



**Candle Lighting Prayers and
Reflections for Advent**

**Church of the Ascension
2021**

What is Advent?

Advent is the first season of the liturgical year and starts 4 Sundays before Christmas. This means it varies in length, depending on what day of the week December 25th falls. This year, it is 27 days, from November 28th to December 24th (technically ending at sundown, when Christmas begins). In church, we mark the season with special prayers and hymns and with the colour blue (or purple, in some places).

It is a season of preparation for the great feast of Christmas (like Lent is for Easter) when we welcome the Word made flesh in the baby Jesus and, as such, has a penitential quality. We turn from all that leads us away from God so that we will better be able to receive God in Christ – at Christmas and at the last day.

It is not only a season of penitence, however. More recently, the emphasis has shifted from one of penitence to anticipation and readiness. We wait eagerly for the birth of Christ at Christmas as the in-breaking of God's kingdom on earth and we look ahead to the eventual fulfilment of that kingdom when Christ comes again.

Advent is also a declaration of the coming of the light in the dark of winter, in companionship with many practices in many northern hemisphere cultures at this time of year. The Advent wreath, with another candle lit each week, grows steadily brighter until the Christ Candle shines forth on Christmas.

Your “wreath” may be a gorgeous circle of greenery with impressive pillar candles or it may be tea lights arranged on a plate. Anything works. Use the prayers in this kit (which we will use on Sundays) or sing a verse of O Come O Come Emmanuel or find your own tradition as you light your candles each day and prepare for the coming of Jesus.

Week One: Yearning for Joy

We are fragile creatures, and it is from this weakness, not despite it, that we discover the possibilities of true joy.
Archbishop Desmond Tutu¹

This “true joy” is not the same thing as happiness or excitement. Those emotions depend on what’s going on around us. Joy depends on what’s going on inside us. It’s an orientation of the heart that does not deny the suffering of the world around us or of our own experiences but that holds that sorrow in relationship with the love of God, the love of community, and the love of creation. When we love, we know we will also grieve. When we are wounded, we discover that we need to be loved.

So, this week, we are asking:

What weighs down your heart?

What makes it hard for you to orient your heart towards joy? Can you, as Archbishop Tutu says, “have heartbreak without being broken”?

Candle lighting prayer

Our world is full of troubles; our hearts grow heavy
But we remember
 that God is with us.
And we remember
 that Jesus is coming.
And we remember
 that the kingdom is near.
So we light one candle for joy,
with hearts filled with yearning.
 light the candle
Lord Jesus, come soon!

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

Week Two: Opening to Joy

Joy is not always big and noisy. Sometimes, joy slips up next to you and waits to be noticed. Learning to pay attention to this kind of joy requires opening ourselves up to its possibility; training ourselves to recognize it in periods of peace and to welcome it deep into our hearts to nourish us during times of unrest. Advent reminds us of the importance of intentional attentiveness – of choosing to notice the signs of God’s love and the gift of God’s joy.

So, this week, we are asking:

How does it feel to watch a beautiful dawn break?

When has joy crept up on you? How might you open yourself up, wider and wider, to greater and deeper joy?

Candle lighting prayer

Our world is full of troubles; our hearts grow heavy

But we remember

that God is with us.

And we remember

that Jesus is coming.

And we remember

that the kingdom is near.

So we light two candles for joy,

with hearts filled with yearning.

with hearts daring to open

light the candles

Lord Jesus, come soon!

I thank my God every time I remember you, -constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, - because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. -I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:3

Week Three: Trusting in Joy

*Dear Child of God, you are loved with a love that nothing can shake, a love that loved you long before you were created, a love that will be there long after everything has disappeared. You are precious, with a preciousness that is totally quite immeasurable. And God want you to be like God. Filled with life and goodness and laughter – **and joy.***

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

In a word full of troubles, it can be hard to trust joy.
Perhaps we start by learning to trust God.

So, this week, we are asking:

What does it mean to be guarded by the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding?

What makes you feel safe and loved? Can this feeling of safety allow you to take a risk and share your joy?

Candle lighting prayer

Our world is full of troubles; our hearts grow heavy
But we remember
 that God is with us.

And we remember
 that Jesus is coming.

And we remember
 that the kingdom is near.

So we light three candles for joy,
with hearts filled with yearning,
with hearts daring to open
with hearts held safe in God's hands

light the candles

Lord Jesus, come soon!

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Philippians 4:4

Week Four: Sharing Joy

...if I see myself primarily in terms of myself as a fellow human, I will then have more than seven billion people who I can feel deep connection with. And this is wonderful, isn't it? What do you need to fear or worry about what you have seven billion other people who are with you?

The Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama and the Archbishop kept coming back to the same principal in their discussion: joy is found most deeply and most purely in the pursuit of well-being for others. Such a pursuit creates a virtuous cycle of joy and an expression of God's kingdom in the particular moments of our lives.

As Advent comes to a close and we celebrate the coming of God in the birth of Jesus, we remember that the kingdom we are waiting for is already here and we ask:

How do we lift up and fill others with good things?

Candle lighting prayer

Our world is full of troubles; our hearts grow heavy

But we remember

that God is with us.

And we remember

that Jesus is coming.

And we remember

that the kingdom is near.

So we light four candles for joy,

with hearts filled with yearning.

with hearts daring to open

with hearts held safe in God's hands

with hearts overflowing with joy

Lord Jesus, come soon!

See what kind of love has our Maker given to us, that we should be called children of God; and we are. 1 John 3:1 ii

Christmas: Joy is Here

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
Jesus (John 15:11-12)

We rejoice at the birth of Jesus, knowing it to be a sign of God's great love for us and an invitation to participate in that love with all our imperfect humanness. We are given the keys to the kingdom of joy— love one another.

How does it feel to be invited to share in God's love for the world?

Candle lighting prayer

Our world is full of troubles;
but today our hearts are lifted
As we remember
 that God is with us.
And we remember
 that our joy is complete.
And we remember
 that Jesus Christ is born!
So we light four candles for joy,
 with hearts filled with yearning.
 with hearts daring to open
 with hearts held safe in God's hands
 with hearts overflowing
and one candle for Christ who is our joy
Jesus Christ is born!

Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.
Luke 2:10

ⁱ all quotes from *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* by Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama

ⁱⁱ translation by Wil Gafney in *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*