

Fourth Sunday of Advent
(December 21, 2008)
Sharing the Light, Reflecting

Christmas Eve
(December 24, 2008)
Celebrating The Birth of Christ

Advent 2008

[Light the first three candles of the Advent wreath.]

After the angel came to Mary and told her that she would conceive the child in her womb and would call him Jesus, Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38, NRSV)

And Mary sings her Song of Praise:
My soul magnifies the Lord who has scattered the proud.
The Lord has brought down the powerful from their thrones.
He has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry.
He has provided for the poor. (Luke 1:46-55, NRSV)

We marvel at Mary, the mother of the Messiah, herself a single, teenaged mother, herself poor and powerless. But she understood that the baby she would call Jesus was sent, not just to her, but ...
to the world
to the hungry
to the weak
to the very young and the very old
and to those who suffer or are in pain

[Light the fourth candle of the Advent wreath.]

We light this fourth candle to remember Mary, the mother of Jesus. May the light of this candle also remind us that the light of Jesus shines in you.

Dear God, Help us to care for the weak, the hungry, the young, the poor and those who are in pain.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

[Light all four candles]. In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. And 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.

[Light the Christ candle.]

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:1-20, NRSV)

Dear God, Thank you for your Son Jesus Christ, the Savior for the whole world.
Come. Lord Jesus. come. Amen.

*A Time to Prepare
To Follow Jesus*

ADVENT is the special season marked by the four Sundays preceding Christmas. It is a time to prepare our hearts and homes for the coming of Jesus Christ...first as a baby in Bethlehem and then as the Lord of all who follow Him.



May this time of waiting and watching remind us that we can share the light of Jesus with others as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior and King, Jesus Christ who is the Light of the World.

Following Lectionary Year B

First Sunday of Advent
(November 30, 2008)
Waiting and Watching

But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come...in the evening, or at midnight, or at dawn. Keep awake.
(Mark 13:24-26, 32, 33, 35, 37, NRSV)

Such amazing things happen in the sky to herald the return of the Son of Man ...
Jesus, coming in the clouds
the sun grows dark
the moon doesn't shine
and stars fall from the heavens

So different from that first coming more than 2000 years ago ...
with angels singing of God's glory and peace on earth
with the single star guiding the way to the manger
with shepherds and wisemen, rich and poor, coming to worship

As we light the first light of Advent, we watch and wait, and stay alert waiting again for the coming of Jesus.

And we light a single candle in preparation for that glorious day.

[Light the first candle on the Advent wreath.]

Dear God, Help us to watch, wait and be alert as we wait for the coming of Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent
(December 7, 2008)
Preparing

[Light the first candle on the Advent wreath.]

The prophet Isaiah wrote, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" (Mark 1:2-3, NRSV)
And John, the messenger of God, proclaimed to all the people who came to him in the wilderness that they must repent of their sins and be baptized. Many people heard his message, repented, and were baptized in the river Jordan.

For many of us it has become our custom to prepare for the birth of the Messiah by decorating our cities and homes, hanging lights inside and out and measuring the quality of our Christmas morning by the number of gifts we receive. Preparing for Christmas means letting go of what is hindering us from listening and growing in our relationship with Jesus.

[Light the second candle on the Advent wreath.]

As we light this second candle in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, let us to listen again to John the Baptizer's message, preparing the way of the Lord by ...
making straight the paths
repenting your sins
remembering your baptism
living holy lives devoted to God

Dear God, Help us to let go, forgive and be forgiven as we prepare for Christmas.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent
(December 14, 2008)
Following

[Light the first and second candle on the Advent wreath.]

We celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Jesus' disciples follow Him every day of the year knowing that He is the Savior and experiencing the peace that comes from following Jesus. Hear these words from First Thessalonians:

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of the prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil."

"May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, NRSV)

Seeking Jesus involves:
following Jesus
experiencing the peace that Christ brings
helping the weak and the poor
loving one another
giving thanks in all circumstances

[Light the third candle of the Advent wreath.]

As we light this third candle, let us remember that we are called to seek and follow Jesus, who was sent to show us the way.

Dear God, we praise you for the peace that comes from following Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.