

ADVENT -> CHRISTMAS -> EPIPHANY

The commercial world blares "Buy!" But for us, this season invites us to wait, in expectation, to celebrate with joy; then go out and **Do!**

God came among us in a way that would help us to **notice**: love, loose in the universe. A baby, with all the hope that a birth holds. An invitation to live a gentler way — a way that includes **all** people.

We will look at stories of people who came along just before the birth of Jesus, his birth and the first ones to get the message, on to the visit of those mysterious "wise ones" we celebrate on Epiphany. We will break open those stories to see what they are offering — and what these stories say to us, here, now.

We explore what this season invites us to do — and how we will mark this time together in our homes.

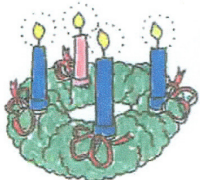


Some Things to Think About

We have a story from the Bible each week, told in a simpler form. We are invited to wonder, to picture the story and notice what was happening. Then we dig into the story for what it is says to us, here, now.

Older Children and Adults

The discussion suggests reading the passage from our Bible. We look for parallel situations in our world and, hopefully, new insights as to what this message is calling us to **do** and to **be**.



Some Things To Do

What might our family be called to **Do**? What can we do to lessen the damage being done to our planet? What could we do for our community? How can we help each other?

We can make choices that meet our schedule — that we can do with generosity and without frenzy!



At Home



We take time to notice aspects of the season. Candles can invite calm. An Advent Wreath may be used. **LED** candles are better with very young children.

A nativity scene with creatures a child can arrange would be good. (Lego "people" could work!)

We can experiment with new ways to pray, such as:

Holding hands in a circle,
and saying together:

"We are here,
YOU are here.
Thank you, God."

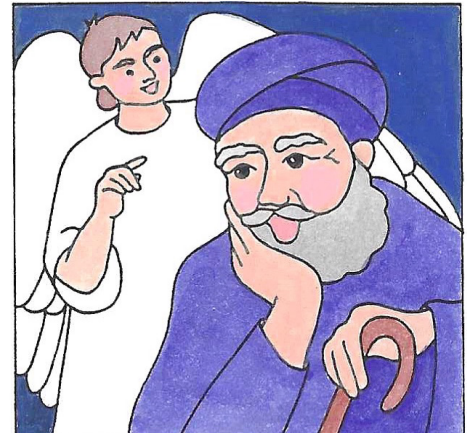
For more formal prayers, see
The Book of Common Prayer,
pages 75-76.

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Luke: 1:5-20, 57-64

In the year before Jesus was born, Zechariah was doing his priest work in the Temple. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were happy, but one thing was missing, they had never had a child to love. One day, when Zechariah was in the Temple getting all the incense billowing, he suddenly saw an angel standing right in front of him! The angel said, "Do not be afraid!"

(Angels have to say "Do not be afraid!" A huge angel can be pretty scary!) Then the angel said, "You and Elizabeth are going to have a baby to be named John."

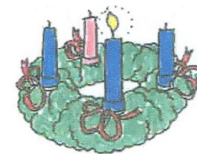


Some Things To Do

What plastics could we choose to avoid to help our planet? (Google plastic-free products for items we could use instead.)

Could we add to our shopping list toys for people down on their luck to give to their children? (Our church may have suggestions.)

We balance needs out there with caring for each other — in here.



At Home

We decide when we can be together, even if it is only once a week. If we chose an Advent Wreath or LED candles, we light one candle.

We share the POSSIBILITIES we notice: happy surprises, good things people do, our own caring.

Thank you God, for POSSIBILITIES. Help us to be tender to them and grateful. Amen.



Some Things to Think About

How would we describe what angels look like to us?

When was a time we heard something so exciting, we could hardly speak?

What is something we are expecting?

Older Children and Adults

(We may want to read: Luke 1:5-20, 57-64)

When was a time we got a great idea and had no clue how we got it?

What is something THEY said was not possible that we have seen happen?

What is something grumpy people say "can't be done" but we are pretty sure can be done?

I bring you good news of great joy!

We observed his star!

Be not afraid!

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Luke 1: 26-38

Six months later, a very young girl was sitting in her garden when suddenly, right in front of her, the angel Gabriel showed up. "Greetings, favored one," the angel said. Then, of course, the angel saw the look on Mary's face and had to say, "Behold! Be not afraid!"

Mary took a deep breath and listened, but the message still sounded really strange. She was going to have a baby soon — as in this very year! And the baby would grow up to bring God's word to lots of people.

The angel could tell that Mary was having a hard time trying to understanding all this, so the angel told her "God is with her, the Holy Spirit is right there with her. What's more, your elderly cousin, Elizabeth, is also going to have a baby very soon. You see, with God, anything is possible."

"OK" said Mary. "I will do my part." At that, the angel slipped out of sight.



Some Things To Do

Do we recycle, and if not, could we begin?

Could we make a "Secret Santa" plan to do something that would help someone?

What if each of us figures out something to do in secret for a person in our family?



Some Things to Think About

When was a time I said, "I will do it," even when I was not sure I could?

When were some times we GOT IT that God is right here with us?

Since God chooses people to help, what might God be choosing us to do?

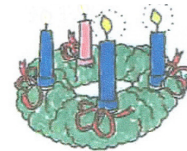
Older Children and Adults

(We may want to read Luke 1:26-38)

What do we think? Did Mary know this was how the Messiah would be born?

What did people expect the Messiah would do?

What signs do we see of people GETTING the message Jesus brought?



At Home

We light two candles if we have chosen to use candles.

The nativity set can help us keep the story in front of us.

We share AMAZING gifts, even ones we take for granted (sun, water, food, etc.), naming them and being grateful.

Thank you, God, for this AMAZING planet we call home. Amen.

I bring you good news of great joy!

We observed his star!

Be not afraid!

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

LUKE 1:39-45

Mary began to think about what she had promised. Then she realized she needed someone to help her figure out all this. Remember what the angel suggested? Ah ha. Cousin Elizabeth: someone older and wiser, and having a baby at her age has to be a challenge. I will go see her.

Mary went "in haste" to the little town in the hill country. She may have had a donkey to ride as it was a long way to walk. Mary got to Elizabeth's house and knocked on the door. When Elizabeth saw Mary there, she grabbed Mary and held her in a big hug. "Wow," said Elizabeth. "I cannot believe that I get to be with you!" Elizabeth somehow knew that Mary was going to have this amazing baby. Elizabeth then told Mary that when she heard the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby "leaped" in her womb!

This is really going to happen, Mary realized. What the angel had told her was true. Mary was going to be a mother! As she began to believe this, she sang a song we still sing along with her: "My soul magnifies the Lord."



Some Things To Do

Could we wrap packages using plain paper (not the shiny stuff that does not recycle) or even use paper we decorate?

How about thank you notes for grocery clerks, mail carriers, etc., to have to give them?

Who in our family needs some extra help (time for homework, or other responsibilities)? What could we do to help?



At Home:

We can light three candles.

Our COMMUNITY: family, friends, people we barely know all make our life so good. It is also good to name them.

Thank you, God, for all in our our COMMUNITY that make our lives so good. Amen.



Some Things to Think About

When was a time I said "yes!" and then thought, "What was I thinking?"

Who are some people who help me figure out hard things?

What does it feel like to be pretty sure you are doing the right thing?

Older Children and Adults

(We may want to read Luke: 1:39-45)

When was a time I got to do something very different, maybe even scary?

How did knowing I was making a difference help me do a hard thing?

How did I feel when I had done it?

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

LUKE 2:1-7

It was now almost time for Mary's baby to be born. Joseph knew he and Mary must go to Bethlehem to be registered for taxes. Bethlehem was about 90 miles away! Maybe they had a donkey for Mary to ride. Can you even imagine how hard that trip must have been?

When they finally got to Bethlehem, the inns all had signs, "No Vacancy!" Joseph kept on going from place to place until finally he found a place to stay. We are not sure where it was. Maybe a room in the back of a house. Maybe a stable. It was probably not in the center of town, as we will see in the next story.



Some Things To Do

What could we do to carry water with us — without using plastic water bottles?

Would we be able to meet with others to go caroling in the neighborhood?

Maybe we could treat ourselves to a walk or a ride to delight in all the lights.

We think that there were animals in that place because Mary found a little container full of straw that she made into a bed for the baby.

In the night, the baby Jesus was born. She wrapped him in the soft blankets she had brought with her, laid him gently in the straw and tried to get some sleep.



Some Things to Think About

When were we on a trip, getting tired and sighing, "Are we there yet?"

In what ways has it seemed that Advent is a long wait?

How can waiting for something make it mean more?

Older Children and Adults

(We may want to read Luke: 2:1-7)

In what ways was this not at all the way people expected the Messiah to appear?

What signs do we see that people are still hoping the message of Jesus is true?

What is giving us hope?



At Home

All four candles are lit; Advent comes to conclusion this week.

We can consider what we will want to keep for next year.

TRUST. Mary and Joseph trusted. What do we **TRUST** and what hope and peace does it bring us?

Thank you, God, that we can **TRUST** that you are in our lives. Amen.

CHRISTMASTIME

Another angel! But who does the angel show up for this time? Shepherds! — the smelly people other people look down on and who have to live outside of town. Can you imagine how spooked they were to be the ones to see an angel showing up for **THEM**? So, of course, the angel had to start with, "Do not be afraid! I have amazing news for you. A baby has been born, the baby we have been waiting for who will grow up to show us a better way to live. And that baby is right here, in town." And just as suddenly, a whole flock of angels began to sing:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven
and on earth peace!"

"Wow," said the shepherds when the angels finished their song. "We must get into Bethlehem and check this out." They found the place, tip-toed in, and peeked at the sleeping baby, then tip-toed out. They couldn't stop talking about what they had seen. Can you imagine how surprised people were to hear this message from **THOSE** people — mere shepherds!



Some Things To Think About

Why do we suppose the angels chose shepherds to receive the message?

Who do we think angels might be singing to — today?

How are we showing our gratitude that we have heard the message?

Older Children and Adults

(We may want to read Luke: 2:8-20)

Why do we think angels did not choose **IMPORTANT** people for their message?

In what ways is it harder for comfortable people to receive the message?

What parts are easier for us to receive?

LUKE 2:8-20



Some Things To Do

We can show our gratitude for our planet by feeding the birds! In drier parts of the country, a dish of water is good.

Could we reach out to someone in our community who is alone — inviting them to supper or even calling or checking in?

Being together in families is good — and so is one-on-one time: maybe a story shared or even a walk.



At Home:

A single white Christ Candle is good, in the middle of the Advent Wreath, or alone.

GRATITUDE. We can be still and take in the love we feel.

Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus, showing us your love for all of us. Amen.

THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Wise ones, we think there were three of them, (maybe they were kings) followed a star. They were pretty sure it would lead them to a baby king, so they brought along some impressive — if a bit odd — gifts.

The star led them to Jerusalem where they stopped to ask King Herod where the baby was. "Ah!" said the king, "go and find that baby and when you find him, come back and tell me where he is — so I can go and WORSHIP him!"

The wise ones continued their journey, until the star led them to the baby. They gathered their gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh and tip-toed in so as not to wake the sleeping baby. Mary watched them gently place the gifts beside the crib. Maybe she figured out that these are gifts given to a king.

The wise ones tip-toed back out. Deciding that it was not wise to tell Herod where the baby was, they went back to their home — by a different way.



Some Things to Think About

Since we can't bring GIFTS to the baby, what are some gifts we can give to God?

How might trying to do what we have learned help encourage others?

How is doing our best a gift back to God?

Older Children and Adults

(We may want to read Matthew 2:2-12)

When was a time we "followed a star" and found a better way?

When did "going by a different way" enrich the way we choose to live?

What are some things we have discovered this season that will improve the way we live?



Some Things To Do

As we consider the variety of options we have chosen, could our family choose one to continue?

How will we commit to continue to hear the message Jesus brings, as it unfolds in our scriptures this year?

How do we hold the light we have seen so it will shine to invite others into the light?



At Home

The Christ Candle can still be lit as we celebrate Epiphany.

Some families celebrate with a King's Cake (a cake that has a surprise hidden in it).

Go. As we go forward, what will we want to make time to do?

Thank you, God, that where we go, you are there with us.
Amen.

We observed his star!

Be not afraid!

I bring you good news of great joy!