

Advent Candle Lighting

Advent 1: The Gospel of John speaks of Christ as the true light coming into the world. In commemoration of that coming, we light candles for the four weeks leading to Christmas and reflect on the coming of Christ. It is significant that the church has always used that language—the coming of Christ—because it speaks to a deep truth. Christ is coming. Christ is always coming, always entering a troubled world, a wounded heart. And so we light the first candle, the candle of hope, and dare to express our longing for peace, for healing, and the well-being of all creation. (Light Candle while we sing Star Child 2095 verse 1)

Prayer of Inspiration

God of the unpredictable, we gather to celebrate the hope and the promise of Advent. We come aware of our need and the need in the world. We are eager for encounter with you, and with faith and anticipation we wait, trusting that as you first came to surprise the world in Jesus, you will come again. Help us to recognize you in every moment of love and grace, in our worship and in our everyday lives. We give you all glory and praise. Amen.

The Word Numbers 6:26; Psalm 29:11; 37:37; Romans 5:1; Phil. 4:6-7
The LORD lift up his face to you and grant you peace.

Let the LORD give strength to his people!

Let the LORD bless his people with peace!

Observe those who have integrity and watch those whose heart is right because the future belongs to persons of peace.

Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks.

Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

Living the Word

Finding Calm: Begin with a breath prayer. As you breathe in say "Lord God Almighty." As You breathe out say "I am yours." Try in your mind to really turn yourself over to God. Surrender yourself to God's will. Lets do it three times: Deep breath in – "Lord God Almighty...I am yours."

Next three times with "Lord Jesus Christ...dwell in me."

And lastly three times "Come Home Spirit...speak to me." Amen.

Thanksgiving: the Fat Tuesday before Advent. The night before Lent begins – is called Fat Tuesday – the reasoning is that if you are going to change your ways during Lent, you should have one last celebration the night before.

Before Advent we do a whole weekend of last celebration with gorging at the turkey feast and spending through Black Friday and tomorrow: Cyber Monday, both of which, in many stores, began as much as a week before the Friday and Monday that they were named for.

How did you fair on the gluttonous scale (sorry to mention scale so soon after) of eating and spending? This year we decided to eat our meal at 5:30pm on Thanksgiving, which meant a whole day of cooking frenzy for family of ten (which turned out to be only 7 as brother-in-law Mark didn't make it across the yard...Granddaughter Brooke went to her boyfriends...and Donald was fighting a house fire in Stone Lake). 30 minutes of eating, and then overeating (Pie is usually later after our systems have rested, but no time to wait as we are already at the table and it is dark outside...); this was followed by 30 minutes of putting all of the leftovers away for the next day.

We can load the dishwasher, but we can't start it as the men move just across the room from the table to the couch for football. So it's 8pm and time to go Black Friday shopping at Wal-Mart to see what is left as the sale began as we were making the gravy... - actually, this year I was too tired and waited for morning - I got a few deals, and on it goes.

So today, we come seeking a calm. Advent, as we prepare, once again, for the coming of Christ and Christmas. "O Come, O Come Emmanuel. And ransom captive all of us." It is difficult to stay focused on calm, as this time is referred to as 'The Christmas Rush.'

Anyone who is seeking Christmas by channel surfing, if they hit upon the "Lifetime Channel" will find an abundance of Seasonal movies to get into the spirit of eating, gathering and giving. People seeking hope, peace, joy and love expressed through family and home will have their hearts warmed as they watch one flick after another.

As I was cooking that Thanksgiving Dinner, someone in the next room turned on a touching 'Lifetime' Santa story. I wasn't watching, but I did notice that the back ground music was The First Noel.

In my head as they watched Santa falling in love with a potential Mrs. Santa were these words: "The first Noel the angels did sing, was to certain, poor, shepherds in fields as they lay." I got instantly caught on the phrase 'was to certain poor shepherds', Which must mean to specific chosen, poor, shepherds. But what if it was to make certain - or assure them of the hope and peace which they could have through the Christ Child.

"In fields where they lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter's night that was so deep. Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel -Born is the king of Israel!" On a cold winter's night as you are going about, doing what you do, could you find that same assurance of hope, peace, joy and love, through the coming of Christ within you? Now there is an Advent thought...

Us poor shepherds, waiting and watching, yet surprised when suddenly the Angels sing or Jesus stops by...will you then take a moment to reflect?

I hope in the midst of your turkey celebration, you took time to be thankful, as in the center of that time of sharing blessings we find the hope, peace, joy and love to continue on.

"O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight."

Psalms 46:10 says "*Be Still and Know that I am God.*" It is very problematic to be still. I am doing the best that I can...'Calgon, take me away.' 1980's commercial: "The traffic, the boss, the baby, the dog; that does it: Calgon, take me away. Lose yourself in a luxury bubble bath it will lift your spirits..."

The Apostle Paul writes to the people of Philippi: "*Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.*"

Paul is writing from Prison; the Philippians are being persecuted for these new ideas as they followed Christ; and there was 'strife' between the Christian leaders. Paul wrote this letter as an encouragement. Chapter one tells of 'opponents who have caused them suffering.'

Can this young Christian group hold together? Also there is alternative teaching from false prophets of that day being taught. Can these new Christians discern the truth of Christ's message?

Paul addresses an issue of several members of the Christian Leaders of Philippi, who are at odds with each other and in their disagreements, they may be dividing the group, who need to hold together for the good of the work of sharing the Gospel. Paul writes from prison, celebrating that in the midst of all kinds of drama and trauma, the message of Christ's Good News is still going forth into the world.

He invites them to pray instead of being anxious. So easy to say – but sometimes difficult to begin. I taught 22 Confirmation classes through my ministry years. When we discussed prayer, the first question I asked them was: By what name do you address God when you pray? I invite you to ask yourself that question right now. (pause) There isn't really a wrong answer, but it is good to have a starting point when you pray. Their answers varied from "Our Father, to Lord, to Dear Jesus, and so on."

Then we moved on to what words do you say? Again, there isn't a set answer, but we listed the kinds of prayer: Praise, Thanksgiving, Forgiveness, praying for others and praying for ourselves. And that there is no set length. Often a one word – 'please, or thanks, or help' is what is called for. "Be with me, stay by me, lead me, guide me, save me...the important part is just to pray..."

Yet Paul who is imprisoned – a more dire situation than most others – then or us now – calls them to 'pray and be at peace.' How are we supposed to 'not worry' and have peace when each of us have our own issues to deal with? We don't all live a 'Lifetime' movie with only one plot issue to solve in our lives and then it's all roses again.

Why are we supposed to 'not worry' and have peace? Because for those who believe God's promise that Jesus Christ, our King, will return – there is a happy ending. So I invite you to set yourself up for moments worthy of reflection. Seek Hope, Peace, Joy and Love this pre-season to Christmas.

Here are some suggestions:

Come on Wednesdays to watch a video and discuss the Faithfulness of Joseph, Jesus' father.

Go to the Community Concert this week on Wednesday or Friday evening at 7pm or Sunday at 2pm. Enjoy our 75 voice choir singing the Carols, like you have never heard them before...and Handel's Messiah. When we get to the Hallelujah chorus, **you** can sing with us for a highlight of your Advent season.

Come on Sunday, December 15 at 10:00am service and take part in the Christmas Pageant, as we tell the Christmas story as a congregation together.

Christmas Eve, 4pm service - we will celebrate with carols, candlelight and communion.

One more invitation: I invite you to take time to watch the movie "The Nativity Story." If you have seen it before, watch for it with new eyes this year. If you haven't seen it yet – take time this year as it makes the Christmas story details come alive in the setting of Christ's birthplace. (show Trailer)

Find Hope, Peace, Joy and Love in the knowledge that this is the true story of Christmas and God had it happen for your benefit. This season is not just about a Babe in a Manger, but about the One who came to show you God's desire for you to know the hope and the peace and the joy and the love – all year. Begin by finding the calm for your heart. Watch for the angels announcing the coming of the King in your life and have a blessed and happy Advent! "Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright!" Amen.