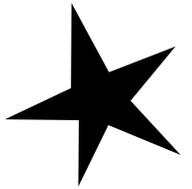
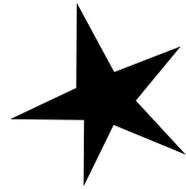
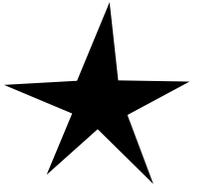


Advent 2018

A Journey to Bethlehem

Common Ground Northeast



Introduction

Advent is coming! Are you ready? A King is coming but not the type of king that people thought. The King is coming to us as a baby! We think of kings entering with pomp and circumstance, but this King is different. He is coming as a vulnerable infant.

Advent is a time of anticipation and excitement. It is also a time of tension as we wait for the Kingdom of our King to arrive in a world that desperately needs a savior. We use the entire season to long and wait for Christ's arrival. Like Mary awaiting the birth of her promised baby, we wait. Like wanderers awaiting our permanent home, we wait. Then we celebrate the birth of Jesus! It begins four Sundays before Christmas Eve. This year, it will begin on Sunday, December 2 and Advent always ends on Christmas Eve.

Why do we celebrate Advent at Common Ground Northeast?

Advent season is a time for us to join with other churches to wait for the arrival of Jesus and celebrate His birth. We join those not only in our city but in our state, country and across the world. It also provides us a change of pace. Advent is a time for us to stop, slow down and take our focus off of the cultural busyness that the Christmas season brings. With shopping lists, traveling, food preparations, concerts and programs, it is sometimes easy for the Christmas story to get lost. Advent is a beautiful season to practice waiting and longing, to sit in the reality of our broken world and lament for its need of a savior. It reminds us of God's redemption story and how it started with a baby in a manger. Jesus came to us fully embodied in the human experience. Christ's life and narrative mirrors much of the narrative of many who are oppressed and marginalized even in our day. This is an added reminder in the Advent season to stop and listen to the stories of the marginalized. Just as Christ did, we can step into the world's brokenness in a fully embodied way so the redemptive story that starts with this season can continue in our world!

How can you celebrate Advent?

We have a couple of practical ways for you, your family and/or your house church to engage during the Advent season. First, a traditional oldie but goodie is an Advent Wreath. Following this introduction, we have provided a wreath devotion for you to utilize. You'll need to purchase a few items, but no fear, we have a list for you.

Another way is to find an Advent devotion book. We recommend the *Advent Devotions for Busy Families* by Laurie Kehler. You can purchase it on Amazon. It takes Christmas traditions and symbols and points them to God and Jesus. There are 25 different symbols with activities, one for each day in December leading up to and including Christmas day. If doing something every day doesn't seem feasible for your family, we have some recommendations on how to incorporate the activities into 2 or 3 days a week. Just flip to page 8 for our advice!

Advent Wreath Devotions

What you need to get started:

- 18" artificial wreath from Hobby Lobby or Michaels
- One pink candle votive
- Three purple candle votives
- One white candle, preferably a pillar so it is larger than the rest
- Lighter
- Bible

First Sunday of Advent (December 2)

Say the following: Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The Church learned a long time ago that we need a way to get ready and prepare for the Mystery of Christmas. Purple is the color of Advent, and it is also the color for kings and queens. It is also a serious color and something very serious is about to happen. Today, we begin a journey to Bethlehem along with some prophets, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, and the wise men.

Light the first purple candle. After lighting the candle, share the following:

This is the hope candle. It is also the light of the prophets. Prophets are people that come so close to God, and God comes so close to them that they know what to say or what to do. The prophets and the hope candle remind us we can place our hope in God and God's promises. Let's enjoy the light as we listen to some verses from the prophet, Jeremiah.

Read Jeremiah 33:14-16.

Say: Jeremiah is telling us something! Someone is coming. He is coming from King David's family. I wonder who this could be? Could He be a baby named Jesus? Jeremiah is anticipating the coming of our Lord and Savior who will bring justice and righteousness to Jerusalem. The prophet sees the suffering of the people and Jeremiah's message gave the People of God hope. Jesus still gives us hope today. In the midst of the darkness of the world, God hears the cries of the suffering promising "the days are coming" when "the Lord our righteous Savior" will reign.

Respond in Song:

- Play "Waymaker" by Sinach. (Versions should be available on YouTube). Sing along or sit quietly and meditate on the words.
- Play "My Hope is in You" by Third Day. (Versions should be available on YouTube). Sing along or sit quietly and meditate on the words.

Read Psalm 25:1-10.

Pray: Take turns praying. Thank God for a time that He has given you hope. Share with God one area where you need to trust Him more.

Say: Look at the light. It is all in one place. When we blow out the candle, watch what it does.

Blow out the candle. Say: The smoke spreads out. Now the light has spread out throughout the room. This light is the light of the prophets.

Second Sunday of Advent (December 9)

Light a purple candle to represent the first Sunday before beginning.

Say the following: Today is the second Sunday of Advent. We continue our journey. God made a way for Mary and Joseph. It wasn't an easy journey.

Light the second purple candle. After lighting the candle, share the following:

This is the faith candle. It is also the light of the path to Bethlehem. Mary was about to have a baby. When you are about to have a baby, it isn't easy to travel. Let's enjoy the light as we listen to a verse from the prophet, Malachi.

Read Malachi 3:1-4.

Say: God prepared the way for Jesus. His plan was in place at the beginning of creation where Jesus was right there with Him. God had all the details worked out from Mary becoming pregnant with a child to Joseph hanging in there to support her, and their travels on the way to Bethlehem. Even though walking in faith was scary and dangerous for both Mary and Joseph, they endured.

Respond in Song:

- Play "Walk By Faith" by Jeremy Camp. (Versions should be available on YouTube). Sing along or sit quietly and meditate on the words.
- Play "This I Know (Ungizungezile)" by We Will Worship. (Versions should be available on YouTube). Sing along or sit quietly and meditate on the words.

Read Luke 1:68-79.

Pray: Verses 72 and 73 remind us of the promises God made to the People of God. We can trust that God is going to do what has been promised and because of this, we can step out in faith. Are there places where you need to step out in faith? Are you unclear of the path that God has set for you? Take time to pray for these situations.

Say: Look at the light. It is all in one place. When we blow out the candles, watch what they do.

Blow out the candles. Say: The smoke spreads out. Now the light has spread out throughout the room. The light of the prophets and the light of the path to Bethlehem.

Third Sunday of Advent (December 16)

Light two purple candles to represent the first and second Sundays before beginning. Then, light the pink candle. After lighting the candles, share the following:

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. Today, we light the joy candle, the light of the angels. We are reminded of the shepherds tending to their sheep and they encountered bright light. They were afraid, but they could hear angels singing “Don’t be afraid.” The angels were announcing the birth of Jesus. They told the shepherds that they were bringing great tidings of joy. The child who would change everything was born!

Read Isaiah 12:2-6.

Say: Isaiah says “Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” God didn’t just send one angel to proclaim the birth of God’s Son. God sent a whole choir!

Respond in Song: Sing “Joy to the World.”

Read Philippians 4:4-7.

Pray: The angels were rejoicing over the birth of Jesus. In the verses you just read, Paul tells us to rejoice and to go to Jesus in prayer with thanksgiving. Take a piece of paper and write down 5 things that give you joy and that you are thankful for today. Take turns praising God for the things you have listed.

Say: Look at the light. It is growing! When we blow out the candles, watch what they do.

Blow out all three candles. Say: The smoke spreads out. Now the light has spread out throughout the room. The light of the prophets, the light of the path to Bethlehem, and the light of the angels.

Fourth Sunday of Advent (December 23)

Light two purple candles and the pink candle. Then, light the last purple candle. After lighting the candles, share the following:

This is the peace candle. Some church traditions use this candle to remind them of shepherds. We are going to use this candle today to remind us of the wise men. The wise men were sometimes called magi or the three kings. They saw a wild star in the sky and since they were familiar with stars, they were curious what it was. They traveled to Bethlehem but it took them awhile to get there. We celebrate their arrival on Epiphany which is January 6. We want to remember them on our journey to Bethlehem since they traveled there.

Read: Micah 5:2-5a.

Say: Jesus is our Prince of Peace. He was born to be the King of the Jews and upset the systems that oppressed the Jewish nation. This didn't bring peace to Herod's heart. He was upset and troubled as he was scared his power and rule were in jeopardy. Herod was so troubled he wanted the wise men to come back and let him know where the baby was. God warned the kings not to go back. God kept Jesus safe! If we look throughout our journey to Bethlehem, we have seen God's provision throughout. Mary and her baby would have been one of the most vulnerable people during their travels and in Bethlehem. Yet, God's hand was behind them. When Herod sought to kill Jesus, they fled as refugees to Egypt where God kept them.

Respond in Song:

- Play "In Christ Alone" by Kristian Stanfill. (Versions should be available on YouTube). Sing along or sit quietly and meditate on the words.
- Play "You Made A Way" by Travis Green. (Versions should be available on YouTube). Sing along or sit quietly and meditate on the words.

Read Mary's Song from: Luke 1:46b – 55.

Pray: Mary mentions how God has helped Israel and was merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever. Where can you ask for God's peace in your life? Pray to God with where you are struggling to find peace. Also take some time to think who in our world is left vulnerable like Jesus, Mary, and Joseph? Pray for their safety and provision from God.

Blow out all four candles. Say: The smoke spreads out. Now the light has spread out throughout the room. The light of the prophets, the light of the path to Bethlehem, the light of the angels and the light of the wise men.

Christmas Eve or Christmas Day

Light the three purple candles and the pink candle. (Wait to light the Christ candle). After lighting the candles, share the following:

Today is the day we have been waiting for! Our journey has brought us to the manger in Bethlehem and the day that changed everything. We celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is a day of pure celebration! The King has arrived!

Light the Christ Candle.

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7.

Say: The prophet, Isaiah, knew what was going to happen on the road to Bethlehem. We have received a child, the Son of God. He is so many things to us: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace and so much more.

Respond in Song:

- Play "You are Holy (Prince of Peace)" by Michael W. Smith. Please listen to it first and then divide up the parts among your group or sing the names of God chorus altogether.
- Play "Hallowed Be" by We Will Worship. (Versions should be available on YouTube). Sing along or sit quietly and meditate on the words.

Read: Luke 2:1-20 and Titus 2:11-14.

Pray: Jesus has come. He is present in the world today, and He will come again. Those who follow Him have been set free! Jesus' birth is a reason to celebrate and is something we shouldn't keep to ourselves. We represent Jesus in this world as we wait and long for Christ to return. Just as Jesus changed systems and structures through individual relationships, ask God to help you be the hands and feet of Jesus in a hurting world.

Sit and enjoy the light. Blow out all the candles when finished.

Additional Advent Resources:

If you are interested in utilizing the *Advent Devotions for Busy Families*, here are some suggested plans to follow:

Daily: There are 25 activities for you to do each day in December leading up to and including Christmas. Follow the order in the Table of Contents.

3 times a week:

Week of	Activities (see Table of Contents for Page #)
December 2	Christmas Lights, Christmas Cards, Count on It
December 9	Christmas Cookies, Stable, Christmas Stockings
December 16	Candy Canes, Shepherds, Angels
December 23	Snowflakes, Poinsettia, The Manger

2 times a week:

Week of	Activities (see Table of Contents for Page #)
December 2	Christmas Lights, Count on It
December 9	Stable, Christmas Stockings
December 16	Shepherds, Angels
December 23	Poinsettia, The Manger