

We're on our way to Bethlehem.



Prepare the way of the Lord.

## Prelude

### Welcome

We begin the Christian Year with the season of Advent, which means "Coming." We celebrate this season in expectation and preparation for Christ's arrival. We remember Christ's birth and look forward in hope to the hope of Christ's coming again as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Advent makes innkeepers out of all of us, asking each of us to make room for the arrival of Christ the King. Let us, today, prepare Him room in our hearts, our lives, and our homes!

May the loving kindness of this Advent Season and the true Spirit of Christmas not only creep into our hearts this season, but there abide, so that not even the return to earthly cares and responsibilities, not all the festivities of our own devising may cause it to creep away weeping. May the joy and spirit of Christmas remain with us now and forever.

[Adapted from a prayer for Christmas by Peter Marshall]

In the days to come  
the mountain of the LORD's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hill;  
all the nations shall stream to it.  
Many peoples shall come and say:

**"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that God may teach us God's ways  
and that we may walk in God's paths."**

— Isaiah 2:2-3 alt.

Lift up your heads, O gates!  
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!  
that the Ruler of glory may come in.

**Who is the Ruler of glory?**

The Lord, strong and mighty,  
the Lord, mighty in battle!

**Lift up your heads, O gates!**

**And be lifted up, O ancient doors!**

**That the Ruler of glory may come in.**

Who is this Ruler of glory?

**The Lord of hosts,**

**the Lord is the Ruler of glory!**

— Psalm 24:7-10

With what shall we come to God's house? **Bring branches of cedar and holly, bring evergreens and a pine tree, hang wreaths and garlands.**

People of God, as we stand at the doorway to the Christian year on this *first* Sunday of Advent let us mark the entrance to the church building, and our hearts and minds, as portals for Christ to enter. May the ways we adorn this space engage our senses during the days of Advent and enliven our praise and worship.

**Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Lord Jesus!**

Among ancient Romans evergreens were an emblem of peace, joy, and victory. The early Christians placed them in their windows to indicate that Christ had entered the home. Holly and ivy, along with pine, and fir are called evergreens because they never change color. They are ever - green, ever - alive, even in the midst of winter. They symbolize the unchanging nature of our God, and they remind us of the everlasting life that is ours through Christ Jesus.

[Put garlands and wreaths up]

**Hymn:** *Prepare the Royal Highway* (Grace) LBW 26 (pg. 10)

**Good Lord, by your mercy guide our outward actions in such ways that our inward being is formed in faith, hope, and love. Forgive us for the good left undone and the wrong done. Forgive us for not noticing you when you are in need. We ask this in the name of the child of Bethlehem, our risen and coming savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

God is good, all the time and his mercy is neverending. By his grace your sins are forgiven+. Amen.

### **Blessing of Paraments and Seasonal Art and Environment**

Gracious God,  
we offer to you these paraments and banners  
*that will beautify our worship space,*  
which have been inspired by our love for you.  
Accept our grateful thanksgiving for what you have given us  
in the Word made flesh,  
and bless our Christmas worship  
as we announce once again the coming of your Son,  
Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

[Put up banners, paraments and linens. **Grace**]

**Hymn :** *People Look East* Verses 1 & 2  
UMH #202; WOV 626 (pg. 11)

### **The Christmas Tree**

The first use of the Christmas tree was in the medieval German Paradise Plays, held outdoors and portraying the creation of humankind. The Tree of Life was a fir tree decorated with apples. Later other ornaments were hung upon them, such as paper flowers and gilded nuts. In England

branches or whole trees were forced into bloom indoors for Christmas. From these beginnings the use of a tree at Christmas was established.

Martin Luther was perhaps the first to use a lighted tree. The story is told that on one Christmas Eve Martin Luther wandered outdoors and became enraptured with the beauty of the starry sky. Its brilliance and loveliness led him to reflect on the glory of the first Christmas Eve as seen in Bethlehem's radiant skies. Wishing to share with his wife and children the enchantment he had felt, he cut from the forest an evergreen, glistening with snow, and took it home. He placed upon it candles to represent the glorious heavens he had seen.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 41:

When the poor and needy seek water,  
and there is none,  
and their tongue is parched with thirst,  
I the LORD will answer them,  
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.  
I will open rivers on the bare heights,  
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;  
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,  
and the dry land springs of water.  
I will put in the wilderness the cedar,  
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;  
I will set in the desert the cypress,  
the plane and the pine together,  
so that all may see and know,  
all may consider and understand,  
that the hand of the LORD has done this,  
the Holy One of Israel has created it.

— Isaiah 41:17-20

The word of the Lord.

[Place the Christmas trees (Grace) Tree will be up already at Trinity.]

## **Hanging Chrismons or Other Symbols of Christ and Faith**

Here in this place,  
we prepare for the coming of the Lord.  
Here we will remember his Advent,  
his birth in Bethlehem,  
weak and helpless as an infant.  
And here we rekindle our prayer,  
"Come, Lord Jesus"  
as we await his coming as the bright and morning star.

**Hang symbols and signs of Christ — ruler, prophet, priest.  
Hang stars, crosses, triangles, the "alpha" and the  
"omega" to remind us of his identity, his story, and of the  
holy Trinity.**

A reading from the book of Revelation, chapter 22:  
"See, I am coming soon ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the  
first and the last, the beginning and the end."  
Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have  
the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.  
"It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony  
for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David,  
the bright morning star."  
The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."  
And let everyone who hears say, "Come."  
And let everyone who is thirsty come.  
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.  
— Revelation 22:12-14, 17

[Ornaments are put on the tree/s]

**Hymn or Song:** *O Christmas Tree* (Grace & Trinity) (pg. 11)

## **The Nativity**

We display a Nativity in our sanctuary. The first use of a Nativity scene was in Assisi Italy in 1223. Brother Francis had been in the Holy Land in 1219 and 1220; and he was inspired by his visits to Bethlehem and Jerusalem. He felt seeing those sites made the stories more real. The story goes that in 1223 he had a cave set up with hay and live animals and staged the first Nativity scene.

**Congregational Song:** *Away in a Manger* (Grace & Trinity) (pg. 12)

## **The Advent Wreath**

The candles are arranged in a circle to remind us of the continuous power of God, which knows neither beginning nor ending. The large white candle in the center is known as the Christ candle, and points to Jesus as the Christ, the Light of the world. A progression is noted in the lighting of the candles of the Advent wreath each Sunday. Each candle symbolizes various aspects of our waiting experience.

**Hymn:** *Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah* (Grace) (pg 13)  
*Advent Song* (Trinity) (TFWS #2090 verse 1) (pg 13)

## **Offertory**

Loving God, you have gathered and enlightened us, and you give us the gift of creativity, and entrust us with this earth and its treasures.

**We give you our thanks and praise  
for this community of faith  
and ask your blessing on our witness in the world.**

May this space and our lives be invitations to others to experience the love you have so freely shared with us. We pray in the name of the babe of Bethlehem, our Lord Jesus.  
**Amen.**

In silence we offer to God the prayers of our hearts and pray together the prayer that Jesus taught, using the words or language we know by heart.

**Our father...**

**Amen.**

The greatest Gift of Christmas is the Gift of God in Christ Jesus. All that we do at this Holy Season points to that expression of Holy Love. *As we give thanks for God's love, we celebrate Holy Communion, or Eucharist, which means thanksgiving.*

## **Words of Institution**

*Let us come to the table and receive the body and blood of Christ freely given for us.*

## **Blessing/Prayer after communion.**

### **James 5:7-9a**

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup> You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup> Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another,



## **Gospel: Matthew 24:36, 42-44**

[Jesus said to the disciples,] <sup>36</sup> “About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father <sup>42</sup> Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

## **Reflection**

### **Benediction (from Romans 13:11-12)**

You know what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup> the night is far gone; the day is near. Throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. May the light and love of God fill your hearts +in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

**Sung:**        *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

**(Grace & Trinity) (pg. 13)**

**Dismissal:** Go in peace to prepare your hearts for the coming of Christ. **Thanks be to God. Come Lord Jesus.**

## **Postlude**

- 1 Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near!  
Let ev'ry hill and valley a level road appear!  
Then greet the King of glory, foretold in sacred story:

*Refrain*

Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

- 2 God's people, see him coming: your own eternal king!  
Palm branches strew before him! Spread garments! Shout and sing!  
God's promise will not fail you! No more shall doubt assail you!

*[Refrain]*

- 3 Then fling the gates wide open to greet your promised king!  
Your king, yet ev'ry nation its tribute too may bring.  
All lands will bow before him; their voices join your singing:

*[Refrain]*

- 4 His is no earthly kingdom; it comes from heav'n above.  
His rule is peace and freedom and justice, truth, and love.  
So let your praise be sounding for kindness so abounding:

*[Refrain]*

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**(Trinity& Grace)** *People Look East*

UMH #202; WOV 626. Verses 1 & 2

1. People, look east.  
The time is near of the crowning of the year.  
Make your house fair as you are able,  
trim the hearth and set the table.  
People, look east (People, look east: )  
and sing today: (People, look east: )  
Love, the Guest, is on the way.

2. Furrows, be glad.  
Though earth is bare, one more seed is planted there.  
Give up your strength the seed to nourish,  
that in course the flower may flourish.  
People, look east (People, look east: )  
and sing today: (People, look east: )  
Love, the Rose, is on the way.

**(Grace & Trinity)** *O Christmas Tree* - Traditional German Carol

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
you stand in verdant beauty,  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
you stand in verdant beauty,  
Your boughs are green in summer's glow,  
and do not fade in winter's snow,  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
you stand in verdant beauty.

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
much pleasure doth thou bring me,  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
much pleasure doth thou bring me,  
For ev'ry year the Christmas tree,  
brings to us all both joy and glee,  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
much pleasure doth thou bring me.

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
thy candles shine out brightly,  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
thy candles shine out brightly,  
Each bough doth hold its tiny light,  
that makes each toy to sparkle bright,  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,  
thy candles shine out brightly.

**(Grace & Trinity)**

*Away in a Manger*

by John McFarland, Jonathan Spillman

Away in a manger, no crib for His bed,  
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head,  
The stars in the heavens looked down where He lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes,  
But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes,  
I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,  
And stay by my cradle to watch lullaby.

Be near me Lord Jesus I ask Thee to stay,  
Close by me forever and love me I pray,  
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,  
And take us to heaven to live with Thee there.

Away in a manger no crib for His bed,  
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head,  
The stars in the heavens looked down where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay.

**(Grace)** *Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah*

- 1 Light one candle to watch for Messiah:  
let the light banish darkness.  
He shall bring salvation to Israel,  
God fulfills the promise.

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**(Trinity)**

*Advent Song* TFWS #2090 vs. 1

1. Light the Advent candle, one: Now the waiting has begun;  
we have started on our way, time to think of Christmas day.

*Refrain*

Candle, candle, burning bright, shining in the cold winter night;  
candle, candle, burning bright, fill our hearts with Christmas light.

**(Grace & Trinity)**     *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*  
by John M. Neale & Thomas Helmore

Verse 1:

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear.

*Refrain:*

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come to thee O Israel.

Verse 2:

O come Thou Dayspring, come and cheer,  
our spirits by Thine advent here,  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark  
shadows put to flight.

*[Refrain]*

Verse 3:

O come Desire of nations bind,  
in one the hearts of all mankind,  
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,  
and be Thyself our King of Peace.

*[Refrain]*

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