

Advent & Christmas 2020

November 29, 2020 – January 3, 2021

Advent is about getting ready for a new beginning. During Advent, we remember that there were many centuries of longing for a showing from God before one ever took place in Bethlehem 2000+ years ago. In Advent, in the midst of our current time, we realize that we too long for God to visit us here, in our pandemic tinged circumstances. Finally, during Advent, we look toward a holy showing that is yet to come, for us but for all those who are as yet unborn. Perhaps this very Christmas 2020, when we once again make the familiar proclamation that Christ is born, a second birth will happen for us all? In fact, all of creation anticipates it, longs for it, groans for it with sighs to deep for words (Romans 8:22, 26).

This year the material, secular preparations for Christmas are simply not going to be possible on the scale we have been used to. This is not a bad thing! The door opens for us to more intentionally focus on the spiritual rhythms of



Advent and Christmas. Over the four weeks of Advent we traditionally light candles on an Advent wreath in order to mark the time and call forth the Advent gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. As we

approach the end of Advent on Christmas Eve, we open our hearts to the final gift of the season, the birth of the Light of Life, God's Christ Child, once again in the world. Within the story of his birth we find the promise of our own re-birth. We find ourselves proclaiming:

"Christ is born!",

"Il est né!

"Das Kindlein ist geboren!",

" Âsay manito-âwasis!"

ADVENT-TO-GO HOME PACKS

To help us all focus on the spiritual rhythms of Advent, we at Salisbury United Church have put together an **Advent-To-Go pack** for you to use at home. In those packs you will find the material to make your own **mini Advent wreath**. You can use that wreath on Sunday evenings starting November 29 along with the reflections in this book.

Along with reflections for Sunday evenings in Advent, this booklet offers suggestions for simple things you can do for **follow-up during the week**. You are also invited to join us on **Sunday mornings** online during Advent at **10:30 am**, when we will be lighting our church's Advent wreath.

If you do not have one of our To-Go packs, **you can always use a single candle** you have on hand and simply relight it each Sunday while you read the evening reflection. **Blue** or purple are the traditional colours of Advent candles. **White** is the colour for the candle we light on **Christmas Eve** and beyond.

On our website there is also a special Advent booklet and calendar available for download by anyone but especially for families with children or grandchildren. If you can't be together, think of creative ways you can use it together online or by phone. Go to www.salisburyunited.ca to get yours.

“The Candle of Hope”

Sunday Evening, November 29, 2020

“In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God.”
John 1:1

ABOUT HOPE:

“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” **Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

“Hope is the thing without feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tunes without words – and never stops at all.” **Emily Dickinson**

LIGHTING THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE

Today I/We light the candle of hope. I/We light the candle of hope as a prayer but also as a protest against all that diminishes hope in our current circumstances.

(the first blue candle is lit)

“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.” **Anne Frank**¹

EXCERPT: “The Uruguayan” by Eduardo Galeano, 1988

“The Uruguayan political prisoners may not talk without permission, or whistle, smile, sing, walk fast, or greet other prisoners; nor may they make or receive drawings of pregnant women, couples, butterflies, stars or birds.

One Sunday, Didasko Perez, a schoolteacher tortured and jailed for “having ideological ideas”, is visited by his daughter, Milay, aged five. She brings him a drawing of birds. The guards destroy it at the entrance of the jail.

On the following Sunday, Milay brings him a drawing of trees. Trees are not forbidden, and the drawings get through. Didasko praises her work and asks about the coloured circles scattered in the treetops, ... “Are they oranges? What fruit is it?” And she whispers in his ear, “Silly. Don’t you see they’re eyes? They’re the eyes of the birds I’ve smuggled in for you.”

TO PONDER & PRAY: Where, when or how has hope been hiding in plain sight for you?

(When you are ready, extinguish your candle and offer prayer)

Holy One, may your hope surround me. May your hope grow within me.
May your hope reach beyond me. Amen.²

Daily Follow Up November 30- December 6, 2020

Monday: If possible, watch the full moon from your window, or from Japan’s Kaguya Satellite
<https://youtu.be/5BCzbZn2sTg> .

Read: Psalm 42:7-8

Tuesday: Listen to your favorite “tunes without words”

Read: Psalm 42:11

Wednesday: Contact someone you have not seen for a while.

Read: Hosea 6:3

Thursday: Name and give thanks for a moment of hope.

Read: Romans 8: 38-39

Friday: Do something anonymous for someone else.

Read: Deuteronomy 31:6

Saturday: Give up social and news media for the day. Use the time to do something hopeful.

Read: Lamentations 3:22-24

¹ Anne Frank was a Jewish teenager who lived in hiding in Amsterdam during much of WWII. She died in of typhoid fever in 1945 in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

² Source: “Body Prayers”, <https://www.united-church.ca/worship-theme/advent-unwrapped>

“The Candle of Peace”

Sunday Evening, December 6, 2020

“The Word was with God from the very beginning.”

John 1:2

ABOUT PEACE

“Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.” **Jill Jackson-Miller & Sy Miller**

“Peace is not just the absence of conflict. Peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish regardless of race, colour, creed, religion, gender, class, caste or any other social markers of difference.” **Nelson Mandela**

LIGHTING THE SECOND ADVENT CANDLE

Today I/We light the candle of peace. I/We light the candle as a prayer but also as a protest against all that diminishes peace in our current circumstances.

(the second blue candle is lit)

“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.” **Anne Frank**

EXCERPTS: *The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank³

“The reason I’m starting a diary is that I have no real friend. ...I feel like writing. The young are not afraid of telling the truth....

Why is mankind so insane? Why make enormous planes, bombs, ...? Why spend millions on the war each day, and nothing for artists, for the poor? Why do people starve, with mountains of food spoiling in other parts of the world?...

Who has inflicted this upon us? Who has made us different from all other people? Who has allowed us to suffer so terribly up till now?...

I feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I believe - not everyone has the gift of believing in heavenly things - I believe in spite of everything that mankind is really, at its heart, *good*....

Here, in the secret annex, see how a single candle can defy and define the darkness.”

TO PONDER PRAYERFULLY: Who or what brings peace into your life? Into the life of the world?

(when you are ready, extinguish your candle)

Holy One, may your peace surround me. May your peace work through me.

May your peace extend to all the world. Amen. ⁴

Daily Follow Up

December 7-12, 2020

Monday: Name an experience of peace and give thanks.

Read: Psalm 13:2-3

Tuesday: Name some aspect of trouble in the world and pray for peace.

Read: Matthew 26:51-52

Wednesday: Write a letter of appreciation to a local front-line service worker or organization.

Read: Psalm 85: 8-13

Thursday: Pray for the well-being of someone you find difficult to get along with.

Read: Micah 5:2-4

Friday: Take a real or imagined walk in your neighbourhood or residence hallway. As you pass each door, offer a silent prayer for peace within.

Read: Isaiah 65:17-18

Saturday: Give up social and news media for the day. Use the time to do something peaceful.

Read: Isaiah 58:6-8

³ You can read a poem called a Cento, adapted from Anne Frank’s diary, here: <https://semaphore1.blogspot.com/2012/09/cento-from-diary-of-anne-frank.html>

“The Candle of Joy” Sunday Evening, December 13, 2020

“Apart from the Word, nothing that exists could come into being.”
John 1:3

ABOUT JOY

“I don't think of all the misery, but of the beauty that still remains.” **Anne Frank**

“There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.” **John Calvin**

CANDLE LIGHTING

Today I/We light the candle of joy. I/We light the candle of joy as a prayer but also as a protest against all that diminishes joy in our current circumstances.

(the third pink candle is lit)

“Look at how a single candle can both
defy and define the darkness.” **Anne Frank**

EXCERPT: The Book of Joy⁴, by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama XIV

“What is this thing called joy, ... that it can evoke such a wide range of feelings? How can the experience of joy span from those tears of joy at a birth to an irrepressible belly laugh at a joke to a serenely contented smile during meditation? **Dalai Lama XIV**

In African Villages, one would ask in a greeting, “*How are we?*” This understanding sees that someone else’s achievements or happiness is a very real way our own.” **Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

Discovering more joy does not save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily too. Perhaps we are just more alive.” **Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

“So,” the Dalai Lama finally said, slapping the Archbishop on the wrist playfully. “I prefer to go to hell than to heaven.... I can help more people there.” **Dalai Lama XIV**

TO PONDER PRAYERFULLY: Where is joy showing up in your world?

(when you are ready, extinguish your candle)

Holy One, may your joy sustain me. May your joy bubble up in me.
May your joy grow in all of creation. Amen.⁵

Daily Follow Up December 14-19, 2020

Monday:

Play Christmas music. Hum or sing along safely.

Read: Philippians 4:4-5

Tuesday: Take an evening drive to take in Christmas lights or watch them online:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCALge6fnHM&feature=emb_l_ogo

Read: Psalm 126:4-5

Wednesday: Hear a children’s story about what joy is here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INWWSQCayo0>

Read: Psalm 100

Thursday: Name and give thanks for a moment of joy.

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-19

Friday: Today is a Canada Post deadline. Get your Christmas cards and letters in the mail!

Read: Isaiah 65:17-18

Saturday: Give up social and news media for the day. Use the time to do something joyful.

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-2,4

⁴ *The Book of Joy* is the result of a 7-day meeting between the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, two of the world’s most influential spiritual leaders. You can find about it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDNecvT5miA>

“The Candle of Love”

Sunday Evening, December 20, 2020

“What came into being was true life,
a life that was a light for the ages”.

John 1: 3b-4

ABOUT LOVE

Love, what is love? I don't think you can put it into words.

Anne Frank

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. **Martin Luther**

King Jr.

God loves human beings ... the real world, this is the ground for God's unfathomable love. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

CANDLE LIGHTING

Today I/We light the candle of love I/We light the candle of love as a prayer but also as a protest against all that diminishes love in our current circumstances.

(the fourth blue candle is lit)

“Look at how a single candle can both
defy and define the darkness.” **Anne Frank**

EXCERPT: Christmas Eve 1943, Letters from Prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁵

I wish I could say something to help you in the time of separation which lies immediately ahead. ... I have learnt something about it myself during the last nine months [in prison], ...I should like to pass it on to you.

In the first place nothing can fill the gap when we are away from those we love, It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap: he does not fill it but keeps it empty so that our communion with another may be kept alive, even at the cost of pain. In the second place the dearer and richer our memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude converts the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy. ... Treated in this way, the past can give us lasting joy and inspiration. Thirdly, times of separation are not a total loss, nor are they completely unprofitable ..., they can be a wonderful means of strengthening and deepening fellowship. Fourthly, it has been borne in upon me here with peculiar force that ... fear and anxiety magnify [themselves] to an immeasurable degree ... we must commend our loved ones wholly and unreservedly to God ..., transforming our anxiety for them into prayers on their behalf.

TO PONDER PRAYERFULLY: Which worries and fears might you transform into prayers or actions for others?

(when you are ready, extinguish your candle)

Holy One, may your love be born again in my head and heart.

May your love be in all I say and do. May your love encircle the earth. Amen.

DAILY FOLLOW UP DECEMBER 21-24, 2020

Monday: Name someone who has helped you and give thanks for loving support.

Read: Luke 1:26-38

Tuesday: Take in “The Nativity” by Canadian Artist William Kurelek at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKK_uvnph08

Read: Luke 1:39-56

Wednesday: Make a donation to an agency which helps people in need.

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

Thursday: It's Christmas Eve! Attend worship with your family online. At Salisbury United, join a family oriented online worship at 7pm, and/or a late evening communion service at 10 pm.

Links to our online worship can be found at www.salisburyunited.ca.

Read: Luke 2:1-20

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young German pastor who spent two Christmases in prison for being an anti-Nazi dissident. He died in a concentration camp in April, 1945. After his death, the letters he wrote in prison were published as a book.

“The Christ Light”

Thursday, December 24, 2020

Or, Friday, December 25, 2020

“The light shines in the darkness
and the darkness has never overcome it.”

John 1:5

ABOUT CHRISTMAS:

“Isn’t there anyone here who can tell me what Christmas is all about?” **Charlie Brown**

Good news: but if you ask me what it is, I know not;
It is a track of feet in the snow,
It is a lantern showing a path,
It is a door set open.

G. K. Chesterton

CANDLE LIGHTING

Today I/We light the Christ candle. I/We light the Christ candle as a prayer but also as a protest against all that diminishes the coming of the light of Christ into our current circumstances.

(the white central candle is lit)

“Look at how a single candle can both defy
and define the darkness.” **Anne Frank**

EXCERPTS: Christmas Sermons, Martin Luther (1483-1546), compiled by Shawn Thomas⁶

“Now a decree went out from Augustus Caesar that all the world should be taxed.” And now Joseph had to go back to be enrolled. ... And as they approached ... Bethlehem, Joseph was saying, “... Soon we’ll be among relatives and we can borrow everything.” A fine idea that was! There was all the room in the inn, but nobody would give up a room! ... Mary and Joseph were obliged to take refuge in a stable,

“And she brought forth her firstborn child and laid him in a manger.” Think of it, women! She didn’t even have a cradle to lay the baby in. No warm water, no cold water, no pan, no towels, no table It’s a wonder the little fellow didn’t freeze to death!

“Now there were shepherds abiding in the fields by night, watching over their sheep.” ... “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host.” ... I wouldn’t have believed it. But God is amazing. He sends a little baby, as weak as an earthworm, lying in the feedbox of a donkey,

The shepherds went to Bethlehem, and ... told the whole countryside round about what had come to pass. And then we read, “And the shepherds returned.” That certainly must be a mistake. It ought to be! “And the shepherds shaved their heads, and counted their prayers, and went into a monastery!” But no, it says they returned ... to their sheep. And a very good thing for their sheep indeed!

TO PONDER PRAYERFULLY: Where are you on this Christmas Eve/Day? How are you on this Christmas Eve/Day?

(when you are ready, blow out your candle)

Holy One, may the gift of Jesus the Christ be re-born in me, along with
your hope, your peace, your joy, your love. Amen.

Daily Follow Up December 25 & 26, 2020

Friday: It’s Christmas day! Eat pumpkin pie for breakfast. Listen to Christmas Carols. Watch a clip from “A Charlie Brown Christmas” here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVHkmsgagI>. Call your family.

Read: Luke 1:41-43

Saturday

It’s Boxing Day. Don’t buy anything today. Avoid social and news media. Use the time to do something that helps someone else.

Read: Isaiah 9:6

⁶ <https://shawnethomas.com/2011/12/19/martin-luthers-christmas-sermon-compiled/>

First Sunday in Christmastide Sunday, December 27, 2020

“The Word became flesh and took up residence among us.”
John 1:14a

ABOUT CHRISTMAS:

“Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home.” **G.K. Chesterton**

“... the testimony of Christmas for all human beings is you have been accepted: Look to the manger!” **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

CANDLE LIGHTING:

Today I/We light the Christ candle. I/We re-light the Christ candle as a prayer but also as a protest against all that diminishes the coming of Christ into our current circumstances.

(the white central candle is re-lit)

“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.” **Anne Frank**

EXCERPT: “Just Drop the Blanket” by Jason Soroski

I was in the first grade back when they still performed Christmas pageants in schools (less than 50 years, but still a very long time ago), and our class performed a version of the Charlie Brown Christmas. Since I was kind of a bookworm and already had a blue blanket, I was chosen to play the part of Linus. As Linus, I memorized [Luke 2:8-14](#), and that Scripture has been hidden in my heart ever since.

But while working so diligently to learn those lines, there is one important thing I didn't notice then, and didn't notice until now. Right in the middle of speaking, Linus drops the blanket. Throughout the story of Peanuts, Lucy, Snoopy, Sally and others all work to no avail to separate Linus from his blanket. And even though his security blanket remains a major source of ridicule for the otherwise mature and thoughtful Linus, he simply refuses to give it up.

In that climactic scene when Linus shares "what Christmas is all about," he drops his security blanket, ... when he utters the words, "fear not"

TO PONDER PRAYERFULLY: What role has fear played in your life this past year? What fears might you drop?

(when you are ready, extinguish your candle)

Holy One, thank you for Jesus the Christ. May your Christ dwell within me.

May your Christ light shine through me. May your Christ light shine on into the world. Amen.

Daily Follow Up December 28, 2020 - January 2, 2021

Monday: Watch a clip from the “A Charlie Brown Christmas”.

Read: Matthew 2: 1-6

Tuesday: Name some aspect of trouble and pray for light.

Read: Luke 2:21-28

Thursday: It's New Year's Eve. Pray for world leaders and for a better year for us all in 2021.

Read: Matthew 2:7-12

Friday: It's New Year's Day.

Start the New Year by writing an encouraging letter to a child or youth.

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:6
Matthew 2:13-15

Saturday: find a new taper or pillar candle that will be your at-home worship candle for the coming year. Get it ready for use tomorrow.

Read: Matthew 2:16- 18

Epiphany Sunday

Sunday, January 3, 2021

"We have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten Son, full of grace and truth."

John 1:14b

ABOUT EPIPHANY⁷

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." **Matthew 2:11**

"I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the **light**, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. ... "There is a **light** that shines in the darkness, which is only visible there." **Barbara Brown Taylor**

"I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year." **Charles Dickens**

CANDLE LIGHTING:

Today I light this candle as a prayer but also as a protest against all that diminishes the manifestation of Christ in our current circumstances.

(The star candle is lit.)

"Look at how a single candle can both defy
and define the darkness." **Anne Frank**

EXCERPT: "My Sister's Keeper" by Jodi Picoult

"I suddenly remember being about seven, riding beside him in the car, and asking him how grown-ups found their way to places. After all, I had never seen him pull out a map. "I guess we just get used to taking the same turns," he said, but I wasn't satisfied.

"Then what about the first time you go somewhere?" "Well," he said, "we get directions." But what I want to know is who got them the very first time? What if no one's ever been where you're going? "Dad?" I ask, "is it true that you can use stars like a map?"

"Yeah, if you understand celestial navigation." "Is it hard?" I'm thinking maybe I should learn. A backup plan, for all those times I feel like I'm just wandering in circles.

"It's pretty jazzy math—you have to measure the altitude of a star, figure out its position using a nautical almanac, figure out what you think the altitude should be and what direction the star should be in based on where you think you are, and compare the altitude you measured with the one you calculated. Then you plot this on a chart, as a line of position. You get several lines of position to cross, and that's where you go."

My father takes one look at my face and smiles. "Exactly," he laughs. "Never leave home without your GPS."

TO PONDER PRAYERFULLY: What guided you through 2020? What intentions will guide you for 2021?

(When you are ready, blow out your candle)

Holy One, may your light dwell within me. May your kindly light guide my footsteps in 2021.

May I reflect your kindly light this year to both friend and stranger alike. Amen.

⁷Epiphany means "unveiling". Epiphany is the Sunday when the church completes the Advent/Christmas cycle by remembering the visit of the wisemen to Jesus at home. Epiphany is also a season of worship in January and February when we reflect on the revealing of Jesus as the Christ, the Light of the World.