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PREPARE FOR ADVENT

Youth Education Department, Unity Village Chapel

Advent is the "Lent" before Christmas-a period of four Sundays to renew yourself to the real meaning of the season. Someone said, "There are no big moments you can reach unless you've a pile of smaller moments to stand on". Christmas is a big moment if you have taken the time to prepare inwardly with many smaller moments of Advent.

Make or buy an Advent wreath.* If you make one, do it as a family. Whether your family is few or many, get them all together to participate in Advent. Lighting and extinguishing the candles, reading the Scripture verses, praying, sharing, and singing are activities that can be assigned to different family members ahead of time.

For a portion of the devotional period, you might all join hands in a circle of love-perhaps during the candlelighting or during a carol. For extra meaning, read aloud the DAILY WORD, a special Christmas story from UNITY, or some author like Pearl Buck.

Don't follow the suggestions here to the letter. Innovate! Mold your Advent devotions to suit your family and circumstances. This folder is designed for each Sunday evening of Advent. You may wish to use it every day-writing your own services or using the first lesson for the entire week, and so on. You might have your ceremony before supper and use your wreath as a centerpiece. The more smaller moments you have to build on, the bigger the moment of Christmas can be.

***TO make a wreath**, use one large circular piece of plywood, 16" or more in diameter, four 3" nails with heads, four candles 12" or taller; plastic Christmas greenery. Pine cones, holly and red bows may be added. Drive nails from underside; place candles on nails and surround with greenery and decorations.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Story theme-The Wise Men; First Candle represents "HOPE".

Read: Isaiah 9:2

INVITATION: "Advent begins! We now start a four-week journey to Christmas. The four lights on our wreath are for each Sunday before we celebrate the birth of Christ through Jesus...an event symbolic of spiritual new-birth in each of us. The wreath is round, meaning complete. In just four Sundays, we will complete our trip to Christmas...and as

we light each Candle, let us light up ourselves".

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Sing: "Joy to the World" - during the carol, one person lights the first candle which stands for hope.

MEDITATE: Become still. Say a few words of prayer only if God guides you to do so - otherwise just be still for a minute or longer.

Read: Matthew 2:1-2

LESSON: Our first candle is lighted. Today, millions of people all over the world will light the first candle of Advent. We have started a journey. The first people to know about Jesus were the wise men. A star was revealed to them and led them out of the East clear across the desert to arrive, according to tradition, on the twelfth night after Christmas. Wise men are like good ideas in us. Thoughts and feelings you have built in your soul are never lost, and travel from within to bring gifts to your answers to prayer. Christ lives in you! This is our hope of Christmas - that our long travels will lead us to the same light within.

Share: Tell something special or read a favorite Christmas story. Invite each member of the family to share with everyone what he "hopes for most of all this Christmas".

Sing: A Christmas Carol - perhaps "We three Kings"

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Story theme - The Christmas Tree; Second Candle represents "PEACE".

Read: Isaiah 9:2

INVITATION: "Advent! We continue on our journey to Christmas with only two more Sundays after today to prepare our hearts to feel more of that same Christ that Jesus lived and taught. Today we light our second candle. Each day is like a step on our journey. Like wise men we get closer to inner peace. Our candle is for peace. With more light we build peace inside ourselves".

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Sing: "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" - while singing one or two people can light the first candle (hope) and the second candle which is for peace.

MEDITATE: Sit quietly. Close your eyes or look at your decorations. Pray silently or aloud

- but mostly "Be still"

Read: Isaiah 61:1-3

LESSON: (Read or tell in your own words). On this, the second Sunday before Christmas we light two candles. This has been done for almost 2000 years.

And we also decorate Christmas trees. Christmas trees are evergreen to remind us that God is always alive; always ready to help us. Each decoration has a history. Angels are for our highest thoughts. Toys are for joy. Doves are for peace. Santa Claus is the spirit of giving. Stars are like the one that led the wise men. Colored balls remind us God shines in many ways. Lights shine and glow in peace. Oh, how wonderful to have a Christmas tree!

Share: Talk about your tree. Of trees of Christmases past. Invite each member to share an idea of "how we can have more peace in our family".

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Story theme-The Holy Family; Third Candle represents "LOVE"

Read: Isaiah 9:2

INVITATION: Advent! We are on a four-Sunday journey to Christmas-to renew ourselves to the inner Christ. Today we light three candles. We began like the wise men, and each day brings us closer to Real Christmas. Soon we will have all our inner lights turned on. Our third Candle is for love-for love is God, in us and through us. Light your life with love!

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Sing: "O Come All Ye Faithful"- during carol one person can light all three candles or three different people can each light one. The third candle is for love.

MEDITATE: Be still and think on love. Some member may by prior arrangement read something short on love - mostly be in "The Silence".

Read: Luke 1:46-47

LESSON: As in any birth, the mother is the foremost personality. Mary pondered God's Truths in her heart. She is like the emotions in everyone, for when they are full of love in meditation we can receive the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Joseph was of Royal lineage and acts like the mind in us. When your mind is filled with thoughts of God, you give your consent for miracles to happen. When the emotions are loving (Mary in us) and our

minds are filled with affirmations of God (Joseph in us) then the miracles we seek (Jesus in us) is born - that could be every Christmas and many times on any day. Loving feelings and love-filled thoughts produce love in your life.

You see, Christmas is about love in the Holy Family and that same love can make your family holy too. God's love blessed Mary and Joseph with a child, and their love grew Jesus to be the great spiritual leader which He was.

Love can light your family. Fill your mind and your heart with love and only good can be born in you and with those you love.

Share: Let each member of the family tell one thing they most love about each person in the room and then all do the same. Or each one tell only one thing they love most about the person to the right of them. Perhaps you would want to read a story of Christmas.

Sing: Your favorite Christmas carol-perhaps "O Little Town of Bethlehem".

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Story Theme - You Are A Light; Fourth Candle represents "JOY".

Read: Isaiah 9:2

INVITATION: Advent! Our four-Sunday journey is complete today. This week we celebrate the birth of Christ into Jesus and into you and me. Like the wise men, we started with hope. We have decorated our tree with peace. Love is in the Bethlehem of our home and hearts. Now we light our fourth candle. This candle is for joy. Millions of people will light their candles and light up themselves with joy for Christmas is here!

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Sing: "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear" - select one to four people to light all four candles during the carol. The fourth candle is for joy.

MEDITATE: In quietness, sit down and feel the power of Joy. Don't show it yet, just feel it.

Read: Matthew 5:13 & Matthew 5:14 & 16

LESSON: Jesus has told us that we are the salt of the earth; we are the light of the world. Salt is a preservative and in small doses it makes most things taste better. Being in the dark is like being lost and ignorant- and the light is like knowing and finding your way. You are salt. You are light. You can preserve joy all the time-but it is up to you. You can show others what a joy it is to have prayed and found the feeling of God's presence.

You are a light and lights are happy. Enjoy being a light. Let your joy show. Smile. Laugh. Love. Have hope. Try to be peaceful. Help others. Joy comes from inside yourself. Make this Christmas a greater joy for the people around you and you will find being a "salty Light" is a great deal of fun!

Read: Proverbs 20:27

Share: Take a few moments to tell what each of you enjoy most about Christmas. Can you think of something you could do to let your lights shine more brightly this Christmas? How about a short story of Christmas joy to read aloud now?

Sing: "Joy to the World" or "Silent Night"

(Put out the candles-and light them all on Christmas Day)

DAILY THOUGHTS FOR ADVENT

In November' we started preparing for Christmas and the Advent season. The Youth Education Director held "secret" meetings for children only, after church during the adult fellowship hour. These meetings were held two or three weeks before the first Sunday in Advent. The children love "secret" meetings, and would not even tell the minister just "what they were up to"!

In the meetings, the children were given as many sheets of standard typing or copier paper (white) as they wished (one sheet at a time[]). They were instructed to draw pictures of the adventure that Joseph and Mary took to get to Bethlehem and Jesus' birth. They were told to do their drawings in black marker or crayon. They were also given the fronts of old Christmas cards that best represented the nativity, the wisemen, the shepherds and angels to use as examples.

When all pictures were handed in, the YE Director picked (not easily, believe me!) a picture to represent the passages from Luke and Matthew that tell the story of the "Advent-ure". One picture, at least, from each child present at the "secret" meetings was used. The appropriate, matching Bible verse was typed on the picture.

Enough copies were made to give a book to every family in the congregation. They were presented as a gift to the adults for their Advent observance and passed out, by the children, on the first Sunday of Advent at the end of the adult worship service.

THE CHRISTMAS "ADVENT-URE

Every Sunday of Advent, the children are told a little more of the adventure of Joseph and Mary and Jesus. The story is told during assembly time, and is told by the same person each week. Each time, at the end of a segment, one child is chosen to put another piece/figure in the manger. The children have made the figures out of clay. Making new manger figures is a great summer activity...Christmas in July. Eventually, at the end of the "Advent-ure", all of the figures are in place.

YE CANDLELIGHTING SERVICE

Each year, on the "Christmas Sunday", during Sunday School time, the children have a candlelighting service/ceremony. After assembly, the children are led into the large fellowship room, where chairs are set up in lecture fashion, facing an alter or table. On the table, is one white candle representing Christ's light and the completed manger. Each child comes up to the table (one child or one row at a time) and is handed a small white candle (with protective paper collar). As they are handed their candle they are told "You are the Light of the world." They go over to the Christ candle and light theirs. As they are lighting theirs, the teacher in charge says, "Christ is (child's name)'s Light." During the lighting of candles, the children are humming...Silent Night or Away In A Manger or O Little Town Of Bethlehem... When all children are done, the teachers/adults present light their candles. Then every one says the Prayer for Protection. Candles are blown out and handed in and then it's on to

JESUS' BIRTHDAY PARTY!!

At the end of the service (both adult and children) during fellowship, the children all gather around a table that has been decorated for a birthday party. There are colorful plates and napkins and tablecloth and a huge decorated cake for Jesus' birthday. All those present sing, "Happy Birthday" to Jesus and the cake is cut and enjoyed by all!
