

FRIDAY GATHERING: "FAITH STORIES IN ADVENT"

This Advent candle lighting ceremony is a variation for traditional lighting of the Advent wreath with sharing stories of faith (www.reformedworship.org). Lighting the candles may be spread over the four weeks of Advent.

"Testimonies" may be included (prepared or spontaneous), followed by music. "Advent Homework" sections may be printed in the bulletin for personal devotions.



PRELUDE "Once in Royal David's City" **UMH 250**

**WELCOME/ANNOUNCEMENTS
INTRODUCTION**

CALL TO WORSHIP

We are waiting to welcome God!

A distant star glitters in the sky:

COME, JESUS, COME.

We are getting everything ready.

A blazing beacon lights the way:

COME, JESUS, COME.

We are praying for the Light of the world.

The Son brightens a gloomy day:

COME, JESUS, COME

OPENING PRAYER OF ADVENT

Bright God of Advent, blaze into our lives. Light up the way and rekindle in us your desire for justice and peace, that we may carry your Light wherever we go. Amen.

SONG "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" **UMH 211**

(Hymn may be sung before lighting the candles or one verse after each candle)

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH: SHARING OUR FAITH STORIES

1st WEEK OF ADVENT: HOPE

We light the first Advent candle, the candle of hope, as we look forward to the coming of Jesus, who is our hope now and forever.

"Praise be to the God and our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth in living hope." In hope, we look forward to Jesus coming into our lives and celebrating Jesus' birth on Christmas. *(1 Peter 1:3)*

Prayer: Dear God, as we light this candle, we pray that you will shine the light of your hope into our hearts and into our world. Amen.

(light one candle)

Testimony

Think of a time when you faced a difficult time and through God's grace you were able to find Hope...

Pause/sing one verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

(Ask a member of your congregation to offer a short testimony about when he or she faced a difficult time and through God's grace was able to have hope.)

Advent Homework (print in bulletin):

This week, read the story of Abraham & Sarah in Genesis 15:1-6 and 21:1-3. This is a story of hope. God promises them a son, and even though it took a long time, God kept his promise. After reading the story, sit quietly and reflect or write about a time when you experienced God's hope. (If others are present, invite each person to share their story.) Additional Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 21:4-9; Luke 2:25-32

2ND WEEK OF ADVENT: JOY

We light the candle of joy. In the gospel of Luke, the angel told the shepherds, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord." Jesus' birth brings great joy. *(Luke 2:10)*

Prayer: Dear God, bring joy into our hearts, now and forever, and help us to tell others about this joy. Amen.

(light one candle)

Testimony

Think of a time when you felt the Joy of knowing that you belonged to God...

Pause/ sing one verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.."

(Ask a member of your congregation to talk about the joy of knowing that he or she belongs to God. Some may have a conversion story; others may tell of being raised in the church and when they claimed their faith as their own.)

Advent Homework (print in bulletin):

This week, read Acts 8:26-40, the story of Philip and the Ethiopian. Reflect or share a story of how you came to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior or a time when you experienced great joy and love of God.

Additional Readings: Acts 9:1-19; 1 Samuel 1:1-20; Luke 1:1-25

3rd WEEK OF ADVENT: LOVE

Today we light the candle of love. In scripture we read, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." *(1 John 4:7)*

Prayer: Dear God, we love you because we know that you first loved us. As we light this candle, help us to love each other, and to share your love in the world. Amen.

(light one candle)

Testimony

Think of a time when you experienced the Love of God through the ministry of other people...

Pause/ sing one verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

(Ask a member of the congregation to talk about a time of experiencing the love of God through the ministry of other people.)

Advent Homework (print in bulletin):

This week, read Genesis 33:1-17, the story of Jacob's return to Esau and the gracious spirit in which Esau received him. Reflect or share a time when the love of Christ was shown to you through the ministry of others.

Additional Readings: Ruth 4:1-12; 1 Samuel 20; 2 Samuel 9

4th WEEK OF ADVENT: PEACE

Today we light the candle of peace. Jesus came to earth as the Prince of Peace to show us how to live in peace. Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 4)

Prayer: Dear God, help us to know how close you are to us all the time, and help us to show your peace to others in our words and actions. Amen.

(light one candle)

Testimony

Think of a place in the world or in life where you most long for Peace...

Pause/ sing one verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

(Ask a member of the congregation to talk about his or her desire for peace. Is there some place in the world, a city, or in life where you most long for peace?)

Advent Homework (print in bulletin):

This week read John 14:15-27, in which Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. Reflect or share your desire for peace in the world, whether in a large conflict or in something much smaller. Additional Readings: Mark 4:35-41; 2 Chronicles 30:1-20

CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

A candle burns, the last marker of our Advent journey.

As we arrive at our journey's end, may we arrive with wonder and awe.

As we arrive, the God of waiting welcomes us.

(light the Christ candle)

SONG

"Star-Child"

TFWS 2095

SEND US OUT

May God, the Bright Star-Maker, travel with us through Advent,
Shine into our lives,
Lead us in ways of justice,
Warm us with joy and love,
And send us out with hope and peace.

Postlude Music **“O Come, O Come Emmanuel” (instrumental)**

RESOURCES: *Prayers adapted from: Candles & Conifers: Resources for All Saints' & Advent, by Ruth Burgess, Wild Goose Publications, 2005.*