

# The Journey of Anticipation - Advent 2015 Resources

from Disciples Peace Fellowship

*The plight of refugees is heavy on our hearts this season. As we prepare to welcome the Christ Child into our midst, we remember that he, too, was a refugee, forced to flee for his life while still just a young child. As we enter into a season of reflection and anticipation, we think of so many children, living under occupation and oppressive regimes, as Jesus and his family did.*

*We invite you to use these materials as best fits your context. The candle lighting litany may be used each week as a separate piece. You may want to use some or all of the worship pieces on Peace Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>. The candle lighting litany is designed to coordinate with “Ahlan wa sahan! - Welcome! Advent Stories for Children”, a children’s Advent curriculum from Global Ministries, which you can download from their website, [globalministries.org](http://globalministries.org).*

## **ADVENT WREATH CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY (written by Rebecca Littlejohn)**

### **Advent 1 - Hope (Luke 1:26-38)**

**Leader (1):** We begin a journey today, toward the moment when the Christ Child will arrive in our midst. We set off in hope, anticipating good news - new birth and new life!

**People:** We hold in our hearts all those who are journeying this day - seeking new life, fleeing violence and despair. We light the flame of hope for them.

**Leader (2):** We remember that God can bring light from darkness, hope from despair, life from death. We remember God’s words to Mary, “Do not be afraid.”

**People:** And yet, the journey seems so treacherous. There is much to fear. We want to believe Jesus is coming, but the nights are long and dark.

**Leader (1):** Let us hear, with Mary, that “nothing will be impossible with God.”

**People:** Let us light the path for one another, sharing the hope we know in Christ Jesus.

**Leader (2):** Let us lift our hearts in prayer for all who journey with no one to light the way.

**People:** Let us lift our voices to share God’s words of hope.

**Leader (1):** We light this candle, as a sign of hope. (candle is lit) May all who journey be filled with the hope of God.

**People:** May all who journey be welcomed with compassion and generosity.

**Leader (2):** May our hearts be strengthened by the light of hope!

**People:** May we welcome the Christ Child with open arms!

### **Advent 2 - Peace (Luke 1:39-56)**

Leader (1): Our journey continues today, as we join those on the road who are seeking peace. Maybe this is the year when Christmas will truly dawn in our lives, restoring all that is broken.

**People:** Throughout the earth, God's people cry out for peace and good will - for safety and warm homes, for food and basic dignity. We light the flame of peace for them.

Leader (2): As Mary found a companion in Elizabeth, we pray that all those whose lives have grown complicated and difficult might find friends who speak peace into their hearts.

**People:** The world seems so upside down. We struggle to find our footing, aching to believe God is even now putting things right way round.

Leader (1): Let us speak words of peace and promise to one another. Let us proclaim God's good favor to all the world.

**People:** Let us renew our conviction that God's peace is for all people. Let us sing together the song of God's shalom, that all may hear the good news of justice and liberation.

Leader (2): Let us open our hearts to the dream of peace and allow God's reconciling power to work in our own lives.

**People:** Let us bear witness to the coming of the Prince of Peace, that the world might learn new ways to welcome those seeking refuge.

Leader (1): We light this candle, as a sign of peace. (candle is lit) May all who journey be filled with the peace of God.

**People:** May all who journey be welcomed with compassion and generosity.

Leader (2): May our hearts be strengthened by the light of peace!

**People:** May we welcome the Christ Child with open arms!

### Advent 3 - Joy (Luke 2:1-7)

Leader (1): As our Advent journey continues, we take a break from somber reflection today to celebrate, for we know that what is coming is good news of great joy.

**People:** We pray for those on perilous journeys toward new lands - that they may find moments of respite, way-stations of grace, reasons for laughter. We light the flame of joy for them.

Leader (2): Our lives, like Mary's and Joseph's, are full of paperwork and hassle - registrations, decrees, taxes, commuting. It is hard to keep our hearts cheerful in the face of such drudgery.

**People:** Even this season of anticipation can add its own burden - shopping, scheduling, heightened expectations. And then we feel guilty for we know we have so much, and others only what they've been able to carry on their backs.

Leader (1): Let us find a way forward, remembering that we worship a God who makes a way where there is no way, a resting place when there is no room in the inn.

**People: Let us seek out a moment to pause, to sit quietly, and ready our hearts for the delight that is coming.**

Leader (2): Let us aim for balance, in celebrating with the loved ones close around us, and remembering God's loved ones all around the world.

**People: Let us recall that the Holy Spirit's irrepressible joy is present everywhere, even in the most desperate of situations, bubbling up where we would least expect it.**

Leader (1): We light this candle, as a sign of joy. (candle is lit) May all who journey be filled with the joy of God.

**People: May all who journey be welcomed with compassion and generosity.**

Leader (2): May our hearts be strengthened by the light of joy!

**People: May we welcome the Christ Child with open arms!**

#### **Advent 4 - Love (Luke 2:8-20)**

Leader (1): Our journey is almost complete. The day is almost here. We are tempted to "make haste" like the shepherds, and get to the cradle of Love as quickly as possible.

**People: But there are those still on the road, whose destinations remain unknown, whose ears are aching for good news that hasn't yet come. We light the flame of love for them.**

Leader (2): In the face of the Divine Presence that is coming into our midst, we begin to realize we are as disreputable, shifty, and fearful as the shepherds who cowered under the heavenly host.

**People: There is so much we fear - perhaps most of all, becoming as vulnerable and lost as those we hear about in the news, people who seem so far away and yet are as close as our own hunger.**

Leader (1): Let us hear with the shepherds, the eternal chorus: "Fear not! Fear not! Fear not!"

**People: Let us sing with the angels songs of peace and good will to all people - those traveling long roads and those offering hospitality to wayfarers of all kinds.**

Leader (2): Let us open our hearts to the miracle of Christmas that waits on our doorsteps even now.

**People: Let us join together in this journey of proclaiming the love we have heard and seen and experienced. Let us share the good news!**

Leader (1): We light this candle, as a sign of love. (candle is lit) May all who journey be filled with the love of God.

**People: May all who journey be welcomed with compassion and generosity.**

Leader (2): May our hearts be strengthened by the light of love!

**People: May we welcome the Christ Child with open arms!**

## RESOURCES FOR PEACE SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2015 (written by John Brock)

### Call to Worship

Leader: In darkness we come together.

**People: We come together in anticipation of the light.**

Leader: The light is indeed coming.

**People: We watch and wait.**

Leader: There is a far-off voice proclaiming its coming.

**People: We turn our heads and listen.**

Leader: Holy Spirit, we gather in your presence in faith, while deep in our hearts we long for peace in the coming light.

**People: Be with us as guide and comforter, as we worship in breathless anticipation.**

### Prayer of Dedication for the Offering

Oh God, We give thanks for these gifts and dedicate them to your service and to the journey toward peace. We present them with trust that just as we are not alone, these gifts are not alone. May they join with the work, talents, and treasure presented to you here and around the world, moving all toward a day when we might see peace. In the name of the Light coming into the world, Amen.

### Communion Prayer

We come to this table, as always, in awe of your gracious invitation. May our joining together over this meal symbolize for us the joining together of all people: friends and strangers, near and far. May this bread and this cup taste in our mouths as sweet as the fellowship we so deeply long for. We pray this in the name of the Child born to be the Prince of Peace, Amen.

### Benediction

Remembering the blessing of peace taught to Moses on another Journey:

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up his face toward you, and give you peace.

### Reflection on Scripture

*Texts: Luke 1:68-79, Luke 3:1-6*

The texts from Luke for the second Sunday in Advent concern the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist. The first (Luke 1:68-79), remembers Zechariah, John's proud father, at his son's circumcision. The second (Luke 3:1-6), speaks of John's ministry as one of a voice in the wilderness and quotes, with unusual directness and length, from Isaiah 40:3-5.

Luke's long, three-chapter, introduction to Jesus' ministry fits with Luke's task of placing Jesus, from birth, within the scriptural tradition of 1st century Judaism.

Similarly, Matthew's genealogical introduction placed Jesus with the tradition of both Kings and outcasts of Judea, and John's mystical introduction placed him within the divine creation of all that is. Mark is unique in the regard as he largely skips the introduction, jumping right in with Jesus' Baptism.

Prophecy, and the place of prophecy in Scripture, presents problems to modern readers. Some over-privilege scripture and tend to fold current day events into shapes to conform to what was written. Others tend to look at prophecy as akin to fortune telling--vague, difficult to interpret words to be seized on by willing readers. The late biblical scholar Marcus Borg is one who points out the weaknesses of each of these approaches

There is a third way. We can consider prophets as cultural commentators, people with a special awareness of the spirit of an age who have the courage to speak to that spirit even, or especially, if it means expressing disagreement with the powers that be. Today we call that "speaking truth to power", though even that phrase is degraded when it is used to give greater legitimacy to the filing of a complaint.

What truth, then, does this prophecy from Isaiah and Luke offer us?

Here it is:

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

In Luke, that voice is John the Baptist. In Isaiah, it can be seen as the spirit of the age calling the captive people of Jerusalem to build the courage and resources to leave Babylon for the long journey back to Jerusalem and the even longer journey of rebuilding a place of freedom.

In Isaiah, the quoted text is preceded by:

"'Comfort, O comfort my people', says your God, 'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid.'"

Taken together these sentences from Isaiah bring to mind Paul, in Romans:

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

On Peace Sunday, we are asked to pay attention to a journey, one that we are called to every day: the journey we make in following the path of Jesus.

It is not easy. It is long. It seems especially difficult this Advent--though that might be said in many Advents. Like the refugees whose paths we follow in the news, it seems this journey may have no end. As for them, it seems the world is hesitant to welcome those traveling the paths of peace. But the journey is there for us to make.

Others have walked this path before. Like them, we have seen and suffered too much to turn back now. Like them, we do not walk alone.

The way has been prepared. Through faith in the truth of the journey, obstacles, real and imagined, will be made easier.

**Hymn Suggestions** (From Chalice Hymnal)

His Eye Is on the Sparrow (82)

Comfort, Comfort You My People (122)

Let There be Peace on Earth (677)