

THE ADVENT BLESSING TREE

INTRODUCTION: The intent of these services is to focus the attention of the people on all the blessings we have received from God. Gifts that are offered to all of us, and possibilities we may have turned away from, but which God continues to offer us in Jesus Christ.

Sunday School classes and individuals can prepare items to be hung from a BLESSING TREE. These can include some larger symbols recognizable from a distance, and smaller items from individuals. Congregation members may be asked to place "their blessings" on the tree. The traditional PROPHECY, BETHLEHEM, SHEPHERDS' AND ANGELS' CANDLES ARE LIGHTED IN THE USUAL ORDER.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- A good sized tree with lots of branches (a sapling in a Christmas tree stand works well). A Christmas tree could also be used.
- Advent Candles, to be lighted as a part of the ceremony each service.
- Advent wreath or candle stand
- Items to be placed on the tree

PARTICIPANTS:

- Advent Candle lighters
- People to read the various sections and the Scripture portion.
- People to hang the symbolic items from the tree
- "Coaches" or teachers to coordinate each-group and practice with them. Those who have speaking parts need to learn them well, and to speak very slowly and clearly.

NOTES: Under items needed, those in CAPITAL LETTERS are mentioned in the presentation and should be present. Others may be used and/or presented as the group wishes.

There are spaces for the maximum number of obvious parts to be filled, but more can be added to put items on the tree each week. Congregation members, if they have been invited in advance to come prepared, may also be used to place what they bring on the tree each week during the ceremony, the singing of the hymn, or after the service. Obviously parts can be combined if need be.

Scriptures should be read out of Bibles for the maximum effectiveness, but they could be printed on separate sheets of paper.

This sign is to mark the intended division of parts

ADVENT ONE: THE PROPHECY CANDLE

This is the first Sunday in Advent. A time when we think about the prophecies that were made long ago promising a Savior. As we light the Prophecy Candle (*someone lights the candle at this point as the reading goes on*) we read in the Letter to the Hebrews wonderful words remembering both those promises and how they were kept when Jesus Christ came to be one with us.

We read from Hebrews 1:1-4:

The promise came through the prophets in many ways. No one back then could dream just how much more God would do than He had promised. The best they hoped for was someone to save the Jewish people. What God did was to send a Savior for the whole world!

In Jesus, people could see God's glory reflected and the mark of His very being on Him. He was one of us, and yet, so much more! Jesus Christ: A promise more than kept... Jesus Christ: A name that has become more special than any other name!

Jesus made other promises to us in God's Name:

... That He will be with us always ...

... That He will give us His strength every day...

... That He will come again some day to give the whole world a new and fresh start...

... And lots of other promises.

Now, for almost 2000 years He has kept His promise to be with us and to give us strength. We don't know when He will come again, but we do know God keeps His promises and we wait for that day.

As we think of promises made and kept, we add symbols to our BLESSING TREE. (*Place symbols and items on tree*) There are MANGERS to remind us of when Jesus was born... There are CRADLES to remind us that everyone of us is meant to be a kind of promise to the world filled with good possibilities from God ... There are SCROLLS to remind us of the promises of long ago ... There are BIBLES to say that there are a lot of promises still to be kept ... There are BAPTISMAL SHELLS to point to the promises that God makes in Holy Baptism, and of the promises parents and sponsors make... And other symbols.

We join in singing hymn # 34 (LBW), "OH, COME, OH, COME, EMMANUEL", a song that reminds us of both promises kept, and those yet to be kept.

ADVENT 1 PROPHECY CANDLE : Promises kept and to be kept!

TREE ITEMS:

SCROLLS ... BIBLES (pictures or actual) ... CRADLES ... MANGERS...BAPTISMAL SHELLS, diplomas ...wedding bands...'Addressed envelopes, palm branches and other items people see as symbolizing promises made and/or kept.

PARTICIPANTS:

Team leader/coach:	
Candle lighter(s):	
Scr:ipture reader:	
Reader 1:	
Reader 2:	
Reader 3:	
Reader 4:	
Reader 5:	
Reader 6:	
Reader 7:	
Reader 8:	
Others:	

ADVENT TWO: THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE

This is the second Sunday in Advent. The word "Advent" means "to come". This morning, as we light the "Bethlehem" candle, (*the Bethlehem candle is lighted*) we think about how God blessed the whole world when His Special Son was born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph.

The first Christians remembered that the prophet Micah had written long ago (*Read Micah 5:2*):

Bethlehem was a little town, but one which was very special in the land of Judah. It was known as King David's city, and Mary and Joseph were distant and poor relatives of David. For the most part, though, people were surprised to have the Messiah be born there. And surprised to have Him be born to poor people, and not to the more famous members of David's ancestors.

When we think of it a bit, we realize that God often gives His blessings in unexpected places, and through people and things that are pretty ordinary. The Jewish nation was not a world power. The bread, wine, and water of the sacraments are among the most ordinary things of life. The Church Jesus gave birth to is made up of mostly common people.

As wonderful and powerful as God is, He doesn't need people or things to be all that special on their own to give His blessings to the world. God makes the ordinary special!

God took an ordinary nation... an ordinary town... an ordinary Jewish couple... and gave them what looked like an ordinary baby... And used them to bless everybody for all time!

God still takes the ordinary and makes it special, or holy. He blesses us through our worship... Our Sunday School and other teachers ... our everyday church activities. He sends us to our jobs, our schools, and our homes to bring His blessings there.

We place symbols for the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, little houses like those that were in Bethlehem, stars of Judah, and people like us on the Blessing Tree to remind us of blessings from simple and unexpected places, things, and people. While we do this, please join in the singing of hymn #41 (LBW), "*O Little Town Of Bethlehem*"

ADVENT 2 BETHLEHEM CANDLE: Blessings from unexpected places.

TREE ITEMS: SMALL JEWISH HOUSES... STARS OF JUDAH...SYMBOLS FOR THE BREAD AND WINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER... Statutes or cut outs of Mary and Joseph other ordinary people... Symbols for the tribes of Judah.

PARTICIPANTS:

Team leader/coach:	
Candle lighter(s):	
Scr:ipture reader:	
Reader 1:	
Reader 2:	
Reader 3:	
Reader 4:	
Reader 5:	
Reader 6:	
Reader 7:	
Reader 8:	
Others:	

Notes:

ADVENT THREE: THE SHEPHERD'S CANDLE

This is the third Sunday in Advent, the day we light what is called "THE SHEPHERD'S CANDLE" (*Light three candles*). The Shepherd's Candle brings to mind the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks on the night Jesus was born, and who went to be among the first to worship Him.

We turn to the Gospel according to St. Luke, the second chapter, reading verses 15-17, to hear a little of this story. (*Read Luke 2:15-17*)

The Shepherd's Candle also reminds us that we now have a Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, the Lord. He cares for us even more lovingly than the shepherds in the field cared for their sheep. It is good to remember just how much we are loved.

The Shepherds who came to the manger after Jesus was born, worshipped the Christ-child, and had a story to tell of what God had made known to them. It was a story that changed both their lives, and the lives of those who heard it from them.

Today, we are invited to worship the Christ-child as the Shepherds did. The Christ-child who became the Good Shepherd. Along with those first shepherds, we kneel and worship Him who is beyond our understanding, but who has a love for us that moves us to love Him in response.

We are not only moved to worship and love the Christ, we are also sent out by the Good Shepherd to tell others what we have had revealed to us. It still is a story that has the power to amaze those who hear it.

That power to move others comes not from us, but from the story about Jesus that we have to tell. It is the Holy Spirit who moves hearts to praise God. Those who hear the story are moved, and we are also moved as we tell it.

We put shepherds' canes on our Blessing Tree (*put canes and other symbols on the tree*) to remind us of the Shepherds from near Bethlehem years ago. They also remind us that we have a Good Shepherd who sends us out with a story that is even more exciting than the one the first shepherds told. Let us sing together hymn #70(LBW), "*Go Tell It On The Mountain*".

ADVENT THREE: THE SHEPHERDS' CANDLE: Lives changed by the story

TREE ITEMS: SHEPHERDS' CANES (candy canes, wooden canes, cut outs, etc.).

PARTICIPANTS:

Team leader/coach:	
Candle lighter(s):	
Scripture reader:	
Reader 1:	
Reader 2:	
Reader 3:	
Reader 4:	
Reader 5:	
Reader 6:	
Reader 7:	
Reader 8:	
Others:	

Notes:

ADVENT FOUR: THE ANGEL'S CANDLE

#1 This is the fourth Sunday in Advent, and today we light the "ANGEL'S CANDLE" and remember the angels who had the joy of singing and shouting the praises of God when Jesus was born (*light the four candles*).

#2 When Jesus was born people had the custom of serenading the newborn and his or her family. When Jesus was born it seems that almost no one knew about it, and of those who did no one came to sing for him. The family of Mary and Joseph may have been too embarrassed to sing ... the Shepherds were too awed to sing ... The rulers and powerful people saw nothing to sing about.

#3 The angels in heaven saw that there was a lot to sing about, and so they went to the fields around Bethlehem praising God with their mighty voices in the presence of the frightened shepherds.

#4 Gradually others found their voices: the shepherds praised God ... Mary and Joseph began to realize what they were a part of ... The Wise Men from afar were to begin their journey . . . in time there would be the first disciples who would pick up the story, and then millions more.

#5 The Good News is that God loves us so much that He has become one with us in Jesus Christ. He comes to all who don't turn Him, away, and makes His home with us! This is the story that brings deep joy and a sense of togetherness to all who receive it,

#6 Like the shepherds, we find ourselves joining the angels in their praises. We also share the story with all who want to hear it. Laughter and song and celebration all come together as we draw near to the Christ. We add symbols of joy, praise, and song to our Blessing Tree (*Put symbols on the tree*).

#7 Join us in praising God with the angels' song, as we sing together hymn #71 (LBW), "*Angels We Have Heard On High*"

**ADVENT FOUR: THE ANGEL'S CANDLE: The blessing of being able to sing
God's praises**

TREE ITEMS: Angels of all sizes and shapes ... Figures of people singing... Musical instruments ... Musical notes and signs ...

PARTICIPANTS:

Team leader/coach:	
Candle lighter(s):	
Scripture reader:	
Reader 1:	
Reader 2:	
Reader 3:	
Reader 4:	
Reader 5:	
Reader 6:	
Reader 7:	
Reader 8:	
Others:	

Notes:

ADVENT CANDLE SUMMARY

PROPHECY CANDLE: Hebrews 1:1-2a

Blessings of promises we have been able to keep ... A promise is positive, a threat is negative... Christmas and Advent celebrate the positive ... Blessing of promises kept to us by loved ones and God ... By nation . . . Family.

TREE ITEMS:

Scrolls of prophecy, Prophet figures, Palm branches , Bibles, Gifts (symbolizing hopes and needs to be fulfilled).

BETHLEHEM CANDLE: Micah 5:2

Blessings from unexpected places ... the small and seemingly insignificant... Blessings we have been blessed by being a part of, even if few if any have noticed it... Chance to be a part of God's great purpose ... Our place in Sunday School and worship ... Supporting giving to others ... Bethlehem, House of Bread, Source of that which nourishes us ...

TREE ITEMS: Small Jewish houses, crowns, Symbols for the 12 tribes or clans of Judah . . . mangers . . .stables . . .

SHEPHERDS' CANDLE : Luke 2:17-18

The differences Christ has made in our lives and the lives of those around us ... The blessing of having a Great Shepherd to guide us and give meaning to our lives ... The wonder of God coming to the poor and simple... The wonder of being included... Being Christ born on earth today...

TREE ITEMS : Shepherds staffs (candy canes)..Solid circles with faces drawn in, showing we are included ... Church buildings where we can gather...

ANGELS' CANDLE: Luke 2:13-14

The blessings of being able to sing God's praises ... Of a joy that has somewhere to go ... Of being in good company as we praise God ... we have a need to laugh and rejoice ... The delight of knowing that God really did come to earth with the one who draws all people to Himself.

TREE ITEMS: Figures singing ... musical instruments ... angels... stars