



Mt Vernon UMC

Christmas Eve

Advent is both a beginning and an end, an alpha and omega of the church's year of grace. Too often considered merely a season of preparation for the annual commemoration of Christ's birth, this rich and many-layered season is actually designed to prepare the Christian for the glorious possibilities of the parousia [second coming]. It is a season of longing expectation—"Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).¹

GREETING

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal God, your promise is spoken in the psalms of David, in the words of the prophets, in the dream of Joseph. Your promise is spoken, eternal God, and takes flesh at last in the womb of the virgin.

May Emmanuel find welcome in our hearts, take flesh in our lives, and be for all peoples the welcome advent of redemption and grace. We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose Day draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

CANDLE LIGHTING

211. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

ADVENT CANDLE²

Reader One: Beloved, today we welcome the Christ Child, the fulfillment of our joy, as we proclaim with the prophet Isaiah, "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

¹ William G. Storey, *Days of the Lord* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965).

² Text by Dr. Lisa Hancock. Copyright Discipleship Ministries.

Lyrics and cover art by John Stuart. <https://stushieart.com>

Light the first Advent candle during this verse.

**Hope, hope, hope, may Earth be filled with hope.
The hope that fills the world with gladness,
Taking away our tears of sadness.
Hope, hope, hope, may Earth be filled with hope.**

Light the second Advent candle during this verse.

**Peace, peace, peace, may Earth be filled with peace.
The peace of God which we are sharing,
Showing the way our faith is caring.
Peace, peace, peace, may Earth be filled with peace.**

Light the pink Advent candle during this verse.

**Joy, joy, joy, may Earth be filled with joy.
The joy that fills our hearts with singing,
praising the One our God is sending.
Joy, joy, joy, may Earth be filled with joy.**

Light the fourth Advent candle during this verse.

**Love, love, love, may Earth be filled with love.
The love of God that knows no ending,
Blessings of love that God is bringing.
Love, love, love, may Earth be filled with love.**

Reader Two: We light this candle as a sign of Christ coming to dwell with us, to live in the neighborhood of vulnerable humanity as a vulnerable child. May the light of Christ warm our hearts and light our way as we share the joy of God's salvation wherever we go.

Light the center candle of the Advent wreath.

THE FIRST LESSON³

845. Psalm 122 (Response #1)

218. It Came Upon a Midnight Clear (v1, 4)

THE SECOND LESSON

Psalm 80. *Leaders read. Congregation sings refrains*

Refrain 1: **Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;**

Refrain 2: **from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.**

Refrain 3: **Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;**

Refrain 4: **dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.**

THE THIRD LESSON

756. Psalm 25

Special Music, “Mary Did You Know?”

THE FOURTH LESSON

Psalm 72 from The Message (excerpted)

Give the gift of wise rule to the king, O God,
the gift of just rule to the crown prince.

May he judge your people rightly,
be honorable to your meek and lowly.

Let the mountains give exuberant witness;
shape the hills with the contours of right living.

Please stand up for the poor,
help the children of the needy,
come down hard on the cruel tyrants.

Outlast the sun, outlive the moon—
age after age after age.

³ Advent Through the Psalms: An alternative to the traditional lessons and carols.
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Be rainfall on cut grass,
earth-refreshing rain showers.
Let righteousness burst into blossom
And peace abound until the moon fades to nothing.
Rule from sea to sea,
from the River to the Rim.

May he never be forgotten,
his fame shine on like sunshine.
May all godless people enter his circle of blessing
and bless the One who blessed them.

**Blessed God, Israel's God,
the one and only wonder-working God!
Blessed always his blazing glory!
All earth brims with his glory.
Yes and Yes and Yes.**

238. Angels We Have Heard on High

THE FIFTH LESSON (A confession)

806. Psalm 85:1-7

Lord, when did we see you?

**I was hungry, starving, and you were full;
thirsty, and you were watering your lawn;
with no road to follow, and without hope,
and you called the police
and were happy that they took me prisoner;
barefoot and with ragged clothing,
and you were saying: "I have nothing to wear,
tomorrow I will buy something new";
sick, and you asked: "Is it infectious?";
prisoner, and you said:
"That is where all those of your class should be."**

Lord have mercy!

Christ have mercy!

806. Psalm 85:8-13

Special Music - O Holy Night

THE SIXTH LESSON

858. Psalm 146

224. Good Christian Friends, Rejoice!

THE SEVENTH LESSON

847. Psalm 126

Leaders read. Congregation sings Response 1.

240. Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

THE EIGHTH LESSON

807. Psalm 89:1-4,19-29

246. Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come

HOLY COMMUNION⁴

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to God.

Let us give thanks to God.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

God of all times and places, we gather at your table of
grace to recall your vision of hope for all people and for
your world.

⁴ www.united-church.ca/worship-theme/advent-unwrapped.ca © 2018 The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada. © Rob Adams.

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Through Abraham and Sarah, you revealed your promise in the surprise of a child. Through your prophets, you called your people to make way for peace and justice. In Jesus, you revealed your way of forgiveness and love. Through the ever-circling year, your Word discloses to us—again and anew—your promise for the restoration of all creation.

As we gather to share this sign of hope and fulfillment, we remember Jesus, the child born into obscurity, amid fear and uncertainty. We remember the fragility of that revelation, as well as the hope he stirred and imagination he inspired, and we sing...

(sung) **O little town of Bethlehem,**

how still we see thee lie!

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep

the silent stars go by.

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

the everlasting light;

the hopes and fears of all the years

are met in thee tonight.

We remember Jesus, the One who blazed a new and risky path of extravagant generosity and of passionate concern: temple-shaker, world-maker, rule-breaker, risk-taker; the author and finisher of our faith.

We remember Jesus' self-giving love and the offer of himself for others, and we sing...

(sung) **For Christ is born of Mary;**

and, gathered all above,

while mortals sleep, the angels keep

their watch of wond'ring love.

O morning stars, together

**proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to men on earth.**

On that night, in the midst of great confusion and fear,
Jesus broke bread with friends, saying, "This is my
body, which I give for you and for all. When you do this,
remember me."

With a blessing, he took the cup and offered it to them
saying: "This cup is God's covenant which is given for
all. When you drink this, remember me."

We remember God gift of forgiveness through Jesus, and
we sing...

(sung) **How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive Him still,
the dear Christ enters in.**

Come to us, life-giving Spirit of God. Bless us, these gifts,
and what we do here, so that we might sing your song of
love for your people and for your world.

Prayers of the People

God of All, we pray for your people.

**For those who are afraid and oppressed, may you give
courage.**

**For those suffering conflict and fear, may you bring
peace.**

For those who long for food and water, may they be filled.

For those who long for justice, may it be fulfilled.

We pray also for ourselves and our community.

That those in hospital and in care feel your strength.

That those who are alone and anxious feel you near.

That those who are ill in body and in spirit be comforted.

That our friends and family be blessed by healing and love.

Hear our prayers, O God,
and in your mercy, answer.

We pray these things, trusting in God's faithfulness revealed:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Gracious God pour out your Holy Spirit upon us gathered here and upon these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood. Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to world until Jesus returns in final victory.

Until then, we remember the promise and we sing...

(sung) **O holy Child of Bethlehem,**

descend to us, we pray;

cast out our sin and enter in;

be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels,

the great glad tidings tell;

O come to us, abide with us,

our Lord Emmanuel!

SERVING THE BREAD & JUICE

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION⁵

God of shepherds and kings, you gather us by the light of the star of promise.

You lead us not only to hope for the future, but to trust in your presence and renewal of life in every time and place.

Guide us this night, by the light of that same star.

Lead us to the mangers of this world, where uncertainty is met with the renewal life and the transformation of this world is most deeply felt in love, one with another.

Be with us on this most wondrous of nights, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CANDLES

239. Silent Night

As you receive the light from your neighbor, please remember to tilt the unlit candle. The lit candle remains upright.

We live always during Advent. We are always waiting for the Messiah to come. The Messiah has come, but is not yet fully manifest. The Messiah is not fully manifest in each of our souls, not fully manifest in humankind as a whole: that is to say, that just as Christ was born according to the flesh in Bethlehem of Judah, so must he be born according to the Spirit in each of our souls.⁶

If you would like a prayer, a visit, a meal, to have Holy Communion brought to your home, or have any other need, please contact any church member or Pastor Rob ([217-751-4400](tel:217-751-4400), pastor@mtvernon-umc.org).

⁵ Rev. Andrew O'Neil, St. Paul's United Church, Riverview, NB

⁶ Jean Danielou, quoted in *An Advent Sourcebook* (LTP, 1988), p. 87; from *The Advent of Salvation* (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward Publishing, 1962).