

Liturgy for the First Week of Advent

This Sunday marks the beginning of the Advent season leading up to Christmas. 'Advent' comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means 'coming'. This is a season marked by waiting: We remember the anticipation of the first coming of Jesus who is Emmanuel, God with us, and participate in the waiting for His second coming when Jesus will return to make all things new and bring the fullness of God's Kingdom.

In 2020 we might feel the ache of waiting more than any other year we've experienced before and we might not be excited to enter into a season marked by waiting. The days feel dim and dark as our world, communities, individuals and families are impacted by loneliness and isolation, sickness, suffering, and even death. The waiting feels endless and unknown as there is no neat timeline to when an effective vaccine might be developed, no set of definite markers indicating when it will be safe to return to gathering in person for church, work, or school, and no countdown to when things might feel normal again even if it is a new-normal. This is not the kind of season of waiting that comes with an "Advent calendar" of 24 chocolates to count down the days until Christmas. It is the kind of waiting where everything has come to be described as *unprecedented*: completely new, never done before, uncharted, no framework built to handle the times.

The waiting and expectation that characterizes Advent is different. It is "*precedented*": experienced before, rooted in a preceding event, a ground on which something can be established. This doesn't just mean that this same season of Advent happened last year, that we ate the 24 count-down chocolates in the calendar, and December 25th came and we celebrated Jesus. Advent is "precedented" in that God promised throughout the Old Testament that he would send a Savior to set his people free from the grips of sin and death. Israel kept watch for their Savior and saw God's promise and their hope fulfilled in the humble birth of Jesus Christ who is Emmanuel, God with us.

A season of waiting for the glorious coming of the Savior has been lived before and has been fulfilled. We know from scripture that Jesus returned to the Father and left us God's own Spirit as we wait for Jesus' return. This is the second Advent that we await-- not just in this season, but in each and every day. This second Advent also requires the kind of waiting that unfortunately doesn't have a chocolate count-down calendar. In this second Advent waiting we have the far greater sustaining gift of God's resurrecting Spirit who strengthens and comforts us and we have God's promise that God will come and dwell with us again, and that God is making all things new and at that time there will be no more mourning, crying, or pain (Rev 21:15).

In the Advent season we are invited to remember that the present daily ache of our "unprecedented time" is sandwiched between two comings, or two Advents. And in the time between these two comings there are firmly established grounds in God's promises and past fulfillment of promise from the first Advent that we can have firmly rooted hopeful expectation for Jesus' second Advent when Jesus will return in glory, where death and destruction will be no more. As we will see in the scripture passage today, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. The light shines in the darkness of this year and the darkness will not overcome it. We can find strength for the waiting that 2020 has required because we have

hope in Jesus' second glorious coming established in the fulfillment of his first humble coming. The light of Christ shines through the darkness of 2020 as the Holy Spirit sustains and comforts us while we expectantly await His return.

Entering the Space:

You are invited to prepare a space to meet with God this morning by adding light:

In the Christian season of Advent we often use an Advent wreath as part of our worship. The Advent wreath has 4 candles around the edges of the wreath, one for each of the 4 weeks of Advent, and at the center is the Christ candle which is lit on Christmas day. Each week the light will grow and increase as we light an additional candle and we get closer to celebrating the coming of Jesus Christ. If you have an Advent wreath in your home, light the first candle.

Alternatively you may light any candle you have, turn on a lamp, pull back the curtains to let light shine in, or even head outside to find a spot where you can enjoy the light and warmth of the sun.

Take a moment in silence before beginning, take a few deep breaths and ask the Lord to open you to his presence this morning through the word and prayer.

Reading and Responding to God's Word: John 1:1-14

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A1-14&version=NRSV>

In your own Bible read aloud John 1:1-14

We might be most familiar celebrating Advent by recounting the story of the birth of Jesus starting with an angel appearing to Mary, but John is taking us back even further in time all the way to the beginning - as in the very beginning.

- Re-read aloud John 1:1-5 and read aloud Genesis 1:1-5. Notice the echoes of the creation account of Genesis in the Gospel according to John. List the similar words, phrases, and images or share them aloud if you are in a group.

The gospel - the Good News of Jesus - starts at creation. John 1:1-5 is a proclamation of the divinity of Jesus, that Jesus is God incarnate, eternally God, and was not created at the time of his birth. Jesus is one with the Father and the Spirit at creation before there was anything that was made. John says that all things have been created through the Word and there is nothing that has been made outside of being made by God through the Word. While this might sound redundant, it is an all-encompassing statement of God's power to create and God as the source of life.

We know from Genesis that when God created, God called his creation good. God's creation is not bad. Because sin entered through Adam and Eve all of creation has been marred by sin and as a result is separated from God and we now experience pain and death. Only Jesus, the God who has created the world and made us in God's own image, is able to take on flesh and

save all creation as Jesus is fully God and fully human. The very spirit of the Word that hovers over the darkness at creation is the true light and has come into the darkness of the fallen and sinful world and is not overcome by the darkness.

- Read aloud John 1:9-14 again. What does Jesus do? What are the different responses to Jesus?

Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12) and gives light to everyone thereby allowing us to know him and see his glory “glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). When God’s creation falls into sin, God does not turn off the light, turn around, and close the door behind him. Instead, God goes to his people in real flesh and blood and as the Message puts it he “moves into the neighborhood”, or as Israel would have heard it, God *tabernacles* among us. In Jesus we see the Son of God, we see God’s grace and truth lived out in flesh and blood even to the extent that Jesus dies on the cross and is resurrected to free us from sin and death and bring us into new life.

John 1:11-13 explains that when Jesus “moved into the neighborhood” so to speak, his neighbors weren’t all knocking on the door with cookies or casseroles in hand to receive him as one of their own. Instead, to extend the metaphor a bit further, Jesus throws a block party and we are extended this invitation to receive Jesus, believe in him, and share in his inheritance as a child of God and to receive eternal life through his life, death, and resurrection.

- How might God be inviting you today to receive him?
- Read aloud John 1:6-8 and hear the invitation to bear witness about the true light. How might you bear witness to the light, to Jesus, in this season?

Breath Prayer or Responsive Prayer

Both the breath prayer and responsive prayer may be adapted to fit if you are worshiping individually or in a group.

Breath prayer is an ancient Christian prayer practice. It is a very short prayer of praise or petition, just four to eight syllables. The first phrase is generally an invocation of God’s name, spoken as you inhale. The second phrase, usually a need or request, is spoken as you exhale.

The breath prayer is usually said quietly and repeated several times. Some people sing it; others chant it. We’ve provided a prayer for you to use, if that’s helpful. Take your time with the breath prayer.

Jesus, light of the world
shine in the darkness

Responsive Prayer: Spend time praying aloud for situations that feel dark and present them before the Lord. God is with you in the midst of these circumstances. Ask God to reveal his presence and work in those situations. Then, proclaim truth by using the following responsive prayer.

If you are worshiping individually, speak both parts as a proclamation of truth after each situation you present to the Lord.

If you are worshiping in a group, after each person shares their prayer, that person will say the “speaker” portion, and everyone will respond together with the section marked “all respond.”

Speaker: The light shines in the darkness,
All respond: and the darkness has not overcome it

Speaking truth, rooting hope: The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed was written at the council of Nicea in 325 CE. At this council, Bishops of the church affirmed the truth revealed through scripture that Jesus is fully eternally God and is not merely a human being. Because Jesus is fully God and fully human, Jesus has the power to save and redeem creation including humanity. As part of the Advent practice of rooting our hope in truth of who God is, what God has done, and what God promises to do, we will join the church throughout time and tradition by proclaiming out loud together what we believe to be true. You may notice some echoes of John 1 in this creed and are invited to reflect upon it.

Let us confess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,
 the Father, the Almighty,
 maker of heaven and earth,
 of all that is, visible and invisible.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
 the only-begotten Son of God,
 eternally begotten of the Father,
 God from God, Light from Light,
 true God from true God,
 begotten, not made,
 of one Being with the Father;
 through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Exiting the Space:

You are invited to extinguish a candle if you lit one, head back inside if you were outdoors, but are invited to keep any other light sources on as you continue through your day. *The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.*

Our worship does not end here...

You are invited to continue reflecting on Jesus as the light of the world by incorporating the breath prayer and/or responsive prayer into your own rhythms of worship during this Advent season. When life feels dark and heavy, call upon Jesus, who is the light of the world, through use of the breath prayer. Affirm the power of God to shine light in the darkness by using the responsive prayer when you feel discouraged or overwhelmed by the darkness of the world.

You may also choose to worship through music and singing. If you have worshiped with Highrock you may be familiar with the song "God With Us" by All Sons & Daughters. You are invited to listen and sing along in this Advent season.

The song can be found here: <https://youtu.be/sukbtENMUw>