

Four Candles Retreat: Things to gather ahead of time

Here are a list of things you may want to do ahead of our time together.

- Clear a space to work creatively, whether that is a table or desk.
- Print out or prepare one or more templates to work from, either the one with the circles or the “coloring pages”. If you like to use paint you may want to trace the circle template onto heavy paper or a canvas board. If you don’t have a working printer, you can gather a few round things to trace, and I’ll show you a quick way to reproduce the template
- Gather any art supplies you might like to use. We will have some creative time together and you may choose to paint, draw, color, collage, or some combination of all of these. Things I like to have on hand for myself:
 - Acrylic paints, at least two brushes (one larger, one smaller), water, and a small plate or palette on which to mix colors
 - Markers or pens
 - Colored pencils, regular pencil, pencil sharpener
 - Crayons and/or pastels
 - Colorful papers or pictures to collage with, glue or mod podge
 - Glitter – I’m a sucker for sparkly things despite the mess it can make

Other things that may make for a lovely contemplative time but are entirely up to you

- Beautiful scented candle to light. I love woody scents, reminders of campfires, and rich aromatic scents. My current favorite has palo santo, an aromatic wood. But you do you.
- Soothing music. I will come with a little soundtrack for us to create by, but if you have something meditative that you love to listen to, turn down the volume on our call and turn up your own tunes.
- Delicious beverage of your choice. Maybe that’s warm spice cider, maybe tea, or just pure delicious water.

A Symbolic Dictionary for the Advent Season

Advent

The season of Advent is a time where people have traditionally focused on the promised coming and/or retuning of the light. Since the Christian church moved the birthday of Christ to coincide with other late December celebrations fixed on or around the Winter Solstice, the promise of Christ as the metaphorical “Light of the world” became mixed with the physical reality of the northern hemisphere where the solstice marks the longest night after which days grow longer and light literally returns to that part of the world.

The overarching theme of Advent, therefore is waiting to turn from darkness into light and waiting for the birth of something miraculous. If you come from a Christian tradition, then that miracle includes the birth of Jesus. If you do not have strong roots in the Christian traditions, then

Four Candles of Advent

Each Sunday in Advent is traditionally marked by the lighting of a colored candle. One candle lit on the first Sunday, two on the second, three of the third, four on the fourth. A fifth, white candle is sometimes added to the set on Christmas. Depending on the specific tradition or branch of Christianity colored candles may be purple or blue (both associated with preparation and royalty, and blue the night sky), usually with the third candle being pink (for joy and love).

Again, depending on tradition, each candle is said to represent a particular theme or part of story leading up to Christmas. These are alternatively given as:

- Hope, Faith, Joy, Peace
- Hope, Peace, Joy, Love
- Faith, Hope, Love, Peace
- Prophecy, Bethlehem, Shepherds, Angels
- God’s People, Prophets, John the Baptist, Mary

Other traditional Symbols

A host of symbols have been used evoke these elements and stories, some drawing on particular Biblical stories, some on more widely held beliefs. If you want to use such icons to evoke particular elements for you, here are some common symbols and their meanings (but remember, you are creating for you, so use what resonates for you in a way that feels true for you)

Anchor – symbol of hope, steadfast faith, strength. In early Christianity it recalled the apostles as “fishers of men” and combine abstractions of a cross (or sword) at the top and a descending dove in its bow at the bottom.

Angels – the heavenly host, praise of the Divine, messengers of the Divine

Animals – evoke the promised “peaceable kingdom” and the humble birth of Jesus

- Lion and the lamb
- Sheep, being kept by the shepherds who first heard the news, metaphor for followers of Christ, in myth a sheep’s fleece was given to the baby

- Donkey, carried Mary to Bethlehem and away into Egypt
- Cattle, whose manger became the crib of the baby
- Dove, who “cooed the babe to sleep so he would not cry,” also a traditional symbol of peace, promise, and reconciliation

Apple – the story of Adam and Eve and so evocative of sin, also a symbol of sweetness, abundance

Bethlehem – the city of David to which Jesus’s birth was prophesied.

Birch trees – hope and new beginnings

Butterfly – hope, resilience, growth

Candles – light in the darkness, light of the world, also the lighted candles of the menorah and the celebration of the miracle celebrated at Hanukah

Circle – unending, eternal love of an infinite Divine

Colors - Many colors have cultural symbolism, but they are varied. Sometimes higher emotional states coincide with colors with higher vibrational frequency on the visual spectrum. But color can also be deeply personal and you may feel that yellow is a happy, joyful color and not one associated with greed, green may connote nature and all its beauty not envy. When you paint, draw, or color from your heart, I recommend you use colors that speak to you in the moment.

Dove symbol of hope

Evergreens – eternal life

- Holly – Red berry, symbol of Christ Blood to be shed, sharp leaves recall both the thorns of Jesus’s “crown” as well as the pain of childbirth, white blossom of holly symbol of purity and protection
- Ivy – prosperity, charity, enduring promise
- Cedar -strength, grace, beauty, fragrance
- Fir – hope, promise, renewal

Gifts – brought by the Magii and the shepherds to Bethlehem, traditionally these are given as

- Gold – a symbol of wealth and authority
- Frankincense – oily sap of the Boswellia tree, burned as incense and having healing properties
- Myrrh – a fragrant oil/sap used to anoint the dead, and mixed in wine as an analgesic

Grain- a single grain of wheat (or sand) symbolizes insignificance and the infinite, in the aggregate a sheaf of wheat symbolizes health, happiness, abundance.

Heart- love, humanity, charity

Honey -symbol of joy, sweetness, and good health

Iris – derived from the Greek for rainbow, symbol of hope and faith

Knot – in the Celtic tradition knots are often depicted so that there is no beginning or end, thus they symbolize unity and eternity in general with different patterns having additional symbolic meanings:

- Triquetra – family, strength, the Christian trinity
- Triskelion – progress, motion
- Serch Bythol – love, unity
- Icovellavna – enduring bond of parent and child

Lilly – symbol of hope and rebirth, often shown in scenes of the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary the birth of Jesus.

Olive (Tree) – universal symbol of peace and friendship

Rainbow – hope and promises

Rose – love and hope, purity, endurance (the rose that blooms in winter)

- May refer to the 5-petalled Hellbore, which in myth sprang up where a young girl's tears hit the earth because she had no gift to bring Jesus
- Often depicted as a more traditional rose, a symbol of Mary

Shamrock (3-leaves) – symbol of Faith, hope, and love also of abundance, productivity, and prosperity

Spring – bubbling up of joy

Stag – from the Celtic tradition, a symbol of hope, growth, regeneration, and abundance

Stair – (or Ladder) symbol of ascension, seeking Divine guidance, following a faithful path

Star – alignments of stars were the signal to the “astrologer kings” or Magii who eventually came to recognize the birth of Jesus as significant.

- Six points, symbol of the Jewish people, established by King David
- Eight points, symbol of hope and guidance

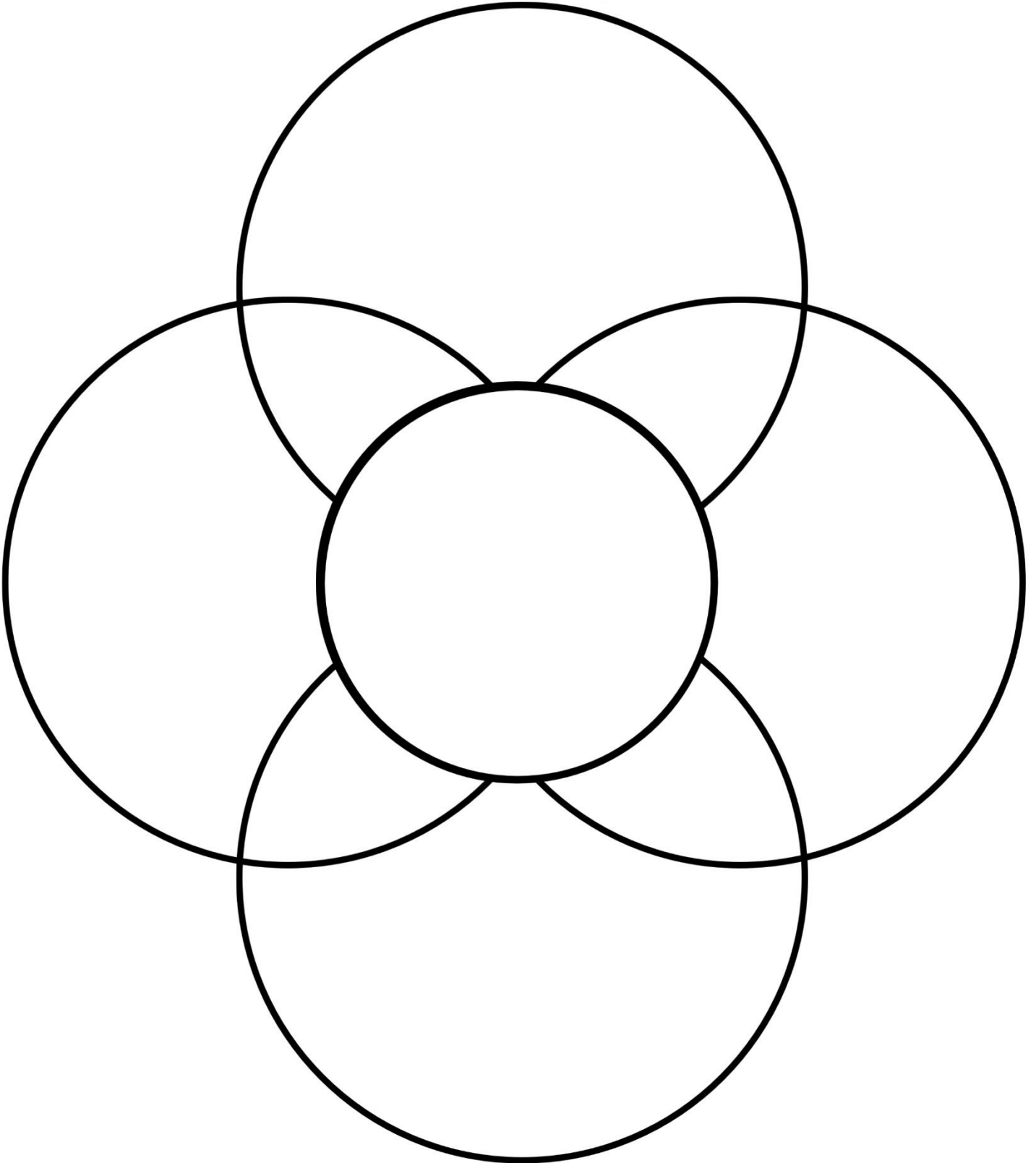
Tree – a traditional Advent hymn evokes the “stem of Jesse” biblical founder of Jesus's family tree. Sometimes depicted as an olive tree. In the Celtic tradition a tree is a symbol of strength, longevity, and wisdom, of connecting the earthly with the divine/heavenly, rooted and reaching.

- Fig – a portend of things to come
- Oak – strength, wisdom, longevity
- Olive – peace, friendship, victory, longevity

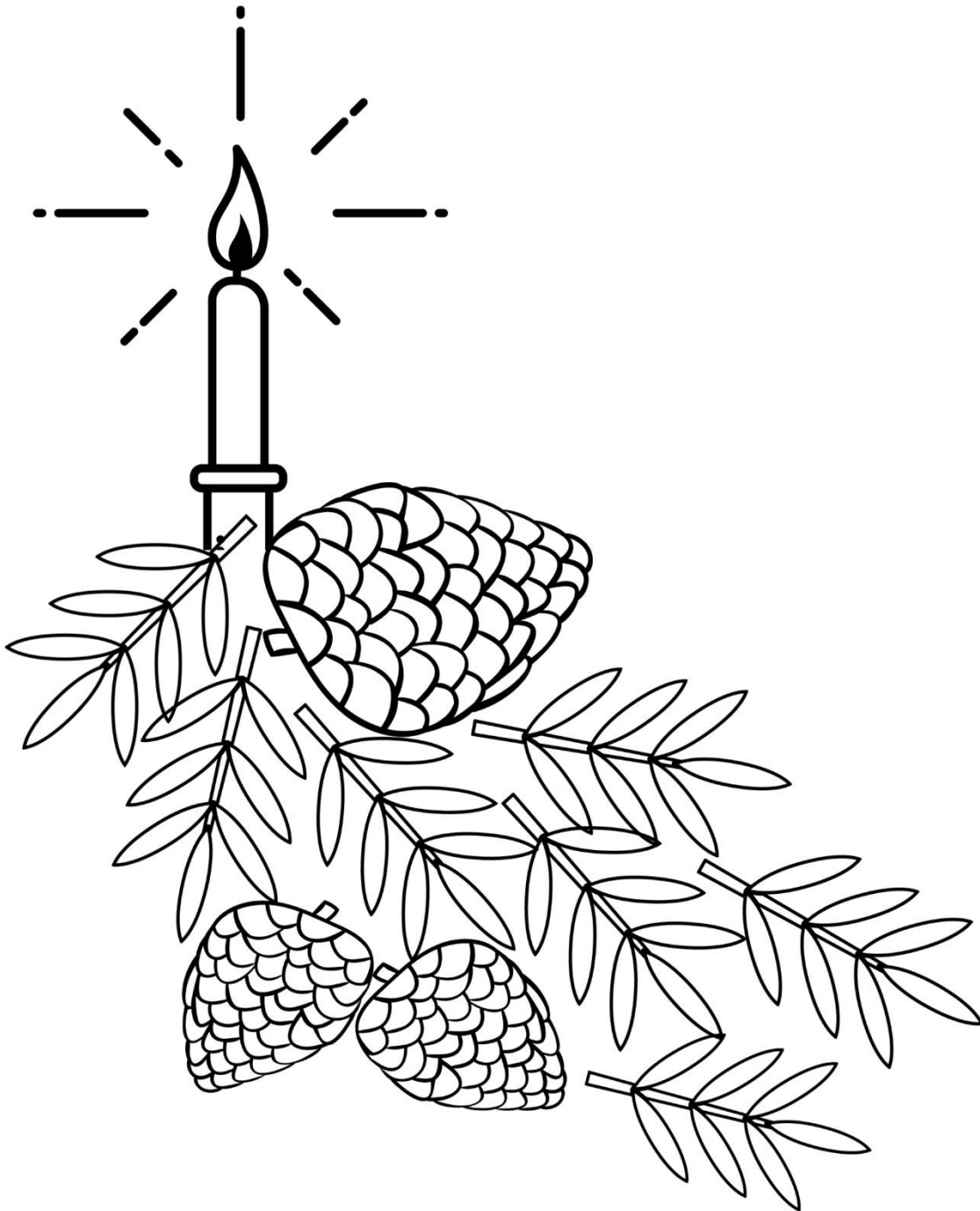
Water – the power of creation, rebirth, life, , satisfaction of longing

Wine – joy, friendship, transformation, sustenance and abundance

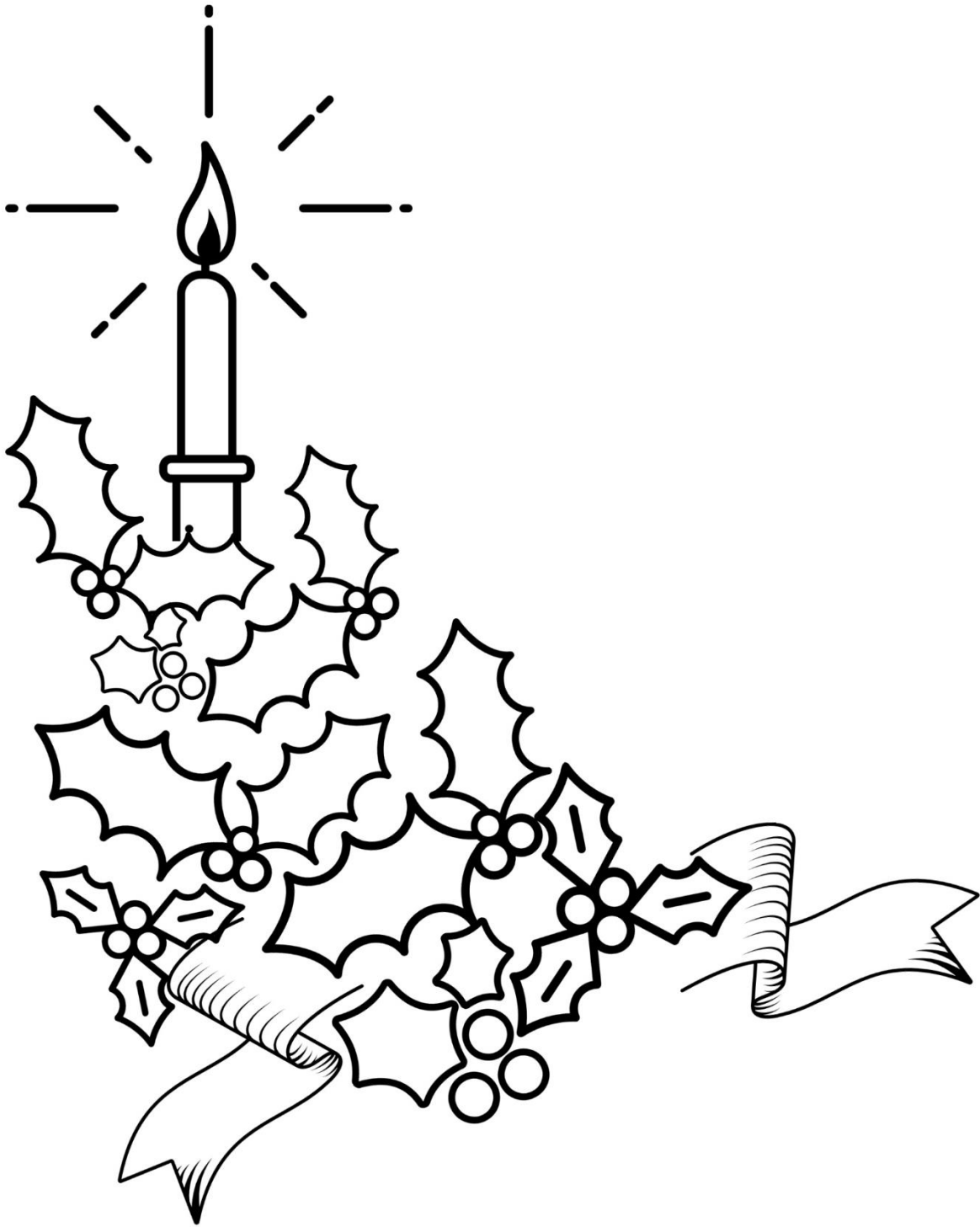
Hope, Faith, Joy, Peace



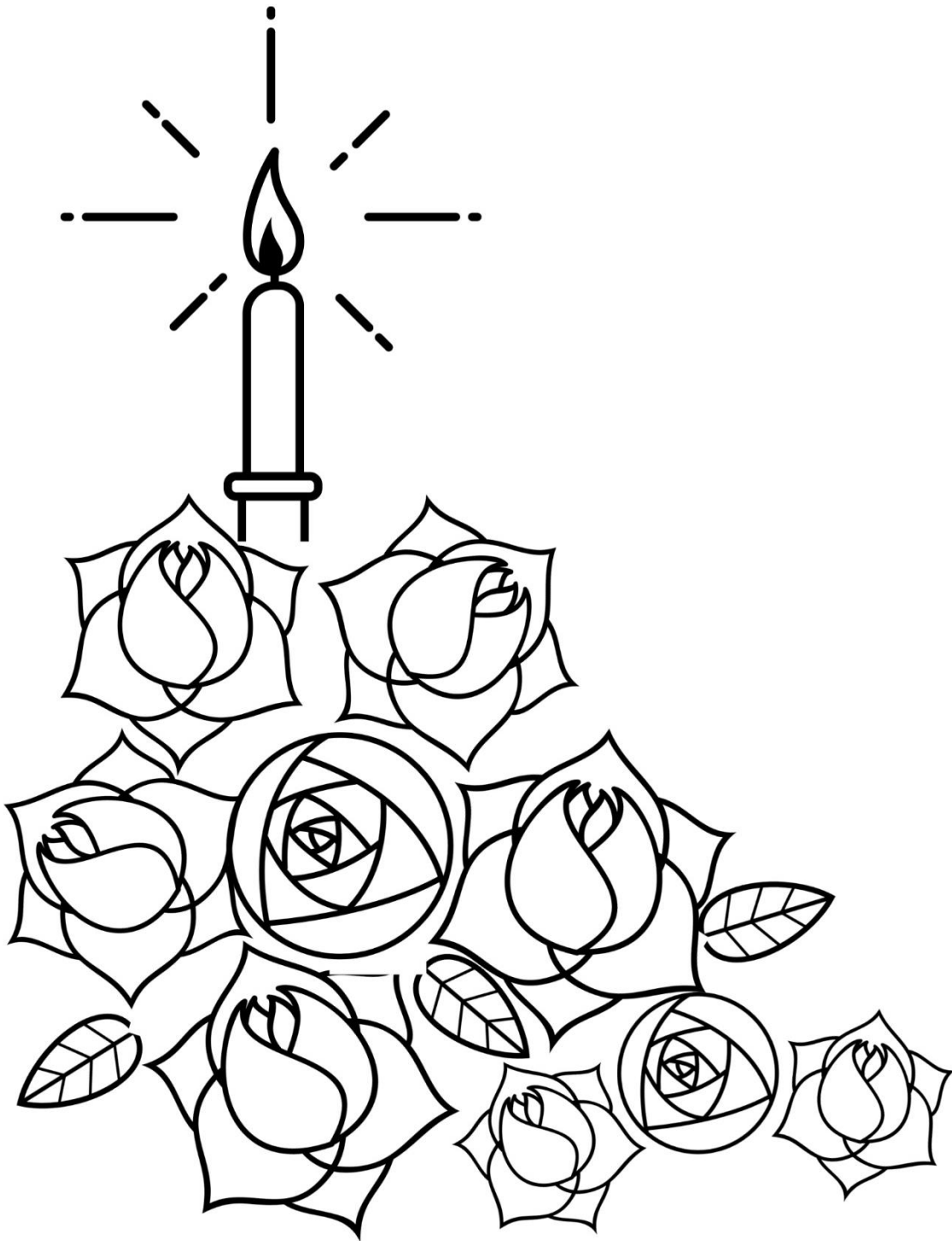
WHAT DO YOU HOPE FOR
IN THE COMING YEAR?



WHERE DO YOU FIND
FAITH FOR THE FUTURE?



WHO OR WHAT BRINGS
YOU GREAT JOY?



WHERE DO YOU GO TO
FIND YOUR PEACE?

