

ADVENT LITANIES 2020*

Every year we busily prepare for the Christmas season: the cookies, the presents, seeing our families. This year during our preparations amid the concerns with the pandemic, politics, and social unrest, I invite us to pay closer attention to God and to remember that Advent means “coming.” Let us prepare our hearts to receive Jesus on Christmas Day and to celebrate his arrival - God with us.

An Advent wreath in your home can be a wonderful reminder that God is with us. The candles on the wreath represents hope, peace, joy, and love. Invite your family to help light the candles and to look each week for symbols that remind us of the meaning of Advent - Emmanuel, God with us. In the rush of the Christmas season, may this sacred pause be a time of joy for you.

First Sunday of Advent: Hope in God's Presence with Us

Speak: "Keep awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake" (Mark 13:35-37, NRSV).

Light the first candle, the candle of hope.

Read: Mark 13:24-37

Reflect: It is tempting to hear Mark's call to "keep awake" as a warning or threat. What if we heard these words as hopeful, as an invitation to set aside the Christmas lists, or a party invitation, and to focus instead on keeping our hearts awake?

Do: Look for signs of God's presence this week. Where is God already present? How is Jesus coming to you in: this season?

Pray: God of the Present Moment, we hear your imitation to keep awake. When hope feels as fleeting as a bird, remind us that you are ever-present. We pray that hope lingers and makes a home in our lives this Advent. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent: Peace in Each Step of the Journey

Speak: "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God" (Isa. 40:1).

Light the second candle, the candle of peace.

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11

Reflect: Isaiah calls the people to get up to a high mountain. For generations people have cried out as Isaiah does that the paths are crooked, the valleys too far down, and the mountains too high. We fear stumbling on uneven stretches of the journey. What if we could see it all from God's perspective, that through it all God is the eternal source of peace?

Do: Each time you set out on a road or pathway today, pause and ask God to grant you peace. Whether you are working from home or office, or taking the dog for a walk, remember God's promise of peace.

Pray: God of our journeys, whether we walk with purpose or wander without clear direction, whether we are in a valley or on the mountaintop, grant us your eternal peace. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent: Joy Experienced and Shared

Speak: "Our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.' The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced" (Psalm. 126:2-3).

Light the third candle, the candle of joy.

Read: Psalm 126:1-6 and First Thessalonians 5:12-22

Reflect: When was the last time you found it difficult to contain your joy? What did it feel like in your body and soul to be so joyful? First Thessalonians reminds us that rejoicing, and prayer come when we are at peace in our communities, when we are encouraging the faint-hearted, when we are helping the weak, and being patient with everyone. What opportunities do you have to help others, be a peacemaker, and offer encouragement this season?

Do: Look for opportunities to rejoice, encourage, and help in your community.

Pray: God of laughter, expand our joy and help us to share it in our communities this week. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love Living Among Us

Speak: "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb'" (Luke 1:41-42).

Light the fourth candle, the candle of love.

Read: Luke 1:39-56

Reflect: The love in this scripture is more than the love of a mother for her child. It is the love of God who would come to dwell among us, demonstrating God's great love for us.

Do: Each time you see a child this week, pray that love would be made real in action.

Pray: God of Love, continue to take on flesh and be made real in our families, in our communities, and in the world. Amen.

Christmas Eve/Christmas Day

Speak: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Light the white candle, the candle of Christ's light.

Read: John 1:1-18

Reflect: We have spent the last few weeks staying awake, looking for hope, offering peace, sharing joy, and embodying love. How can you imagine these daily acts of love bringing more light to the world?

Do: Each time you turn a light on or off this week, renew your covenant to live as a follower of the Light.

Pray: God of Light, grant us the courage to testify to the Light. May your hope, peace, joy, and love fill the earth. Amen.*

* Adapted from *Passing It On: How to Nurture Your Children's Faith Season by Season* by Kara Lassen Oliver, Upper Room Books