

WEsources:

A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

THE SEASON OF
Advent

ADULT STUDY

THE PROPHETS' CANDLE: HOPE

Lesson 1

RESOURCES

- Device to show video links (computer, tablet, projector)
- Hymnal
- Bible
- Journals/or writing pad & pens
- Optional: Advent Wreath

GATHERING

Before you start this WEsources on Advent, it might be good to have an Advent wreath for your room. You can keep it there all Advent and light the candles each week, or you can just have it for this opening lesson.

After everyone has entered and gotten settled say, "This week starts our new lessons that will focus on Advent. You might be thinking that you have heard that word but are not sure what it means. Advent is a Middle English term from a Latin term that means to "arrive." Most notably, it is used to describe the waiting period of the church for the arrival of Christ that we celebrate

every Christmas."

To start off watch this 2 minute video by copying and pasteing the link below or going to youtube.com and searching for "Advent in 2 Minutes" produced by Busted Halo.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S02KOlw7dIA>

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

You can share more about the Advent wreath that you brought to the room or take a trip to the sanctuary to see the Advent wreath there.

This Advent, we are going to study the themes that shape Advent. Each week is centered on that theme, and each week we light one of the candles:

Hope - The Prophets' Candle

Faith - The Bethlehem Candle

Joy - The Shepherds' Candle

Peace - The Angels' Candle

Christmas - The Christ Candle

These are the words that help shape our idea of the Advent Season and the anticipation of Christmas.

For more on Advent, you can look at our youth curriculum Faith Out Loud. The series study is called "Seasons" which has a full lesson

including discussion questions and activities on Advent. You can find this resource online by searching the CP online book store for "Seasons" or Copy/paste link <http://cpcmc.org/faithoutloud/>

Say, "Each week we will look at the story of the events leading up to and including the birth of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel of Luke. Today's scripture comes from Luke chapter 1 verses 26-38.

PRAYER

To you Lord, we lift up our heads, hearts and hands in prayer. We put our trust in you, believing that your word is true. We lift up to you our longing for hope in a despairing world. We lift up to you our need for hope in a time of deep hopelessness in our world. We lift up to you our deep desire for hope in a bleak and sometimes depressing world. You promised hope to Israelites and you kept your promise. You promised hope in the coming of your son and he was hope for the world. You promised hope to the early church and that hope was not denied. You promise hope to us and we pray for your continued faithfulness.

Lord, we pray for strength when our faith falters. We pray for you to pour your love so it fills our lives and splashes over on everyone around you. Fill us with confidence in your presence in our lives. Fill us with your joy and peace as we go through this busy time of year. Keep our minds focused on you, our hearts filled with you and ours outstretched for you. Amen.

– Rev. Abi, on her Long and Winding Road blog
Prayer Resource: <http://vicarofwadley.blogspot.com/2009/11/prayer-for-first-sunday-in-advent.html>

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 1:26-38.

GETTING STARTED

Our theme for this first week of Advent is Hope.

- What does hope mean, or what does it mean to be hopeful?
- Where is the hope in this text?

- If you are comfortable, can you share a moment or experience in your life where hope was the only thing that kept you going? Invite others to do the same.

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

We are coming up on the Christmas season, and you might be starting to panic. What gifts am I going to buy for who? Your schedule may be getting crazy because you have Christmas get-togethers with co-workers, family, friends, and the church. We put in all this work and time for something that, in theory, is so simple. For the next five weeks, use this time to get back to the original purpose of the holiday season. We are readying our hearts and homes for the coming of Jesus Christ. Just as we prepare our schedules and our homes for all these holiday events, we mentally, emotionally, and spiritually prepare for worship.

Our passage is a very familiar passage when the Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she would bear a child, and his name would be Jesus. In the Matthew narrative, we read that Jesus would be known as Emmanuel, which translated means "God with us."

The scripture from Luke is the beginning of the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about one who would come from the lineage of David to establish the kingdom for all times. It is the fulfillment of Isaiah 2:1-5.

Read Isaiah 2:1-5

- Again, ask where is the hope in the Isaiah text?
- How does the promise of Christ's return give the world hope?

One real-world example from history of the effect of Emmanuel is from WWI, it is called the "Christmas Truce."

Here is a video from the History channel you can watch. If this is a printed file go to youtube.com and search for the video titled "The Christmas Truce | History". If this is a digital file, copy/paste the link into your browser of choice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGO9Q1vl-iM>

Or here are the highlights of the “Christmas Truce” story.

On December 7, 1914, Pope Benedict XV suggested a temporary hiatus of the war for the celebration of Christmas. The warring countries refused to create any official cease-fire, but on Christmas, the soldiers in the trenches declared their own unofficial truce.

Starting on Christmas Eve, many German and British troops sang Christmas carols to each other across the lines, and at certain points the Allied soldiers even heard brass bands joining the Germans in their joyous singing.

At the first light of dawn on Christmas Day, some German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines across no-man’s-land, calling out “Merry Christmas” in their enemies’ native tongues. At first, the Allied soldiers feared it was a trick, but seeing the Germans unarmed they climbed out of their trenches and shook hands with the enemy soldiers. The men exchanged presents of cigarettes and plum puddings and sang carols and songs. There was even a documented case of soldiers from opposing sides playing a good-natured game of soccer.

Some soldiers used this short-lived ceasefire for a more somber task: the retrieval of the bodies of fellow combatants who had fallen within the no-man’s land between the lines.

The so-called Christmas Truce of 1914 came only five months after the outbreak of war in Europe and was one of the last examples of the outdated notion of chivalry between enemies in warfare. It was never repeated—future attempts at holiday ceasefires were quashed by officers’ threats of disciplinary action—but it served as heartening proof, however brief, that beneath the brutal clash of weapons, the soldiers’ essential humanity endured.

Resource: <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/christmas-truce-of-1914>

Discuss the implications of Emmanuel in this story. It proves that the coming kingdom can be one of peace. It gives us, however brief, hope that the world can beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

Yet, very quickly the leaders of each army and nation squashed any hope of a cease-fire.

World peace may be difficult to fathom, but ask your class: How can the news of Emmanuel bring you hope as you lay your head down on the pillow tonight? How will this affect your decision-making tomorrow as you get ready for all the responsibilities of this holiday season? Will you allow that busy schedule, the quest for the perfect present or all your responsibilities to quash your hope and replace it with anxiety?

An old hymn most congregations sing during Advent is “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” If you have someone that can play for your congregation you may want to sing this great hymn or read it together.

Note the interplay between despair and then the proclamation of hope in Emmanuel and the resulting joy that comes from the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.
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
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind All peoples in one heart and mind; Bid envy, strife and discord cease; Fill the whole world with heaven’s peace. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel. CCLI #1975626

May you discover hope during this Advent. May it become real and sustain you. May it transform your thinking and doing.

Close in prayer.

WE sources.

A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

THE SEASON OF
Advent

ADULT STUDY

THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE: FAITH

Lesson 2

RESOURCES

- Device to show video links (computer, tablet, projector)
- Hymnal
- Bible
- Journals/or writing pad & pens
- Optional: Advent Wreath

GATHERING

This Advent, we are studying the themes that shape Advent. Each week is centered on that theme, and each week we light one of the candles:

Hope - The Prophets' Candle

Faith - The Bethlehem Candle

Joy - The Shepherds' Candle

Peace - The Angels' Candle

Christmas - The Christ Candle

These are the words that help shape our idea of the Advent Season and the anticipation of Christmas.

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Say, "Each week we will look at the story of the events leading up to and including the birth of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel of Luke. Today's scripture comes from Luke chapter 2 verses 1-7.

PRAYER

Come, Jesus Christ, our savior
teach us your way,
lead us to freedom,
grow in our lives,
open our minds,
shine in our actions,
rule in our hearts,
be with us here, now, always.

- Adaption of an O Antiphons

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 2:1-7.

GETTING STARTED

Our theme for this second week of Advent is Faith.

- How do you define faith?
- If you are comfortable, share a specific moment or experience in your life where your faith influenced a decision you made? Ask others to share as they are comfortable as well.
- Where are the acts of faith in this text?

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

It may be difficult to see faith in this text. Joseph is simply doing the things he is supposed to do. He has a family, and the empire has ordered all people to return to the city of their origin to be registered. Joseph does exactly what he is supposed to do. There doesn't seem to be a lot of faith in this story.

We, however, know the background of the story. This is no ordinary family, and this return to the place of Joseph's hometown was no mere coincidence. We know that Joseph was exercising faith by staying with Mary, who was pregnant, but not with Joseph's child. We know that God was fulfilling the messianic promises by having the child born in Bethlehem.

Sometimes in the Church, we define faith as our belief or mental acceptance of God's promises. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines faith as:

conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it.

Faith is best understood in Christianity with a broader definition, as the definition from Thayer's.

One component of faith is intellectual, in that we ascent intellectually to promises of God. We take it on faith when scripture says, "Believe in

the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved you and your household."

A second component of faith is emotional. You have probably heard the saying, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Unless we have an emotional attachment to the promises, we have faith in, we will not respond correctly to the promises of God. Contrasting examples of this can be found in Acts 4:32-5:11. The believers in chapter 4 had an intellectual, active, and emotional investment in the promises of God. They shared all their possessions with one another without regard for their own well-being because they had a sure and certain faith. In contrast, Ananias and Saphira had faith, but there was some element missing. They intellectually agreed, they even went so far as to sell their property and give, but their faith wasn't complete in that they lied about the share they gave. They had not yet fully invested emotionally to the promises of God.

A third component of faith is action. In response to the intellectual component of faith, we act on that faith. A good example of this from scripture is when the widow threw in her two copper coins. She had faith that God would provide her daily bread.

Another component of faith is to believe God is working all things to the good of those who love God. We can live in faith because we believe that God is working through the circumstances and events of history to bring good to us.

Read Romans 8:28-30.

After exploring a more robust definition of faith, ask again, "Where is the faith in this gospel reading"?

Think about how God determined all the events of history so that Mary becomes pregnant at just the right time, with just the right husband, who must go to a specific city for a census so that Jesus can be born in Bethlehem. It's amazing.

But, with all the good events of history, we would be fooling ourselves if we didn't think of the bad events of history and circumstances that happen. It takes a great amount of faith to keep trusting God when these things happen.

For example, we read in the Gospel of Matthew 2:13-18 that one of the prophecies Jesus had to fulfill was to be called out of Egypt. The infant Jesus and his family move to Egypt, but it was because King Herod sent soldiers to kill all the children 2 years old or younger. They had to escape for their lives. Others lost theirs.

How does faith work at a time when events are terrible? Where is the faith in Matthew 2:13-18?

If you or someone in the class feel comfortable, relate a time when your faith was challenged. How did faith inform the experience during that time?

If you would like to end your time with an Advent hymn, this week sing, read, or listen to an old German hymn, "Es ist ein Ros entsprungen" literally translated as "A rose has sprung up." We know it in English as "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming."

It is a beautiful hymn that juxtaposes the images of a bleak wintery night with the audacity of a rose in bloom when no flowering plant should be blooming or alive. This is an incredible image of faith. Many times, when circumstances seem bleak and dark, God breaks through like a rose in wintertime. In these times, our faith is validated and strengthened.

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming,
From tender stem hath sprung.
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
By faithful prophets sung.
It came, a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The rose I have in mind,
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore for us a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

This flower, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispel with glorious splendor
The darkness everywhere;
Enfleshed, yet very God,
From sin and death he saves us
And lightens every load.

CCLI #1975626

May your faith be deepened during this Advent. May it sustain and strengthen you.

Close in prayer.

WE SOURCES:

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THE SEASON OF
Advent

ADULT STUDY

THE SHEPHERDS' CANDLE: JOY

Lesson 3

RESOURCES

- Device to show video links (computer, tablet, projector)
- Hymnal
- Bible
- Journals/or writing pad & pens
- Optional: Advent Wreath

GATHERING

This Advent, we are studying the themes that shape Advent. Each week is centered on that theme, and each week we light one of the candles:

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Say, "Each week we will look at the story of the events leading up to and including the birth of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel of Luke. Today's scripture comes from Luke chapter 2 verses 15-20.

PRAYER

O Emmanuel, God with us, truly in this Advent season we celebrate that you are not hidden in some faraway cloud, but you chose to be with us in the blur and mystery of our lives.

Amid the lists and rush, you are with us as a song that echoes in our minds, as the light of a candle, as a card from a friend. They are signs of your presence.

We turn to you this season and pray that you would bring joy and healing, blessing and hope in us. Let something wonderful begin in us—something surprising and holy.

May your hand be upon us. Let your love fill us. Let your joy overwhelm us. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 2:15-20.

GETTING STARTED

Our theme for this third week of Advent is Joy.

Many of you have heard the song, "Don't Worry, Be Happy!" People use it as a type of proclamation. As if you can simply say, I am no longer worried, and now I have been directed to be happy, so therefore I will make the decision to be happy. Has that ever actually worked for you? Ever? I think instead of shooting for being happy, we might want to become joyful.

How do you define happiness? How do you define joy? What are the differences and similarities between joy and happiness?

If you are comfortable, share a specific moment or experience in your life where you were happy. Now see if you can share a time when you were joyful. Invite the class to participate in this exercise.

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Being a minister, I often get in a conversation in counseling that revolves around someone's happiness. In the context of marriage counseling I sometimes hear, "I am no longer happy." In the context of listening to someone about life's problems, I often hear, "I just want to be happy. I don't need a lot of money; I don't need a lot of fame. I just want to be happy."

Our society is "chasing the dragon" when it comes to happiness. Chasing the dragon is an urban slang term. It starts when you have your first high from some type of narcotic, the world is peaceful, everything is perfect, you're numb, but in the best way possible. But, soon, it starts wearing off. Fast. Your mind races, you're pulled out of your dream world. You crave the drug more and more, wanting to feel the same way as you did on your first high. You go to the dealer and buy the same amount you had the first time, and smoke. Still feels good, but not as good as the first time. You go and buy more. Closer, but not quite there. You're stuck, you don't know what to do. You want to go back to that little dream world and stay forever, but your body is

already developing a tolerance. Urban Dictionary

In our culture, happiness seems to be the goal. Often, people get a taste of happiness, and it becomes something like a drug. Once we get the taste of happiness, we long for more and more of it. We experiment with things and search for things that bring us happiness. Maybe you think a better job can bring you happiness, maybe a better relationship, maybe more material possessions, sadly many find the feeling of happiness in addictive substances. There are times when we find some happiness, but it proves to be elusive and we are left wanting more. Instead of feeling contentment, we still feel empty.

Merriam-Webster defines happiness as "a state of well-being and contentment. A pleasurable or satisfying experience."

What happens when the pleasurable or satisfying experience goes away? Think of the Israelites in the Exodus. They went from the high emotions of being delivered from the Egyptians to the lows of saying, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." (Exodus 14:11-12)

Compare the Israelites with Paul who writing in prison says, "Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress."

For Paul it seems that there was something beyond his circumstances that he could look to in order to live a life of contentment. Happiness wasn't his goal. Contentment, dare I say, joy is what characterized Paul's life.

Going back to Merriam-Webster, it defines joy as "the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or

good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires." I think this is a great definition. The Christian faith is one that proclaims we can have joy and have it abundantly because we can possess and be possessed by the love of God in Jesus Christ.

In verse 20 of the Luke passage we read, "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." The shepherds were going back to the same old routine. In other words, their circumstances were not changing in any real meaningful way. They were returning to their old job, with their same co-workers, but they left praising and glorifying because they had seen the fulfillment of God's promises. They received with their own eyes, confirmation of God's love to the world. They now possessed their greatest desire. The desire of God walking on earth, establishing the throne of David forever. They would never be the same.

Here is a video from *The Bible Project* that further studies what Joy is in relation to the Bible and the theme for this week of Advent.

If this is a printed file go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search for the video titled - "Word Study: Chara - "Joy".

If this is a digital file, copy/paste the link into your browser of choice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvOhQTuD2e0>

After exploring the concept of joy ask the opening questions again,

- How do you define happiness? How do you define joy? What are the differences and similarities between joy and happiness?
- Is there a way to be a joyful person, but be unhappy all the time?
- How would you respond to these statements?

I believe the very purpose of life is to be happy.

- Dalai Lama

Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim, and end of human existence.

- Aristotle

If you would like to end your time with an Advent hymn, this week sing, read, or listen to another old German hymn, it was written probably 1500 AD. It is known by two different titles. The original title is simply the first line of the hymn, "While by My Sheep." Some hymnals and traditions have named it, "How Great Our Joy," after a refrain was added in the early 1900s.

The hymn focuses on the joy of the advent of our God.

While by the sheep we watched at night,
Glad tidings brought an angel bright.

Refrain:

How great our joy! Great our joy!

Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

There shall be born, so he did say,
In Bethlehem a Child today.

Refrain:

There shall the child lie in a stall,

This child who shall redeem us all.

Refrain:

This gift of God we'll cherish well,

That ever joy our hearts shall fill.

Refrain:

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May you find joy this Advent. May you desire the love of God and feel the certainty of it.

Close in prayer.

WE SOURCES:

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THE SEASON OF
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ADULT STUDY

THE ANGELS' CANDLE: PEACE

Lesson 4

RESOURCES

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- Hymnal
- Bible
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- Optional: Advent Wreath

GATHERING

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PRAYER

Holy God may the divisions between us be erased.

May we, people of all backgrounds, walk with one another;

listen to one another;

bear one another's burdens.

May we be peacemakers in everything we say and do. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 2:15-20.

GETTING STARTED

Our theme for this fourth week of Advent is Peace.

Did you know that America has the highest use of anti-anxiety pills? We live in a country where we have more than the basics of life, yet we are unhappy people. It isn't just non-Christians that struggle with anxiety and depression. Here is a summary of findings from a Duke Divinity School study on pastors:

A new study conducted among more than 1,700 pastors has found that clergy is at far greater risk for depression and anxiety, mostly due to stress than those with other occupations.

The study by the Clergy Health Initiative (CHI) at Durham-based Duke Divinity School interviewed over 1,726 United Methodist pastors in North Carolina by phone and through online surveys. It found that the clergy depression prevalence was 8.7 percent and 11.1 percent respectively, significantly higher than the 5.5 percent rate of the national sample.

The study, published this week in the *Journal of Primary Prevention*, also found that anxiety rates among the clergy were 13.5 percent, and more than 7 percent of clergy experienced both depression and anxiety.

"Pastors may have created a life for themselves that is so strongly intertwined with their ministry, that their emotional health is dependent on the state of their ministry," CHI research director Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell was quoted in the study. "So, it's possible that when pastors feel their ministry is going well, they experience positive emotions potent enough to buffer them from mental distress. Of course, the converse is also true."

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/study-pastors-at-greater-risk-of-depression-anxiety.html>

- What about you? Do you struggle with having peace in this world? If you feel comfortable sharing, talk about an area of life in which you struggle with peace.
- Acceptance from others?

- Financial peace?
- Peace in your relationships?
- Peace in the progress of your life?
- Our Advent theme today is peace. I am sure peace is something all of us wish we had just a little more of. Is it possible to have peace?

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

In our text today, we read about the shepherds minding their own business, doing what they do, keeping watch over their flocks by night when all the sudden an angel appears. Not only did an angel appear, but some type of glory shone around them. It was an instant from darkness to light-type thing, and just think that it was the glory of the Lord shining. The text said they were terrified. The angel quickly said, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you gospel!" That is the literal translation. Do not be terrified, for I am bringing you gospel! Good news!

Today we will discuss some of the reasons why we have anxiety and fear. We will also discuss how the good news addresses our fears and anxieties. We can live with peace, and we can live an abundant life in Jesus Christ.

One fundamental reason many have anxiety in the world is that they have an improper relationship with or understanding of God.

Back in 500 B.C., there was a young man in India named Siddhartha Gautama. He was a rich prince whose father shielded him from any type of distress or negativity. He never experienced anything that would disrupt his peace in the world. One day he ventured out of the palace grounds and saw a dead body. He was stunned. He didn't understand what was wrong. He asked the attendant driving the chariot what it was. The attendant said, "it is a dead body. This will happen to you one day, too, Siddhartha."

Siddhartha could no longer function. He was so shocked by death that he left his wife and newborn child to search for peace. Siddhartha became known as the Buddha, and his teachings have gone around the world in trying to teach peace in a world that is constantly changing.

I wished that Siddhartha had been born in a later time and had heard the good news! He would have known that death is not the end. If he had known the promises of Jesus, then he could have had peace in this world regardless of the changes that constantly occur. Siddhartha did not have a true knowledge of God.

Death is not the only reason we experience fear and anxiety. Many people even Christians, understand God to be one that sits above the clouds ready to send lightning bolts when we do something wrong. Many people are living in such a way that they are scared they have done something to offend God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, "Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will." Bonhoeffer is right. When we live in such a way to avoid punishment, we lose our peace and joy that is proclaimed in the gospel, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people."

Sin is another reason we lose peace. Simply put, sin steals our joy and peace. When we are actively doing something, we know to be against God's will, it will tear us apart. The Book of James compares this to looking into the mirror, but once turning away, forget what we look like. Knowingly committing sin makes you feel like you are two different people living in the same body. It is tiresome, and it will create much anxiety.

Lack of forgiving is another reason why we live in anxiety. In the Lord's Prayer, we repeat the line, "Forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Jesus teaches, "Forgive and you will be forgiven." Jesus also says, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

When we refuse to forgive, we give the devil a foothold. We allow our heart to become hard toward someone else. We begin to think about how we will get even with that person or worse; we simply reject that person and never allow for grace to redeem the situation.

Another common reason we lose our peace in this world is that we lack faith in God's

providence and care for us. Many of our worries stem from our concern about having enough or having the stuff we want. Do we really believe that God will provide our needs? Maybe the better question is, can we let go of some of our desires that aren't necessarily needs?

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

- How does faith bring peace in this passage?
- How does this passage inform how we live in the world?

The angels in the Luke passage proclaimed peace to all of God's people. We can be part of God's family. We can enter the abundant life offered by Christ. When we live in faith, we can be assured in this world that God will provide and care for us.

Here is a video from *The Bible Project* that further studies what Peace is in relation to the Bible and the theme for this week of Advent.

If this is a printed file go to youtube.com and search for the video titled - "Word Study: Shalom - "Peace".

If this is a digital file, copy/paste the link into your browser of choice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLYORLZOaZE>.

If you would like to end your time with a hymn, this week sing, read, or listen to the old hymn, "Angels We Have Heard on High."

The hymn replicates in song the passage for today and focuses on the joy and peace that the birth of Christ brings to everyone.

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o're the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Shepherds why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be

Which inspire your heavenly song?

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Come to Bethlehem and see

Him whose birth the angels sing;

Come, adore on bended knee

Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

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The LORD bless you, and keep you:

The LORD make his face shine upon you,
and be gracious to you:

The LORD lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. Amen.

Close in prayer.

WE SOURCES:

A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

THE SEASON OF
Advent

ADULT STUDY

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS: THE CHRIST CANDLE

Lesson 5

RESOURCES

- Device to show video links (computer, tablet, projector)
- Hymnal
- Bible
- Journals/or writing pad & pens
- Optional: Advent Wreath

GATHERING

This Advent, we are studying the themes that shape Advent. Each week is centered on that theme, and each week we light one of the candles:

Hope - The Prophets' Candle

Faith - The Bethlehem Candle

Joy - The Shepherds' Candle

Peace - The Angels' Candle

Christmas - The Christ Candle

These are the words that help shape our idea of the Advent season and the anticipation of Christmas.

For more on Advent, you can look at our youth curriculum Faith Out Loud. Our FOL called "Seasons" has a full lesson, including discussion questions and activities on Advent. You can find this resource online by searching the CP online book store for "Seasons" or copy/paste link <http://cpcmc.org/faithoutloud/>

Say, "Each week we will look at the story of the events leading up to and including the birth of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel of Luke. Today's scripture comes from Luke chapter 2 verses 8-14.

PRAYER

Loving God help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be your children, and Christmas evening

bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts,
forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

-Robert Louis Stevenson

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 2:22-38.

GETTING STARTED

Christmas is our theme today.

- What was the greatest experience you had this Christmas?
- Did you get an amazing gift?
- Did you get that perfect reaction you were hoping for when someone opened that special gift you bought for them?
- Any special memories made this year?
- Any spiritual developments during the Advent season?

You may remember a Johnson and Johnson ad campaign. The tagline was, "Having a baby changes everything!"

Our theme today is Christmas. Christ has come into the world. Now that you have journeyed through Advent and have thought deeper about the meaning of Christ coming into the world, what is your response? Remember, having a baby changes everything! What does this Christmas child change about you?

Here are some examples from new mothers on how having a baby changes life:

"You'd rather buy a plastic tricycle than those shoes that you've been dying to have."

- Sophie's mom

"You realize that although sticky, lollipops have magical powers."

- Roxanne

"You no longer rely on a clock - your baby now sets your schedule."

- Thomas' mom

"You give parents with a screaming child an 'I-know-the-feeling' look instead of a 'Can't-they-shut-him-up?' one."

- Jaidyn's mom

"You learn that taking a shower is a luxury."

- Jayden's mom

"Nothing is just yours any longer. You share EVERYTHING!"

- Dylan's Mom

"You can have the most wonderful conversation using only vowel sounds like 'ahhh' and 'oooo.' "

- littlehulk2008

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

In our text today, we read about the responses of a priest and a prophetess that see the baby Jesus. We just celebrated the greatest event in the history of the universe—the birth of the Holy Child. And this holy child which split history in two surely has consequences to us who claim to be Christians. This week we think about what happens to us, now that we have a baby. The baby Jesus would grow to be our savior and king of kings.

In verse 34 of our text, Simeon warns Mary saying, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

The birth of the Christ child calls for a response from us. When we accept Jesus Christ, our lives must change. Our first response to Christ is repentance.

When a person chooses to follow Christ, they are allowing Christ to be born in their hearts just as he was born a baby so long ago in Bethlehem. Jesus says, no one puts a hand to the plow and looks backward. You can't start building a tower without first counting the cost. You don't go to war if you don't have the numbers. Having a baby changes things. Having Jesus changes our lives. Listen to Paul writing to the church in Ephesus,

Have someone read Ephesians 4:22-32.

Change is inevitable when you have a baby, change is inevitable when Jesus is birthed in your heart.

A second response to Christ being born in our

hearts is that worldly things pale in comparison to the love of Christ.

There is a hymn sung in many churches that captures what I am trying to say here. The hymn is "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus." The chorus is:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face; And the things of earth will grow strangely dim In the light of His glory and grace.

This is what love does; it calls us to a higher plane of existence. You come to find out that it isn't the things that you can use, like money or material possessions that fill life with joy and happiness, but it's the things you cannot see, taste or touch that is the flavor of life. What value does lying and cheating have over a precious baby? How much money can make you as happy as love? The Beatles said it right, "Can't buy me love." How much power and influence in this world does one need once they look at the face of their newborn baby. Much less when they think about the power and privileges that come with being a child of God through Jesus?

Another thing that changes when you have a baby is that free time is pretty much gone. Time is prioritized. Everything is purposeful and proactive.

You can't just sit around when you have a baby, or you will get swallowed up. Why is that we Christians think we can sit around when Jesus tells us to go to work?

We are all good at sitting around and watching the news talking about how bad things are. We sit on our couch watching the news with a potato chip bag in front of us, and we moan about the state of things. "O Come, Lord Jesus, Come." Maybe Jesus is telling us, "Go, Lazy Christian! Go! Go and let your light Shine—go and proclaim the good news! Go and heal the sick, clothe the naked, feed the hungry—Go Christian, go!"

Paul writes again to the people of Ephesus in the 5th chapter of his letter, "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." We must stop sleeping. There is work to be done! You don't wait around waiting on that baby—instead you plan the day, you are proactive. Why would we not be proactive when Jesus commands work to be done? Why do we sit

around like there is nothing to do?

In our passage today, we read about Anna, the prophetess. When she saw the baby Jesus the text says she "began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

This should be our response, as well. We have work to do now that Christ has been born in our hearts. We are called to go and tell. We are to be witness to the redemption of the world in Jesus Christ!

If you would like to end your time with a hymn, this week sing, read, or listen to the old hymn, "Go Tell It on the Mountain."

The hymn recaps the joy of the birth of Christ and proclaims to the world the peace and redemption found in Christ. We should proclaim it from the mountain tops!

For a neat contemporary version of this song by Sarah McLachlan and EmmyLou Harris you can go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfzIMK7YKxo) and search for the video titled "Sarah McLachlan - Go Tell It On The Mountain (Audio)" or copy/paste the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfzIMK7YKxo>.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching
O'er silent flocks by night,
Behold, throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

The shepherds feared and trembled,
When lo! above the earth,
Rang out the angels chorus
That hailed the Savior's birth.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

Down in a lowly manger
The humble Christ was born,
And God sent us salvation
That blessed Christmas morn.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

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The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in deepest night, are lit up with a brilliant sight. Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. The spread of his influence and of his peace will never end. Therefore, go out into the world with great joy, and the grace of Bethlehem's matchless child, the love of the God who never ceases to amaze, and the fellowship of the Spirit who never wearies, will be with you this holy night and evermore.

Thanks be to God!

Close in prayer.