles. Glow sticks are quite a fun addition, especially in the context of a children’s pageant.*

**Reading:** John 1:1-5

**Hymn:** Silent Night

**Blessing**

May the God of the angels, who heralded Christ's birth,

bring joy to your hearts this day and always. **Amen**

**Dismissal**

Go in Peace! Jesus Christ is Born!

**Thanks Be to God!**

**FAITH IN THE HOME IDEAS**

**Create Portable Advent Wreaths for Home Use**

Use an Altoid tin (you can leave them as they are or spray paint them to a uniform color, maybe blue or silver) or small metal container (check at Dollar Tree). Air-dry green clay to make a wreath and four blue (or any color will do) birthday candles complete the kit. Form a circle from the clay and push the candles into the clay until they stand firmly. Wait for the clay to dry and remove the candles to store them in your tin.

**Service Project Idea**

Throughout the week collect a variety of items based on the following prompts to donate to your local food bank or free little pantry.

Week 1-Hope: Something that you hope you will get to eat this week.

Week 2-Peace: Something that has pieces or is served in pieces.

Week 3-Joy: Something that makes you smile when you get to eat it.

Week 4-Love: Something that someone you love thinks is delicious.

Christmas-Jesus’ Birthday: Cake mix, frosting, and candles in a disposal cake pan.

**Advent Paper Chain**

*See next pages for instructions*

|  |
| --- |
| ***ADVENT PAPER CHAIN USING READINGS FROM THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY FOR ADVENT 2025***  *INSTRUCTIONS: COPY THESE SHEETS (EVEN NUMBER DAYS) ON PAPER COLOR #1.*  *CUT STRIPS AND MAKE A CHAIN BY TAPING OR STAPLING STRIPS TOGETHER.*  *EACH DAY, REMOVE A LINK IN THE CHAIN AND READ THE VERSE.* |
| Nov 20  **36**“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2024%3A36-44&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23991a)] but only the Father.  **44**Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” Matthew 24:36, 44 |
| Dec 2  I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” 2 8For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.” 9For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. Psalm 122:1, 8 |
| Dec 4 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. 2The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. 6band a little child shall lead them. Isaiah 11:1, 6b |
| Dec 6  **13**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.  Romans 14:13 |
| Dec 8  **4**Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.  Isaiah 35:4a |
| Dec 10 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, 6who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them who keeps faith forever; 7who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; 8the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. Psalm 146:5-8 |
| Dec 12  14Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.  Isaiah 7:14 |
| Dec 14 4Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” Matthew 11:4-6 |
| Dec 16  9Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish once these waters reach there. It will become fresh, and everything will live where the river goes.  Ezekiel 47:9 |
| Dec 18 **12**When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. **13**He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. **14**I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.” **17**In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David. 2 Samuel 7:12-14, 17 |
| Dec 20 **4**But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5**in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. **6**And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” **7**So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir through God.  Galatians 4:4-7 |
| Dec 22 **21**But there the Lord in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams where no galley with oars can go nor stately ship can pass.**22**For the Lord is our judge; the Lord is our ruler; the Lord is our king; he will save us.  Isaiah 33:21-22 |
| Dec 24 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them [the shepherds], and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” Luke 2:9-12 |

|  |
| --- |
| *INSTRUCTIONS: COPY THESE SHEETS (ODD NUMBER DAYS) ON PAPER COLOR #2* |
| Dec 1  **4**He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. **5**O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!  Isaiah 2:4-5 |
| Dec 3  “Let us then throw off[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2013%3A11-14&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-28264a)] the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; **13**let us walk decently as in the day,”  Romans 13:12b-13 |
| Dec 5  **18**Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. **19**Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth.  Amen and Amen.  Psalm 72:18-19 |
| Dec 7  In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, **2**“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” **3**This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”  Matthew 3:1-3 |
| Dec 9  [Mary said,” “My soul magnifies the Lord, **47**and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, **48**for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, **49**for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name;**50** indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.”  Luke 1:46b-50 |
| Dec 11  Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. **8**You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. **9**  James 5:7-9 |
| Dec 13  **2b** up your might, and come to save us! **3**Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.  Psalm 80:2b-3 |
| Dec 15  Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  Romans 1:7b |
| Dec 17  **16**These are the things that you shall do: speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, **17**do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord.”  Zechariah 8:16-17 |
| Dec 19  **26**for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. **27**As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28**There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.  Galatians 3:26-28 |
| Dec 21  “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.”  Matthew 1:20b-21 |
| Dec 23  “Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.” **13**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us**14**in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.  Galatians 3:12b-14 |
| Dec 25  14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.  John 1:14, 16-17 |

**GETTING READY FOR CHRISTMAS**

*Written by Kathi Nygaard © 2019*

**THE BIG IDEA:** The Christmas Program takes place as if it is a rehearsal. Select your roles ahead of time, but act as if you are making those decisions on the fly.

**Props:**

A big ladder, a pole with a star dangling from it. A couple kids trying to get the star in place.

A few others working on putting together a stable: Boards, tape measure, hammer, saw, etc.

Some kids trying to draw or paint a scene of Bethlehem in the background: paper, paints, etc. (I used all black wrapping paper and traced the silhouette of Bethlehem on the back and then they attached that to white butcher paper)

A manger with straw

A baby doll and a blanket/fabric

6 Bibles with readings marked

Nativity costumes

Signs with Characters on them and duct tape

**Characters:**

A coordinator and a couple of assistants (Adults or high school kids)

6 readers: (you can have them do multiple readings if you have fewer kids)

Mary

Joseph

Some shepherds

Some angels

Some Wise Men

**Congregational Songs:**

O Little Town of Bethlehem, Angels We Have Heard On High

**Kid Songs:** Emmanuel, Away in a Manger, Silent Night

**Special Music: The** Angel Gabriel, Rise Up Shepherds

SING THE SONGS AS YOU GO ALONG WITH THE “REHEARSAL”

**COORDINATOR:** Thank you everyone for coming to rehearsal for our Christmas Program. Christmas is when we celebrate the birth of Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem long, long ago.

So, here’s the deal. The program is already this Sunday, and we haven’t even practiced yet! We need all of you to make this a success. We need builders and organizers and readers and singers and people to act out the parts in the story. Something for everyone!

**ASSISTANT 1:** Big kids. You know this story, so I need your help with getting our scene ready.

You 2, hang up the star. I need a couple of you to build a stable and a few of you to make a backdrop with Bethlehem. Got it?

[The set designers get in place and start working on the props. Set up the ladder. Throughout the production try a variety of methods and means to hang the star-ribbon, string, wire, etc.)

**ASSISTANT 2:** We will also need to practice a few songs, but it’s probably important that everybody knows the story first, especially the younger kids.

So, let’s pick a couple of readers (assign 6 readers and give them Bibles with larger print versions of the readings placed inside. They will read their selections as they appear in the script).

[During songs, kids working on back drops, stop and sing along.

[For special group pieces, have the other kids just sit down and listen.]

**READER 1:** Luke 1:26b-33 The Angel Gabriel Visits Mary

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

[Pick out characters with each section that is read. Give them signs with their character to either hold or tape them to them-maybe with duct tape.]

MARY

**MARY**

**COORDINATOR:** While \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ reads this part of the story, Mary comes out and stands here. When the reading ends, go out that way.

**COORDINATOR:** While \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ reads this part of the story, the angel Gabriel comes out and stands here. When the reading ends, go out that way.

**THE ANGEL GABRIEL**

[Here pretend we can’t think of a song for this and then later one of the kids suggests “The Angel Gabriel” after thumbing through the hymnal- it’s in both ELW and WOV. It will become a time filler during the transition]

**READER 2:** Matthew 1:20b-23 An Angel Appears in Joseph’s Dream

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, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” 22 This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: 23 “Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will name him Emmanuel,” which means “God with us.”

**SONG:** Emmanuel by Bob McGe. Text and music © 1976 C. A. Music, a div. of C. A. Records, Inc. All rights reserved. ASCAP (kids)

**COORDINATOR:** While \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ reads this part of the story, Joseph comes out and stands here. When the reading ends, go out that way.

**JOSEPH**

**READER 3:** Luke 2:1-7 Jesus is Born in Bethlehem

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place whileQuirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

**COORDINATOR:** While \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ reads this part of the story, Mary & Joseph come out and sit here by the manger. Pick up the baby Jesus doll (hidden behind the manger) and put him in the manger.

**SONG:** O Little Town of Bethlehem (Congregation)

**READER 4:** Luke 2:8-14 Angels Appear to Shepherds in the Fields

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

**COORDINATOR:** OK. Stop after that first verse. While \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ reads this part of the story, the shepherds come out and sit here.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | SHEPHERD | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | SHEPHERD |  | SHEPHERD | |

9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ANGEL-THE ONE WHO TALKS | **COORDINATOR:** While \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ reads this part of the story, the first angel comes out and stands by the shepherds. |

13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | ANGEL (BUNCH) | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | ANGEL (BUNCH) |  | ANGEL  (BUNCH) | | |  | | --- | | **COORDINATOR:** While \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  reads this part of the story, the rest of the angels come out and stand with the first one. | |

SONG: Angels We Have Heard on High (Congregation)

**COORDINATOR:** After the song, the angels leave that way.

**READER 5:** Luke 2:15-20 The Shepherds Go to See Baby Jesus

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

**COORDINATOR:** While \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ reads this part of the story, the shepherds go kneel by Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus.

**SONG:** Rise Up Shepherds and Follow (Special Music) Other kids just sit down and listen

**READER 6:** Matthew 2:1-12 Magi Come to Worship the King Jesus

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

6Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, the Magi returned to their country by another route.

**SONG:** The First Noel

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | WISE MAN | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | WISE MAN |  | WISE MAN | | |  | | --- | | **COORDINATOR:** When \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ gets to the part of the story after they visit King Herod, the Magi look for their star and then take their presents to give to Baby Jesus. | |

**ASSISTANT 1**: OK-that seems good. Anything else before the program on Sunday?

Costumes? Right. Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, Wisemen-Wear

Bathrobes and put a towel on your head. Wise men. Bring a present. Wrap it up nicely. Angels. I don’t know. Put a dishtowel on like a cape and wrap some tinsel around your head.

**OLDER KID:** (*Thumbing through a hymnal*) Hey, I found a song for that first part. It’s called “The Angel Gabriel”

**ASSISTANT 2**: Perfect. Younger kids, you can go home. Don’t forget your costumes. See you on Sunday. [They exit to the rear and put on their costumes with assistance from adults]

[At this point, the silhouette of the Bethlehem skyline should be completed and displayed]

Older kids, let’s practice that song.

Song: The Angel Gabriel (older kids)

ASSISTANT 1: Good. We’ve got a couple of days we can get the backdrop finished. Thanks. That’s enough for today.

\*If you need more time for the kids to get into costume, add an instrumental piece (O Holy Night) or another congregational song like It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

[Kid on the ladder trying to get the star in the right place stays there. Everyone else exits to get candles.]

[Kid on the ladder finally gets the star in place. -or not. It isn’t a deal breaker here]

**COORDINATOR** (*looking upward*): Dear, God, this all seems a little hectic and unorganized. Please let it turns out ok.

**KID FROM THE LADDER**: Oh, I think it will.

**SONG:** Away in the Manger

[Music for Away in the Manger -probably at least a full verse-starts to play as Mary and Joseph take their spots by the manger in costume.]

[Angels, shepherds and wise men enter, and they all sing.]

[Older kids join them with lit candles to sing Silent Night.

PRACTICING FOR CHRISTMAS

example photos



Away In A Manger Silent Night

**ADVENT WREATH CHRISTMAS PROGRAM**

**MATERIALS:**

* 20 feet of greenery/garland (smaller pieces okay) to make the wreath on the floor.
* 4 blue or 3 purple and 1 pink (joy candle) t-shirts. If you don’t want to buy new shirts, you can turn other shirts inside out if they have something on them.
* 1 white t-shirt
* Fabric paint to label “candle” shirts or paper signs to hang on shirts (hope, peace, joy, love)
* 5 “flame” hats or headbands (suggestion: make flame hats out of paper plates-http://www.drawn2bcreative.com/pentecost-holy-spirit-hats-from-paper-plates/)

**CHARACTERS:**

* 2 narrators (can be split up or more)
* 5 candles (non-speaking)
* Stage Helpers to lay out garland and put on flame hats

**MUSIC:**

* “Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah” Congregation sing
* “He Came Down”
* “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy”

**“He Came Down” (sung by kids one verse at a time, and congregation later)**

He came down so that we may have hope/peace/joy/love/life

He came down so that we may have hope/peace/joy/love/life

He came down so that we may have hope/peace/joy/love/life

Hallelujah forever more

**“I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy”**

I’ve got hope, hope, hope, hope down in my heart, down in my heart, down in my heart, I’ve got hope, hope, hope, hope down in my heart,

down in my heart to stay

I’ve got the peace of baby Jesus down in my heart, down in my heart, down in my heart, I’ve got the peace of baby Jesus down in my heart,

down in my heart to stay

I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart, down in my heart, down in my heart, I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart,

down in my heart to stay

I’ve got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus down in my heart, down in my heart, down in my heart, I’ve got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus down in my heart,

down in my heart to stay

**Advent Wreath Christmas Program (2 narrators)**

MUSIC: “Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah” congregational hymn-during this song, kids take their places while Advent Wreath is lit.

**Reader 1:** Advent wreaths have been around for hundreds of years, but they look a little different today than they did at first. In fact, they have changed several times since they were first used. But since we have a time limit, we’re mostly going to talk about the way most advent candles are arranged today.

**Reader 2:** The advent candles are typically arranged in a wreath, the circular shape representing Christ’s eternal victory over death. The evergreens on the wreath represent God’s faithfulness to the people.

*(During speaking: place garland for the wreath on the floor—tape marks on the floor ahead of time will make this easier)*

**Reader 1:** The first candle is the “hope candle.” The Israelites had a pretty tough time in the Old Testament. Some bad things happened to them, and even when God made it better, they made some poor choices. God sent them prophets to tell them about how a Messiah would come. The Israelites spent a lot of years waiting and hoping for that Savior.

*A kid wearing a royal blue shirt labelled “HOPE” comes out during the reading and stands in the wreath. During the music, someone puts a “flaming” headband or hat on his/her head.*

**Reader 2:** We get to experience just a little bit of their waiting as we celebrate the season of Advent. But we tend to skip ahead to Christmas instead of getting ready for baby Jesus during these four Sundays. Think about it: when people have a baby, they spend MONTHS getting ready. And we struggle to even spend four weeks preparing for the most important baby EVER. I HOPE we can all slow down a little bit and enjoy the beauty of Advent before we jump right into Christmas.

*“HE CAME DOWN SO THAT WE MAY HAVE HOPE”*

**Reader 1:** The second candle is the “peace candle.” The shepherds were so scared when the angels showed up, that the angel had to tell the shepherds “do not fear . . . and on earth peace among those whom [God] favors.” And really, can you blame the shepherds? Nobody really wanted to be around them, and all of a sudden, heavenly beings show up?

*A kid wearing a royal blue shirt labelled “PEACE” comes out and stands in the wreath, approximately ¼ of the way around the circle from “HOPE.” During the music, someone puts a “flaming” headband or hat on his/her head.)*

**Reader 2:** Besides the angels coming in peace, Christ *is* our peace. Most of us tend to spend the month of December rushing around shopping and going to parties and squeezing in way too many extra things, but it is meant to be a time to find spiritual PEACE while we reaffirm our HOPE in God.

*“HE CAME DOWN SO THAT WE MAY HAVE PEACE”*

**Reader 1:** The “joy candle” is the third candle that we light in the advent wreath. In the past, this candle was sometimes pink since the church’s color to represent joy is rose, but today all the candles around the advent wreath are royal blue, which is the church’s color for the season of Advent. Are you taking time to appreciate the joy that the season of Advent represents?

*A kid wearing a royal blue shirt labelled “JOY” comes out and stands in the wreath, across from “HOPE” and approximately ¼ of the way around the circle from “PEACE.” During the music, someone puts a “flaming” headband or hat on his/her head.*

**Reader 2:** Think back to how we talked about waiting for a baby: we should be so excited that we get to experience Christ. If you are a parent or a grandparent or even just know someone who had a baby, think back to before that baby had arrived. That family was probably really happy knowing that the little one was on the way. Are we that JOYful about celebrating Christ’s birth every year? Are we allowing ourselves to be filled with PEACE during this time of waiting? We should spend the season of Advent full of HOPE for all the great things that God can do through us.

*“HE CAME DOWN SO THAT WE MAY HAVE JOY”*

**Reader 1:** The fourth candle is the “love candle.” Think about those little babies again or think of your favorite person—it can be anyone. Somebody you couldn’t possibly love more. Got it? God loves them more than you do. God loves you more than you love them.

*A kid wearing a royal blue shirt labelled “LOVE” comes out and stands in the wreath, across from “PEACE” and approximately ¼ of the way around the circle from “HOPE” and “JOY.” During the music, someone puts a “flaming” headband or hat on his/her head.*

**Reader 2:** We know that God *is* LOVE; we should find JOY in that incredible gift; if we are at PEACE with God, we can HOPE in all the promises that have been fulfilled and that we know God will continue to keep in the future.

*“HE CAME DOWN SO THAT WE MAY HAVE PEACE”*

**Reader 1:** The candle in the center of the wreath is the Christ candle. The candle is white to show Christ’s pure love and life.

*A kid in a white shirt labelled “CHRIST” comes out and stands in the center of the circle. During the music, someone puts a “flaming” headband or hat on his/her head.*

**Reader 2:** And that’s how he was able to fulfill all of those prophecies from the Old Testament that people put their HOPE in. That’s how he was able to give us PEACE that he keeps his promises. That’s why we can trust in the JOY that he gives us in eternal life. And that’s how we can receive his LOVE and also share it with others. Because CHRIST us everlasting life.

*“HE CAME DOWN SO THAT WE MAY HAVE LIFE”*

**Reader 1:** Now that all our candles are lit, I should mention that those flames also remind us of something important. The light from the candles represents the light of Christ in the world.

**Reader 2:** How does Christ’s light get to all the world? Through the Holy Spirit, Christ’s light shines through each and every one of us, and lights up the world with hope, peace, joy, love, and Jesus.

**Reader 1 and 2:** Please join us in singing “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy”