



A SEASON OF PROMISES

Home Advent Worship Booklet

2007



First Baptist Church of Decatur



This Season of Promises Worship Booklet is intended to encourage your spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christmas, the coming of the Christ Child, and the return of Jesus the Christ.

This booklet includes an explanation of the seasons, colors, and decorations, and home worship suggestions to use with a Home Advent Wreath.

Home Advent Wreaths are available from the church. You will receive a circled garland with four candlestick holders, plus a white candle for the center. You may find it more meaningful to add live greenery, berries, etc. Enclosed you will find an explanation of the Advent Wreath and the various elements traditionally used.

May you experience the presence and peace of the Christ Child during this holy season!

Advent, Christmas, Epiphany: What's All This About?

We schedule our life's activities by some type of calendar: civic, school, social, family, etc., especially during this time of year. **Advent, Christmas** and **Epiphany** are part of the Christian Church Year which is actually a calendar for the worship life of the church. This historical calendar has been a way for the church to remember the "Christ Event" by marking time around Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. For instance, we celebrate Christ's birth on Christmas, remember Christ's death on Good Friday, sing of the resurrection on Easter Sunday, and speak of the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost.

The church year begins with **The Season of Advent**, the four Sundays before Christmas. Advent means "coming." Can you remember a time when you had to wait for something? Perhaps it was the birth of a child, a new job, a special "prom date," or a special gift. How did you feel during those times of waiting? In Advent, we focus on the coming of Christ into the world (past), in our hearts (present), and the "second coming" (future). We wait and prepare for the coming Christ (past, present, and future). Advent is not the "Christmas season." It is preparation for the "Christmas season." By observing Advent, the church disciplines itself in understanding what it means to wait with expectation or to prepare with hope. It also involves a form of spiritual "time travel." Scott Hoezee writes the following about the Season of Advent:

"At one moment, we cast our glance back toward the ancient past as we consider not only Jesus' birth but also all the promises that predicted it long before. At the next moment, we swivel our gaze the other direction toward a future that we believe is coming but is not yet here. And in the midst of it all, we try to apply to this present moment what we learn from Jesus' past as well as what we glean from Jesus' future, when the kingdom of God will be all in all."

That's why we can sing, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," "Joy to the World! The Lord is Come," and "Soon and Very Soon" in Advent.

The Season of Christmas begins on Christmas Day and lasts for twelve days. (Yes, that's where we get "The 12 days of Christmas.") Obviously, our celebration concentrates on the birth of Christ...the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us...the Incarnation.

Epiphany is traditionally on January 6 (or the Sunday preceding) and means "manifestation." On Epiphany Sunday (Dec. 31 this year), we acknowledge Christ as Savior of the world (Jew and Gentile) through remembering the visit of the magi.

The Colors and Decorations of the Seasons

We are a people of symbols. We express our faith through symbols. We teach, worship, and communicate through symbols. Symbols can be powerful tools of expression when truths are associated with them. The Seasons of Advent and Christmas are rich with traditional symbols which are a means of our understanding truth and receiving grace. Some of the symbols of Advent we use at First Baptist Church of Decatur are below.

The Chrismon Tree originated at a Lutheran Church in Virginia in 1957. The church was financially unable to purchase new ornaments, so they began making their own by hand. The word “chrismon” comes from combining parts of two words, Christ and monogram, meaning signature of Christ. Thus, the chrismons symbolize the name, life, and saving acts of Christ.

The Advent Wreath began being used centuries ago in Germany and was associated with the Yule tradition of burning lights. By the 16th century these lights were being used in Christian homes. Today, our Advent Wreath is round, symbolizing the eternal nature of God. It speaks of life and our commitment to the Lord. There are five candles. The four outside candles represent for us this season peace, hope, joy, and love which comes from Christ, our God. The center candle is the Christ Candle, recalling the birth of the Babe. The greenery and elements which can be included on the wreath are: rosemary for remembrance and acceptance, mistletoe and cedar for life eternal, laurel for our victory through love of God, holly for the crown of thorns, ivy for weakness of humanity clinging to God’s strength, and fir for living incense to Christ.

Elsewhere in the sanctuary, *garlands* and *wreaths of evergreens* remind us of the everlasting life shared by all believers. *Burning tapers* are symbols of Jesus, Light of the World. *The Creche* is complete except for the Christ Child figure which will be placed in the manger on Christmas Eve.

The colors of Advent and Christmas can serve to remind us of spiritual truths. The liturgical color *purple* (seen on the Communion Table and Choir stoles) is used to symbolize the royalty of the King born in the manger. *Green* is for the everlasting life in Christ and innocence and purity is expressed through using *white*. *Gold* is one of the gifts of the magi and can express our love of Christ through giving our lives to God and *red* reminds us of the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

It is our prayer that the colors and decorations of this season point you to the Christ Child, the giver of new life!

Home Worship
First Week of Advent
December 2-8, 2007
Hope and the Promise of Home

Scripture Lesson: *Jeremiah 33:14-16*

Advent Questions (Take time to answer the following questions.)

What is your favorite room in your home? Why?

Advent Reading

While on a trip away from home, have you ever said something like, "It's going to be great to sleep in my own bed again?" There's something wonderful about having a place to call home, isn't there? Having a place we call "home" can give us a great sense of contentment and stability. Everyone desires a place where they are accepted...a place of where they are safe.

The scripture lesson today reminds us of a time when the Hebrew people were yearning for a place of safety. They hoped for a home where justice reigned. They were awaiting the Messiah. Today, there are those among us without a place to call "home," the homeless and others, including children, who may have a place to sleep at night, but it is not a nurturing place. During this Advent Season, pray for those without a home or a safe place. You might want to take up a mission of helping someone or family. One suggestion is to assist the ministry of "Hagar House." The church can provide you with more information. This Advent, help give hope to those in need.

Light the Candle of Hope (*purple candle*)

Advent Hymn: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight*

Prayer

*Thank you, God, for bringing hope into the world through the gift of Jesus.
Place a desire in our heart to help those who need the hope you give.
Amen.*

Home Worship
Second Week of Advent
December 9-15, 2007
Peace and the Promise of Presence

Relight the Candle of Hope

Scripture Lesson: *Matthew 1:23*

Advent Questions (Take time to answer the following questions.)

What names have you given your pets? Why did you choose those particular names? Did they have special meanings? Did they help describe your pet? Children, ask your parents why they gave you your name? If an adult, do you know why your parents chose your name? Do you know the meaning of your name or your family name?

Advent Reading

Jesus is known by many names in scripture. The scripture lesson today reminds us that one of Christ's names is "Immanuel," which means "God with us." Jesus was named with a promise...the promise of God's presence. The first chapter of the gospel of Matthew speaks of "God with us" and the last chapter ends with Christ's words, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Perhaps, this Advent, you may want to take on a mission of sharing God's presence with someone who is feeling alone during the holidays, especially someone who has experienced the death of a spouse, parent, or child. Take them a gift with the reminder that God will be with them in their grief. Invite them to our "Blue Christmas" Service for the grieving on Dec. 16 at 4:00pm.

Light the Candle of Peace (*purple candle*)

Advent Hymn:

Silent Night, Holy Night

*Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child!
Holy Infant so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.*

Prayer

Thank you, O God, for the peace you bring through your presence in the world and in our hearts. You are truly "Immanuel," God with us. Give us the wisdom and the strength to share your presence with others this holiday season. Amen.

Home Worship
Third Week of Advent
December 16- 22, 2007
Joy and the Promise of Contentment

Relight the Candles of Hope and Peace

Scripture Lesson: *Luke 1:39-49; 2:13-14*

Advent Questions (Take time to answer the following questions.)

What are your top 3 favorite activities? What gives you joy? What makes you happy? Is there a particular time in your life when you experienced great joy?

Advent Reading

Recently, we've been asking persons who join our church, "What makes your heart sing?" or "What is your passion?" Another way to ask it is, "What gives you joy?"

Now, there is a difference between joy and happiness, isn't there? To be happy depends on circumstances, but to have joy is something experienced apart from circumstances. In the fact-based movie "Chariots of Fire," the character, Eric Liddell, an Olympic runner says, "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel God's pleasure!" Surely, winning a race made Eric happy, but the reason he ran gave him joy!

Sometimes circumstances can be a barrier to people experiencing joy. Is there a mission you could take on this Advent that would lift someone out of a bad circumstance? The next time you go by a Salvation Army Bell Ringer, put some money in the pot, or donate to FBC's local missions fund to help someone in our church or local community, or give to our Global Missions Offering. Giving may even be a source of joy for you! Like Eric, maybe you will "feel God's pleasure!"

Light the Candle of Joy (*pink candle*)

Advent Hymn: *Joy to the World*

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come, Let earth receive her king
Let every heart prepare him room, And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing, And heaven and heaven and nature sing*

Prayer

God of Joy, apart from your presence in our lives we would never know true joy. We might experience occasional happiness apart from you, but there would be no joy down deep within us. Remind us as we draw near to Christmas that the gifts we receive from others may delight us but will not bring the joy only you can give. You are our great joy. And we praise you and give you thanks. Amen.

Home Worship
Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 23, 2007
Love and the Promise of Being Lifted Up

Relight the Candles of Hope, Peace and Joy

Scripture Lesson: *Ezekiel 36:26-27; Luke 2:8-12*

Advent Questions (Take time to answer the following questions.)

Who do you love? Why? What is your definition of love?

Advent Reading

Someone may answer the “Why?” question above with something like, “Because I can count on her to be there when I need her.” It has been said that the definition of “love” is “loyalty.” When you love someone, you are loyal to that person. To know that there’s a person you can count on in times of difficulty is a gift, a gift given to you by those who love you. They are loyal to you. Likewise, when you love someone, you will seek to be dependable and available to them.

To enter into marriage with someone is to enter into a covenant...a solemn agreement. God has entered into a covenant with us through Christ. Christ proclaimed the “new covenant” at the Last Supper. God promises us divine love and loyalty. God is always faithful. We can count on God to lift us up in times of difficulty because God loves us.

This Advent might be a good time to enter into a covenant or re-covenant with loved ones. Maybe your family can pray a prayer together signifying your commitment to be loyal to one another, or you might want to enter into a covenant with a friend in being servants to one another, or you could write a note to someone for no particular reason letting them know why you love them.

Light the Candle of Love (*purple candle*)

Advent Hymn: *The First Nowell*

*The first nowell the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the king of Israel.*

Prayer

Thank you for being with us, especially in times of need. We are amazed at your love for us, God. May we feel your love in new and deeper ways this Advent season. Amen.

Home Worship
Christmas Eve Night and/or Christmas Day
December 24-25, 2007
Christ is Born

Relight the Candles of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love

Scripture Lesson: *Luke 2:1-7*

Christmas Reading

The day we have been waiting for is finally here. The baby has been born. The angels are singing. The shepherds are rejoicing. And we celebrate the presence of God in our midst. Go ahead and open your presents. But do not forget to open the gift of God's love. It is "wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

Light the Christ Candle (*white center candle*)

Christmas Hymn: *O Come All Ye Faithful*

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!

Come and behold him, born the king of angels

O come, let us adore him, O come let us adore him

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord

Prayer

We celebrate your birth into our world, O God. Your presence among us fills us with peace, hope, joy and love. We cannot imagine our lives without you. You are forevermore Emmanuel. We worship and adore you on this your birthday. We will sing your praise now and forever. Amen.

Events this Advent/Christmas Season

Sunday, November 25

“Hanging of the Greens” Event—6:00 PM

Sunday, December 3 - First Sunday of Advent: *The Promise of Home*

Sunday School - 9:45 AM

Worship - 9:00 AM & 11:00 AM

Friday, December 7

Parent's Night Out—6:30-9:30 PM

Sunday, December 9 - Second Sunday of Advent: *The Promise of Presence*

Sunday School - 9:45 AM

Worship - 9:00 AM & 11:00 AM

Wednesday, December 12

Children's Choir Christmas Program—6:30 PM

Saturday, December 15

Children's Christmas Craft Day - 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Youth Christmas Mission Day - 2:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Sunday, December 16 - Third Sunday of Advent: *The Promise of Joy*

Sunday School - 9:45 AM

Youth Christmas Reunion (1995 - 2014) - 10:00 AM

Worship - 9:00 AM & 11:00 AM

FreshStart (9:00 AM) - A Service of Christmas Music

Sanctuary (11:00 AM) - “Let Heaven and Nature Sing” offered by the
Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra

Blue Christmas Service - 4:00 PM in the Chapel

Youth Christmas Party - 6:00 PM

Sunday, December 23 - Fourth Sunday of Advent: *The Promise of Being Lifted Up*

Sunday School - 9:45 AM

Worship - 9:00 AM & 11:00 AM

Monday, December 24

Christmas Eve Communion Service (emphasis for children) - 4:30 PM

Christmas Eve Communion Service - 6:30 PM



First Baptist Decatur

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