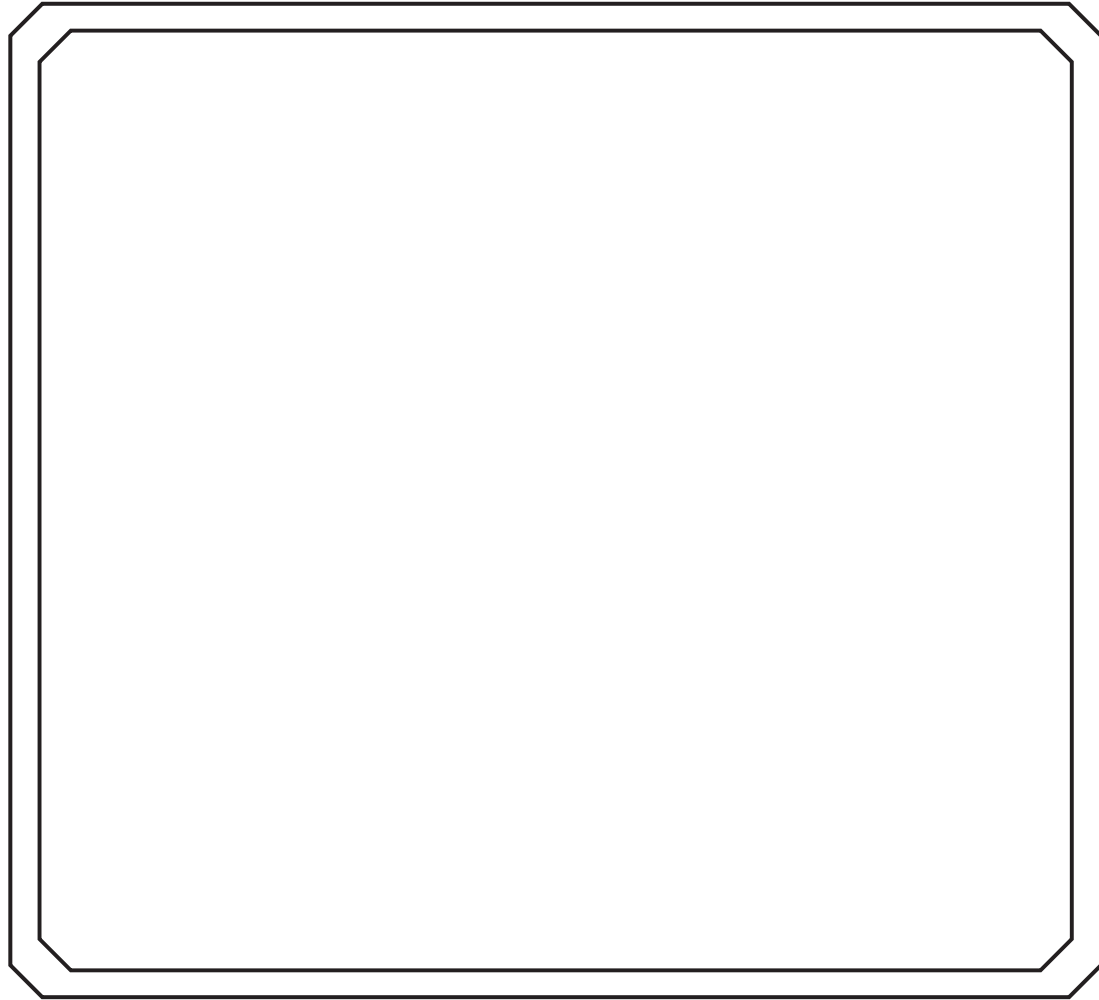




Advent Special Events



salt*

saltproject.org



Week One

LIGHT

One candle

READ

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence. + *Isaiah 64:1*

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. + *Mark 13:33*



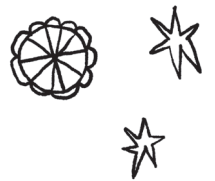
MEDITATE

Especially during the Advent season, Christians are not to shy away from the world's pain and despair. On the contrary, it's precisely in the shadows that we are called to light a candle, since that's the place the light can do the most good - for ourselves and for others. With this in mind, instead of simply "lighting a candle of hope," first turn toward specific shadows of hopelessness in our lives, in our neighbors' lives, and around the world. Then keep watch, strike a match, pray, and sing.



Dinner Conversation Starters

1. If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?
2. What specific experiences give you the most hope?



PRAY

God of light and hope, you are our shepherd, even and especially in the valley of the shadow of death. Show us the way, and let our lives glow with the light of your hope. Keep us awake and alert to your coming. Tear open the heavens; let the mountains of despair quake at your presence. Come, Jesus, come. Amen.

SING

"O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and "This Little Light of Mine"

WEEKLY PRACTICES

- Light a candle. Say a prayer. Breathe in despair, breathe out hope. Sip a cup of tea. Write down two or three ways you can help spread encouragement this week, both near and far. For example, check out Amnesty International's Urgent Action page - and write a letter of hope.
- Call a relative who lives far away and sing his or her favorite Christmas carol together.
- Read an extra bedtime story, or stay up a little later than usual with your nose in a novel.
- Make a nativity scene out of Legos. God can be born in lots of different places!
- Volunteer one hour this week at your favorite service organization. For everyone involved, service is one way God tears open the heavens and dwells with us...

Week Two

LIGHT

Two candles

READ

A voice cries out, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, 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 LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." + *Isaiah 40:3-5*



MEDITATE

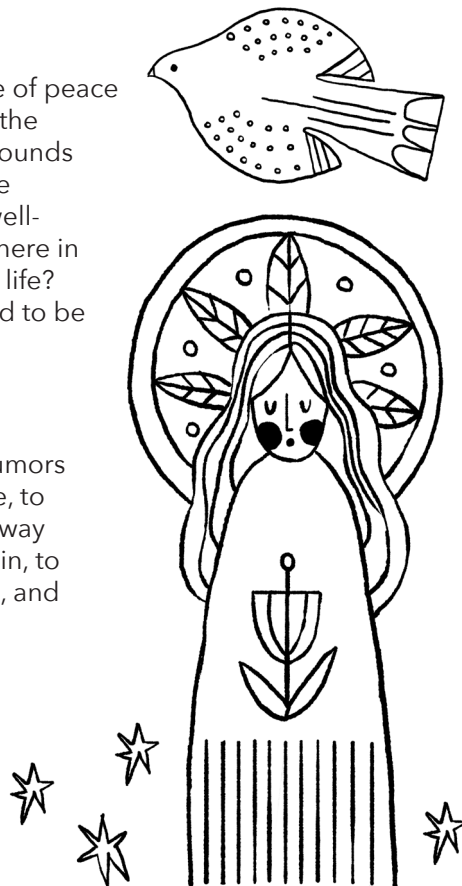
Alongside the candle of hope, this week we light a candle of peace in the midst of a war-torn world. From the playground to the workplace, among families and among nations, strife surrounds us. But God's peace – God's shalom – is more than just the absence of strife; it's the humming, pulsing presence of well-being. Where do we most need God's shalom today? Where in your personal life, in your community's life, in our planet's life? What would peace look like – and how are we being called to be peacemakers?

PRAY

God of shalom, we pray for our world so full of war and rumors of war. Give us the courage to become warriors for peace, to make peace, to protect peace, to be peace. Show us the way to prepare for your coming, to make the rough places plain, to create a lasting shalom in our homes, our neighborhoods, and our world. Come, Prince of Peace, come. Amen.

SING

"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" and
"Down by the Riverside"

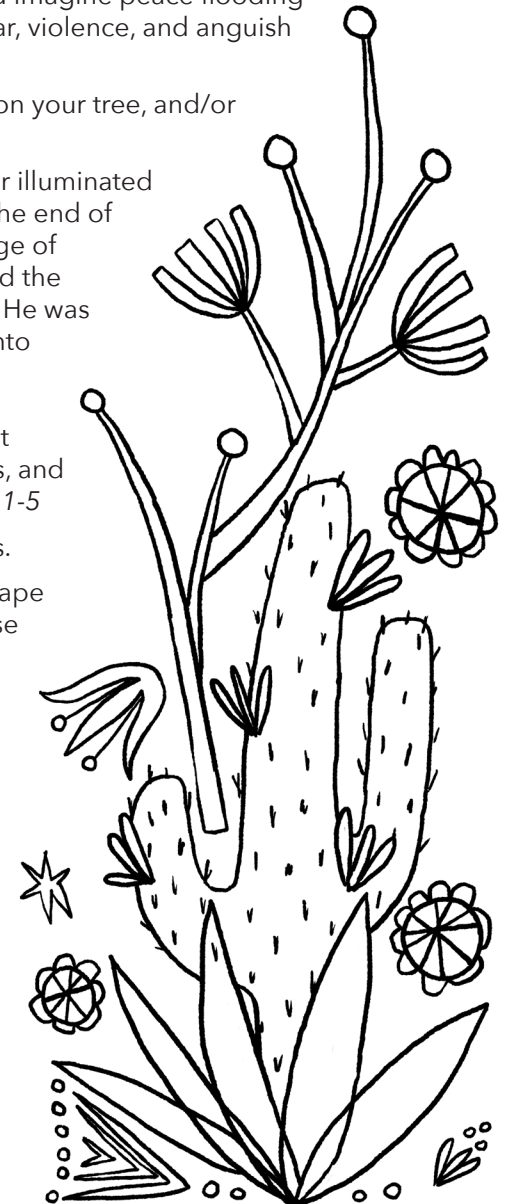


WEEKLY PRACTICES

- Light two candles. Read a poem (for example, Mary Oliver's poem, "Making the House Ready for the Lord," on the next page of this booklet). Breathe in pain, breathe out peace. Close your eyes and imagine peace flooding the streets and countryside of Syria, where war, violence, and anguish have been present for over six years.
- Write a Christmas wish for the world, hang it on your tree, and/or post it on Facebook or Instagram.
- Turn out all the lights and have a picnic dinner illuminated only by the lights of your Christmas tree. At the end of dinner, together whisper the following passage of scripture, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." + *John 1:1-5*
- Go for a forest walk and look for animal prints.
- Go to your local hospital or laundromat and tape quarters onto the vending machines – because sometimes peace comes in the form of chocolate!

Dinner Conversation Starters

1. So many people today are refugees fleeing violence. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were refugees – if you had to leave your home, what three things would you take with you?
2. When you picture true peace, God's peace, what specific images come to mind?





*The color of Advent is the night sky just before the dawn.
Draw a picture of God's night sky, complete with stars, comets, the moon,
angels, planets - whatever comes to mind. The sky's the limit!*

Making the House Ready for the Lord

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but still nothing is as shining as it should be for you. Under the sink, for example, is an uproar of mice - it is the season of their many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves and through the walls the squirrels have gnawed their ragged entrances - but it is the season when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow; what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly up the path, to the door. And I still believe you will come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox, the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-geese, know that really I am speaking to you whenever I say, as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

+ Mary Oliver



Week Three

LIGHT

Three candles

READ

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God’s servant. 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. God’s mercy is for those who fear God from generation to generation. God has shown strength with her arm; she has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. She 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 her servant Israel, in remembrance of her mercy, according to the promise she made to our ancestors, to Abraham and Sarah and to their descendants forever.” + *Luke 1:46-55*



MEDITATE

Alongside the candles of hope and peace, this week we light a candle of joy in the midst of a world full of sorrow. Some have called joy “the secret of the Gospel,” since even the greatest faith, or hope, or peace, or love – if it lacks a sense of joy, it is not yet fully alive. What do we see around us that gives us joy? How can we sing with Mary her song of celebration, even from the shadows of sorrow?

PRAY

God of delight, God of celebration, God of good news of great joy for all people – we pray for your world so full of sorrows. Let us weep with those who weep, and sing with those who sing. Most of all, give us voices to join with Mary in singing of how you delight in lifting up the lowly, scattering the proud, and filling the hungry with good things. Come, Jesus, come. Amen.

SING

“Joy to the World” and “Mary Don’t You Weep”

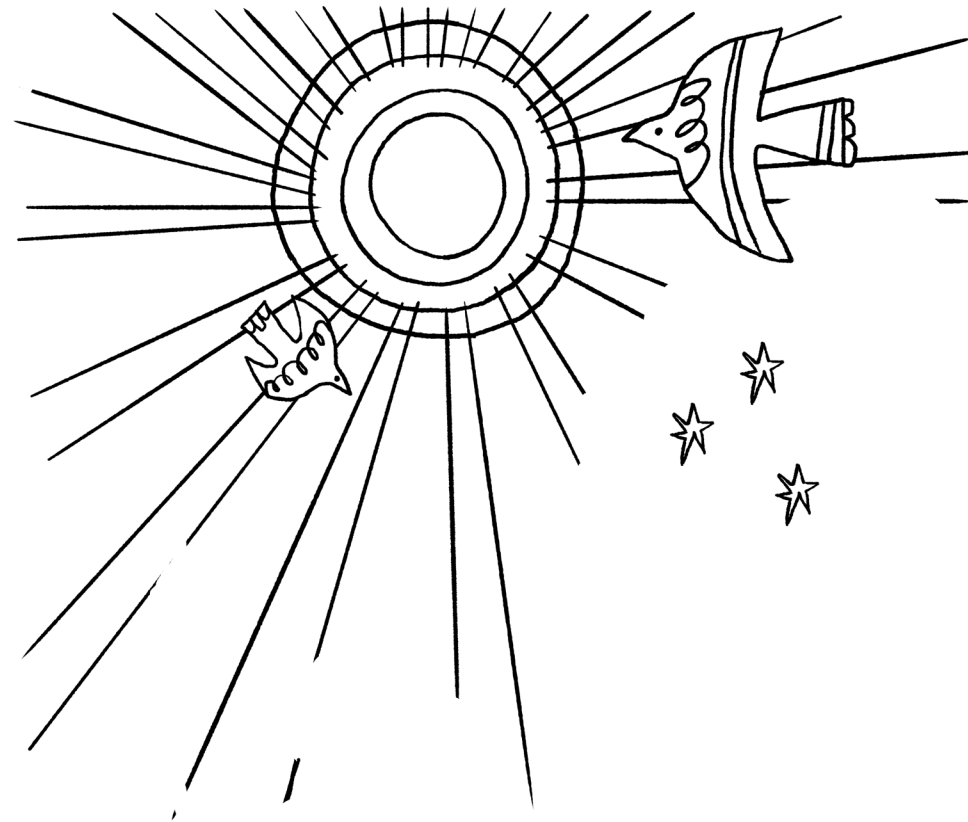
WEEKLY PRACTICES

- Light three candles. Breathe in sorrow, breath out joy. Write down ten things for which you are grateful. In her book, *Daring Greatly*, Brene Brown argues that cultivating gratitude creates room in your life and heart to experience joy - and joy, she says, is one of the most terrifying and wonderful emotions.
- Take an evening walk after darkness falls, look at all the Christmas lights, and don’t forget to marvel at the stars through the trees. Listen for an angel whispering good news, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people!” + *Luke 2:10*
- Increase your joy tonight by dipping candy canes in hot chocolate (and, don’t forget to say a prayer of thanksgiving over your steaming mug!).
- Grab a group of enthusiastic singers and go caroling. Go door to door, neighborhood to neighborhood, and to a nursing home where some people might not remember their own name, but still know every word to, “Silent Night.” Make a joyful noise!
- Put on your comfiest pajamas and watch the movie “Elf”!

Dinner Conversation Starters

1. Describe yourself ten years from this Christmas. What kind of life do you hope you’ve created? What kind of joy is in your life?
2. What’s the difference between joy and happiness?





The promise of Advent is that the desert places will bloom, and water will break forth in the wilderness. Draw a picture of your city, town, or neighborhood blooming with God's love!

Week Four

LIGHT

Four candles

READ

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... + *Luke 1:39-41*



MEDITATE

Alongside the candles of hope, peace, and joy, this week we light a candle of love in the midst of the shadows of hate. In our homes and in our hearts, across our country and among nations, discord and disrespect seem to rule the day. And yet the greatest commandment of all is to love God with everything we've got, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. How can we make love more tangible, vibrant, and clear in our everyday lives?

PRAY

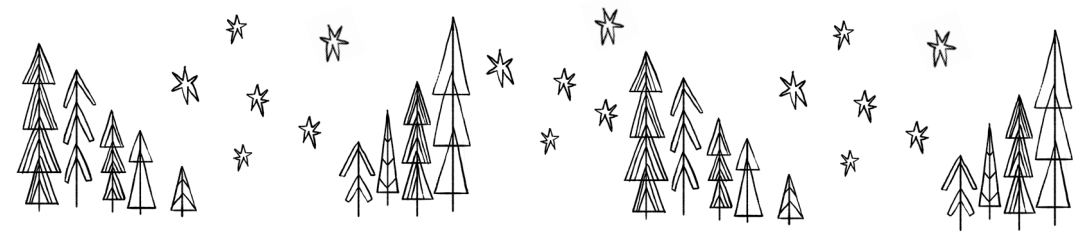
God of love, fill us with your Spirit. When we are tempted by hatred, let us sow love. When we encounter hate in others, let us sow love. And when we witness or receive the gift of love, let us recognize your presence, leap for joy, and sow love all the more. Come, Jesus, come.

SING

"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" and
"Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow"

Dinner Conversation Starters

1. What image is for you the perfect illustration of "hate"? Can love overcome hate?
2. What specifically makes you feel loved?



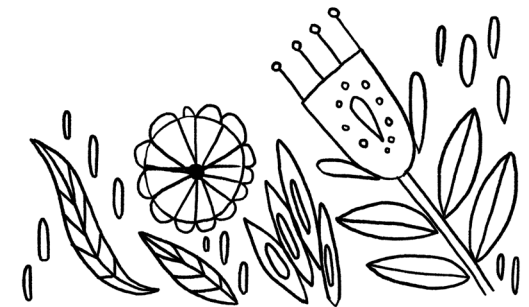
WEEKLY PRACTICES

- Light four candles. Breathe out hate, anger, or resentment; breathe in love.
- Write a "love letter" to someone who's made a difference in your life.
- It is sometimes said that "justice is what love looks like in public." Contribute time, talent, or treasure to a just cause this week - and do it in a spirit of love.
- With family or friends, have everyone write down - on separate gift tags - something they love about each person in the group (be sure to disguise your handwriting!). Then play a game guessing who wrote each tag - and hang the finished tags on the Christmas tree!

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the 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 brothers,
To make music in the heart.

+ *Howard Thurman*



Christmas Eve

LIGHT

Four candles, plus the Christ Candle

READ

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. + Luke 2:1-7



MEDITATE AND PRAY

Alongside the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love, tonight we light the Christ Candle as we make our way to the manger. Tonight is just a few days from the December solstice, the longest night of the year. Here in the shadows, yet bathed in light, pray this Christmas prayer:

Loving God,
For you animals prepared a bed
For you the heavens shone brightly and the stars clapped their hands
For you angels sang to help calm your crying
For you shepherds stood watch and marveled at how small you were
For you wise ones came running from the east, and when they saw you,
They fell down on their knees
Because you were Almighty God and yet you were so vulnerable
You were God and yet you had a soft spot on your head
God with Mary's milk on your breath, wrapped up in swaddling clothes
God, creator of everything, now born of flesh and blood to be with us
Emmanuel, God with us
Hope is ours
Peace is on the way
Sorrow has lost its grip
Love has flooded every heart
Emmanuel, God with us
Light has come back into the world
And the darkness of despair, and war,
and hurt, and hate shall not overcome it
Tonight you are with us
And we will never be the same
We will be more tender
We will protect the vulnerable
We will stand watch
We will come running to soothe the pain, to
befriend the lonely, to lift up the lowly
To live as your people, to walk with you in love
We pray all of this in the name of Emmanuel, God with us
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



SING

Have each person choose a favorite Christmas carol!
Or try "Go Tell It On the Mountain" and "Silent Night"