



THE POWER AND PROMISE OF PEACE

LIGHTING CANDLES OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS IN THE
DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE



The spiritual journey through Advent prepares us for the joy of Christmas by reminding us that even when we think we are ready, God asks us to pay closer attention to the messages around us. The inevitable movement of the liturgical calendar carries us towards Christmas and a time when many experience a break from work and a reunion with family or friends. During this same time, we live with an ongoing war on terror and violent confrontations in many parts of the world. Our daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers are fighting in Iraq and will not be home for Christmas. We feel the disjuncture and tension of these difficult realities that can temper the joy of the season.

“The Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace” (2001–2010) is a program of the World Council of Churches that our General Synod affirmed in 2001. That affirmation encouraged United Church of Christ congregations and members to get involved in the program. The geographical focus for 2004 is the United States and the theme for this year is “The Power and Promise of Peace.” Advent 2004 is a wonderful time to remember that Jesus was born to bring God’s love into the world in new and astonishing ways. How does the birth of Christ challenge worn-out assumptions and entrenched power structures?

Violence takes many forms and none of them are good for us. We do violence to each other with our words as well as our hands and weapons. We live in a culture of violence, which glorifies domination and might through music, videos, movies, and other forms of media. We tend to act first, talk later. Nations lift up sword against nations—still.

To overcome violence, we must begin to imagine that a new world is possible, where our towns, villages, and cities are places that nurture life and community rather than separate those who have from those who have not. This Advent we await the advent of God’s new world. The good news born at Christmas has the power to help us both imagine this new world and make it happen. Our churches can shout “Hallelujah! Christ is coming soon! Christ is born!” and provide assistance and advocacy to make sure that every child of God has an equal chance to thrive.

Advent often emphasizes the qualities of hope, joy, peace, and love during the four weeks leading up to Christmas Eve. This year, journey with an awareness of God’s touch upon your lives: awake to all that is around us, welcome all of God’s children, be patient with the process of discerning and waiting and conceive the good news of God’s love in heart and actions. Do this particularly with attention to the ways in which you and your congregation can help to create a culture of peace and justice to overcome the culture of violence. When the Child is born, so much then is revealed to us. May you be ready to receive all these good gifts from the One who created us so we might be reconciled to each other and to the world.

The special candle-lighting liturgies this year are based both on the lectionary readings for Advent/Christmas and on the theme of overcoming violence. Please find out more about the “Decade to Overcome Violence” at www.overcomingviolence.org. A theme song, “Song for Peace” (by Bette and David Rod), may also be downloaded from the site. The song might be used through the Advent season.

Readers for these liturgies may be persons of different ages. Traditionally the Advent candle includes four purple candles set in a ring, a wreath, of evergreens surrounding a white Christ candle. During each Sunday of Advent, an additional purple Advent candle is lit. All Advent candles are burning on Christmas Eve or Day, when the Christ candle is also lit. The liturgy may be used early in a worship service—perhaps immediately before an opening hymn.

For additional ideas for Advent candle lighting, see also *Book of Worship: United Church of Christ*, page 169, and the *Worship Ways* online archives at www.ucc.org.

First Sunday of Advent

Theme: Awake

Possible Bible readings: Romans 18:11–14 or Matthew 26:36–44

Reader 1: It’s a start. Lighting the first candle is a start in this Advent journey toward receiving God’s great gift.

Reader 2: It’s a start just like a baby’s first step, or the first word on the page, or the first “I love you” uttered in anticipation of a “yes.”

(Light the first Advent candle.)

Reader 1: Let us begin by awakening our senses.

People: We hear both the cries of victims of violence and the songs of those singing for peace.

Reader 2: We see both the tears on the faces of those orphaned by AIDS and the smiles of children who have not yet known loss.

People: We smell both sour rivers and mountain fresh air; we taste sorrow and savor joy.

Reader 1: Wake us, God, to the fullness of your world.

People: Wake us, God, to our own yearnings.

Reader 2: Keep us from falling asleep when you would have us look for new possibilities stirring among us.

Reader 1: Keep us alert to those openings in walls of violence where we can plant the seeds of peace and justice.

People: Start with us, O God. Wake us, stay with us, and keep us from dozing off as we live your way into Advent holiness.

Possible hymn: “Keep Awake, Be Always Ready”

TNCH #112

Second Sunday in Advent

Theme: Welcome

Possible Bible readings: Isaiah 11:1–10 or Romans 15:4–13

Reader 1: Last week we lit the first candle to invite God’s awakening spirit to accompany us during Advent.

(Light first Advent candle.)

Reader 2: Today we light the second candle, which calls us to welcome each other as Christ has welcomed us.

(Light second Advent candle.)

Reader 1: How easily we say the words, “All are welcome here!”

Reader 2: Yet often we hope that those who come through our doors will be like us.

Reader 1: God puts before us another image, the image of the lion and the lamb resting together. God paints a picture of God’s people living in harmony with each other.

People: How we long to bask in God’s extravagant welcome!

Reader 2: In God’s peaceable kin-dom, violence is overcome by relationships of understanding and respect.

Reader 1: A spirit of wisdom prevails, breaking down borderlands of hostility and fear.

People: How we long to embrace one another in peace!

Reader 2: In God’s vision of justice, no one is poor, no one oppresses another.

Reader 1: God’s peace showers upon us as fresh as spring rain delivering hope from a season of drought.

People: How we long to welcome God’s reign of peace! Come, Holy One, and prepare a way in the wilderness of our confusion.

Possible hymns: “O How Shall I Receive You” TNCH #102
and
“Isaiah the Prophet Has Written of Old” TNCH #108

Third Sunday in Advent

Theme: Be Patient

Possible Bible readings: James 5:7–10 and Matthew 11:2–11

Reader 1: We light the first two candles to remind us that Advent calls us to be awake and alert to God’s wondrous signs, and that we are invited into God’s extravagant welcoming kin-dom of peace and justice.

(Light the first two Advent candles).

Reader 2: The weeks of Advent keep us full of anticipation of what is to come, the Word made flesh!

People: The coming of Christ into the world is indeed good news! Are we there yet?

Reader 1: Hold on, good friends! God wants us to be patient, to wait, to listen so that when Love bursts into the world at Christmas we will know that it is indeed Love.

(Light the third Advent candle.)

Reader 2: As John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, we must prepare the way to receive the fullness of God's grace.

People: So much in the world, however, needs healing and transformation. It can't wait much longer!

Reader 1: How true, and yet God's time is always on time, whenever it shall be.

Reader 2: And nothing can keep the love and peace of God, which already lives in you, from being shared with the world.

People: We pray, then, for patience and for wisdom to know God's truth even as we bear witness to the things that make for peace and justice.

Possible hymn: "Toda la Tierra" ("All Earth Is Waiting") TNCH #121

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Theme: Conceive

Possible Bible readings: Isaiah 7:10-16 and Matthew 1:18-25

Reader 1: Today we light three candles to mark our Advent journey of staying awake, of welcoming God's world, and of being patient as we wait for transformation.

(Light the three previously lit Advent candles.)

Reader 2: We light the fourth candle to symbolize that the good news is taking hold deep within us.

(Light the fourth Advent candle.)

Reader 1: What wondrous love is this that is conceived in our hearts yet cannot be contained by our limitations?

Reader 2: It is the love of God, which exceeds all expectations and crashes every barrier to wholeness, holiness, and community.

People: **Is this love truly in us? Are we a wondrous gift to others?**

Reader One: You are!

Reader Two: You are!

All People: **We are!**

Reader 1: This wondrous love makes us conceive of another world, a world where hatred, violence, fear, and indifference have no place.

Reader 2: When we dream of such a world, we can begin to create it.

People: **Let us bare God's justice and peace within us.**

Reader 1: Do not be afraid, for God is with you.

Reader 2: Let new life come into the world because you have received this good news.

People: **O Source of Life, open our hearts to your Word and make your home within us.**

Possible hymns: "Of the Parent's Heart Begotten" TNCH #118
and
"Come, O Long-Expected Jesus" TNCH #122

Christmas Eve or Christmas Day:

Theme: Reveal

Possible Bible reading: Matthew 2:13–23

Reader 1: Wake, welcome, be patient, conceive! The spiritual movement of Advent brings us to this moment.

(Light the four previously lit Advent candles.)

Reader 2: On the edge of dawn when night is its darkest, a child is born and the angels sing! Hush and rejoice! Be still and dance!

(Light the Christ candle.)

People: **The heavens and the earth are full of the glory of God! Hallelujah!**

Reader 1: And yet . . .

Reader 2: And yet . . .

Reader 1: We must remember that Jesus, the Holy One of Peace, came into a troubled world, where the powerful could be cruel and unjust.

Reader 2: We remember that many innocent children died as Herod tried to destroy God's unlikely intrusion in the world.

People: O God of mercy, we remember, and we know that even today mothers around the world cry for their lost children.

Reader 1: We trust as we retell the ancient stories of Jesus and his birth that despair does not have power to overcome hope.

Reader 2: We believe that this is as true today as it was yesterday, and will be so tomorrow.

People: O God of hope, rekindle your spirit of love within us.

Reader 1: Bring our families together in peace, including our global human family.

Reader 2: Restore community where it has been broken.

People: O God of love, strengthen our faith this night to overcome violence, despair, and hopelessness with your power and your love. Cradle our world with your holy peace.

Possible Hymns:	“Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming”	TNCH #127
	<i>(could be sung by the choir accapella),</i>	
	“It Came upon the Midnight Clear”	TNCH #131
	and	
	“What Child Is This”	TNCH #148

TNCH refers to hymns or resources from *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995). Similar resources may be found in other hymnals.



This liturgy was prepared by Lois M. Powell, Minister and Team Leader in Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ, Cleveland, Ohio. She serves on the U.S. Committee on the Decade to Overcome Violence representing the UCC. For more information about the decade to overcome violence, you may also contact her by phone at 216.736.3715 or by e-mail at powell@ucc.org.

Copyright 2004, Justice and Witness Ministries: A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ, Cleveland, Ohio. Permission is granted to reproduce or adapt for use in services of worship or church education. All publishing rights reserved. Designed and printed by Resource Design and Production Services, Local Church Ministries.

