



# Lighting the Advent Candles

Hope, Peace, and JOY

(Two persons coming forward during the Prelude video, one holding a lit candle. She processes up to the Advent wreath and stands to the side, ready. At the appropriate point she will light the three candles from the side, one at a time at the prompts below, doing so in such a way that all can see. The other person picks up a microphone and goes and stands to the side a couple yards away, ready to read once the prelude is finished.)

In this season of Advent, we are not just getting ready for Christmas, actively waiting for the celebration of the birth of our Messiah Jesus. We are also preparing ourselves for the Advent, the coming of Christ on that distant, yet very near day when God will make all things new at the end of this age and the beginning of the next. *“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,”* Isaiah said, *“the desert shall rejoice and blossom.”* The promise of God will be fulfilled. *“They shall see the glory of the Lord.”*

We re-light the first candle, the flame of **HOPE**.

*(candlelighter lights the front candle)*

*“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees,”* Isaiah said. *“Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God... He will come and save you.’”* ... Advent is a journey. We prepare the way of the Lord by walking the road upon which Jesus leads us. *“A highway shall be there,”* Isaiah said, *“and it shall be called the Holy Way ... it shall be for God’s people.”* It is the way of Peace.

We re-light the second candle, the flame of **PEACE**.

*(candlelighter lights the right candle)*

*“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,”* Isaiah said, *“and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.”* Did you catch that? **Joy!** *“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

We now light the third candle, the flame of **JOY**.

*(candlelighter lights the pink candle)*

Rise now, in body,  
in spirit and sing,  
“Joyful, joyful, we adore thee,”  
#71 in your hymnal,  
the words also upon the screen.

Scripture quotes are from Isaiah 35:1-10  
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# Responsive Prayer

One: O God, as people who often wander in darkness,  
we notice that your light is growing in the world.  
We witness your lively action in our midst.

***All: In the Lord we'll be ever thankful.***

Women: Creator God, we have walked in dry places, and  
have stumbled in the wilderness. But now, look!  
Blossoms are appearing where there was only  
brown barrenness.

***All: In the Lord we'll be ever thankful.***

Men: Redeemer God, we have felt weak in body and  
spirit. Discouragement and fear have been with  
us. But we hear your song of hope around us,  
and in our souls. We will take heart and be  
strengthened in spirit.

***All: In the Lord we'll be ever thankful.***

Women: Sometimes we've ignored your presence, Holy  
One. But now our eyes have clear vision, and  
our ears are opened to your good news.

***All: In the Lord we'll be ever thankful.***

Men: We praise you, Tender One, that your mercy  
frees us from exile! We rejoice in all the ways  
you restore us with hope and courage. May fears  
and sorrows vanish as we put our trust in you.

***All: In the Lord we'll be ever thankful.***

***Amen and amen.***

# Some encouraging words

James 5: 7-10

- 1 - Some encouraging words,
- 2 - Yes, because we all need courage!
- 1 - Encouraging words from the book of James,
- 2 - as paraphrased by Nathan Nettleton,
- 1 - a Baptist pastor in Australia.
- 2 - Listen, and receive some courage!

*(pause)*

- 1 - My friends, be patient...
- 2 - Yes, be patient!
- 1 - be patient as you wait for the Lord to return.
- 2 - Be as patient as the farmers.
- 1 - Farmers sow their crops
- 2 - Yes, they sow and then have to wait patiently,
- 1 - hoping for good seasonal rains,
- 2 - They hope because the harvest that pays their bills
- 1 - it ripens in its own good time.
- 2 - Did you catch that? The harvest ripens in its own good time.
- 1 - There is nothing
- 2 - Absolutely nothing!
- 1 - nothing they can do to hurry it up.

- 2 - You can't hurry the Lord up either, so...
- 1 - Soooo, be patient.
- 2 - Stay focused though it all,
- 1 - and condition yourselves,
- 2 - because the arrival of the Lord is not far off.
- 1 - My friends, don't go whining and putting each other down.
- 2 - Nope, don't you do it!
- 1 - If you do, you'll find yourselves having to answer for it.
- 2 - The judge could reopen the case against you at any moment.
- 1 - Take as your role models the prophets
- 2 - Yes indeed! The prophets who brought us God's message in the past.
- 1 - They really suffered for their stand,
- 2 - but they hung in there,
- 1 - never giving up,
- 2 - and their patience paid off.

# A good word on Joy

Psalm 146:5-10

- 1 - Joyful...
- 2 - Blessed...
- 1 - Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
- 2 - whose hope is in the Lord their God,
- 1 - who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;
- 2 - who keeps faith forever;
- 2 - who executes justice for the oppressed;
- 1 - who gives food to the hungry.
- 2 - The Lord sets the prisoners free;
- 1 - the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
- 2 - The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
- 1 - the Lord loves the righteous.
- 2 - The Lord watches over the strangers;
- 1 - he upholds the orphan and the widow,
- 2 - but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
- 1 - The Lord will reign forever,
- 2 - your God, O Zion, for all generations.
- 1 - Praise the Lord!
- 2 - Yes, Praise the Lord!

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# Returning our Tithes and Offerings

- 1 - “*God loves a cheerful giver,*” the apostle Paul wrote the believers in Corinth long ago.
- 2 - On the one hand, are those who give of themselves because they feel forced to do so,
- 1 - or their arm is twisted,
- 2 - or because they are motivated by some sob story.
- 1 - They give hesitantly, full of regret, or out of a sense of duty.
- 2 - On the other hand, however, are those who -
- 1 - with open arms and hearts –
- 2 - delight in sharing of themselves,
- 1 - gladly,
- 2 - cheerfully,
- 1 - full of sheer JOY.
- 2 - That’s the kind of giving God loves.
- 1 - Isn’t that the kind of self-giving that attracts us, and blesses us?
- 2 - Isn’t that the kind of giving we have received in Jesus?
- (pause)*
- 1 - The ushers will soon come forward,
- 2 - as they always do,
- 1 - to pass the plates and receive your offering.
- 2 - May you give joyfully.

refers to 2 Corinthians 9:7 (various translations)

The Visual Bible  
**Matthew 11:2-11**

Last Sunday, with the young children who were here for the baby dedication, I noted that there was an Advent character not in our nativity sets. Anyone remember who that is? ... John the Baptist. Of course, in the timeline of the Christmas story, he is at this point but an infant cousin of Jesus, in the arms of his parents, Elizabeth and Zachariah. However, we insert John as an adult into this season of Advent because he was the precursor to Jesus. He prepared the way for the Messiah, whose birth we will celebrate in two weeks.

“Are you the one who is to come,” is John’s question for Jesus in this morning’s gospel scripture. John sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus about this, since John was in prison and could not ask it in person himself. Now, in the storehouse of our faith, we remember when Jesus was himself baptized by John. There was some recognition in that moment, for John questioned whether he should instead be baptized by Jesus. He consented when Jesus replied, *“Let’s do it this way, to fulfill what God has in mind”* (Matthew 3:15, my paraphrase).

Even after that voice from heaven spoke out when Jesus rose from the baptismal water, *“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased”* (3:17), John must still have harbored doubts. *“Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”* John’s disciples ask this of Jesus at the beginning of the today’s gospel.

We will make use of “The Visual Bible,” a video which acts out the scripture word-for-word from the New International Version. At the outset, let me note a couple problems with this. First, you may not hear every word as they are spoken by Jesus. But, then, that’s often how it is in real life. We miss some of what others say. Did you hear everything in Joys and Concerns?...

Second, don’t let this blunt your imagination. You may envision things differently in your mind’s eye. That’s okay. I sort of like how Jesus seems to be a bit playful in this video, both tussling with a disciple at the beginning, and speaking with a grin and a wink and even a wry sense of humor. However, we always need to be a bit cautious in how we see Jesus. He can look like how we think he should. Now, that’s the good news of the incarnation – God in Christ became like us. But, he isn’t captive to us. He is always more than our preconceptions. He speaks and acts in ways that lead us beyond ourselves. He opens us up to the immensity and the mystery of the Kingdom of God.

“Are you the One,” may be our question of Jesus as well. ... Let’s listen and watch this telling of the Gospel story...

<https://youtu.be/22KXnMGGVky> (0:00-1:57)

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

<sup>2</sup> When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup> to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

<sup>4</sup> Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. <sup>6</sup> Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

<sup>7</sup> As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>8</sup> If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. <sup>9</sup> Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.”

<sup>11</sup> Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. <sup>15</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear.

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## The Lord is coming

The musical score is written for a single voice and guitar. It features a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is simple and hymn-like, with lyrics written below the notes. Chord symbols (D, F#m, G, A) are placed above the staff to indicate the guitar accompaniment. The score is divided into several lines of music, with a 'refrain' section starting with a double bar line and the word 'refrain:' above it. The lyrics are: 'God's king-dom nears, so cast off your fears, all is not in this world ful-ly as it ap-pears. Don't be a-shamed to speak in Christ's name, for the truth that is in you will help you pro-claim. The Lord is com-ing, lift up your voice. Let all God's peo-ple sing and re-joice. His ad-vent is what we cel-e-brate. God's king-dom comes, for which we a-wait.'

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# Benediction

*(Pastor, Reader, and Candlelighter come forward during the last verse of the final hymn – the reader and candlelighter in the same positions as at the beginning of the service. After the hymn finishes: )*

*(candle-lighter lights the taper from an Advent candle)*

Pastor - Go forth with HOPE.

*(candle-lighter extinguishes the front candle)*

Reader - *“The desert shall rejoice and blossom.”* The promise of God will be fulfilled. *“They shall see the glory of the Lord.”*

Pastor - Go forth with PEACE.

*(candle-lighter extinguishes the front candle)*

Reader - *“Be strong, do not fear!”* Prepare the way of the Lord by walking the road upon which Jesus leads us - *“the Holy Way,”* the way of Peace.

Pastor - Go forth with JOY.

*(candle-lighter extinguishes the front candle)*

Reader - *“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

Pastor - God be with you!