

ST. LUKE'S ADVENT WREATH GUIDE



St. Luke's
United Methodist Church





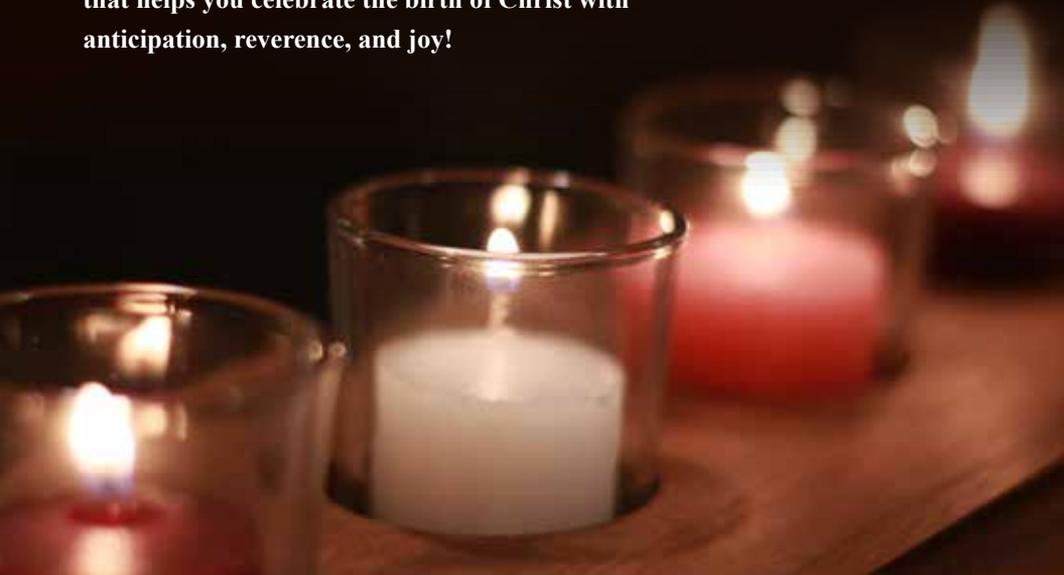
Advent is the season leading up to Christmas Day. It is a time set aside for the preparation of our hearts and minds to fully celebrate the birth of the Christ Child. Advent is marked by anticipation of the coming of Christ as the physical manifestation of God. Jesus is “God in the flesh” and the best expression of God’s love for all creation. He is Emmanuel, which means “God with us,” and that is the greatest gift we can receive.

The candles are a way of counting down to Christmas by focusing on a different theme each week. Just as there are countless lessons to learn from the birth of Christ, there are also numerous themes that can be applied to the Advent candles.

Just as we clean and decorate our homes to get ready for the holiday, so too we make our hearts ready. There are five candles - each representing a certain week of the Advent season and one for Christmas Eve/Day.

There are three purple candles, one pink candle, and one white candle placed in the middle. Purple is a sign of royalty and represents that Jesus was born as the Prince of Peace and King of Kings. Pink or rose is the liturgical color for joy. The pink candle is traditionally lit on the third Sunday of Advent which is known as Gaudete Sunday. “Gaudete” (the first syllable rhymes with “cow” so that the word is pronounced Gow-Day-Tay) means “rejoice.” White is the color to represent holiness and is lit on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning to celebrate the birth of Christ.

Let the lighting of the Advent Wreath become a family tradition that helps you celebrate the birth of Christ with anticipation, reverence, and joy!



WEEK ONE - FAITH

Scripture

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus. - Matthew 1:18-25



Light the first candle (purple).

Reflection

Opening lines can tell you a great deal. They reveal what the author considers to be the beginning of the story and it is often unexpected. However, we put trust in the author and have faith in the story itself. Charles Dickens opens the story, *A Christmas Carol*, with the following line, “Marley was dead, to begin with.” It seems like an odd start, but it highlights the importance of the character Jacob Marley, as well as getting the reader ready for the message that Marley was going to deliver to Scrooge. In a similar way, the Gospel of Matthew begins the story with the verse, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.” It doesn’t start with the actual birth

but sometime before when an angel delivered a message to Joseph about his fiancée, Mary. Though Joseph did not fully understand, he had faith in the messenger. The author of Matthew is emphasizing the proclamation of the Word of God. The birth of Jesus Christ begins with a message to Joseph, “Do not fear...” And that is God’s message to us, “Do not fear; for Jesus has come into the world.” The Word of God is an everlasting promise in which we can have faith.

WEEK ONE - FAITH (cont.)

Prayer

God of the Ages,

You are the One who was, who is, and who always will be. You have given us faith - an undying trust in Your love for us as Your children. Thank You for the birth of Christ, the Living Word, the everlasting message of faith. - Amen.



WEEK TWO - MERCY

Scripture

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this?

For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. - Luke 1:1-23



WEEK TWO - MERCY (cont.)

Light the candle from the first week and then the second candle (purple).

Reflection

In John 14:27 Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” The world tends to view “peace” in the same light as “tranquility,” as in, a life without any negative circumstances. The peace that Christ brings to us is the reassurance of His loving presence in the midst of turmoil. Joseph had plenty of reasons to be troubled and fearful; his fiancée was found to be pregnant outside of marriage. The circumstances didn’t change, but something changed within Joseph following the dream where the angel spoke to him. He had peace as he was reassured by the messenger. Recall some moments where you faced difficult circumstances, but you felt peace.

Prayer

Merciful God,

We are set free by Your mercy. You give us courage to embrace the joys of our past without leaving us there. Thank You for the message of Jesus Christ who sets us free to live the life You have given us. - Amen.



WEEK THREE - JOY

Scripture

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

- Luke 1:39-45



Light the candles from the first and second weeks and then the third candle (pink),

Reflection

Joy is different than happiness. Happiness is a choice that is often reliant upon the circumstances; if things are good, it's easier to be happy. Joy is a quality that exists apart from temporary circumstances. Mary and Elizabeth would have had great concerns at their respective pregnancies; Mary with being unwed and Elizabeth with being older. But

despite their worries, they experienced joy in their pregnancies and that of the other woman. Elizabeth exclaimed, "For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy!" Even the baby within Elizabeth, John the Baptist, was given joy before he was even born. Jesus was born to be a message of joy for all!

Prayer

Loving God,

You are the source of all goodness and joy. Thank You for the birth of Jesus Christ who brings the message of a joy-filled life to humanity. We celebrate the joy of Christmas!

- Amen.

WEEK FOUR - LOVE

Scripture

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths 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, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." - Luke 2:8-15

Light the candles of the first three weeks and then the fourth candle (purple).

Reflection

“For God so loved the world...” Jesus Christ came into the world because of the love of God. We celebrate Christmas because of the everlasting love of God. For every gift you purchase or unwrap, remember the greatest gift of all. The Christ Child is the eternal symbol that God so loved the world!



Prayer

Dear God,

Your love blesses us every moment. Fill us with Your grace and peace. Give us eyes to see the opportunities we have to share Your love and bring hope to the world. - Amen

CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY - RECEIVING CHRIST

Scripture

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'" Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.
- Matthew 2:1-12



CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY - RECEIVING CHRIST (cont.)

Light the first candle (purple).

Reading

We light this candle and give thanks for the faith we receive in Christ.

Light the second candle (purple).

Reading

We light this candle and give thanks for the mercy we receive from Christ.

Light the third candle (pink).

Reading

We light this candle and give thanks for the joy we receive from the birth of Jesus.

Light the fourth candle (purple).

Reading

We light this candle and give thanks for the love we receive from Christ.

Light the Christ candle (white).

Reading

We light this candle and give thanks for the gift of Jesus.

Reflection

The actual date of the birth of Jesus is not known. We celebrate on December 25, but it is a reminder to be intentional to give thanks for Christ coming into the world. More importantly, we should express our gratitude that Christ has come into our lives. Just like Scrooge, we can have a brand new beginning today understanding that the God who was, who is, and who always will be - is with us now and always!

Prayer

Holy Christ,

We thank You for the example of true love. You have given us new life and shown us how to live life to the fullest. Help us follow You today and every day! - Amen.





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