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Christmas Eve

Rev. Allyson Sawtell, 2024

Note to Pastors

This resource is not meant to be an entire Christmas Eve service on its own. Each church has its own particular traditions around Christmas Eve, and these resources are simply to supplement what you and/or your worship team will be planning.

These resources were written as part of [the whole Advent resource collection](#) also on my website. Some of the phrases as well as the Lighting of the Christ Candle hearken back to the theme and sense of the previous four weeks of Advent. If you have used those Advent resources, the Christmas Eve pieces will provide a nice connection to what has come before.

Resources for Worship

Call to Worship

Friends, welcome! Welcome to a time of celebration and wonder.

Rejoice this night of love and light, joy, promise, hope, and life!

Rejoice, you weary ones, leaning softly into candlelight and a silent night.

Rejoice you jubilant ones, bursting with new life, dancing into joy for all the world

Rejoice, even as you wonder how and why you might possibly enter this celebration.

Simply, rejoice!

Rejoice in the power and presence of Love, in our lives and in our world, this night and always!

Readings

In the Beginning

In the beginning was Love: connection, relationship, interdependency. And Love was within all things and among all things.

Love was, is now, and ever will be, in the world. Love is in the very nature of all created beings, even, somewhere, in those who would deny its presence and power.

Love shines in the midst of hate, and hate never does comprehend it. Love shines, and its flame can never ultimately be quenched.

Love moved over the face of our deepest fears, and in angel song proclaimed glad tidings even in the night.

Love now still dances with our joys and our uncertainties, gently cradles our longing, and sets the frame for our comprehension of ourselves, each other, and all Creation.

Love always and forever leads us to wonder and to hope.

The “Why” of Christmas

Reader 1: So, you may ask, “What are we doing here? Why are we here?”

Reader 2: Indeed, why do we gather, year after year, on Christmas Eve, again and again?

Reader 1: Why, we ask ourselves, do we sing the same songs each year, hear the same stories, light the same candles (often while thinking “We really need to get new ones for next year...”)?

Reader 2: Why gather? Why sing? Why Christmas?

Reader 1: Because.

Because something pulls at us each year, and it’s not just the decorations that go up before the Halloween candy is even stale. Or the tacky renditions of Christmas carols over the grocery store loudspeakers.

Something about that first Sunday of Advent, with its one purple candle, begins to pull us, once again, to the journey towards tonight. We are pulled, again and again, into this Christmas story.

Reader 2: Why Christmas?

Reader 1: Because.

Because we need that holy disruption Mary said yes to so long ago, opening up a world of possibility and hope.

Reader 2: We need the angels’ song of “fear not” in the night.

Reader 1: We need celebration and deep joy, even when tears stain our faces.

Reader 2: We need each other, the gift of love in community, with a shared journey, struggle, and celebration.

Reader 1: We need be able to say a resounding “Yes!” to the promise that God’s world of justice and joy, hope and healing, is true and with us, even now, even here.

Reader 2: Why Christmas?

Reader 1: Why not?

Why not embody hope in a world that is often filled with despair?

Why not embody peace by the way we live, vote, work, and play?

Why not celebrate, and resist the powers of despair by affirming the presence of life and hope?

Why not keep on loving, in all our diversity and wonder, doing the hard and beautiful work of community?

Reader 2: Why not be a people of Christmas joy?

Readers 1 & 2: Yes, here! Yes, now!

Lighting of the Christ Candle

The Christ Candle (with the Advent candles, if you will be lighting them on Christmas Eve) is to be set up in a central location – altar, Communion Table, special table. Beside the Christ Candle, place a candle that is different from the other candles (of any color, but probably not purple, pink, or white). The purpose of this candle will be explained at the start of the Candle-lighting ritual. This candle is to remain unlit during the service – remind your candle-lighters that they should not light this one.

Opening words

Candle-lighter:

Here we are, at this time of candle-lighting, the lighting of the Christ Candle. And we still have the other candle here, the unlit one, different from the rest. This candle is still a reminder of incompleteness, empty spaces, unfinished business, the work yet to be done in creating and sustaining a community of hope, and in embodying love in and for God's world. This candle will remain unlit – even now, on Christmas Eve! But in the context of God's love, of community and of rejoicing during this season, we can live with the unlit candle, and the work yet to be done.

Reading – We Hold a Story

Leader: We hold a story. Of shepherds and stars and angels and animals, wise ones and new parents. Of wonder, fear, hope, upheaval and new life. Of love.

People: We hold a story. The story holds us.

Leader: We hold this story in our own stories of questions and trepidation, of hope, of love. Our stories of struggles, of working hard to make this world a place of beauty and justice, healing, accountability and peace.

People: We hold a story. The story holds us.

Leader: And it's so hard, sometimes to hold this story and to live it. But because of God's promises found in this newborn Christ Child, promises of life overcoming death, love triumphant over hate and apathy, goodness stronger than evil – because of these promises, we know that together, we can hold this story for a long, long time.

People: We hold a story. The story holds us.

Leader: We hold our story tenderly, as we hold a newborn child, knowing how fragile it is.

And, like a newborn child, this story will cry out with a sound powerful and full of life, keeping us up all night, and we come to know that our story is stronger than we could ever imagine. (And here we end the metaphor of the newborn before we get into what the dirty swaddling cloths might mean!).

People: We hold a story. The story holds us.

Leader: Hold us, God. Let us be so gripped by your story that,
Like the shepherds, we go into the night into something new and strange and wondrous

Like Mary and Joseph, we say yes to new life, with all its hard work and pain and moments of curiosity and sheer joy

Like the critters at the manger may we provide warmth for the vulnerable, and comfort from the cold.

People: May we be like those of the old story, O God, holding what is good in our arms and sharing it all with your world now, a world so hungry for hope and new life.

All: We hold a story. The story holds us.

The Christ Candle is lit.

Benediction

As you leave this night of celebration and wonder, take with you the power of this ancient story. Rejoice in the power and presence of Love, in our lives and in our world, this night and always! And a blessed Christmas to you all!



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