

Palestine Lutheran Church 2025

Advent Sundays – 9:30 a.m.

Blessing of Advent Wreath (Nov 30) - Make Wreath Kits
Blessing of the Nativity (Nov 30) – exploring the sacred ordinary
Blessing of Christmas Trees (Dec 7) – Make family ornaments.
Christmas Children's Program (Dec 14) "The Birth of Jesus"

Christmas Celebrations

ROCK Christmas Extravaganza (Dec 6) – 9am-11am
"Cookies to Go"

Senior Tea – Dec 7 after worship – Meal, children choir, Fellowship

Blue Christmas (Longest Night) – Thurs. (Dec 11) @ 7pm @ Trinity United Methodist Church, Huxley

Christmas Program (Dec 14th) @4:30pm – "The Birth of Jesus"
Live & Streaming – Meal and fellowship fundraiser

Christmas Eve Family Service (Dec 24) – 4:00pm (Streaming) & 7:00pm (Acoustic worship)

Christmas Day (Dec 25) – Video message upload on Palestine website (www.plchuxley.com)

Christmas Hymn Festival (Dec 28) "Lessons & Carols" 9:30am

Epiphany Celebration Sunday (Jan 11) – 9:30
Star of Wonder Worship



Holiday Resources @ 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 1st. 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, November 30th 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 25th 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.

Colors of Advent

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



2025 Advent Wreath Kits will be available at Palestine from Nov 30 to assemble.

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.

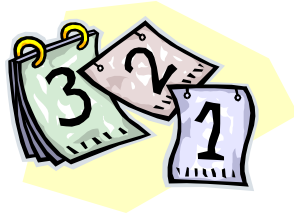
The wreath is primarily green and speaks to the hope of eternal life, recalling that our faith, hope and lives are always alive when they spring from God and his Son. Although the wreath is typically constructed of evergreens, many alternate media may be used to create an Advent Wreath. There are many “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 or purple candles, corresponding to the sanctuary colors of Advent, and one white (pink) candle. Beginning with the first Sunday of Advent, one blue or purple candle is lit. This candle is lit again each remaining Sunday of Advent. On the second Sunday of Advent, a second blue or purple 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 25th 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:

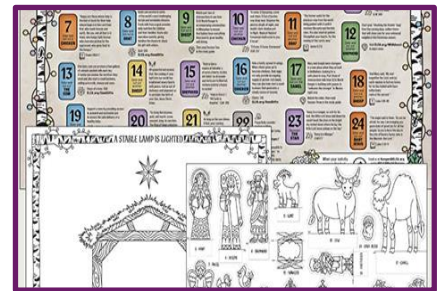
Encourage daily reflection and prayer by handing out adult Advent calendars.

Bring the season home to your families in this convenient and attractive calendar. Scripture verses provide the basis for a brief spiritual reflection for every day of Advent. The blank back is ideal for adding a special message or the dates and times of Advent and Christmas services. This calendar brightens any bulletin board or refrigerator door!

2025 Adult Advent Calendar

Picked up at church office & Fellowship Hall

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.

Gazing Ornament The "gazing globe" are ornaments in gardens which would help servants see if their master was in trouble without looking directly at them. They could use the 'gazing globe" to see who was coming and going around the garden; thus providing a greater awareness of their surroundings. Our gazing globe helps us to be aware of the wonder around us, and remind us of God helping us when we might not always see God directly. Jesus is the gazing globe into which we see the very presence of God with us all the time!

Family Ornament During this year of uncertainty and physical separation due to the pandemic we thank God for the gifts that keep us and sustain us like that of family and friends. Each family represents the network of love and support that God provides whether in person or virtually. This Advent will honor the gift of family and the importance of connection with God and one another.

Hourglass Ornament During this Advent season we are called to wait on the Lord for his presence to be revealed to us on Christmas. As we make this ornament and hang it on our tree, or place it in our prayer space, we are invited to take 2 minutes to pray, listen and prepare ourselves for how God comes to us now in this moment as God did in Jesus at Christmas. We can use this ornament all year long.

Born in Us Bells During this Advent season we pray for Christ to be born in us with blessing, renewal, guidance, and power for our journey into life each day. We will receive a different color bell to add to our ornament each Sunday of Advent to remind us of Christ's living promises and then together on Christmas ring them to announce His birth in us and into the world.

God is With Us! Through Us - During the Advent season, we experience God's presence in the people who bear His Light of grace inside them. Each character of the Christmas story reflects the light of Grace around them as we do every day together.

The Word Made Flesh – Each day of Advent, we encounter the holy in everyday ways. Just as Jesus is the Word, so we might connect God's Word to ordinary things and experiences. Take the journey with Mary and Joseph in this season and look at the ordinary in extra-ordinary ways.

170th Anniversary Ornament of Palestine Lutheran Church – Give one per family
To celebrate 170th Christmas celebration.
(Pick up on the fellowship hall on the small tree)



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

❖ **Christmas Program Sunday, December 14th – The Birth of Jesus @ 5pm**

Christmas Program Rehearsal schedule grades 3-6:

- Sunday, Nov 30th 6:00 p.m. – snack provided
- Wednesday, Dec 3rd 5:30 meal – 6:00 p.m. starts
- Sunday, Dec. 7th 6:00 p.m. – snack provided
- Wednesday, Dec. 10th 5:30 meal – 6:00 p.m. starts
- Sunday, Dec. 14th final practice after worship until 12:00 p.m.
includes all kids pre-k thru grade 6

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

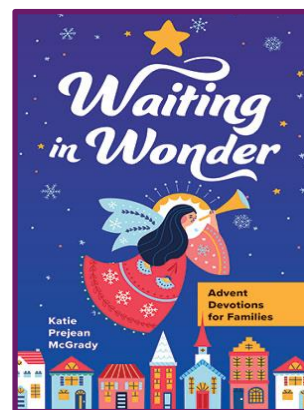
(You can alter this list to fit your situation)

November 30	Prepare an advent wreath and light the first candle
December 1	Count your blessings
December 2	Write a Christmas card and send it to a friend
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 2025**

Waiting in Wonder

Devotions for Advent



Advent is filled with anticipation and wonder and, sometimes, a little impatience! Let's not be too quick to skip over these Advent days, for they hold precious opportunities to learn more about the promises of God and the surprises that come from the joy of the Lord. In this Advent devotionals for families, Katie Prejean McGrady has families ponder and pray through Advent while waiting in wonder for Immanuel, God-with-us. You'll find simple activities to fill the days leading up to Christmas, along with questions to consider and discuss as you anticipate the birth of our Savior, Jesus.

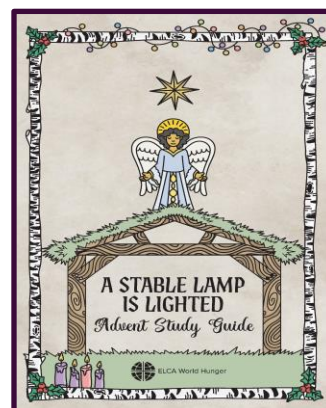
Also available as a digital download from:



Pick Up at Church with Calendars and Wreath Kit

A Stable Lamp Is Lighted

Advent Study Guide for "Intersections: Justice Ministry with ELCA Partners"



This is a three-session study. Each session focuses on one segment of the video, following a different ELCA partner as it fights hunger at its roots. We welcome you to gather family, neighbors and church members to join in, but you can use the study on your own too. All sessions include: Video link here: <https://youtu.be/WNc0z6EJbvE?si=1TBeVlebaRw98Rwc>

- A biblical passage appropriate to Advent and the respective video segment.
- A short introduction to the "Intersections" clip and reflection theme.
- Questions for reflection and discussion. We recommend that you prepare by reading the biblical passage, introduction and questions before watching the clip.
- Resources for action and further learning. Let your learning inspire ministry with your community!



Is a leading statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of children and families by providing comprehensive human services. Founded in 1888, the organization has a long history of adapting its services to meet the evolving needs of lowans, growing from a small adoption agency to a major provider of diverse family support programs. Its core mission is "restoring hope, building futures, and changing lives," operating on the fundamental principle that every child and family deserves to be safe and have the opportunity for a brighter tomorrow.

CFI offers a broad spectrum of accredited and licensed, trauma-informed services across multiple locations, including Des Moines (headquarters), Ankeny, Fort Dodge, Osceola, and Ottumwa. Key program areas include:

- **Behavioral Health:** Providing therapy, counseling, and substance abuse treatment for individuals, couples, and families.
- **Domestic Violence Intervention:** Offering secure shelter, 24/7 hotlines, counseling, and legal advocacy for survivors and their children.
- **Family Support & Preservation:** Services aimed at preventing child abuse, offering parenting classes (e.g., SafeCare, Caring Dads), adoption services, foster care support, and home studies.
- **Youth & Career Development:** Providing childcare and tutoring, juvenile justice supported services for teens referred by the court system, and career planning/work readiness support for at-risk youth and adults facing employment barriers.
- **Financial Management:** Assisting individuals with Social Security benefit management (Payee Services) and offering budgeting help.

As a United Way partner agency, CFI is held to high standards of care and collaborates with hundreds of local organizations and state agencies to deliver holistic support to thousands of lowans annually. The organization emphasizes personal growth,

development, and recovery, offering hope and essential life skills to those navigating significant challenges like poverty, mental illness, addiction, and family turmoil.



FAMILY ADVENT DEVOTIONS 2025 – **ELCA GOOD GIFTS FOR THE HOLIDAY**



School supplies for a classroom

Far too many of the world's children don't go to school because they can't afford the supplies. By providing school books, paper and pencils, you provide the building blocks for a brighter future.

\$300 for classroom of 30, \$10 per child



Each family reads a devotion for the day in Advent and Ad offering to the jar. We will combine the offerings of our church family after Epiphany (Jan 11) and help some children outside of Iowa.



In this worship series for traditional worship for Advent, we contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas, taking cues from the psalms of old and from those whom God chose to play a part in the story of our Lord's birth. As we draw near to the manger bed of our Savior from sin and death, our hearts prepare him room for his everlasting love.

Week 1 (November 30): Ponder (Psalm 48:9): We consider ways in which we can ponder the meaning of the birth of our Savior through the reading of Scripture and through reflection. Mary serves as a model for us in this pondering in the Annunciation.

Week 2 (December 7): Pray (Psalm 69:13): We think about ways in which we can take more time during this season to communicate to our God through prayer as we wait for Christ. Zechariah, who went to the temple to pray, serves as an example for us of how hard that waiting in prayer can be.

Week 3 (December 14): Praise (Psalm 30:4): We celebrate the upcoming arrival of our Savior through songs and shouts of praise as we prepare for him. Elizabeth, in her greeting of Mary, provides a benchmark for rejoicing with others over the good news of salvation in Jesus, even as we wait.

Week 4 (December 21): Proclaim (Psalm 145:6): We contemplate how we can prepare ourselves and others for the arrival of Jesus through our proclaiming. John the Baptist stands as the forerunner of all future proclaimers of Christ and gives us the courage to use our own voices to proclaim our devotion to the One who is born to save.

Birthing Hope & Peace

Advent Candle Blessing Themes



In year A, when we hear the Gospel according to Matthew, the Advent and Christmas readings offer no angelic visitation to Mary, no tender manger scenes, no shepherds watching their flocks by night. Instead, the gospel begins with a recitation of family connections—through the paternal line!—and a stark retelling of events from Joseph’s perspective. What might women contribute to understanding the birth of Jesus as told by Matthew? How might deeper contemplation of Mary and Joseph draw us nearer to the people around us?

In his Christmas sermons, Luther encouraged his congregation to care for the Christ child in their midst. If we could imagine traveling back in time to offer support to Mary, what would we say? How can we offer that kind of unconditional love and care to one another and our neighbors facing unexpected difficulties? Each Advent, we consider anew how to welcome God incarnate. These devotions are intended to offer possibilities for relationship-building within the congregation, and between the congregation and the community.

Candle of Mary

Community, I invite you to join me in a space of imagination and wonder. Today we have some news to share. A young woman is going to be facing some big changes in her life, and it’s complicated. Knowing that we are a community of grace and unconditional love, she’s asked us to support her. She doesn’t yet know everything she needs, but she’s going to have a baby and she needs us. For the next few weeks, she’s asked for our support. It’s important to acknowledge that we all have different experiences and feelings about pregnancy and babies, and we’ll all have different levels of readiness to help someone out. That said, will you as a community go on this journey with Mary and offer comfort, care, and love? We’ll need to learn to breathe with Mary for the labor ahead, we’ll gather all that a baby needs, and we’ll prepare for the tender work of caring for the vulnerable among us.

Candle of Joseph

*Community, I invite you to join me in a space of imagination and wonder.
Family comes about in many different ways: through marriage, through adoption and foster care, through chosen family. Tonight we are asked to support someone who is going through a rough time. His fiancée is pregnant with someone else's baby, and he's wondering what to do.*

Candle of Emmanuel On the Way

*Community, I invite you to join me in a space of imagination and wonder.
With Mary and Joseph, we've heard the word that a baby is on the way. The due date is getting closer, and big changes are coming. Are we ready for the labor? Are we ready to welcome the little one who will change everything?*

Candle of Proclamation

Gracious and merciful God, on this day when Advent is ending and little more can be done by human preparation, I commit to you all my incomplete tasks, my unfulfilled hopes, and my unprepared heart. Lift them from me and give me in exchange peace and serenity to accept the gift of your Word and to hear anew the gospel of the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Christmas Eve Worship 2025

Candle Vigil & Holy Communion "Another First Christmas"



**On Christmas Eve,
join us as we celebrate
and ponder the
humble birth of Jesus
as he rests in a
manger of straw,
though he is the Son
of God. Jesus is the
Word Made Flesh who
is God With Us.
Life will never be the**

Date: Tuesday, Dec. 24th

Time: 4:00 PM (family worship) & 7:00 PM (acoustic worship)

Place: Palestine Lutheran Church



While Advent is a season of hope and Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels hopeful or 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 time. A Longest Night/Blue Christmas service may provide a time and place of solace during the often frenetic days surrounding the celebration of Christmas. We come together seeking healing and room to share grief, sadness, loneliness, or confusion when these emotions often feel out of place during the holidays.



Imaginative Contemplation @ Christmas

“Encountering Jesus in the Gospel Story”

What is Imaginative contemplation?

Imaginative contemplation is all about getting to know Jesus. It is a method of prayer in which you imagine yourself as present in a Gospel scene, stepping into the story and encountering Jesus there. It was St Ignatius' firm belief that God can speak to you just as clearly in your imagination as through your thoughts. This way of praying will help you to see more clearly, love more dearly, and follow more nearly the person of Jesus Christ.

The idea that God can speak to people through their imagination can seem a bit strange. Isn't this just making things up in your head? On the contrary, the imagination is foremost a gift from God in the same way that a person's intellect or memory is a gift from God. Christianity is clear that God speaks to people through the scriptures and the sacraments, through daily experiences and their emotions. If God can do all of these things, He can speak through the imagination too.

How does it help?

Imaginative contemplation is a way of praying that engages your full person: your imagination, your senses, and your heart. St Ignatius believes that this is essential for bringing about interior transformation, by going beyond the intellect, moving from the head to the heart, and meeting Jesus there.

In imagining Jesus and contemplating how He acts in the Gospels, you will also be challenged. The first step is to come to know Jesus Christ, the second is to love Him more, the third is to follow Him and imitate His example of radical love, living it out in your own life.

‘Imagining Christ Our Lord before me on the cross... asking how it came about that the Creator made Himself man, and from eternal life came to temporal death, and thus to die for my sins. Then, turning to myself I shall ask, what have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?’ St Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises

How does it work?

1 - Imagine the place

The first step in an Imaginative Contemplation exercise is setting the scene. So, what is the location? What does it look like? What details do you see? Getting into the

details here will help. For example, here is how St Ignatius writes about beginning a contemplation on the Nativity:

‘Composition, seeing the place. Here it will be to see with the eyes of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, considering the length and breadth of it, whether it is a flat road or goes through valleys or over hills; and similarly to look at the place or grotto of the Nativity, to see how big or small it was, how low or high, and what was in it.’ St Ignatius, Spiritual Exercises

2 - Engage all your senses

Imaginative contemplation goes beyond just what you can see, it requires you to engage all of your senses. In doing this, you can fully immerse yourself into the story; this means exploring what you smell, hear, taste and touch. Once you have filled out your sensory experience of the place, you can move into the ‘action’ of the scene, having finished ‘composing the place’ fully.

3 - Let the scene play out

This is to let the story unfold and to allow yourself to be drawn into what has captured your imagination. Sometimes people are not drawn to the main action of the story but towards other things. When this happens, it is best not to judge that but to allow yourself to follow what you are naturally being drawn to.

It is important to understand that, at this stage, you are not just watching the scene play out as though it is a scene from a movie and you are a viewer. Instead, see yourself as a character inside the story. For example, this is how St Ignatius writes about experiencing the Nativity scene:

‘This is to see the people, i.e. Our Lady, and Joseph, and the servant girl, and the child Jesus after his birth. Making myself into a poor and unworthy little servant, I watch them, and contemplate them, and serve them in their needs as if I were present, with all possible submission and reverence’. St Ignatius, Spiritual Exercises

4 - Open your heart to Jesus

Conclude with a conversation in your imagination between Jesus and yourself, as one friend speaks with another. Express what is in your mind and heart and let Jesus express His responses too.

The Spirit of Christmas

The crowds asked John, "What should we do?" John told them, "If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share it with someone else." Luke 3:10-11 (CEV)

Words are taken from Luke 3:7-11 (NLT).



I	C	P	W	Y	O	H	P	P	S	V	Q	V	S	A
A	G	T	R	F	Q	W	R	R	O	H	G	A	X	F
L	H	O	U	O	K	V	P	L	O	O	I	O	Y	U
C	Z	U	P	R	D	P	U	T	O	V	R	R	O	U
H	Z	F	N	Q	N	U	C	R	X	T	E	T	T	D
U	F	O	F	G	E	E	C	E	U	W	S	E	P	S
I	R	O	Q	M	R	J	D	E	Q	E	R	C	F	D
P	U	D	S	C	N	Y	Q	J	K	A	K	D	E	Q
C	I	U	E	U	F	Y	S	A	H	U	R	H	T	R
I	T	X	M	L	Z	E	N	S	W	A	R	N	E	D
S	I	N	S	I	G	S	I	O	U	W	C	V	Q	P
H	E	X	Z	V	I	S	R	M	T	W	O	I	W	A
K	E	O	A	E	V	B	F	C	R	O	W	D	S	Q
T	O	A	R	L	E	D	R	E	P	E	N	T	N	O
Z	G	L	Q	O	H	B	O	B	A	P	T	I	S	M

baptism	give	poor	share	tree
crowds	good	produce	shirts	turned
food	hungry	prove	sins	two
fruit	live	repent	snakes	warned

Ready for the Christ of Christmas

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Matthew 3:1-2 (NIV)







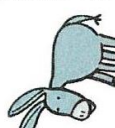





Based on Matthew 3:1-12









JOHN THE BAPTIST

W L U Z M H V J O J Q V Q S U
 I Y V S L O G N K M D B H A K
 K C T X T N M R H K Y T E X X
 C I X J T E Z Y J T A E S L E
 P N N Y Y Y A S L P P T R Z T
 R B M G J W I L D G S U E S Q
 E D A H D H A I R U X G P T C
 P Z O P Y O U S C E N U E R F
 A T O Q T W M O H I N J N A F
 R Z S G N I L O H L R L T I M
 E Z J N P O Z C P N E P Y G P
 E S P O A E A E H M N N Z H C
 L O R D H E M T A F T Q X T Y
 J W K K R N J C U Y C T Q T U
 I X E P F N M H L D Z D E N I

LORD	PREPARE	KINGDOM	JOHN	HAIR
BAPTIZE	STRAIGHT	PATHS	PREACHING	WILD
REPENT	LOCUSTS	HONEY	CAMEL	BELT

<p>1</p>  <p>"God Sent the angel Gabriel to a girl named Mary." Luke 1:26</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>"The angel said to her, 'Don't be afraid, because God is very pleased with you.'" Luke 1:30</p>	<p>3</p> <p>★ "Listen! You will become pregnant and have a baby boy. You will name him Jesus." Luke 1:31 ★</p>	<p>4</p>  <p>"He will be great. People will call him the Son of the Most High God." Luke 1:32</p>
<p>5</p> <p>★ "Mary Said, 'I am the Lord's servant. Let this thing you have said happen to me!'" Luke 1:38</p>	<p>6</p>  <p>"Caesar sent out an order... that everyone's name must be put on a list." Luke 2:1</p>	<p>7</p>  <p>"Everyone traveled to their hometowns to have their name put on the list." Luke 2:3</p>	<p>8</p> <p>"So Joseph went to the town of David because he was from the family of David. Joseph registered with Mary." Luke 2:4-5</p> 
<p>9</p> <p>"While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. She gave birth to her first son." Luke 2:6-7</p> 	<p>10</p> <p>★ "There were no rooms left in the inn. So she wrapped the baby with cloths and laid him in a box where animals are fed." Luke 2:7 ★</p>	<p>11</p>  <p>"That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep." Luke 2:8</p>	<p>12</p> <p>"An angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them." Luke 2:9</p> 
<p>13</p> <p>"The angel said to them, 'Don't be afraid, because I am bringing you some GOOD News!'" Luke 2:10</p> 	<p>14</p>  <p>"Today your Savior was born in David's town. He is Christ, the Lord." Luke 2:11</p>	<p>15</p>  <p>"This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding box." Luke 2:12</p>	<p>16</p> <p>★ "All the angels were praising God, saying, 'Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please God.'" Luke 2:13-14 ★</p>

<p>"So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby." Luke 2:16-17</p> 	<p>"Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God and thanking him for everything that they had seen & heard." Luke 2:20</p> 	<p>★ "After Jesus was born, some wise men came from the east." Matthew 2:1</p> <p>★</p>	<p>"When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy." Matthew 2:10</p> 
<p>"They went to the house... and they bowed down and worshiped the child." Matthew 2:11</p> 	<p>"They gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Matthew 2:11</p> 	<p>★ "A child will be born to us. God will give a son to us. His name will be... Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6</p> <p>★</p>	<p>"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life." John 3:16</p> 

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