

WAITING FOR CHRIST

IN A WOUNDED WORLD

An Advent Companion from the
Student Christian Movement



INTRODUCTION

When Christmas decorations start going up on All Souls and carols blast everywhere from before the beginning of December, it can be hard to carve out time and mental space for the reflective, solemn, mysterious, anticipatory waiting that is Advent. And yet, in a world of growing far-right populism, genocide, and environmental instability, allowing ourselves to really settle in to what it means to wait for Christ feels more needed than ever.

This resource is offered as a companion and guide for your Advent practise. Above all, it is an invitation to an observance of the season that doesn't attempt to distract from the pain in the world with sparkle, forced cheer, or platitudes. It is an invitation to open ourselves to the hurting world, and to allow that openness to guide us in the ancient Christian experience of waiting for Christ in prayer, reflection, and action.

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USING THIS RESOURCE

The Advent observance suggested in this companion is centred around two key pillars: spiritual practices to ground and sustain us, and meaningful action towards healing our wounded world. If you are seeking to explore the themes more deeply, each week also includes a suggestion of poetry and/or music to engage with, and a question for reflection.

One suggested way to use this guide is to take a few minutes on each Advent Sunday to read the scripture, engage in the candle-lighting practise, and read through the suggested spiritual practise and action. Then try to incorporate the spiritual practise throughout your week – daily or every other day. The suggested practices are designed to be for the most part brief, and easy to incorporate into your day. For the action, you might choose to spend the first part of the week reflecting and planning, and set aside some time later in the week to complete the action. If you choose to engage with the poetry, music, and reflection question, you might choose to do so at the mid-point of the week, or simply whenever you feel called to.

Finally, a note on action: we anticipate that folks will come to this practise from many different circumstances. You may already be very engaged with activist work. You may be looking for ways to become more engaged with activism and community work. Or you may be restricted in the ways you're able to be engaged in activism because of health, employment, caregiving, or other life circumstances. You may find that the weekly suggested actions are something you are already doing – in that case, take the opportunity to reflect on and connect prayerfully with your current work. You may likewise find the suggested action to be impractical or impossible for you currently. Give yourself grace. Do what is meaningful and sustainable for you.

Wishing you a meaningful Advent, in rage and grief, in solidarity and hope.



Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Luke 21:29-33

Candle-Lighting:

In a darkened room, light one candle. Notice how that simple action changes its surroundings; illuminating, revealing.

Practise: Notice Hope

At the end of the day, think back over the day and name 3 signs of hope for the world that you noticed, heard about, or experienced. Challenge yourself to find different things every day.

Act: Resist Despair

Think about a situation in your community, your country, your world that makes you feel despair or grief. Then, try to find one organization/person/group who is doing something about it. Reflect on how you can contribute to that work of hope making? Donate, volunteer, amplify, write a letter. Even just pray for them, if that's what you're able to do.

Poetry

Read *'Hope' is the thing with feathers* by Emily Dickinson and *Hope is not a bird, Emily, it's a sewer rat* by Caitlin Seida.

Reflection Question

Poets & writers have found countless different metaphors for hope - a bird and a rat are only two of them. What images for hope most resonate with you?



*Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Luke 1:78-79

Candle-Lighting:

Take a moment before lighting your candles to think of a conflict that is currently weighing heavy on you - interpersonal, local, national, or global. As you light the first candle, pray for those on one side of the conflict. As you light the second candle, pray for those on the other side.

Practise: Peace

Walking Meditation

This meditation can be done indoors or out, anywhere where you have space to walk at a slower pace. An empty hallway or open room, a not-busy sidewalk, or a park all work well. If walking is not accessible for you, you can tap a hand or foot in time with your inhales and exhales, or simply focus on your breath.

Begin by taking one step forward as you inhale, inviting in the Peace of Christ. As you exhale, take another step and envision the Peace that Passes All Understanding flowing out into the world. Repeat. (You may choose to engage in this practise for a set amount of time, to a certain distance, or simple until you feel ready to stop.)

Act: for Peace

in Palestine

Write a hand-written letter to a member of government demanding a ceasefire or commit to one BDS action (bdsmovement.net)

Music

Listen to *Open Up* by The Brilliance.

Reflection Question

The idea of peace can sometimes be weaponized to mean enduring mistreatment for the sake of preventing conflict - ie. 'keeping the peace'. What's the difference between this and real peace? How can this inform how we understand what it is to walk a path of peace?



Third Week of Advent

JOY

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

Candle-Lighting:

As you slowly light three candles, allow yourself to notice and delight in how the light plays off other objects in the room; how each candle lit magnifies and expands the brightness

Practise: Invite Joy

Joy can't be summoned at will, but it can be invited. This week, make an effort to do something each day that you know often brings you joy. Make music, make art, spend time with a child in your life, dance, enjoy nature. Identify an activity or activities that often trigger joy, and engage in them with intention and openness.

Act: Protect Forms of Joy

Joy is instrumental to resistance. Joy creates and sustains community, joy celebrates survival, joy resists despair, joy soothes and strengthens our nervous systems. We need joy. Pick one of the practises that you engaged in to provoke joy, and think of something you can do to protect that form of joy for the future. Examples: If your joy was spending time with a toddler you know, find an action you can do to support parental & child health and wellbeing in your community. If your joy was a form of artistic expression, write to your education minister advocating for the imperative for strong arts education & funding. If your joy was bird-watching, sign up for the Christmas Bird Count to help support conservation efforts.

Music & Poetry

Listen to *Canticle of the Turning* by Rory Cooney. Read *Don't Hesitate* by Mary Oliver

Reflection Question

In her poem "Don't Hesitate," Mary Oliver says "Joy is not made to be a crumb." What does it mean to resist letting joy be a crumb? In your activism? In your faith? In your life?



*He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*

Luke 1:51-55

Candle-Lighting:

As you light each of the four candles, meditate on what it means to love: your neighbour; your enemy; yourself; God.

Practise:

Do with Love

“Let all that you do be done in love.” Choose a simple act that you do every or most days - an act of creation or an act of care is ideal. Every time you do that activity, be intentional about performing and experiencing it as an act of love - for a pet, child, partner, or roommate, for the earth, for yourself, or for God.

Act: Protect LGBTQ2+ Love

Self-love, interpersonal love, and community love are integral to well-being, and yet not everyone is equally free to love themselves, love their partners, and love their community. If you aren't a part of the LGBTQ2+ community: learn about the state of legal protections for LGBTQ2+ people & families in your area. What rights are not protected, or what protections are in danger? Local LGBTQ2+ orgs are a great place to start to find this out, and will also likely have resources to tell you what you can do to support LGBTQ2+ rights in your area. If you are a part of the LGBTQ2+ community: Engage in mutual aid within your local queer community, or carve out a little bit of time this week to engage in grief/solidarity/advocacy work you've been craving.

Music

Listen to Love has a Way and *Mother of God* by The Brilliance.

Reflection Question

How is working for justice a form of love?
For the oppressed? For the Oppressor?



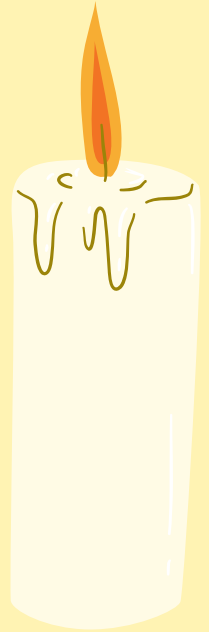
CHRISTMAS EVE

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined. You have multiplied the exultation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:2-7



Candle-Lighting:

Light four candles, followed by a Christ-candle. As you watch the flame of the Christ candle, reflect on the names we have for Jesus. Wonderful Counsellor, Lamb of God, Son of Man, Prince of Peace, etc. In what aspect are you hoping to encounter Jesus this Christmas?

Practise: Nativity Lectio Divina

On your own or with a friend, partner, family, or small group, use a simple lectio divina exercise to experience Luke 2:1-20. Step one: read the passage slowly and carefully, listening for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Step two: read the passage a second time, with your word/phrase in mind, inviting and noticing any questions that come up. Step three: Read the passage a third time, listening for what the text/God/the Spirit is saying to you. Step four: Read the passage one final time, listening for what the text/God/the spirit is calling you to do.

Act: Respond

Follow through on, or take steps to follow through on, the call you discerned in your Lectio Divina.

Music

Listen to *Shepherd's Song* by the Bombadils



CHRISTMASTIDE

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being

in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

John 1:1-5

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

Matthew 5:14

Candle-Lighting:

Light all five candles. Sit with the light for several moments, allowing yourself to reflect on John 1:5 “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.”

Reflection Question:

which of the four week themes was the most challenging for you? Reflect on why, and what that could be inviting you into.

Practise:

Commit to a practice that sustains and supports you.

Act:

Commit or recommit to an ongoing action in the year ahead, and commit to focussing on the light you are able to bring, and to not discounting that.





STUDENT CHRISTIAN
MOVEMENT OF CANADA

The Student Christian Movement (SCM) of Canada is a youth- and student-led grassroots network passionate about social justice, community in diversity, and radical faith in action.

As a radical ecumenical movement, we welcome all at our table, regardless of belief, sexual orientation, faith tradition, and age. Together, we take action for social justice, engage in progressive spiritual and faith activism, and seek to foster community in diversity. We work to be a prophetic voice for justice in our world.

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