

Not Ordinary Church

Advent for a New Creation

Notes About These Materials

- The website that features this resource is called Not Ordinary Church – and these Advent materials prove it!
- The main themes of *Advent for a New Creation* center on environmental healing and justice, which is God’s call to us as individual people of faith, and as Church. This includes: proclaiming that we are called to build up a new world of justice, peace, and wholeness for all Creation; recognizing that Jesus often did the unexpected and did not fit into the prevailing status quo; lamenting Creation’s devastation yet finding reasons to hope, and celebrating that we are all in this together – community is in our DNA and it’s our key to planetary survival.
- These materials are not necessarily lectionary-based, so you can use them in any year.
- This is not an entire service. These are simply resources for parts of the service for each week of Advent, including the Lighting of the Advent Candles.
- The lines in **bold-faced red** are for instruction only, and are not to be printed in the bulletin.
- One of the resources is an Advent hymn: “Come Thou Un-Expected Jesus”. I’ve rewritten the words (and title). The middle verse changes each week, to reflect the theme of the week. The tune is “Stuttgart”, or “Come, O Long-Expected Jesus”.
- The individual pieces will hang together better if you use all of the materials in a given week. And it’s best to use all four weeks.
- If you only use one or two of the readings instead of all of them, that would be alright, but be consistent over the four weeks. For example, if you use just the Call to Worship, use the Call to Worship for each week. They sort of build on each other.
- Some of the readings include references to stories and scriptures churches traditionally use during this season, found in the Gospel of Luke, or from Isaiah. It may be that some of your church folk won’t recognize those references, if they are new to church or to those stories. While I haven’t paired readings with each week, the references in some of the readings include the Magnificat (selections from Luke 1:26-56), Isaiah 40:1-5, and Luke 2:8-16.
- Each week there is a piece called “Words of Reflection Before the Service.” This helps set the tone. It is intended to be printed in your bulletin (or as a slide for Zoom).
- You may very well be having a Christmas Pageant on one of the Sunday mornings in Advent, but some of the readings could still fit into the service, depending on how you do your pageant. (And for a bit of shameless advertising, let me suggest you could try using in your pageant one of the readings from my website Not Ordinary Church – “The Qualifier Angel”, which is a whimsical look at angels and annunciations!)

- The readings are both deeply serious and often playful. And I've offered a couple of options for some of the readings, if your congregation isn't as comfortable with "playful"!
- A few words about the Lighting of the Advent Candles:
 - This liturgy uses the Advent themes that are traditional in many, if not most, churches: Week One – Hope; Week Two – Peace; Week Three – Joy; Week Four – Love.
 - Many churches have individuals, or families, come forward each week to light the Advent candle(s) and do a reading. The resources will fit well with that format.
 - However, here's an additional suggestion: As the candle lighters come forward, have them share who/what else they are bringing with them (who is not present) to this ritual. It could be, for example, that during the Hope week, they could say they're bringing forward all those species brought back from the brink of extinction and those still facing extinction; "they are with us as we gather here." Or other weeks it could be missing and murdered Native American women, or Afghan refugees – or something deeply personal like members of the congregation no longer with you. Talk it over with the persons you select to do the candle-lighting and see what they come up with!
- In your bulletin, please acknowledge authorship – something like, "The Advent readings and the words to "Come Thou Un-Expected Jesus" were written by Rev. Allyson Sawtell and can be found on the website Not Ordinary Church (allyson.sawtell.org).” Also, the Advent graphics are courtesy of *Alternatives for Simple Living*, and are used with permission.
- Let me know how it goes! And I wish a blessed Advent and Christmas season to you and your congregation!

Advent for a New Creation

Week One – Hope



Words of Reflection before the service

An Advent People, An Advent Church

On our really great days, when we are feeling strong and extraordinary,
 we are an Easter people, full of new life. Life, not death, is the final word.
 On our really great days, we are an Easter people.
 And we really, really want to be an Easter people.

Most of the time, though,
 When we're merely ordinary and beloved human beings, we are an Advent people:
 Living in waiting for something
 Yearning for something
 Facing an unknown future, and that frightens us and excites us.

So we lean into that future, and proclaim hope.

We are an Advent people! We are an Advent church!

Call to Worship

(Two Options)

Leader: Here we are, the first week of Advent!

People: Good grief! Is it Advent already? But we still have Halloween candy!

Leader: Advent is a time of hope!

People: Good grief! We're supposed to be all holly-jolly and hopeful? The environment is being devastated, and violence, injustice, exclusion, and hate inflict their terror, war and violence are the norm! It never seems to end. And we're supposed to celebrate hope right now? Really??

Leader: Advent is a time of yearning, of looking towards an unknown future.

People: Yes! We do yearn so fiercely for peace, for justice, for healing of Creation, for healing of our lives. We do yearn so fiercely for restoration of all Creation, for joy, for a new world to be born.

Leader: Advent is a time of holding on, in the midst of yearning, in the midst of the unknown. Advent is a time of going forward, because we have each other, and the promises of God that life is triumphant, love is real, and we are stronger and more courageous than we think.

People: So Advent is a time of hope.

Leader: Advent is a time of hope!

All: Amen!

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If you want to go with a more traditional tone, then use this option:

Leader: Advent is a season of expectation, of unexpectedness, and the unknown. It is a time of active waiting, called hope.

People: Thank you, God, for hope!

Leader: We yearn for a new world to be born, a world of love and justice, joy and healing, and restoration of all Creation.

People: May we join in that work to bring forth that new world. Thank you, God, for hope!

ALL: Thank you God for hope and hard work, during this season of waiting. May we celebrate your promise of life, of justice, and of joy, today and always. Amen!

Hymn

Come, Thou Unexpected Jesus!

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

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

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

Lighting of the Advent Candle of Hope

Candle lighters come forward and stand around the Advent Wreath.

They say something like, “Today we also bring with us...” [A person or being of their own choosing that might fit with the week’s theme of hope; for example, species brought back from extinction]...In spirit, they are with us today.”

Responsive reading [*Led by candle lighter, or pastor/worship leader*]

Leader: We are an Advent people. We are an Advent church.

People: Like Mary, we feel life growing within us, an unknown future expanding daily.

Leader: Sometimes we’re frightened of the birth itself.
Sometimes we’re simply nauseous, or we’d rather sleep it all away.

People: Sometimes we wonder and question. Sometimes we’re joyous beyond all imagining.

All: We are between what we think we know, and what is to come.
So we lean into that future, and sing of hope.

Leader: We are an Advent church.

People: We have each other, the grace of God, and the promise of life. We do not wait alone. We do not journey alone.

Leader: We are Mary in her holy labor, Joseph in his holy tenderness.
We are the midwife helping to birth a new world.
We are the angels shouting the good news (and scaring the pants off of folks, to be honest).

People: We are the shepherds, moving on faith. In the dark. In the cold.
Sometimes not sure exactly where we are going, but the good news is so strong that we keep on moving.

Leader: We are the critters at the manger, those icons of Creation, sharing space with the Holy One. Warm, curious, a bit smelly and noisy, and occasionally nipping at the holy toes to get to that hay.

All: We are an Advent church of resurrection and hope, love and justice,
living between what we think we know and what is to come.
So, together, we lean into that future, and embody hope.

Candle lighters light one candle

Benediction

Read by the pastor or other worship leader

Go out into the world, oh people of hope!

Embody hope. Live hope.

Even when it's hard. Even when you think hope is impossible.

Hold on, move forward, and celebrate, for the God of new life and new creation moves with you.

Your community of love and hard work moves with you.

Go out in hope!

Advent for a New Creation

Week Two – Peace



Words of Reflection before the service

Let There Be Peace

Peace is not polite.

Peace is not quiet.

Peace includes (but is not limited to!) rage, tears, and lament.

Peace is a promise

To ourselves

To the future

To our God

That we won't give up or give in, and that we will work to the end of our days so that all Creation might be at peace.

Peace is personal only insofar as it is global.

Peace is yours, peace is mine, only insofar as it comes to all of us, and there is no "them" or "other."

The song of peace is the song of justice, the song of community.

The song of peace is ours to sing, as we walk the path of accountability, confession, and courage.

Call to Worship

Leader: Before you say anything, yes, it is Advent already. It's been Advent for a week. Welcome to Week 2 of our Advent journey! It's all about peace, peace.

People: We could use some peace! Tell us where, how, do we find peace? We yearn so fiercely for peace!

Leader: "Comfort, comfort, my people," says our God. We are already on the road to finding peace, as we commit to embodying hope for and in a fractured world. As we find the courage to lament the destruction of God's good Creation, as we confess our species' participation in this destruction, we are moving towards peace.

People: We yearn fiercely for peace! Come, Prince of Peace!

Leader: Peace is the wellbeing of all humankind on a thriving planet, and we are not there yet. But we are on our way.

People: Call us forth, O God, to work and wonder, and to be creators of your peace.

All: We yearn fiercely for peace! Come, Prince of Peace! In unexpected and hoped-for ways, come, Prince of Peace! Be born in our hearts today!

If you prefer a more traditional approach (especially if you didn't use the Call to Worship for Week One), just replace the Leader's first reading with:

Leader: Welcome, friends, to our second week of Advent! It's all about peace, peace.

Hymn

Come, Thou Unexpected Jesus!

1. Come, thou unexpected Jesus!
Thought you'd be so meek and mild.
Never causing any trouble.
Nope, that's not the Holy Child!
2. Come, thou unexpected Jesus.
God, we yearn so for your peace!
Help us move in love and justice,
So your world might find release
3. Come, thou unexpected Jesus!
Heal Creation, make us one.
Grant us courage to work with you
That your will for life be done

Lighting of the Advent Candle of Peace

Candle lighters come forward and stand around the Advent Wreath.

They say something like, “Today we also bring with us...” [A person or being of their own choosing that might fit with the week’s theme of peace; for example, those suffering from addiction or mental health issues]...They are with us today.”

Prayer for Peace *[Led by candle lighter, or pastor/worship leader]*

Leader: God of all creation, of Advent hope and expectation, of peace that passes all understanding: we confess we know full well the things that make for peace, yet we don’t seem to do them.

People: Systems of greed and exploitation flourish, “us and them” and “me and mine” are our battle cries.

Leader: Compassion has dried up, and we are drowning in despair.

People: Where is peace? In God’s name, where is peace?

Leader: Push back! Push back against those systems of death and destruction, of greed and exploitation. Say “no!” to Business as Usual. This is how you begin to make peace.

People: God, give us the courage to be your peacemakers.

Leader: Refuse to be defined as consumers, opt out of “us and them” thinking. Push back against narrow definitions of who your neighbor is. This is what can make for peace. Push back!

People: God of peace, give us the courage to do those things that make for peace.

Leader: Push forward! Break through apathy and despair! Proclaim, “There is another way!” Even if it’s only to yourself that you say those words at first. Push forward!

People: Help us imagine that other way: of peace, life, justice and joy. Help us embody that new life and help us to bring it into being.

Leader: Peace is hard work. It’s the work of non-violence and justice, love, lament, and reconciliation, of courage and action. It’s of you and of me, in community, step by step, changing ourselves, our worldviews and our systems. And we’re not there yet.

People: But we are on our way. With God’s help, and in this church, we are on our way! Amen!

Candle lighters light two candles.

Benediction

Read by the pastor or other worship leader

Go out into the world, oh people of peace!

Do those things that make for peace.

Even when it's hard. Even when you think peace is impossible.

Push back, push forward, and celebrate, for the God of new life and new creation moves with you.

Your community of love and hard work moves with you.

Go out in peace!

Advent for a New Creation

Week Three – Joy



Words of Reflection before the service

What were they thinking?

Stories have power. It matters what stories we tell. It matters what stories we immerse ourselves in. This third Sunday in Advent, let's enter into the birth story, the story of the shepherds, and the scene at the manger. Dismiss questions of historical/mythical reality, and embrace the story.

Mary and Joseph rejoiced at the birth of their son. Still recovering from the labor of the night before, they knew that harder work lay ahead of them still, yet they rejoiced. An even more unsettling unknown lay before them still, yet they rejoiced. And, eventually, they had to flee for their lives in the wake of Herod's wrath and violence. But perhaps – or almost certainly – their joy at the new life they brought forth traveled with them.

The shepherds (once they caught their breath) rejoiced at that startling good news spoken first to them. Did their lives change dramatically? Did they suddenly become prosperous and well-respected? Probably not, but who knows? But perhaps – or almost certainly – the joy of that night and the angels' words embraced them even after they left the Holy Child and eventually went back to work.

And who knows what the critters at the manger scene were thinking? As animals do so well, they probably picked up the vibrations of emotions from the humans around them – the wonder, exhaustion, and joy of Mary and Joseph. And perhaps – or almost certainly – joy settled into their beings.

Call to Worship

- Leader:** As Mary and Joseph rejoiced at the birth of their son, even in the face of hard work and an unsettling future,
- People:** So, too, in our work and worship, we will rejoice! Even in our times of uncertainty, pain and violence, we will remember joy.
- Leader:** As the shepherds rejoiced at the angels' proclamation of good news, even as it was in the middle of the night, and probably terrified people and sheep alike,
- People:** So, too, in our work and worship, we will rejoice! And even in the face of our fears and questions and chaos, we will rejoice!
- Leader:** This is real joy: the new life Christ brings, the power of love, and the grace of community.
- People:** In our work and worship, we join with Christ whose birth we celebrate, participating in his new life of love, justice, and community.
- ALL:** This holy season, in our work and our worship, we will take courage and rejoice!

Hymn

Come, Thou Unexpected Jesus!

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

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

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

Lighting of the Advent Candle of Joy

Candle lighters come forward and stand around the Advent Wreath.

They say something like, “Today we also bring with us...” [A person or being of their own choosing that might fit with the week’s theme of joy]...In spirit, they are with us today.”

Responsive reading *[Led by candle lighter, or pastor/worship leader]*
[There are two options offered below. You can use either, or both!]

Option 1:

One: Joy is a miracle. Joy is a wonder. Joy is a gift of love and connection. Joy is holy ground that has been watered by tears and laughter, hope and hard work.

All: Let us be a people of miracle and wonder, of love and connection. Let us be a people of joy!

One: Joy is deep down reaching into your being, and finding your own strength, and the power of your love. Joy is courageous reaching out and finding others, and discovering your collective strength and the power of your love together. Joy is in truly knowing that all life is connected, and in this web of life that is human, creature, land, water, air, rock, fire, seed and stardust, we glimpse all our collective strength and the power of all of our love.

All: Let us know the joy of connection – to ourselves, our God, each other and all Creation. Let us live the joy of connection, for we are all one.

One: Joy is that light that shines in the darkness. Joy is the angels’ proclamation of good news for all, of peace on earth.

All: Joy is a miracle! Joy is a wonder! Joy is a gift! With grateful hearts, we will rejoice!

Candle lighters light three candles.

Option 2:

Reader One:

Joy is a miracle!

Joy is a wonder!

Joy is a gift of love and connection!

Joy is holy ground that has been watered by tears and laughter, hope and hard work

Reader Two:

Joy is not static, not something received and simply set on a shelf to be remembered fondly. Or like a trophy gently polished and then ignored.

But picture this, instead: Joy flung wildly about! Like what happens when the adoring dog greets its human again, body-wiggling rapture, and its fur flying all over the living room, embedding itself in the upholstery. Joy is like that, but with no need to vacuum afterwards.

Reader One:

Joy is pretty down to earth.

Reader Two:

Joy is pretty heavenly, too: the angels' "Gloria" in the dark of night, the song of God in a despairing time:

There will be peace! There will be life! A new world can be birthed!

Rejoice! Even if you're terrified – rejoice!

Reader One:

The angels in our lives call to us:

Even as you're exhausted – have joy!

Go ahead, weep, grieve, doubt, rage – and rejoice anyway!

There will be peace! There will be life! A new world can be birthed!

Reader Two:

We are part of that new Creation. It may not come fully in our lifetimes, but those holy bits and pieces of new life here and now will keep us going. Rejoice!

Reader One:

Joy is raucous. Joy is quiet. Joy is often "in the midst of" or "in spite of" and thus sometimes it may not even be very polite as it breaks into propriety or despair and casts its liberating spell.

Joy doesn't know when to quit, and when it is silenced or dismissed, it finds its way back for those who have pledged to never give up.

Candle lighters light three candles.

Benediction

Read by the pastor or worship leader

Go forth with hope – and rejoice!

Go forth in peace – and rejoice!

And may the joy of God, which passes all understanding,

The joy of the Christ who brings new life to all creation

And the joy of the Spirit that binds us together in the web of life,

Go with you all now and always.

Amen! Rejoice!

Advent for a New Creation

Week Four – Love



Words of Reflection before the service

We are called to be lovers

Love is hard to define, because “everybody knows what it is.”

But here goes:

We are created for love and connection – our purpose in life is to love – and that takes countless forms.

Love is our foundation, our journey, and our goal.

We are an Advent people. And as an Advent people, we are a people of love, called to connection, justice, and healing of all Creation.

Together.

Power and strength. Together.

Grace and hope. Together.

This holy season of love calls us to co-create and move towards God’s new creation. It will not be handed to us, a brightly-wrapped gift, but will emerge from the womb of our hard work and tears, our lament and our courage, our tenacity and our laughter.

Our love.

Call to Worship

Leader: The yearning embodiment of hope, the hard work of peace, and the power of joy bring us to love, which ties it all together.

People: We are an Advent people of love and longing, of hope and hard work!

Leader: This holy season, we celebrate the incredible act of love that is Christ, the love of the One who usually did the unexpected, who healed, challenged, questioned, and welcomed.

People: In our worship and work, may we embody Christ's love, for all Creation!

Leader: This holy season, we celebrate the incredible act of love that is the person of Jesus, who challenged the powers that be, pushed back against his day's Business as Usual, and who gathered together a community, because he knew it took more than one person alone to bring in God's new Creation.

People: In our worship and work, in this holy season and beyond, may we follow in the footsteps of the One who had the courage and grace to love all beings.

Leader: This holy season, we celebrate love that heals, challenges, weeps, and rejoices. We celebrate the love of Christ that holds up and holds out a vision and reality of a new Creation.

People: In our worship and work, in our lives together as community, and as part of the whole web of life, may we embody the love of Christ, in all that we do and all that we are.

All: We are an Advent people of love and longing, of hope and hard work!

Hymn

Come, Thou Unexpected Jesus!

1. Come, thou unexpected Jesus!
Thought you'd be so meek and mild.
Never causing any trouble.
Nope, that's not the Holy Child!
2. Come, thou unexpected Jesus:
Gift of love that sets us free
Holds and shapes and sends us out to
Build your new world joyously!
3. Come, thou unexpected Jesus!
Heal Creation, make us one.
Grant us courage to work with you
That your will for life be done

Lighting of the Advent Candle of Love

Candle lighters come forward and stand around the Advent Wreath.

They say something like, “Today we also bring with us...” [A person or being of their own choosing that might fit with the week’s theme of love]...In spirit, they are with us today.”

Reading – Love. Love? Love!

Reader One:

Love – “It isn’t just for breakfast anymore.”

No, that’s not it.

Love – “It’s what’s for dinner.”

Nope, not that either.

“Love – it’s what makes a Subaru a Subaru.”

Uh, no.

Love is not an advertising slogan, set out for one’s own profit.

Reader Two:

Love is hard to define.

Any attempts so often spill out in a cloying glob, like corn syrup, with no nutritional content, oozing all over the countertop.

Reader One:

Love is a mystery, except without the creepy bad guy.

Love is a song, sung even by the tone deaf and raspy-voiced, and heard in beauty.

Reader Two:

I think we’re getting closer.

Reader One:

Love is touch, love is wonder, love is work, love is tears, love is laughter, love is gift and giver.

Love is accountability and relationship.

Love is an act of will – of willing the good for another.

Love is forgiveness and starting over.

Reader Two:

And God so loves the cosmos:

And God so caresses the cosmos, wonders at its beauty, works and plays with all its children.

And God so weeps with Creation and its wrenching pain, and calls us to accountability.

And God so laughs with the mountains and trees, the clouds and seas, all creatures,
and with all who would not give up in God's healing work.

And God so loves
God so loves

Reader One:

Shall we choose love, Church?

Shall we choose wonder and work, tears and laughter? Shall we choose the
building up of community and breaking down of those powers that violate,
oppress, and marginalize?

Shall we choose love?

This season and always, Church, shall we choose love?

Benediction

[Read by pastor or other worship leader]

Congratulations, you've made it through this Advent journey!

Hope can be hard. Peace nearly impossible. Joy just out of reach. And love, don't get me started on love! So hard to pin down, but so foundational for all that we are and all that we do.

And so, here we are. A people of hope and of peace. A community of joy and of love.

We stand on the brink of that great celebration that is Christmas. And in our work of hope, of peace, of joy and of love, God is with us. Joy to the world! Come, Christ, be born in us today!



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