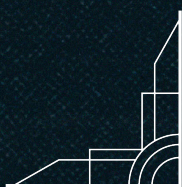
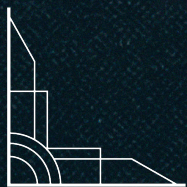


NAME: _____

ADVENT

PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR CHRISTMAS



HOW TO USE

Welcome to Advent 2026! We are excited to celebrate together as a church family.

The Weekly Reading section instructions are located below. This is our recommendation for studying the daily scriptures.

How to Use the Weekly Reading Section:

The weekly reading section is designed to allow you the space and opportunity to work through the week's Advent theme with continued readings, prayer and worship.

1

Begin with Prayer. Use your favorite Psalm as a prayer, the Lord's Prayer, or ask the Lord to open your eyes for what He has for you today.

2

Read through the designated scripture slowly. You may want to grab a journal or notebook, and write out the scripture. Notice how the scripture is connected to the week's theme.

3

Read through the designated scripture a second time slowly. As you read through slowly, is there a word or phrase that stands out to you? Make note of it by writing it down.

4

Then write down, or think about these:

- What stands out to you, or what do you notice about this word or phrase?
- What feelings and emotions are you having related to this word or phrase?
- What is happening in your life to which these words apply or connect?

5

Read through the designated scripture a third time slowly. Pray through the following questions:

- Jesus, is there something You want to show me?
- Jesus, is there something You want to say to me?

6

Respond to God through prayer by reflecting on the following questions:

- What do you sense is God's invitation to you from your time together?
- What is your response to God and His word to you?
- Write down, or say aloud, your response to God as prayer, directly to Him.

7

Rest with God. This can be done in silence as you sit with Him, or you may choose to sing a song of praise to Him, write a poem or create a piece of artwork.

Candle Lighting Guide

Week One - Advent - Hope

Today is a special day because it marks the beginning of a new season in the church year-- a season we call Advent.

What does Advent mean?

The word Advent means “coming” or “to come.” Advent is a season of waiting and preparation as we get our hearts ready to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ. At Christmas, we remember that Jesus came into the world as a baby-- the greatest gift God has ever given us.

What are some things we do to get ready for Christmas?

We might decorate our homes, put up a Christmas tree, buy gifts, bake special treats, or spend time with family and friends. But during Advent, we are invited to prepare in another way too. We prepare our hearts.

We make space to think about Jesus, reflect on His love for us, and consider how our own hearts are doing. Gathering around the Advent wreath is one way we can intentionally prepare ourselves for Christmas.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, and we light the first purple candle.

This first candle is called the Candle of Hope.

Purple is the traditional color of Advent. It reminds us that Jesus is our coming King. It also reminds us of the darkness of a world in need of Christ's light.

Before we light our first candle, let's pray together.

Prayer

Father God, Your Son, Jesus, is Your greatest gift to us. He is a sign of Your never-ending love. During these weeks of Advent, help us open our hearts more fully to that love as we wait and prepare to celebrate His coming.

May Your blessing be upon us as we light the candles of this wreath, and may each candle turn our hearts toward Jesus.

We pray this in His name. Amen.
(Light the first candle.)

This Candle of Hope reminds us of the many years God's people waited and hoped for the promised Messiah. They trusted that God would fulfill His promise and send a Savior -- and He did. Jesus Christ came to bring salvation, light and hope to the world.

As we light this candle, we remember that we, too, are people of hope. We look forward with joy to celebrating the birth of Jesus, and we hope and pray for the day when people everywhere will know God and worship Him.

Waiting with hope is not always easy. That is why we turn to Scripture to remind us that God is faithful to His promises.

Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 7:14 - "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel."

Isaiah 9:2 - "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah spoke words of hope about the coming Savior.

At Christmas, we see lights all around us-- on Christmas trees, homes, and decorations. Whenever we see those lights, they can remind us of an even greater light: Jesus, the Light of the World.

Because Jesus came, we have hope. Even when life feels uncertain or dark, we can trust that God is with us, God keeps His promises, and His light continues to shine.

Closing Prayer.

Jesus, thank you for coming to earth and fulfilling the promises spoken through the prophets. Thank you for being our hope, our light and for showing us how to live. As we prepare for Christmas, help us keep our hearts focused on You. May Your light shine through us so that others may experience the hope and love You bring.

Amen.

Weekly Readings/Activities: Hope

The weekly reading instructions are located on page 3

Sunday, Nov 29: Use the Candle Lighting Guide to light your candle and watch the weekly video

Monday, Nov 30: Genesis 22:15-18

Tuesday, Dec. 1: Isaiah 11:1-15

Wednesday, Dec. 2: Complete the Confession practice below.

Thursday, Dec. 3: Galatians 4:4-7

Friday, Dec. 4: Isaiah 7:10-14

Saturday, Dec. 5: Repeat one of the verses above or one from the Candle Lighting Guide.

Confession and Reflection Practice

As we prepare our hearts for Advent, it is important to reflect on where we have been, and what we are bringing into this season of waiting. Use the prayer below to begin preparing your heart for this Advent season.

Jeremiah 31:3

The Lord has appeared to us in the past, saying, “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you out with kindness.”

Spend some time in silence, reflecting on God’s eternal, unconditional, extravagant love for you.

From the backdrop of this love, take some time to think about your desire to receive God's extravagant grace and prepare your heart for this Advent season. Let go of anything that may be holding you back from receiving all He has for you during this Advent season.

As you pray through the following prayer, if time allows, incorporate silence after each statement. In the silence, ask God to reveal any ways that each confession might be true for you, but do not feel that you have to get something for each one.

Allow this exercise to be characterized by gentle openness rather than any kind of pushing or forcing. When God does reveal something to you, quietly ask if there is anything you need to confess or make right with any person(s) whom you have injured or offended. When you have had enough time with a confession, pray the refrain **(the phrases printed in bold)** and move to the next confession.

Most holy and merciful Father:

*I confess to you that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word and deed; by what I have done, and by what I have left undone. (Silence) **Have mercy on me, Lord.***

*I have not loved you with my whole heart, mind and strength. I have not loved my neighbors as myself. I have not forgiven others, as I have been forgiven. (Silence) **Have mercy on me, Lord.***

I confess to you, Lord, all my past unfaithfulness: The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of my life. (Silence)
I confess to you, Lord.

My self-indulgent appetites and ways, and my exploitation of others. (Silence) ***I confess to you, Lord.***

My anger at my own frustration, and my envy of those more fortunate than I. (Silence) ***I confess to you, Lord.***

My love of worldly goods and comforts, my dishonesty in daily life and work. (Silence) ***I confess to you, Lord.***

Accept my repentance, Lord, for the wrongs I have done: for my blindness to human need and suffering, and my indifference to injustice and cruelty. (Silence) ***Accept my repentance, Lord.***

For all false judgements, uncharitable thoughts towards my neighbors, and for my prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from me. (Silence) ***Accept my repentance, Lord.***

Restore me, good Lord, and let anger depart from me. Favorably hear me for your mercy is great.

Accomplish in me and in all your church the work of your salvation, that we may show forth your glory in the world.

By the cross and passion of your Son, our Lord, bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection. Amen.

Prayer adapted from Phyllis Tickle, [A Guide for Eastertide](#).

Candle Lighting Guide

Week Two - Advent - Peace

Today is the second Sunday of Advent.

Do you remember why we are taking time each week to gather around our Advent wreath?

Advent is a season of waiting and preparation. During these weeks, we are preparing our hearts to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ. Each candle we light helps us remember something important about who Jesus is and what His coming means for us.

Today, we will light two purple candles.

Before we light our candles, let's pray together.

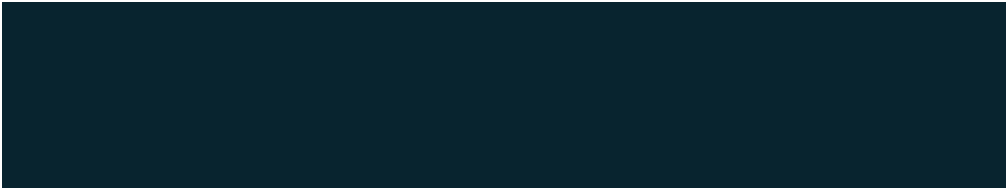
Prayer

Father God, Your Son, Jesus, is Your greatest gift to us. He is a sign of Your never-ending love. During these weeks of Advent help us open our hearts more fully to that love as we wait and prepare to celebrate His birth.

May Your blessing be upon us as we light the candles of this wreath, and may each candle turn our hearts toward Your Son, Jesus.

We pray this in His name. Amen.

Last week, we lit the Candle of Hope. It reminded us that God is faithful to His promises and that because of Jesus, we can always have hope.



(Light the first purple candle.)

Today we light our second candle-- the Candle of Peace.

(Light the second purple candle)

Our world does not always feel peaceful. We experience disagreements, uncertainty, sadness, and suffering. Sometimes we may even feel worried or unsettled inside our own hearts.

But Jesus offers us a peace that is greater than our circumstances. During Advent, we remember that true peace comes from God. We also ask Him to help us become people who bring His peace to those around us.

When we look at the second candle, we remember the angels who appeared to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born. They announced the arrival of the Savior-- the Prince of Peace.

Listen to what the Bible tells us:

Luke 2:13-14: "Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others -- the armies of heaven-- praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.'"

Long before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah told God's people about the One who would come:

Isaiah 9:6: "For a Child is born to us, a Son is given to us. The government will rest on His shoulders. And He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Jesus came into a world that desperately needed peace- and our world still needs His peace today.



As we look at the Candle of Peace, we remember that Jesus not only gives us peace but also calls us to share His peace with others. We can be peacemakers in our homes, friendships, schools, workplaces, church, and community.

Sometimes being a peacemaker means choosing kindness over anger, listening rather than arguing, forgiving someone who has hurt us, or reaching out to someone who feels alone.

This Advent, may the light of this candle remind us that because Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has come, we can receive His peace and carry His peace into the world around us.

Closing prayer.

Father God, thank you for sending Your Son, Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Thank you that even when the world around us feels uncertain, we can find peace in You.

Thank you for the people in our world who work to bring peace to others. Help us to become peacemakers too. Show us ways to bring kindness, forgiveness, understanding, and peace into our homes, church, workplaces, schools, and community.

May Your peace fill our hearts and shine through our lives.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Weekly Readings/Activities: Peace

The weekly reading instructions are located on page 3

Sunday, Dec. 6: Use the Candle Lighting Guide to light your candle and watch the weekly video.

Monday, Dec. 7: Matthew 1:18-22

Tuesday, Dec. 8: Zechariah 9:9-12

Wednesday, Dec. 9: Complete the Slowing practice below

Thursday, Dec. 10: Isaiah 55:1-13

Friday, Dec. 11: Haggai 2:6-8

Saturday, Dec. 12: Repeat one of the verses above or one from the Candle Lighting Guide.

Slowing Practice

Below is a prayer that can help us slow down and practice peace in the midst of waiting.

This prayer practice helps us to be aware of what we are carrying into our day. Carrying concerns and anxiety into our day can cause us to move throughout the day in harried, frantic ways that disturb our peace, and distract us away from the peace offered through Jesus. John 14:27 tells us that Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Remember, peace is not the avoidance of discomfort. Jesus offers us the peace of restoration through His life, death, and resurrection.



To begin to become aware of the anxieties and concerns you are carrying, try the following practice: When you wake up, offer God three central concerns of the day. You can say these out loud, write them out, or say them in the quiet of your heart. Ask God to care for these things as you go about your daily tasks.

When your anxiety or worries appear again, return to the moment when you handed God your concerns. Ask Him to fill you with His peace.

Candle Lighting Guide

Week Three - Advent - Joy

Watch the Candle Lighting Video for Week 3

gatewayvisalia.com/advent



Today is the third Sunday of Advent.

Do you remember why we are taking time each week to gather around our Advent wreath?

Advent is a season of waiting and preparation. During these weeks, we are preparing our hearts to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ. Each candle we light helps us remember something important about who Jesus is and what His coming means for us.

This is the third week of Advent. Can you guess how many candles we will light today? Three!

Before we light our candles, let's pray together!

Prayer

Father God, Your Son Jesus, is Your greatest gift to us. He is a sign of Your never ending love. During these weeks of Advent, help us open our hearts more fully to that love as we wait and prepare to celebrate His coming.

May Your blessing be upon us as we light the candles of this wreath, and may each candle turn our hearts toward Jesus.

We pray this in His name. Amen.

On the first Sunday of Advent, we lit the Candle of Hope. It reminds us that God is faithful to His promises and that we wait with the hope as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

(Light the first purple candle.)

On the second Sunday of Advent, we lit the Candle of Peace. It reminds us that Jesus is the Prince of Peace and that He calls us to receive His peace and share it with others.

(Light the second purple candle.)

Today, on the third Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Joy.

(Light the pink candle.)

You may notice that this candle is different from the first two. Instead of purple, it is pink.

The pink candle marks a joyful moment in our Advent journey. Christmas is getting closer! Its brighter color reminds us to rejoice because the Savior we have been waiting for is coming.

We have joy because we remember God's incredible gift of Jesus to the world.

But the joy we celebrate during Advent is about more than simply feeling happy. Happiness can change depending on what is happening around us. The joy we receive from God is deeper. We can have joy because we know that God loves us, is with us and keeps His promises -- even when our circumstances are difficult or uncertain.

When we look at the third candle, we remember God's promise to send a Savior. We also remember a young woman named Mary, who trusted God's promise even when she did not know exactly what the future would hold.

Listen to Mary's words:

Luke 1:46-47: Mary said, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!"

Mary's words remind us that we can seek God's joy even in times of uncertainty.

Then on the night Jesus was born, God shared the joyful news of His arrival with a group of shepherds.

Listen to what the Bible tells us:

Luke 2:8-11: "There were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. 'Don't be afraid!' he said. 'I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior-- yes, the Messiah, the Lord-- has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!'"

The angel did not announce good news for just a few people. He announced, "great joy to all people." Jesus came for the whole world -- and that is a reason to rejoice!

As we look at the Candle of Joy, we remember that our joy is found in Jesus. And just as the angels shared the joyful news of His birth, we can share His joy with the people around us.

We can bring joy through kindness, encouragement, generosity, gratitude and the way we love others.

This Advent, may the light of this candle remind us that Jesus is our joy-- and His good news is worth celebrating and sharing.

Closing Prayer

Lord, today we rejoice!

We rejoice because You kept Your promise and sent Your Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. Thank you for the joy we have because You love us and are always with us.



Fill our hearts and our days with Your joy. When life feels difficult or uncertain, remind us that our deepest joy is found in You.

Help us live in such a way that our words and actions share Your joy with others. May the people around us see the joy of Jesus shining through our lives.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Weekly Readings/Activities: Joy

The weekly reading instructions are located on page 3

Sunday, Dec. 13: Use the Candle Lighting Guide to light your candle and watch the weekly video.

Monday, Dec. 14: Nehemiah 8:8-12

Tuesday, Dec. 15: Isaiah 61:1-9

Wednesday, Dec. 16: Complete the Celebration practice below.

Thursday, Dec. 17: Isaiah 12:1-6

Friday, Dec. 18: John 15:1-17

Saturday, Dec. 19: Repeat one of the verses above or one from the Candle Lighting Guide.

Celebration Practice

As we enter this week of Joy, we are practicing cultivating joy in our own life through celebrating God's goodness to us.

Begin by placing yourself in the presence of God.
Spend time recalling all of God's gifts towards you.
Spend time recalling all of God's provisions towards you.
Spend time recalling all of God's guidance in your life.
Spend time recalling God's love toward you.

To celebrate God's grace to you, write a song of celebration, make a collage that represents your joy, write a poem of praise, play music and dance before the Lord, or memorize a verse of praise and repeat it all through the coming days.

Candle Lighting Guide

Week Four - Advent - Faith & Love

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent.

For four weeks, we have been gathering around our Advent wreath. Do you remember why?

Advent is a season of waiting and preparation. During these weeks, we are preparing our hearts to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ. Each candle we light helps us remember something important about who Jesus is and what His coming means for us.

This is the fourth week of Advent, which means we will light four candles today!

Before we light our candles, let's pray together.

Prayer

Father God, Your Son, Jesus, is Your greatest gift to us. He is a sign of Your never-ending love. During these weeks of Advent, help us open our hearts more fully to that love as we wait and prepare to celebrate His coming.

May Your blessing be upon us as we light the candles of this wreath, and may each candle turn our hearts toward Jesus.

We pray this in His name. Amen.

On the first Sunday of Advent, we lit the Candle of Hope. It reminds us that God is faithful to His promises and that we wait with hope as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

(Light the first purple candle.)

On the second Sunday of Advent, we lit the Candle of Peace. It reminds us that Jesus is the Prince of Peace and that He calls us to receive His peace and share it with others.

(Light the second purple candle.)

On the third Sunday of Advent, we lit the Candle of Joy. It reminds us of the angels' announcement of "good news that will bring great joy to all people."

(Light the pink candle.)

Today, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Faith & Love.

(Light the third purple candle.)

Christmas is almost here!

Throughout Advent, we have remembered God's promises and prepared our hearts to celebrate His greatest gift—Jesus.

Today, we remember that Jesus came to show us just how deeply God loves us. God's love for the world is the reason He sent His Son. At Christmas, love came near to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

We also remember the gift of faith. Faith means trusting God and believing that He is faithful, even when we cannot see or understand everything He is doing.

Mary and Joseph give us beautiful examples of this kind of faith.

Mary was asked to trust God with a plan she could never have imagined. Joseph was also asked to believe that God was doing something extraordinary.

Listen to what the Bible tells us:

Matthew 1:18 “Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

In **Matthew 1:20** an angel told Joseph: “The child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

John 3:16- “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Father God, thank You for Your Son, Jesus, and for loving us so deeply that You sent Him into the world for us. Thank you for the gift of faith and for reminding us that we can always trust in You.

Fill our hearts with Your love and help us share that love with others. Teach us to love our families, our friends, our classmates, and the people we meet each day. May our words and actions help others experience the love of Jesus through us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Weekly Readings/Activities: Faith & Love.

The weekly reading instructions are located on page 3

Sunday, Dec. 20: Use the Candle Lighting Guide to light your candle and watch the weekly video.

Monday, Dec. 21: Psalm 89:1-8

Tuesday, Dec. 22: Hebrews 11:1

Wednesday, Dec. 23: John 3:16-21

Thursday, Dec. 24: Complete the Gratitude practice below

Christmas Day, Dec. 25: Use the Christmas Candle Lighting Guide on Page 26.

Saturday, Dec 26: Repeat one of the verses above or one from the Candle Lighting Guides.

Gratitude Practice

As we enter the final week of Advent, we celebrate the gift of faith and God's love for us. One way to do this is to practice gratitude.

Begin a gratitude journal by keeping a record of the abundances God has given you. If this is difficult at first, ask God to reveal the abundances to you.

Next to each abundance write what it means to you to have a God who interacts and intervenes in your life. What feelings, thoughts, or emotions does this reality evoke?



Notice what you have been given that you did not deserve.

What do you want to say to God about these things?
Write out your thoughts.

Throughout this week, continue recording abundances as they are brought to mind.

Christmas Day Candle Lighting & Reading

Today is Christmas!

The day we have been waiting for and preparing our hearts for is finally here. Throughout Advent, we have waited with expectation, remembered God's promises, and prepared ourselves for the coming of Jesus.

Today, our waiting is over.

Today, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ!

During the four weeks of Advent, we lit four candles. Each one helped us remember something important about God's promises and the gift He has given us in Jesus.

First, we lit the Candle of Hope. It reminded us that God is faithful to His promises and that because of Jesus, we can always have hope.

(Light the first purple candle.)

Next, we lit the Candle of Peace. It reminded us that Jesus is the Prince of Peace and that He calls us to receive His peace and share it with others.

(Light the second purple candle.)

Then, we lit the Candle of Joy. It reminded us of the angels' announcement of "good news that will bring great joy to all people."

(Light the pink candle.)

On the fourth Sunday of Advent, we lit the Candle of Faith & Love. It reminded us that we can trust God and that He loves us so deeply that He sent His Son into the world for us.

(Light the fourth purple candle.)

Today, on Christmas, we light one final candle—the Christ Candle.

The white candle in the center of our Advent wreath represents Jesus Christ. White reminds us of His purity, holiness, and light.

For four weeks, we have waited to light this candle. Today, our waiting has ended.

Jesus has come!

(Place the white candle in the center and light it).

Listen to the joyful announcement from the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 2:11 “The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!”

The Savior God promised had finally arrived.

When we look at the light of the Christ Candle, we remember that Jesus is the Light of the World. His light shines into our darkness and leads us to life.

Jesus tells us:

John 8:12 “I am the light of the world. If you follow Me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”

Throughout Advent, we have remembered hope, peace, joy, faith, and love. Today, we celebrate that all of these gifts are found in Jesus.

God sent Jesus to bring hope to the hopeless, peace to troubled hearts, joy to His people, faith to those who trust Him, and love to the whole world.

And that good news was not meant for only a few people.

Far away from Bethlehem, wise men saw a star in the sky. They followed its light because they knew that something extraordinary had happened. Their journey reminds us that Jesus did not come for only one family, one town, or one group of people. Jesus came for the world.

Listen to what the Bible tells us:

Matthew 2:1-2 “Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw His star as it rose, and we have come to worship Him.’”

The wise men followed the star until it led them to Jesus.

Matthew 2:10-11 “When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with His mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

God used a star to guide the wise men to Jesus. God has guided us to the true meaning of Christmas during our waiting season of Advent. God has come into the world in Jesus Christ to be with us so that we will experience God's hope, joy, love, faith and peace.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank you for the greatest gift of all—Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for sending Jesus into the world for all people.

On this Christmas Day, fill our hearts with joy as we remember and celebrate the birth of our Savior. Help us to remember each day how deeply You love and care for us.



Teach us to share that same love and care with our families, our friends, and everyone we meet. May the love of Jesus shine through our words and actions, not only at Christmas, but every day of the year.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

