

GATHERING AROUND THE ADVENT WREATH

Responsive Readings for Advent and Christmas (2007, Year A) By Jan L. Hoffman

Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. With eagerness we wait to celebrate the coming of the Christ into our world. As a child, as a sovereign ruler, Christ comes: God's gift to faithful people. During Advent we prepare for this sacred celebration in ways both personal and corporate. One of the ways we prepare together is by lighting the candles of the Advent wreath, a symbol of eternal promise. As we light the candles each week, we focus on the light that shines in our dark world.

The following readings and responses are designed for use during the Sundays of Advent and Christmas in services of worship as the church gathers around the Advent wreath. Readings are based on the recommended gospel texts in the *Revised Common Lectionary, Year A*.

These readings could be used most effectively as calls to worship. Each week invite one household to come forward, lead the congregation in the readings and prayers, and light the appropriate candle(s) for that day. Include households of varying compositions: single parent, blended family, two-parent family, single persons, extended families, and households with special needs persons.

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THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Keep awake! Be Ready!

(Based on Matthew 24:36-44)

Leader: The Son of Man is coming, but about that day and hour no one knows,

People: Neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Leader: Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

People: Therefore be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. We light the first candle of Advent to remind us to keep awake and be ready.

Suggested Hymns:

"Stay Awake, Be Ready"

Songs for LiFE, #126

"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

Songs for LiFE, #122

Sing With Me, #83

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Repent! Change your ways, be baptized!

(Based on Matthew 3:1-12)

Leader: John the Baptist proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

People: And the people went out to him and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Leader: And John said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals.

People: He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire."
We light the first Advent candle to remind us to keep awake and be ready. (*Pause while the first candle is lit.*)
We light the second Advent candle to remind us to change our ways.

Suggested Hymns:

"Comfort, Comfort Now My People"

Songs for LiFE, #121

"Prepare the Way of the Lord"

Songs for LiFE, #124

Sing With Me, #84

Sing! A New Creation, #105

"Make Way"

Sing! A New Creation, #98

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The blind receive their sight!

(Based on Matthew 11:2-11)

Leader: John asked Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

People: Jesus said, "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear.

Leader: The dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.

People: Truly I tell you, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." **We light the first Advent candle to remind us to keep awake and be ready.** (*Pause while the first candle is lit.*) **The second Advent candle reminds us to changes our ways.** (*Pause while the second candle is lit.*) **We light the third Advent candle to remind us of the good news that the blind can see and the lame can walk.**

Suggested Hymns:

"People in Darkness Are Looking for Light"

Songs for LiFE, #119

Sing With Me, #85

"When Jesus the Healer"

Songs for LiFE, #149

Sing With Me, #120

"Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"

Songs for LiFE, #19

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

God is with us!

(Based on Matthew 1:18-25)

Leader: When Mary was engaged to Joseph, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

People: An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Leader: She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

People: All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us.” We light the first candle to remind us to keep awake and be ready. (Pause while the first candle is lit.) The second Advent candle reminds us to change our ways. (Pause while the second candle is lit.) The third Advent candle reminds us of the good news that the blind can see and the lame can walk. (Pause while the third candle is lit.) We light the fourth Advent candle to remind us that God is with us!

Suggested Hymns:

“O Come, O Come, Immanuel”

Songs for LiFE, #123; *Sing With Me*, #81

“God Is With Us”

Sing With Me, #196

“Jesus, Name Above All Names”

Sing! A New Creation, #114

CHRISTMAS EVE OR CHRISTMAS

To you is born a Savior!

(Based on Luke 2:1-14)

(The four candles on the wreath are already lit.)

Leader: There were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

People: Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Leader: But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

People: Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” We light the Christ candle to remind us that the Savior is born!

Suggested Hymns:

“Go Tell It on the Mountain”

Songs for LiFE, #131

“Mary Had a Baby”

Sing With Me, #98

Sing! A New Creation, #107

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

Songs for LiFE, #133

Sing With Me, #90

“Hitsuji Wa/Sheep Fast Asleep”

Sing! A New Creation, #110