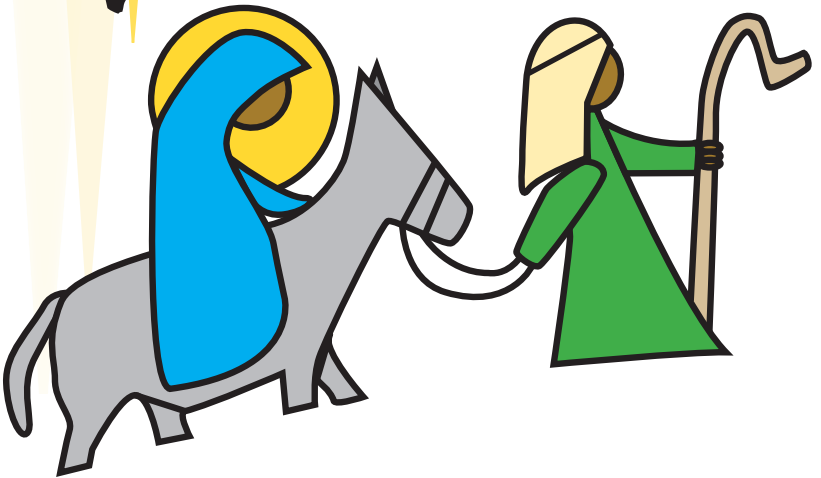




WAITING AND WONDERING



**Mennonite
Church
USA**

Advent 2019 to Epiphany 2020
At Home Worship Guide

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We would love to hear how you are using this material, and we are interested in your suggestions for making it more useful and accessible. Please write to Elsie Rempel at elsiewrites1@gmail.com and Shana Peachey Boshart at shanapb@mennoniteusa.org.

These abbreviations in the text refer to the following song collections by Herald Press:

HWB = Hymnal Worship Book

STJ = Sing the Journey

STS = Sing the Story

Advent to Epiphany At Home 2019

December 1, 2019 through January 6, 2020

Lectionary Cycle A

Written by Elsie Rempel

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INTRODUCTION

by Elsie Rempel

Advent means “coming” or “arrival.” In this spirit of expectancy, we seek to connect families in our congregations with God’s ways, celebrating the Kingdom which is already among us and is still coming more fully.

Because this year’s texts explore questions people have had for God, we focus on questions people still have today. God welcomes our curiosity; God welcomes our questions. God listens. Wondering questions open up theological activity in even very young minds and this guide encourages them.

This Advent season, we invite you to bring your questions to God and respond to God’s questions with these themes: Our wait begins, Getting ready while we wait, Kept waiting by fear, Worth the wait, Time to get a move on, and Unable to go back the way we came!

The prayers and activities in this booklet are adapted from the worship resources developed by the Advent 2019 writing team from Mennonite Church Manitoba for *Leader* magazine. Subscribe to *Leader* through your congregation or visit online at www.mennomedia.org (MC USA) or www.mennomedia.ca (MC Canada).

Use this worship guide in 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. Your family might also enjoy the Early Childhood Birth Narrative Ritual at www.commonword.ca/go/137.

The pondering questions are meant to help your family listen to the nudging of the Holy Spirit. Feel free to share your thoughts aloud or ponder these thoughts in your heart as Mary did.

CREATING HOLY SPACE & 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. **A Theme Poster:** Title the poster "Waiting and Wondering". Begin your poster by drawing or stamping a series of question marks in the center, perhaps even creating the shape of a Christmas tree with them. Draw background lines from behind the center to create six segments to fill in the six weeks.
2. **Advent Candles and Wreath:** This guide includes the lighting and snuffing of candles. Lit candles are a traditional sign of Christ's presence. Also, children love to light candles and blow them out! Find four candles of the same size plus one "Christ candle" that is a bit larger or fancier. A simple arrangement of candles in inexpensive holders on a plate with greenery around them works well.
3. **A Simple Crèche:** If you don't have one, create a simple A-frame with rough lumber or bark and add appropriate toy 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 Worship Book (HWB), Sing the Journey (STJ), and Sing the Story (STS).
6. **A Bible and this booklet.**

OUR WAIT BEGINS

WEEK 1 – ADVENT ONE

Call to Worship: Oh God, our God, we cry out to you and wonder, “What are you waiting for?” We call on you in our longing and waiting. Wake us up, gather us into your goodness, and bring us your peace. We worship you.

Candle lighter: (light the first candle, then say) This first Advent candle reminds us to wait and join with the good things God longs for.

Leader: Blessed be our God, who invites us to wait and walk in the light of the Lord!

Listening to God’s Word: Reflect on God’s dream through these texts this week: Isaiah 2: 1 – 5, Psalm 122: 1 – 5, 6 – 9, Romans 13: 11 – 14, Matthew 24: 36 – 44, Luke 1: 26 – 38, 39 – 45.

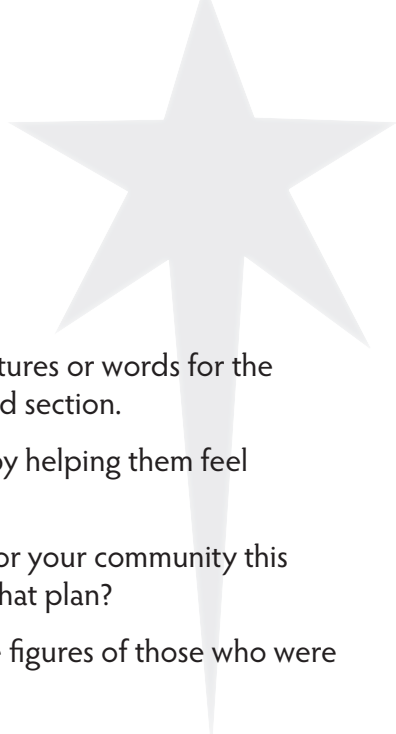
Pondering thoughts

- What questions did you notice in today’s reading?
- I wonder what they were longing for.
- I wonder what things God longs for in my life.

Sing or play: STS 3 *Come, Light of the World*, STS 10 *Come! Walk in the Light*

Prayer: In our longings and fears, may the God of peace carry us, bind us together, and make us ready for God’s breaking in of peace.

Candle snuffer: May God’s longing for peace shine in and through us, even as we blow out this candle. Amen.



Activities to choose from

1. Create the title for your poster and add pictures or words for the things you really long for in the first background section.
2. Respond to someone else's deep longings by helping them feel accepted and loved.
3. Imagine what God's longing for creation is for your community this Advent. How can your celebrations fit in with that plan?
4. Start setting up a Christmas crèche. Add the figures of those who were waiting for the Messiah.
5. Start out on God's Advent path by trying to look at your home and neighborhood with God's eyes. Record the things you notice your Family Advent journal.
6. When you wake up, ask yourself if you dreamed about something for which you are waiting. Think about it and then tell your family about your dream when you gather around the Advent wreath.
7. Find a project that helps you respond to God's longings that make a difference for families and congregations in Israel/Palestine this Advent. Invite other families to join your giving project.

GETTING READY WHILE WE WAIT

WEEK 2 – ADVENT TWO

Call to Worship: What are you waiting for, O God? When will you heal creation, defend the poor, deliver the needy? God hears our cries and calls to us with hope. Listen for God's invitation.

Candle lighter: (light the first and second candles, then say)
The second candle reminds us that God wants us to get ready and hope for healing while we wait.

Leader: God, we pray for our eyes to be opened to your hopes for our world. Fill our hearts with hope for your kingdom to come.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's hopes in these daily texts: Isaiah 11: 1 – 10; Psalm 72: 1 – 7, 18-19; Romans 15: 4 – 13; Matthew 1: 18 – 25; Luke 1: 57 – 66; 67 – 80; Matthew 3: 1 – 12.

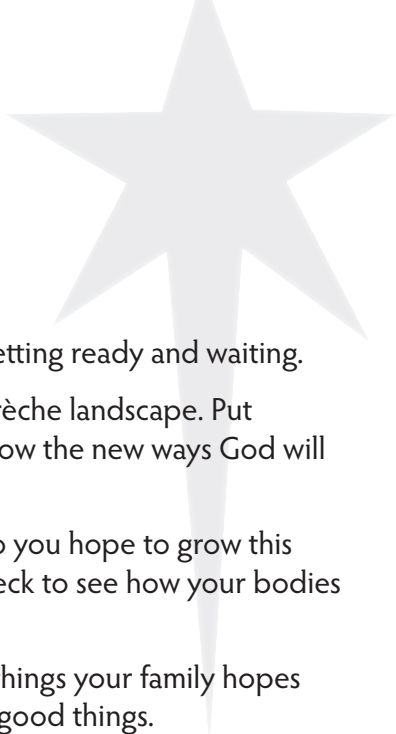
Pondering thoughts

- I wonder what it meant to wait for God in these Bible verses.
- I wonder when enemies will learn to co-operate and become friends.
- I wonder how God's ideas can bring hope into your lives this Advent?

Sing or play: STS 62 *Create in me a clean heart* and STS 15 *Hope is a candle*.

Prayer: May the God of patience and hope share that patience and hope with us. May we trust in and respond to the One who makes all things new.

Candle snuffer: May God's patient hope keep growing in and through us, even as we blow out this candle. Amen.



Activities to choose from

1. On your poster, add words or pictures of getting ready and waiting.
2. Add small toy animals and bushes to your crèche landscape. Put animals that are natural enemies together to show the new ways God will make possible one day.
3. Measure to see how tall you are. How tall do you hope to grow this year? Mark these heights in a place you can check to see how your bodies are growing.
4. In your Advent journal, make a list of good things your family hopes for. Encourage each other to live toward these good things.
5. Write a letter or send an e-mail to your political representative that expresses your hopes for our world.
6. Grow bean or alfalfa sprouts between moist paper towels to wait to enjoy the way God makes things grow. How is caring for sprouts like living into our hopes?
7. Get together with your neighbors, or another family from your church, to share hope in a nearby seniors' home or food bank.

KEPT WAITING BY FEAR

WEEK 3 – ADVENT THREE

Call to Worship: O Lord, what are we waiting for? Why are we afraid? We see our need for your strength and courage in the middle of our fears and come to worship you.

Candle lighter: (light the first, second and third candles, then say)
The third candle reminds to trust God even when we are afraid.

Leader: God, we know you are always there for us. Help us to trust you and with our fears and do the courageous things that need doing.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's encouraging power with these daily texts: Isaiah 35: 1 – 7, 8 – 10, Psalm 146: 5 – 10, Luke 1: 39 – 56, James 5: 7 – 10, Matthew 11: 2 – 6, 7 – 11.

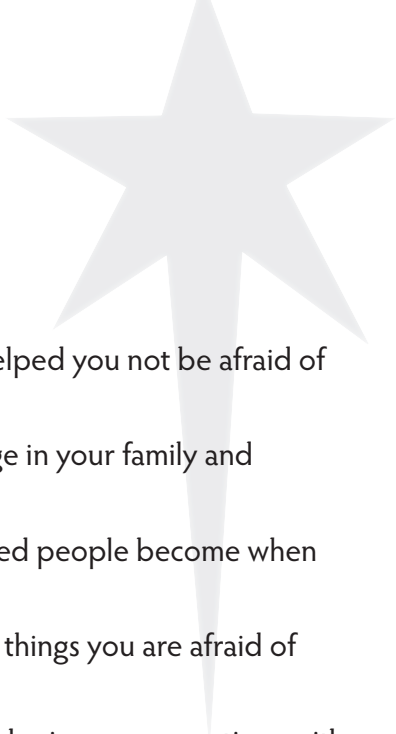
Pondering thoughts

- I wonder what kind of fear was at work in these Bible verses.
- I wonder what life would be like if everyone trusted God to help them with their fears.
- I wonder what fear you would like God to help you with.

Sing or play: STS 28 *Holy Child within the manger* and STJ 97 *The Lord is my light*.

Prayer: Help us remember you are the good God of all creation and rejoice when your people overcome their fears to do the right thing.

Candle snuffer: May God's courageous love work in and through us we wait for God's way in our world, even as we blow out this candle. Amen.



Activities to choose from

1. Add words or pictures of things God has helped you not be afraid of anymore.
2. Think thankfully about signs of God's courage in your family and congregation.
3. Draw a picture about how hopeful frightened people become when they receive God's help.
4. In your family Advent journal, make a list of things you are afraid of and ask God to help you face those fears.
5. Practice waiting patiently for Christmas by sharing your questions with each other.
6. Add figures to your crèche for people who live in fear and pray for them.
7. As you bake Christmas goodies and prepare gifts, share some of these with people who have less than your family.

WORTH THE WAIT!

WEEK 4 – ADVENT FOUR

Call to Worship: Oh God, our God, we cry out to you. Will we follow the child you sent to lead us? Will we no longer be afraid, but be restored? Restoring God, we worship you.

Candle lighter: (light the first, second, third and fourth candles, then say) The fourth candle reminds us of a night long ago when waiting was interrupted by the birth of Emmanuel, the one worth waiting for.

Leader: Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's restoring power with these daily texts: Isaiah 7: 10 – 16, Psalm 80: 1 – 7, 14 – 19, Romans 1: 1 – 7, Matthew 1: 18 – 25 (Christmas Eve), Luke 2: 1 – 7 (Christmas Day), Luke 2: 8 – 20.

Pondering thoughts

- I wonder how these Hebrew Scriptures helped Mary and Joseph wait as Jesus' birth drew near.
- I wonder which of these Bible verses you liked best.
- I wonder which of these Bible verses is most important for you.

Sing or play: HWB 202 *The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy*, STS 4 *Rejoice, Rejoice, the Savior Comes*, and other favorites from HWB this week (189 – 214).

Prayer: Emmanuel, God-with-us, help us look around, see what God has done and is doing, and know God is really with us. Help us stay with you always.

Candle snuffer: May Jesus help us know God is with us always, even as we blow out this candle. Amen.



Activities to choose from

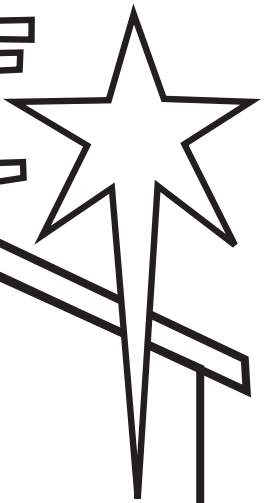
1. Fill in the fourth background section of your poster with pictures or words that show Christmas was worth waiting for.
2. Add a special Jesus stocking to your other Christmas decorations. Invite guests and family members to donate money to this stocking. Send the proceeds to the project your family chose in week one as a place Jesus would want his "gift" to go.
3. Bring Mary and Joseph to the stable.
4. Create a coloring page with Jesus' name, Emmanuel, on it. Put it up where you want a reminder that God is with us.
5. Thank an older person for ways they have helped you know God is in your life.
6. Give the gifts of time, friendship and a hug to someone who needs it.
7. Read and enjoy some Christmas story picture books. Books that connect well with this year's theme are: *The Shoemaker's Dream*, retold by Mildred Schell, ill. Masahiro Kasuya, and *Baboushka* by Arthur Scholey.

CHRISTMAS HOME WORSHIP

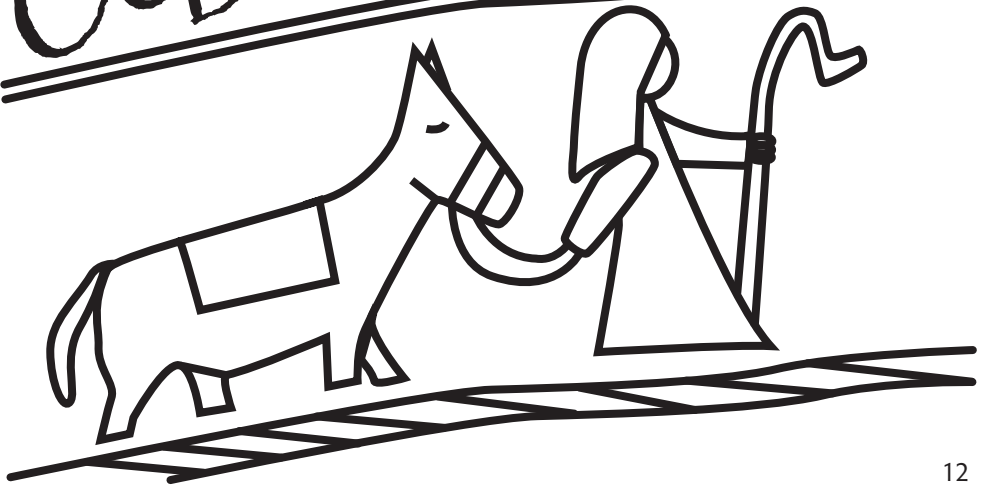
CHRISTMAS DAY

- As you light the Christ candle in your worship center for the first time, light a candle on a birthday cake for Jesus, too. Sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, or another appropriate Christmas song.
- Gently place the baby Jesus into the crèche, then add the angels and bring the shepherds into the stable.
- Pick an appropriate carol to sing as you carry out each of these actions.
- 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.
- Repeat or create your own special rituals and traditions to mark the importance of "Emmanuel – God with us."
- On Christmas Day, you may want to plan a party and invite people from your neighborhood to attend. Give each person a balloon and invite him or her to blow their questions for God into the balloon. Gather around your worship center, light all candles from the Christ candle, and talk about the many questions you thought about during Advent. Then have a shepherd style snack together and wonder about the questions they had about Jesus' birth.

PEACE



EMMANUEL
GOD WITH US



TIME TO GET A MOVE ON!

WEEK 5 – CHRISTMAS ONE

Call to Worship: What are we waiting for? All creation sings the praises of our God, who is fair and good. Let us join our voices and rejoice about the coming of Emmanuel.

Candle lighter: (light the candles, including the Christ candle, then say) The fifth candle is the Christ candle. Lighting it reminds us to praise God for sending Jesus, Emmanuel.

Leader: May we join in praise with all creation, rejoicing at the presence of a God who abides with and among us.

Listening to God's Word: Praise God's saving power with these daily texts: Isaiah 63: 7 – 9, 15 – 19, Isaiah 64: 1 – 5a, Psalm 148, Hebrews 2: 10 – 13, 14 – 18, Matthew 2: 13 – 23.

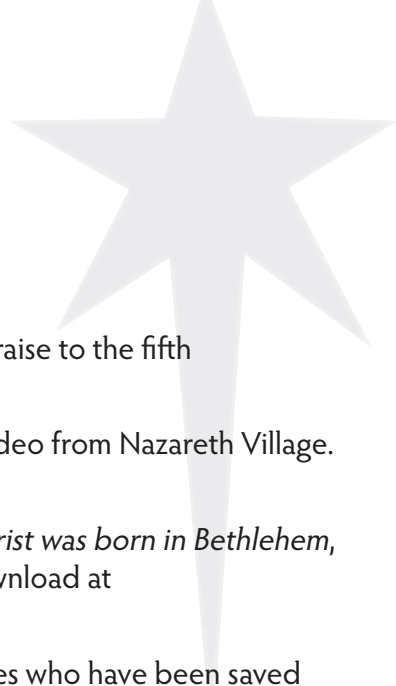
Pondering thoughts

- I wonder what makes people praise or resist God's saving power.
- I wonder how God felt about trusting humans to care for Jesus.
- I wonder how God's love keeps on loving and helping, even when scary and tragic things happen.

Sing or Play: HWB 202 *The virgin Mary had a baby boy*, STS 12 *Magnificat*, HWB 318 *Joy to the world* and other favorites.

Prayer: God of all time, who never gives up, we need your strength and power. Help us resist what is evil and stick to your good path of hope and fairness.

Candle snuffer: May God's goodness shine in and through us even as we blow out this candle. Amen.



Activities to choose from

1. On your poster, add words or pictures of praise to the fifth background section.
2. Imagine Jesus birth story by watching this video from Nazareth Village. www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkTA_EqygYE
3. Listen to Bryan Moyer Suderman's song, *Christ was born in Bethlehem*, to help you think about Jesus as a refugee. Download at www.commonword.ca/go/1805.
4. Read about or hear a live story from refugees who have been saved from violence. The 2017 picture book for 3 – 6 year-olds, *The Journey*, by Francesca Sanna, describes the heart-wrenching experience in simple, but powerful terms.
5. Buy or make a blanket for Mennonite Central Committee to send to refugees or send some of your clothing to a homeless shelter.
6. Go for a walk or ride into the countryside and think about how the land, the plant and animal life show signs of God's life-giving action.
7. Rewrite Psalm 148 so it refers to the land, plants and animals where you live.
8. Send notes of thanks to people in your church family who have worked hard to share the good and saving news of Jesus during Advent.

UNABLE TO GO BACK THE WAY WE CAME!

WEEK 6 - EPIPHANY

Call to Worship: The wait is over. The mystery has been made known. Arise! Shine! Walk in this new path and be transformed! Come and worship.

Candle lighter: (light all the candles, then say)
These candles remind us that God's glory shines a new path for all through Jesus.

Leader: God, along with the wise of every age, we worship and adore you. But we sometimes lose our way. Help us find our way with you wherever it leads.

Listening to God's Word: Read and reflect on the mystery of God's glory through these daily texts: Matthew 2: 1 – 12, Isaiah 60: 1 – 6, Psalm 72: 1 – 7, 8 – 14, 15 – 20, Ephesians 3: 1 – 6, 7 – 13.

Pondering thoughts

- I wonder how God's glory shone in the baby Jesus.
- I wonder how God's glory shines through us.
- I wonder about the new path God leads on?

Sing or play: STS 32 *Oh, beautiful star of Bethlehem*, HWB 207 *Niño lindo (Child so lovely)*, or STS 29 *Brightest and Best*

Prayer: May we enjoy God's refreshing and redeeming grace with all people, everywhere wherever God leads us.

Candle snuffer: May God's glory shine in and through us as God leads us on new ways, even as we blow out and put away these candles. Amen.



Activities to choose from

1. Have a Three Kings Party. Invite friends and neighbors, dress up with crowns and robes, and read Barbara Brown Taylor's 2018 book, *Home by Another Way: A Christmas Story*, illustrated by Melanie Cataldo. Refill your luminary candle holders with new candles and enjoy giving them away as gifts to your guests.
2. Make a plan with the members of your household to find new ways of listening to God and worshiping together, now that the Christmas season has ended. We recommend [*Let the Children Come to Me: Nurturing Anabaptist Faith Within Families*](#).
3. Wrap a gift brightly and give it to a foreign student or a lonely neighbor.
4. Think of ways your family can share God's goodness with others. If you have been gathering money project, as recommended in week one, this would be a great time to send in your donation.
5. Brighten the life of the birds who have stayed around for winter by putting up or refilling a bird-feeder with suet and seeds.
6. Play your favorite Christmas music while you clean up and put away the objects that have helped you celebrate Christmas.
7. Reflect on highlights of this year's Advent to Epiphany worship time and record them in your family worship journal.