

Advent Candle Liturgy

for the churches in the Bath Mission Area

During Advent many churches display an Advent wreath. Consisting of five candles an additional one is lit each Sunday in Advent until all five are lit on Christmas Day.

The idea of a wreath dates back to 1839 when a cartwheel was hung from the ceiling of a Lutheran orphanage near Hamburg. There was a candle for each day leading to Christmas Day and by 1851 it was being decorated with greenery. By the 1920s the number of candles had been reduced to five and the custom was spreading through Bavaria and Austria.

The base is a ring (representing eternity) made of evergreen (suggesting everlasting life) into which four purple or red candles are placed. The fifth candle, in the centre is white, and is lit with the others on Christmas Day.

Most wreaths are placed on a stand but since 1994 York Minster has had the largest suspended Advent wreath in Europe. The ten-foot-wide wreath is hoisted into position under the central tower where it remains until Epiphany with its candles burning all day. The wreath is lowered and raised at the beginning of the Sung Eucharist each successive Sunday of Advent for the next candle to be lit.

Perhaps one of the most famous Advent wreaths (in this case called an Advent Crown) was the one made every year on Blue Peter. Made with coat hangers and plenty of tinsel it had four red candles. In later years children were advised to use baubles or LED tea-lights to reduce the risk of fire.



You can make your own Advent wreath by using five candles in individual candle holders or placed in a pot of soil and surrounding them with evergreen foliage. Or you can use one candle and light it every week.

Light a candle in a darkened place,
in its flame see hope on every face,
Christ our Saviour will be born,
heralding a brand new dawn,
so let it burn.

Singing the Faith 174 v1

As we cannot journey together in church during Advent this year perhaps you might like to engage with this Advent liturgy which Rev Jan Tate has written to use in your own homes.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Read: Mark 13:32-37

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

The first candle represents God’s people throughout the ages who recognised God in the world and trusted in his promises.

Light the first candle

We light a candle for the past,
and give thanks for God’s people of every age
who were watching and waiting for his coming.

The Jews waiting for God’s chosen one,
Mary and Joseph expecting a child,
The disciples seeking the kingdom.

We light a candle for the present
and give thanks for those watching & waiting today,
those who recognise God wherever he comes to our world.
We rejoice that God who was and is and is to be
Comes to us now.

Amen.

In the darkness, see the coming light,
Word of God speaks through the darkest night,
keep a watch, the time is near,
time for hope and not for fear,
so let it burn.

Singing the Faith 174 v2

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Light the first candle

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.' A voice says, 'Cry out.' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures for ever.' You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!' See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

The second candle represents the prophets: those who heard God's word and proclaimed it.

Light the second candle

We light a candle for the past
and give thanks for the prophets of old
who saw more clearly what God was like,
whose messages are recorded in the Bible.

We light a candle for the present
and give thanks that we still find you in the pages of the Bible
that we still find you in our lives.

We rejoice that the Word of God comes to us now
in our own situations.

Amen.

Stepping through each page of history,
prophets contemplate the mystery,
celebrate the coming King,
words of joy and hope they bring,
so let it burn.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Light the first two candles

Read: Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"', John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

The third candle represents John the Baptist, the forerunner, called by God to prepare the way.

Light the third candle

We light a candle for the past
and give thanks for John the Baptist,
proclaiming the advent of someone greater than he,
urging all people to prepare their hearts.
We rejoice that through the ages
the message has brought hope and joy.

We light a candle for the present
and give thanks for messengers today,
their message like a lamp shining in a dark place
calling us to watch and pray.
We rejoice that God is always faithful
and keeps calling us.

Amen.

In the desert now the waiting's done,
make things ready for your King, says John,
see, his glory is revealed,
and the hope for all is sealed,
so let it burn.

Singing the Faith 174 v4

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Light the first three candles

Read: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

The fourth candle represents Mary, the mother of Jesus, the young woman who said "Yes" to God. Sometimes this candle is blue or pink.

Light the fourth candle

We light a candle for the past
and give thanks for Mary, the mother of Jesus
who humbly accepted God's commission
offering life and love
giving all that she had.

We light a candle for the present
and give thanks for all those today who offer all they have:
those who bring life, love and humility to the world.
We rejoice that God comes to us now
comforting, nurturing, loving.
Amen.

Mary found true favour with the Lord,
yet she trembled at his strange reward,
knew this was the special One,
hope for many through God's Son,
so let it burn.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Light the first four candles

Read: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The fifth candle, in the centre of the wreath, is the Christ candle. It represents Christ, the light of the world.

Light the fifth candle

God of our yesterday, our today, and our tomorrow
we light our candles to celebrate your coming amongst us
as a little child, a baby in a manger.

Help us to discern your presence and walk in your light
today and everyday.

Amen.

Do not fear, today I bring good cheer,
Jesus Christ, the Saviour now is here,
God has lit his flame of love,
through his Son from Heaven above.
So let it burn.

Singing the Faith 174 v6



This Advent Liturgy booklet has been prepared by Rev Jan Tate

All Bible Readings are from the NIV UK or NRSVA version

References used: *Keeping Advent & Christmas*, Leigh Hatts; Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2017
Singing the Faith 174, Claire Stainsby