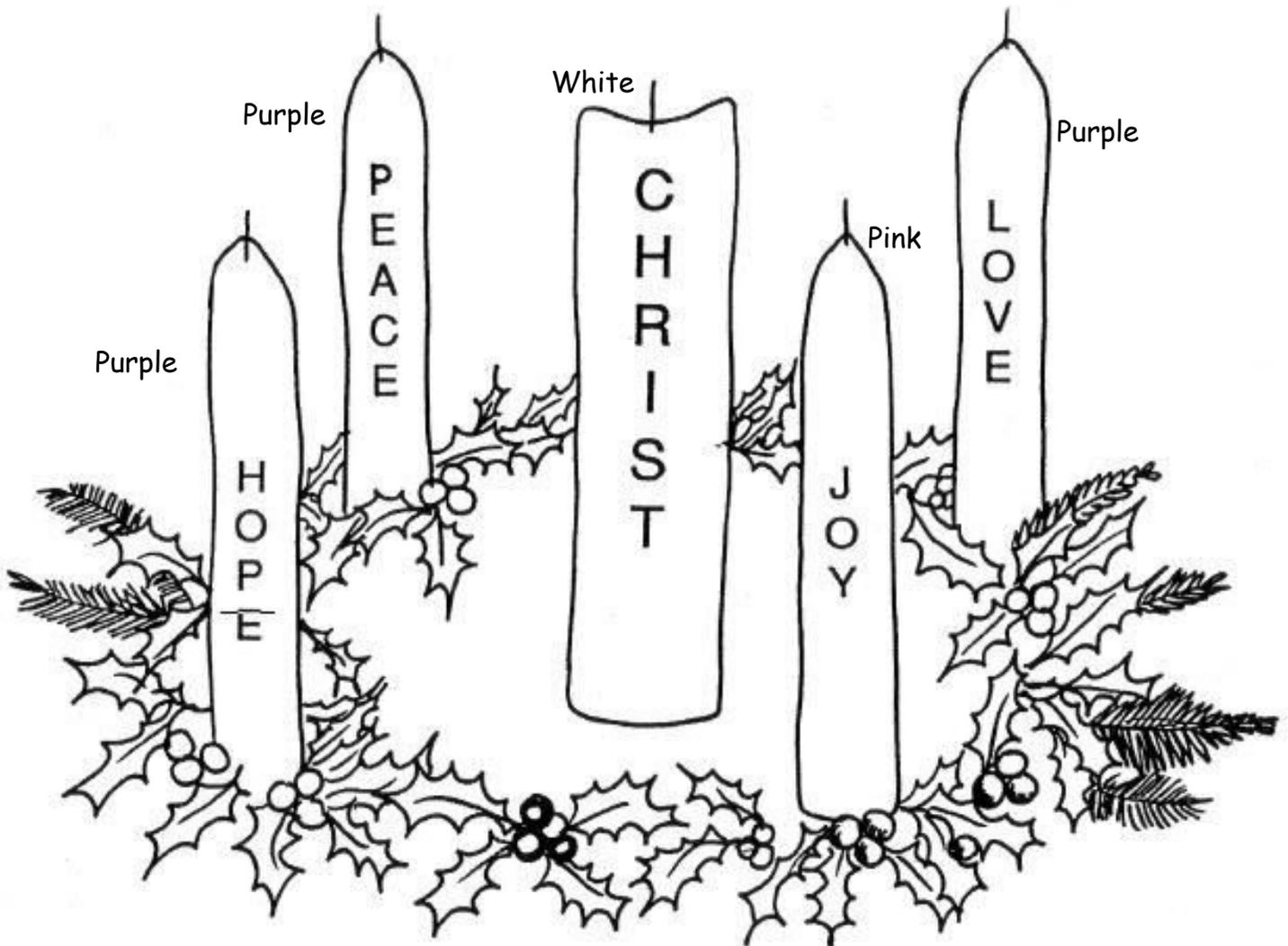




# ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

## A FAMILY ADVENT & CHRISTMAS



The four weeks before Christmas is called the Season of Advent. The word Advent means "coming." It is the time we prepare our hearts and our lives as we wait for the coming (birth) of Jesus. Every week before Christmas, we light a candle and take time to slow down, be quiet, and think about the real meaning of Jesus' birth.

Christmas begins the night Jesus is born. This is a time that we celebrate God's love for the world through the birth of the Christ child: Jesus. The Christmas season is 12 days after Jesus' birth.

The Season of the Epiphany begins when three Wise Men follow the star to Bethlehem and visit baby Jesus in the stable.

**And so here the story begins...**

## November 29 - Advent 1: Lighting the Candle of HOPE (purple)

The first candle of Hope, is the "Prophet's Candle". It reminds us that Jesus is coming. We watch for the light of Christ, even in the most unlikely places and people. Our hope comes from God.

"and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." ~ Romans 5:5

### **Prayer:**

Dear God, we have done things our own way and have put our hope in so many things that disappoint us. Thank you that you sent Jesus, that first Christmas long ago, to be our Savior. We believe He came for us, to show us how to live, how You can impact our lives, our character, and our circumstances. We put our hope in You right now. Please make Yourself known to us in our lives. Amen.

How will I be hopeful this week? \_\_\_\_\_



### **The Annunciation (Announcement)**

About 2000 year ago, God sent the angel Gabriel to a young virgin woman who lived in the town of Nazareth. Her name was Mary and she was engaged to marry a man named Joseph. The angel Gabriel said to Mary: 'Peace be with you! God has blessed you and is pleased with you.' Mary was very surprised by this and wondered what the angel meant. The angel said to her, Don't be afraid, God has been very kind to you. You will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and give birth to a baby boy and you will call him Jesus. He will be God's own Son and his kingdom will never end.' Mary was very afraid but she trusted God. 'Let it happen as God chooses.' she replied to the angel. Gabriel also told Mary that her cousin Elizabeth, who everyone thought was too old to have children, would have a baby boy whom God chose to prepare the way for Jesus.

## The Visitation



Mary was so excited about her baby and her cousin's baby that she wanted to visit Elizabeth. Mary said goodbye to her family and friends and went to visit Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah.

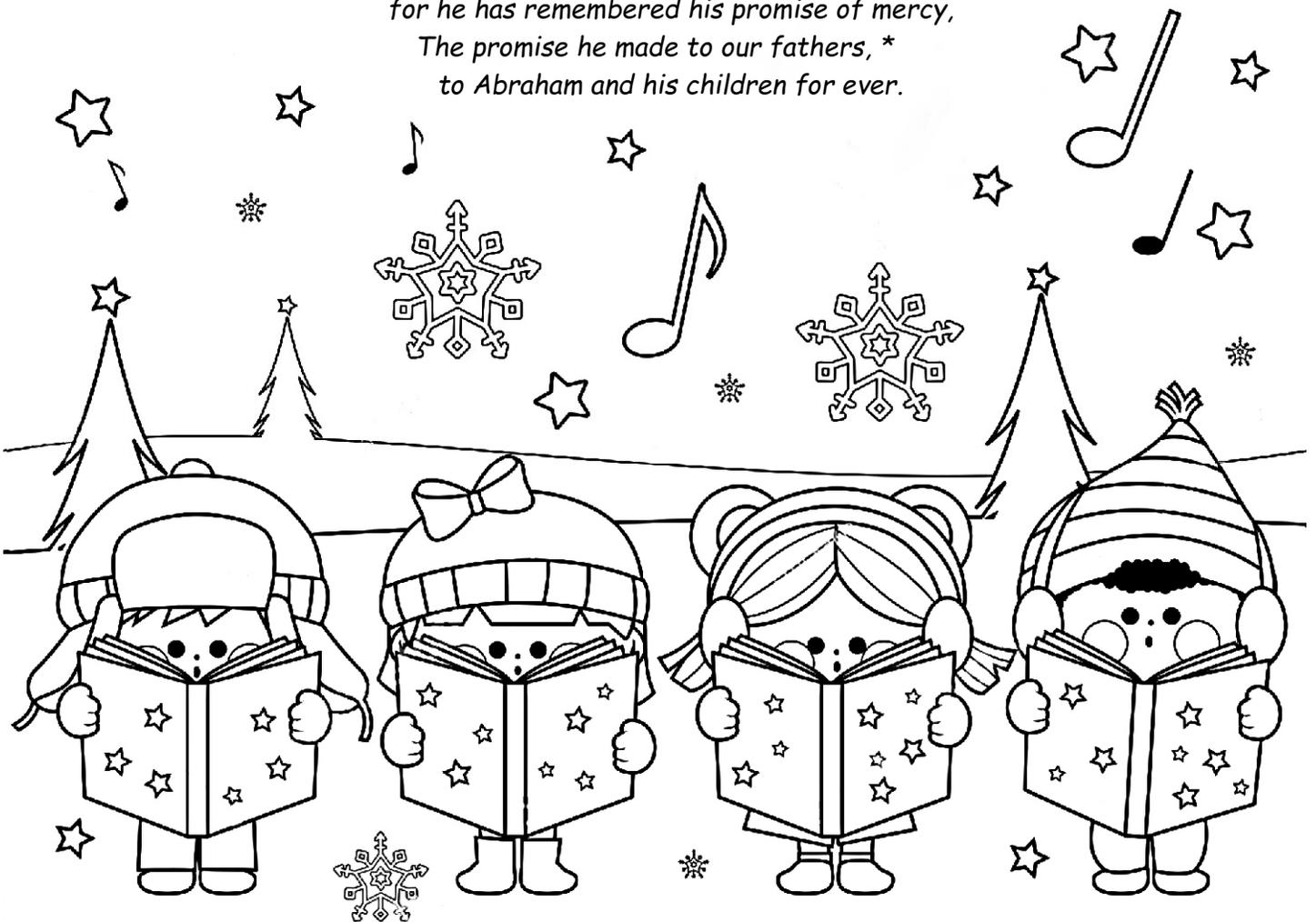
Elizabeth was very happy to see Mary. She knew that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of his Son because when she saw Mary, her own baby jumped for joy inside her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit." And she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord 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 Lord."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home to Nazareth.

# Mary's Song

Mary was so happy with the news of her baby boy, and Elizabeth's baby, too, that she sang a song:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; \*  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed: \*  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.  
He has mercy on those who fear him \*  
in every generation.  
He has shown the strength of his arm, \*  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.  
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, \*  
and has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things, \*  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
He has come to the help of his servant Israel, \*  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
The promise he made to our fathers, \*  
to Abraham and his children for ever.*

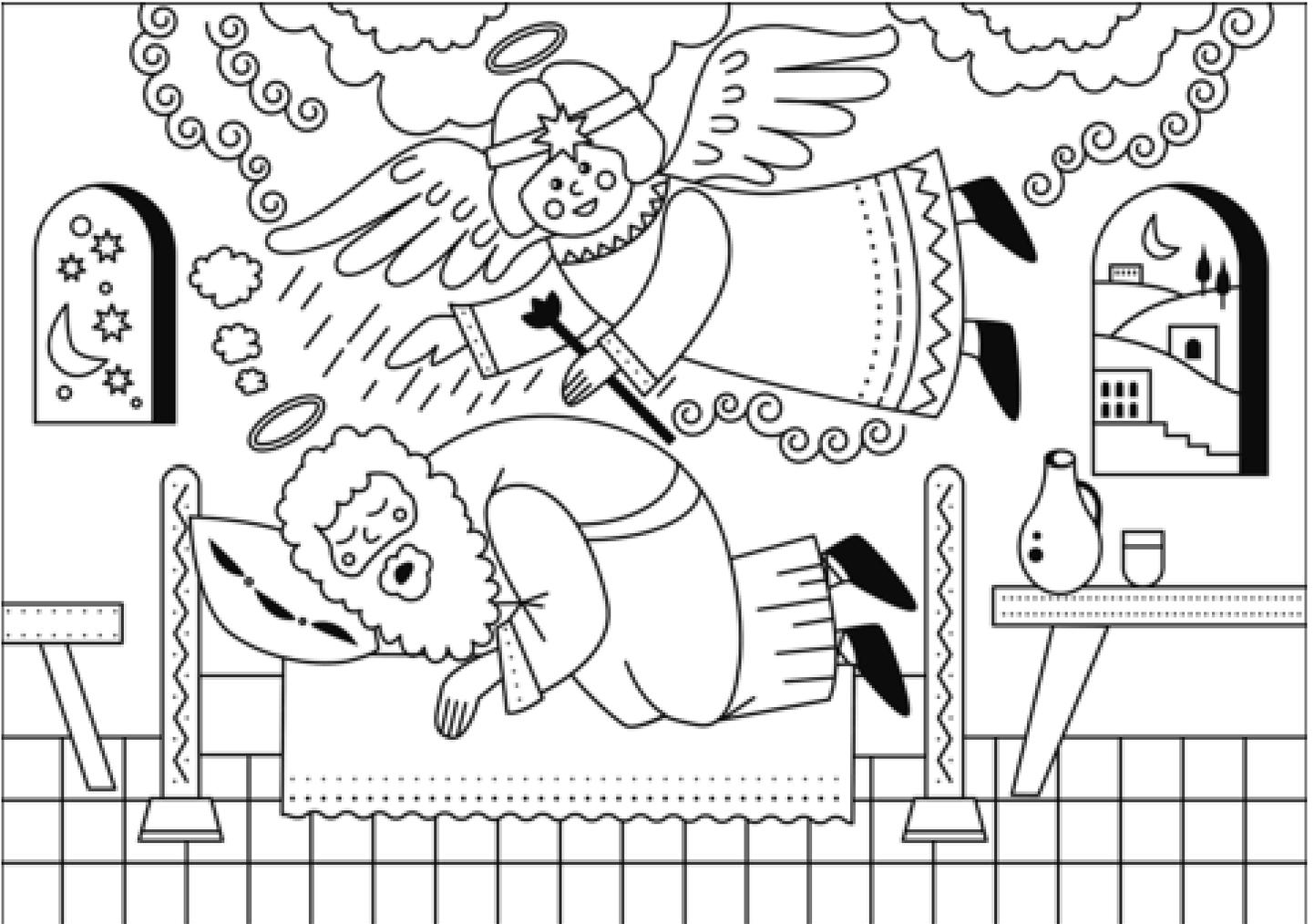


## The Birth of John the Baptist



Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were old and Zechariah couldn't speak, and they thought they would never have a baby. When their baby boy was born they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father, but Elizabeth said she would name him John. Everyone was amazed. Suddenly Zechariah could speak and shouted, "Hallelujah! Praise the LORD! Oh, I've got my voice back!"

## Joseph's Dream



A man named Joseph also lived in Nazareth. He was the village carpenter. Joseph and Mary had planned to get married before she found out she was pregnant. Joseph was worried when he found out that Mary was expecting a baby before their marriage had taken place. He wondered if he should put off the wedding altogether. Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: 'Don't be afraid to have Mary as your wife.' The angel explained that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of his Son and told Joseph that the baby would be named Jesus which means 'Savior' because he would save people. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel had told him to do and took Mary as his wife.

## December 6 - Advent 2: Lighting the Candle of PEACE (purple)

The second candle of Peace, is the "Bethlehem Candle." It reminds us of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. We prepare for Christ's birth and the peace that will stay in our hearts, in our homes, in our communities, and in our world. God gives us the gift of peace when we turn to him.

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

"You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is focused on You because He trusts in You." ~ Luke 2:14

### **Prayer:**

Dear God, make us show your peace to others. Where there is hatred, let us show love; where there is hurt, release; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; and Where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not ask to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; and to give as to receive. Amen.

How will I be peaceful this week? \_\_\_\_\_



### **Going to Bethlehem**

The land where Mary and Joseph lived was part of the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor Augustus wanted to have a list of all the people in the empire, to make sure they paid their taxes. He ordered everyone to return to the town where their families originally came from, and enter their names in a register (or census) there. Mary and Joseph traveled a long way (about 70 miles) from Nazareth to Bethlehem, because that is where Joseph's family came from. Most people walked but some lucky people had a donkey to help carry the goods needed for the journey. Joseph and Mary traveled very slowly because Mary's baby was due to be born soon.

## December 13 - Advent 3: Lighting the Candle of JOY (pink)

The third candle of Joy, is the "Shepherd's Candle", It reminds us of the Joy the world experienced at the coming birth of Jesus. To the shepherd's great joy, the angels announced that Jesus came for humble, unimportant people like them, too.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near." ~ Philippians 4:4-5

### **Prayer:**

Dear God, fill our hearts with the wonder of what that first Christmas means for us today. Thank you that today or in the future, any need we have will be embraced by You. Let joy fill into our souls as we lean on You to be our Counselor, our Mighty God, our Everlasting Father, and our Prince of Peace! Help us to look with expectation to what You will do in our lives and fill us with Your joy! Amen.

How will I be joyful this week \_\_\_\_\_



### **Shepherds in the Field**

In the hills and fields outside Bethlehem, shepherds looked after their sheep through the long night. Suddenly an angel appeared before them and the glory of God shone around them. The shepherds were very, very scared, but the angel said, 'Don't be afraid. I have good news for you and everyone. Today in Bethlehem a Savior has been born for you. You will find the baby lying in a manger.'

## December 20 - Advent 4: Lighting the Candle of LOVE (Angel's Candle)

The fourth candle of Love is the Angel's candle. It reminds us of the love that God has for us. Jesus shows us God's perfect love. He is God's love in human form. There is nothing that love cannot face, there is no limit to its faith, to its hope, to its endurance. Love never ends. We are called to love like Jesus loves us, to show that love in the way we treat others.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace good will toward men." ~ Luke 2:14 reads

### **Prayer:**

Dear God, thank you for Your generous love to us. Thank you that You see the abundance in our lives rather than the shortfalls we have. Help us to offer that same love to those we are with this Christmas season. Pour Your love into our hearts so we can give it away. May they know we are followers of Jesus by our love. Amen.

How will I be loving this week? \_\_\_\_\_



### **Angels Singing**

Then many more angels appeared, lighting up the sky. The shepherds heard them praising God singing: 'Glory to God in the highest, and peace to everyone on earth.' Then angels disappeared as quickly as they had come and it was dark again.

## THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS: December 24 - Christmas: Lighting the Christ Candle

The fifth, and last, candle is the Christ candle. It is lit on Christmas Eve and celebrates the birth of Jesus who is the Light of the World—a Light no darkness can put out. He lived among us, experiencing our joys and hopes, our struggles and challenges. He came to bring us out of the darkness into which we had fallen and into God's wonderful, eternal Light.

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." ~ John 8:12

### **Prayer:**

Dear God, we thank you for your mystery of the Incarnation - Christ is God with us. Help us receive the Light of Christ in our hearts and share it generously and joyfully in our families and communities. We ask this in the name of the one born in Bethlehem, Jesus our Lord. Amen.

How did you experience Jesus today? \_\_\_\_\_



**The Birth of Jesus**

When they reached Bethlehem they had problems finding somewhere to stay. So many people had come to register their names in the census that all the rooms and beds were taken in the town. They finally found a stable they could stay in. So they slept there with the animals. That night, with the donkey and cows standing close and watching, Mary's baby boy was born. She named him Jesus, as the angel told her. In those days it was the custom to wrap newborn babies tightly in a long cloth called 'swaddling clothes'. Jesus' bed was the manger that the animals ate their hay from.

## Shepherds Visit Baby Jesus in the Manger



When the angels had gone the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem to see what has happened.' So the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph. The baby Jesus was lying in a manger as they had been told. When they saw him, they told everyone what the angel had said and everyone who heard the story were astonished. Then the shepherds returned to their sheep, praising God for sending his Son to be their Savior.

## THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST: The Three Wise Men



When Jesus was born, there were Wise Men looking at the night sky. They were in a faraway country. One of the Wise Men said, "Look, there's a new star. I've never seen that bright star before." The second Wise Man said, "It means a new king has been born." The third Wise Man studied the stars and had read in very old writings that a new star would appear when a great king was born, said, "We must follow the star and find him." So the three Wise Men started their long, hard journey, following the star by night, to find the new king and bring him gifts.

When they arrived in Judea, they went to King Herod's palace, but the new king Jesus was not there.

They set out again to follow the bright star. At last the star stopped over Bethlehem. As soon as they saw Jesus, the Wise Men bowed and worshipped the baby. They spread the gifts they had brought before Jesus. The gifts were gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

FIND THESE WORDS FOR ADVENT

P B B E C A E P F S N A B S P  
 Y E M M A N U E L K U D N P G  
 N U N S M G N L P V Y S M Q G  
 R O T O E E I R Y O J O E Q U  
 F O I I I L R D S F H V M J K  
 J D T T G T D U N Z W O A O E  
 P B T H A H A N O O O A R Z W  
 L U R H G R P P A F H G Y N R  
 T F R O O I A E I C X C A E E  
 Q I D P I Y L P S C J X G O A  
 Q K M M L V Q P E O I S J T T  
 W O M N T E A X N R J T H O H  
 I U H X S X S S H R P I N K O  
 F S F V J V Y E G N I T I A W  
 L O V E C I O J E R O M O N S

ANGEL  
 ANTICIPATION  
 CANDLES  
 EMMANUEL  
 FOUR  
 HOPE  
 JESUS

JOSEPH  
 JOY  
 LIGHT  
 LOVE  
 MARY  
 PEACE  
 PINK

PREPARATION  
 PURPLE  
 REJOICE  
 SAVIOR  
 WAITING  
 WREATH

# ADVENT CALENDAR 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p><b>29 Worship</b></p> <p><b>Advent 1</b></p> <p>What word or words from worship today have found a home in your heart? Share these words with a friend or family member.</p>	<p><b>30 Go</b></p> <p>Take time to listen closely to someone you may not ordinarily take seriously or someone with a different perspective than you. Pray that you hear this person as God does.</p>	<p><b>1 Learn</b></p> <p>Read Luke 1:30. What are you afraid of that keeps you from saying “yes” to God?</p>	<p><b>2 Pray</b></p> <p>Set a timer for three minutes. Silently repeat this prayer – “Here I am, God” – until time is up.</p>	<p><b>3 Bless</b></p> <p>The angel blessed Mary with the gift of presence. To whom can you give the gift of presence this week?</p>	<p><b>4 Turn</b></p> <p>In giving generously, St. Nicholas turned from a sense of scarcity to a posture of abundance. From what do you need to turn in order to be generous of heart?</p>	<p><b>5 Rest</b></p> <p>From what could you rest in order to receive renewed life? Find that rest today, and do it for as long as you are able.</p>
<p><b>6 Worship</b></p> <p><b>Advent 2</b></p> <p>What part of gathering for worship fills your heart with hope?</p>	<p><b>7 Go</b></p> <p>Read or watch your local news. Where is reconciliation needed? Pray for healing.</p>	<p><b>8 Learn</b></p> <p>Read Luke 1:45. Consider how your faith is a blessing. Share your faith story with a friend.</p>	<p><b>9 Pray</b></p> <p>Offer a prayer of thanks for each person you encounter – both stranger and friend – silently or aloud.</p>	<p><b>10 Bless</b></p> <p>Call or write a family member with whom you desire a closer relationship. Share with this person how they are a blessing.</p>	<p><b>11 Turn</b></p> <p>Reflect: Where have I fallen short this week? How can I make amends? Give thanks for the gift of fresh starts that we have through God’s grace.</p>	<p><b>12 Rest</b></p> <p>Set aside 30 minutes to rest, pause, and breathe deeply with a friend or family member. Give thanks for the restorative power of love in relationship.</p>
<p><b>13 Worship</b></p> <p><b>Advent 3</b></p> <p>Pray for each person as they receive Communion. Imagine whom you would like to see at church next week. Invite that person to join you.</p>	<p><b>14 Go</b></p> <p>Today, choose to take a different route to work, to school, or to play. Whom or what did you encounter differently?</p>	<p><b>15 Learn</b></p> <p>Read Luke 1:64. When Zechariah could finally speak, he began by praising God. For what can you praise God? Share on social media or with a friend.</p>	<p><b>16 Pray</b></p> <p>Keep a lookout for anyone who might seem lonely, stressed, or sad. Offer this simple invitation: “May I pray for you?” Then offer prayers – silently or aloud – on the person’s behalf as you move through your day.</p>	<p><b>17 Bless</b></p> <p>Identify a blessing you have that you could give away. Share this blessing with your church, a local ministry, or your community.</p>	<p><b>18 Turn</b></p> <p>Turn away from the busyness of the week and turn toward someone who gives you life or to whom you give life. Give thanks.</p>	<p><b>19 Rest</b></p> <p>In Genesis 1-2, God calls the creation “good” and rests. What can you proclaim to be “good” instead of “not enough” as a witness to God’s love for the world today?</p>
<p><b>20 Worship</b></p> <p><b>Advent 4</b></p> <p>Linger before leaving worship today. Ask God to prepare and send you on a journey into the world to witness to God’s love.</p>	<p><b>21 Go</b></p> <p>Go out into your neighborhood today. Where do you see God at work? What attributes of God’s love are visible? Ask God to show you how you can celebrate and join in that love.</p>	<p><b>22 Learn</b></p> <p>Read Luke 2:8-10. When has God surprised you? Share with a friend.</p>	<p><b>23 Pray</b></p> <p>Set aside a time today to pray for others. Include three minutes of intentional silence, asking God to speak to you.</p>	<p><b>24 Bless</b></p> <p>If you are gathering with others today, take turns naming a way the person on your right or left has blessed you.</p>	<p><b>25 Turn</b></p> <p><b>Christmas Day</b></p> <p>Read Luke 1-2. Give thanks for the birth of the Christ-child. Pray that you may follow Christ Jesus on his Way of Love with your whole heart, mind, body, and spirit.</p>	