

## **Draw Near To Christ**

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Birmingham

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### **WELCOME**

Welcome — all of you to this celebration of the coming of Christ, God's Anointed One, into the world. God has come among us to be one of us, to live alongside us and within us. Today we celebrate the birth of the Christ and from this point forward we know that we are never alone, and God's salvation has come to us!

Listen through this service to the story being retold in word and song.

Let us pray.

Loving God, today we acknowledge that you came to us many years ago in person to bring us salvation and show us the way to rich and full life. Today we celebrate your gift to us, your only beloved son, born as a baby to Mary and Joseph. May you move within us today to help us know your hope, your peace, your joy, and your love. Help us to know you, the Christ among us. Amen.

### **REFLECTIONS**

We are going to take a trip back through time to the ancient Celts who lived between Ireland and Turkey. We call this current season Advent, but hundreds, if not thousands of years before Christ, the Celts celebrated the cyclical rhythm of nature around them during this season.

So, the time after harvest in November they shifted their attention from the busy work of harvest to a slower pace of life, just like all of creation around them slowed down. As the daylight diminished, so their lives entered a new season. All of creation, including people, entered a season of darkness, and this was embraced as good and important.

Now, in dualistic thinking, which was brought to us by the Greeks, everything is split apart into warring opposites. Everything fighting its opposite. So, the heavens and earth fight each other, male and female fight each other, the government and the people fight each other, Republicans and Democrats fight each other, light and darkness fight each other.

During this season, we sometimes talk about light banishing the darkness. This is a very Greek way to think, and not so much like the Celts or most indigenous cultures.

The ancient Celts held a more holistic view of the world where everything had its place in relation to everything else. So, darkness was not bad, but offered something wonderful and good, even essential to life. This is much more in line with Jewish tradition that scheduled nearly all of their celebrations and feasts around the patterns of nature.

A primary way of living for the Greeks was opposition. For the Celts it was integration and wholeness.

So, Advent was placed in the calendar when the Christian world met the Celtic world in the fourth and fifth century. From this point forward there are two different versions of Christianity — the part that followed the Celtic way of integration and the Greek way that followed the pattern of opposition.

Which would you choose?

The Celtic version, celebrated the darkness.

Darkness comes at night when the day has ended and something new is brewing for tomorrow. It is the space for rest, for reflection, for creativity, for re-creation.

The Celts celebrated the season of darkness as the beginning of their

year and a time to set a solid foundation for the rest of the year. The season of darkness for the Celts began after harvest in November and ended at the winter solstice on Dec 25, the darkest night of the year. This was adjusted in the 16th century to Dec 21.

This season was called the holy darkness because it provided fertile ground for new beginnings. It was in this season that nature could recreate them, realign them, and there was space to renew or rediscover their vitality. It was in the season of darkness that they could set aside the old dreams and cast new dreams.

When the world was at its darkest it was being prepared for something new to be birthed.

Now, the actual date of Jesus' birth was not recorded, and when it came time to create an annual celebration, it is no wonder that they borrowed from the Celts, aligned the celebration of the birth of the Christ in the darkness to deepen and enrich the understanding of what God was doing in the renewing cycle and pattern of nature.

Christians started calling the season Advent, which means the

beginning, the onset of something new.

Now, we can't have anything new when life is completely full. You have to allow some things to die, to fade away, to relinquish their place of prominence, in order to make space for something new. This is the season of Advent. This is when we slow down, and let go of the past and open up the space within us for something new.

Now what about the lights of Christmas that we place on our trees, in our yards, and on our ugly sweaters? Do we bring the lights to take away the darkness? Actually, no — that is the Greek, dualistic way.

The Celts saw the light of candles as something that adorns or decorates the darkness in the celebration of it — lights make the

darkness luminous and instill new wonder.

This moment of darkness is the face of a new beginning.

I'm inviting you today to draw near to the Christ, the living God who lives among us, who created rhythm of life in all things.

I'm inviting you to draw near to the darkness, to the rhythms of the natural world to understand the gift of new beginnings.

I'm inviting you to discover the Christ child, who was born as the Prince of Peace not only in some future world, but in the glorious and creative darkness of the here and now.

Merry Christmas!

## **Closing Blessing**

“Now The Work Of Christmas Begins”  
By Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.