

Introduction

When I was a small child, my family received a copy of an at home advent activity from our Unity Church. This family service has been performed by our family every advent season since. This has become one of our most cherished holiday traditions. Since many people I have spoken to have never heard of it, I feel that it is high time to give it make-over and share it with the world. I am keeping the format similar to the document we received from our Unity Church in Bremerton WA, which had come from an earlier document out of Unity of San Diego, CA. I am eternally grateful for this early foundation in ritual and metaphysics, and every hand that had a part in bringing it to me.

Prepare for Advent

Many Advent celebrations include lighting candles in a wreath. While not required, a wreath or holiday arrangement with four candles is suggested. Some people add a fifth candle in the middle to represent the Christ. The traditional colors for the candles are three violet and one rose, to match Catholic vestments, while red is also a popular choice. You may decide that battery candles are a better option than open flame for your family. As for the wreath, you might already have one, or wish to create one as a family. You can easily find holiday decorations that suit your style at a craft store and wrap them into a circle around candle holders.

There are many different parts to the service, and allowing each member of the family to have a role is part of what makes this tradition so special. As a child I remember taking turns to light the candles and lead the songs was most important, as I got older, reading scripture or the lesson became a sacred duty. This is an outline, I hope you will modify as needed to make it fit the needs of your family. Maybe you are inspired to share a Christmas story or reading from Daily Word. Maybe you add more songs or sing different ones. Do what makes your heart sing.

Do it together

Throughout my life I have been grateful for a pause in the busy week to prepare myself spiritually for Christmas. Whether your family is many, few, or a gathering of friends, I encourage you to share a special time together building memories. Read slowly, let the Christmas spirit fill your heart. Take the time to feel the love in the circle and listen to each other's stories. Maybe this is part of the Sunday evening meal, with the wreath as a centerpiece.

Since I was a teen I have felt like there should be one more page, for a gathering on Christmas Eve or Day, whichever fits your plans. I have included this final gathering in this version.

I hope that your family finds joy, love, peace, and connection in this sacred time of Advent.

~Rev. Rachel Simpson, Christmas 2015

“Let all that you do be done in love” 1 Corinthians 16:14

The First Sunday of Advent

“Hope”

The Wise Men

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Introduction: Advent! Today we begin the journey to Christmas. We join people around the world who have celebrated advent for many hundreds of years. Advent is a time of preparation. Our journey, symbolized by the candles on our wreath, represents the rebirth of the Christ within. Let us not only light our candles, but light up ourselves!

Read: Matthew 2:1-2

Sing: “What Child is this” While singing, light the first candle for Hope.

Meditation: Take a moment of stillness for a prayer or meditation, or to silently gaze at the candle.

Read: Matthew 2:10-11

Lesson: Our first candle representing Hope is lit. According to legend, the Wise Men traveled far across the desert to follow a new star. They believed the star would lead them to meet a great leader whom they would then shower with gifts. Like the wise men, we too have wisdom inside. We are never truly lost. When we follow the star of our intuition, we will arrive at the gift of deeper understanding. This is the Hope of Christmas, that our travels will allow us to shine our light ever brighter.

Share: Invite each person to share something they hope for this Christmas or read a favorite Christmas story.

Sing: “We Three Kings”

The Second Sunday of Advent

“Peace”

The Christmas Tree

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Introduction: Advent! We continue our 4 week journey to Christmas. Today we take time to prepare our hearts and minds to express more of the Christ that Jesus taught. Today’s candle is for peace, we use our wisdom like the wise men to bring us closer to expressing peace in our lives.

Read: John 14:27

Sing: “The First Noel” While singing, light the first candle for hope and second candle for peace.

Meditation: Take a moment of stillness for a prayer or meditation, or to silently gaze at the candles.

Read: Colossians 3:14-15

Lesson: We light two candles to symbolize our journey toward Christmas. Another thing we do to prepare for Christmas is decorate Christmas trees! Evergreen trees have been decorated in the winter time for millennia. Because trees stay green all year, they remind us that God is always alive within us. We decorate the tree with lights to remind us to shine our own lights. Stars remind us of the one that led the wise men, angels represent our highest thoughts. Santa Claus is the spirit of giving. Doves are a symbol of peace, and toys are for joy. The variety in our tree and other trees reminds us of the many beautiful ways that God expresses in the world. Oh how wonderful to have a Christmas Tree!

Share: Share about your tree or a favorite tree of the past. Have each member share something they could do to bring more peace to their lives or the family.

Sing: “O Christmas Tree” or another Christmas favorite. Maybe decorate the Christmas tree or add a new special ornament.

The Third Sunday of Advent

“Love”

The Holy Family

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Introduction: Advent! Today we light three of our candles on our four week journey to Christmas. In our quest to renew the Christ within we began with hope like the wise men, with our second candle we reignited peace in our hearts, and today’s candle is for love. The love of God that is in every being and expresses in our every action. Let love light your life.

Read: John 13:34-35

Sing: “Away in a manger” While singing, light the previously lit candles for Hope and Peace, and the third for Love

Meditation: Take a moment of stillness for a prayer or meditation, or to silently gaze at the candle.

Read: Luke 2:6-7

Lesson: Mary was visited by an angel who told her she would be the mother of a great leader. She represents the divine mother and unconditional love. Joseph was also visited by an angel who told him that his bride to be, Mary, would be carrying the Holy child and it was his calling to care for this child. Joseph represents wisdom and using our mind. When we use love (like Mary) and wisdom (like Joseph) we bring forth miracles, (Jesus). The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph loved one another and their love helped Jesus become a great spiritual leader. The love you have for your family and friends can help them become great too. When we fill our hearts with love, and speak words of encouragement and kindness, we create our own holy family. Let your love spread out and light your world.

Share: Invite each member to share a time they saw someone at the table acting from love.

Sing: “O little Town of Bethlehem”

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

“Joy”

You are the Light

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Introduction: Advent! This is the final Sunday in our four Sunday journey to Christmas! This week we celebrate not only the birth of Jesus two thousand years ago, but the birth of the Christ in each of us. Cultures and religions around the world celebrate the arrival of the light during this, the darkest part of the year. Today’s candle is for Joy, it is a celebration of the presence of the light within each of us that never goes out.

Read: Isaiah 9:2

Sing: “Angels we have heard on High” While singing, light the candles for Hope, Peace, Love and the final candle for Joy.

Meditation: Take a moment of stillness for a prayer or meditation, or to silently gaze at the candle.

Read: Matthew 5:14-16

Lesson: Before modern lights, it was common for a house to have one candle or lamp. If someone were to cover the light, they would essentially be putting everyone in the house into the dark. Jesus reminds us that it is foolish to try to cover our light, and that a shining light will be seen and will make a difference. When we remember that the Christ is born within us each day, we can go out and let our light shine in the world. Enjoy being a light! Encourage the light in others! Sing a joyful song. Show your love through kind words and actions. Have hope. Speak words of peace. The joy of Christmas comes from inside. Share your Christmas joy throughout the year!

Share: Invite each person to share their favorite part of Christmas and something they could do to let their light shine more brightly.

Sing: “Joy to the World”

Christmas Eve or Day

Christmas all year

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Introduction: Today we come together to celebrate Christmas! We light all the candles to remind us that we are the light of the world. Millions of people around the world are celebrating Christmas today. As we enjoy our Christmas plans, take a moment to reflect on joys of the past and hopes for the future. Share in the love of family and friends. Relax in the peace of twinkling lights. Laugh, hug, and be merry.

Sing: A favorite Christmas song.

Meditation: Take a moment of stillness for a prayer or meditation, or to silently gaze at the candle.

Lesson: There are many different ways to celebrate Christmas, and recognize our spiritual birth as well as the birth of Jesus. When the celebrations come to a close and we blow out the candles for the last time, what happens next? As we put away the decorations, let's remember the wise men who faithfully journeyed far following their inner guidance. Let's practice peaceful ways to acting and speaking every day. Let's be like Mary and Joseph and use both love and wisdom to create the best outcomes. Finally, let's practice being a light in the world. Shining your light is not something for just the Christmas season; it is for every day and every season. In this way, Christmas, and the Christ, lives on in and through you always.

Read: John 15:12

Sing: A favorite Christmas song or blessing for the meal.