



Sundays in Advent and Christmas Eve

A Liturgy of Light:

Advent Candle Lighting Service for Year B

In the three-year lectionary cycle of assigned readings, Advent during Year B is one of the toughest periods for many of us. It is tempting to abandon the lectionary and turn to more traditional or tender texts. This liturgy for lighting candles is designed for the congregation to hear the entire Hebrew Bible text, which is often filled with foreboding shadows, but never without a glimpse of the promise of light. It also allows the candles to represent the often traditional themes of hope, peace, joy, love and Christ. The ultimate reality we seek to communicate is that, even in the midst of lengthening night, these elements of our faith offer light to our lives and to our world.

*The last act in each liturgy is a sung response. We recommend a couple of possibilities: one is **Shine on Us**, a contemporary chorus written by Michael W. Smith. If, however, your congregation prefers a more traditional response, or perhaps does not have a CCLI License, you may wish to use a hymn such as **Now Bless the God of Israel** (*The New Century Hymnal* 110). The chorus provided begins quietly, and continues with a key change during which the music rises, as do the people. This can be timed to occur as the candle is lit. Ideally, the candles from preceding weeks will be lit when the altar candles are. An individual or family would then process into the sanctuary carrying the flame by which that week's candle would be lit. This can be done with a hymn with one verse sung softly and the second more robustly. You actually may process the entire wreath during the soft music then light it as the music raises the people. We use the last half of the chorus as a hymn of preparation before the Gospel lesson.*

The idea is to synchronize the music and the actual lighting so that the feeling of the room reflects the day's theme of hope, peace, joy or love. In a world starved for liturgy this is an opportunity to create a moment of awe and inspiration for four Sundays. For verbal people the litany may suffice, but at least one-third of the congregation needs for this to be a visual event. There is yet another sizable group for whom this needs to be an experience felt and recalled. A careful use of music can accomplish that.

Liturgy of Light was written by the Rev. Michael Piazza, Dean and National Pastor of the Cathedral of Hope UCC, Dallas Texas.



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**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



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THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

One: As our days grow shorter and our nights longer,
we who are people of faith turn to symbols
such as candles, evergreens and wreaths
to proclaim our belief in the unquenchable light.
In hopeful anticipation,
we prepare for the coming of the Reign of God.
Listen for the Word in the words of the prophet
for the first Sunday of this new church year:

All: We open our hearts to the Word in the words.

One: A reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 64, verses 1 to 9.
The Scripture passage is read.

**All: As we begin our journey to the light,
we confess that our lives have not always been lived
in ways pleasing to God.
Our shame has left us feeling distant from
the One who is both Mother and Father to us all,
the One in whose hands we are like clay.
Yet even now,
our longing for the One
who tears open the heavens and comes down
kindles like a fire in our soul.
Even now as we wait, we dare to hope.**

One: We who are pregnant with anticipation
feel hope rise up within us.
And so we light this first candle
and name it Hope.

Hymn: Shine on Us

or

Now Bless the God of Israel

Michael W. Smith

TNCH 110

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

One: Advent calls us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ.
All around us people prepare for parties, dinners and presents.
These events could distract us from the real reason for our anticipation.
On the other hand, they also could prepare us;
they could be the voice crying in a wilderness of materialism:
“Prepare the way for the coming of what is really important.”

**All: Rather than get lost in the wilderness of distractions,
we will let the music and the lights make us sensitive
to the voice that is even now calling our name.
We will listen for the Word in the words and even in the noise.**

One: A reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 40, verses 1 to 11.
The Scripture passage is read

**All: In this season of hustle and bustle
we are tempted to get frantic and join the panic
to shop our way into the holiday spirit.
In this moment, we resist that temptation
and choose instead to be at peace
with who we are and where we are on this path.
We will let this time prepare us,
and we will hear God’s call
to be those who prepare the world.**

One: On this second Sunday of Advent
we choose to be a peaceful presence
in this midst of a frantic season.
So, today, we light the second candle
as an act of preparation and call it Peace.

Hymn:

Shine on Us

Michael W. Smith

or

Now Bless the God of Israel

TNCH 110

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

One: This season of preparation is half done,
and today we light the third candle of our wreath.
It is pink to remind us
that there is so much about which we should rejoice.

**All: In the midst of all the parties and merriment,
we are a people seeking true joy
in the arms of the One who comes to bring it.
Even as night continues to lengthen,
we sense the coming of light that will brighten our days,
so we listen for the Word in the words of the prophet.**

One: A reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 61, verses 1 to 4; 8 to 11.
The Scripture passage is read.

**All: We rejoice in the Anointed One
who came and who comes.
With joy-filled hearts,
we join the energy of our life to the life
whose birth we anticipate.
With Christ, we, too,
will bring good news to the oppressed,
bind up the broken-hearted,
proclaim liberty to the captives
and release to the prisoners,
and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**

One: For us, God has replaced our mourning
with the oil of gladness,
so we light this third candle and name it Joy.

Hymn: Shine on Us

Michael W. Smith

or

Now Bless the God of Israel

TNCH 110

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

One: Love's memory is long.
As we come to the last Sunday of Advent,
we recall the many times we have been here before
with still so much to do
and so much love left unexpressed.
The Hebrew Bible lesson today recalls a promise to King David,
which the church has often understood
to be fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.
Love's promise is often kept in unexpected ways.

**All: God's love endures forever.
In a world where even evergreens turn dry and brittle,
God's love is the one reality on which we can rely.
Today we prepare for the greatest expression of that love,
as we listen once more for the Word in the words.**

One: A reading from the Second Book of Samuel, Chapter 7, verses 1 to 11; 16.
The Scripture passage is read.

**All: God's love endures forever.
Through acts as simple and common
as the birth of a baby,
God transforms the world,
and God's promises are kept.
It is that expression of faithful love
we anticipate and celebrate this day.
It is that promise that brings light to our deepest night.**

One: So, as we light the fourth candle
in eager anticipation of God's greatest promise fulfilled,
what else can we do but name this candle Love?

Hymn: **Shine on Us** *Michael W. Smith*
or
Now Bless the God of Israel TNCH 110

CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

One: For weeks we have listened to obscure messages from ancient prophets.
In their words
we have caught glimpses of the light that is promised.
Now, though the wreath is ablaze
and all the candles of anticipation have been lit,
still there is one last prophecy to hear.

**All: With eyes wide open,
ears attuned and hearts unguarded,
we gather around the wreath one last time,
longing to receive the Word within the words.**

One: A reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 9, verses 2 to 7.
The Scripture passage is read.

**All: This night these words are fulfilled in our hearing
and in our living
for the promise of God has come to us.
Our lives are the manger
in whom the Christ child is born.
No longer do we seek light from another source;
now the light burns in our hearts
and we become love's lamp.**

One: So, we light the candle at the center of our wreath and our faith.
We light it in the name of the One who is the light,
and, as Mary did so long ago,
we name this light Jesus.

Hymn: Shine on Us

Michael W. Smith

or

Now Bless the God of Israel

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