

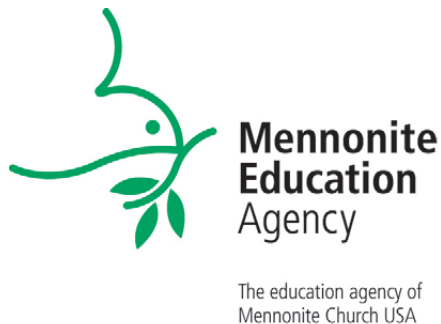


Advent at Home Worship Guide 2024
December 1, 2024, through January 6, 2025

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Journey Stop 2:

- Play caravan telephone. Stand in a line, and see how a phrase changes when it's passed from the front of the line, or caravan, to the back. Try using a phrase that goes with the story, like, "Camel spit smells like frankincense."
- Spot the star over the door, and travel to it.
- As you travel: Talk about the question, "Why do people caravan or travel on journeys today and in other Bible stories?"

Destination:

- Go in the door, and gather around a nativity set — or your household manger.
- Sing together. Consider singing "Away in a Manger" or "Silent Night." This could be the end ...
- Or, if you want to spend some more time wrapping this season up, consider: How do you feel now at the end of our little journey? Imagine. The magi journeyed for many, many days, maybe even a year. They weren't fleeing or getting a reward at the end or anything, they came purely to worship Jesus. Jesus is so very, very special that these seekers-of-wisdom from a foreign land undertook a long and dangerous journey. They wanted to be part of what God was doing, part of the way God was changing the world.

This resource frequently draws on knowledge gained from the essays and commentaries of "The Jewish Annotated New Testament".

Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament : New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*. Second edition. Oxford University Press, 2017.

EPIPHANY WALK

Adapted from an event that took place at College Mennonite Church in January of 2021, led by Daniel Yoder and Talashia Keim Yoder.

Get started:

- Have one household member: put a star over a door of your house. If you have children in your group, try not to let them see you do it!
- Gather the supplies: You will need a “travel pack,” with a thermos full of a hot drink and some cups, plus some dried fruit and nuts.
- Decide who will be the camel; that person will carry the pack. You can take turns with this job!
- Step outside to begin your journey.
- Journey prompt 1: The magi were seekers of wisdom, and they saw something in nature – a star – that prompted their curiosity and led them to Jesus. What in creation makes you curious and leads you to Jesus? Spot something, and “travel” to it.
- As you travel, sing a travel song together. Here are two song ideas:
 - We are marching in the light of God (793 VT)
 - Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.

Journey Stop 1:

- Eat your snack.
- Read Matthew 2:1-12 from your Bible or story Bible.
- Spot the next thing that makes you curious, and “travel” to it.
- As you travel: Talk about what your household’s — or household of origin — travel traditions are/were. Or share wacky travel stories.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Introduction |
| 10 | Week 1: Hope in rocky times |
| 13 | Week 2: Visions of peace for the journey |
| 17 | Week 3: Joyful justice on the journey |
| 20 | Week 4: Love incarnate on the journey |
| 24 | Christmas Week 1: Jesus is blessed for his journey |
| 27 | Epiphany: The journey continues |



On pilgrimage: Isle of Iona, Scotland

INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT AT HOME

Advent through Epiphany, Dec. 1, 2024-Jan. 6, 2025

TOGETHER ON THE JOURNEY

Journeying is a popular metaphor in today's culture, and for good reason. The metaphor reminds us that it's not just the destination that matters. The paths that take us from here to there, with all the twists and turns and detours and traveling companions, are just as important. This year's theme, developed for "Leader" magazine, frames Advent as a journey. Scripture from the Narrative Lectionary will guide us on a persistent journey with God and with one another. In this season, the communal journey takes us to the manger, but we recognize that this is just a first stop. Immanuel, God with us, in the form of an infant named Jesus, joins us on an eternal journey. And as the writers of "Leader" series say, "Like a threefold cord, we are stronger when we walk with God and others 'together on the journey.'"

WHAT IS ADVENT?

- It is a season of waiting and preparation, during which we recreate the longing people felt before the birth of Jesus. Christians prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth by remembering their longing for a Messiah.
- The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word "adventus", which means "coming" or "visit." During the Advent season, we keep in mind both "advents" of Christ: the first one in Bethlehem and the second one yet to come.
- During Advent, we move from darkness to light — right at the time of the year when the days are reaching their shortest in the northern hemisphere, and when the world is going from light to darkness leading up to the winter solstice. We don't do this to equate light with goodness and darkness, with evil. Rather, light is a symbol of illumination, helping us to see more clearly.

- Prayer: Jesus, source of hope, peace, joy, and love, walk with us on this journey.
- Blow out the candles.
- Optional: Sing.



- Read the story through the eyes of Mary and Joseph. Imagine how you would have felt at each point in the story. Maybe it wasn't so easy to parent Jesus.
- Read this story through the eyes of Jesus. He knew he was perfectly safe and at home. Wonder: Did he stumble upon this group of teachers, or did he seek them out?
- Read this story through the eyes of the teachers. Are you excited by this young prodigy? Intimidated? In awe?

- Advent hike:** This might be a good time to take your hike.
- Journey to the manger:** Put Jesus in the manger, if you didn't already do this on Christmas Day!
- Reflective Listening Ideas:** Look up a video of people singing one or more of these songs: Sizohambe Naye (815 VT), Ask the complicated questions (440 VT), Solemn stillness, weary streets (273 VT), O beautiful star of Bethlehem (275 VT).

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light one purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings hope," or "We journey with hope." Light a second, and say, "Jesus brings peace," or "We journey with peace." Light the pink candle, and say, "Jesus brings joy," or "We journey with joy." Light the final purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings love," or "We journey with love." Light the Christ candle, and say, "We journey with Jesus."
- Optional: Read one, or part of one, of the week's Scripture passages, or read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Optional: Complete the "Tracing pathways" ritual.
- Optional: Sing one of the week's suggested songs. Or, let someone in the household choose a song they would like to sing.

WHY CELEBRATE ADVENT?

- The four weeks of Advent help us make sure we are making Christmas about Jesus and more than a present-opening party.
- Living in the Advent season slows us down and helps us remember that December is not just about our frantic preparations for Christmas.
- Advent is the beginning of the Christian calendar, and walking through Advent gives shape to our entire year.

HOW TO USE THIS WORSHIP GUIDE

- This resource accompanies the worship planning materials in "Leader" magazine. The themes and Scriptures are the same, which will connect your worship at home to your worship at church. If your congregation is not following the Leader resource, that's not a problem; this worship guide will still make sense to you.
- Rather than using the typical Revised Common Lectionary scriptures, this year's Scripture passages are taken from the Narrative Lectionary. While some of the stories will still be familiar, they're not the Scriptures most of us are used to hearing during Advent.
- This guide refers to the "Shine On" and "Peace Table" story Bibles from MennoMedia. If you have these resources, you can find correlating stories in them. If you don't have them, it won't be a problem. Reading straight from the Bible or from another story Bible is also great!
- This guide refers to the "Voices Together" songbook which is from MennoMedia. Again, having this songbook is not necessary for using this resource.
- This guide can be used weekly, daily, or a combination of both.
- Choose the rituals and ideas that are helpful for your household and skip the ones that aren't. To remind you that you can choose what works for your household, there are empty checkboxes next to each option.

- There is no need for perfection; aim for persistence. If “daily” means “every few days,” that’s OK!
- Fit these materials into your schedule. If the only thing your household can manage is a daily lighting of candles, singing a song, or saying a quick prayer, *that is enough!*

THE ADVENT WREATH

Create your own version of an Advent wreath that looks similar to this:



- The traditional Advent wreath includes evergreens arranged in a circle with three purple candles and a pink candle, all the same size, lining the inside edge of that circle. One taller white candle is set in the middle of the circle.
- The wreath is circular, like God’s eternal love. It has no beginning and no end.
- Wreaths are traditionally dressed with evergreens, symbolizing endless life and rebirth. Since actual evergreens are highly flammable, consider using some artificial greenery, or decorate your wreath in a different way.
- The purple candles represent both repentance and royalty, and the pink candle, used the third week, is Mary’s candle.
- We often use a word for each week of Advent, as we light each candle. Week 1 is “hope,” week 2 is “peace,” week 3 is “joy” and week 4 is “love.”

Egypt, where they remained as refugees until it was safe for them to return and settle in Nazareth, where Jesus continued to grow up.

Tell the story: Luke 2:41-52

- Read “Shine On” p. 174-175 or “The Peace Table” p. 180-181.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active prompt:** Go on a journey with your household, or maybe join up with another household. Make it a pilgrimage to a place that has some meaning for your faith journey. This could be traveling to the graves of ancestors, visiting a place where God felt very real to you or walking to your church. Tell stories along the way, and tell your faith stories when you arrive. Listen to one another well, and see what insights you learn from one another.
- **Active prompt:** The caravan journey we most often talk about on Epiphany is the journey of the Magi. Do the Epiphany walk described below.
- Mark out the days of this story. This spans a longer time than we realize when we quickly read it.
- Read verses 48-49. Notice the way “father” is used. What are Mary and Jesus saying? What’s going on here?
- Mary and Joseph probably traveled with a large group of pilgrims for this “pilgrimage festival.” That’s why they wouldn’t have known Jesus was missing at first. Have you ever traveled with others? Talk about the joys, and maybe chaos, of experiences like that.
- We don’t know much about Jesus’s conversation with the teachers other than that it was certainly a two-way conversation. Jewish culture highly valued children, and it wasn’t unusual for a child to talk with the teachers. What’s unusual here seems to be the depth of his insights and questions. Reflect on your culture. Do you value conversations with children and listen to them?

Epiphany week, beginning Jan. 5

Focus scripture: Luke 2:41–52

Additional lectionary scriptures: Psalm 2:7-8

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”: God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, and God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people of God were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them, by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live out God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn't always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. During this time of civil war and unrest, prophets like Isaiah tried to point the people to God's way. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets and other leaders, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby, born to a woman named Mary and welcomed by shepherds, angels, common people, and elders. When Jesus's life was in danger, his parents fled with him to

- The white candle in the center is the “Christ candle.”
- There are many stories recounting the history and symbolism of the Advent wreath, and even multiple colors that are used. If you're intrigued, look it up!
- Pathway wreath option: One simple way to tie your wreath into this year's theme is to create pathways in it. Using small rocks, create paths from one candle to the next, moving around the circle, and finally to the Christ candle.

ADVENT HIKE

Discern a regular time that you will journey on a hike. This could be daily, three times per week, once per week. Just make it regular! There are endless variations for this ritual, and here are a few ideas to get you started.

How/where to hike:

- Walking doesn't work for all of us. Your hike might take the form of sitting and observing the journeys of those around you — from people to leaves to birds.
- If it's difficult for you to leave your home, there are all kinds of virtual hikes online. [This playlist](#) has hours upon hours of lovely trails.
- Hike your neighborhood, a local trail or your city streets.
- Hike your home or a local indoor walking area. Shopping malls and churches can be interesting places to take a walk!
- Hike the same place every time or try out new places.
- For many of us, it's not exactly hiking weather. Make safe choices about when to be outside.

Hiking Companions: Remember, the theme is “Together on the journey.”

Find some hiking companions.

- Ask someone to hike regularly with you.
- Change it up, and hiking with different companions each week.
- Join your household with another for regular hikes.
- Let your companions be anyone you meet along the way. Be open to others and see who God will place along your path.
- Hike with Jesus — imagine Jesus coming alongside you for your hike, influencing how you see the world around you. Chat with Jesus. Imagine Jesus at various ages - what would it be like to take a walk with toddler Jesus one day and, then, with 33-year-old Jesus another day?

Hiking as a spiritual practice: Simply getting out into God's world is a spiritual practice. But here are some additional ways to encounter God on the journey.

- Be mindful. Notice God's creativity and rich variety, the textures and sounds and layers of the world around you.
- Read or recite Scripture as you hike.
- Recite Psalm 23, The Lord's Prayer, or another prayer you have memorized, as you move. See how it works in you.
- Notice the many different paths you could take. Alter your route occasionally.
- Ask the Spirit to open your senses, then follow your curiosity.
- Sing as you hike.

more of these songs: Sizohambe naye (815 VT) To us a child of hope is born (259 VT), Go tell it on the mountain (252 VT).

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light one purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings hope," or "We journey with hope." Light a second, and say, "Jesus brings peace," or "We journey with peace." Light the pink candle, and say, "Jesus brings joy," or "We journey with joy." Light the final purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings love," or "We journey with love." Light the Christ candle, and say, "We journey with Jesus."
- Optional: Read one, or part of one, of the week's Scripture passages, or read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Optional: Complete the "Tracing pathways" ritual.
- Optional: Sing one of the week's suggested songs. Or, let someone in the household choose a song they would like to sing.
- Prayer: Jesus, source of hope, peace, joy, and love, walk with us on this journey.
- Blow out the candles.
- Optional: Sing a Christmas song.

Tell the story: Luke 2:21-38

- Read “Shine On” p. 168-169 or “The Peace Table” p. 174-175.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active prompt:** Jesus's parents presented him at the temple. We sometimes compare this to parent-child dedications in our churches. If people in your household were dedicated like this, tell those stories, and look at pictures, if you have them.
- **Active prompt:** Jesus's parents took him to be blessed by elders. Think of some important elders in your life, and connect with them.
- Anna is called a prophet. We see the writings of male prophets that have been preserved, but here and in other places, we see mention of women who were prophets. How have their stories been told, or not told?
- Simeon sings a song, just like Mary did! He also had words for Mary that would give the mother of a newborn pause. Read them, and imagine how they would have felt to these new parents.
- We don't really know what is meant by “purification” in verse 22. There was no purification requirement for fathers or infants, and Mary's purification would have been 40 days after the birth. So, we really have no idea what this is talking about.
- Mary and Joseph, at the time of this passage, have journeyed to Bethlehem and over to Jerusalem, and their lives have been forever changed. Look back over your Advent journey. What changes has God been working in you? And how will you tell that story?

Advent Hike: This might be a good time to take your hike.

Journey to the manger: Put Jesus in the manger, if you didn't already do this on Christmas Day!

Reflective Listening Ideas: Look up a video of people singing one or

TRACING PATHWAYS

Many households may start and end their day in the same place, but the daily journey might take household members on very different paths. Share the stories of your journeys each day. Choose one of these methods, or make up your own!

- In the morning, ask, “Where will your journey take you today?” Share where you think the day will take you, both literally and figuratively.
- In the evening, ask, “Where did your journey take you today?” or “Did today's journey take you anywhere unexpected?” Share about where the day took you and how that was the same or different from what you expected.
- Ask, “When did you sense Jesus with you on today's journey?”

CLEARING THE PATH FOR THE JOURNEY

The month of December can quickly become chaotic. There are pressures to do things certain ways, to keep traditions, to go to a lot of extra events, to travel and to make things special, not to mention the weird family dynamics that seem to assert themselves around the holidays. Some of these pressures are out of our hands, but we do have some control over at least some of them. *Before* you dive into the season, sit down as a household and prioritize. List out the many calls for your time and attention that are going to come your way. Discern which are non-negotiable, which really aren't necessary and which give life and joy.

Ask, “How do we clear our path so that we can be present on this journey toward the birth of Jesus?”

JOURNEY TO THE MANGER

This is a simple daily or weekly ritual that people of all ages have found meaningful. It's a visual way to anticipate the birth of Christ.

1. Set up a simple, unadorned nativity crèche. Maybe you have a nativity structure you want to use, but this could also be something you create.
 - a. "Simple and unadorned" is enough! But if you want an extra challenge, you could decorate the crèche a little more each week to prepare it for Jesus.
2. Place Mary and Joseph somewhere in your home to the north of the manger and place the Magi somewhere to the east. Hide Jesus for now.
3. Each day of Advent, move Mary and Joseph a little closer to the manger, letting them land at the manger on Dec. 24.
4. You may want to also place your shepherds nearby, instead of at the manger, so that you can move them in to worship Jesus on Christmas Day.
5. On Dec. 25, Christmas Day, add Jesus to the manger.
6. After Christmas, begin moving the Magi closer each day, letting them arrive to worship Jesus on Jan. 6, Epiphany.

Note: If you don't have a nativity set, make a simple one! You can paint rocks for different characters or create them out of sticks or clothespins and fabric scraps. Find a free downloadable nativity set to print on paper and cut out, or use other child-friendly nativity set options.

TOGETHER ON THE Journey JESUS IS BLESSED FOR HIS JOURNEY

Christmas week 1, beginning Dec. 29

Advent word of the week: Christ

Focus scripture: Luke 2:21-38

Additional lectionary scriptures: Psalm 131

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Connect to the "big story":** God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, and God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people of God were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them, by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live out God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn't always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. During this time of civil war and unrest, prophets like Isaiah tried to point the people to God's way. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets and other leaders, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby, born to a woman named Mary and welcomed by shepherds, angels, common people, and elders.

the household choose a song they would like to sing.

- Prayer: Jesus, source of hope, peace, joy, and love, walk with us on this journey.
- Blow out the candles.
- Optional: Sing a song of love.



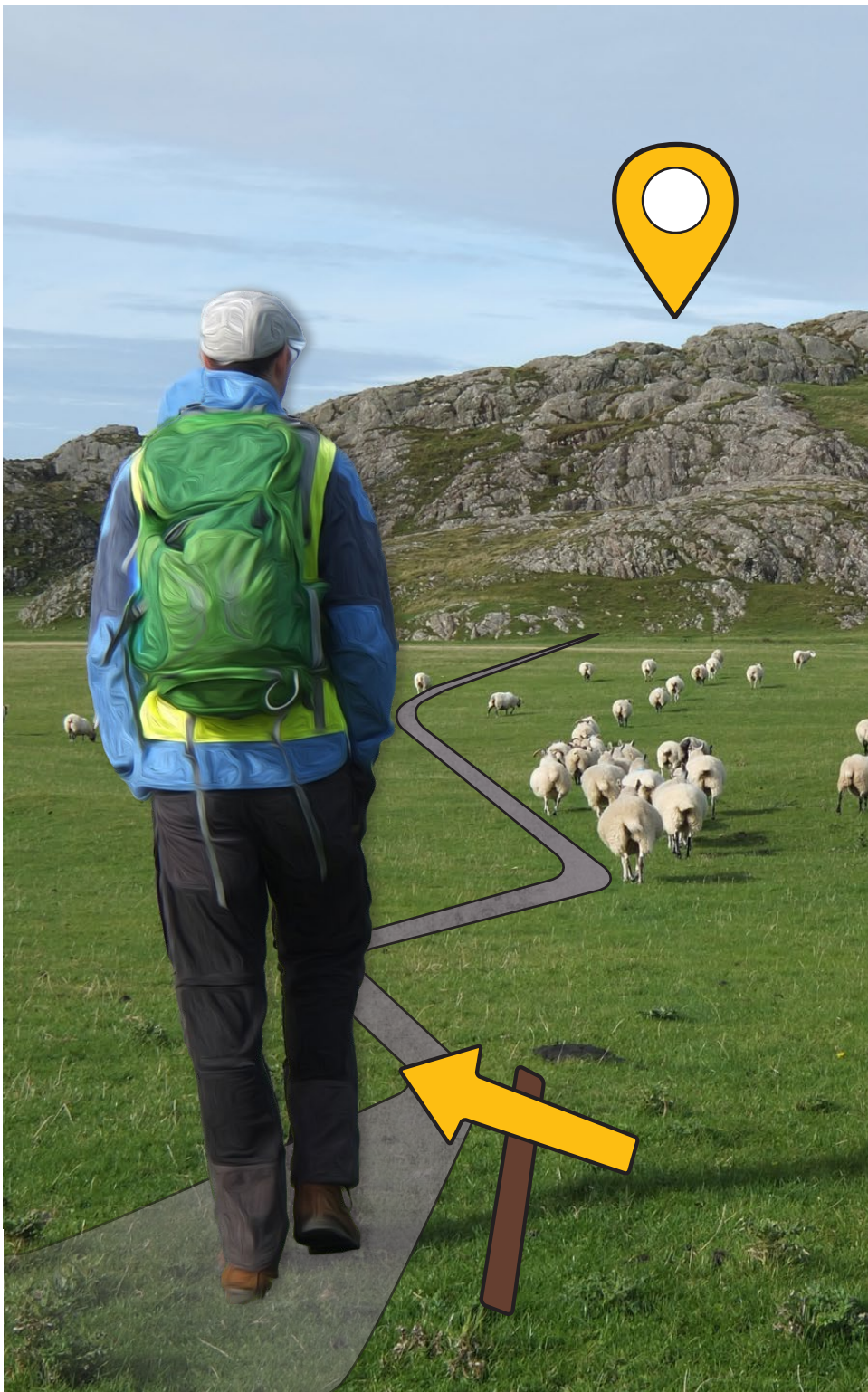
WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Two Scripture passages will be listed for each week. We encourage you to read both of them at some point during the week! The weekly worship ritual will focus on one of the Scripture passages each week.

- Connect to the “big story.” We begin by remembering that the Bible tells one big story that leads to Jesus. By reading this section each week, we can learn where this week’s Scripture belongs in the bigger story.
- Tell the story. Read the Scripture passage from your Bible and/or a corresponding version in a story Bible.
- Talk about it. Choose a few “Talk about it” prompts, provided in this guide, to explore.
- If you’re doing the Advent hike, you may want to make part of this weekly ritual, or maybe you’ll opt to do that at a different time during the week.
- If you want to end your time in a more reflective manner, listen to some music together. Each week’s ritual has a music idea or two to get you started.

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light the candle(s) of the Advent wreath, saying aloud the corresponding Advent word.
- Optional: Read one, or part of one, of the week’s Scripture passages, or read the story of Jesus’ birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Optional: Complete the “Journey to the manger” ritual.
- Optional: Complete the “Tracing pathways” ritual.
- Optional: Sing one of the week’s suggested songs. Or let someone in the household choose a song they would like to sing.
- Pray the simple suggested weekly prayer or another prayer of your choosing.
- Blow out the candles. Maybe you would like to sing a song here. “He Came Down” (#239 “Voices Together” and #31 “Sing the Journey”) is a simple song that can be altered for each week, by using that week’s Advent word in the lyrics. For example, the first week’s version would be, “He came down that we may have hope ...”



- Mary's Song, the canticle of verses 46-55, is similar to Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2) and also has similarities to other songs sung by women, like Miriam and Deborah. All of these are highly political songs.

- This story is about incarnation — God embodied — love itself in the flesh. It's because of this miracle that we can walk with Jesus on this journey.

- Where is the love in this passage?

Advent hike: This might be a good time to take your hike.

Journey to the manger: Move Mary and Joseph a little closer to the manger.

Reflective listening ideas: Look up a video of people singing one or more of these songs: Sizohambe naye (815 VT), Hacia belén (Mary journeyed) (224 VT), Love has come (258 VT).

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

Light one purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings hope," or "We journey with hope." Light a second, and say, "Jesus brings peace," or "We journey with peace." Light the pink candle, and say, "Jesus brings joy," or "We journey with joy." Light the final purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings love," or "We journey with love."

Optional: Read one, or part of one, of the week's Scripture passages, or read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.

Optional: Complete the "Journey to the manger" ritual.

Optional: Complete the "Tracing pathways" ritual.

Optional: Sing one of the week's suggested songs. Or, let someone in

- Tell the story:** Luke 1:26-49
 - Read “Shine On” p. 160-161 or “The Peace Table” p.164-165.

- Talk about it:** Choose a few of these prompts to explore:
 - **Active prompt:** If you have heard this story a lot, the wonder of it may have worn off. Read it with fresh eyes. It’s full of mystery, of the supernatural. An angel, a virgin conception, overshadowing by the Holy Spirit, an unborn child leaping for joy ... Note all of these mysterious elements, and create a graphic novel version of it.
 - **Active prompt:** Act out this story. In addition to the main characters, consider adding some, like a neighbor who walked by during the angelic visit, or the mouse who watched it all and hitched a ride on Mary’s journey.
 - Many of us learned, as children, about Mary who was “meek and mild.” But look at the Mary of this story! She boldly questions the angel, agrees to the task put before her, knows what she needs in this pivotal moment, and journeys to make it happen. Read this story, and find Mary’s strength and courage.
 - Mary seeks out her cousin, when she needs someone to share this moment with her. Who do you seek out when you need to process the curveballs of life? Visit them, or call them on the phone for a good heart-to-heart.
 - This passage is full of allusions to Old Testament Scriptures. Here are just a few:
 - “The Lord is with you” (v. 28) is a conventional greeting. Find it elsewhere: Judges 6:12; 2 Samuel 7:3; 2 Chronicles 15:2.
 - Verses 32-33 mirrors 2 Samuel 7:13-16, the promise made to David.
 - “Son of God” (v. 35) sometimes refers to humans, like Adam, but also refers to divinities (see Psalm 29:1).
 - “Nothing will be impossible with God” (v. 37) has been said several other times, including in Genesis 18:14 about Sarah being pregnant with Isaac.



TOGETHER ON THE *Journey*
HOPE IN ROCKY TIMES

Advent week 1, beginning Dec. 1

Advent word of the week: Hope

Focus scripture: Daniel 6:6-27

Additional lectionary Scriptures: Luke 23:1-5

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Connect to the “big story”:**

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people of God were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them, by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live out God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets and other leaders, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

- Tell the story:** Daniel 6:6-27

Read “Shine On” p. 150-151 or “The Peace Table” p. 126-129.

- Talk about it:** Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active prompt:** Daniel got in trouble for praying with the windows open and not trying to hide what he was doing. He was praying to the Hebrew God, instead of the Babylonian god, which was illegal!

Advent week 4, beginning Dec. 22

Advent word of the week: Love

Focus scripture: Luke 1:26-49

Additional lectionary scriptures: Psalm 113

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”: God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, and God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people of God were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them, by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live out God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. During this time of civil war and unrest, prophets like Isaiah tried to point the people to God’s way. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets and other leaders, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby, born to a woman named Mary.

Worship God publicly, then talk about how it felt to be so bold in your worship. It often makes us feel self-conscious, and we don’t even have the threat of being thrown to a lion’s den for doing it! Here are a few ideas of ways to worship publicly:

- Open the windows for a little bit, and pray or sing prayer songs loudly.
- Go to church, and join boisterously in worship.
- Pray out loud in a restaurant.
- Sing praise songs loudly on your hike.

- **Active prompt:** Act out this story, trying out the characters, from the conspirators to Daniel to the lions. See what you discover.
- Daniel is put in an impossible situation. He makes a decision to trust in God, even though he might lose his life because of it. Tell stories about impossible or difficult situations you’ve found yourself in. What did you do? If you could live it over again, would you make the same choices?
- A young man in exile overcomes the odds and is placed in a position of power, because he shows his wisdom in interpreting the dreams of a king. Who does this remind you of? Why do you think another character like this is featured in the biblical story?
- The book of Daniel, along with other apocalyptic texts, like Revelation, has been frequently used by Jews and Christians alike to try to predict the “end times.” Many of us have some baggage with this! Unpack your experiences.
- Scholars are confident that the book of Daniel was the last book of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament to be written. It serves as a bridge to the New Testament. Imagine Jesus knew this story, as a child and as an adult. What questions do you think Jesus would have asked of the text? How might it have inspired him?
- Verse 24 is tough to read. What do we do with a verse like that?
- Find all the ways people address one another in this story. What do you notice?

- Advent hike:** This might be a good time to take your hike.
- Journey to the manger:** Move Mary and Joseph a little closer to the manger.
- Reflective listening ideas:** Look up a video of people singing one or more of these songs: Sizohambe naye (815 VT), Waterfall (763 VT), Hope is a candle (211 VT).

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light one purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings hope," or "We journey with hope." Light a second, and say, "Jesus brings peace," or "We journey with peace." Light the pink candle, and say, "Jesus brings joy," or "We journey with joy."
- Optional: Read one, or part of one, of the week's Scripture passages, or read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Optional: Complete the "Journey to the manger" ritual.
- Optional: Complete the "Tracing pathways" ritual.
- Optional: Sing one of the week's suggested songs. Or, let someone in the household choose a song they would like to sing.
- Prayer: Jesus, source of hope, peace, and joy, walk with us on this journey.
- Blow out the candles.
- Optional: Sing a song of joy.

- Who shows faith in God in this story, and how do they show it? Does any of it surprise you?
- Sometimes this journey is very rocky. Sometimes the path seems to be blocked. How do you sense God coming alongside you?
- Where is the hope in this passage?

- Advent hike:** This might be a good time to take your hike.
- Journey to the manger:** Move Mary and Joseph a little closer to the manger.
- Reflective listening ideas:** Look up a video of people singing one or more of these songs: Sizohambe naye (815 VT), Don't be afraid (596 VT), Come long expected Jesus (218 VT).

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light one purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings hope," or "We journey with hope."
- Optional: Read one, or part of one, of the week's Scripture passages, or read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Optional: Complete the "Journey to the manger" ritual.
- Optional: Complete the "Tracing pathways" ritual.
- Optional: Sing one of the week's suggested songs. Or, let someone in the household choose a song they would like to sing.
- Prayer: Jesus, source of hope, walk with us on this journey.
- Blow out the candles.
- Optional: Sing a song of hope.

Advent week 2, beginning Dec. 8

Advent word of the week: Peace

Focus scripture: Joel 2:12-13, 28-29

Additional lectionary scriptures: Luke 11:13

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the "big story":

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, and God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people of God were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live out God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn't always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets and other leaders, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Tell the story: Joel 2:12-13, 28-29

- This passage is not found in "The Peace Table" or "Shine On".

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

Tell the story: Isaiah 61, Luke 4:16-21

- Read both of these passages if you have time!
- Read "The Peace Table" p. 186-187.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active prompt:** There is a definite call to active justice in this Scripture! How can you bring "good news to the poor" this week? During this time of year, there are plenty of local opportunities to help others. Choose one, as a household, and then do the legwork together.
- Read one passage, then the other. Now you see why we have two main texts for this week! This is a fantastic reminder that what we call the Old Testament was Jesus's holy Scripture, too.
- Read Isaiah 61 out loud.
- Many prophets bring messages that are gloomy. Notice how this prophecy begins in Isaiah 61:1.
- Jesus read these words in the synagogue to people who were living in a land colonized by the Roman Empire. Imagine people listening to him read this Scripture, then hearing him say, "Today, this Scripture has come true." How would they feel?
- Look at all the powerful, incredible happenings in this Isaiah 61 prophecy. Then imagine: When God decided to act and bring these things to pass, God sent a baby.
- Isaiah 61's powerful imagery describes the righting of many injustices that the people of that time were facing. What might a prophecy in this vein say to today's world? Write your own version of Isaiah 61 that reflects the injustice and need in our world today.
- What does this journey together mean, in light of God's call to justice?
- Where is the joy in this passage?

Advent week 3, beginning Dec. 15

Advent word of the week: Joy

Focus scripture: Isaiah 61:1-11, Luke 4:16-21

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”: God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, and God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people of God were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them, by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live out God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. During this time of civil war and unrest, prophets like Isaiah tried to point the people to God’s way. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets and other leaders, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby. When Jesus grew up, he began to teach and preach, often drawing on the big story of his people.

- Joel is one of the “minor prophets.” Virtually nothing is known about the author, and scholars find it frustrating to try to date the text. It is prophetic, in that the author describes reality as though a veil has been lifted and in the way the author foresees what may happen in the future because of what they see in the present — and because of their faith in an active God.
- **Active prompt:** Dreaming dreams and seeing visions ... whatever our age, gender or status, the Holy Spirit sometimes lifts the curtain for us to see the world as God sees it. Using whatever artistic media you like, invite God to lift that veil, as you prayerfully create. The process, or the journey, is the goal, not a beautiful piece of art at the end. Here are some ideas to get you started:
 - Watch the sunset, and write, in words or phrases, all that you see. Then, read the poem that your observations have created.
 - Finger paint, while listening to music or Scripture.
 - Turn on music, and just move.
 - Give everyone in your household a percussion tool, and create rhythms together.
 - Look at another person. Imagine Jesus beside you, looking at them, and say, in words or phrases, what Jesus sees. Have someone else write down what you say, or use voice to text, creating a poem.
 - Create a collage with pictures or paper scraps.
 - Create a sculpture with things you find in the recycling bin.
- Does Joel 2:28-29 sound familiar? Where else have we heard those words? (Hint: wind and fire ...)
- Read verse 13. The prophet describes God as “relenting from punishment.” According to Robert Alter, the Hebrew verb here “means to change one’s mind after having determined to follow a particular course of action” (The Hebrew Bible: Prophets, pg. 1246). Like many other prophets, Joel doesn’t see a predetermining God but, rather, a God who works with us.

- In the Christian Old Testament, verses 28-32 are part of chapter 2. In the Hebrew Bible, these verses make up the total of chapter 3. Why do you think there's this difference? How do the verses read differently, depending on their chapter?
- "Then afterward" (v. 28) doesn't mean the end times. It just means later. It could be tomorrow or in a month. How does knowing that change how you read the passage?
- Verses 28-29 describe the people to whom God will reveal God's Spirit. These descriptions — young, old, sons, daughters, slaves — indicate an inclusive dream. Look around at your household, your community, your world. Do we allow God's dream to be revealed to all, or do we tend to limit who receives God's revelation and put boundaries around it?
- How does this journey look and feel different, if we know that the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us?
- Where is peace in this passage?

- Advent hike:** This might be a good time to take your hike.
- Journey to the manger:** Move Mary and Joseph a little closer to the manger.
- Reflective listening ideas:** Look up a video of people singing one or more of these songs: Sizohambe naye (815 VT), Holy Spirit, come with power (57 VT), Comfort, comfort o my people (212 VT).

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light one purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings hope," or "We watch with hope." Light a second purple candle, and say, "Jesus brings peace," or "We watch for peace."
- Optional: Read one, or part of one, of the week's Scripture passages or read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Optional: Complete the "Journey to the manger" ritual.
- Optional: Complete the "Tracing pathways" ritual.
- Optional: Sing one of the week's suggested songs. Or let someone in the household choose a song they would like to sing.
- Prayer: Jesus, source of hope and peace, walk with us on this journey.
- Blow out the candles.
- Optional: Sing a song of peace.

