

# Home Advent Candlelighting Services

One popular family practice is the lighting of the family Advent wreath. Many churches have wreaths that are lit each week as church members read passages of scripture or sing an Advent carol. You can bring this practice into your home. Begin by having an Advent party. As a family make a wreath out of greenery and attach it to a styrofoam or straw base, which can be found in any craft store. Inside the wreath, place four candleholders with four purple or blue candles (or three purple [blue] and one pink candle for the third week). In the center place a Christ candle, found at many Christian bookstores, or a big white candle to be lit on Christmas Day.

The devotions that follow are based on the traditional themes for each week of Advent and use the Revised Common Lectionary readings for each Sunday. They may be read once a week at Sunday dinner or some other weekly meeting time, or read each day in the morning or evening as a time of family devotion. Building this practice into your family life is a gift all will enjoy.

## **FIRST SUNDAY • NOV • 27** **Are You Ready for Christmas?**

READ Mark 12:24–37.

INVITE everyone to name ways they prepare for Christmas.

REFLECT on the following thought:

Many children try especially hard to be good before Christmas so that Santa Claus will bring them everything they want. But the good news about Jesus' coming to Earth is that God loves us no matter what, even though God does indeed want us to love others and treat one another well. And although God may not give us everything we want, we believe God gives us good gifts.

LIGHT the Candle of Hope or Preparation. (If using a pink candle, light the candle opposite the pink candle.)

SING “Christians All, Your Lord Is Coming.”

ASK everyone if there is someone or something they want to talk with God about. Suggest that praying for others is a good way to prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming.

PRAY, beginning with a moment of silence, for the requests just mentioned or with family members offering their requests in prayer. Close with your own prayer or the following:

God, thank you for the journey to Christmas we make each year during Advent. Help us look for you in all our preparations, in all the ways this season calls us to love one another. Keep us ready for your surprise appearances each day. Amen.

SING “People, Look East.”

## **SECOND SUNDAY • DEC • 4**

### **God Answers Our Prayers**

READ Mark 1:1–8.

SAY: Last week we talked about how we could prepare for Christmas. We suggested one way is to pray for others. Today, let's think about how God answers our prayers.

REFLECT on the following meditation:

For many centuries the people of Israel prayed for the Messiah to come. He was expected to deliver the nation from its enemies and to bring peace. The Old Testament also tells of one who would prepare the way for the Lord's coming.

In those times much effort was made to fill in the potholes and to remove trees and rocks from the road before a visit from a king or queen. God sent John the Baptist not to clear the roads of obstacles, but to clear the hearts and minds of the people. He said to them, "after me will come one more powerful than I, and He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit, like the wind, can't be seen. But the Spirit moves in our lives just as powerfully as a gust of wind blows a kite high in the sky. One of the gifts of the Spirit is peace.

LIGHT the Candles of Hope and Peace. (Relight the first candle and the one next to it.)

SING "Kum ba Yah."

PRAY: Come Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove. May your blessed peace fill our hearts and our home, and deliver all who are imprisoned in spirit or body. Amen.

SING "Come, O Long-expected Jesus."

## **THIRD SUNDAY • DEC • 11**

### **Missing a Blessing**

READ Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11.

SAY: Everyone wants their family and neighbors to be proud of them. I don't think Jesus was any different. But it isn't always easy to return home. Jesus, we are told, visited Nazareth in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's see what happened.

On the Sabbath, Jesus worshiped in the synagogue. He was asked to read the scripture lesson. He read a passage from the book of the prophet Isaiah that begins: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."

At first they were surprised. The people of Nazareth could be proud of their town's native son. They had heard stories of the miracles he had performed elsewhere; surely he would do the same here at home. Then surprise gave way to anger. How dare this carpenter's son try to tell them how to live! Where did he get these powers? If he can heal the sick, let him do it here. Jesus was saddened by their lack of faith and left home never to return.

ASK: Did the people of Nazareth want to hear God's message or just "get stuff" from God, such as healings and other miracles? Do we ever approach prayer or worship as a time to "get" rather than a time to give or to listen?

LIGHT the Candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy. (Relight the first two candles and light the third or pink candle.)

SING "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence."

PRAY: Stir up your power, God, and with great might come among us. Let your bountiful grace and mercy help and deliver us from our sins through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

SING "Spirit of the Living God."

## **FOURTH SUNDAY • DEC • 18**

### **The Word of God: Believe It or Not**

READ Luke 1:26–38.

REFLECT on the following meditation:

The angel Gabriel breaks the news to young Mary: she would give birth to a son. She asks, "How can this be?" Zechariah responded similarly when told that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, though she had never been able to have a baby before. The difference between Mary and Zechariah was that Mary believed, and Zechariah did not. Most of us today probably resemble Zechariah more than we do Mary.

Mary was probably a teenager, and recently engaged to Joseph. What would she tell him? Would he believe her story? Would her parents disown her? Yet Mary said, "let it be with me according to your word." Also, she could not know how hard her life would be as Jesus' mother. She could not know that she would be forced to escape to Egypt to protect Jesus from King Herod, that she would have to let Jesus go as he ministered to people, and that eventually she would kneel at a cross on which her son had been nailed. Do you think her answer would have been different had she known her future?

LIGHT the Candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. (Light four candles.)

SING "My Soul Gives Glory to My God."

PRAY: God of love, God of light, help us have the faith of Mary that we can trust you completely, even when the future is unclear or even scary. Let us see the light of your love this week and always. Amen.

SING "Glory Be to the Father."

## **CHRISTMAS DAY • DEC • 25**

### **God's Love Revealed**

READ John 1:1–14.

ASK: What does the word "flesh" mean to you?

SAY: Jesus was born of a woman, born as a baby just as we all were. He ate, drank, worked, slept, laughed, cried, grew up and grew older, and finally he died. The Word of God became flesh and lived among us.

Jesus walked on Earth for a little more than thirty years before returning to be with God our Creator. Jesus did not abandon us. He gives the gift of his presence in the Spirit. He is Emmanuel, God with us, now and forever.

LIGHT the Candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love and the Christ Candle

SING "Joy to the World."

SAY: A poem by Howard Thurman says that the "work" of Christmas now begins, now that we have celebrated Jesus' birth, now that we have been reminded of the great gift of love God gave in sending Jesus to Earth as a human being. We are charged with spreading the good news of God's love.

PRAY: Christ our Savior is born. Hallelujah.

SING "Go, Tell It on the Mountain."