

2020 Advent liturgies

Provided by Rev. Thad Allen, regional minister in the Northeastern, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia regions

Advent 1

The text is divided into 4 readers; you may divide it any way you wish, and include someone to light the candles at the appropriate time.

Reader 1

Listen to the prophet Isaiah:

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Reader 2

The poet George Herbert once wrote: "He that believes in hope dances without music." This is a good picture for a life of faith. To hope in God's grace is to move to a rhythm that other people may not hear. It is to act out a drama others cannot imagine. It is to glide through life guided by a tune that plays only in your own heart.

The hopes of our faith make no sense from the outside. It's a rough world, with forces that try to dominate our lives. But we hope in a God of truth and justice to have the final word. In a world where violence and force always seem to win the day, we hope in a force of love that is the supreme power. In a world where wealth and status seem to have the upper hand over desperate, needy people, we hope that poverty and innocence have God's special blessing.

Candle-lighter: *Light 1 candle*

All sing the candle-lighting hymn. (Suggested: "One Candle Is Lit," Chalice Hymnal #128, verse 1)

Reader 3 *As the hymn ends...*

Having hope means constantly expecting a different kind of future, even when history seems to confirm our fears. Hope is for those who feel the pain of the world. Hope is for those who agonize at human cruelty. Hope is for those who hear the cries of homeless and hungry children, and cry along with them.

In a world where hope seems so far away, we are a people of hope. We listen for the voice of angels in the wind. We stretch to see the first light of a new day on the horizon. We long for a new birth of grace in every human heart. We wait. We listen. We hope.

Reader 4 (*may be offered responsively or by one voice*)

Let us pray:

Christ we sit in darkness, but you are our light.

We long for your coming into our hearts, into our lives and into our world.

You are the One for whom all the peoples of the earth wait.

Our world has been shaken by fire and earthquake and storm;

Our security has been shaken by bombings and wars and uncertainty.

We wait in anticipation expecting God's light to penetrate our darkness and radiate within us.

In the midst of our doubts and our insecurities we are reminded that you are never shaken. Your faithfulness reaches to the ends of the earth.

We watch and wait expecting new light to shine as the season of joy approaches.

You are our rock and our refuge, an ever present help in trouble.

Come down, come in, walk with us so that we trust in you and not be shaken.

We wait in hope attentive to all the signs of Christ's coming.

Advent 2

The text is divided into 7 readers; you may divide it any way you wish, and include someone to light the candles at the appropriate time.

Reader 1

Listen to the Prophet Isaiah:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

ALL:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

Reader 1 (continues)

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Reader 2

Advent is about peace. And we do so long for peace. We live in a world of chaos and discord. The trademark of our times is violence. In a nation awash in guns, we continue to raise our children on myths of machismo. Our movie heroes are tough-talking, gun-wielding musclemen. Our streets are dangerous. Our civil dialogue has given way to abusive rhetoric. And a routine trip through a busy intersection is often enough to give us a glimpse of at least one other driver's middle finger. In all of it, we do long for peace.

Reader 3

The state of our minds often mirrors the state of our world. We juggle hyperactive schedules, fragmented families, and hypertensive pressures. We worry about our children, we agonize over how to care for our parents, and no job seems secure. Our choices of antacid are outnumbered only by our spiritual options. We grasp for gurus and scan self-help books in serial confusion. Stress is the name of our days. And we do so long for peace.

Candle-lighter: *Light 2 candles*

All sing the candle-lighting hymn. (Suggested: "One Candle Is Lit," Chalice Hymnal #128, verse 2)

Reader 4: *As the hymn ends...*

Surely the peace of our world starts with the peace of a heart. We are reminded that there is a peace of God which passes all understanding. At the core of each of us, if we will only listen, there is a still, small voice which can calm our fears, quiet our lives, and dispel our desperation. At the heart of each of us, if we only seek it, there is a spirit that rests in the grace of God. An assurance at the center of our lives can tame the chaos at the edges.

Reader 5

That spirit of God is also the hope of our world. Peace can come only when we can understand each other, knowing that God's spirit makes us truly one. In the eyes of even a murderer, I can see my own anger. In the face of a terrorist, I can see my own desperation. In the breast of my enemy, I can feel my own fear. Peace is possible because we share that one spirit that rests in the presence of God.

Reader 6

Not one of us is a stranger to the other. Every passion or malice that might separate us I can find and recognize in my own heart, and so our differences lose their force. We are one with each other, and one with God, and that is a peace beyond the power of any stress or violence that can assault us. As we await the Bringer of Peace, the peace of God is already with us.

Reader 7 *(may be offered responsively or by one voice)*

Let us pray:

Prepare the way! The promise is come!

The lion shall dwell with the lamb.

Prepare the way! The old with the young!

A child shall teach us to stand.

Prepare the way! Make the paths straight!

Earth shall fill her deep valleys!

Prepare the way! Break down walls of hate!

The Way is approaching! Servants keep watch. Soon we shall see the salvation of our God!

Advent 3

The text is divided into 6 readers; you may divide it any way you wish, and include someone to light the candles at the appropriate time.

Reader 1

Listen to the word of God from Isaiah:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. ...Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come and save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people...the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Reader 2

Advent is about joy. But our times seem little suited for rejoicing. Our culture irritates and entertains, intoxicates and numbs, but rejoicing seems like a foreign idea. You can't do it on cue. Joy can't be bought and sold. You can't plan for it or train for it. It doesn't fit into a well-ordered life, and it's not FDA approved.

Reader 3:

Joy comes only when least expected. We rejoice only when life has been turned on its ear; when—whatever we feared, whatever we steeled ourselves against--some gift of God has presented itself instead. When we rein in our loves to protect ourselves from pain, when we curtain our hopes from fear of disappointment, when we equip ourselves with cynicism to avoid looking foolish, we do so at the expense of joy.

Candle-lighter: *Light 3 candles (in places where a pink candle is available, this should be the 3rd one lit)*

All sing the candle-lighting hymn. (Suggested: "One Candle Is Lit," Chalice Hymnal #128, verse 3)

Reader 4: *As the hymn ends...*

As freedom can only be tasted in all its sweetness by those who know the feel of chains, so joy sings with its most full-throated glory only in spirits enlarged by the weight of despair and softened by the brine of tears. Pleasures floats on the surface of life. Happiness flits across a moment or an hour. But joy springs from the depths.

Reader 5

Joy is new life beating in a heart that has been broken. Joy is awakening to a fair morning from a nightmare of reality. Joy is a flight sunward on wings you had forgotten you had. Joy is the sound of laughter erupting from a procession of grief. Joy is God's melody amid the discord of life, a song carrying the rhythm of eternity and touching the chords of longing in our souls.

Hand microphone to Reader 6

Reader 6: *(may be offered responsively or by one voice)*

Let us pray:

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.

We give thanks to you, O God, for the promise of full joy that this season brings to light.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.

For all the troubles life can bring, you bring amazing possibilities that fill our hearts with joy.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.

Renew in us this day the promises of light after darkness, day after night, hope after despair, joy in this and every morning, for our trust is in you. Amen.

Advent 4

The text is divided into 6 readers; you may divide it any way you wish, and include someone to light the candles at the appropriate time.

Reader 1

Listen to the Gospel according to Luke:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Reader 2

Advent is about love. Francis Bacon once wrote: "A crowd is not company, faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk is but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love."

We are social beings. That is our blessing and our curse. We long for each other. We long to touch, to share, to bare some part of ourselves, to be understood, to invite others into our lives. We all long to lessen the loneliness that lurks in the background of even our most crowded moments.

Reader 3:

We are born alone and we will ultimately die alone, but in between we desperately want to be known, to be understood, to belong, to find some kind of acceptance just as we are—some intimacy of soul. And so we reach out with fragile, delicate efforts of love.

But love is dangerous. We can hurt each other. Hearts can be broken. Rejection can come. If you try to belong, you can be excluded, and that can hurt more than being alone.

Love, and the vulnerability that comes with it, can be the riskiest business of all. But there is no love without such risks. Like hunger and thirst, the longing for love is implanted deeply within us, and God offers us many opportunities to care, to reach out, and to love.

Candle-lighter: *Light 4 candles*

All sing the candle-lighting hymn. (Suggested: "One Candle Is Lit," Chalice Hymnal #128, verse 4)

Reader 4: *As the hymn ends...*

There is some part of this gift of life that can't be stored up or locked away. Some part of this spirit that God has placed in us will die if we do not spend it or share it or give it away.

Reader 5

Love is always a risk, but it is a risk upon which the very heart of our life depends. To love is to touch the heart of God. To look into the eyes of another and recognize our common soul is to see the face of God. Even to feel the ache of a heart broken for love is to discover God's grace.

Reader 6: *(may be offered responsively or by one voice)*

Let us pray:

Your love, O God, is great, and the risks you have taken were supreme.

Teach us the way of love, and help us to walk in it.

From the depths of your creating love, you made us male and female.

Teach us the way of love, and help us to walk in it.

In the goodness of your covenant, you created us a community of your love.

Teach us the way of love, and help us to walk in it.

In the fullness of time you sent us Jesus, a man of love that risked all for the sake of the world.

Teach us the way of love, and help us to walk in it.

In your resurrection power, you have revealed your love to all humanity.

Teach us the way of love, and help us to walk in it.

Help us, O God, to reveal your love as we discover anew the tremendous power of the Christmas story and meet again the Christ-child, born anew among us.

Amen and Amen.