

Dear Cathedral Family,

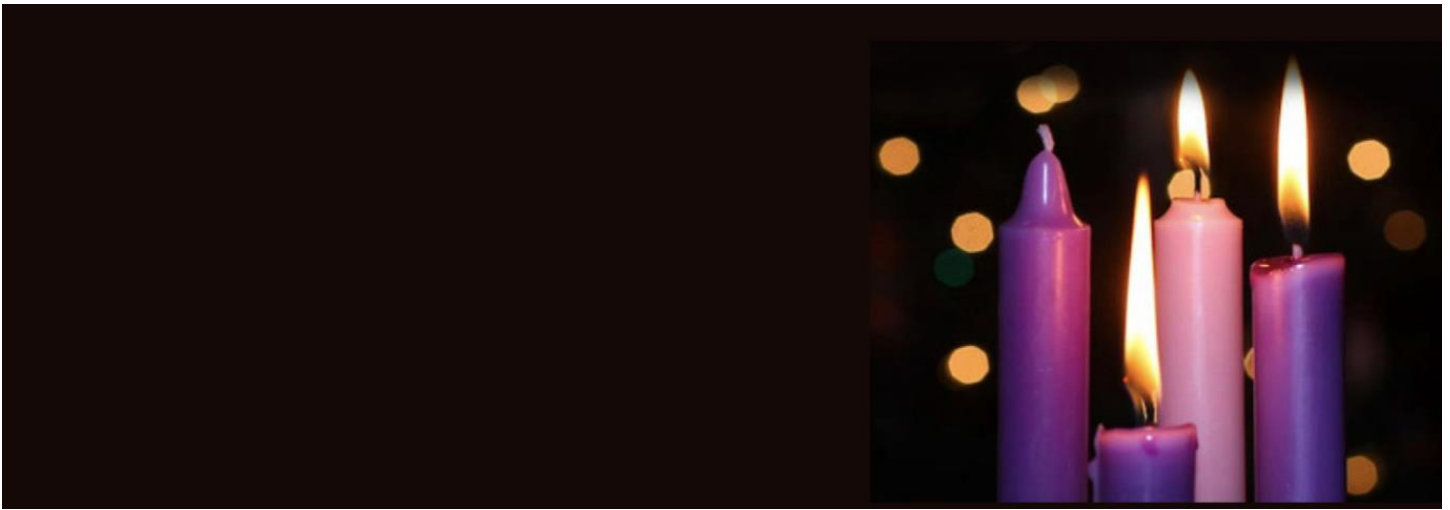
Advent marks the start of the Church's liturgical year, beginning this year on November 28th. Advent encompasses the four Sundays and weekdays leading up to the celebration of Christmas on December 25th.

Advent, from the Latin "to come", is a time of preparation and anticipation for the coming of God's light to earth in the form of the Christ-child. Observing the simple tradition of the Advent wreath can help us to slow down and find the peace and stillness of this season. The wreath itself is full of rich symbolism and can be a source of contemplation as we prepare our hearts and minds for Christmas. As you assemble your wreath, what symbolism calls to you in its shape and elements?

This is an experiential and contemplative guide to accompany the lighting of each candle, offering suggestions for participation for all ages, as well as a lectio divina for adults. Lectio divina; literally divine reading, is the practice of using a text meditatively. Rather than reading to gather information, read from a heart space. I've chosen passages and poetry to inspire reflection on the already-and-not-yet-ness of advent from Mothers and Fathers of our faith.

A very blessed and peaceful advent to you and yours!

Megan Suttman
Director of Family Engagement
Christ Church Cathedral



The First Light Of Advent (purple candle) is sometimes called the “Prophecy Candle” in remembrance of the prophets who foretold the birth of Christ. It represents the HOPE and expectation of the coming Messiah. Purple candles represent a liturgical time of prayer and anticipation.

With Children

As we celebrate this season of expectation with children we can acknowledge and honor that all of creation is anticipating the coming Christ-child’s light with us! The following suggestions will bring a simple and beautiful sensory quality to the season that will be meaningful to young children as they contribute found objects and treasures to your advent wreath.

The First Light Of Advent is the Light of Stones

The Light that shines is seashells, crystals and bones!

Gather these treasures if you may,

To add to your wreath this First Advent Sunday!

For all the stones upon the earth

And waiting with us for the Christ-child’s birth!

Activity: *Find a stone, crystal or shell to place in your wreath or advent star path!*

Mary’s Star Path Advent Calendar Activity

Making a star path is a beautiful way for children to visualize our journey to welcoming the Christ-child on Christmas day! Choose a place in your home such as a mantle, or large table where this star path can remain for all of advent. I have provided a mother and child peg doll to be decorated (marker works well, or you can glue bits of fabric! I’ve included a bit of wool “hair” also), a star tracing pattern, and cardstock for making your stars. Cut 4 yellow stars, one for each Sunday of Advent, and 24 blue stars for the rest of the Advent days. You can set the path up however you choose; a spiral, or a meandering or straight path. Setting your stars up over a

bit of cloth helps to keep it all in place. The path can be decorated seasonally if you wish. Each day Mother Mary is moved from star to star and at the end of the path, on Christmas day, the baby joins her!

Adult Lectio Divina : *Advent Credo* By Daniel Berrigan (1921-2016)

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—

This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—

This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

From *Testimony: The Word Made Flesh*, by Daniel Berrigan, S.J. Orbis Books, 2004.

The Second Light of Advent (purple candle) is called the “Bethlehem Candle” as a reminder of Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem. It reminds us of the LOVE of a Mother for her coming child.

With Children

The Second Light of Advent is the Light of Beasts

The light that shines in the greatest and the least!

Draw a picture if you may,

To add to your wreath this Second Advent Sunday!

For all the animals upon the earth

Are waiting with us for the Christ-child’s birth!

Activity: *Draw a picture of the donkey Mary rode into Bethlehem on, or choose your favorite animal(s)! Cut out and place near your Advent Wreath or star path*

Adult Lectio Divina: An Advent Meditation with James Finley

When we read the Gospels in the spirit of faith, everything that Jesus says and does, and everything that happens to Jesus reveals to us how God is present in our lives. The way Jesus responds to the situations and people in his life reveals to us how we are to respond to God's presence in our lives. So in that spirit, we look to the Gospel story of Jesus' birth. Mary and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem in compliance with the census imposed by Caesar, as everyone had to report to their town of origin. And so, Joseph, being of the house of David, went with Mary late in her pregnancy to Bethlehem for the census and while they were in Bethlehem the time came for Mary to give birth. Because of all the people in Bethlehem for the census, there was no room at the inn. And so they had to go to a small stable where Jesus was born. Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes and put him in a manger, outside in the dark, in the stable with the animals.

What does this story teach us about how God is present in our lives? To me it seems that the lesson is that there was no room in the inn, but God came anyway. The fact there was no room in the inn did not stop God from being born into this world.

Sometimes in today's world, with all the things that are going on, and the hectic pace we must keep to stay ahead of the day's demands, along with the complexities of it all, it seems that there's no room in the inn. That is, there's no hiatus. But we know in faith that as true as that might be, that God comes anyway. That God's being born into our life moment by moment, breath by breath, as the interior richness of every little thing that happens to us and everyone around us. But here's the thing. In order to discover this, we have to leave the hurly-burly of the inn and the superficiality and chatter of it all, and find our way in the dark; back to the stable. That is, we have to enter into the humility and the simplicity and the patience and the delicate nature of what's unfolding in our hearts to discover where God's being born in our lives. And in this kind of prayerful attentiveness we are then asked to bring that delicate simplicity back *out* into the hurly-burly of the world. It would be so much easier if we were asked to live a simple life in a simple world, but we're asked to live a simple life in a complicated world, and I think this is how God's born in our hearts.

One of my earliest memories, I was maybe three years old and at Mass with my Mother. I know it was Christmas time because there were Christmas trees up in the sanctuary and there was a nativity scene. I remember the church was very crowded and a little baby started to cry somewhere in the church. I whispered in my mother's ear, "Is that the baby Jesus crying?" and I remember her leaning down and whispering in my ear, "Yes, it is." I believed her, and today at 74 years old, I still believe her. Not in the naive way that a small child would believe it, but knowing that in Christ it's revealed to us that every child is worth all that God is worth and the truth is, for all the complexity under which that simplicity has been buried, there is in our hearts, a childlike purity, a God-given Godly nature of who we simply are because God loves us. And so then, Christmas is our awakening to this birthing of God in the simplicity of our hearts, in the depths of our life, in the complexities of whatever the day might bring.

Taken from an unedited transcript for the Center for Action and Contemplation, edits made for readability by Megan Suttman

The Third Light of Advent (pink candle) is called the "Shepard's Candle," and is pink because rose is a liturgical color for JOY. The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday, "Gaudete" is simply the Latin word for "joy". This is the Sunday in Advent when we intentionally, in the midst of our preparations and busyness, try to simply be joyful as we look forward to Christ's long-anticipated arrival.

With Children

The Third Light of Advent is the Light of Plants

Who light us with joy, and in the breezes dance

Gather seed pods or leaves on a blustery day

To place upon your wreath this Third Advent Sunday!

For all the plants upon the earth

Are waiting with us for the Christ-Child's birth!

Activity: *Take a winter walk and find dried or living plants to add to your advent wreath or Advent star path. Be mindful of fire hazards, making a bouquet in a vase set to the side if necessary. Alternatively buy fresh flowers to add.*

Adult Lectio Divina: Julian of Norwich (1342-1416)

God rejoices that he is our Father. God rejoices that he is our Mother. God rejoices that he is our Beloved and we are his true lover. Christ rejoices that he is our Brother. Jesus rejoices that he is our Savior. These are five supreme joys and he wants us to rejoice in them, too, and praise him, thanking and loving and endlessly blessing him.

During our lives here on earth, we experience a wondrous mixture of well and woe. We hold inside us both the glory of the Risen Christ and the misery of the Fallen Adam. Christ protects us in our dying and, through his gracious touch, uplifts us and reassures us that all will be well. . . . We are so fragmented, afflicted in our feelings in so many ways, that we hardly know where to turn for comfort. The various pains and transgressions of this life fill our hearts with sorrow and cloud the eyes of our souls.

But we cultivate our intention and wait for God. We have faith in his mercy and grace, and trust that he is working within us. In his goodness, he opens the eyes of our understanding and gives us insight. Sometimes we glimpse more, sometimes we see less, depending on what God gives us the ability to receive. Now he elevates us; now he allows us to come tumbling down.

The mixture of sorrow and joy is so powerful that we cannot figure out how to handle it all, let alone assess how our fellow spiritual seekers are doing. The diversity of feelings can be overwhelming. And yet, in those moments when we sense the presence of God, we surrender to him, truly willing to be with him, with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength. This holy assent is all that matters. It eclipses all the wicked inclinations inside us—physical and spiritual—that might lead us to miss the mark.

Sometimes, however, that sacred sweetness lies deeply buried, and we fall again into blindness, which leads to all kinds of sorrow and tribulation. So we must take comfort in the essential article of our faith that teaches us not to give into our negative impulses, but to draw strength from Christ, who is our defender against all harm. We need to stand up against evil, even if to do so causes discomfort—even pain—and pray for the time when God will once again reveal himself and fill our hearts with the sweetness of his presence. And so we remain in this muddle all the days of our lives. But our Beloved wants us to trust that he is always with us.

From *The Showings of Julian of Norwich: A New Translation*, Mirabai Starr (Hampton Roads: 2013), 142–143.

The Fourth Light of Advent (purple Candle) signals the final week of prayer as we wait for the Christ-child's birth. This candle is the “Angel’s Candle”, and symbolizes PEACE. It reminds us of the message of the angels: “Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men.”

With Children

The Fourth Light of Advent is the Light of People Everywhere

The Light of peace and kindness that between us we share

Give a gift, an act, or a kind word to say
To celebrate the light of love that lives in you this Fourth Advent Sunday
For all the people upon the earth
And waiting with us for the Christ-child's birth!

Activity: *Make a gift, card, poem or picture for someone. Or choose a kind act or word to share with someone who needs it.*

Adult Lectio Divina: A poem by Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

Charm with your stainlessness these winter nights,
Skies, and be perfect!
Fly vivider in the fiery dark, you quiet meteors,
And disappear.
You moon, be low to go down,
This is your full!
The four white roads make off in silence
Towards the four parts of the starry universe.
Time falls like manna at the corners of the wintry earth.
We have become more humble than the rocks,
More wakeful than the patient hills.
Charm with your stainlessness these nights in Advent, holy spheres,
While minds, as meek as beasts,
Stay close at home in the sweet hay;
And intellects are quieter than the flocks that feed by starlight.
Oh pour your darkness and your brightness over all our solemn valleys,
You skies: and travel like the gentle Virgin,
Toward the planets' stately setting,
Oh white full moon as quiet as Bethlehem!

from : Advent and Christmas with Thomas Merton (A Redemptorist Pastoral Publication), July 16, 2002

On Christmas Eve, the white candle is placed in the middle of the wreath and lit. This candle is called the “Christ Candle” and represents the life and light of Christ coming to dwell among us.

With Children

The Last Light of Advent is the light of the Christ-child!

Born in a manger so tender and mild

The Light of God has now come to dwell

In and among every person, plant, beast, rock and shell!

Now All of creation in all the Earth

Rejoices with us in the Christ-child's birth!

Activity: *Sing a song, ring bells make a joyous noise of any kind!*

Adult Lectio Divina: Thoughts on a Christmas Mood by Howard Thurman (1899-1981)

Christmas is a mood, a quality, a symbol. It is never merely a fact. As a fact it is a date on the calendar — to the believer it is the anniversary of an event in human history. An individual may relate himself meaningfully to the fact or the event, but that would not be Christmas.

The mood of Christmas — what is it? It is a quickening of the presence of other human beings into whose lives a precious part of one's own has been released. It is a memory of other days when into one's path an angel appeared spreading a halo over an ordinary moment or a commonplace event. It is an iridescence of sheer delight that bathes one's whole being with something more wonderful than words can ever tell. Of such is the mood of Christmas.

The quality of Christmas — what is it? It is the fullness with which fruit ripens, blossoms unfold into flowers, and live coals glow in the darkness. It is the richness of vibrant colors — the calm purple of grapes, the exciting redness of tomatoes, the shimmering light on the noiseless stirring of a lake or sunset. It is the sense of plateau with a large rock behind which one may take temporary respite from winds that chill. Of such is the quality of Christmas.

The symbol of Christmas — what is it? It is the rainbow arched over the roof of the sky when the clouds are heavy with foreboding. It is the cry of life in the newborn babe when, forced from its mother's nest, it claims its right to live. It is the brooding Presence of the Eternal Spirit making crooked paths straight, rough places smooth, tired hearts refreshed, dead hopes stir with newness of life. It is the promise of tomorrow at the close of every day, the movement of life in defiance of death, and the assurance that love is sturdier than hate, that right is more confident than wrong, that good is more permanent than evil.

From the Prologue to Howard Thurman's, The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations, 1985