

## **Palestine Lutheran Church 2018**

### **Advent Sundays – 9:30 a.m.**

*Blessing of Advent Wreath (Dec 02) - Make Wreath*

*Blessing of the Nativity (Dec 02) – Make Nativity Scene*

*Blessing of Christmas Trees (Dec 09) – Make Ornament*

*Advent Hymn Festival (Dec 16)*

*Christmas Children's Program (Dec 16)*

*Affirmation of Baptism – (Dec 23)*

**Advent Mid-Week Services – Wed (Nov 28, Dec 5, 19) at 7:30pm – Make Us Bread for Others: An Advent service of Lament and Hope (30 min worship/devotion)**

### **Christmas Celebrations**

**ROCK Christmas Extravaganza (Dec 08) – 9am-12pm**

**Seniors Christmas Tea (Dec 02) – 11:00am**

**Blue Christmas Service (Dec 18) – 6:30 pm**

@ Fjeldberg Lutheran Church, Huxley, Iowa

**Christmas Caroling (Dec 12) – 6:00pm at Ballard Creek**

**Christmas Program (Dec 16) – 4:30 p.m.**

"The Midnight Miracle" & meal by confirmation class

**Christmas Senior Service (Dec 24) – 2:00pm**

@ Ballard Creek Home w/Holy Communion

**Christmas Eve Family Service (Dec 24) – 5:00p.m.**

**Christmas Day (Dec 25) – 9:00 a.m.**

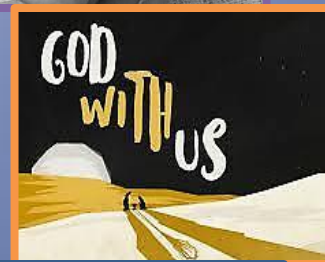
@ Nazareth Lutheran, Cambridge w/breakfast

**New Dawn Worship (Dec 30) – 9:30 a.m.**

Affirmation of Baptism and New Year's Blessing

Christmas Lessons and Carols 2017

**Epiphany "3Kings" Sunday (Jan 6) – 9:30**



## **Holiday Devotions @ Palestine Lutheran**

### **For Advent and Christmas Season**



**You can explore as a family the meaning, activities and prayers for the seasons of the spirit and soul**



Most of us are accustomed to celebrating the New Year on January 1<sup>st</sup>. But the Christian church begins its New Year a little differently. For Christians, the church year begins four Sundays before Christmas (either on the last Sunday in November or the first Sunday in December). This year, December 02<sup>nd</sup> happens to be the first day of the new Church year, and therefore, the first day of the Advent season.

It might surprise some to know that the Church has its own tradition of keeping time – it uses a separate calendar than the rest of the secular world. This tradition grew from the Christian need of a calendar that would reflect a chronological chain of events of Christianity. The Church calendar gives Christians a more logical way to remember God’s gifts (Christ’s birth before his death and resurrection) and serves as a convenient reminder of all that God gave in His son, Jesus Christ and all He has done through Christ.

Historically speaking, Easter was the first special day assigned to the Christian calendar. Next, came Epiphany (which marks the baptism of Jesus and the coming of the Wise Men). Sometime later, December 25<sup>th</sup> was selected as the “official” birth date of Jesus. Eventually, Christians began to observe a special time of preparation for Easter, known as *Lent*. Before too long, a similar custom of preparing for Christmas evolved and was named *Advent*.

The name *Advent* simply means, “coming”, but there is nothing simple about this time of Preparation. Not only are we getting ready for the coming of the Christ Child as anticipated by the prophets, but also the coming of Jesus into our lives today, tomorrow and always, remembering that he will come again to judge and rule the world.

The Advent season is a time of getting ready to enter into the mystery of Christmas. This mystery is so great that it takes four weeks to get ready to enter. These treasured weeks are reserved for preparing us to grow closer to Christ through the glory of Christmas.

In a sense, Advent allows us an opportunity to become modern day innkeepers. We choose to make room for the Holy Family and journey with them again as they prepare for the arrival of Christ the King.

Let us use these four weeks of Advent wisely so that our hearts and minds will be worthily prepared to joyfully celebrate the birth of our Lord.

# *Celebrating Advent - The Colors*

The primary color of Advent is Purple. Purple is a color that was reserved for royalty during Christ's lifetime. It was the color Kings and Queens. Another color associated with Advent is Blue. Blue is the color of repentance and hope. The color blue matches the color of the sky from where our Lord will come in the clouds on the Day of the Lord.

Jesus was a King, not the kind of King that people had ever met before. He didn't have an army – or, at least not the kind of army that people could understand. Nor did he have a great or majestic home – at least, not while he was on earth. And, as for riches, well, his riches were in the form of parable and miracles. They were a sort of treasure that no other King had ever possessed.

Yes, Jesus was a King who was coming then, is still coming today. And that is the mystery of Christmas. During the season of Advent, the Altar linens and vestments reflect the color purple to help us focus our attention on the special nature of Christ as King.

When we prepare for the coming of Christ, as Light of the World, we remember that through him God showed us His extraordinary presence. And as we prepare to enter the mystery of Christmas, we can also remember that the color purple represents another aspect of Christ's life. The color purple is used during Lent and Holy Week to symbolize both Christ's kingship and his suffering.

In remembering Christ's life, we cannot separate his birth from his death; the Nativity from the Atonement. Christ, God's Perfect Gift, was sacrificed for us, as Perfect Sacrifice, to take away the sins of the world. And because of this, in the early days of Christian worship, Advent, Christmas and Lent were seen as somber times. But over time, the focus of Advent and Christmas shifted to one of joyful anticipation.

Not all Christian churches use the color purple during Advent. Some churches choose to use the color blue to symbolize the Coming of Christ. Blue is associated with the Mother Mary and also with quiet, yet joyful anticipation. Royal blue may be used to represent royalty. Bright blue may be used to symbolize the night sky, in anticipation of the announcement of the coming of the King or to represent the waters of Genesis 1, the beginning of a new creation.



*"The Glory of Lebanon shall come unto you, the fir tree, the pine tree and the box together, to beautify the place of your sanctuary." Isaiah 60:13*

During the season of Advent, it is traditional for churches to engage in an event called "the hanging of the greens". This is a time when churches decorate their sanctuaries with evergreens as a symbol of God's ever presence and the everlasting life he has promised through Jesus Christ.

Evergreens are ancient symbols of immortality, life and growth. Ancient Romans considered evergreens a symbol of peace, joy and victory. Early Christians used evergreens a symbol of their faith, placing them in their windows to indicate that Christ was ever present.

Firs, cedar, juniper, holly, laurel, bayberry, ivy and pine are some of the greenery hung and are considered "evergreens" because they are ever, and always, green and full of life. Their color never, ever changes, not even during the winter months.

Holly has many symbolic meanings: the burning bush, the Mother Mary (who is said to glow with the Holy Spirit), and Jesus' crown of thorns. The red holly berries are also symbolic of the blood of Jesus. Ivy reminds us of the human spirit clinging to God's strength. Juniper and cedar represent life and hope. Laurel symbolizes triumph and victory.

Evergreens have long been symbolic of Christmas time and many people refer to the hanging of the greens as "Bringing home Christmas!" In addition to the evergreens, another familiar plant, the Christmas Poinsettia, is usually used during the season of Advent and Christmas as a symbolic representation of the star of Bethlehem (it resembles a flaming star) and is called the "Flower of the Holy Night". This tradition includes the placing of evergreen trees (Christmas Trees) in worship and fellowship areas with chrismon decorations.

# *The Advent Wreath*



The Advent Wreath, rich in symbolism, is a powerful visual aid used in moving through the four Sundays of Advent while remembering the reason for the season: Jesus Christ.

With no beginning and no end, the circular nature of the wreath testifies to God himself. His eternity, and endless love and mercy for humanity have no beginning or end.

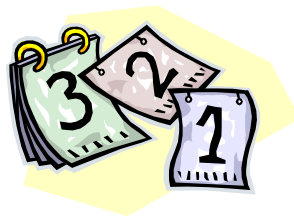
The wreath is primarily green and speaks to the hope of eternal life, recalling that our faith, hope and lives are always alive when they spring from God and his Son. Although the wreath is typically constructed of evergreens, many alternate media may be used to create an Advent Wreath. There are many “how to” ideas on the internet.

Four candles surround the Advent wreath; one for each week of Advent. These four candles symbolized the four centuries of waiting between the prophet Malachi’s telling of the coming day of the Lord and the birth of the Christ Child. The lighting of these candles symbolizes the light of God coming into the world through the birth of his son, Jesus, Light of the World.

The colors of the candles vary with different traditions. We use three blue candles, corresponding to the sanctuary colors of Advent, and one white (pink) candle. Beginning with the first Sunday of Advent, one blue candle is lit. This candle is lit again each remaining Sunday of Advent. On the second Sunday of Advent, a second blue candle is lit as well. This candle continues to be lit throughout Advent. The third and fourth candles follow suit, except that the white (pink) candle is lit on the third Sunday (symbolizing joy). A center candle is often used to denote the birth of Christ and is appropriately called the “*Christ Candle*”. It is lit either on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning.

Each candle symbolizes various aspects of our waiting period during Advent. A theme or focus is usually assigned to each week and its associated candle. Traditionally, the first candle is the candle of Hope, Expectation or Prophecy, drawing our attention to the anticipation of the coming of the King of Kings. The other three candles may be associated with many different aspects of the Advent story. Themes are varied and yet the traditional message of the third candle is one of joy for the coming of Christ. Regardless of the stories, scripture reading or prayers used with the lighting of each candle, the common theme is the story of redemption through God’s grace in the Incarnation.

# *The Advent Calendar*



Another way to mark the passing of days during Advent is to use a traditional Advent calendar. Remember though that the number of days in Advent will vary from year to year.

Most commercial Advent calendars typically consist of 24 to 25 panels or doors, one for each of the 24 days in December that proceeds Christmas Day. Sometimes a 25<sup>th</sup> panel will be included, representing Christmas Day. The idea being that behind each panel, there is a message revealing a piece of the Nativity story.

Advent calendars can be very helpful in keeping children focused on the reason for the season. The calendars provide daily involvement through the season of Advent, and sometime through Epiphany.

There are many variations to the traditional Advent Calendar and the Internet provides a host of information on them. Here are just a few suggestions:

## *Jesse Tree*

This activity is centered on Isaiah 11, which suggest that: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots”.

Everyone has a family tree, including Jesus. He was a descendant of King David whose father was Jesse. The idea of the Jesse Tree is to show Jesus’ family tree back to his ancestor, Jesse. Place a tree branch in a stable container, safely anchored with rocks or dirt, and decorate it with symbols of the various members of Jesus’ family. As an Advent Calendar, one ornament can be added each day of Advent with a related scripture reference read.



## *Chrismon Tree*

The word Chrismon comes from two words, “Christ” and Monogram”. Chrismon trees are decorated with symbols for Jesus. Making these symbolic ornaments and learning about their meaning can be a special Advent project. The ornaments can be added one day at a time



(serving as an Advent calendar or all at once on Christmas Eve. They are elaborate ornaments of white and gold; often 3-dimensional beaded creations. Glitter and glue can work too if beading is not an option.

### *The Advent Chain*



A variation of the Advent calendar is the Advent chain. These can be constructed at home by simply cutting strips of colorful construction paper and placing a special Advent reading, good deed or message on each strip. Each day, a strip is added and glued or taped into the link formation.

This variation of the Advent calendar allows for the complete coverage of all three seasons: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. The links of the chain can even be color coordinated to the week of the season.

### *The Blessing Box*



You will need a box to serve as a bank for this Advent activity. Decorate and place the box on the kitchen table for 36-38 days (from Advent through Epiphany). Each day, place a daily offering in the box, counting your own blessings and remembering those less fortunate. Explain to children that the money being banked will be given to someone who will be able to use it to provide themselves with the blessings they are in need of (socks, food, shelter, clothes, etc.). On Epiphany Sunday, give the box away to someone in need.

### *Recycled Christmas Cards*

Using last year's Christmas cards, create an Advent calendar of your own. Use your imagination. Hang them from a line, post them on a board or make them 3-dimensional. The options are endless

### *An Activity A Day*

Figure out how many days are in Advent for that year and create a simple list of family activities that can be performed on each day. Look for the example located at the back of this booklet!

### *Ornament A-Day*

*Christmas Balls* Using round Christmas balls to remind us that God's power and love has no beginning or end, hang one round Christmas ball for each day of Advent. As each ball is hung, scripture can be recited that corresponds to the Advent lessons of that week.

Choose Advent colors for the balls or create a color system that applies to a theme of your choice.

**Stars** Jesus is called the “*Bright Morning Star*”. For each day of Advent (and perhaps continuing through Epiphany), decorate star-shaped cutouts, placing a scripture message around its edges. Then, place the stars on a poster board or wall. Remember that the wild star, which the Magi followed, was a five-pointed star.

**Mustard Seeds** Jesus taught that if you have the faith the size of a mustard seed then you can move mountains, or uproot trees from the ground and cast them into the sea. During Advent we prepare with great anticipation for Jesus to come and forever change the world, and it begins with the little faith each of us has to act together to be a part of those changes and witness to those changes a little bit at a time.

**Paper Clips** The Holy Spirit calls, gathers and hold us together as a community of faith like a paper clip holds together paper. More pages can be added or shuffled as needed with a paper clip as the God adds and changes His community to teach and serve in the world. Paper clips represent the power of the Spirit to enlighten us in new and innovative ways to best communicate the love of God in Christ Jesus – right now there are over 400 ways to use a simple paper clip to accomplish tasks beyond its intended use.

**Stocking Stuffers** We hang stockings over the fire to dry them after our daily journeys in and about the world. The Bible tells us that beautiful are the feet that bear good news. We have an opportunity to bear good news over the season of Christmas that “God is with us.” Remember when you put on your stockings (socks) and go out the door that God goes with you to bring “joy, peace, faith and love” to others. Write down on a piece of paper the name of someone who is that “good news” bearer to you, and write the name of someone who you pray the Spirit will help you bring “good news” to.

**The Gifts of Advent** We give gift to people out of love. Some gifts are wrapped in boxes just waiting to be opened on Christmas morning with both joy and surprise. However, some gifts don’t come in a box. During Advent we recognize the gifts that keep on giving and have true meaning throughout our lives, such as time, family, shared interests, listening, patience, hope, trust, etc. Write down what gifts you want to share with your family that are not “things” which show how much you love them (*Don’t look at what each wrote*). Place the notes in your family box, seal the box and put a ribbon around it. Hang it on your tree, or put it in a stocking, or place it by your manger scene and open it on Christmas day.

**God With Us: Our Story** We read in the newspapers, hear in the media and see in our communities the events of the day and wonder what is God up to? And why does God allow bad things to happen? Advent and Christmas celebrates God’s promise to be with us in the world no matter what is happening? We may not understand the “why?” but we can trust in the “who” – God who comes to be with us because of God’s love for each person. God redeems and reconciles the world in Jesus Christ.



# *Blue Christmas*

*A service of longing and hope*



We experience loss in many ways throughout our life. Some losses are small and some are life-altering and call us to provide a time and place of solace during the frenetic days surrounding Christmas. Not everyone feels like celebrating. Grief, illness, aging, depression, loneliness, unemployment, and loss are magnified. Even those who are not struggling with losses may feel the stress of preparations and expectations around Christmas.

In the Northern Hemisphere, December 21 is the longest night, the winter solstice, which means literally "standing still." It marks the shortest day of the year, the official start of winter, when the sun traces its shortest, lowest path above the horizon in the northern hemisphere. Tradition says that nature and all her creatures stop and hold their breath to see if the sun will turn back from its wanderings, if the days will lengthen and the earth will once again feel the sun's warmth. We might feel like that in our circumstances as life seems to stop or take a detour and we wonder if we can go on. How will life be now?

In the gathering darkness of December, we anticipate the coming again of the Light of the world. It may only be the hope that marks Advent's waiting that keeps us looking toward the coming of Christ. It may also be that the blue of the Advent season (which symbolizes hope) is the very remedy we need for what makes us feel "blue" at Christmas.

We celebrate a time of remembrance and hope by making Christmas ornaments and hanging them with family and friends on our Christmas tree.

**Blue Christmas service will be at Fjeldberg Lutheran Church, Huxley, Iowa on Tuesday, December 18<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm.**

# *A Nativity Scene*



St. Francis Assisi popularized the nativity when he created one using real people and animals with the backdrop of a cave. In doing so, he emphasized the significance of devotion to the Christ Child during the waiting period of Advent.

A nativity scene, also called a “Crèche”, can be very useful in preparing for the coming of Christmas. The nativity can be set out whole or can be introduced piece by piece, or group by group, during the four weeks of Advent. You may choose to present the figures in chronological order or in some other sequential order. For instance, present the empty manger scene for week one, the animals for week two, the Holy Family for week three, the shepherds on week four, the Christ Child on Christmas Eve and the three Kings on Epiphany.

Some nativity scenes depict a cave as Christ’s birthplace, while others show a stable or shed. Regardless, it is this humble beginning of our Savior’s life that is a mystery of God’s wisdom. We may not know why God chose such humble surroundings, but we do know that He reached out to all people. God reached out to the rich and poor, the rejected and accepted, the simple and wise, the powerful and powerless. And he continues to reach out to all. During Advent, we gather around the manger with the animals, the Shepherds, the Holy Family and the Wise Men. And, we bow down as we remember God’s expression of love through his son, Jesus Christ.

**Build you own nativity scene. Say a prayer of blessing as you set the scene up.**

**Advent Table – Blessing materials**

**Build you own Nativity Scenes**

**The Midnight Miracle - On Sunday, Dec 16<sup>th</sup> at 4:30pm.**

**Rehearsal Schedule to date:**

***Wednesday, November 28th 6-7:30 (Dinner provided 5:30pm-6pm)***

***Sunday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6pm to 7:30pm***

***Wednesday, December 5th 6pm-7:30pm (dinner @ 5:30pm)***

***Wednesday, December 12th 6:15 – 8 – Caroling/Skit –At Ballard Creek***

***Sunday, December 9th 6-7:30 – dress rehearsal at church***

***Sunday, December 16th – at church after service until noon***

**Sunday night, December 16<sup>th</sup> – Kids at church 4pm. Special music - 4:30pm**

# *An Advent Liturgy*

## *The First Week in Advent*



Each day of this week, light the first candle and say together:

*Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". Our King and Savior now draw near; Come let us adore him.*

Let the first candle remind us of the prophets who hoped the Messiah would come and bring peace and love to the world.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, our world is in darkness. We need the light of peace and love to shine in our work. Help us to prepare our lives and our homes to receive the One who said, I am the light of the world. We pray this in Christ's name. AMEN*

## *The Second Week in Advent*



Each day of this week, light the first and second candles and say together:

*Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". Our King and Savior now draw near; Come let us adore him.*

This week, let the first candle remind us of the prophets who hoped the Messiah would come and bring peace and love to the world. And, let the second candle remind us of John the Baptist, the great prophet, who pointed the way for the Messiah. "In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our Lord." Isaiah 40:3

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, as we remember the message of John the Baptist, help us to wait patiently for the good things you have prepared for us, and help us to prepare our hearts for the gift of your Son. AMEN*

## *The Third Week in Advent*



Each day of this week, light the first, second and third candles and say together:

*Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". Our King and Savior now draw near; Come let us adore him.*

This week, let the first candle remind us of the prophets who hoped the Messiah would come and bring peace and love to the world. And, let the second candle remind us of John the Baptist, the great prophet, who pointed the way for the Messiah. The third candle reminds us of the Shepherds; let us also remember the Angels who were messengers of God; delivering the message to Mary and Joseph that they would give birth to Jesus, and to the Shepherds in the fields announcing Jesus' birth.

**Prayer:** Mary, for you this time before Jesus' birth was a quiet time, a growing time. As we wait, we prepare our hearts to receive the Christ Child. Lord, help us to be good Shepherds of your word. Come, Lord Jesus, the whole world is waiting for you. AMEN

## *The Fourth Week in Advent*



Each day of this week, light all four candles and say together:

*Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". Our King and Savior now draw near; Come let us adore him.*

This week, let the first candle remind us of the prophets who hoped the Messiah would come and bring peace and love to the world. And, let the second candle remind us of John the Baptist, the great prophet, who pointed the way for the Messiah. And, let the third candle remind us of the Shepherds, who with Mary and Joseph were the first to hear the Good News of the birth of Jesus. And as we are reminded of the Shepherds, let us also remember the Angels who were messengers of God; delivering the message to Mary and Joseph that they would give birth to Jesus, and to the Shepherds in the fields announcing Jesus' birth. The fourth candle reminds us of God's love and glory through his Son, Jesus.

**Prayer:** Mary, for you this time before Jesus' birth was a quiet time, a growing time. As we wait, we prepare our hearts to receive the Christ Child. Lord, help us to be good Shepherds of your word. Come, Lord Jesus, the whole world is waiting for you. AMEN

# *An Activity A Day*

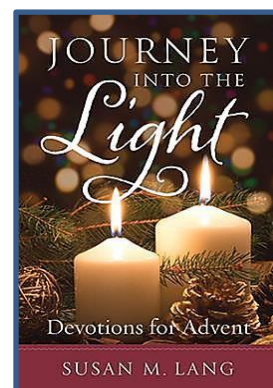
*(You can alter this list to fit your situation)*

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| December 2  | Do homework early. Read a favorite book.  |
| December 3  | Read the Christmas story from Luke 2:1-20.  |
| December 4  | Visit a shut-in friend.   |
| December 5  | Read John 3:19-21 and John 8:12 by candlelight.                                     |
| December 6  | Watch a Christmas movie.  |
| December 7  | Make a birthday card for Jesus.   |
| December 8  | Make Christmas cookies to take to church tomorrow.                                  |
| December 9  | Read a favorite Christmas book.   |
| December 10 | Reflect on how Jesus is the Light of the World.                                     |
| December 11 | Take an evening walk.   |
| December 12 | Make an ornament for the tree.  |
| December 13 | Make Christmas cookies.   |
| December 14 | Purchase gifts for a needy family.  |
| December 15 | Watch a Christmas movie.  |
| December 16 | After church, take a walk and admire the decorations                                |
| December 17 | Visit a friend.   |
| December 18 | Read the Christmas story from Matthew 1:18-2:11.                                    |
| December 19 | Mom and dad read stories for one hour.  |
| December 20 | Invite friends over for hot chocolate and wassail.                                  |
| December 21 | Put out food for the birds.   |
| December 22 | Take an evening drive to see Christmas lights and talk about the lessons at church. |
| December 23 | Read the Christmas story from Luke 1:26-38, 2-1:14.                                 |
| December 24 | Go to church on Christmas Eve.  |

# **Palestine Lutheran Church** **Advent & Christmas Daily** **Devotions 2018**

## **Journey Into The Light!**

*Family Reflections for Advent*

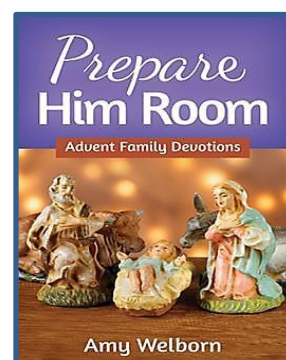


This devotional invites us to take a daily journey into what it means to be children of the light as we prepare our hearts and our homes for the celebration of the birth of the baby born in Bethlehem who is the Light of the World. Take these weeks prior to Christmas to celebrate and explore anew your identity as a child of the light, called to be a light-bearer to a world so desperately in need of holy illumination.

**Also available as a digital download from:**  
**Amazon Kindle Barnes & Nobel Nook**

## **Prepare Him Room**

*Advent Reflections for Families*



Like the rest of us, families make their way toward Christmas in a world that is already celebrating, if not the coming of Christ, at least the season of parties and gift-giving. How do we keep a focus on Jesus and the Incarnation amid the busy-ness of getting ready for December 25? Author Amy Welborn offers families simple ways to find the gospel message in what is going on all around them, even in preparations that can get hectic at times. These brief but pointed devotions will keep a family centered on what is most important not only at this time of the year, but every day. **Also available as a digital download from:**  
**Amazon Kindle Barnes & Nobel Nook.**

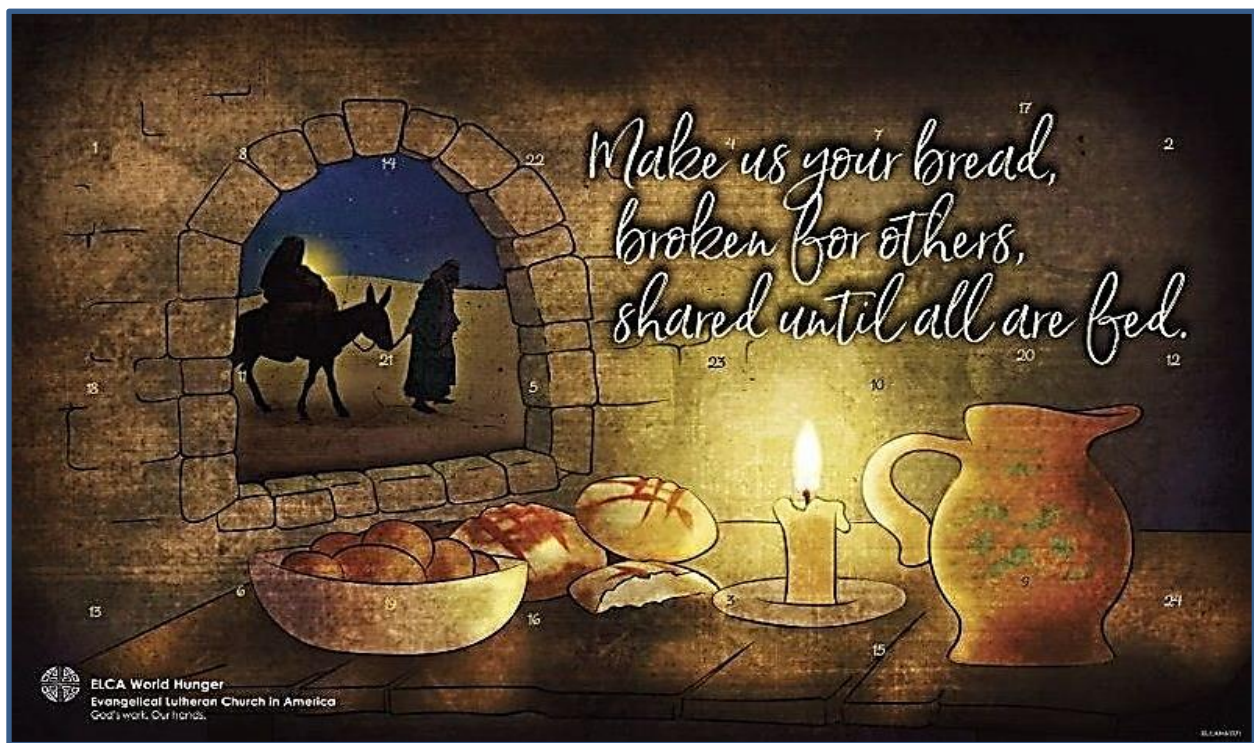


## Advent Mid-Week Worship 2018

### Make Us Bread for Others Until All Are Fed

#### *An Advent Service of Lament and Hope*

*Advent is a season of anticipation and longing. This service is based on Psalm 80 and is structured in three main sections: Hear Us, Heal Us, and Send Us. Theme comes from the ELCA World Hunger emphasis for Advent.*



**When: Wednesday, Nov 28, Dec. 05 & 19 @**

**7:30pm** Offering for ELCA Global Barnyard

**Place: Palestine Lutheran Church**

**(Ending confirmation class)**

**Candlelight Service of Reflection**



# Welcome to the Waiting Room

## Sunday Advent Worship Experience



### Sunday Series Overview

Advent is a season of hoping, waiting, yearning, and preparing, but for what or whom and how? These are some of the themes explored in this Advent series. The word “advent” is from the Latin *adventus*; it means “arrival” or an awaited coming. It’s a season of big promises. We wonder, “Will God keep ancient promises or has God forgotten us?”

During these four weeks, the future and the past mingle together as we celebrate the Christ who came and is yet to come. Memories, inherited through scripture and tradition, are sparked in order to feed tomorrow’s hope. The Spirit nudges the discovery, “If God came once, maybe God really will come again.”

Advent is a season largely forgotten by our culture of immediate gratification, and likewise we’ve forgotten what it means to wait well. In all of this waiting, God is creating desire within us. And we trust it’s worth the wait. Along the way, there are a few things for which we’re not yet ready, because when God comes close it’s almost always accompanied by surprise or scandal.

### This is God’s story. This is our story. Welcome to the season of Advent.

#### Advent 1: Surprise (December 2<sup>nd</sup>)

Salvation always comes as a surprise. It’s what happens when God does for us what we could never do for ourselves. So when God comes close it is always unimaginable, yet God asks us to expect it.

#### Advent 2: Prepare (December 9<sup>th</sup>)

Hope might sound passive, but it’s the farthest thing from it. Christian hope won’t let you just sit on your hands. There are preparations to be made and roadwork to be straightened out because *God is coming*.

#### Advent 3: Expectations (December 16<sup>th</sup>)

How do we know when God has come close? What if it’s not what we were expecting? Advent asks us to adjust some of our hopes and expectations.

#### Advent 4: Scandal (December 23<sup>rd</sup>)

More often than not, when God comes close it results in a major scandal. Our sensibilities are offended and misunderstandings fly about. When “God is with us” it’s likely that public disgrace and secret dismissals will soon follow, because, essentially, when God comes close life gets disrupted.