

2018 ADVENT TOOLKIT for MCC CHURCHES

This Advent Resource Kit is filled with an abundance of materials: Weekly Advent plans, creative events and alternate text options, and a rich list of music, video, and story collections. This toolkit also includes a two-track option for Advent: “Silent Night: Living the Song,” and “No More Silent Night” for a justice-focused theme.

If you need assistance, email Linda Brenner, Associate Director for MCC Communications, at Communications@MCCchurch.net.

Thank you to Rev. Colleen Darraugh who was the Project Coordinator for these resources.

This toolkit includes the following:

1. **Advent/Christmas Worship Themes and Scriptures** – [Page 2](#)
2. **No More Silent Night** – [Page 2](#)
3. **Silent Night: Living the Song** – [Page 3](#)
4. **Two Track Advent Calendar with Weekly Summary and Scripture** – [Page 3](#)
5. **Alternate Texts** – [Page 11](#)
6. **Advent One Resources** – [Page 12](#)
7. **Advent Two Resources** – [Page 19](#)
8. **Advent Three Resources** – [Page 24](#)
9. **Advent Four Resources** – [Page 27](#)
10. **Christmas Eve/Day Resources** – [Page 31](#)
11. **More Communion Celebrations** – [Page 36](#)
12. **Additional Songs to Consider** – [Page 40](#)
13. **Silent Night Stories** – [Page 43](#)
14. **Silent Night Music and Video** – [Page 46](#)
15. **Creative Ideas** – [Page 48](#)
16. **Single Advent Event – A Night to Consider Silent Night** – [Page 49](#)
17. **Christmas 1 Resources** – [Page 53](#)
18. **Watchnight – New Year’s Eve Resources** – [Page 55](#)
19. **Epiphany Resources** – [Page 58](#)

Advent/Christmas Worship Themes and Scriptures

Two related tracks are offered for the 2018 Advent/Christmas season and both acknowledge the 200th Anniversary of the beloved carol “Silent Night.” The two theme tracks may be used independently, or you may choose to merge parts of them together. They can easily be contextualized with the issues important to your community. If you have a midweek service or a small group, you might use one of the theme tracks for Sunday Worship and utilize the other as the theme base for a midweek service or a small group. If you are a community that meets only monthly, you might consider using the weekly sub-themes as briefer components of an ordered meal/event/service much like a Seder.

The two themes are: **NO MORE SILENT NIGHT** and **SILENT NIGHT: LIVING THE SONG**

THE BACKGROUND:

Christmas Eve 2018 marks the 200th anniversary of the first singing of Silent Night in a small village church in Oberndorf, Austria. There are many stories/legends and tales surrounding the origin of this carol and its role and influence. We will consider some of these stories focusing less on the factual details and more on the significance. As a Native American tradition says, “I don’t know if it happened exactly this way but I know it is true. (Silent Night stories may be found as part of the Readings Resource.)

NO MORE SILENT NIGHT

There are not weekly sub-theme titles in this series template. This justice focused template invites contextualization to fit your social location and congregational commitments. The weekly summaries can be used in your promotions, planning and as launch pads for your sermon prep and focus. You can use the Series Summary in promotions and planning too. It might work well as a bulletin insert to let visitors and those who attend occasionally what your overall theme is.

SERIES SUMMARY

The height of the AIDS crisis taught us “Silence=Death.” We say “No More Silent Night!” Instead we raise our voices saying #MeToo, #Black Lives Matter and more. We speak up for all holy families, for the refugee and displaced, the documented and undocumented, and for those families who weep and mourn due to unjust separations, unresolved differences, war and death. We will not be silent. We will speak up in the name of the Incarnate Word of Love who came and comes with justice and reconciliation.

SILENT NIGHT: LIVING THE SONG

This track features a section of the lyrics of Silent Night as the focus for each week. It is recommended that you sing this carol each week in Worship. There are many different settings/arrangements of the carol, so you can experiment with different sound colors and textures yet use the familiar tune and words. Rather than writing a summary paragraph for each week, this track has points that you may use to shape your specific focus and sermon.

SERIES SUMMARY

This Christmas Eve, we mark the 200th anniversary of the first singing of the beloved Christmas Carol, Silent Night. It is sung around the world in so many languages as part of familiar Christmas traditions. It is one of those carols that we may love to sing yet have we taken time to consider the depth of meaning of the words. This year we invite you to both celebrate this favorite carol and live the song as we reflect on its message, phrase by phrase.

Date	No More Silent Night	"Silent Night" – Living the Song	Lectionary Scripture Readings and Alternates
<p>Advent 1 – Dec. 2nd</p> <p>Sunday closest to World AIDS Day</p>	<p>It's the first Sunday of Advent. People get eager to sing Christmas Carols, attend holiday parties, shop and get to the gifts. We may give a donation to a charity but don't really get involved personally. So many effectively silence the cries of those in need when they are inconvenient or distract from their celebrations.</p> <p>Silence=Death. We cannot and must not shut out the sounds of those in need. Our silence will equal our death – our spiritual death. We must join our voice with the Righteous Branch who came and comes bringing justice. What are the signs and sounds around you? What are you hearing? It's not really silent! The Word of God is always speaking! How are we raising our voices and for what?</p>	<p>"Silent Night, Holy Night"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Silence the distractions and step into the holy night with conscious awareness of the Divine Presence - Silence the voices within that shame, doubt, disempower, the voices that hold you back - step into the holy, loving, healing, restful, restorative Divine Presence 	<p><u>Jeremiah 33:14-16</u></p> <p>The days are surely coming, says the Almighty, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; who shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Almighty is our righteousness."</p> <p><u>Luke 21:25-36</u></p> <p>"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Humanity coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Then Jesus told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the realm of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of</p>

			<p>Humanity."</p> <p><u>ALTERNATE TEXT - Isaiah 62:6-7,10-12</u> Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the Almighty, take no rest, and give God no rest until the re-establishment of Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples. The Almighty has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, "See, your salvation comes; God will do what has been promised and will see it through." They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Almighty"; and you shall be called, "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."</p>
Advent 2 – Dec. 9 th	<p>Too many tell us not to discuss politics or religion at Christmas. Let's be nice, they say. The appearance and proclamation of truth, justice and love may disturb the norm and make the comfortable uncomfortable. The prophetic word is often disturbing. Even the shepherds quaked at the sight and sound of glory's streaming. We have constant news streams today and most of it is not good news. Much of it is opinion and positioning rather than news. What would our world be like if we joined in glory's stream and the surprising song of the angels? What news are you sharing? How are you speaking Love, Justice and Hope into</p>	<p>"All is calm, all is bright"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Living with inner peace - calm interior trusting the Truth, Love and Light that is within and beyond - Living IN the LIGHT – all IS bright – the Light and Love of God is always present - I choose to consciously live with my focus on the Light, Love, Justice, Peace and Presence of God in which I find my center and my inner calm - seeing the Divine in All – seeing as the Divine sees - How might this approach help "prepare the way"? 	<p><u>Malachi 3:1-4</u> See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Almighty whom you seek will suddenly come to the temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight--indeed is coming, says the Almighty, God of hosts. But who can endure the day of the coming of this One, and who can stand when the Divine Presence appears? For God is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; God will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to Almighty God in righteousness. [optional]3:4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to God as in the days of old and as in former years.</p> <p><u>Luke 3:1-6</u> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the</p>

	<p>today's issues and struggles?</p>		<p>region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of God Almighty, make plain God's paths. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"</p> <p><u>ALTERNATE TEXTS</u></p> <p><u>Isaiah 40:1-11</u> Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Almighty, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Almighty God shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Divine One has spoken."</p> <p><u>Luke 1:68-79</u> "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has looked favorably on the people and redeemed them. God has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of David, God's servant, as was spoken through the mouth of God's holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus God has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered God's own holy covenant, the oath sworn to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before the Divine Presence all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Almighty to prepare the way, to give knowledge of salvation to God's people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on</p>
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			high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."
Advent 3 – Dec. 16 th	<p>Don't believe the lies. It wasn't a silent night. The city was full, bustling with activity as people arrived for the census. No doubt people were catching up with friends and family. Mary was in labor. Her cries and his newborn cries would have pierced any quiet there might have been. Months earlier, Mary cried out in praise. Elizabeth and the baby John within her womb responded to Mary and the presence of Divine Love. Mary's Magnificat is a song of power and hope. Mary knew the truth and would not be silenced. She sang out claiming the Divine Power within her. Are you silenced by your circumstances? Do you silence others? Do you claim your reality and your power? Do you respond to the Christ Spirit in others?</p>	<p>"Round yon virgin, mother and child, Holy Infant so tender and mild"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relationship – mother and child – heaven and earth meet in loving embrace - Virgin – never happened before in this way – - The example of this young woman giving BIRTH to Divine possibility – the power of her YES - The sheer focus of mother and child in the birthing process and immediately afterward – all else disappears – life is changed forever - What is it we see surrounding a new mother and child? LOVE – tiredness, physical exhaustion yet sheer joy and overwhelming love – meeting place of pain and joy - We look on infants with love <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We look on the innocence of a child - We see the potential and possibilities for a child - Can we see ourselves with this same tenderness - imagine God looking on each child/us with such love even with the pain of giving birth to us 	<p><u>Zephaniah 3:14-20</u> Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! God has taken away the judgments against you, and has turned away your enemies. The God and Ruler of Israel, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Almighty, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; God will rejoice over you with gladness, and will renew you in Divine Love; God will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says Almighty God.</p> <p><u>Isaiah 12:2-6 (alternate listed Lectionary Text for Year C)</u> Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for Almighty God is my strength and my might; God has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Almighty, call on this name; make known God's deeds among the nations; proclaim that this name is exalted above all others. Sing praises to the Almighty, who has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.</p> <p><u>Luke 3:7-18</u> John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to</p>

		<p>say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages." As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.</p> <p><u>ALTERNATE GOSPEL – The Magnificat - Luke 1:46b-55</u> "My soul magnifies the Almighty One, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because the Almighty has looked with favor on the lowliness of this servant of God. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name. Divine mercy is for those who are in awe of God from generation to generation. The Almighty has shown strength with God's own arm; and has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. God has helped Israel, the servant of the Almighty, in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and Sarah and to their descendants forever."</p>
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Advent 4 – Dec. 23 rd	<p>It is not the absence of war/conflict rather the presence of peace and justice that we seek. The story is often told of the wartime ceasefire with enemies joining together to sing “Silent Night.” We conveniently forget that after this ceasefire, the war resumed. Is that what we will do this Christmas? – take a time out from certain behaviors, battles or language and then return to them once again after the holidays? How might the sounds of New Life, New Hope, the Christ coming alive in you cut through the illusions of peace and the lies of our culture?</p>	<p>“Sleep in Heavenly Peace”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rest from your daily efforts in the knowledge and experience of heavenly peace, God is with you - Rest from the distractions and disturbances of the day, God is with you. - Not just a message about eternal rest – think more about our 24 hour cycle of work and rest – both are life! - Circumstances of life may not disappear yet our worry about them, our focus on them can be set aside as we connect with, trust and rest in the Divine Presence - Cycle back to themes from week one silent night, holy night - It IS a holy night in which I can sleep in heavenly peace. The Spirit can silence my worries and stresses and help me enter divine restorative rest. 	<p><u>Micah 5:2-5a</u> But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore the Almighty shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of the kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And this One shall stand and feed the flock in the strength of the Almighty, in the majesty of the name of the Almighty God. And they shall live secure, for now this One shall be great to the ends of the earth; and shall be the one of peace.</p> <p><u>Luke 1:39-55</u> In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my God comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Highest." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Almighty One, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because the Almighty has looked with favor on the lowliness of this servant of God. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name. Divine mercy is for those who are in awe of God from generation to generation. The Almighty has shown strength with God's own arm; and has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. God has helped Israel, the servant of the Almighty, in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise made</p>

			to our ancestors, to Abraham and Sarah and to their descendants forever."
Christmas Eve Monday Dec 24th	Hallelujah! For us, for ALL of us, a Child was born. True authority rests on the shoulders of this One who was, is, and shall be our Source of Peace. Sing praise with the angel chorus! Let your joy and hope be heard. Hallelujah! Go tell your story as the shepherds did. No silent night here! Sing. Shout. Praise. Celebrate the truth. God is with us!	<p>"Love's Pure Light" is Here</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verse 3 reminds us of the identity of Jesus and ourselves – we are filled with "Love's Pure Light" - This is "the dawn of redeeming grace" as we recognize, welcome, embrace the birth of Incarnate Love and Light that is always with us - We are touched and caught by the radiant beams of Light from the historical Jesus and the Christ Spirit. - We participate in letting Love's Pure Light radiate from us – in letting the birth of hope, peace, justice, love (faith) be seen in us and through us. Love's Pure Light IS Here! - Optional material drawing on verse 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o [Verse 2 draws us out of ourselves, our earthly concerns and to Divine energy o Glories stream from beyond our previous awareness o Like the shepherds, we quake/shake at this sight and sound o Heavenly hosts sing alleluia – even the rocks will not be 	<p><u>Isaiah 9:2-7</u></p> <p>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon the shoulders of this One; who is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting One, Source of Peace. The authority of this One shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and this kin-dom. This One will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Almighty God of hosts will do this.</p> <p><u>Luke 2:1-20</u></p> <p>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of God stood before them, and the glory of the Almighty shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the</p>

		<p>silent – all creation gives evidence of the Divine Presence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Celebrate the birth of awareness of the Christ Spirit born in you/ residing in you] 	<p>people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to all on whom God's favor rests!"</p>
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Other Alternate Texts for Various Weeks

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Almighty God is upon me, because God has anointed me; the Almighty has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of God's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Almighty, to display God's glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

For I, Almighty God, love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom God has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Almighty, my whole being shall exult in my God; for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation, and has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so Almighty God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return to Zion of God. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Almighty has comforted God's people and has redeemed Jerusalem. God has bared a holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Psalms 98

Make a joyful noise to the Almighty, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to God with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the Highest One, the Almighty God. Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Almighty, for God is coming to judge the earth. God will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through the Word, and without this Word not one thing came into being. What has come into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. The true light was in the world, and the world came into being through this One; yet the world did not know the Light or the Word. This One came to what was already this One's and yet the people did not accept this One. But to all who received the Word and the Light, who believed in the names of this One, the Word gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of humanity, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen the glory of this One, the glory as of the Creator's only flesh, full of grace and truth.

ADVENT ONE RESOURCES

Resources that would work with either weekly theme focus are listed first. Scroll for theme specific focus resources. Additional resources for any week are at the end.

Advent One is the Sunday closest to World AIDS Day. Consider how you might incorporate remembrance, hope and action regarding HIV/AIDS in this week's service. Here are some ideas:

- *have someone share a personal experience of hope and not staying silent.*
- *have someone who lived through the early days of AIDS Activism tell a story and lead an old protest chant such as Silence=Death*
- *honor a local AIDS activist*
- *receive an additional offering for a local AIDS organization*

Contemporary Readings

"You Can't Stop Me"

by *Takesha La'Shawn Rogers*, age 17 (TheBody.com: AIDS Poetry Project)

I'm just a person, plain to the eye,
Look inside my soul, there's a lot you might find.
Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you, you see,
There's not many differences, between you and me.
I may be sick more often, and won't hesitate to cry,
Sometimes I wake up in the morning, and ask myself why?
Why am I hurting, why must this be?
But for all the obstacles in my way...

YOU CAN'T STOP ME!!!

At night I wake up in a sweat,
Will I live to another day?
I run to the window, look up at the sky, and silently began to pray.

"Dear GOD and all the heavens above, please guard me with your light,
And make my body tough and strong, and prepare it for the fight.
See, I've just discovered for the past few months, I've been living with HIV.
So I'm asking you to heed my words, and put a blessing on my heart,
So that I may live a little longer and prevent this from the start.

That's the end of my prayer, and LORD it's not just for me,
But it's for all the people in the world, whose eyes have not yet seen."

Sometimes I just stare out the window, and think of how things would be,
But for all those thoughts that get me down...

YOU CAN'T STOP ME!!!

I Am Not Afraid of Death/ Ya No Tengo Miedo a la Muerte

from *Threatened With Resurrection* by Julia Esquivel © 1982, Elgin, Illinois: Brethren Press

[Julia Esquivel is a Guatemalan poet who lived in exile for almost 20 years for raising her voice against the government. Her cry, like the Baptist's in the wilderness, is the outcry arising from depth of spirit, where call leads to powerful action.]

*I am no longer afraid of death,
I know well its dark and cold corridors
leading to life.*

*I am afraid rather of that life
which does not come out of death,
which cramps our hands and slows our march.*

*I am afraid of my fear
And even more of the fear of others,
who do not know where they are going,
Who continue clinging to what they think is life
Which we know to be death!*

I live each day to kill death;

*I die each day to give birth to life,
and in this death of death, I die a thousand times
and am reborn another thousand
through that love
from my People,
which nourished hope!*

*Ya no tengo miedo a la muerte,
conozco muy bien
su corredor oscuro y frío
que conduce a la vida.*

*Tengo miedo de esa vida
que no surge de la muerte,
que acalambra las manos
y entorpece nuestra marcha.*

*Tengo miedo de mi miedo,
y aún más del miedo de los otros,
que no saben a donde van
y se siguen aferrando
a algo que creen que es la vida
y nosotros sabemos que es la muerte!*

*Vivo cada día para matar la muerte,
muero cada día para parir la vida,
y en esta muerte de la muerte,
muero mil veces
y resucito otras tantas,
desde el amor que alimenta
de mi Pueblo,
la esperanza!*

Advent One – NO MORE SILENT NIGHT

Consider using the introductory paragraph in your bulletin or advertising in the week before. Another option is to use this for a time of quiet meditation in the service, perhaps before a time of prayer. Read it by one person or all together, followed by a time of silence and a pastoral prayer. It might even be read followed by silence right before the sermon.

It's the first Sunday of Advent. People get eager to sing Christmas Carols, attend holiday parties, shop and get to the gifts. We may give a donation to a charity but don't really get involved personally. So many effectively silence the cries of those in need when they are inconvenient or distract from their celebrations. Silence=Death. We cannot and must not shut out the sounds of those in need. Our silence will equal our death – our spiritual death. We must join our voice with the Righteous Branch who came and comes bringing justice. What are the signs and sounds around you? What are you hearing? It's not really silent! The Word of God is always speaking! How are we raising our voices and for what?

Call to Worship *This can be led by one voice or two voice or even as a One/All*

There are so many “signs” around us that Christmas is near!

Holiday movies galore, commercials shouting the latest deal, bright lights blinking all night...

But this Advent is not about this noise or these “signs”! No.

We prepare the way, for the Righteous Branch, for the One who comes with justice.

There is No Silent Night here! No. We have learned that Silence=Death.

We call out injustice, speaking truth in love, for all people.

We hear the oppressed and raise our voices with shouts of

Me Too, Black Lives Matter, Refugees are Welcome *[contextualize this section]*

Thoughts and prayers become justice actions and the sounds of Christ's coming again.

We will not be silent! We sing God's praise and share gifts of love and hope.

Prayer of Confession

Forgive me for the times I forget my sacred identity. Forgive me for the times I act as if others are not also sacred people. Help me to recognize the fingerprints of God in myself and others. Help me to raise my voice for justice, not only for me but for all people.

Words of Assurance

We have the assurance of God that if we have confessed our sins that God is quick to forgive us. Hear the angelic proclamation, “Do not fear. I bring Good News for all people!”

Advent One – SILENT NIGHT: LIVING THE SONG – “Silent night, holy night”

Remember to sing the Carol “Silent Night” as a featured Carol in your service. Consider using it weekly before or after your prayer time! Also, include one of the stories about the Carol either as a Contemporary Reading or as a story within the sermon.

Call to Worship

There are options on how to use this Call. Consider having someone do it unseen, as a voice-over. If the whole thing is a voice over, change the first line to: “You sing... who calls to you.” Another option is to have one person do the first line and various people do each other line. The Shhh should be very gentle as in calming a child.

We sing Come, O Come Emmanuel yet it is the Divine Presence, already here, who calls to us.

Shhh.... Silence your doubts.

Shhh...Be not afraid.

Shhh...Quiet those voices of shame.

Shhh... All that would hold you back and keep you from my embrace.

Shhh... Be still. Be calm. Be at peace.

Shhh... Let it be a Silent time, a truly Holy time. *[if your service is at night, say Silent Night, Holy Night!]*

Come, be with me. Right now, just as you are.

Let your worship be, time, fully present with me.

Contemporary Reading

“In the silence of a midwinter dusk, there is far off in the deeps of it somewhere a sound so faint that for all you can tell it may be only the sound of the silence itself. You hold your breath to listen. You walk up the steps to the front door. The empty windows at either side of it tell you nothing or almost nothing. For a second you catch a whiff of some fragrance that reminds you of a place you’ve never been and a time you have no words for. You are aware of the beating of your heart... The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment.” -- Frederick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark*

Confession and Assurance

ALL: Forgive me, God, for listening to shaming and blaming voices and internalizing them. Forgive me, for paying more attention to the voices around me than to yours. Forgive me for doubting your embrace. Forgive me, for forgetting my own sacred worth. Help me remember to silence anything that tries to drown out your voice of Love and Justice. Help me rest from the stuff of this world in your holy, restorative Presence.

ONE: Never doubt that you are a holy, beloved Child of God and that God is with you! There is nothing you can do to make God love you more and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less. You are forgiven and loved.

Night Prayer by Rev. John Williamson from The New Zealand Book of Prayer

Lord,
it is night.

The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.

The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
rest in you.

The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys,
new possibilities.

In your name we pray.

Amen.

ADVENT TWO

Call to Worship *[This call could work with either theme focus.]*

In the midst of the tweets and headlines,

When we often feel alone and lost

Helpless and hopeless

Moved to frustrations rather than peace

Through all the noise and distractions

Your voice cries

Prepare the way for my Presence!

In the shadow places

Where we hide the things we are less than proud of

The things done and said

And the things undone and unsaid

In those places where we try to hide our fears and tears

Your voice is heard

Prepare the way for my Presence!

In the places where we live, shop and work

With the people we know well

And the people we see yet who remain nameless to us

On all the paths we travel

May we hear your voice; May you use our voice

May we, with John the Baptist, proclaim

Prepare the way for the Divine Presence!

By Colleen Darraugh

Advent Two – NO MORE SILENT NIGHT

As with last week, consider using this summary either in your advertising or in your bulletin for this week or for a time of meditation followed by prayer.

Too many tell us not to discuss politics or religion at Christmas. Let's be nice, they say. The appearance and proclamation of truth, justice and love may disturb the norm and make the comfortable uncomfortable. The prophetic word is often disturbing. Even the shepherds quaked at the sight and sound of glory's streaming. We have constant news streams today and most of it is not good news. Much of it is opinion and positioning rather than news. What would our world be like if we joined in glory's stream and the surprising song of the angels? What news are you sharing? How are you speaking Love, Justice and Hope into today's issues and struggles?

Confession and Assurance

ALL: God, forgive me if I get ahead of you and forget the Source of my Good News! Forgive me for speaking my opinion instead of your love. Forgive me, if in the process of speaking against injustice, I become the oppressor. Forgive me too for the times I don't want to be the one to disturb the status quo; for the times I seek to stay comfortable at someone else's expense. Help me always remember, your Peace and Justice is for All. Be with me in every situation. Purify me. Refine me. May my life, my service and my worship be pleasing in your sight, O God.

ONE: The voice of God speaks through the prophet Isaiah saying: I am God who created you. Do not fear, for I have redeemed you and have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through deep or fast waters, you will not be swept away. I will be with you. When you walk through trials that feel like fire, you will not be burned. I am Almighty God, your God, your Savior and I will be with you. You are precious in my eyes and I love you. (based on Isaiah 43 1-4)

Contemporary Reading

Comfort the disturbed, disturb the comfortable.

This quote from the newspaperman Finley Peter Dunne is a good pointer for **society and politics**.

As a society, it's our responsibility to comfort the disturbed through working to reduce inequality and by providing good education, universal health care, good social safety nets and so on. And it's in our interest to disturb the comfortable through questioning privilege, reducing inequality, curbing the influence of corporations and the wealthy on politics and policies, creating a deeper democracy, and building a society – locally and globally – that works for all and not just a few.

This is also a good pointer for how **I relate to myself**.

When parts of me are disturbed, I can invite them to find comfort – through being present with them, relating to them with kindness and respect, see their value, gently explore, see more of what’s really going on, and invite in healing for these parts of me. And when parts of me are (falsely) comfortable, I can shake them out of their complacency – by noticing what’s really going on and what’s more true and real to me than my initial beliefs and viewpoints.

From Mystery of Existence <http://absentofi.org/2011/03/comfort-the-disturbed-disturb-the-comfortable/>

Advent Two – SILENT NIGHT: LIVING THE SONG – “All is calm, all is bright”

Use this as a Gathering Prayer/Invocation

Advent Prayer by Henri J.M. Nouwen [edited]

Lord Jesus,

Source and Ruler of both the light and the darkness,

Send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.

We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kin-dom.

We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.

To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!" Amen.

Confession and Assurance by Priscilla L. Denham and Maren C. Tirabassi from Before the Amen: Creative Resources for Worship (Pilgrim Press, 2007).[edited]

Prayer of Confession

Birther of Our Lives, in this time of preparing, we struggle to make time for your coming. When there are presents to get, we forget your presence among us. With “so much” to do, we forget the mystery of your Being and the miracle of our being avenues of your grace. Slow us down. Loosen us up. Let us laugh at ourselves more freely and love each other more generously. In the midst of the tinsel and the bustle, help us to see and hear the twinkling joy of Your Love. In the name of the One Whose Being Blesses Humanity, Amen.

Words of Assurance

Beloved, hear these words of grace. The glory of God shone around the shepherds on a “normal” night. The angel telling them not to fear spoke in the middle of a regular work week. John the Baptist’s declaration and Divine encounter likewise came as part of his living out his calling. Expected and anticipated yet totally unscheduled. Love comes to us that our lives may become God-stained with Light and Love, right on time – Divine time. Let us rejoice, truly believing we are forgiven. Amen.

ADVENT THREE

Here is a Eucharistic Prayer/Communion Celebration suitable with either theme for this week especially if you use Mary's Magnificat as a reading or talk about Mary in your sermon. This celebration was influenced by a poem by Alla Renee Bozarth called "Before Jesus." It may be helpful for your sermon preparation.

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/before-jesus>

A Eucharistic Prayer

ONE: On the night in which Mary delivered Jesus, she placed her hands over her round, full womb and whispered, "Flesh of my flesh, this is my body which I willingly open for you."

TWO: We remember how Jesus took the bread, broke it and said, "This is me. This is my body broken open for you. Each time you eat of this, remember me.

ONE: May we remember to open ourselves to God and one another.

TWO: In the same manner, Mary whispered, "Child, you share my blood; freely shall I shed it in bringing you to birth."

ONE: In the same manner, Jesus turned to the cup of things to come. He said, "This is my blood, my love, poured out freely for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Each time you drink of it, remember me.

TWO: May we remember that God forgives us, and we too should forgive each other pouring out love to the world.

ONE: Before his body, her body; before his blood, her blood.

TWO: O Mary, we remember your gifts, and we join our hearts to yours in rejoicing, singing and praising God's goodness.

ALL: Glory to the God of generations! Heaven and earth have met in human birth. Peace to all people who bring forth the Christ.

TWO: Almighty God, we offer you these simple gifts that they might be gifts of faith for us, truly holy food on our spiritual journey. Bless them and bless us that we might take in the fullness of your Gifts to us and that we may be the embodiment of your Spirit.

ONE: O God may we also embody Mary's Yes and continue to give birth to Divine Love in all we do. AMEN.

Advent Three - NO MORE SILENT NIGHT

Consider using this summary in your advertising or bulletin for this week or for a time of meditation followed by prayer or just before the sermon.

Don't believe the lies. It wasn't a silent night. The city was full, bustling with activity as people arrived for the census. No doubt people were catching up with friends and family. Mary was in labor. Her cries and his newborn cries would have pierced any quiet there might have been. Months earlier, Mary cried out in praise. Elizabeth and the baby John within her womb responded to Mary and the presence of Divine Love. Mary's Magnificat is a song of power and hope. Mary knew the truth and would not be silenced. She sang out claiming the Divine Power within her. Are you silenced by your circumstances? Do you silence others? Do you claim your reality and your power? Do you respond to the Christ Spirit in others?

Call to Worship

ONE: What is this giving birth to hope and possibility? Who am I to be a bearer of grace?

ALL: I am a beloved and called vessel of Christ! I will not be silenced! I will speak truth to power. I will proclaim God's Presence and Justice.

ONE: The Divine in me recognizes the Divine in you.

ALL: Together we sing God's praise for all to hear. GOD-IS-WITH-US!

Call to Worship (based on Romans 8 and Luke 1)

ONE: I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us. The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. ... We know the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit ... also groan inside as we wait... We hope for that which is not yet, and we wait with patience and with joy. If God is for us and with us, who or what can be against us?

ALL: The Holy One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name. My soul rejoices in God, my Savior. I will magnify God's name now and as Divine possibility comes to birth through me.

Contemporary Reading by Steven Charleston

"Open your hands. Extend your arms. Raise your head. Look up. Smile. Even the smallest gestures we make are signs of the Spirit. In the microcosm of the sacred, little things count. A single touch may heal a thousand hurts. By being mindful of the least we can do, we open ourselves to the greatest gift we can be. Pay attention to the fine print of hope. Be aware of the details of kindness around you. As we internalize each tiny act of goodness, we transform ourselves, moment by moment, from people racing through life into saints walking gently our island home."

Prayer of Confession

Forgive me, Almighty and All-Knowing God for thinking I know more than you! Forgive me for not listening to the inner voice of your Spirit and giving voice to your Divine Wisdom. Help me to live a life spiritually centered and rooted in Sacred Knowing.

Words of Assurance

"Be not afraid, for God is with you!" Know this truth, live it and proclaim it! God has chosen to dwell within you!

Advent Three – SILENT NIGHT: LIVING THE SONG - “Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child, Holy Infant so tender and mild”

Call to Worship

ONE: We call out, O Come, O Come Emmanuel

ALL: while believing “God is with us” now.

ONE: We gather at this Sacred Time in this Sacred Place

ALL: knowing all time and places are sacred when we recognize the Divine Presence.

ONE: We raise our voices in praise and proclamation

ALL: with all of creation, and the hosts of angels.

ONE: We worship trusting that God is with us.

ALL: We worship the One who is with us and within us.

A Reflection (may be used as a Contemporary Reading)

Our song lyrics this week focus us, draw us in close to Mary and Jesus as if all else disappears. We are not thinking about the tax burden Rome imposed upon the Jews or the arduous journey the pregnant Mary and Joseph along with others had just made to their ancestral homes. We are not looking around at the crowded surrounding or the shouts of vendors hawking their wares, or the chatter of old friends reunited for this census. We are not even looking at the specific conditions of their simple housing. No, this week invites us to focus in on Mother and Child. The challenges of pregnancy and waiting are forgotten. The cries of labor are done. All that remains is Love Incarnate. Can you see Mary taking in this moment of embrace? In this both/and moment, Mary holds the Divine who holds her.

Confession

Forgive me God for paying more attention to all the distractions around me. Help me to focus in on you in such a way that I might see and experience your loving gaze. May I take time to just appreciate, look upon Your Presence and love You. May I say Yes with Mary to giving birth to something new within me. May I say Yes with Mary to spending time in loving embrace. With Mary, may I leave tomorrow to tomorrow and be with You in each present moment. Amen.

Assurance

Hear these words of assurance. Hear the voice of God say: I see you. I know you. I love you. I am with you. Right here. Right now. It is enough.

ADVENT FOUR

Advent Four – NO MORE SILENT NIGHT

Once again, consider using this summary either in your advertising or in your bulletin for this week or for a time of meditation followed by prayer or just before the sermon.

It is not the absence of war/conflict rather the presence of peace and justice that we seek. The story is often told of the wartime ceasefire with enemies joining together to sing “Silent Night.” We conveniently forget that after this ceasefire, the war resumed. Is that what we will do this Christmas? – take a time out from certain behaviors, battles or language and then return to them once again after the holidays? How might the sounds of New Life, New Hope, the Christ coming alive in you cut through the illusions of peace and the lies of our culture?

Use the Story of Silent Night and the war this week. See the Silent Night Story Resources.

Call to Worship - Author Unknown

ONE: If we believe that Christ is coming,

ALL: Let us prepare the world for Christ's coming - now and in the end time, whenever that might be.

ONE: If we believe that Christ is coming,

ALL: Let us work with the Spirit for peace and justice.

ONE: If we believe that Christ is coming,

ALL: Let our words and deeds witness to Christ's new age that begins now in us.

ONE: If we believe that Christ is coming,

ALL: Let us love God and one another passionately, even if others call it scandalous!

ONE: If we believe that Christ is coming, let us live and worship like we believe.

ALL: We worship with hope, love and eager anticipation.

Dream Peace – A Confession by Rev. Pressley Sutherland

Holy One,

Do not leave us to visit destruction again and again,

Recall within us a time when fear did not cause us to harden.

Each time we have chosen disregard or inaction--for this, forgive us.

Already we long to join the approaching critical mass,

Making personal and collective commitments to end violence and factions.

Pursue our hearts with your Spirit,

Enter our homes, our cities, our world,

Accomplish the work of grace and forgiveness today and tomorrow.

Come, any way you need to do so.

Emmanuel, teach us the ways of peace again. Amen.

Benediction – original author unknown, now edited

The lights are burning brighter now.

We have accomplished much in terms of justice.

Still there is more to be done.

Not all the lights are burning yet!

Advent, with the light of hope, pointed out the places where we need to work.

We came to worship, now lets go, do the work of peace and justice

Letting our Light shine and our song of Love be heard.

Advent Four – SILENT NIGHT: LIVING THE SONG – “Sleep in Heavenly Peace”

Call to Worship

ONE: It feels like Christmas is already here and yet is still around the corner.

ALL: We are excited and exhausted; eager with anticipation and almost over it.

ONE: We have work to do and are much in need of rest.

ALL: This is very true! There is always more to do it seems.

ONE: We don't want to be so tired that we don't enjoy Christmas!

ALL: So, we come to worship, to remember and to be refreshed.

ONE: Let us pray:

ALL: Divine One who came, comes, and comes again, we worship You.

Receive us just as we are. Restore us as we rest awhile in Your Presence. Amen.

Confession

God, we are exhausted. We need your peace. We need to rest even though the work is not done. Help us to trust you on this journey of life and love; in the balance of work and rest. Forgive us for trying to do everything all at once or pushing to do it on our own. Call us again to rest in your peace and trust you with our today and our tomorrows.

Assurance

Hear the Almighty remind us: I will feed and strengthen my flock. Live secure in the knowledge that I hold time and all that you need. Rest, restore and live in my Presence. I am with you. Amen.

Night Prayer by Rev. John Williamson from The New Zealand Book of Prayer

Lord,
it is night.

The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.

The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
rest in you.

The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys,
new possibilities.

In your name we pray.

Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY RESOURCES

Christmas Eve/Day Call to Worship – Source Unknown

This is the night [day];

When we remember

What happened so long ago

We hear the sounds of angels

Fear not! Glory in the highest

We feel the cool winds that surrounded shepherds

As they tended their sheep

And heard angel voices sing Noel.

We look in on a small stable

And feel the warmth of life

Hear the bleating of sheep

The beating of a new heart

We see a Child

The Holy One of God

The Baby Jesus

Asleep on the hay,

In a manger

No crib for his bed.

And the song begins to grow

Over the years

As faithful saints join angelic chorus
Celebrated by holy light and angel chorus
shepherd and magi point the way
and we too follow the Way
We too come to worship.
We journey back in time,
To this moment where past meets present
Where Christ was born and is born
Where we find new birth
O come let us adore him!
O come let us adore him!
Come sing with the angels!
Sing with all the hosts of heaven
Glory to God in the highest
And on earth Peace
Peace, goodwill to all.
Come celebrate Christmas!

Christmas Gathering Prayer

God of Joy, we come to celebrate again the arrival of Love Incarnate here in our very midst. Your glorious arrival is enough to cause the forests to sing for joy, yet we still find reasons to complain and sigh. Your light of salvation is bright enough to illuminate every corner of our lives, yet we still find ourselves shrouded in worry and doubt. Your gift of Love is big enough for the whole world, yet we still find ourselves resentful that your love extends to those whom we deem to be unworthy. God, you invite us into the light of the Christ Child where the overlooked and forgotten have gathered to celebrate the miracle of your love. Give us the strength and courage to join you at the manger and to sing your praise with the angels until the whole world hears. Amen.

A Christmas Creed

WE BELIEVE in Jesus Christ and his gospel, born to us all so long ago in Bethlehem of Judea.

WE BELIEVE in Jesus whose birth glorified Bethlehem despite being born in a stable and laid in a manger.

WE BELIEVE in Jesus whose Angel choir and guiding Star gathered local, humble, workers and educated, affluent, foreigners.

WE BELIEVE in Jesus whose love changed human hearts showing us that it is more important to serve than to be served, and that the greatest are those who give their lives in service for others.

WE BELIEVE in Jesus whose life changed the course of history, over whom kings had no power, whose life humbled the proud, toppled the mighty, and elevated those of low degree.

WE BELIEVE in Jesus who is the Source and Prince of Peace and justice.

WE BELIEVE in Jesus whose life and story invite us into Divine Unlimited Love!

WE BELIEVE that the Christmas spirit - the spirit of Christ - is the spirit that can change the world for the better through the power of faith and love.

-- from an anonymous South American creed, with Walter Russell Bowie, adapted by Dr. A. Howard Gabriel and Colleen Darraugh

Christmas Eve Sung Consecration

Rev. Nancy Wilson, written November 1989, To the tune of "Greensleeves" (or "What Child Is This?")

In Upper Room we met and shared
We ate and drank to our hearts content.
New words and life were offered there
The meal was changed forever.

Chorus:

This, this is all I am,

And all in love I give to you.

This, this is me for you,

The body and blood of your Savior

The Bread is now my body offered,
Not only bread of afflictions past,
The Cup my life, my blood, myself
Elijah has come to proclaim it

Chorus

I am the Christ, the Anointed One
Whom sages promised and waited long.

I came to heal, to free, to die
To live and to love you forever

Chorus

I shall not eat or drink again
Until that Day with God on high.
'Til then remember me when you share
The Mystery of my Presence

Chorus

Benediction

Let your hearts be at peace. Christ is born.
Let your hearts be hopeful. Christ is born.
Let your hearts be joyful. Christ is born.
May the Love of the newborn Christ,
surround and nourish you now and forever. Amen.

MORE COMMUNION CELEBRATIONS

If you use Christmas Carols during Advent or blend some Advent and Christmas themes, these communion celebrations could work any week or save them for Christmas Eve/Day and Christmas 1

This Communion Celebration is written in a form that would not require the text to be in a bulletin or on a screen, though it could be.

A Celebration of Communion – original author unknown

ONE: The Presence and the Peace of Christ is with us!

Let the people affirm saying “Christ is with us all!”

ALL: Christ is with us all!

Let the people say, “We lift up our hearts to our God!”

ALL: We lift up our hearts to our God!

ONE: Let us give thanks to the Almighty, our God!

Let the people say, “It is right to give our thanks and praise!”

ALL: It is right to give our thanks and praise!

You, created all Light,

You, who created all Goodness,

You, who created all Life and Form and Word, we praise your many names.

You, who continues to surprise us with possibilities beyond our imagining.

You, who comforts us when we feel there is no peace,

You, who lights our way with each day’s dawning,

We glorify you with all the saints, ...please repeat after me: [*or substitute a sung Gloria here*]

Gloria in excelsis deo! **Gloria in excelsis deo!**

Gloria in the highest heaven and on earth! **Gloria in the highest heaven and on earth!**

Gloria and hosanna! **Gloria and hosanna!**

You, who came in flesh and blood to meet our flesh and blood.

You, who came in cry of babe's first breath,

You, who were born into the mess of humanity for our sake,

We offer our awe and gratitude.

Wonderful Counselor, Source of Peace, Emmanuel, God-With-Us.

We come.

We open.

We break.

We pour.

We wait. *Pause here.....*

The Presider breaks the bread and pours/lifts the cup with no words. Hands in a posture of blessing the elements and then in blessing of the people. All in silence. Perhaps have Musician play simple slow melody of Silent Night.

Let us proclaim the Great Truth, the Mystery of our Faith, repeating after me: *[or use your traditional formula here.]*

Christ was born. **Christ was born.**

Christ has died. **Christ has died.**

Christ will come again. **Christ will come again.**

Christ is with us. **Christ is with us.**

I invite everyone to open your palms upward in an ancient posture of prayer.

Let us pray together.

God of All,

Pour into us your love, peace, hope and joy. *[If you use the traditional 4 words you might add one each week.]*

Fill this temporal sacred vessel with your sacred presence.

Break us open to each other

As you have broken open this bread and fruit of the vine.

Open us to both see your sacred presence around us and to share your sacred presence that dwells within us.

Now I invite everyone to make a point of connection with those around you, holding hands or placing a hand on a shoulder, whatever is comfortable for you.

Let us continue in prayer:

Make us one in you, God Almighty, Sacred Being, Blessed Holy Child,

Make us individually and collectively understand and claim our Sacred Being

So that the light of Christ

The light of the world,

May be multiplied in us this night.

We pray

Through your Son Jesus Christ

With the Holy Spirit in your holy church

All honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen!

A Celebration of Communion – *original author unknown and edited*

ONE: God your gifts to us are from the very beginning of time.

TWO: They began with creation, when your Spirit gave form to the chaos of energy and matter, and when your word brought forth light on the face of the earth.

ONE: They continued with our ancient ancestors, like Noah, whom you blessed with the colorful promise of the rainbow.

TWO: And like Sarah and Abraham, whom you blessed with a child whose descendants, as many as the stars of the sky, were to be a light to the nations.

ONE: In the desert, you gave the gifts of manna and of living water to the weary pilgrims whom you led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

TWO: At last, you sent yourself into the world in the form of a tiny child, fragile and vulnerable, who grew to be full of grace and truth, revealing your glory on earth.

ONE: We thank you, O God, that you have sent Jesus to bring us your peace that passes our understanding. Thank you for the gifts of Christmas and Easter, for eternal life, for love beyond measure, for forgiveness and resurrections, rebirth.

TWO: Help us to receive all of your gifts with joy and humility. As we receive this bread and fruit of the vine, may we open our hearts to receive your Spirit. Help us be mindful always of our connection to you, O God, and to each other.

ONE: Be born among us and within us, that we may give Christ's peace and love to the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because we have experienced your peace, feel your love and believe your promises, we are able to join our voices with all the saints and angels proclaiming, *[or sing a traditional Gloria here]*

TWO: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill to all.

ONE: MCC celebrates an open communion. We do not require that you be a member of this church or any church.

TWO: This is God's table set for you, the people of God.

ADDITIONAL SONGS TO CONSIDER

No More Silent Night *words by Mel Martinez © 2018*

Silent night, holy night,
Babes detained without fight,
Huddled sleeping on cement floors
Dreaming, longing for Open doors,
Jesus, Lord at the birth,
Weeping o'er all of the earth.

Silent night, holy night,
Human bodies for a price,
Use and abuse them to your every whim,
They won't tell if you lock them in,
Jesus, Prince of peace, render such slavery to cease.

Silent night, holy night,
Dumpsters ravaged for one small bite,
Empty bellies and shattered souls,
Left to find food in a villain's role,
Jesus, bread of life, fill them lest soon they will die.
Silent night, holy night,
Blood is spilled, more black than white,

Born of hatred shared long ago,
Stirred by fear 'against imagined foe,
Jesus, light in the shadow, witness to all of this woe.

Come and Find the Quiet Center

Come and find the quiet center
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being, face to face,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking,
finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel,
open to each other's pain,
let our loves and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming,
there's a time for heart to care,
in the Spirit's lively scheming
there is always room to spare!

Words: Shirley Erena Murray © 1992 Hope Publishing Inc. (in 7 hymnals)

Music: 8.7.8.7.D. Beach Spring, Come Thou Fount

Dare to Dream

Music by Jallen Rix/Words by Jallen Rix and Glenna Shepherd. USED BY PERMISSION OF AUTHORS – in previous release. PDF-format music is found on the CD **Songs of Praise from a Strange Land** © BALM Music – www.balmministries.com

[Use this stanza as a REFRAIN]

*When your love is made a mockery,
When your heart's locked and someone holds the key,
Dare to dream and know that you are not alone,
Dare to dream, and watch what it brings.
Dare to dream and do the work that Christ began,
But dare to dream.*

[2nd Sunday of Advent]

*When we can no longer find the path
When last shreds of innocence is past
Dare to dream of One who rights the wrong at last,
Dare to dream of pain truly healed!
Dare to dream that old can die and new emerge
With John we dream!*

[4th Sunday of Advent]

*In the fullness of God's dream we find
Hope and wonder – born again in time.
Dare to dream of God-in-flesh Emmanuel.
Dare to dream Christ's birth in you today!
Dare to dream and know the joy this night brings forth –
If we dare to dream!*

[1st Sunday of Advent]

*When our world is broken, seized by war,
When what matters is twisted to the core,
Dare to dream that Christ can live on earth again,
Dare to dream that Light can break through.
Dare to dream, to stay awake and live God's Peace,
Just dare to dream.*

[3rd Sunday of Advent]

*When we find ourselves in desert dry,
When injustice triumphs over right,
Dare to dream and call God's justice into life,
Dare to dream – proclaim victory!
Dare to dream – emerge into Christ's freedom,
With Mary - dream.*

[Christmas Eve]

*Star and angels witness to the dream
Shepherds fall in fear as glories stream
Dare to dream – and in that dream find God's own son
In that dream, know hope and joy restored
Dare to dream that Christ is born anew this night,
Just dare to dream!*

SILENT NIGHT STORIES

Video Story - https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=48&v=tISAxn1QV24 4:58

- Segments of this video could be used rather than the whole
- For those who don't know, trimming a video once inside PowerPoint is pretty easy!

A Simple Version of the Origin

In the winter of 1818 at St. Nicholas' Church at Obendorf, a village near Salzburg, Austria, Joseph Mohr, the assistant to the priest, faced a dilemma. It was just days before Christmas, and the church organ which was so important to providing music for the Christmas services was broken. Since the organ repairman was not a local of the village it would actually be months before the repair could be made, and Christmas would be long past.

His solution to the problem of the broken organ resulted in one of the most popular Christmas carols of all time. In 1816 Mohr had written a simple poem that the villagers could understand expressing the wonder of the birth of Jesus. He asked his friend Franz Gruber who was the organist at St. Nicholas to write music to accompany his poem so that they could sing it together using a guitar to accompany their singing.

<http://www.noelnoelnoel.com/trad/silent.html>

Another Version of the Origin

In 1818, a roving band of actors was performing in towns throughout the Austrian Alps. On December 23 they arrived at Oberndorf, a village near Salzburg where they were to re-enact the story of Christ's birth in the small Church of St. Nicholas.

Unfortunately, the St. Nicholas' church organ wasn't working and would not be repaired before Christmas. (*Note: some versions of the story point to mice as the problem; others say rust was the culprit*) Because the church organ was out of commission, the actors presented their Christmas drama in a private home. That Christmas presentation of the events in the first chapters of Matthew and Luke put assistant pastor Josef Mohr in a meditative mood. Instead of walking straight to his house that night, Mohr took a longer way home. The longer path took him up over a hill overlooking the village.

From that hilltop, Mohr looked down on the peaceful snow-covered village. Reveling in majestic silence of the wintry night, Mohr gazed down at the glowing Christmas-card like scene. His thoughts about the Christmas play he had just seen made him remember a poem he had written a couple of years before. That poem was about the night when angels announced the birth of the long-awaited Messiah to shepherds on a hillside.

Mohr decided those words might make a good carol for his congregation the following evening at their Christmas eve service. The one problem was that he didn't have any music to which that poem could be sung. So, the next day Mohr went to see the church organist, Franz Xaver Gruber. Gruber only had a few hours to come up with a melody which could be sung with a guitar. However, by that evening, Gruber had managed to compose a musical setting for the poem. It no longer mattered to Mohr and Gruber that their church organ was inoperable. They now had a Christmas carol that could be sung without that organ.

On Christmas Eve, the little Oberndorf congregation heard Gruber and Mohr sing their new composition to the accompaniment of Gruber's guitar.

<https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/silent.htm>

What Happened to the Organ?

In some versions of the story it is told that mice had eaten the bellows of the organ. Others say that Gruber himself had broken the organ. It is believed that there was frequent flooding of the area that caused rust and mildew to affect the condition of the church organ often making it unplayable. It is actually not known however if the organ was truly broken at Christmastime of 1818. Some say that Mohr simply wanted a new carol for the service and was fond of the guitar as an instrument. Some stories tell that both the poem and the music were hastily written that Christmas Eve.

<http://www.noelnoelnoel.com/trad/silent.html>

The Song Spreads

Weeks after that first Christmas Eve, well-known organ builder Karl Mauracher arrived in Oberndorf to fix the organ in St. Nicholas church. When Mauracher finished, he stepped back to let Gruber test the instrument. When Gruber sat down, his fingers began playing the simple melody he had written for Mohr's Christmas poem. Deeply impressed, Mauracher took copies of the music and words of "Silent Night" back to his own Alpine village, Kapfing. There, two well-known families of singers — the Rainers and the Strassers — heard it. Captivated by "Silent Night," both groups put the new song into their Christmas season repertoire.

The Strasser sisters spread the carol across northern Europe. In 1834, they performed "Silent Night" for King Frederick William IV of Prussia, and he then ordered his cathedral choir to sing it every Christmas eve.

Twenty years after "Silent Night" was written, the Rainers brought the song to the United States, singing it (in German) at the Alexander Hamilton Monument located outside New York City's Trinity Church.

In 1863, nearly fifty years after being first sung in German, "Silent Night" was translated into English (by either Jane Campbell or John Young). Eight years later, that English version made its way into print in Charles Hutchins' *Sunday School Hymnal*. Today the words of "Silent Night" are sung in more than 300 different languages around the world.

<https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/silent.htm>

Another Version

It was not until years later in 1825 when Carl Mauracher was rebuilding the organ at St. Nicholas that a handwritten copy of the words and music was found in the organ loft. Mauracher was from an area in the mountains of Tyrol which had many traveling folk choirs who performed throughout Europe. He carried the carol back home, and it became a popular song with the choirs as they traveled and spread its popularity wherever they went.

<http://www.noelnoelnoel.com/trad/silent.html>

Authorship

Over the years, because the original manuscript had been lost, Mohr's name was forgotten and although Gruber was known to be the composer, many people assumed the melody was composed by a famous composer, and it was variously attributed to Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven. However, a manuscript was discovered in 1995 in Mohr's handwriting and dated by researchers as c. 1820. It states that Mohr wrote the words in 1816 when he was assigned to a pilgrim church in Mariapfarr, Austria, and shows that the music was composed by Gruber in 1818. This is the earliest manuscript that exists and the only one in Mohr's handwriting.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_Night

Silent Night – a Song of Peace and Unity

The song “Silent Night” has been seen as a hopeful message about the human condition since its very creation. Today, it is considered a world peace song and was declared an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2011. Unusually for the time, Joseph Mohr, a priest from Salzburg, wrote the lyrics in German. But this little detail reveals exactly what Joseph Mohr had in mind: To bring people together and unite them. Mohr was a priest who cared deeply for the plight of his people. His strong beliefs made it into each and every line of the song. And its powerful message of peace has been demonstrated by its ability to bring people together across borders, language barriers and religions for centuries.

<https://www.stillenacht.com/en/history/song-of-peace/>

Silent Night in the Trenches

Christmas 1914: Around five months after the beginning World War I, something occurred on the Western Front — where over a million soldiers had already died or been wounded — that would become known as an unlikely pacifist and fraternal miracle between thousands of soldiers of different nations. On 24 December, Christmas Eve, the trenches went quiet. Several soldiers placed small, illuminated Christmas trees on the upper edge of their trench — as a sign of peace. On both sides of the approximately 50-kilometre-long front in Flanders, the combatants collectively put down their rifles and helmets and sang their domestic Christmas songs. “Silent Night” was also heard — and sung in various mother tongues. The peaceful, solidary Christmas celebration in the middle of the war was treated as a state of emergency. Fraternisation was subsequently prohibited and made punishable by death.

<https://www.stillenacht.com/en/history/song-of-peace/>

Silent Night and Politics

During the Second World War and through the middle of the 1950s, the emigrant from Oberndorf Leopold Kohr (1909-1994) fused a message of peace with political statements against the war. In the United States, the economist and philosopher from Salzburg published highly successful calls for empathy for his Austrian homeland with the help of “Silent Night”. Every year during the Christmas season, he wrote dozens of newspaper articles, employing “Silent Night” as a political song against Nazi Germany and calling for the liberation of Austria. With sentimental descriptions of his home of Salzburg and the Austrian Alps, he managed to capture the emotions of his readers: “Oberndorf is only a small village in Austria. But it is my village, and this is why I often like to think of it. In the distance rise the mighty chains of the Alps to their majestic height. And the melody will float out again from the village which created it to the world to which it belongs.”

<https://www.stillenacht.com/en/history/song-of-peace/>

Myths and Legends of “Silent Night” - <https://www.stillenacht.com/en/a-global-hit-is-born/myths-and-legends/>

Silent Night – Music and Video

There are many settings of Silent Night. If you choose to sing this carol each week, consider using different settings or different accompaniment for variety in texture and color. Have children in your church? Perhaps have the children sing it alone one week. Consider having someone sing the first verse in German or use a recording of the song in German. For Christmas Eve, consider singing the carol with guitar only as on that first time Silent Night was sung.

German lyric version - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXMM24n1yno>

German and English simultaneously - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu-US5flsww>

Spanish lyric video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SF47MzYs_I4

Enya in Gaelic (Irish) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBpPTGUg0WE>

Spanish, English, Finnish, & Swedish version - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVSwpWL8pBE>

In 6 languages with lyrics - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-0oxhji7k>

Boney M. – Silent Night with another song – in English and German – with video images of Christmas lights around the world
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwLqHo79Qwg>

English version sung by Filipino boys - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQi84doPLzg>

Karaoke version with piano and strings - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AuSXvutXsE>

Rafael Scarfullery – classical guitarist - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ca0iZaHsCQ8>

Ukulele solo - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inGMJsawr6U>

Hillsong – lyric video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNpiQwgStNA>

Stephan Carlson – acapella arrangement, layered video – consider for music during communion - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPjZwEjzhvg>

Pentatonix – Silent Night – consider for music during communion
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sme8N2pzRx8>

Aretha Franklin – consider for music during communion - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfZgrYuDIDo>

Chris Tomlin with Kristyn Getty - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pEndgvJe2s>

Kirk Franklin – new setting of Silent Night – may make a good audio prelude or postlude - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O4Ssr7Pvp0>

Somewhere in Your Silent Night – Casting Crowns <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT-5cP4Beol>

On this Still, Silent Night – with Stille, Stille, Stille (in English) – Oxford Treble Choir - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVbdzCS8gyw>

Peace, Peace with Silent Night – a favorite choral setting often with the choir singing Peace, Peace then the congregation joining in with Silent Night. Makes a great closing. Music readily available.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SAffetzSNc>

Sheet Music <https://www.musicnotes.com/sheetmusic/mtd.asp?ppn=MN0179616>

CREATIVE IDEAS

Beer and Christmas Carols – Go to a local watering hole and sing Carols together. Hand out invites to your Christmas Eve Service. Take donations for your mission project for the homeless or hungry.

Snacks, Games and Jesus – This is an idea for more than a holiday get together! Check out “A Game for Good Christians.” It’s similar to “Apples to Apples” but with an obvious twist.

Kwanzaa – Maybe your church has not observed Kwanzaa. Consider a “Kwanzaa Moment” in each week of the season to simply introduce the principles to your congregation. Another approach is to use a different principle of Kwanzaa as the basis for your weekly children’s time in Worship. Here’s another idea: create a daily email blast to help your congregation learn about and observe the seven principles (Nguzo Saba) of Kwanzaa beginning Dec. 26th. Too many of us focus up to Christmas and then activity and correspondence from the church tends to drop off. A daily email blast about the principle of the day will maintain contact and further educate and inspire during this usually low activity week!

If introducing weekly:

Advent 1 – Umoja – Unity

Advent 2 – Kujichagulia – Self-Determination

Advent 3 – Ujima – Collective Work and Responsibility

Advent 4 – Ujamaa – Cooperative Economics

Christmas Eve/Day – Nia – Purpose

Christmas 1, Dec. 30th – Kuumba – Creativity

Epiphany, Jan 6 – Imani - Faith

Here are some resources for Kwanzaa. The internet has lots to offer! Consider connecting with a local community organization that is offering Kwanzaa events too.

<http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/index.shtml>

<http://www.holidays.net/kwanzaa/7days.htm>

<https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2013/12/24/can-white-people-celebrate-kwanzaa-and-other-questions-you-were-too-afraid-to-ask/>

<https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/kwanzaa>

SINGLE ADVENT EVENT - A Night to Consider Silent Night

Here is an option for a single event to consider the 200th Anniversary of “Silent Night.” If you are a small group that meets only once a month, this is for you. If you are a church that has already planned another Advent/Christmas theme then this might be a resource for a single event.

During the Sharing times consider breaking it up by having people share as a whole group or share in pairs. You know your community and context! Let it inform you how best to help people participate.

This material could also be used for small groups that meet weekly! Just divide it up by Reflection.

WELCOME

We are gathered tonight to consider the famous Christmas Carol “Silent Night” in a new way. There are lots of stories about the circumstances of the writing of this beloved carol. Here is one version.

Have another person read the story, this version or another one. More are in the resources.

A Simple Version of the Origin

In the winter of 1818 at St. Nicholas’ Church at Obendorf, a village near Salzburg, Austria, Joseph Mohr, the assistant to the priest, faced a dilemma. It was just days before Christmas, and the church organ which was so important to providing music for the Christmas services was broken. *[There are lots of traditions around why!] ...* His solution to the problem of the broken organ resulted in one of the most popular Christmas carols of all time. In 1816 Mohr had written a simple poem that the villagers could understand expressing the wonder of the birth of Jesus. He asked his friend Franz Gruber who was the organist at St. Nicholas to write music to accompany his poem so that they could sing it together using a guitar to accompany their singing.

<http://www.noelnoelnoel.com/trad/silent.html>

Sing “Silent Night”

ONE: Tonight we are taking a different approach to consider this song. Tonight we say “No More Silent Night!” Why? Because we have learned that Silence=Death.

TWO: We call out injustice, speaking truth in love, for all people.
We hear the oppressed and raise our voices with shouts of
Me Too, Black Lives Matter, Refugees are Welcome *[contextualize this section]*

ONE: We speak up for all holy families, for the refugee and displaced, the documented and undocumented, and for those families who weep and mourn due to unjust separations, unresolved differences, war and death.

TWO: Thoughts and prayers become justice actions and the sounds of Christ’s coming again.
We will not be silent! We will speak up in the name of the Incarnate Word of Love who came and comes with justice and reconciliation.

LEADER: Tonight the carol Silent Night invites us to reconsider our silence. It invites us to conversation with each other and within ourselves. We will have a series of Reflections that will be shared along with some questions. We invite your participation in thoughtful discussion of the questions.

OPTION FOR SILENT REFLECTION: Tonight the carol Silent Night invites us to reconsider our silence. It invites us to conversation within ourselves. We will have a series of Reflections that will be read along with some questions. You will then be invited to reflect on those questions and to journal, for yourself, some of your thoughts.

Have someone read the first reflection.

REFLECTION #1

People are eager to sing Christmas Carols, attend holiday parties, shop and get to the gifts. Maybe that's you too! We may give a donation to a charity but many of us don't really get involved personally. So we may effectively silence the cries of those in need when they are inconvenient or distract from our celebrations. Silence=Death. Remember? We cannot and must not shut out the sounds of those in need. Our silence will equal our death – our spiritual death. We must join our voice with the Righteous Branch, that's one of the Advent titles for Jesus, who came and comes bringing justice. What are the signs and sounds around you? What are you hearing?

Take a few shares here or invite to private reflection and journaling.

This time approaching Christmas is not really silent is it?! The Word of God is always speaking. What is the Word saying to you? How are we raising our voices and for what?

Allow time here for more sharing or private reflection and journaling.

REFLECTION #2

Too many tell us not to discuss politics or religion at Christmas. Let's be nice, they say. The appearance and proclamation of truth, justice and love may disturb the norm and make the comfortable uncomfortable. The prophetic word is often disturbing. Even the shepherds quaked at the sight and sound of glory's streaming. We have constant news streams today and most of it is not good news. Much of it is opinion and positioning rather than news. What would our world be like if we joined in glory's stream and the surprising song of the angels?

Ask, so what do you think? What might that look like?

What news are you sharing on Social Media or with those you talk to regularly? How are you speaking Love, Justice and Hope into today's issues and struggles?

Time for sharing or personal reflection.

Confession and Assurance *If you don't have a bulletin or a screen, just have another voice read the ALL.*

ALL: God, forgive me if I get ahead of you and forget the Source of my Good News! Forgive me for speaking my opinion instead of your love. Forgive me, if in the process of speaking against injustice, I become the oppressor. Forgive me too for the times I don't want to be the one to disturb the status quo; for the times I seek to stay comfortable at someone else's expense. Help me always remember, your Peace and Justice is for All. Be with me in every situation. Purify me. Refine me. May my life, my service and my worship be pleasing in your sight, O God.

ONE: The voice of God speaks through the prophet Isaiah saying: I am God who created you. Do not fear, for I have redeemed you and have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through deep or fast waters, you will not be swept away. I will be with you. When you walk through trials that feel like fire, you will not be burned. I am Almighty God, your God, your Savior and I will be with you. You are precious in my eyes and I love you. (based on Isaiah 43 1-4)

REFLECTION #3

Don't believe the lies. It wasn't a silent night. The city was full, bustling with activity as people arrived for the census. No doubt people were catching up with friends and family. Mary was in labor. Her cries and his newborn cries would have pierced any quiet there might have been. Months earlier, Mary cried out in praise. Elizabeth and the baby John within her womb responded to Mary and the presence of Divine Love. Mary's Magnificat is a song of power and hope. Mary knew the truth and would not be silenced. She sang out claiming the Divine Power within her. Are you silenced by your circumstances? Do you silence others?

Quiet personal reflection. No shares.

How do you claim your reality and your power? How do you respond to the Christ Spirit in others?

Take a few shares OR have asked 2 people in advance to think about how they would respond to these two questions and have them share here.

An Affirmation

ONE: What is this giving birth to hope and possibility? Who am I to be a bearer of grace?

ALL: I am a beloved and called vessel of Christ! I will not be silenced! I will speak truth to power. I will proclaim God's Presence and Justice.

ONE: The Divine in me recognizes the Divine in you.

ALL: Together we sing God's praise for all to hear. GOD-IS-WITH-US!

One of the often-told stories about Silent Night involves the singing of it during a ceasefire in wartime. Let's hear that story. *[Read the story or use a video telling.]*

Christmas 1914: Around five months after the beginning World War I, something occurred on the Western Front — where over a million soldiers had already died or been wounded — that would become known as an unlikely pacifist and fraternal miracle between thousands of soldiers of different nations. On 24 December, Christmas Eve, the trenches went quiet. Several soldiers placed small, illuminated Christmas trees on the upper edge of their trench — as a sign of peace. On both sides of the approximately 50-kilometre-long front in Flanders, the combatants collectively put down their rifles and helmets and sang their

domestic Christmas songs. “Silent Night” was also heard — and sung in various mother tongues. The peaceful, solidary Christmas celebration in the middle of the war was treated as a state of emergency. Fraternization was subsequently prohibited and made punishable by death.

<https://www.stillenacht.com/en/history/song-of-peace/>

REFLECTION #4

Sometimes when the story of Silent Night in the trenches is told, it is said that German and English soldiers crossed into no man’s land and sang together, sharing rations and wishing one another a Merry Christmas. This story and image creates warm feelings in us. We conveniently forget that after this ceasefire, the war resumed. Is that what we will do this Christmas? – take a time out from certain behaviors, battles or language and then return to them once again after the holidays?

Silent reflection

It is not the absence of war or conflict rather the presence of peace and justice that we seek. How might the sounds of New Life, New Hope, the Christ coming alive IN YOU cut through the illusions of peace and the lies of our culture?

Time for sharing and discussion.

PRAYER TIME – *Take time for prayer requests or have a pastoral prayer here.*

The Good News *If you had co-leaders for this event, you can divide this up for two or more voices.*

Here’s the Good News. We are not alone. God is with us. True authority rests on the shoulders of this One who was, is, and shall be our Source of Peace. We know the story behind the story of Silent Night. We know that a Child was born, for ALL of us – for those we agree with and those we struggle with! We know it was not a Silent Night. We know that there were the sounds of labor, of crowds gathered for the census and oppressive Roman taxation; that there were the sounds of sheep being moved and shepherds telling their experience; AND there were the sounds of angel proclamations and songs of praise. Be not afraid. It was not a silent night. And we should not be silent. Let your joy and hope be heard. Go tell your story as the shepherds did. No silent night here! Proclaim justice and love. Sing. Shout. Praise. Celebrate the truth. God is with us! Hallelujah!

Benediction

The lights are burning brighter now.

We have accomplished much in terms of justice.

Still there is more to be done.

Not all the lights are burning yet!

Advent, with the light of hope, pointed out the places where we need to work.

Christmas comes to tell us we do not work alone!

We came to worship, now we must go, do the work of peace and justice

Letting our Light shine and our song of Love be heard.

Everywhere. Everyday! Amen!

RESOURCES for CHRISTMAS 1, NEW YEAR'S EVE and EPIPHANY SUNDAY

CHRISTMAS 1 – 30 December 2018

Make some noise! Sing Hallelujah! God-Is-With-Us! Our identity is in the One who came, who comes again and indeed is with us always. Christmas Day is gone yet we are in the midst of the Christmas season. It is time to embody the Christmas story. It is time to prepare for a new year.

Consider a focus, or at least a good portion of your message, on the Epistle this week and help people embody Emmanuel, God-With-Us. Help them live into their spiritual identity and calling. In other words, assist them in being about their Parent's work.

In looking at the Gospel, consider who you are in the story. Are you the parents? Who are you looking for? Why do we presume someone is lost if they are not where we are, doing what we are doing? Perhaps the lost are not really the lost! Perhaps it is our perception that needs to change! Why do we chastise others for not being or doing what we think they should?

This is a good time to consider how we dismiss youth or don't notice their spiritual callings and identity. We ought not be surprised to find one another doing Divine work or spending time in the Divine presence. Isn't that the gift of Christmas? Emmanuel comes to us, all of us, and invites us, like the shepherds to come and see, then go and tell!

The question Jesus asks "Why were you looking for me?" comes to us in a number of ways. Why do we look outside, beyond ourselves for Jesus when he is already with and within us? Why are we busy looking for someone else rather than finding ourselves and centering ourselves, at home in the Divine Presence? This circles us back to the reminders of the Epistle, how to live and what kind of concern to have for one another. Emmanuel, God-With-Me, God-With-You, God-With-Us. Let it be so!

Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as God has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Almighty through Christ.

Luke 2:41-50

Each year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom. After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know it. Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their friends and family. When they didn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them. Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and answers. When his parents saw him, they were shocked. His mother said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We've been looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Heavenly Parent's house?" But they didn't understand what he said to them.

Calls to Worship

Consider using this Psalm text for the day as the Call to Worship

Psalm 148:1-5

Praise the Almighty! Praise God from the heavens and in the heights! Praise God, all of you who are God's messengers! Praise the Almighty, all of you who comprise Divine heavenly forces! Sun and moon, praise God! All of you bright stars, praise God! You highest heaven, praise God! Do the same you waters that are above the sky! Let all of these praise the name of Almighty God who gave the command and created them!

Call to Worship

ONE: Make some noise! Sing Hallelujah!

ALL: YES! Emmanuel has come! God-Is-With-Us!

ONE: Our identity is in the One who came, who comes again and indeed is with us always.

ALL: Christmas Day may be over but we are here to embody the story.

ONE: That's right. We are here to celebrate the Spirit of the Christ who is with us today, tomorrow and into this next new year.

ALL: No more silent nights or silent days. We will praise God and shout Good News!

ONE: Let's worship!

Christmas Creed – *If you didn't use the Christmas Creed from Christmas Eve, consider using it on this day. Even if you did use it, it is worth repeating.*

Communion Celebration - *It IS the Season of Christmas. Use one of the celebrations from the Christmas Eve Resources or More Communion Celebrations section.*

ALTERNATIVE CHRISTMAS 1

In many churches this is considered a low attendance Sunday. People are traveling. There can be a let down after all the Christmas festivities. Your music people may be tired out from Advent and Christmas extras. Why not try an alternative model of worship for this day? All of these options can easily be concluded with the celebration of Communion. All of these would require minimum music and could be done with unaccompanied singing.

Option 1 – *Take this week to do an entire service focusing on the seven principles of Kwanzaa! You can easily use this week's Epistle lectionary reading along with material about Kwanzaa. Resources for Kwanzaa are found under Creative Ideas. Consider partnering with another group to help facilitate this and build partnerships.*

Option 2 – *If you did not use the No More Silent Night theme, consider using the Single Advent Event service model. It would only require a few word changes to shift from being in Advent to being in Christmas.*

Option 3 – *If you did not use the Silent Night: Living the Song theme, consider using elements of the four weeks plus Christmas Eve to create a worship experience in 5 movements using the song Silent Night. Want to do this? Need help designing the service? Contact Rev. Colleen Darraugh at RevEagle@gmail.com for assistance.*

WATCHNIGHT SERVICE – NEW YEAR’S EVE

Some churches like to have an 11pm Worship Service to close out the old year and bring in the New Year. For some this is an alternative to parties and an alcohol-free, drug-free safe space for New Year’s Eve. Some churches offer a social evening (potluck or planned meals with a game night or dance) followed by a short service - perhaps a very short message by the Pastor, communion and prayer to welcome the New Year. With any of these formats, the focus is a releasing of any regrets or mistakes of the past, embrace of forgiveness, appreciation of the lessons learned and growth of the past year, and prayers/blessings for the New Year.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Psalm 8 *This text has been edited from “them” to “us” to help people personalize it. Consider having the whole congregation read this together.*

O God, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! ... When I look up at the skies, at what your fingers made – the moon and the stars that you set in place – what are human beings that you think about us; what are human beings that you pay attention to us? You’ve made us only slightly less than divine, crowning us with glory and grandeur. You’ve let us rule over your handiwork, putting everything under our feet. ... Almighty God, my God, how majestic is your name throughout the earth!

Releasing Rituals

Burning Bowl – Have people write down, on small pieces of paper, the things they want to leave behind / release. Burn these in a large fire safe bowl. Surround this ritual with prayers for considering what they NEED to release, what they are willing to release, courage to release, etc. and then assurances of forgiveness.

Dissolving Paper – Very similar to the Burning Bowl, this instead uses dissolving paper that can be ordered online. Instead of burning the paper, you place it in a large, clear bowl and the paper dissolves. Hint, sometimes you need to stir it! It helps for the bowl to be clear so the dissolving can be seen and experienced.

Sand Paper and Wood – For this activity you need wood shims (inexpensive wedges of wood), pens, and sand paper. Have people write one or two things they would like to release or find forgiveness. Encourage people to go deep so they can get the issue or driving force behind the presenting issue and write it in a word or two. Shorter is better. Then they take the small square of sand paper and rub the wood, erasing the ink and the dent writing created. The Leader/Pastor can talk before or during the sand paper effort. Embracing our forgiveness takes our intention and effort. We are often tempted to blame and judge ourselves again. God has forgiven us already. Will we forgive ourselves? People get to keep their piece of wood. For New Year’s they can write on it a value they wish to embrace more deeply!

Call to Worship

ONE: O God, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth and heavens!

TWO: You made the years before us and the year ahead of us.

ONE: You have given us every good gift under heaven.

TWO: You call us to be aware of just how much you love us and how much you have given us.

ONE: We gather today to say goodbye to yesterday's mistakes and missed moments.

TWO: We gather today to prepare to enter this next year as forgiven, beloved people.

A Prayer Based on the Night Prayer from the New Zealand Prayer Book

God,

it is almost the beginning of a New Year.

The end of this year is for stillness.

As we approach the dawn of a New Year, let us be still in the presence of God.

Soon it will be a new day after a long year.

What has been done has been done;

what has not been done has not been done;

let it be.

Let our fears of the shadows of the world and of our own lives
rest in you.

This time is quiet.

Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,

all dear to us,

and all who have no peace.

Let us look expectantly to this new day and new year,
to new joys,
and new possibilities.

In your name we pray.

Amen.

Lighting the Way – A Prayer (Source unknown)

ONE: The Lights of our Advent Wreath burn brightly.

The Christ Light of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love burns for all.

Christmas lights the Way into our New Year

And the truth of Christmas goes with us.

ALL: Love Incarnate is with us every day.

As we have received the gift of the Light and Love,

It becomes our calling to share the Light and Love.

ONE: When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.
This is our task in this New Year!

ALL: Beyond our resolutions or our personal hopes and dreams,
We are called to Light the Way to Christ.
We are called to do the work of peacemakers, justice bringers, hope restorers and igniters of deep love of God, of neighbor, of self and all of creation.
This is our calling. This is our prayer. Amen.

A Prayer of the People based on prayers by Jan L. Richardson

ONE: Make of the universe, fashioner of the stars, who dwells within time and beyond time, hear this prayer: If I have failed to perceive you when you have appeared in the face of a friend,

ALL: If I have neglected to feed you when you have come with the hunger of a stranger;

ONE: If I have not embraced you when you have sought me out of a sister or brother's poverty,

ALL: If I have not laughed and played with you when you greeted me with the delight of a child, forgive me.

ONE: Open my eyes, my hands, my arms, my heart to know your appearing and to celebrate the flesh-shaped mystery of Emmanuel, God-With-Us.

ALL: Make my heart a dwelling place ready to receive you in even the bleakest spaces, to delight at your appearing even as the animals who made welcome for the birth of wonder.

ONE: God of seasons and times, changes and cycles, days past and yet to come, be with us in this turning of time. Guide us by the light of your love. Help us be ignited by the fire of your passion. May your light burn brightly in us so that others may see and know the Light of Hope. AMEN.

EPIPHANY

Although Epiphany is a Season and some launch a whole new season focus beginning this week, others use this as the last Sunday of the Christmas Season (which it is) and start new series in the next week. Since Epiphany actually falls on January 6th, the Feast of Epiphany, this resource will focus on Epiphany as the end of the Christmas Season. Certainly it is a transitional Sunday letting the Light point us forward into the New Year!

Isaiah 60:1-5

Arise, shine; for you light has come, and the glory of God has risen upon you. For behold, shadows shall cover the earth, and thick shadows the peoples; but God will arise upon you, and the glory of God will be seen upon you. And the nations shall come to your light, and rulers to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters be carried in the arms. Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

Matthew 2:1-2

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold, magi from the East came to Jerusalem, saying: "Where is the one who has been born ruler of the Jews? For we have seen the star in the East, and have come to worship the newborn child."

John 1:1-5, 12-14, 16

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God; all things were made through the Word, and without the Word was not anything made that was made. In the Word was life, and the life was the light of all. The light shines in the deepest night, and the night has not overcome it.

To all who received the Word, who believed in the name of the Word, power was given to become children of God; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of human will, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld the Word's glory, glory as of the only Child from God. And from the fullness of the Child we all have received, grace upon grace.

Call to Worship *Use with one voice or divide - first line for ONE and the second line ALL*

Arise! Shine, for your Light has come!

The glory of our God is upon us!

Gathering Prayer

Light of God, illumine the path that leads us to healing, hope and salvation.

Glory of God, fill this sanctuary and expose the shadows that linger in our souls.

Light of God, illumine each person, each temple of the Holy Spirit with your wisdom.

Glory of God, we welcome you in this place and we worship you. AMEN.

Prayer of Confession

God, our Light, illumine the chaos of our world, our relationships, and our thinking. Shine in our hearts and minds revealing those corners where we harbor negativity towards others or ourselves. Forgive us for being anything less than loving. Forgive us and help us forgive ourselves and others. Help us arise from complacency or depression or self-limitations to be bright lights of love, hope and possibility.

Assurance

The light of Christ is within you. The light of Christ is around you. The light of Christ is before you. The light of Christ is behind you. The light of Christ is beside you. The light of Christ is here. Arise in Truth and shine, for your Light is with and within you!

An Affirmation of Faith (Source Unknown)

ONE: We believe that in the beginning was the Word, that the Word was with God, and that the Word was God; that through the Word all things began; through an outpouring of love, God created the heavens and the earth.

ALL: We believe in the Word made flesh, God's presence in the world.

ONE: We believe that God touched the earth, and in a rush of tenderness fashioned man and woman, formed them in God's image, loving them as a mother loves her child.

ALL: We believe that God walked with us from the beginning, in the cool of the evening and the heat of the day, gifted us with freedom to achieve and to fail, liberated us whenever our bondage became more than we could bear.

ONE: We believe that after a long period of waiting, the God of history in fact became flesh to share our human condition; the salt of our tears, the thrust of our dreams, the intensity of our loves.

ALL: We believe that Christ came, comes and will come again, enlightening the shadows of our minds and hearts, satisfying our hungers and forgiving our sins.

ONE: We believe that even now the Word is with us and will be until the end of time. We believe in Christ's death and resurrection and in our own progression through death to life.

ALL: We believe in the providence of the Creator and in the Spirit's power to heal, calling us together as one common family: young and old, rich and poor, black and white, heterosexual and homosexual, oppressed and oppressor.

ONE: We believe that there is hope for tomorrow despite the discouragements of today!

ALL: For with Abraham and Sarah, Rebekah and Isaac, Jacob and Rachel, with the prophets and apostles, with all of God's people through tests and through time, we have clung to the Promise and we believe that the Promise has been fulfilled! We believe in the Word made Flesh, God's presence in the world!

AMEN!

Benediction

The prophet Isaiah says: "There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined." Go, spread the good news: God is with us!

MUSIC RESOURCES for New Year's and Epiphany

A New Year's Carol/ Another Year is Dawning

Another year is dawning, dear Teacher, let it be,
in working or in waiting, another year with thee.

Another year of leaning upon thy loving breast,
of ever-deepening trustfulness, of quiet, happy rest.

Another year of progress, another year of praise,
another year of proving thy presence all the days.
Another year of service, of witness for thy love;
another year of training for holier work above.

Tune: The Church's One Foundation

Lyrics: Frances R. Havergal edit and verses 1 & 2 merged

Jesus, the Light of the World / Follow the Light

Hark! The herald angels sing, Jesus the Light of the world;
Glory to the Christ Child bring, Jesus the Light of the world.

We will follow the light the beautiful light
Come where the dewdrops of mercy are bright
Shine all around us by day and by night
Jesus the Light of the World.

Joyful all ye saints arise, Jesus the Light of the world;
Join the triumph of the skies, Jesus the Light of the world;

Christ of highest Heav'n adored, Jesus the Light of the world;
Jesus the Everlasting Word, Jesus the Light of the World.

Words: Charles Wesley, 1739 Music: George D. Elderkin, Jeffrey Radford ©1993

"Siyahamba"

Siyahamba ekukhanyeni kwenkhos,
Siyahamba ekukhanyeni kwenkhos,
Siyahamba ekukhanyeni kwenkhos,
Siyahamba ekukhanyeni kwenkhos,
Siyahamba, hamba, Siyahamba, hamba,
Siyahamb ekukhanyeni kwenkhos,
Siyahamba, hamba, Siyahamba, hamba,
Siyahamba ekukhanyeni kwenkhos.

We are marching in the light of God, We are marching in the light of God,
We are marching in the light of God, We are marching in the light of God.
We are marching, marching, We are marching, marching,
We are marching in the light of God.
We are marching, marching, We are marching, marching,
We are marching in the light of God.

Traditional South African Tune

On This Day of Celebration - Tune: Ode to Joy

On this day of celebration, at this time when hopes are new,
God, we gather as your people, called to put our trust in you.
You have made the world we live in; you have worked through history.
In your plan we find our purpose, in your love, our unity.

Long ago, you sent our Savior to this world in deep despair.
In your Word made flesh you came, our life to know, our sins to bear.
Christ has died and Christ is risen! At this new year we proclaim:
Yesterday, today, forever— Jesus Christ is still the same!

On this day, we pause and wonder what the future years will bring,
Yet we know you clothe each flower and you make each sparrow sing.
How much more will you protect us with your guiding, caring hand!
By your Spirit, lead us boldly in the future you have planned.

Words: from "Gifts of Love: New Hymns for Today's Worship" by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, copyright© 2000, Geneva Press.
Carolyn is the co-pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Pitman, NJ.
Music: Ludwig van Beethoven, 1824

Don We Now Our Holy Habits

Deck the halls with holy garments. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Making room for new commitments. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Don we now our holy habits. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Making room for Christmas spirit. Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Samuel in simple clothing. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Easily could hear God calling. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Serving love as illustration. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Of a life of dedication. Fa la la la la, la la la la.

See the world grow bright before us. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Wear your faith and join the chorus. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Love to all the world exclaiming. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Doing all by Jesus naming. Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Lyrics by D'Anna Chance © 2009.

Arise Your Light Is Come

Arise, your light is come! The Spirit's call obey;
Show forth the glory of your God which shines on you today¹

Arise, your light is come! Fling wide the prison door;
Proclaim the captive's liberty, good tidings to the poor.

Arise, your light is come! All you in sorrow born,
Bind up the broken-hearted ones and comfort those who mourn.

Arise, your light is come! The mountains burst in song!
Rise up like eagles on the wing; God's power will make us strong.

Words: Ruth Duck © 1973 © 1992 G.I.A. Publications Music: Festal Song, William Walter, 1872

Additional Epiphany Song Suggestions

Here I Am to Worship

God of Wonders

The First Noel

Angels from the Realms of Glory v.3 & 4 only

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet

Shine, Jesus, Shine

Shine the Light