

Appendix 1. Advent Sunday Candle Readings

There is no single tradition about the four Advent candles. There are at least three common traditions (with lots of variations). Depending on your church culture, each candle might represent:

1. A Christian concept – Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.
2. A person or group involved in the Christmas story – the Messiah or Prophecy candle, the Bethlehem candle, the Shepherd candle, and the Angel candle.
3. In the UK, often – Hope, Old Testament prophecies, John the Baptist, and Mary.

For your own family Advent celebrations, feel free to choose the tradition that seems best to you – or use a different series on the successive Advent seasons. You'll find different readings for each series.

For each of these three common traditions, for each Sunday of Advent – plus Christmas Day – you'll find a Bible reading, a brief thought, a prayer, and a suggested Christmas carol to sing. (The carols are just an idea. Feel free to draw from the carols your group or family knows.) These Advent Sunday readings can be used in a family, small group, or congregational setting. I recommend that you assign different people to read so that it becomes a community project, rather than just one person doing it all. Little children love to light the candle, even though they can't read yet.

Traditionally, the (white) Christ Candle is lit either on Christmas Eve (often in a Christmas Eve service) or on Christmas Day (in a family setting). Either is fine.

For your convenience you can find these readings online formatted one day per page on 8-1/2 x 11 or A4 paper, so each participant can have a copy. Feel free to print them out for your use. www.jesuswalk.com/advent/advent-sunday-candle-readings.pdf



Appendix 1a. God's Blessings Candles (Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love)

This tradition of Advent candle readings emphasizes God's blessings to us at Christmas – hope, peace, joy, and love. On the second and successive Advent Sundays, have the previous Sundays' candles lit ahead of time, then light that Sunday's candle as part of the Advent celebration.

1st Sunday of Advent. The Hope Candle**Narrator**

Today we light the Hope Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the first Advent candle.)

Scripture

“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31, NIV)

Meditation

Hope looks to God and waits on him with a firm expectation that he will fulfill his promises. Allied with hope are the ideas of faith and patience, endurance and trust, of joy and a settled peace that God will do what he says he will do.

Israel had been beaten down by a succession of world powers – Babylon, Persia, the Greeks, and now Rome. In their distress, they call out, “Come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel.” Yet in the cry there is hope, a strong expectation that God will keep his promises to send a Messiah, a Deliverer.

The hope is fulfilled on the first Christmas Day when Jesus is born in Bethlehem, God's Savior sent to planet earth to save us from our sins and deliver us from whatever oppresses us.

People live in hope of One who can help them. Jesus is that Person, present today by the Holy Spirit to deliver us from any need. He is the One we hope for.

Prayer

Father, thank you for sending Jesus into our world, our “hope of glory,” our “blessed hope” of resurrection and eternal life. In His name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

2nd Sunday of Advent. The Peace Candle**Narrator**

Today we light the Peace Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the second Advent candle.)

Scripture

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'" (Luke 2:13-14, NIV)

Meditation

Jesus is sent by the Father to bring peace between God and man. We are caught up in struggle, strife, and sin. Jesus doesn't come, however, to smooth over our conflicts. Nor does he come with armed might to force us to lay down our arms. Rather, he comes to die for the sins that lie at the heart of our rebellion against him.

The Prince of Peace takes upon himself our sins and unrest. As Isaiah put it, "the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5b, NIV).

To receive his peace this Christmas, come to him in surrender and, through this act of faith, receive his grace of forgiveness and shalom.

Prayer

Father, forgive us our selfish, rebellious hearts. We open ourselves to you, and invite you to come into us afresh and grant us your peace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"

3rd Sunday of Advent. The Joy Candle

Narrator

Today we light the Joy Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the third Advent candle.)

Scripture

"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" (Luke 2:10-11, ESV)

Meditation

The shepherds hear the angel's proclamation, and indeed are filled with both awe and joy. They are mere shepherds, considered by some as the lowest of the low.

But the angel comes to them. No one else, but to them and gives them the news of a momentous event, the birth of the Messiah. Filled with joy they careen down the hills into the town, find the stable and manger, and kneel before the Christ Child.

Joy is an emotion of exaltation that comes from a new realization, an event of blessing, a state of blessedness. And surely the shepherds feel that. But as the years progress and they tell the story to their children's children, the sense of wonder and joy remains. An angel has spoken to them!

The angel spoke of a physical birth. But there is also a spiritual dimension – the joy that breaks upon us when we finally grasp that Jesus loves us in spite of ourselves, forgives all our sins and past failings, and takes up residence in our lives. Then the initial joy melds into an enduring joy of companionship with the Lord.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the joy the angels experienced, the joy of Jesus' birth, and the joy of the new birth that we can experience day by day until we see you in glory. Thank you! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

"Joy to the World"

4th Sunday of Advent. The Love Candle

Narrator

Today we light the Love Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the fourth Advent candle.)

Scripture

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16, NIV)

Meditation

This is probably the best-known verse in the Bible. "John 3:16" is flashed in ball parks and memorized in Sunday school classes. Why is it so beloved?

Because it tells us about God's love – the reason that the Father sent his Son on Christmas day.

"He gave his one and only Son" that Christmas morn. Why? Because he loved the world so much – not the physical globe, but the people whom he had created. Struggling, confused, exuberant, depressed, striving and sinful. He loved them. He loves us! That is why Jesus came.

In the way Jesus relates to hurting people, we can see that love, that compassion. His gentle words – "my daughter" – to the woman who touched the hem of his garment. His encouragement to Peter who had betrayed him – "Feed my sheep, Peter, I haven't given up on you." His compassion for the crowds whom he saw as "sheep without a shepherd."

Jesus came on Christmas morn out of the Father's love. And in spite of persecution and crucifixion, even a history of saints and sinners inside and outside of his Church, his love for us is undiminished this Advent season.

Prayer

Father, thank you for your undeserved love that envelopes us and saves us, that fills us with your Spirit, and includes us in the momentous plans of your Kingdom. Thank you for loving us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

"Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"

Christmas Day (or Christmas Eve). The Christ Candle**Narrator**

Today we light the Christ Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the fifth Advent candle.)

Scripture

"Joseph ... 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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:4-7, NIV)

Meditation

We're told nothing of the journey itself – four days on the road, sometimes walking, mostly riding a donkey, we would guess. It would have been excruciating for Mary, who is near-term, in that waddling, clumsy stage of pregnancy.

They look for lodgings when they arrive in Bethlehem. Apparently, they have no family there. The local inn has no room, but they're given a stable as a shelter. Tradition says it was a cave.

In that humble setting, Mary gives birth to the Christ-Child. Joseph hears the squalling of a newborn, quieted as he finds his mother's breast. And this new family of three hold onto each other and to the promises God has given them.

Later shepherds bearing glorious tales of angels find them. This is how God intended that his Only Son be brought into the world. A newborn and his freshly-minted parents in a cattle stable. The glory of heaven brought down to earth. God humbling himself so that even the most humble is invited to come.

Come Today to see the Christ-Child afresh as we greet Christmas Day – his day!

Prayer

Father, thank you for the gift of your Son. For sending him into our world to be our Savior, who will save his people from their sins. Our sins. Thank you. In Jesus' holy name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

"It Came upon the Midnight Clear"

Appendix 1b. Christmas Story Candles (Prophecy, Bethlehem, Shepherd, Angel)

This tradition of Advent candles emphasizes specific events that mark the Christmas story – Messianic prophecies, birth in Bethlehem, shepherds, and angels. On the second and successive Advent Sundays, have the previous Sundays' candles lit ahead of time, then light that Sunday's candle as part of the Advent celebration.

1st Sunday of Advent. The Messiah or Prophecy Candle

Narrator

Today we light the Messiah or Prophecy Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the first Advent candle.)

Scripture

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.” (Isaiah 9:6-7, NIV)

Meditation

Seven hundred fifty years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah predicted that a descendant of King David, Israel's greatest king, would come and reign again over the Kingdom of God.

Many other prophets saw the coming of a Messiah who would deliver his people. But Isaiah spoke of his nature, his character. He calls him Wonderful Counselor, the ultimate source of wise counsel. He is said to be the Mighty God, coming with God's presence and mighty power to the earth. He is the Prince of Peace. There will be no more wars or conflicts. No more estrangement from God. As Messiah's reign covers the earth, he will sweep in a wave of peace throughout the empire.

He is called Everlasting Father. Though he comes in time and space, he is eternal. He never has a beginning, nor will he have an end. He is forever, and his Kingdom, too, will never fail.

There is much we would like to know about him. But what we do know is wonderful! His kingdom will be just towards even the weakest, the poorest, the most marginalized. Because the King is a good king, a righteous Lord. King Jesus is God himself!

Prayer

Father, thank you for the Child who is born to us, whom we celebrate this time of year. We long for the time his kingdom will come fully on earth as it is now in heaven. We open our hearts, O King. We desire to live under your rule now, in this life, and serve you forever and ever. Amen.

Suggested Carol: “What Child Is This?”

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2nd Sunday of Advent. The Bethlehem Candle**Narrator**

Today we light the Bethlehem Candle.:

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the second Advent candle.):

Scripture

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me, one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2, NIV)

Meditation

Bethlehem is a small village in Jesus’ day. Its only claim to fame is that David had been born there a thousand years before. But this sleepy town is destined for something great, so said the prophet Micah 800 years before.

But notice what he says about the Messiah who would be born there.

“One ... whose origins are from old,
from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2b)

His origins, his roots go way back. Not just to the beginning of recorded history. Before that. To before time begins. John tells us,

“He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things were made;
without him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:2-3)

How could a new ruler have ancient origins? Little did they know that in Bethlehem God had chosen to perform his greatest miracle, the Incarnation. The miracle of God coming in a tiny Man-Child, with only a manger for his bed.

God can take the common-place and make it special. He can take your life and light it up. He can be born within you, to fill your days with his light and life. Come, Lord Jesus.

Prayer

Father, we are ordinary, common, unremarkable, like Bethlehem of old. We invite you into our hearts this day. Come to us anew and fill us with your presence. We pray in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

Suggested Carol

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

3rd Sunday of Advent. The Shepherd Candle**Narrator**

Today we light the Shepherd Candle.,

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the third Advent candle.),

Scripture

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people....’ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.” (Luke 2:8-9, 16, NIV)

Meditation

The Patriarchs had been shepherds. So had David. These days people didn’t think much of shepherds.

But on the occasion of his Son’s birth, God sends to shepherds a mighty herald angel, then thousands of army angels who flood the hillside with the light of a hundred arc lights.

Even after the light dims and the angels are gone, the shepherds’ terror remains. But the angel’s announcement so intrigues them that they leave their flocks and come into town, looking for that manger and the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.

They find the Child and these rough shepherds kneel on the floor of the stable, heads bowed before the Babe. For this Child, God’s Son, will change their destiny and the destiny of all who live on earth. As the angel had told Joseph,

“You shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

In the light of Jesus, the shepherds’ sins, your sins and mine, lose their hold. And in their place is love, forgiveness, and blessing from the Child who is our Savior.

Prayer

Father, thank you for sending Jesus, not to the rich and famous, but to the lowest of the low. To us and to our kind who, when you peel back the layers of our masks, are so needy. Heal us, forgive us, we pray in the name of Jesus’ our Savior. Amen.

Suggested Carol

“The First Noel”

4th Sunday of Advent. The Angel Candle**Narrator**

Today we light the Angel Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the fourth Advent candle.)

Scripture

“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.

This will be a sign to you:

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths
and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:9-14, NIV)

Meditation

The Herald Angel is given the honor of making the first joyful pronouncement of the birth of Messiah who is God’s only Son. This One who has ruled in heaven at the Father’s side since before the beginning is now become the tiniest of human beings. The angel declares the momentous words:

“Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11)

Notice the angel’s description:

1. Savior. This tiny one will be the Lamb of God who “takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He is a Savior, Rescuer, One who risks his own life to pull from peril those who hang on the brink.

2. Christ. Long had the prophets spoken of this Son of David, descendant of human royalty, who would come to deliver his people. He is the Christ, the Anointed One. The time of waiting is over. Messiah is born!

3. Lord. This little Child also has the title of Lord. Not just the son of a great personage. He is that. But “Lord” in a sense so mighty and holy that the Jews would pronounce the word “Lord” as they read the name “Yahweh” in the Scriptures.

This Child is Savior, Messiah, and Lord God. Dear friends, he is your Savior, too. Your Messiah. And your Lord and Master.

Prayer

Father, thank you for sending your Son to deliver us. Let us reverence your Son as he deserves to be worshipped. We bow our knees and hearts before him Today. In his holy name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

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Christmas Day (or Christmas Eve). The Christ Candle**Narrator**

Today (or tonight) we light the Christ Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the fifth Advent candle.)

Scripture

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1-4, 14, NIV)

Meditation

When Christ came into the world, God’s light began to shine with new brilliance. For the Christ-Child is God himself in human flesh – that’s what the miracle of incarnation is all about.

The Old Testament tells us of a time when Moses would talk to God directly, and when he came out to where the people were his face shone with the reflected glory of God. When Christ came into our world, we could see “his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father” – God’s Son himself.

This Jesus, this Anointed One, this Christ is especially full of two elements:

1. Grace, that is, God’s unrestricted, unmerited, unlimited favor towards us, in spite of our sins! That is truly amazing.
2. Truth. So often we deceive ourselves – sort of – deciding to believe and act on things we want to do but we know aren’t God’s best for us.

But the Christ-Light comes to shine his truth, and glory, and unending grace upon us. He invites us to take off our masks. His truth and grace make our little lies redundant and useless. He invites us to be who we actually are. He frees us. And then he floods the real us with his grace, his overwhelming favor. He envelopes us in his love.

This Christmas Day he offers you both truth and grace, and the possibility of a new life of joy in God’s Kingdom. Happy Christmas!

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for the truth and grace we have received in Jesus our Savior. Let his light flood every dark corner of our lives until we are wholly his. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

“Angels from the Realms of Glory”

Appendix 1c. UK Tradition Candles (Hope, Prophecies, John the Baptist, Mary)

On the second and successive Advent Sundays, have the previous Sundays' candles lit ahead of time, then light that Sunday's candle as part of the Advent celebration.

1st Sunday of Advent. The Hope Candle

Narrator

Today we light the Hope Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the first Advent candle.)

Scripture

"A woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind [Jesus] and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.' Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' he said, 'your faith has healed you.' And the woman was healed from that moment." (Matthew 9:20-22, NIV)

Meditation

The woman has been suffering for twelve long years. She has spent all her money on doctors, but her condition is no better. Then she hears that Jesus is coming to her town. Compelled by hope, she pushes and shoves and elbows her way through the crowds until she can reach down and touch his robe. Instantly, she is healed, and Jesus commends her faith, for hope and faith are closely intertwined.

Christmastime reminds us of how the people of God have looked forward to him sending them a Deliverer, a Savior, One who would set them free. Then one starry night an angel proclaims,

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)
And on that Christmas night, the hopes of generations of believers were fulfilled in this tiny baby. Phillips Brooks puts it, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."

What is it that you've put before God in prayer? Trusted for, dreamed about, hoped for. Don't give up. Continue in hope and see the answer that God has prepared for you.

Prayer

Lord, renew our hope. Lift us when we are weak. Help us to trust in your coming with the same kind of eager anticipation as the saints of old. Thank you for all your blessings, both now and forever. Amen.

Suggested Carol

"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

2nd Sunday of Advent. The Old Testament Prophets' Candle

Narrator

Today we light the Old Testament Prophets' Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the second Advent candle.)

Scripture

"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow... Even angels long to look into these things." (1 Peter 1:10-12, NIV)

Meditation

We look at the Old Testament prophecies in light of Christ's coming. But those original prophets wondered at what God was saying through them. "*How* will this come to pass?" they asked. "*When* will it come to pass?"

"The sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" first became visible on a Bethlehem hillside when the angels in all their glory declared the birth of the Messiah. The sufferings were to come years later, culminating in Jesus' death on the cross. But the cross itself is a veiled mystery. Even Isaiah wondered when he said:

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray ...
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

How could it be that Messiah would suffer? Be crucified? It doesn't make sense! Except for two factors: (1) Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins and (2) God raised him from the dead and glorified him. No wonder the prophets weren't able to figure out the secrets of God's plan of salvation until it took place!

For each of our lives there is a purpose. Jesus' path in our lives takes twists and turns, but as we follow Jesus, his purposes for us come into focus and bless the world around us.

Prayer

Father, thank you for your plan to save your people from their sins. We couldn't see it until it was done and now we rejoice. Give us patience and faithfulness as you work out your purposes in our lives Today. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

"Go, Tell It on the Mountain"

3rd Sunday of Advent. The John the Baptist Candle

Narrator

Today we light the John the Baptist Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the third Advent candle.)

Scripture

“Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:16–17)

Meditation

John the Baptist is the Forerunner of the Messiah, one sent to prepare the people to receive Jesus.

I wonder how many of us have been properly “prepared for the Lord.” It is so easy to fall into familiar ways, easy paths. And when a holy man comes out of nowhere calling for repentance, we become offended. Isaiah called him:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,
Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him...
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.” (Luke 3:4, 5, quoting Isaiah 40:3-5)

Few of us want to admit that we’re on crooked paths that desperately need to be straightened out and made smooth.

Thousands heard John’s call, humbled themselves before God, and received his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins. And yet, the Jewish leaders did not and so “rejected God’s purpose for themselves.” In the end, Herod cut off John’s head and silenced the one God sent to prepare his people.

Has God been seeking to straighten some of your crooked paths? Will you let God prepare you to serve the Messiah?

Prayer

Father, forgive us for resisting your words. We repent and surrender ourselves to you afresh. Prepare us, we ask, to serve King Jesus. In his name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

“Silent Night”

4th Sunday of Advent. The Mary Candle**Narrator**

Today we light the Mary Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the fourth Advent candle.)

Scripture

“The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus....’

‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’

The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.... For nothing is impossible with God.’

‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May it be to me as you have said.’” (Luke 1:30–38)

Meditation

“You will be with child,” the angel says.

“How will this be?” Mary asks.

Mary’s question doesn’t arise from doubt, but from wonder. From faith.

I marvel at the grit and graciousness of this young girl, perhaps 14 years old. She is being asked to bear God’s Son. Not by the man she is engaged to, but by the Holy Spirit. Think of all the complications this will bring with Joseph: perhaps he’ll reject her. With her family: the dishonor – they can’t understand. With the townspeople: they can’t resist juicy gossip.

But Mary doesn’t look at the obstacles, the impossibilities, the difficulties. God will take care of those. Rather, she looks to God in trust.

“I am the Lord’s servant.”

Why do we find it so hard to trust God’s leadings? We worry about problems that may arise. We agonize about the people who will misunderstand. We become paralyzed. Why? I guess you’d call it fear. Unbelief.

Then we remember the angel’s pronouncement: “For nothing will be impossible with God!” Trust *God* to open the closed doors, to remove the blockages. Your job. My job. Mary’s job is to say, “Yes, I trust you, Lord. After all, I am your servant.”

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the faith of your daughter Mary. A young but determined faith that saw her through many ups and downs along her path. Help us to exercise this kind of durable faith also. And may you be as pleased with us as you were with Mary. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

Christmas Day (or Christmas Eve). The Christ Candle**Narrator**

Today we light the Christ Candle.

Candle

(The candle-lighter now lights the fifth Advent candle.)

Scripture

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’ ... Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod.” (Matthew 1:20-21; 2:1)

Meditation

One night Joseph is troubled that his fiancée is pregnant – not by him. But by morning, God has resolved it for him and given him a new life mission.

“She will give birth to a son,
and you are to give him the name Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins.”

Joseph is to be father to the Messiah, the Savior from sin.

And he is to be a father in the most difficult of times, “during the time of King Herod.” Herod is old and paranoid. He has killed thousands to retain his throne, including two of his own sons. As the story progresses, the Magi bring the Christ Child to King Herod’s attention. Joseph is warned in a dream to leave at once for Egypt to protect the child and is obedient. He cares for his family in a foreign land for several years, then relocates them to Nazareth

Fathers are given responsibility under God to protect and care for their family. And Joseph is given the extra responsibility to care for and protect another’s Son, God’s own and only Son Jesus. What a blessing – and a burden.

Joseph is dead by the time Jesus comes to the cross. His mother is there, however, looking on helplessly. His heavenly Father is there, weeping as he sees his Son march toward his destiny. And at the cross, Jesus does indeed “save his people from their sins.” There at the cross, the Lamb of God “takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Jesus is born for this! It is his destiny. And the Father raises him from the dead to proclaim forever that, indeed, God has set us free from our sins. Hallelujah!

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for your amazing plan to bring your Son into the world, and through him to bring light and life to us all. May we serve him with joy all our days. In Jesus’ holy name, we pray. Amen.

Suggested Carol

“Away in a Manger”

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