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# Not Ordinary Church

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## Advent 2025: A Call and a Promise

*A Collection of Liturgical Resources*

*Rev. Allyson Sawtell*

### Notes for Pastors and Worship Leaders

You may note that there is a different arrangement of materials this year. I don't have four of everything here: not four Calls to Worship, or four Benedictions, and so on. To be honest, for a number of reasons, I was unable to write an entire Advent liturgy this year; it was not a great season for creativity. On the upside, this can free you up to use these materials whenever and wherever you wish in your Advent journey. Some of the longer readings might be used as part of your Advent Candle-Lighting ritual each week, or anywhere else you'd like to place them. Some of the readings lend themselves well to being read by two worship leaders, instead of just one.

It is my hope that this collection of various readings can inspire you to your own creativity, can help you as you plan your Advent season, and can make your workload just a little bit lighter!

Blessings on you, your leadership and staff, and your entire congregation!

### Calls to Worship

#### Welcome to Advent!

Leader: Welcome to Advent, dear friends! That journey towards Christmas, the movement towards celebration of the power of God's love. And it begins, this week, with Hope.

People: Yes! Hope! So...where is it? What does it mean? We so desperately need hope right now, and we aren't even sure it exists in these times!!

Leader: Oh, it exists, even in these times. Hope exists in you, in me, and in our stories of faith. Hope exists in each action – small or large – that we take to reach out to others and to a hurting world. Each movement towards justice, peace, reconciliation and the healing of Creation; each act of love embodies hope. Hope is a calling and a promise. And we don't do hope alone.

People: Alright then. We will begin, this week, with hope, whatever and wherever it is! Together!

All: Oh God, hope with us. Help us to move with you on this Advent journey. May we be hope-bearers for all your Creation. Amen!

**Peace, Peace**

Leader: Peace be in this place! Peace be with this people! Peace to all Creation!

People: And what exactly does that mean?

Leader: Peace be in this place! Peace be with this people! Peace to all Creation!

Peace that comes from communities of care, courage and compassion.

Peace that is not polite. Peace that does not sit quietly by, afraid to rock the boat.

Peace that does not stay still in the face of exploitation, privilege, and injustice.

Peace that moves from deep love for all Creation.

Peace is possible.

People: Peace be in this place! Peace be with this people! Peace to all Creation!

**Rejoice? Rejoice!**

Leader: Advent is a calling and a promise

Joy is not always – or only – something that’s “in spite of”, or “in the midst of...” or as an act only of resistance. We also celebrate because there simply is *so much* to celebrate!

Even here, even now, this is true.

People: We will rejoice and be glad! Maybe?

Leader: Joy is real! And because joy knows that not all of us may be in this exuberant space right now, joy will simply wait on us. Joy will not completely disappear, but remains quietly offstage for a time. Its absence does not invalidate its truth. For joy is not only a calling. It is a promise.

People: We will rejoice exuberantly or silently, laughing or tear-stained, but we will rejoice!

<b>Benedictions</b>
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Hold hope. Make hope. One step at a time, one breath at a time, one action at a time.

Become a hope-bearer for this good Creation. And know you are not alone.

People of hope, your communities of love, and all that is holy, will go with you.

Amen!

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Now may the Holy One, who makes a way out of no way, guide you and nourish you in the ways of peace, that you may continue to speak up and speak out, to live persistently and courageously, and to do what you can wherever you can to embrace a weary world with peace. Amen!

## Scripture-Based Readings

### **Rejoice!**

*Inspired by Isaiah 35:1-10*

Isaiah the prophet has proclaimed: “The desert will rejoice and blossom.”

The dry desert will break forth into bloom – like it does each spring. Creation will do what it was meant to do, life will flourish! Promise of new and abundant life has found a home. Here. Now.

Rejoice!

Isaiah has proclaimed that God will strengthen weak hands and make firm feeble knees (oh, how many of us wish for that!).

Hands will be strong enough to grasp the task put before us, and to clasp one another’s hands in greeting and love. Knees strong enough to stand up for all that is good in this world. And to keep moving through it all.

Rejoice!

When we finally open our eyes and see in new ways,  
 When we listen with courageous hearts  
 When we speak up and speak out, push back and move through  
 When we act as if we “fear not”, even when we tremble,  
 We bring healing and justice and reconciliation and love to our hurting world, and to each other’s hurting souls.

Then, oh people, Creation will dance out of sheer delight! And all will join in.

Rejoice!

### **In The Wilderness Lament and Proclaim!**

*Inspired by Isaiah 40: 3-4, and Matthew 3:1-3*

Reader 1: A voice cries in the wilderness:

*“Prepare the way of God.”*

A voice cries:

*“In the wilderness, prepare the way of God.”*

Reader 2: The way of God is love, and justice, connection, and peace.

Reader 1: A voice *cries* in the wilderness!

A voice alone, in the empty place.

In the place where paths are lost and ways are hard to find.

The place you don’t understand.

The place that makes you afraid.

Peace. Peace.

Reader 2: A voice cries: *“In the wilderness, make that way!”*

In the place where paths are lost, make that way

In the place where ways are hard to find, make that way  
 In the place you don't understand, and that makes you afraid, make that way.  
 Peace, Peace

Reader 1: Remember: you are not alone.

Reader 2: The One who makes a way out of no way is with you.

Readers 1 & 2: Peace. Peace.

### **For You, On This Journey**

*Inspired by Jeremiah 31:8-9*

Oh you who can't really see the path ahead of you, and you who struggle to move along on that path – God will gather you and lead you.

Oh you who carry new and growing life, vision, promise within your soul, and you who work to bring a new creation into being, even in these rocky and uncertain times – God will gather you and lead you.

Oh you who move on this journey with tears and questions and lament and curiosity and expectation – All you, together, moving in your own way – God will gather you and lead you.

And along the way, together, we will find nourishing waters to feed the earth and all its creatures.

And along the way, hope will become more and more real.

<b>Prayers</b>
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### **Prayer of Hope, Lament, and...Hope**

Leader: Comfort, comfort, my people.

People: God, we're tired! So many promises of long ago:

Comfort, comfort my people

Peace. Peace.

They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation.

Leader: So many promises that have yet to find a home. Here. Now.

People: God, we're tired.

Leader: Be of good cheer!

People: What?!?!?

Leader: How about "Fear not"?

People: That's better.

Leader: Comfort, comfort, my people.

Comfort my people. Be the reason someone clings to hope and continues on.

“Comfort, for you are my people, and I will not let you go, and I will not lose sight of you.” Thus says the Holy One!

All: So many promises of long ago – made real even here, even now!

### *A Prayer for It All*

When our leaders turn away from the needs of people and planet:

give us the courage to turn toward that need, and to act for justice and healing.

When our leaders intentionally, willfully, and uncaringly cause harm to people and planet:

give us the courage to call them out

to push back as forcefully as we can and still be nonviolent

and to proclaim a better way to be.

When the onslaught of cold hostile power nearly overwhelms us, and when the danger is real:

give us the strength to hold steady, to protect the most at-risk and endangered among us

and respond with the power of fierce and forceful love.

When it all seems too much, and when rage and numbness dance in our souls:

give us the brave vulnerability of Christ, to push through and keep going

to walk in the footsteps of hope and resistance.

When the wrenching abyss of loss and fear in our hearts threatens to overwhelm us, and when our souls isolate in trembling fear:

Say to us again, “You are not alone. Our ancestors and those with us today, that holy and beloved community, that blessed web of life, all reside in and with you. Always.”

Say to us again “Fear not!”

### *Draw Us, O God*

Draw us, O God.

Draw us as a living portrait, O Divine Artisan:

With pen on paper, outlines of our faces and bodies made beautiful by you,

even as there are those who will stop by to watch, and say, “No, no, no! You’re doing it all wrong!”

Draw us, O God:

persistently, sketching your face in ours, your hands in ours, your heart in ours.

Draw us, O God.

Draw us out:

Out of ourselves, our comforts, our familiarities

Draw us out of our despair, our rage, our helplessness.

Draw us, O God.

Draw us in:

To the warmth of your heart, that is held by communities of welcome, work, and wonder.  
 To the power of your love that flows from communities of courage, care, and creativity.  
 To the raucous joy of your laughter that spills from communities of gratitude and resistance,  
 grief-bearers and revelers all, daring to be creatures of joy.

Draw us, O God.

## Other Readings

### **Advent is a Movement**

*May be read at the start of the service, by the worship leader.*

Advent is a movement, not an end.

Advent is sitting with all the turmoil around us and within us.

Advent is a reminder of who we are, and who we might yet become.

Advent is both a call and a promise.

Who we are, and what we need to remember is this:

We are a people of Hope and of comfort

We are a people of Peace, who cry out in the wilderness, with lament and proclamation

We are a people of Joy and celebration even here, even now.

And we are a people of Love – of compassion and connection. And we are not alone. We are a people of love.

Advent is that process that helps us remember who we are, even here, even now

Advent is that gift that shows us we are connected to each other.

Advent is that calling for us to embody the stories of hope, of wilderness, of celebration and of connection.

### **Peace Be With You**

And it begins with breath

Take a breath of the air we all share

Peace be with you.

In ways that are

Strong Fearless Full of wonder

Peace be with you

Not as the world has taught us, the Powers that Be, Business as Usual that says, “You will have peace when you have everything you want and more; when you win; when you can make others fear your power; when you’re the best.”

Instead, Peace be with you

As you speak up and speak out

As you don’t give up or give in

As you put one foot in front of the other  
 As you embody a sweaty, weary, persistent and never-dying hope.  
 “Peace be with you” doesn’t make “it” all go away.  
 “Peace be with you” is a mystery unfolding that you hold in your hands, wondering what in heaven’s name this means, but you seek to anoint this weary world with it anyway, and find to your great surprise that there is still plenty left for you.

### **We Have Joy!**

Reader 1: This is a time for joy! And I know you’re about to say: “Have you read the headlines??”

Reader 2: Joy does not erase sorrow, but sits alongside it in its own way, tempering our grief, eventually softening its edges.

Reader 1: Joy does not erase our fears entirely, but gives us a portion of courage in its own way.

Reader 2: We proclaim joy because there is simply, still, so much good in the world!

*[At this time, the Reader invites people to call out the good they’ve seen or experienced. NOTE – If the congregation is too large, or not used to this sort of “calling out”, have people write out a few things ahead of time, and Reader and others collect them and then Reader reads a few aloud. That will take time, but perhaps there could be some quiet music in the background for a couple of minutes. Or, you could announce this at the start of the service.]*

Reader 1: We have joy because we are:  
 Living into a vision  
 Bringing a new world to birth  
 Engaging in “good trouble”

Reader 2: We have joy because sunsets are so dang gorgeous, people do some extraordinarily courageous or generous things, baby goats in pajamas make us laugh, because our dogs are so deliriously happy to see us when we come home, even if we were only gone for 5 minutes, and our cats (who will never admit to how much they adore us) will curl up on our laptops and purr contentedly.

Reader 1: We will have boisterous tail-wagging joy, and quiet purring joy, and everything in between.

### **Did They Know?**

Faithfully following the star: did they know?

The Magi, those wise ones, those astronomers, on the road to Bethlehem: did they know they were following ancient light?

Did they know the light from the Star that led them was light from a star millions of years before them, or perhaps from a star long dead? A cold chunk of rock, leading them to surprising light, life, and wonder?

Did they know, as they moved to Jerusalem, to Bethlehem, and back home again, did they know that they, like the stars, would move through millennia to now? (Albeit often manifested as folks in bathrobes with Burger King crowns on their heads, but still, that counts.)

The Magi moved from the past to the future – our Now – the connecting point a stable in Bethlehem.

That light of a million million years shone in the night, and the night still has not overcome it.

And they went home, changed, by a different way.

## Songs

*Some are gleaned from previous Not Ordinary Church Advent resources*

### **Perfectly Clear**

*(Tune: It Came Upon The Midnight Clear)*

Oh God, let's make one thing perfectly clear:  
 The world You love struggles so  
 Creation longs for hope this day  
 And progress just seems so slow.  
 Yet hope still reigns throughout the earth  
 In actions of justice and love  
 And we can bring Your new world to birth  
 So God, please give us a shove! ☺

Please, God, just make one thing perfectly clear –  
 That peace is real and true!  
 So all your children throughout the world  
 Can build their lives anew.  
 “Peace on the Earth, good will to all”  
 Your angels proclaimed long ago.  
 And now, may all of us here on Earth  
 Ensure that peace will grow!

God, there's one more thing perfectly clear:  
 Your joy will not go away!  
 The light still shines through the clouds and tears,  
 With gratitude, we pray!  
 Laugh with us and rejoice, good God,  
 For goodness and beauty are true,  
 The freshness of your joy, O God,  
 Will make your world anew

God, you've made one thing perfectly clear:  
 You call us all to be one  
 When we're together through bonds of love  
 Your will on earth is done.  
 Creation, then, will rejoice, O God  
 When love is the way that we live  
 When justice, peace, and hope, dear God  
 Become the gifts we give.

**Come, Thou Unexpected Jesus**

*(Tune: Come, O Long-Expected Jesus)*

Come, thou unexpected Jesus  
 Thought you'd be so meek and mild.  
 Never causing any trouble.  
 Nope, that's not the Holy Child!

Come, thou unexpected Jesus  
 Turn the world – and us – around.  
 Born of Mary's hope and courage  
 Let her "Yes!" in us resound.

Come, thou unexpected Jesus  
 God, we yearn so for your peace!  
 Help us move in love and justice,  
 So your world might find release

Come, thou unexpected Jesus  
 Fling your joy o'er all the earth!  
 As together, we work with you,  
 Bringing your new world to birth!

Come, thou unexpected Jesus:  
 Gift of love that sets us free  
 Holds and shapes and sends us out to  
 Build your new world joyously!

Come, thou unexpected Jesus  
 Heal Creation, make us one.  
 Grant us courage to work with you  
 That your will for life be done.

**Trust the Vision: A Hymn for Advent and Christmas**

*(There is a different version for each week)*

*(Tune: Angels From the Realms of Glory)*

Week One:

Here we are Week One of Advent. Hope is what we're supposed to sing.  
While we try, and search and wonder, mostly questions are what we bring!  
But, like Mary, we'll say "Yes!" to  
All the hope God is offering.

Hope is how we live and move and work within Creation's sphere  
We are part of something stronger that can free us from our fear.  
So, together, let's keep going,  
Trust the vision, hold what's dear.

Week Two:

Peace just seems so hard to come by; what to do is not so clear.  
Always called to make the real choice – live the vision or live from fear?  
Be like Joseph, grasp for courage,  
Trust the dream that's always near.

Peace is how we live and move and work within Creation's sphere  
We are part of something stronger that can free us from our fear.  
So, together, let's keep going,  
Trust the vision, hold what's dear.

Week Three:

God, you urge us to be joyful, like the shepherds in the night:  
Celebrate with tears and laughter; know a new world's just in sight  
Be the joy the world so needs now,  
Fill Creation with delight!

Joy is how we live and move and dance within Creation's sphere  
We are part of something stronger that can free us from our fear.  
So, together, let's keep going,  
Trust the vision, hold what's dear.

Week Four:

God, you hold us with your loving, never ceasing or letting go.  
Then you call us to do likewise: "Go ahead, this will make you grow!"  
Love is hard yet love is worth it.  
Celebrating, here we go!

Love is how we live and move and dance within Creation's sphere  
We are part of something stronger that can free us from our fear.  
So, together, let's keep going,  
Trust the vision, hold what's dear.

Christmas Eve:

Love has called us to be joyful, live with hope, and strive for peace  
God, we know, You won't forsake us, for Your love will never cease.  
So, together, let's keep working!  
May Creation's joy increase!

Hope is how we live and move and work within Creation's sphere  
Peace is part of something stronger that can free us from our fear.  
So, together, let's be joyful,  
Love the vision, hold what's dear.



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