

Advent 1 – Hope

Leader: Christians around the world begin this day to await the advent of Christ. We join with a joyous and hopeful throng in lighting the Advent candles, symbols of our faith and signposts of God's love. Father Ron Rolheiser once wrote: "Lighting a candle in hope is not just a pious, religious act. It's a political act, a subversive one, and a prophetic one, as dangerous as brandishing a firearm. To light an advent candle is to say, in the face of all that suggests the contrary, that God is still alive, still Lord of this world, and, because of that, "all will be well, and all will be well, and every manner of being will be well," irrespective of the evening news."

Today, as we light the candle of Hope, we remember that hope is more than wishful thinking. Hope is the Spirit of God dwelling within us, daring us to dream of an alternate reality. Hope is our active commitment to be God's faithful people, whether we walk an easy path or face fiery trials.

Let us Pray: Source of love, we give thanks today for the possibility of new life and healing we find in the ministry of Jesus, and for the many ways you invite us to be hope-bearers to the world. Amen

Let us sing together verse 1 of hymn #132 "When God Is a Child."

Advent 2 – Peace

Leader: The season of Advent continues. We join with Christians across the globe in the lighting of the Advent candles, symbols of our faith and signposts of God's love.

The poet, Wendell Berry, wrote:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."

Today, as we light the candle of peace, we remember that even in those times of life when everything feels hopeless, when we feel as dead as the dry bones in Ezekiel's valley, God calls us away from the workaday world. God calls us to breathe in the holy breath of peace.

Let us pray: Spirit of Love, in this Advent season may we cultivate peace in our thoughts, peace in our hearts, peace in our relationships, peace in our world. Amen.

Let us sing together verses 1 and 2 of hymn #132 "When God Is a Child."

Advent 3 – Joy

Leader: We continue our Advent journey this day with Christians worldwide, lighting these candles as symbols of our faith and signposts of God's love. The poet, Mary Oliver, wrote:
"If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it...life has some possibility left...Joy is not made to be a crumb."

In Matthew's narrative, the shepherds first respond to the angels in fear...but that fear turns to joy as they realize the nature of the angel's message. "Don't be afraid," says the angel. "Be joyful! Can't you see that God is close by?"

Today as we light the candle of Joy, we celebrate the One who has come, is coming, and will come again.

Let us pray: Spirit of love, as Christmas draws near, may we allow your joy to enter our hearts -- a joy so infectious that we feel compelled to share it with the world. Amen

Let us sing together verses 1, 2 and 3 of hymn #132 "When God Is a Child."

Advent 4 – Love

Leader: Our subversive Advent journey continues, as we dare to believe in the power of Gods' love to transform the world. We light these candles in community with Christians worldwide, as symbols of our faith and signposts of God's love.

A poet writes: We can scarcely believe it, God,
this story of love's birth in the world.
We rationalize and reason,
we read the headlines and we doubt
and yet, oddly, we hope, desperately,
that it just might be true.

If we've come here disbelieving, God
 unwrap our doubt to make a space for love
If we've come here despairing
 unwrap our grief to make a space for joy
If we've come here angry
 unwrap our resentment to make a space for peace
If we've come here nostalgic
 unwrap our sentimentality to make a space for life
If we've come here cynical,
 unwrap our skepticism to make a space for Love.

Today as we light the candle of Love, we anticipate the One who dares us to love others as God does - wastefully and unconditionally.

Let us pray: Spirit of love, as we sink ever deeper into your Advent story, may we truly believe that your kind of love - a subversive, world-changing love--can work through us to bring healing and new life. Amen

Let us sing together hymn #132 "When God Is a Child."

Christmas Eve – Christ Candle

With sisters and brothers everywhere, this night we again light the Advent candles, symbols of our faith and signposts of God's love. Episcopalian priest Phillips Brooks in 1868 penned the lyrics to the beautiful carol "Of the Father's Love Begotten." The third verse describes the miracle of the moment we celebrate tonight. "How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given; so God imparts to human hearts, the blessing of His heaven. No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin; where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in."

As this holy night we light the candles of hope, peace, joy, love and the Christ candle, carry the light of Christ into the world that all people may know God's love made manifest in the vulnerability of a little child.

Let us Pray. Spirit of love, we celebrate again this night the arrival of your light. Our lives are marked by that light, even when our circumstance might prove to the contrary. May we hold this light in our heart and reflect it to a darkened world in the year to come. Amen.

Let us sing together hymn #132 "When God Is a Child."