

Preparing for Perfection

A set of Advent readings for 2014, Year B, or any year

Written by Sharon Rauenzahn, New Life Nazarene Church, Cupertino, CA

Notes about Advent:

Churches use Advent liturgy for at least these 5 reasons:

1. We live as citizens of God's Kingdom on earth. This kingdom has its own calendar, which begins each year on the first Sunday of Advent (the fourth Sunday prior to Christmas Day). If congregations live as citizens of God's Kingdom, they need to know its calendar.
2. An Advent liturgy is a nice prelude to Christmas season messages, and it works in very small or very large churches.
3. It is especially comforting for parishioners who grew up in formal traditions.
4. It offers creative writers an outlet for their gift.
5. It is an opportunity to involve several people in the worship experience.

There are 5 Advent candles, available from various Christian supply stores. In stores, they are a bit expensive, but you can just as easily get the traditional colors of candles from anywhere. Three of the candles are purple, 1 is pink, and 1 is white. They are arranged in a circle of 4 candles surrounding the white one, which is called the "Christ candle." On the 1st Sunday of Advent, have some parishioners light one purple candle and read/recite the liturgy. On the 2nd Sunday, light two purple candles and do the reading. On the 3rd Sunday, light the two purple candles and the pink one. On the 4th Sunday light the two purple candles, the pink one, and the last purple candle. On Christmas Eve/Day, light all the surrounding candles, and finally the white "Christ candle."

The Advent Readers generally enter the worship area from the back, carrying a lit candle-lighter (such as in a wedding), or they can use a cigarette lighter. Avoid matches because of the smell. The Advent team walks to the front, lights the appropriate candle(s), and then reads that day's reading. You can do this anytime in the service. Once lit, leave the candles to burn throughout the rest of the service.

Notes on Advent during remote worship:

One option if you are worshipping remotely, either pre-recorded or via zoom, is to distribute one or more candles ahead of time to five families or individuals and ask them each to make a short video of themselves lighting the candle and doing the readings.

You can download this file to your computer by clicking on the File pulldown menu >> Download as... and choose the file type you want. Once it's on your computer you can edit it all you want.

First Sunday of Advent, Year B, 2014 (NIV scriptures)

Reader 1: “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.”

Reader 2: In the technology industry, people speak of “Creative Destruction,” the idea that to make a new thing, you have to break down what came before. The Prophet Isaiah understood Creative Destruction. His words remind us that our human longing for change and renewal, at its deepest, is a longing for our own Creator to come in power, to set the world right.

Reader 1: “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.”

Reader 2: Today we light the first candle of Advent, the candle of Hope. Our hope is not in technology, not in science or understanding, not in family or friends or even in our fellowship together. Our hope is in the Lord God Almighty, and in the Son, he sent to save us.

Reader 1: “Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.”

Reader 2: “You, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people.” Lord, come quickly! Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent, Year B, 2014 (NIV scriptures)

Reader 1: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for. Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.”

Reader 2: The story of Jesus begins with a messenger. He calls out in the lonely places, in the wilderness, far from home. ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Repent of your sins. Be baptized. Ask to be forgiven.’ The season of Advent is a season of active waiting, of getting ready for a guest who is already on the way. When he arrives, our whole world will have to change.

Reader 1: “Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Reader 2: Today we light the second candle of Advent, the candle of Love. God’s love for us is tied up intimately with the idea of perfection. When we love someone, we want the best outcome for them. In the same way, God insists on having the best possible outcome for the world he created. As Peter writes, “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.”

Reader 1: “So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Our Lord’s patience means salvation.” Lord Jesus, we await your coming. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent, Year B, 2014 (NIV scriptures)

Reader 1: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Reader 2: In a drought year, when the crops are bad, when the wheat withers in the field, farmers in poor countries are faced with a terrible decision. Do we eat the grain now, and postpone starvation a little longer? Or do we go without, hold our seed until planting season, and bury it in the ground, never knowing whether rain will come to sprout the crops. Will we go hungry again? Or will this be a year of the Lord’s favor?

Reader 1: “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy! Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the desert. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.”

Reader 2: Today we light the third candle of Advent, the candle of Joy. Sorrow is easy to find. Joy we have to look for, and hold onto with both hands! Some of us are almost afraid of joy. Fearing our sorrow will return, we consume our own happiness. Advent reminds us that this is the year of the Lord’s favor. This is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reader 1: “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, for as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.”

Reader 2: “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.” Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B, 2014 (NIV scriptures)

Reader 1: “The Mighty One has done great things for me! Holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”

Reader 2: There is a gap in our world, between rich and poor, between those who have plenty and those who don't have enough. Sometimes the gap has a physical presence, like a river or railroad tracks. Or it might be an invisible barrier, hinted at by the cars we drive or where we buy groceries. We would all like to be on the comfortable side of that divide. But the story of Advent is a story of humility: an unmarried girl with nothing, who gave her own body to bring God her Savior into our world.

Reader 1: “I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth, I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.”

Reader 2: Today we light the fourth candle of Advent, the candle of Peace. Jesus himself is the Peace of God! He is the one who destroys the barriers between us, preaching peace to those who are far away and to those who are nearby. In Him we are all united, rich and poor, old and young, foreigner and native born. Jesus is our bridge across the gap that divides us. Let us walk together in His light.

Reader 1: “Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with the gospel, to the only wise God, be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

Christmas Eve/Day of Advent (2014)

Reader 1: "Pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up the highway! Raise a banner for the nations. See, your Savior comes! Clouds and darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord. The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all peoples see his glory."

Reader 2: The road has been straightened; the house has been tidied up; the people have been put on alert. If we're not ready yet, it's too late to do anything else! The king we've been watching for, our far away ruler, has come near to us at last. He is here! He is right at the gate, ready to come in.

Reader 1: "You, Lord, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. Let those who love the Lord hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones, and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name."

Reader 2: When Christmas is over, the presents unwrapped, the leftovers put away, we are often left with a hollow feeling. What did all our preparations accomplish? Today we light the last candle of Advent, the Christ candle. This flickering flame reminds us that Jesus is really here! Right now, right in the middle of everything, he is Emmanuel, God with us. The hollow in our hearts can only be filled with Him.

Reader 1: "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of the good things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior so that we might have the hope of eternal life."

Reader 2: Lord Jesus, we welcome you! Be with us. Stay with us. Make your home with us. Amen