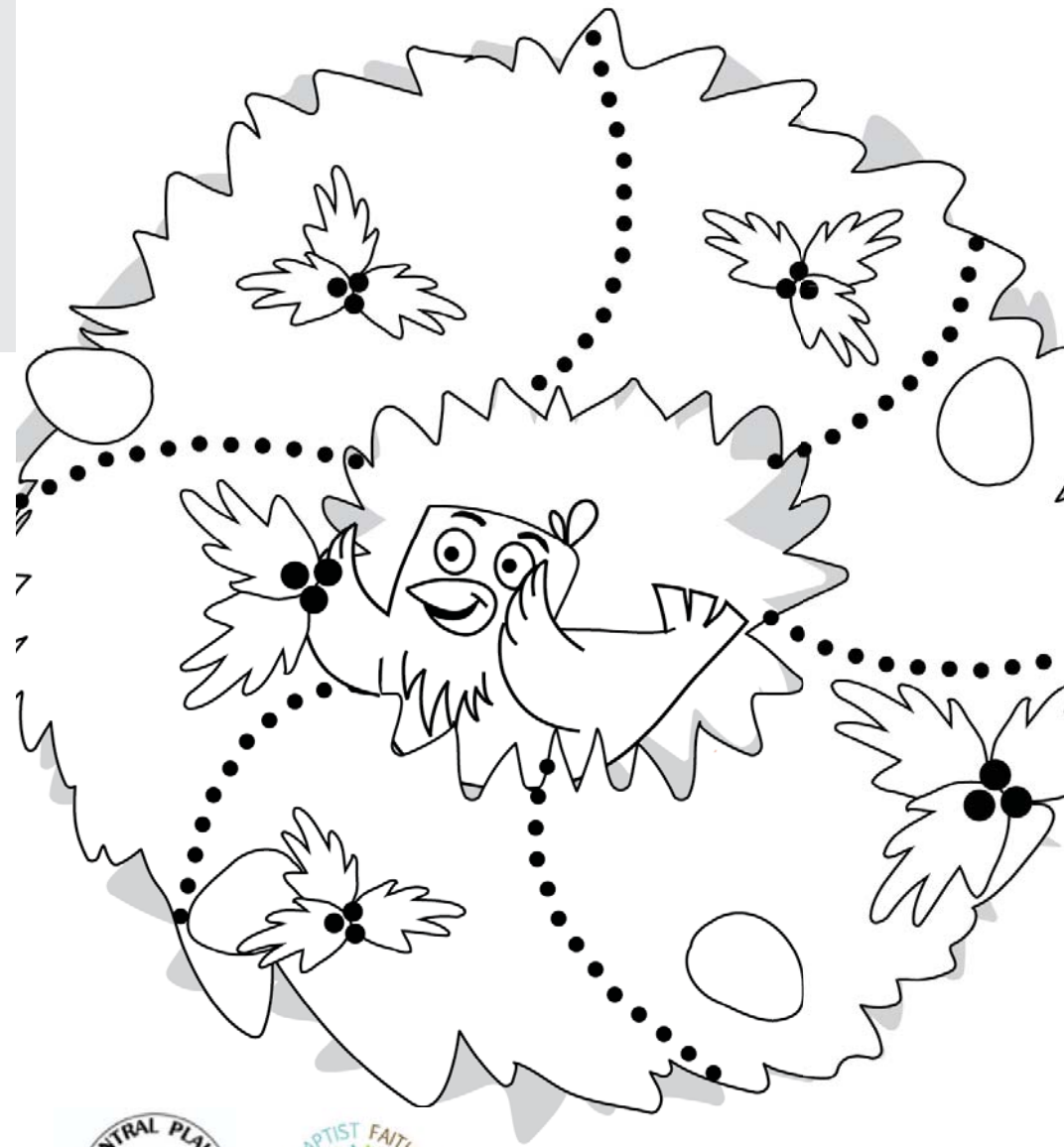


YES! LET IT BE!

Advent At-Home 2017

If you found this material helpful, or would like to tell us how you used it, please send a note to Elsie Rempel at elsiewrites1@gmail.com or to Shana Peachey Boshart at shanaboshart@centralplainsmc.org 319-936-5905

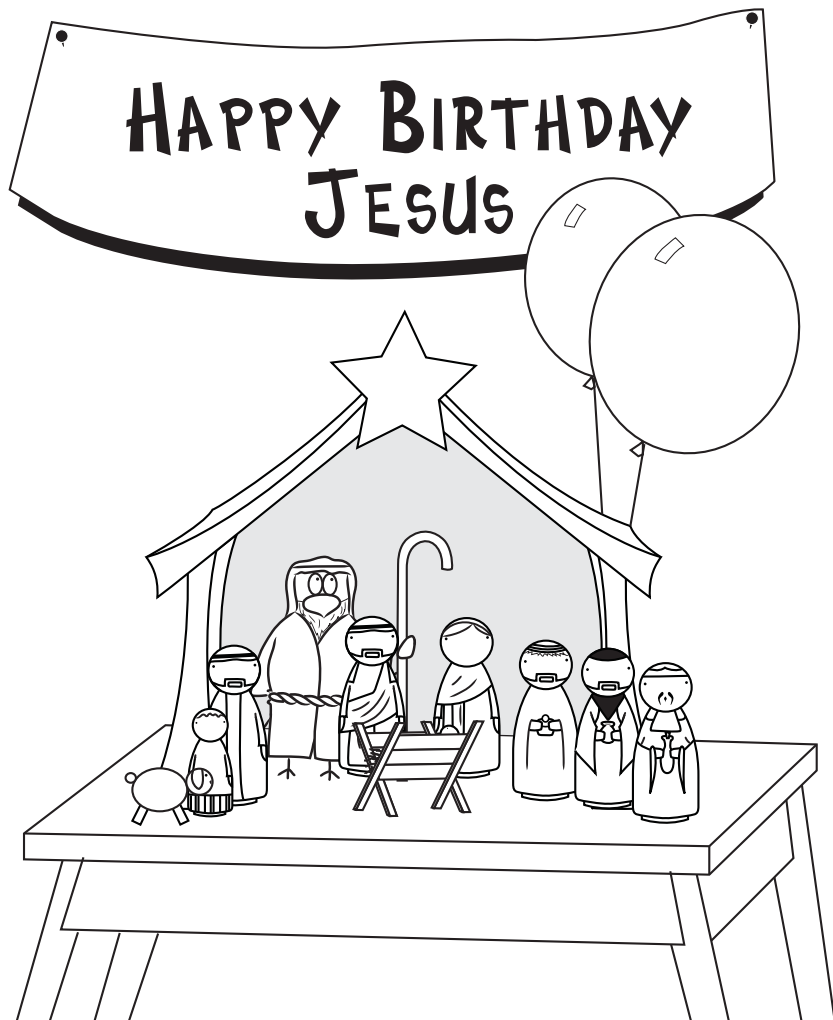


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Christmas home worship:

1. Light the Christ candle in your worship centre for the first time, and light a candle on a birthday cake for Jesus. Sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, or other appropriate carols.
2. Bring Mary and Joseph from the path into the stable. Gently place the baby Jesus into the crèche, then add the angels, and bring the shepherds into the stable. Save adding the wise men for a date closer to Epiphany.
3. Sing, or listen to, an appropriate carol as you carry out each of these actions.
4. You may want to sleep in the living room on Christmas Eve, near the poster, the crèche, and the tree, as a way of identifying with Mary and Joseph sleeping in an unusual place this night. If you have been collecting hay in your "God's change bin," use that as part of your bedding.
5. Share travel stories with each other that help you identify with Mary and Joseph's trip to Bethlehem.
6. Repeat or create your own special rituals and traditions to mark the importance of "Let it be" and "Emmanuel – God with us."



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Introduction

During this season of Advent, our worship resources remind us to identify with Mary as she received the Holy Spirit and prepared to mother Jesus. With Mary we will ponder and prepare for what it means to receive Jesus and to partner with the Holy Spirit, who will prepare our hearts and minds to join God's good dream for the world God has entrusted to us.

Advent connects us with those who waited for the Messiah in the Hebrew scriptures, with all who celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and in their hearts, and with all who wait for Christ's second coming when all creation will be restored to God.

The prayers and activities in this booklet are adapted from the Worship resources developed for the Advent 2017 – 18 season by Leader Magazine for Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

Use the resource whatever way best fits into your home's routines and life stage realities. If your family has younger children, feel free to simplify, shorten and paraphrase the prayers and pondering thoughts. Repeat the weekly litany each day of the week, moving through the list of daily Scriptures. Or, use the *Early Childhood Birth Narrative* ritual, downloadable at www.commonword.ca/go/137

The **pondering questions** foster a contemplative attitude of listening to the nudging

Activities to choose from

1. Complete your Advent/Christmas Poster by adding sparkly glue or other glitter to highlight the celebration and sharing of God's love for all.
2. Retell the story of Mary and Joseph hiding in Egypt with Jesus to keep him safe while you clean up and put away the crèche and the other objects that have helped you celebrate Christmas. This will add a spiritual meaning to cleaning up for young and concrete thinkers.
3. Read a book that shows the wideness of God's welcoming wisdom, such as *The Golden Rule*, by Ilene Cooper, ill. by Gabi Swiatkowska, NY, Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2007. Available at CommonWord: www.commonword.ca/go/1206
4. Add to your Family Advent journal by writing or drawing from the wise men's point of view. You may want to finish it with a reflective comment by each member of your family.
5. Share God's love by welcoming a foreign student or lonely neighbour into your home.
6. Give a gift to the birds that have stayed around for winter. Welcome them to your yard by putting up or refilling a birdfeeder with suet and seeds.
7. Make a plan with the members of your household to find new ways of letting God's love work in you, now that the Christmas–Epiphany season is over.



Yes! Let it be declared!

Epiphany week

Call to Worship (Speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: Come, let God's light draw you like it did the magi. May we, like them, seek you until we find you and offer you our gifts. Yes! Let your mystery be declared.

Candle lighter: (*Light and review the meaning of the Advent and Christ candles. Then say:*) We light this candle of your epiphany, to declare your home among all your people.

Listening to God's Word: Read and reflect on through these daily texts: Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Isaiah 60:1-3, 4-6; Matthew 2:1-12; Ephesians 3:1-6, 7-12.

Pondering thoughts to choose from

- I wonder about the ways God is present and active among different faiths and peoples.
- I wonder if the wise men were able to see God's face in the stars as they followed it to Bethlehem.
- I wonder how we reflect God's welcome in our homes and congregations.

Sing or play: HWB 318 *Joy to the world*, STJ 95 *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*, STS 39 *Will You Come and Follow Me*, HWB 401 *This Little Light of Mine*

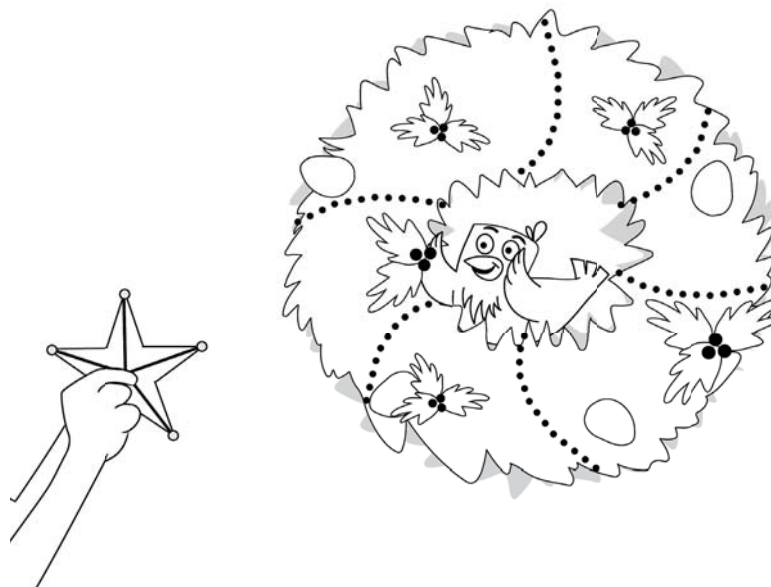
Prayer: Thank you, God, that you make us strong to trust you and to share with those we know that you are important in our lives. You make us special because your plan for us is the best. In the midst of family we say (three times): "Let it be, let it be, let it be." Amen.

Candle snuffer: (*Lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise. Say:*) This smoke reminds us of the Spirit of God spreading God's love all over our homes, churches, and the world. Amen.

Creating Holy Space and Time in your Home

The following items can help make a holy space in your home and your hearts for Christ this Advent and Christmas season. Feel free to adapt them to suit your home.

1. Theme Poster: "Yes! Let it be." Create a poster of colour 'splashes'. Write the theme with bold letters in the centre of a large sheet of poster-board. Use a sponge (irregular or star shaped) to sponge the colours on for each week, colours that show the movement from darkness to light: dark purple, dark blue, violet, dark orange-red, orange, yellow. You might want to layer these in a rainbow fashion, or be inspired by more detailed church banner instructions at www.leaderonline.org.
2. Advent Lights: Create an advent log by attaching six candles to a small log or use an existing wreath of four with a taller Christ candle in the centre.
3. A Nativity Set: If you don't have one, create a simple A-frame with rough lumber or bark and add toys or play dough figures to the scene throughout the season.
4. A family Advent journal: The activities section will have a reflective question for each week's theme. If you haven't kept a journal before, consider starting one for this season.
5. Mennonite Hymnals such as *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (HWB), *Sing the Story* (STS) and *Sing the Journey* (STJ).
6. A Bible and this booklet. (NRSV has a lovely illustrated children's Bible.)



Yes, Let it be

First Advent

Call to Worship (Speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: God, you invite us to carry light into the world's darkness. This is scary. How can we carry your blazing light? But, God, help us not be frightened by this invitation, so we can say, "Let it be," like Mary did.

Candle lighter: We light this first Advent candle as a reminder to join up with God's light.

Listening to God's Word: How is God's light present in these texts? Isaiah 64:1-4, 5-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-31, 32-36

Pondering thoughts to choose from

- I wonder how light and darkness help us know God?
- I wonder where we will see signs of God's light in our lives this week.
- How does looking for God's light change what we see?

Songs for the week: STJ 105 *Don't Be Afraid*, STS 48 *I Will Come to You in the Silence*, HWB 172 *O Come, O Come, Immanuel*.

Closing Prayer: (Use echo form or ask one person to prepare and read this prayer.)
Whenever we are frightened, may we remember that Jesus' invitation to walk with him is a call to courage, and that God's Spirit can make us bold to do the hard right things.
Amen.

Candle snuffer: *Lift the candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise. Say:* This smoke reminds us of the bold presence of God's Spirit spreading out all over our world, even when we can't see it.

Activities to choose from

1. Continue your Advent poster by sponging on the yellow colour for the fifth week, building on your chosen design.
2. Listen to or make music that helps you praise God for giving us Jesus.
3. Talk about how God's love has become new to you through your neighbours. Then tell them, or send them a note about what you've noticed and about the ways you have celebrated Advent and Christmas.
4. Continue your family Advent journal by writing as Anna and Simeon, or draw cartoons of them.
5. Go for a walk or ride into the countryside and think about how the land and plant and animal life belongs to God. Rewrite Psalm 148 to include local sights that glorify God.
6. Send notes of thanks to people in your church family who have worked hard to help you celebrate God's renewing love during Advent.
7. Plan a party and invite people from your neighbourhood to attend. Playing games that help you renew your friendship could help you talk about God's renewing love.
8. See Christmas home worship on page 16 for additional suggestions.



Let it be new!

Christmas 1

Call to Worship (Speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: Come and praise the Lord from the heavens, from the heights, with the sun and the moon, and with the angels!

Candle lighter: (*Light and review the meaning of the four Advent candles. Then say:*) As we light this fifth candle and the Christ candle, we celebrate Jesus, through whom God makes all things new.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's renewing ways with these daily texts: Luke 2: 21-24, 25-32, 33-40; Isaiah 61:10-11; 62:1-3; Psalm 148: 1-6; 7-14.

Pondering thoughts to choose from

- I wonder what celebrating Jesus, like Simeon and Anna did, is like.
- I wonder what was most amazing about the birth of Jesus.
- I wonder how God's coming to us in Jesus renews us to bless others..

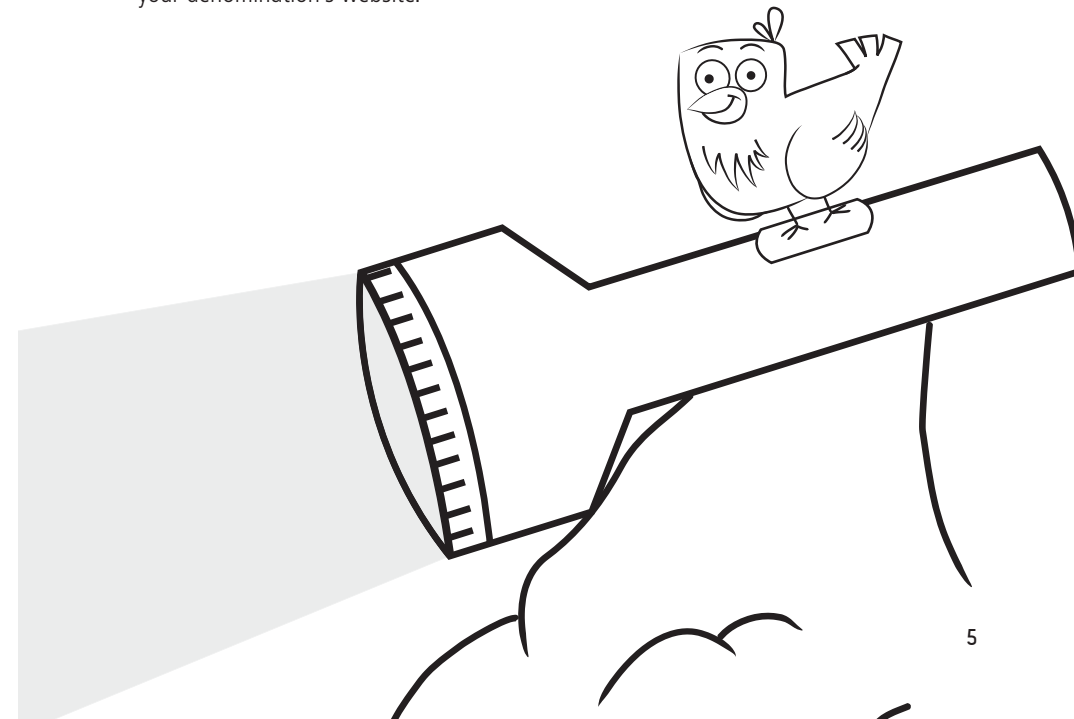
Sing or Play: STJ 13 *My Soul Is Filled with Joy*, STJ 31 *He Came Down*, HWB 210 *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice* and other favourites

Closing Prayer: God, we praise you for being our friend, for planning our salvation, and for knowing us. Your plan for us is wonderful, and we continue to say (ask children, "What do we say together?"): "Let it be!"

Candle snuffer: (*Lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise. Say:*) This smoke reminds us of God's saving friendship spreading out over our homes, churches, and the world. Amen.

Activities to choose from

1. Begin your Advent poster by writing the theme, "Yes! Let it be!" in the middle of a large sheet of poster board. Use a sponge (it could be cut in the shape of a star, or flower) to sponge on dark purple colours for the first week, perhaps as an arc at the poster base.
2. Start setting up a Christmas crèche. Begin with the figures of those who were waiting for the Messiah.
3. Begin your family Advent journal by reflecting on Mary as she responded to the Angel's visit with her "Let it be" and then to God's son stirring inside of her. Write as Mary, or draw cartoons of her.
4. Hide signs of God's light for each other. Look for them and bring them to the supper table to share with others. (As a young boy, St. Nicholas tried to help people secretly as a sign of his love for Jesus.)
5. Plant crocus bulbs near the walls of a see-through pot that is at least 20 cm deep. Wrap the pot so the bulbs remain in darkness, but so that you can peek to see that things are happening while the bulb is hidden in the soil but stretching toward the light. They should greet you next February.
6. Use modelling or potter's clay to express what people in your family discover as signs of God's light.
7. Choose a way of joining in God's activity by picking a family service or gift project from your denomination's website.



Let it be so!

Second Advent

Call to Worship (Speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members)

Leader: God calls us to help smooth the way through wild, rough and rugged places. This sounds so hard! So God, quiet and strengthen our hearts by leading us into your presence.

Candle lighter: *Light and review the meaning of the first candle.* Then say: We light this second Advent candle as a reminder that your light can change rough places so they welcome you.

Listening to God's Word: God's coming changes the rough places in our lives. Reflect on it through these daily texts: Isaiah 40:1-5, 6-11; Psalm 85:8-13; Luke 1:5-14, 57-66; Mark 1:1-8; 2 Peter 3: 8-15.

Pondering thoughts to choose from

- I wonder how the images in today's reading show God changing things.
- I wonder which words invite us to join in with the changes God wants today.
- I wonder how joining with God will change the rough parts of our lives today.

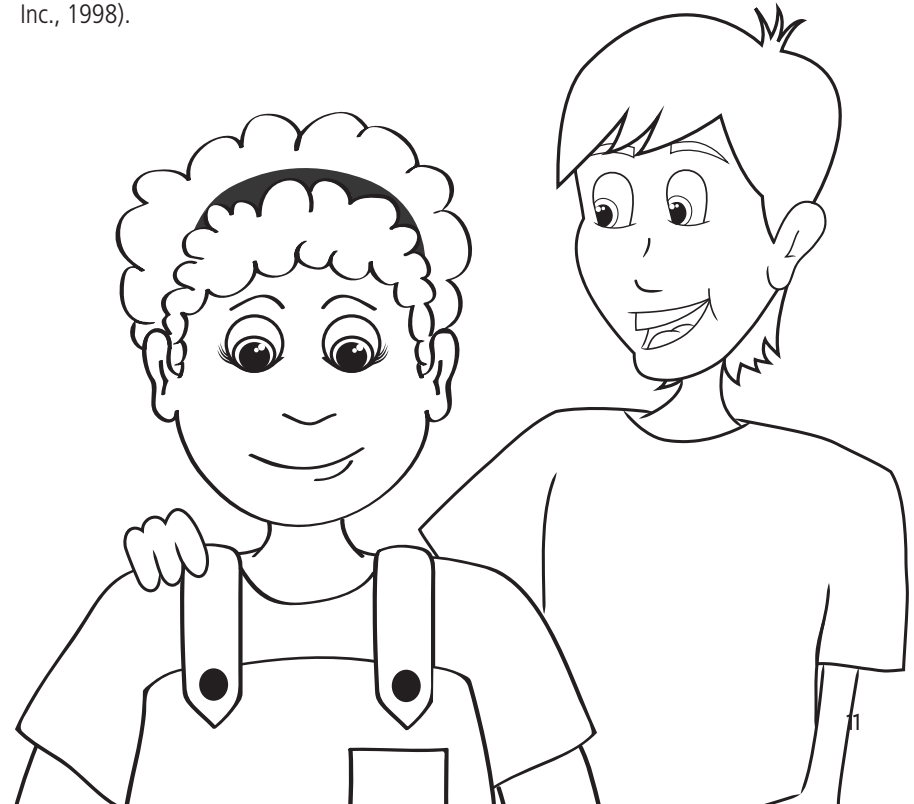
Songs for the week: HWB 178 *Come, thou long-expected Jesus*, STJ 100 *Here I Am*, STS 124 *My Soul Cries Out*

Closing Prayer: May our ordinary lives be filled with the power of your Word and be changed by your grace. Help us all say and feel, "Let it be so." May the light of Christ dwell within us, and may we see clearly the path the Spirit is blazing for us. Amen.

Candle snuffer: (*Lift the candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise. Then say:*) This smoke reminds us of God's light changing rough things all over our world, even when we can't see it.

Activities to choose from

1. Continue your Advent poster by sponging on the orange colour for the fourth week, building on your chosen design.
2. Add a special Jesus stocking to your other Christmas decorations. Invite guests and family members to donate money to this stocking. Add these proceeds to your Advent project and collect it as your gift for Jesus.
3. Practise Mary's song of praise, help each other recite it from memory this week, or, sing it from STJ 13.
4. Continue your family Advent journal by drawing a maze for the path to Bethlehem. Get family members to pretend their fingers are the donkey and challenge them to help the donkey get Mary to Bethlehem. Will they meet any poor shepherds on the way?
5. Recall and share stories of how people in your congregation have learned to love what God loves.
6. Memorize the Luke 2 passage as a family by hiding written portions of the text under the dinner plates on your table. Look under your plates before you put food into them and read them in correct order each day.
7. Read some Christmas story picture books. Then act them out in your home with simple props and costumes. One good option is *Jacob's Gift* by Max Lucado, (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998).



Let it be now!

Fourth Advent

Call to Worship (Speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: Come, worship God, who chooses to dwell within us. God, you promise to move about with us until we find our rest in you. You came to us because your love for us was strong. We want to respond with (*ask children to say with you*): "Let it be!" Amen.

Candle lighter: *Light and review the meaning of the first three candles. Then say:* We light this fourth Advent candle to remember that God's loving light in our lives helps us see and love all that God loves.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's lifting the lowly and changing the world's order with these daily texts: 2 Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 89:1-4, and 19-24; Romans 16:25-27; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; 47-55; (Christmas Eve) Luke 2:1-20.

Pondering thoughts to choose from

- I wonder how David, Mary, and Joseph felt God in their lives.
- I wonder how God moves with people to prepare them for special tasks.
- I wonder for what tasks God is preparing our family.

Sing or play: STJ 57 *Mayenziwe (Your Will Be Done)*, HWB 189 *To Us a Child of Hope Is Born*, HWB 209 *Oh, How Joyfully*

Closing Prayer: God, we find it hard to say "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Give us the courage through your Spirit and help us go with you and fearlessly share the grace of Christ. Amen.

Candle snuffer: (*Lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise. Say:*) This smoke reminds us of the Spirit of God overshadowing us and filling us with courageous love.

Activities to choose from

1. Continue your Advent poster by sponging on the violet colour for the second week, following the design you began in week 1.
2. Add to your Christmas crèche. Add 'grassy' hills and a 'stream' for the shepherds and think of how they cared for their sheep in rough places.
3. Continue your family Advent journal by reflecting on how Mary's older cousin, Elizabeth, could have responded to this week's readings. Write as Elizabeth, or draw cartoons of her.
4. Prepare for a change in your home and begin preparing a bed of hay for a Christmas Eve sleep under the tree. Get some hay and place a piece of it into a "God's change bin" each time you notice someone making a good change in how they treat others.
5. Enjoy a picture book, such as Deborah Froese's, *Mr. Jacobson's Window*, (2013, Peanutbutter Press.ca), that shows us how God's light shines into and smooths out some rough places. www.commonword.ca/go/418
6. Make a list of ways we can smooth out rough places for others. Remember your Advent giving project that can help children of God who are in rough places.



Let it be whole!

Third Advent

Call to Worship (Speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: Come worship our God, who has promised to replace the ashes of the past with garlands of beauty. God, lead us beyond our fears, and guide us on the path to peace.

Candle lighter: (*Light and review the meaning of the first two candles. Then say:*) We light this third Advent candle to remember the way God's presence transforms fear into courage in our world.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on how God creates beauty from brokenness in these daily texts: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; Luke 1:46-55; 57-66; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23; John 1:6-8, 19-28.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- What kinds of changes do you think God wants in our world?
- How does our God of peace help us change brokenness to beauty in our neighbourhoods?
- Imagine how your home, your congregation, and the world would change if everyone lived God's way.

Sing or play: STS 3 *Come, Light of the World*, STS 12 *Magnificat*, HWB 299 *New Earth, Heavens New*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for choosing us. We know you see the beauty in each of us. We want to let you choose us in your kingdom work. We say, (*together*), "Let it be!" Amen.

Candle snuffer: *Lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise. Say:* This smoke reminds us of the Spirit of God going out to restore what is broken, and helping us be willing partners with God.

Activities to choose from

1. Continue your Advent poster by sponging on the dark red-orange colour for the third week, following the design you began in week 2.
2. Add to your Christmas crèche by making sure everything in the stable is fixed and ready for the coming visitors.
3. Celebrate the joy of looking forward to Jesus' birth by memorizing Mary's song of praise from Luke 1:46-55.
4. Continue your family Advent journal by reflecting on how Joseph might have felt about this week's readings. Write as Joseph, or draw cartoons of him.
5. Fix an unused toy and give it to the local thrift store or charity—or offer a favourite toy to someone whom you know would appreciate it.
6. Write and send a letter to your political representative that encourages him/her to help make things right and help change some brokenness into beauty.
7. Reflect on and give thanks for things in your family and congregation where God's way has changed brokenness into beauty.

