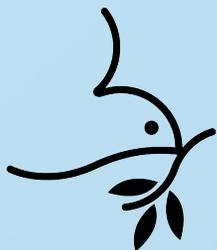


We Wait for Jesus



Mennonite
Church
USA

Advent 2020 to Epiphany 2021
At Home Worship Guide



Advent to Epiphany At Home 2020
November 29, 2020 through January 6, 2021

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We would love to hear how you are using this material, and we are interested in your suggestions for making it more useful and accessible.



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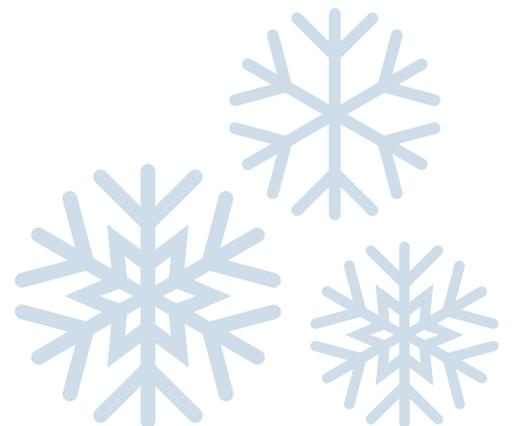
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ADVENT AT HOME 2020

WE WAIT FOR JESUS

Introducing Advent

What is Advent?

- The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming” or “visit.” In the season with this name, we keep in mind both “advents” of Christ: the first in Bethlehem and the second yet to come.
- A time to remember we need a Savior. Without divine help, we are unable to live in peace with God, ourselves or each other.
- The season of preparation for Christmas. Christians prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus by remembering the longing for a Messiah.

Why celebrate Advent?

- The four weeks of Advent help Christmas to be about Jesus, making Christmas more than a present-opening party.
- Living in the Advent season slows us down to remember that December is not just about frantically doing the busy-ness of Christmas.
- Advent is actually the beginning of the Christian calendar, and walking through Advent gives shape to our entire year.

How to Use this Worship Guide

- This guide can be used weekly, daily or a combination of both.
- Choose the components that seem right for your household and let the others go.
- No need to be perfect; aim for persistent. If “daily” means “every few days,” that’s just fine.
- By the same token, allow yourself to be inconsistent in how often you do this or which activities you choose. Again, aim for persistence not perfection.
- Fit this material to *your* household. If all your household can manage is a daily lighting of candles and singing a song or saying a sentence prayer, *that is enough!* Or, maybe in this pandemic year you feel adrift without the events that normally give structure to December and want to incorporate multiple ideas into your At Home worship.

Daily Worship Ritual

Choose from these steps. All are listed each week, but you will choose the ones that work for your household. You might even choose more steps some days and fewer other days.

- ❑ Light the Advent candle(s) and say each candle's Advent word.
- ❑ Read the scriptures. Read one of the suggested texts, or read all or part of the weekly story every day.
- ❑ Do the Expecting Ritual you've chosen from the list below.
- ❑ Pray the simple suggested weekly prayer.
- ❑ Sing a song like *Sing the Journey* #31, "He came down," using each candle's word as you blow it out ("He came down that we may have **hope**, he came down that we may have **peace**...")
- ❑ Blow out the candles.

Weekly Worship Ritual

Here are four steps through the Weekly At Home ritual. Choose the ones that work for your household.

1. Tell the story

Each week, one Bible story will be highlighted as the main story. These stories will correlate to "This is the Story," an at-home, intergenerational curriculum for faith formation found at www.godsstorygodssong.com. (You don't need to subscribe to "This is the Story" in order to use this Advent At Home download.) Each week will focus on a different aspect of the Advent of Jesus.

2. Put it in context

Each story will also be put into the context of the broad biblical story. You'll notice that each one starts with the same paragraph. We do this to make the narrative of the Big Story of the Bible familiar as each weekly story finds its place in that Big Story of God acting to create, teach, rescue and restore a people.

3. Talk about it

This section gives you many different conversation prompts to choose from in case you want further conversation and engagement with the Bible story.

4. Tell it your way

Make a Journey to Bethlehem mural. This weekly project can deepen your growth toward Christmas. Choose a place for your mural. It can be wherever you have space in a common area, or maybe you want it to lead toward a manger scene or another symbol of Christmas. Each week, draw a scene or make a collage inspired by the week's story and add it to your mural.

The Advent Wreath

Create your own version that looks similar to this:



- The wreath is circular like God's love - it has no beginning or end. It is eternal.
- It is traditionally dressed with evergreens, symbolizing endless life and rebirth.
- There are five candles: three purple, one pink and one white. The purple candles represent both repentance and royalty. The pink candle, used the third week, is Mary's candle. The white candle in the center is the Christ candle.
- There are many different stories of the history and symbolism of the Advent wreath, and even multiple colors that are used. If you're intrigued, look it up!
- You can search the internet for sets of Advent candles and Advent candle holders.
- Be creative with what you have to make your wreath and don't feel limited by the traditional colors. Do what is possible and meaningful for your family.

The “Expecting Ritual”

Here are some daily Advent rituals that create a sense of expectation. If you want to, choose one of these to include with your candle-lighting ritual.

- ❑ Add another component to your nativity set each day or each week, so that you are slowly getting the scene ready for Jesus to be born.
- ❑ Place Mary and Joseph in another room from nativity scene and move them a little closer to it each day. On Christmas Day, put Jesus in the manger.
- ❑ Write down names of 24 people, put them in a special container and place it by your Advent wreath. Each day, draw one name and pray for that person.
- ❑ Make a paper chain with 24 strips of colored paper that match the Advent candles. Tear one off each day.
- ❑ Collect all your Advent- or Christmas-themed books and wrap them for your children to open, daily or weekly or whatever works best. Read them together and talk about their themes.
- ❑ Gradually decorate your house for Christmas. Add a new ornament to the tree every day, or decorate a different room each week.
- ❑ Read the story found in Luke 2:1-20 daily.

Anytime Activities for Advent

- ❑ As you tell the story, act it out in various ways: use a nativity set, Legos, dolls, stuffed animals, or act it out yourselves.
- ❑ Keep out a nativity set that your kids can play with – whether or not they use it to tell the nativity story!
- ❑ Have an Advent singalong.
- ❑ Turn off all the lights in your house and let it get very dark. Talk about how dark it is – how you can’t see. Try to do an activity, like reading a book or even walking from room to room, and notice how difficult (or impossible) it is. Light a candle (or turn on a flashlight) and notice how that one little light makes such a big difference. Try the activity again and notice how much easier it is. Talk about how Jesus came to be the light in a dark world. If your kids are old enough, light more candles from the original one you lit, and talk about how when we follow Jesus, that light is multiplied and can bring a lot more light to the world.
- ❑ Have a special Advent dinner once a week. Keep it simple – bread, cheese and fruit, or something like that. Eat by candlelight. Do your weekly Advent time following or during the meal.



Advent Week 1, November 29: Hope

This week's story: ISAIAH AND THE PROPHETS

Advent Daily Ritual

- Light one purple candle, saying, "We wait for Jesus who will bring **hope**."
- Weekly scripture reading: Isaiah 40 .
- Daily scripture readings: Isaiah 64:1-9, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, or Mark 13:24-37. (This week, you may choose to read a bit of Isaiah 40 each day instead.)
- Do your Expecting Ritual.
- Pray: **God, we look around and see so much pain. We need hope. We long for hope. The prophets told us that hope comes from you. God of hope, live in us today. Amen.**
- Sing a song of hope.
- Blow out the candles.

Weekly Worship Ritual

Tell the story

Read Isaiah 40 together. This is a long chapter! Maybe you want to read part of it each night this week instead of reading it all in one sitting.

→If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this passage is referred to on page 138.

Put it in context

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when Abraham and Sarah and their descendants missed the mark, God stuck with them. When their Egyptian rulers missed the mark and made them slaves, they cried out to God, and God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them.

The people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, so God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God. Eventually, the people missed the mark so much that their land was taken over by invading armies. Many of the people were captured and put into exile, and others were left in the ruins of what had been their home.

It's in the middle of this time that the writers of Isaiah lived and prophesied. The first people who heard these words were people who felt like their lives had been completely upended. They couldn't do anything the way they were used to doing it. They couldn't go and worship in the temple. Things would never go back to "normal," and they didn't know what was ahead for them. Sound familiar? These words of the prophet brought comfort to the people in this time. The prophet reminded them that God is very, very, very big, and God sticks with us. We read these words now in Advent, because we know that the glory of God the prophet talks about is revealed in Jesus. These words are about getting ready in **hope** of the Messiah, the light of the world breaking in.

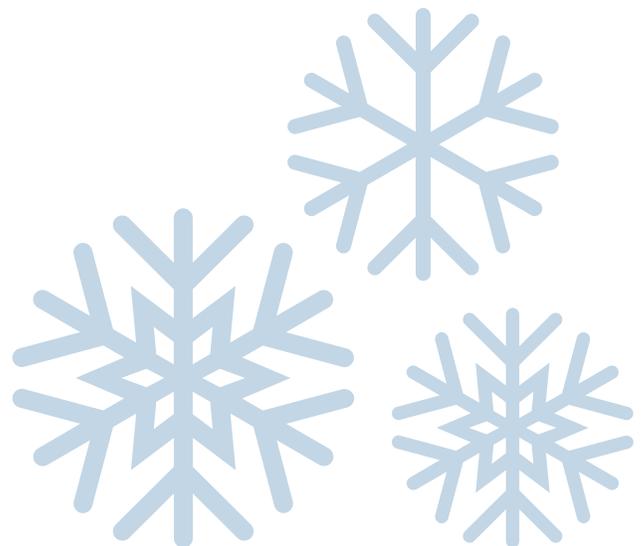
Talk about it

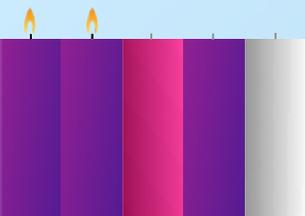
Choose the prompts that are appropriate for your household.

- Do any words from this scripture sound familiar to you? Notice all the phrases that ring a bell. You may even want to list out all the songs and commonly-quoted verses that come from Isaiah 40. How do the meanings of these quotes and songs change when you think of them in the context of the whole poem - and of exile?
- Isaiah 40:3-4 makes a different kind of sense when you look at the terrain between Babylonia and Judah. Check out a topographic map if you're intrigued.
- The final verse of this chapter is familiar to many of us. The first half of it more literally translates "grow new pinions like the eagles" - as in, molt and grow new feathers. It's less about growing something totally new and more about renewal.
- It is tempting to read prophetic texts like Isaiah as predictors of things that are going to happen to us here and now. But this text was written in a specific time and place, and it is a commentary on what was happening in that moment. The people of God had REALLY missed the mark, and had to deal with major consequences. Read this passage in the context of people who have been exiled from their homes and places of worship. How is this poem an example of God sticking with the people?

Tell it your way

Begin your "Journey to Bethlehem" mural.





Advent Week 2, December 6: Peace

This Week's Story: THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

Advent Daily Ritual

- Light two purple candles, saying, "We wait for Jesus who will bring **hope** and **peace**."
- Weekly scripture reading: Matthew 1:1-17.
- Daily scripture readings: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8
- Do your Expecting Ritual.
- Pray: **God, there is a lot of hurt and conflict in our world. We need justice. We need peace. Your story tells us that your peace and justice can show up in the most hurt places, and that you came for everyone. We know peace comes from you. God of peace, live in us today. Amen.**
- Sing a song of peace.
- Blow out the candles.

Weekly Worship Ritual

Tell the story

Matthew 1:1-17

Put it in context

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when Abraham and Sarah and their descendants missed the mark, God stuck with them. When their Egyptian rulers missed the mark and made them slaves, they cried out to God, and God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them.

The people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, so God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God. Eventually, the people missed the mark so much that their land was taken over by invading armies. Many of the people were captured and put into exile, and others were left in the ruins of what had been their home.

Prophets like Isaiah brought **hope** to the people in exile. Eventually, the people returned from exile and rebuilt Jerusalem. We call this the “second temple period.”

Now it's time for a Messiah. The writer of Matthew begins the gospel with proclaiming this Messiah, and that's our scripture for this week. On the surface, it may not seem like this list of names has anything to do with our word for this week, **peace**. But it does!

It looks like Jesus is being proven as the Messiah by showing who his ancestors are. His genealogy is a long list of Abraham (the father of the faith) and David (the royal line). He has a pedigree! But there are little clues throughout the genealogy that there might be a twist coming. The clues are the women. Pay attention to the four women in the story (you can see more about them below to guide your reading). These women are outsiders, and their stories often involve scandal. And then the final twist - this is the line of Joseph, but Jesus is born of Mary. He is not born, but adopted, into this pedigreed line.

What does this have to do with peace? Jesus isn't the Messiah because he has the right heritage, but because he is the Son of God. He is the Messiah, the Great Liberator, who comes for everyone - not just for people like King David but for people like Ruth and Rahab. Even the fact that women are named in this genealogy is a clue of the liberating nature of Jesus. The gospel begins by blowing the boundaries around the people of God wide open. This peace won't mean lack of conflict. It will mean justice and inclusion and equality and uncomfortable surprises.

Talk about it

Notice that we have three sets of fourteens. In the Ancient Near Eastern culture, three is a holy, complete number. Seven is perfection, and fourteen is double perfection.

The First 14 Generations

- *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah*: Familiar characters from Genesis.
- *Judah, father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar*: This is a very messy story, which you can find in Genesis 38. In a nutshell, Tamar was an outsider, and these twin boys were conceived with her father-in-law, Judah, in a great example of a woman getting creative and being declared in the right.
- *Hezron, Aram, Aminadab*: These take us to the time of Moses. Aminadab was the father-in-law of Aaron, brother of Moses.
- *Nahshon, Salmon*: These take us to Jericho.
- *Rahab*: The second woman mentioned in this genealogy, Rahab is described in Joshua 6 as a Canaanite prostitute who offers hospitality and protection for Joshua's spies. She married Salmon.
- *Boaz and Ruth*: In Ruth, we have another outsider here, another story with potential scandal, a story of creativity, a story of steadfast love.
- *Obed, Jesse*: You may hear the name Jesse sometimes this season, and now you know why!

The Second 14 Generations

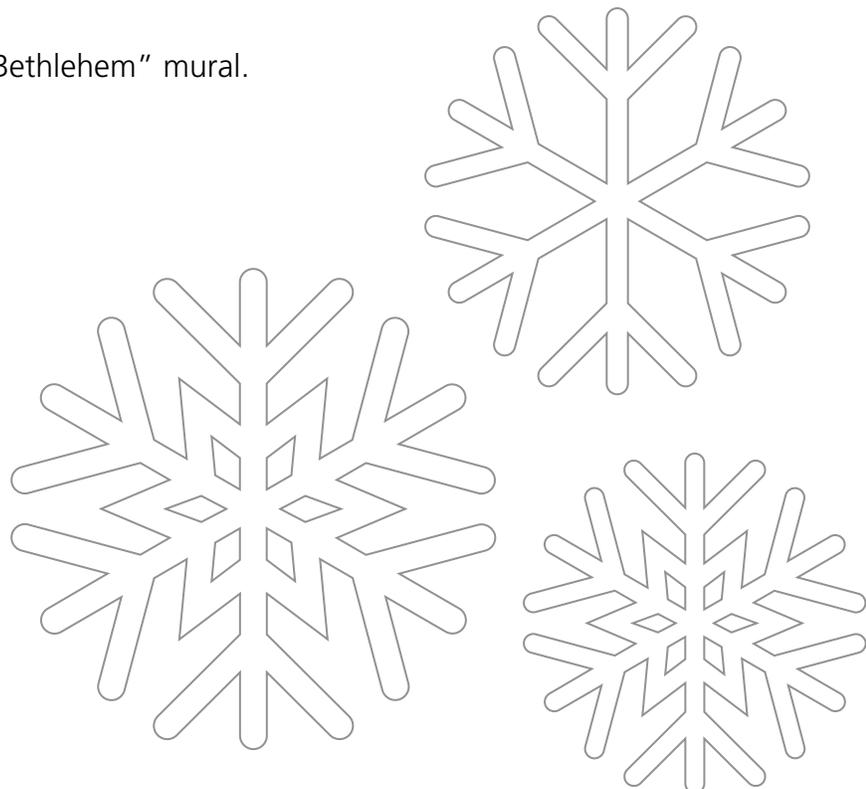
- *King David and Bathsheba*: Bathsheba was a faithful woman who was treated unfairly by King David. She comes in a messy and uncomfortable part of David's story. She may be an Israelite, but since she's married to a Hittite, some think she was a foreigner.
- *Solomon*: The flawed, wise, prolific, temple-building, third king of Israel.
- *Rehoboam*: He really messed up. And the kingdom divided.
- *Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon (or Amos), Josiah*: A string of kings of Judah, some righteous and some unrighteous.

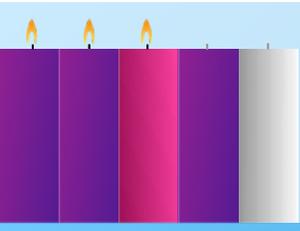
The Third 14 Generations

- *Jechoniah, Salathiel*: Exile kings.
- *Zerubbabel*: He led the people back to Jerusalem, began construction of the temple, and was appointed governor by King Darius.
- *Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan*: We don't know much about these people!
- *Jacob the father of Joseph*: Wait a minute, here. We have seen this parent-child name pairing before...
- *Joseph the husband of Mary*: Joseph here is defined by his wife.
- *Mary, of whom Jesus was born*: So this is the genealogy of Joseph...but it's to Mary that Jesus is born.

Tell it your way

Add to your "Journey to Bethlehem" mural.





Advent Week 3, December 13: Joy

This Week's Story: MARY'S STORY

Advent Daily Ritual

- Light two purple candles and the pink candle saying, "We wait for Jesus who will bring **hope, peace and joy.**"
- Weekly scripture reading: Luke 1:26-56.
- Daily scripture readings: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; or John 1:6-8, 19-28. Or maybe read all or part of Luke 1:26-56 each day.
- Do your Expecting Ritual.
- Pray: **God, in the quest for happiness, we sometimes forget the deeper joy that comes only from you. Teach us the satisfaction that comes from having enough. Help our souls to be filled with joy like Mary's. God of joy, live in us today. Amen.**
- Sing a song of joy.
- Blow out the candles.

Weekly Worship Ritual

Tell the story

Luke 1:26-56

→If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this passage is referred to on page 161.

Put it in context

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when Abraham and Sarah and their descendants missed the mark, God stuck with them. When their Egyptian rulers missed the mark and made them slaves, they cried out to God, and God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them.

The people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, so God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God. Eventually, the people missed the mark so much that

their land was taken over by invading armies. Many of the people were captured and put into exile, and others were left in the ruins of what had been their home.

Prophets like Isaiah brought **hope** to the people in exile. Eventually, the people returned from exile and rebuilt Jerusalem. We call this the “second temple period.” The people longed for a Messiah, and at the beginning of the New Testament, we learn that the Messiah is on his way. Jesus, the Messiah, adopted into a line of both royalty and messes, came to show the way of **peace**.

In this week’s story, we are introduced to Mary, the mother of Jesus. An angel appeared to her and told her she would have a child, and not just any child, but *the* child, the Son of God. We can imagine how strange this would have been for her! She accepts what is asked of her, then hurries to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. When these two women greet each other, they erupt in joy.

This week’s word is **joy**. Joy is something that comes from God, not from fleeting external things. Mary’s song, which proclaims who God is, is a great example of this deep joy.

Talk about it

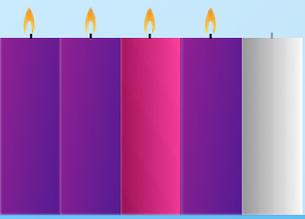
Choose the prompts that are appropriate for your household.

- This story invites us to imagine and empathize. If you choose to do that, try it multiple times with different personalities for Mary. She’s often portrayed as passive, but notice what happens if you imagine her as assertive and direct with the angel.
- If you have heard this story a lot, the wonder of it may have worn off. Read it with fresh eyes. It’s full of mystery, of the supernatural—an angel, a virgin conception, overshadowing by the Holy Spirit, an unborn child leaping for joy.
- Mary’s song is political. Read it and really notice what it’s proclaiming. It is also similar to Hannah’s prayer (see 1 Samuel 2) and songs sung by women like Miriam (Exodus 15: 21) and Deborah (Judges 5).
- This passage is *full* of allusions to Old Testament scripture. Here are just a few:
 1. “The Lord is with you” (v 28) is a conventional greeting. Find it elsewhere: Judges 6:12; 2 Samuel 7:3; 2 Chronicles 15:2.
 2. All of verses 32-33 mirrors 2 Samuel 7:13-16, the promise made to David.
 3. “Son of God” sometimes refers to humans like Adam, but also refers to divinities, as in Psalm 29:1.
 4. “Nothing will be impossible with God” (v 37). This phrase appears several other times, including in Genesis 18:14 about Sarah becoming pregnant in old age.

Tell it your way

Add to your “Journey to Bethlehem” mural.





Advent Week 4, December 20: Love

This Week's Story: THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

Advent Daily Ritual

- Light three purple candles and the pink candle, saying, "We wait for Jesus who will bring **hope, peace, joy** and **love.**"
- Weekly scripture reading: Luke 2:1-5.
- Daily scripture readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; or Luke 1:26-38. Or maybe you want to read all or part of Luke 2:1-5 each day.
- Do your Expecting Ritual.
- Pray: **God, we are travelers like Mary and Joseph. Along the way, your love shows up. Your love shines in the most unexpected and difficult places. We know that you are the source of love. God of love, live in us today. Amen.**
- Sing a song of love.
- Blow out the candles.

Weekly Worship Ritual

Tell the story

Luke 2:1-5

Put it in context

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when Abraham and Sarah and their descendants missed the mark, God stuck with them. When their Egyptian rulers missed the mark and made them slaves, they cried out to God, and God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them.

The people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, so God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God. Eventually, the people missed the mark so much that

their land was taken over by invading armies. Many of the people were captured and put into exile, and others were left in the ruins of what had been their home.

Prophets like Isaiah brought **hope** to the people in exile. Eventually, the people returned from exile and rebuilt Jerusalem. We call this the “second temple period.” The people longed for a Messiah, and at the beginning of the New Testament, we learn that the Messiah is on his way. Jesus, the Messiah, adopted into a line of royalty and messes, came to show the way of **peace**. When the angel appeared to Mary, she responded with God’s request with deep **joy**.

Mary is pregnant with God’s child, and Joseph has decided to stick by her (see Matthew 1:18-25 for his story). In this week’s story, Mary and Joseph journey to Bethlehem. It’s a journey they had to make because of the world they lived in, and it could not have been an easy one. They walked this journey together, though. Our word this week is **love**. The five verses we are reading are mostly descriptive, but when we dig into the story a little, we can see that their love for each other is reflected in their taking of this journey together, and that God’s sustaining love is with them. And as they travel this journey, the time of God’s ultimate love revealed in Jesus is coming closer and closer.

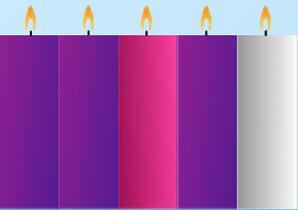
Talk about it

Choose the prompts that are appropriate for your household.

- There’s a lot of “fulfillment of the scriptures” going on in the story of Jesus’ birth. Even this traveling story is a fulfillment. Read Psalm 87:5-6.
- Wait a minute. Where’s the donkey?! Every tradition has inserted assumptions and additions to this beloved story. It’s okay to do that! And it’s good to recognize those additions as our own way of doing “midrash,” which is playing with and interpreting the story.
- Emperor Augustus ruled from 27 BCE to 14 CE. His era was one of peace, and he was called “god,” “son of god,” “savior” and “father” by the people. So right away, we have a challenge. Which “son of god” are the readers of Luke going to follow?
- Get out your map! Trace this journey. How long is it? How long would it have taken to travel? One place to explore this journey is www.photorientalist.org/exhibitions/palestines-nativity-trail-a-journey-through-history/.
- We don’t know exactly what this journey looked like. It’s likely that Mary and Joseph were part of a caravan of people. They probably walked most or all of the way. Mary was heavily pregnant. Do your own imagining and playing with this story. How do you think love showed up along the way?
- Journeys are a major biblical theme. Think about other journeys in the Big Story of the Bible. This is already the second journey in the story of Jesus’ birth, and there are more to come. Can you think of other journeys in Jesus’ story?

Tell it your way

Add to your “Journey to Bethlehem” mural.



Christmas Day, December 25: Jesus

Christmas Week 1, December 27

Introduction

Christmas Season is here! Yup, you heard right. Now, beginning December 25, we are in what is called the “Christmas Season” in the Christian year. So instead of packing it all up, make the most of these twelve days that bring us from Christmas to Epiphany. You know that song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas?” This is what it’s talking about!

Activities for this time will be similar to the ones you used for Advent. You can continue the routine from the last four weeks, with a few tweaks.

Christmas Daily Ritual

- Light three purple candles and the pink candle, saying something like, “Jesus will bring **hope, peace, joy** and **love**.” Light the middle candle and say, “Jesus is born!”
- Read Luke 2:1-20 and explore it, using the prompts below. Find some way to embody it today, maybe by telling it with a nativity set, acting it out, or walking through your house (or even outside) as you read it.
- Daily texts for the week of December 27: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; John 1:1-14.
- Do your last Expecting Ritual. Celebrate that *today is the day* that Jesus arrives!
- Pray: **God, today we are full of hope, because today reminds us that with you, anything is possible. We are full of peace, because we know that this is your world and you are in charge. We are full of joy, because of this special day. We are full of love for you and for each other. Thank you for the biggest gift of all, your son Jesus. Amen.**
- Sing a song of Jesus’ birth.
- Let your candles burn longer today while you celebrate Jesus’ birth. When you blow them out, sing a song or say a prayer.

Weekly Worship Ritual

Tell the story

Luke 2:6-20

→If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this story is found on pages 165-167.

Put it in context

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when Abraham and Sarah and their descendants missed the mark, God stuck with them. When their Egyptian rulers missed the mark and made them slaves, they cried out to God, and God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them.

The people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, so God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God. Eventually, the people missed the mark so much that their land was taken over by invading armies. Many of the people were captured and put into exile, and others were left in the ruins of what had been their home.

Prophets like Isaiah brought **hope** to the people in exile. Eventually, the people returned from exile and rebuilt Jerusalem. We call this the "second temple period." The people longed for a Messiah, and at the beginning of the New Testament, we learn that the Messiah is on his way. Jesus, the Messiah, adopted into a line of royalty and messes, came to show the way of **peace**. When the angel appeared to Mary, she responded with God's request with deep **joy**. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and the time of God's ultimate **love** revealed in Jesus came closer and closer.

Today we celebrate Jesus being born. The savior of the world was a tiny, helpless baby, whose birth was proclaimed by angels. This is a beautiful, humble, earthy, mysterious story. Dig into it today!

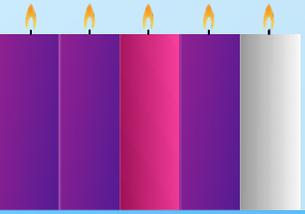
Talk about it

Choose the prompts that are appropriate for your household.

- We read this story with a lot of Western assumptions. [Read this article](#) if you want to see one person's case for a less lonely nativity story. Jesus was probably born in a home instead of in an area reserved for guests. The word translated as "inn" in verse 7 is elsewhere translated as "guest room" (Luke 22:11).
- A "manger" is a feeding trough for animals. This is the clue that we use to deduce that Jesus was born in an area that included animals. (See the article linked above.)
- "Bands of cloth" would be like swaddling a baby today. Some say it also foreshadows Jesus being wrapped in bands of cloth for burial.
- Notice the different names given for Jesus in verse 11. Why do you think all of these are used?
- Every culture reads this story their own way and adds their own spin to it. Maybe you want to explore the story from the viewpoint of other cultures. A great place to start is by looking at nativity scenes from around the world. For one playful example, look up "caganer" to learn about a little French addition.

Tell it your way

Add to your "Journey to Bethlehem" mural.



Christmas Week 2, January 3, 2021

This Week's Story: SIMEON AND ANNA

Christmas Daily Ritual

- Light three purple candles and the pink candle, saying something like, "Jesus will bring **hope, peace, joy** and **love.**" Light the middle candle and say, "Jesus is born!"
- Weekly scripture reading: Luke 2:21-38.
- Daily scripture readings: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20, Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1: 1-9, 10-18.
- Pray: **God, thank you for the wise people, like Simeon and Anna, that surround parents. Thank you for your guiding Holy Spirit. Help us to recognize you breaking into our world. Amen.**
- Sing a song of Jesus' birth.
- Blow out the candles.

Weekly Worship Ritual

Tell the story

Luke 2:21-38

→If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this passage is referred to on page 169.

Put it in context

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when Abraham and Sarah and their descendants missed the mark, God stuck with them. When their Egyptian rulers missed the mark and made them slaves, they cried out to God, and God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them.

The people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, so God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God. Eventually, the people missed the mark so much that

their land was taken over by invading armies. Many of the people were captured and put into exile, and others were left in the ruins of what had been their home.

Prophets like Isaiah brought **hope** to the people in exile. Eventually, the people returned from exile and rebuilt Jerusalem. We call this the “second temple period.” The people longed for a Messiah, and at the beginning of the New Testament, we learn that the Messiah is on his way. Jesus, the Messiah, adopted into a line of royalty and messes, came to show the way of **peace**. When the angel appeared to Mary, she responded with God’s request with deep **joy**. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and the time of God’s ultimate **love** revealed in Jesus came closer and closer.

Jesus was born in humble circumstances, visited by shepherds and proclaimed by angels. When he was eight days old, he was brought to the temple to be circumcised and presented. A devout man named Simeon and a prophet named Anna recognized him as the Messiah.

Tell it your way

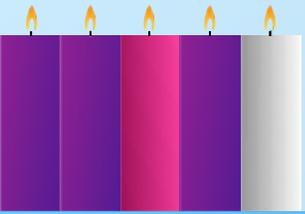
Choose the prompts that are appropriate for your household.

- This presentation at the temple may refer to a dedication of sorts. What infant dedications have you participated in? Were you dedicated as an infant? Why did your parents make that choice? What did it mean?
- In Simeon’s speech in verses 29-32, he references familiar passages from Isaiah (Isaiah 52:10, Isaiah 49:6 and Isaiah 46:13). Then in verses 34-35, he foreshadows what will come. What do Simeon’s words tell you about Jesus?
- In verse 36, Anna is rather off-handedly called a “prophet.” How does this strike you? What else do we know about her?
- Simeon had been promised he would see the Messiah, and after he did, he said he was ready to die. Imagine this and talk about it.
- Verse 33 says Mary and Joseph are “amazed at what was being said about Jesus.” Why might they feel as they do?
- Simeon and Anna are both described as old, wise and devout. They fill in a necessary piece of the story of Jesus’ birth. Look back over the diversity and depth of the characters in this New Testament story so far.

Tell it your way

Add to your “Journey to Bethlehem” mural.





Epiphany Day, January 6, 2021

The Visit of the Magi

Epiphany means realization. Here's the dictionary.com definition: "a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience." It's when you suddenly get something. It's finally clear, it makes sense. We often associate Epiphany with a shining light that illuminates Jesus. Jesus is the realization of all that has been hoped for and promised.

Epiphany Day Ritual

- When it is dark outside, gather up all the candles and flashlights you can find and bring them into one room of your house. Turn off all the lights in the house.
- Light the candles and flashlights one at a time, beginning with the advent wreath. Say your advent words with the wreath, "Jesus will bring **hope, peace, joy** and **love**. Jesus is born!" Then, just keep noticing the difference all these little lights make.
- By the light of your candles and flashlights, read and explore the story.
- Scripture reading: Matthew 2:1-12.
- Pray: **God, we are so glad you sent Jesus to be our light! The Magi were overjoyed when they found Jesus. Thank you for the people from far away who can see your light. Thank you that Jesus is for everyone. Amen.**
- Sing a song of Jesus as the light.
- Blow out the candles.

Tell the story

Matthew 2:1-12

Put it in context

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when Abraham and Sarah and their descendants missed the mark, God stuck with them. When their Egyptian rulers missed the mark and made them slaves, they cried out to God, and God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them.

The people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, so God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel

to bring the people back to God. Eventually, the people missed the mark so much that their land was taken over by invading armies. Many of the people were captured and put into exile, and others were left in the ruins of what had been their home.

Prophets like Isaiah brought **hope** to the people in exile. Eventually, the people returned from exile and rebuilt Jerusalem. We call this the “second temple period.” The people longed for a Messiah, and at the beginning of the New Testament, we learn that the Messiah is on his way. Jesus, the Messiah, adopted into a line of royalty and messes, came to show the way of **peace**. When the angel appeared to Mary, she responded with God’s request with deep **joy**. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and the time of God’s ultimate **love** revealed in Jesus came closer and closer.

Jesus was born in humble circumstances, visited by shepherds, proclaimed by angels, and blessed by a wise old man and a prophetess. Then, when he was about a year old, Magi, or Wise Men, came to worship him and give him gifts. These visitors were from far away, and were from outside the Jewish faith. Jesus was born for everyone.

Tell the story

Matthew 2:1-12

→If you have *Shine On Story Bible*, see page 170.

Talk about it

Choose the prompts that are appropriate for your household.

- Notice the uses of the title “King” in the first couple of verses. What do you think the writer of Matthew might be trying to point our attention to?
- Notice how God speaks to the Magi in this story. Look back at Matthew 1:20 and forward to Matthew 2:13. What’s going on here?
- What in the world were these Magi/Wise Men/Kings? *Magi* were a class of Zoroastrian priests, known as great astrologers. They probably came from Persia. Interestingly, early Jewish readers of this story would have regarded Persian astrologers as foolish, not wise.
- What do these gifts mean? Gold has much the same meaning and value today, but frankincense and myrrh take a little more explanation. They were often used for religious rituals, including the anointing of kings and burial. These gifts may have had different symbolic meanings at different points in Jesus’ life. Do you think Mary, Joseph and Jesus ever used these gifts?
- The Magi are not descendants of Abraham and Sarah, but Gentiles. Think back to Jesus’ genealogy. Here we have one more foreshadowing of the mission to the Gentiles. The definition of the people of God was expanding. If you think of this expansion as a continuing pattern throughout history, what does that mean for us today?
- What do you make of the lurking danger in this story? What is Herod up to, enlisting the explanations of the scribes and priests and asking to pay homage?

Tell it your way

Add to your “Journey to Bethlehem” mural.