

Lighting the Advent Wreath

The First Sunday of Advent



Introduction

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the time of waiting and preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth. As part of our Advent waiting, we will light a candle in our Advent wreath each week, reminding us of the light of the world that is to come.

The candle for this first week of Advent is the candle of hope. Today the flame of this candle reminds us of the hope that came to this world when God came to be with us in the person of Jesus.

Jesus said, "I came so that everyone would have life, life in all its fullness."

One purple candle is lit, as the following is said:

Prayer

Let us pray.

Eternal God, thank you for the hope you have brought to us. As we await the coming of our Savior, give us the courage to hope. Help us be witnesses of that hope and shine the light of hope for those living in darkness. Speak to each of us this day, and fill us with Advent hope as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth. Amen.

Adapted from liturgy resources by:
Rev. Karen Ware Jackson
Emma Morgan
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Lighting the Advent Wreath: Group Reflections

The First Sunday of Advent

We begin by revisiting this morning's reading from the prophet Jeremiah. Prophets were sent by God to deliver difficult truths to God's people when they had gone astray, and to offer hope for redemption.

Scripture: Jeremiah 33:14-16

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

Discussion

In your discussion group, reflect on the following prompts.

Conversation Tips: Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

Share a story about a particular time and place when you spoke a difficult truth to another person or group. If you have never done that, speak about about a time you heard a difficult truth.

Share a story about a particular time and place when you felt your voice was silenced, misinterpreted, or not heard. What did it feel like before and after speaking your truth? What did it feel like when you were unheard, silenced, or misinterpreted?

What did it feel like to hear someone else's story? What did you learn?

Lighting the Advent Wreath

The Second Sunday of Advent



Introduction

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. In addition to the candle of hope, we light a second purple candle this week. The candle for this second week of Advent is the candle of peace.

Along with the prophets and people through the ages, we dream of a world of peace and justice. We share John the Baptist's dream of making crooked paths straight, of making a smooth highway broad enough for all God's people to move on together in peace and harmony. Today the flame of this candle reminds us of the special kind of peace that Jesus brings into this world.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Two purple candles are lit, as the following is said:

Prayer

Let us pray.

Loving God, thank you for the peace you have brought to us. Give us the desire, the willingness, and the courage to be part of your dream for a world of peace and justice. Help us be witnesses of your peace and shine the light of peace for those living in darkness. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

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Lighting the Advent Wreath: Group Reflections

The Second Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Cantic 16, The Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David. Through his holy prophets he promised of old, that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, to set us free from the hands of our enemies, Free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life. You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, To give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Group Discussion

The coming of Christ is so close we can sense him. Dwell for a moment with your own longing for Jesus' coming.

After some silence, as a whole group, sing or speak this hymn:

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lowly exile here, until the son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*

Pause and silently imagine communities near and far who wait for ransom and relief: refugees, immigrants with or without documentation, prisoners and detainees in the criminal justice system, victims of human trafficking, and many others.

Conversation Tips: Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

Now reflect as a group:

- What unjust systems and institutions in our society disproportionately target people of color? In a posture of deep prayer, name these systems aloud. Name and capture them.
- Which of these systems and institutions most intersects with the life of your church or community? Agree on no more than two.

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The Third Sunday of Advent

Introduction

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. In addition to the candles of hope and peace, we light the pink candle this week, which is the candle of joy. We join with the writers of the Bible in shouting for joy that God is always with us. The child of Mary brought a message of compassion and healing, the things that make for real joy. That joy spreads as we follow Jesus' words and actions.

Jesus said "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete."

Two purple candles and one pink candle are lit, as the following is said:

Prayer

Let us pray.

Dear God, Thank you for the joy you have brought to us. In this season of giving, and on every day of the year, help us to say and do those things that will bring Christ's joy to others. Help us shine the light of joy for those living in darkness. Amen.

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Lighting the Advent Wreath: Group Reflections

The Third Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

Discussion

Conversation Tips: Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

Reflect on ways your congregation engages in loving your neighbors, within and outside the church. Make a list of your church's most significant ministries (no more than three).

Now consider your conversations over the first two weeks. Think about people groups - racial, ethnic, and cultural, but also socioeconomic, ideological, and theological - with whom your church has experienced separation or even tension.

- With which of these do you wish your church would develop deeper relationship?
- How could the lessons from your church's significant ministries (listed above) help you to approach the challenge of forming these challenging new relationships? How are those experiences a gift you can offer?
- What new learning and practice would help you to prepare for relationship across difference and division? Book study? Dismantling racism training? Story-telling training? Pilgrimage? Prayer? (For specific information, check www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation)

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The Fourth Sunday of Advent



Introduction

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. In addition to the candles for hope, peace, and joy, we light the final purple candle this week, which is the candle of love. Today the flame of this candle reminds us of the love that came to this world when Jesus was born and his presence with us. It reminds us of God's promise to be with us and to love us, now and always. Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; remain in my love."

Three purple candles and one pink candle are lit, as the following is said:

Prayer

Let us pray.

Loving God, your mercy and compassion endure forever. Thank you for the love you have brought to us and your promise to be with us always. Open our hearts, that we may receive your love; and give us the courage to spread that love to a love-starved world. Help us be witnesses of the love you bring and shine the light of love for those living in darkness. Through Jesus Christ, who loved us to the end. Amen.

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The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Discussion

Conversation Tips: Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

Tell a story using **one** of the prompts below. Allow at most two minutes for each story, with a little silence but no discussion between each. Each group should designate a timekeeper who will gently but clearly indicate when each speaker has 30 seconds left, then 10 seconds, and when time is up.

Story Prompts for Group Sharing:

1. When I walk around this neighborhood/town/city/community, I feel...
2. When I look at our neighborhood/town/city/community, I dream of...
3. To me, Beloved Community looks like...
4. I was especially aware of my race when I...
5. I was saddened about race in our neighborhood/town/city/community when...
6. I was grateful for race in our neighborhood/town/city/community when...
7. To foster Beloved Community, I hope to...

Lighting the Advent Wreath



On Christmas Eve

All the candles of the Advent wreath - three purple candles, one pink candle, and the white candle in the center - are lit.

Light one candle for Christ.
Because the world is broken and the wait is long
but Christ is with us through it all.
In humble manger in a back water town - a baby.
On a convict's cross - a king.
In every heart and every home
where hope, peace, joy, and love endure-Christ with us.
“Glory to God in the Highest heaven,” she whispers,
“and peace to all on earth.”
So we light one candle,
because it only takes one: Christ with us.

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 15:13

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