



HOW
will
we
KNOW



**Mennonite
Education
Agency**

Advent 2023 to Epiphany 2024
At Home Worship Guide



Advent to Epiphany At Home 2023
December 3, 2023 through January 6, 2024

Written by Talashia Keim Yoder
Edited by Michael Danner and Jolene VonGunten
Designed by Erin Ramer

This material may be reproduced and adapted by Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada congregations free of charge.

Contact: Michael Danner, Executive Director Mennonite Education Agency
574-523-3045 MichaelD@MennoniteEducation.org



**Mennonite
Education
Agency**

The education agency of
Mennonite Church USA



Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 9 Week 1: We wait in Hope
- 12 Week 2: We wait for Peace
- 16 Week 3: We wait with Joy
- 19 Week 4: We wait with Love
- 23 Christmas Week 1: We welcome Jesus
- 26 Epiphany: Now we see!



Introduction to Advent at Home

Advent to Epiphany, Dec. 3, 2023-Jan. 6, 2024

How will we know?

We think of Advent as a time of preparing for the birth of Jesus. But it's also a time of waiting – something that's challenging for us at any age! This year's theme, developed for *Leader* magazine, encourages us to do the spiritual work of this season. To watch and wait, to discern, to “wonder and wander,” to ask questions, to live without instant gratification, to do the work of the present while anticipating the fulfillment of the future. And in all of this, we experience God's illumination as we come closer and closer to the ultimate revelation of God incarnate, the infant Christ.

What is Advent

- It is a season of waiting and preparation in which we recreate the longing people felt before the birth of Jesus. Christians prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth by remembering the longing for a Messiah.
- The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming” or “visit.” During the Advent season, we keep in mind both “advents” of Christ: the first one in Bethlehem and the second one yet to come.
- During Advent, we move from darkness to light — right at the time of the year when the days are reaching their shortest, and when the world is going from light to darkness leading up to the winter solstice. We don't do this to equate light with goodness and darkness with evil. Rather, light is a symbol of illumination, helping us to see more clearly.

Why celebrate Advent

- The four weeks of Advent help us make sure we are making Christmas about Jesus and more than a present-opening party.
- Living in the Advent season slows us down and helps us remember that December is not just about frantic preparations for Christmas.
- Advent is actually the beginning of the Christian calendar, and walking through Advent gives shape to our entire year.

How to use this worship guide

- This resource accompanies the worship planning materials in *Leader* magazine. The themes and Scriptures are the same, which will connect your worship at home to your worship at church. If your congregation is not following the *Leader* resource, that's not a problem; this worship guide will still make sense to you.
- This guide refers to the *Shine On* and *Peace Table* story Bible from MennoMedia. If you have this resource, you can find correlating stories in it. If you don't have it, no problem. Reading straight from the Bible or from another story Bible is also great!
- This guide refers to the *Voices Together* songbooks, both of which are from MennoMedia. Again, having these is not necessary for using this resource.
- This guide can be used weekly, daily, or a combination of both.
- Choose the rituals and ideas that are helpful for your household and skip the ones that aren't. To remind you that you can choose what works for your household, there are empty checkboxes next to each option.
- No need to be perfect; aim for persistence. If "daily" means "every few days," that's ok!
- Fit these materials into your schedule. If the only thing your household

can manage is a daily lighting of candles, singing a song, or saying a quick prayer, that is enough!

The Advent Wreath

Create your own version of an Advent wreath that looks similar to this:



- The wreath is circular like God's eternal love. It has no beginning and no end.
- Wreaths are traditionally dressed with evergreens, symbolizing endless life and rebirth. Since actual evergreens are highly flammable, consider using some artificial greenery, or decorate your wreath in a different way.
- The purple candles represent both repentance and royalty, and the pink candle, used the third week, is Mary's candle.
- We often use a word for each week of advent as we light each candle. Week 1 is "hope," week 2 is "peace," week 3 is "joy," and week 4 is "love."
- The white candle in the center is the "Christ candle."
- There are many stories recounting the history and symbolism of the Advent wreath and even multiple colors that are used. If you're intrigued, look it up!

- Manger “Wreath” Option: In keeping with the manger theme (see below), consider putting a small manger in your Advent wreath. You could use a little manger from a nativity set, or create one out of Legos, sticks, or other materials.

Manger Talks

Riffing on the worship resource idea from Leader, gather around the manger weekly for household chats, allowing the manger to be the place that holds your questions, thoughts, and observations.

1. Create a manger. This could be quite literal – a doll cradle or manger you build out of wood. You could also create it out of objects from around the house or outside – Duplo blocks, a cardboard box, a dresser drawer, sticks and branches, a tub, or a large bowl. Get as elaborate as you like! Or keep it simple – it’s fine to just plunk down a shoe box and call it a manger.
2. Set slips of paper and writing utensils by the manger.
3. Throughout the week, as you live with the week’s texts and move through the world, write down questions, thoughts, and observations, and place them in the manger. For young children: They can draw a picture of what they have observed or ask an adult to write something for them. Prompt them to note what they’re curious about, where they notice God’s love, what confuses them, what gives them joy or sadness.
4. At the end of the week, gather around the manger as a household (or a small group of friends if you’re the only one in your household). Pull the slips of paper, read them, and talk about them together. This is not meant to be a problem-solving exercise – while you may talk about some answers to questions, that’s not the goal! The goal is to let Jesus hold our wonderings, and to name them in community.

Morning Question

This daily idea is very simple and can work well for all ages. Sometime in the midst of your morning routine, ask, "What are we/you waiting for today?" Let each person respond. Maybe you're waiting for something special happening later in the day. Maybe you're tired already and waiting for bedtime. Maybe you wait for an interaction or an answer or snow! These responses will sometimes be deep, sometimes silly. Young children can sometimes lead into weird responses. And all of that is great! It's about naming what we wait for and starting to see how sometimes we see instant gratification, and often we wait for a long time.

Wonder and Wander Walks

Go on a weekly walk. As you walk, wonder and wander. Try different paths and explore. Notice beauty, strangeness, humor, and stillness. Let these walks be in turn adventurous and reflective. If children are involved, let them lead the way in following curiosity.

*If walking isn't an option for you, instead find a place to sit for a while. Maybe you want to sit in a hub of human activity, or maybe in a calm natural setting – maybe even just right outside your door!

Making Space to Wonder and Wander

The month of December can quickly become manic. There are pressures to do things certain ways, to keep traditions, to go to a lot of extra events, to travel, and to make things special, not to mention the weird family dynamics that seem to assert themselves around the holidays. Some of these pressures are out of our hands, but we do have some control over at least some of them. *Before* you dive into the season, sit down as a household and prioritize. List out the many calls for your time and attention that are going to come your way. Discern which are non-negotiable, which really aren't necessary, and which give life and joy. Ask: How can we make space to experience the waiting, watching, wondering, and wandering that lead us to the "comfort and joy" of the birth of Christ?

Journey to the Manger

This is a simple daily or weekly ritual that people of all ages have found meaningful. It's a visual way to anticipate the birth of Christ.

1. Set up a simple, unadorned nativity crèche. Maybe you have a nativity structure you want to use, but this could also be something you create. "Simple and unadorned" is enough! But if you want an extra challenge, you could decorate the crèche a little more each week to prepare it for Jesus.
2. Place Mary and Joseph somewhere in your home to the north of the manger and place the Magi somewhere to the east. Hide Jesus for now.
3. Each day of Advent, move Mary and Joseph a little closer to the manger, letting them land there on December 24.
4. You may want to also place your shepherds nearby instead of at the manger so that you can move them in to worship Jesus on Christmas Day.
5. On December 25, Christmas Day, add Jesus.
6. After Christmas, begin moving the Magi closer each day, letting them arrive to worship Jesus on January 6, Epiphany.

Note: If you don't have a Nativity set, make a simple one! You can paint rocks for different characters or create them out of sticks or clothespins and fabric scraps. Find a free downloadable Nativity set to print on paper and cut out, as well as other child-friendly Nativity set options at www.MennoniteUSA.org/adventathome.

Weekly worship ritual

Four Scripture passages will be listed for each week. We encourage you to read all of them at some point during the week! The weekly worship ritual will focus on one Scripture passage each week.

- Connect to the “big story.” We begin by remembering that the Bible tells one big story that leads to Jesus. By reading this section each week, we can learn where this week’s Scripture belongs in the big story.
- Tell the story. Read the Scripture passage from your Bible and/or a corresponding version in a story Bible.
- Talk about it. Choose a few “Talk about it” prompts, provided in this guide, to explore. These will include the “context questions” that are offered in the Leader resource.
- If you’re doing Manger Talks or Wonder and Wander Walks, you may want to do that at this time – or maybe you opt to do that at a different time during the week.
- If you want to end your time more reflectively, listen to some music together. Each week’s ritual has a music idea or two to get you started.

Daily Worship Ritual

- Light the candle(s) of the Advent wreath, saying aloud the corresponding Advent word.
- Read one (or part of one) of the week’s Scripture passages, or read the story of Jesus’ birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Optional: “Journey to the Manger” ritual
- Pray the simple suggested weekly prayer or another prayer of your choosing.
- Blow out the candles. Maybe you would like to sing a song here. “He Came Down” (#239 in the *Voices Together* hymnal and #31 in the *Sing the Journey* songbook) is a simple song that can be altered for each week by using that week’s Advent word in the lyrics. For example, the first week’s version would be, “He came down that we may have hope...”



HOW will we KNOW? How Long? We Wait in Hope

Advent Week 1, Beginning December 3

Advent Word of the Week: Hope

Focus Scripture: Mark 13:24-37

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”: God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we experience the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were enslaved and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often by calling prophets to point the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby.

Jesus called disciples to learn from him and follow him and spent about three years traveling, teaching, and healing. Today’s scripture

comes from the final week of Jesus's life. Jesus has words for people about **waiting in hope**.

Tell the story: Mark 13:24-37

This passage is not found in very many story Bibles, and for good reason – its imagery is challenging to understand and can be confusing and scary for children (or any of us!). If you have young children (under age 8), you may want to stick to reading just Mark 13:28-31, then jump to the last verse of the chapter and focus on it: "Keep awake!"

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active Prompt:** After reading Mark 13:28-31, look around your house or outside for clues of what is about to happen. For example, bare trees give us a clue that rest is happening to prepare for the vibrancy of spring. A sunset tells us that night is coming. Thumping from the washing machine tells us clothing is about to be clean.
- As you read this, notice your physical and emotional responses to it. Many of us have baggage from apocalyptic passages like this one. Note your responses, name them, and "say hello" to them. You may want to share some stories of where they come from.
- The "end times" were much-discussed in Jesus's time, and have been repeatedly throughout history. There is great temptation among Christians to try to predict the end. But Mark's gospel is very clear that this is an exercise in futility. There is no code to crack. Instead, keep awake to what God is up to, right here and now. Live well and righteously always.
- Find all the time language in the passage – words like "after," "then," "when," "day," etc. What patterns (or lack of patterns) do you notice?
- Verses 24-25 are a combination of prophetic writings that Jesus' audience would have been familiar with. Look up Isaiah 13:10, Ezekiel 32:7-8, Joel 2:10, 2:31, and 3:15, and notice what Jesus is pulling together.

- This long apocalyptic speech from Jesus is prompted by wonderment from one of his disciples. Read Mark 13:1. Why do you think that comment launched Jesus into this speech?
- Look back at chapter 12 and ahead at chapter 14. This teaching of Jesus is sandwiched between two stories of women who gave generously. Read today's passage with that in mind. What do you notice?
- Where is the hope in this passage?

- Manger Talk or Wonder and Wander Walk:** If you're doing one of these weekly rituals, you might want to make it part of this time.
- Journey to the Manger:** If you're moving Mary and Joseph weekly, do that now.
- Reflective Listening Ideas:** [Poor of the Earth](#); [Come Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light one purple candle and say, "Jesus brings hope" or "We watch with hope."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Journey to the Manger ritual: Move Mary and Joseph toward the Nativity scene.
- Prayer: God, give us patience as we wait. Help us keep awake and watch for signs of your hope all around us. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of hope.

HOW will we KNOW?

What Now? We Wait for Peace

Advent Week 2, Beginning December 10

Advent Word of the Week: Peace

Focus Scripture: Mark 1:1-8

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”: God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we experience the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were enslaved and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often by calling prophets to point the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby.

But God sent someone before that little baby, to **prepare the way of**

peace. Today's scripture is about John the Baptist.

☐ **Tell the story:** Matthew 3:1-12

• Read pg 177 in *Shine On* or pg 182 in *The Peace Table*.

• To get the fuller story of John the Baptist, read additional pages 158 and 161 in *Shine On* or additional pages 162, 164, and 166 in *The Peace Table*.

☐ **Talk about it:** Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

• **Active Prompt:** John the Baptist is described as a pretty strange guy, kind of a wild man. Draw pictures or dress someone up as John. It may be hard to find culinary locusts, but [here's a recipe](#) if you want to make some granola with crickets and honey!

• This begins Mark's gospel. Notice what the story doesn't begin with – and which part of the story we know is actually completely missing from Mark's narrative.

• Read the first verse, and notice the word "good news" (which may be translated as "gospel" in some Bibles). The Greek word translated here was often used in the Roman world to mean the good news of peace brought by the emperor. The writer of this gospel gives it new meaning – the good news of peace is Jesus! What are the real-life, political implications of this connection?

• Read Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:30 and you'll see the prophecies that verses 2-3 quote. Malachi (the name means "my messenger" and is part of the quoted passage) calls the people to repentance. And Isaiah 40 is talking about a literal road on which those exiled will be able to return to Jerusalem. When you put that all together – the call to repentance and the hope of reunion – what kind of move do you think the writer of Mark might be making?

• What is the way? Where have you heard that phrase, "the way," used? Do you have any baggage with the phrase? The earliest

followers of Jesus called themselves the “people of the way,” and the phrase is often used in the Bible to describe not just where one goes, but how one travels the path.

- John was baptizing people. What does baptism mean to you? It was a thing before the time of Jesus, a practice for certain groups of Jews. It was primarily a practice of purification, a mikvaot. Note how the meanings of rituals shift over time!
- Unpack your experiences with the term “repentance.” “Repent” means a literal 180 degree turn and was used to talk about turning back to God and reunion with God. This baptism is about reconciliation!
- John, and Jesus with/after him, brought the good news of peace. And yet, we know that violence persists in our world today. Take some time to wrestle with this now/not yet, with this continued waiting for fulfillment.
- Where is the peace in this passage?

Manger Talk or Wonder and Wander Walk: If you’re doing one of these weekly rituals, you might want to make it part of this time.

Journey to the Manger: If you’re moving Mary and Joseph weekly, do that now.

Reflective Listening Ideas: [Prepare Ye the Way \(Godspell\)](#)

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light one purple candle and say, "Jesus brings hope" or "We watch with hope." Light a second purple candle and say, "Jesus brings peace" or "We watch for peace."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Journey to the Manger ritual: Move Mary and Joseph toward the Nativity scene.
- Prayer: God, give us patience as we wait. Help us to walk in your way of peace and draw close to you. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of peace.

HOW will we KNOW?

What's next? We Wait with Joy

Advent Week 3, Beginning December 17

Advent Word of the Week: Joy

Focus Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

Connect to the "big story": God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we experience the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were enslaved and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn't always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often by calling prophets to point the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby. Today's scripture is the **words of joy** of that baby's mother, Mary.

Tell the story: Luke 1:46-55

Read pg 161 in *Shine On* or pg 164 in *The Peace Table*.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active Prompt:** In this song of Mary, she is so full of joy she is bursting! Do something that helps you and/or your household find joy. Maybe it's playing a favorite game that brings the joy out of you, or talking with/visiting a loved one, or an activity like sledding, or a certain kind of music. Experience the kind of joy that bursts out of you together.
- Mary is newly pregnant when she sings her song. The 9-ish months of pregnancy are a unique time of waiting and watching and wondering. If anyone in your household has been pregnant or walked with someone through pregnancy, read this song with those experiences in mind. How do you hear the words differently?
- Songs like this one happen several times throughout scripture. Mary is engaging in a spiritual practice of her people here. Her song has similarities to Hannah's song from 1 Samuel 2:1-10, but it also has similarities with the songs of Miriam and Deborah. And there are hints of Isaiah 61 in Mary's words. All these songs that are part of her come out in a new way when she feels this deep joy. How can you relate? Are there certain songs or phrases that have become part of you that come pouring out when your emotions are high?
- Find all the verbs in this text. Who gets the verbs? What are God's verbs? Mary's? Others? What patterns do you notice?
- Notice the time span Mary sings about: Abraham to all generations. This joy, this gift, is for all the ages.
- Mary's words are political. Say them out loud and hear how they ring – and how they might ruffle some feathers!

- We often describe joy as happiness, but it's much deeper than happiness, which can be fleeting. Joy lodges deep within us and can spring forth when we least expect it. What are moments of joy you can point to in your life? Have you had times of joyful waiting – or un-joyful waiting?
- Where is the joy in this passage?

- Manger Talk or Wonder and Wander Walk:** If you're doing one of these weekly rituals, you might want to make it part of this time.
- Journey to the Manger:** If you're moving Mary and Joseph weekly, do that now.
- Reflective Listening Ideas:** [Waterfall](#)

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light one purple candle and say, "Jesus brings hope" or "We watch with hope." Light a second purple candle and say, "Jesus brings peace" or "We watch for peace." Light the pink candle and say, "Jesus brings joy" or "We wait with joy."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Journey to the Manger ritual: Move Mary and Joseph toward the Nativity scene.
- Prayer: God, give us patience as we wait. Move us to courageous joy as people of your story. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of joy.

HOW will we KNOW?

Why Me? / Why NOT Me? We Wait with Love

Advent Week 4, Beginning December 24

Advent Word of the Week: Love

Focus Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the "big story": God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we experience the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were enslaved and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn't always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often by calling prophets to point the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby. In today's story, we read about that baby's mother, Mary, learning that she was going to **bear love incarnate**.

Tell the story: Luke 1:26-38

Read pg 161 in *Shine On* or pg 164 in *The Peace Table* (yes, these are the same as last week!).

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active Prompt:** Read the story, either from the Bible or a story Bible, a couple times through. Then set it aside and retell it as you remember it. Get active with it, acting it out or telling it with manipulatives (like stuffed animals or blocks). Do it several times, and see what discoveries you make in the story!
- **Geography:** Look up Galilee (and Nazareth if you can) on a map. While Jesus was born in Bethlehem (close to Jerusalem, in what had been the Southern Kingdom), his people are from Galilee, which is as north as you can get! The people of these two regions have very different histories and identities. Some say that Galileans were, in today's terms, from the "boondocks," whereas Jerusalem was the center of religious and cultural life. What implications might this geographical difference have for who Jesus is and how he ministers?
- We sometimes hear people talk about Mary being a "child." She wasn't. A typical age for a woman to marry was in her late teens. Adolescence is a modern construct, and a woman about to marry was an adult. She was young, yes! But God did not ask a child to give birth to the Messiah.
- Almost every phrase in this passage is a quote from the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament). If you're curious about the connections, get a lexicon or study Bible and have at it!
- The text emphasizes Mary's virginity twice, and the Greek word here is pretty unmistakable. Over the years, many have fixated on Mary's virginity, some even insisting on her "perpetual virginity" (and doing all kinds of mental gymnastics so that Jesus's siblings could come from different mothers). Why do you think this has been such a point of fixation over the years? Why does it (or doesn't it) matter?

- The language that describes this baby to come is big – almost hyperbolic. “Jesus” (or Yehoshua, or Hosea, or Joshua) means “the Lord saves.” Note all the other descriptors of this little baby. All parents think their child is exceptional, but can you imagine being told this about your child-to-be?
- Mary is now MARY to us. But when she had this encounter, she was just Mary, an ordinary person. God calls each of us, where we are, to be part of the story. Have you ever had a moment of, “Really? Me?!”
- Where is the love in this passage?

- Manger Talk or Wonder and Wander Walk:** If you’re doing one of these weekly rituals, you might want to make it part of this time.
- Journey to the Manger:** If you’re moving Mary and Joseph weekly, do that now.
- Reflective Listening Ideas:** [The Angel Gabriel Called Mary Blessed](#) (begin at 1:36 for the song, or listen to the first part if you want to know why the lyrics might be different from what you remember)

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light one purple candle and say, “Jesus brings hope” or “We watch with hope.” Light a second purple candle and say, “Jesus brings peace” or “We watch for peace.” Light the pink candle and say, “Jesus brings joy” or “We wait with joy.” Light the last purple candle and say, “Jesus brings love” or “We wait with love.”
- The second day of this week is Christmas! So on that day, you can begin lighting the center candle, saying, “Jesus is born!”
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus’ birth from Luke 2:1-20.

- Journey to the Manger ritual: Move Mary and Joseph into the stable. On December 25, add Jesus!
- Prayer: God, give us patience as we wait. When you call us out of our ordinary lives to be part of your extraordinary story of love, give us the courage Mary had to say, "Yes. Jesus, we welcome you in this world." In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of love.

HOW will we KNOW?

We welcome Jesus

Christmas Week 1, Beginning December 31

Advent Word of the Week: Christ

Focus Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148;
Galatians 4:4-7

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Connect to the “big story”:** God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we experience the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were enslaved and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn't always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often by calling prophets to point the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby. This story is about some of the first people to welcome that baby and recognize who he was.

Tell the story: Luke 2:22-40

Read pg 169 in *Shine On* or pg 174 in *The Peace Table*.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active Prompt:** Find a way to welcome a baby in your midst. If you know someone who has just had a child, bring them a gift or a meal. Buy or create something to care for an infant (hat, clothing, blanket, etc) and take it to your local hospital or other institution of care. Go visit a baby. If there's a baby in your house, spend some quality time with them. Wonder at what all might be in that baby's future, at the whole life ahead of them. Say a prayer of blessing. And imagine what it felt like to Simeon and Anna to hold the infant Jesus and have some insight into who he would become.
- **With Young Children:** If there are young children in your household, look at their newborn pictures with them. Tell stories. What did you already know about them, and what was still a mystery? Who visited them/held them/blessed them? Were they dedicated in a worshiping community like Jesus is in this story?
- Notice the ritual language in verses 22-24. This places Jesus in the context of his Jewish faith and community. Jesus was a Jew, born of observant parents, and he acted and taught out of this identity.
- But also...these three verses are puzzling. There was no purification ritual for fathers or babies, and the mother's ritual was at 40 days after giving birth. There was also no law about presenting the child at the temple. What's going on here? We really don't know!
- Read Simeon's words a couple of times and unpack them. Notice the underlying emotions, the tough prophecy to Mary, the past/present/future of his words. Where is Wisdom here?
- Anna the Prophet! Yes, women could be prophets. Yes, women could worship in the temple. And she's one of the first to spread the good news about Jesus.

- Is this story of Anna and Simeon new to you? If not, how do you remember hearing it before?
 - Note Simeon and Anna's ages. In a modern culture that sometimes devalues elders, what does this story stir up in you?
 - Where do you see hope, peace, joy and love in this story?
- Manger Talk or Wonder and Wander Walk:** If you're doing one of these weekly rituals, you might want to make it part of this time.
- Reflective Listening Ideas:** [There is a Line of Women](#), [Lord Jesus, Come and Overtun](#)

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light one purple candle and say, "Jesus brings hope" or "We watch with hope." Light a second purple candle and say, "Jesus brings peace" or "We watch for peace." Light the pink candle and say, "Jesus brings joy" or "We wait with joy." Light the last purple candle and say, "Jesus brings love" or "We wait with love." Light the center candle and say, "Jesus is born!"
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Prayer: God, help us to recognize the potential in each person. And help us to recognize Jesus with us, beside us. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of Jesus.

HOW will we KNOW?

Now we see!

Epiphany, Beginning January 6

Focus Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the "big story": God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we experience the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were enslaved and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn't always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often by calling prophets to point the people back to God and back to a community of shalom.

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They began to hope for a Messiah. And that Messiah, as we now know, came in the form of a tiny baby. The little baby was visited by humble shepherds, elders, and as we hear in this story, wise strangers.

Tell the story: Matthew 2:1-12

Read pg 170 in *Shine On* or pg 176 in *The Peace Table*

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- **Active Prompt:** Go on an Epiphany Walk, inspired by this story! See “Epiphany Walk” below for ideas.
- Before you read the scripture, tell the story of the visit of the Magi from your collective memories. Then read it, noting what from your telling comes from the Bible and what comes from the way the story has been told and retold throughout history.
- Who in the world are these people? The Greek word is “magos,” from which we get “magi.” We think they were [Zoroastrian](#) priests. Early Jewish readers may have seen them as astrologers and regarded them as foolish. They are decidedly foreign and “other.” What does it mean to you that these wise/foolish foreigners are a part of the Jesus story?
- Where were they from? On a modern map, we believe they were from the Iran/Iraq region. Get out a map to see the distance and terrain between there and Jerusalem.
- Count how many times the word “king” is used – and note who it is used for. Why did the writer play with the word like this? Also, do you see some irony in the way we have started to call the magi kings?
- Verses 5-6 are a paraphrase of Micah 5:2. Look up that passage and its context and see what comparisons you can make.
- January 6 is known as Epiphany. An epiphany is a moment of sudden insight – an “aha moment.” Why do you think we call the celebration of this story Epiphany? Tell stories of your own epiphanies.

• Where do you see hope, peace, joy and love in this story?

- Manger Talk or Wonder and Wander Walk:** If you're doing one of these weekly rituals, you might want to make it part of this time.
- Reflective Listening Ideas:** [Helpless and Hungry/What Child is This,](#)
[O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem](#)

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light one purple candle and say, "Jesus brings hope" or "We watch with hope." Light a second purple candle and say, "Jesus brings peace" or "We watch for peace." Light the pink candle and say, "Jesus brings joy" or "We wait with joy." Light the last purple candle and say, "Jesus brings love" or "We wait with love." Light the center candle and say, "Jesus is born!"
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Prayer: God, thank you for welcoming all people, including us, to be part of your story. Help us notice your light, follow it, and always seek you. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of Jesus.

Epiphany Walk

Adapted from an event at College Mennonite Church in January of 2021, led by Daniel Yoder and Talashia Keim Yoder.

Get Started:

- One household member: put a star over a door of your house. If you have children in your group, try not to let them see you do it!
- Gather the supplies: A “travel pack” with a thermos of hot drink and some cups, plus some dried fruit and nuts.
- Decide who will be the camel (who carries the pack). You can take turns with this job!
- Step outside to begin your journey.
- Journey Prompt 1: The magi were seekers of wisdom, and they saw something in nature – a star – that prompted their curiosity and led them to Jesus. What in creation makes you curious and leads you to Jesus? Spot something and “travel” to it.
- As you travel: Sing a traveling song together. Here are two song ideas:
 - [We are marching in the light of God](#)
 - Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Journey Stop 1:

- Eat your snack.
- Read the story (Matthew 2:1-12) from your Bible or story Bible.
- Spot the next thing that makes you curious and “travel” to it.
- As you travel: Talk about what your household’s (or household of origin’s) travel traditions are/were. OR share wacky travel stories.

Journey Stop 2:

- Play Caravan Telephone. Stand in a line and see how a phrase changes when it's passed from the front of the caravan to the back. Maybe use a phrase that goes with the story, like, "Camel spit smells like frankincense."
- Spot the star over the door and travel to it.
- As you travel: Talk about the question, "Why do people caravan/travel go on journeys in today's world and in other Bible stories?"

Destination:

- Go in the door and gather around a nativity set (or your household manger).
- Sing together, maybe "Away in a Manger" or "Silent Night." This can be the end...
- Or, if you want to wrap it up more, here are some potential things to think about: How do you feel now at the end of our little journey? (hot/cold, tired, invigorated...). Imagine – the magi journeyed for many, many days – maybe even a year. They weren't fleeing anything or getting money at the end or anything, they came purely to worship Jesus. Jesus is so very, very special that these seekers-of-wisdom from a foreign land undertook a long and dangerous journey. They wanted to be part of this thing God was doing, part of the way God was changing the world.

This resource frequently draws on knowledge gained from the essays and commentaries of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament*.

Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. 2017. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament : New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation* Second edition, fully revised and expanded ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press