



Sun, Dec 22 • Practicing Together

On this final Sunday of Advent, gather your people around the Advent wreath, and ...

LIGHT

Light two purple candles, the pink candle, then the third purple candle on the Advent wreath. You will relight the past week's purple candles representing hope and peace, the pink candle for joy, and the final purple candle which represents love.

PRAY

God of love, as we light this candle and approach the celebration of Jesus' birth, fill us with your perfect love. Teach us to see others as you see them. Awaken our hearts to you this Advent season, so when Christ arrives, we are ready to receive him. Amen.

DISCUSS

- Spend a few minutes making a list of things you love. (Have everyone share a few things from their lists.)
- What do you think of when you hear the word "love"?

Love is one of those words in English that is capable of a variety of nuances. We say we love pizza or ice cream, but we also say we love our spouse, parent, or child. Although we use the same word, the meaning is different based on the object of our love.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, a language with distinct words for different kinds of love, including *philia* (brotherly love), *eros* (sexual love), and *agape* which is associated with the divine love God has for us. It is a pure, sacrificial, unconditional love that prioritizes the good of the other and expects nothing in return.

READ JEREMIAH 31:3 & JOHN 3:16-21

Through this week's focus on love, we are reminded that God did not leave or forsake his people. On the contrary, he loved us so much he sent his son to live among us—Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus loves us so much he gave up his heavenly home to become human and do what humankind was incapable of doing. In the ultimate act of love, he sacrificed his own life to save us and reconcile us to God. Our response must be one of awe and wonder at such great love.

Practicing Together

Reading

Digging

Listening

Seeing

Doing



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WORSHIP

Read or listen to these songs. Praise God for his love and care for you. Cry out, like the Psalmist, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:1-2).

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MARY, DID YOU KNOW

[youtube.com/watch?v=UVsGNAYfFe0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVsGNAYfFe0)

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has
come to make you new?
And this child that you delivered, will
soon deliver you.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
would give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
would calm the storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has
walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby, you kiss
the face of God.
Mary, did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the
dead will live again.
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
the praises of the Lamb.

The praises of the Lamb.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is
heaven's perfect Lamb?
And that sleeping child you're holding
is the great, I Am.
Did you know?

NOEL

youtu.be/aBZ6Lqx1OHk

Love incarnate, love divine
Star and angels gave the sign
Bow to babe on bended knee
The Savior of humanity
Unto us a Child is born
He shall reign forevermore

Noel, Noel
Come and see what God has done
Noel, Noel
The story of amazing love!
The light of the world, given for us
Noel

Son of God and Son of man
There before the world began
Born to suffer, born to save
Born to raise us from the grave
Christ the everlasting Lord
He shall reign forevermore

Noel, Noel
Come and see what God has done
Noel, Noel
The story of amazing love!
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Let's return to John 3:16 and focus on the last two words of the verse: *eternal life*. What do these words bring to mind? If you are like most people, you think about heaven. However, what Jesus came to bring us is much more than a very, very long life at some point in the future. Rather, it is a quality of life that is available to us now. It is life with God now, the capacity to live in step with Jesus in this life. This gift of love was costly: it cost Jesus his life. Rejecting the gift is costly for us. As Dallas Willard so eloquently wrote, the cost is "... abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10)."

The love that motivated Jesus to come to us in human form is illustrated by light during Advent and in the beginning of John's gospel: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4-5). Whenever you see Christmas lights shining brightly at night, let them remind you of God's great love for you.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, the whole meaning of Christmas can be explained in one little four-letter word ... LOVE. Jesus, you came and showed us how to live and how to love, at great cost to yourself. May we be inspired to love one another as you have loved us. Amen.

Consider going to look at Christmas lights together as a group!

ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK

BE A SECRET ADMIRER

Choose someone you will pray for every day this week, and find at least one thing you can do secretly for that person each day. (Do a chore they don't like doing, leave a sticky note with words of encouragement, give a gift, send a card, etc.) expecting nothing in return.

Note: An optional practicing guide for December 25 is included in this PDF



Sun, Dec 25 • Christmas Day

LIGHT

Light all three purple candles and the pink candle, then light the white candle.

READ LUKE 2:1-20

The white candle represents Christ's purity—and reminds us he was the spotless lamb of God. Traditionally, it is lit on Christmas Day (or Christmas Eve). The season for watching and waiting is over. Christ is here. God's promises have been fulfilled. Light has entered a dark world desperately in need of his grace. The Savior has come ... and life will never be the same.

WORSHIP

Listen to these songs, and sing along in celebration of Jesus' birth. Rejoice in the knowledge that God sent his Son as the light of the world to show us his glory and to give us new life.

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

[youtube.com/watch?v=InDEkPiUi2g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InDEkPiUi2g)

Oh, come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
Oh, come ye, oh, come ye, to Bethlehem
Come and behold him,
Born the King of angels;

Refrain:

Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation;
Oh, sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;

Refrain

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing;

Refrain x4

OH, HOLY NIGHT

[youtube.com/watch?v=xrWX2RzjYlw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrWX2RzjYlw)

Oh, holy night, the stars are brightly shining;
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth!

Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Til he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope, the weary soul rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Fall on your knees, Oh, hear the angel voices!
Oh, night divine, oh, night when Christ was born!
Oh, night divine, oh, night, oh, night divine!

Truly he taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His Gospel is peace.

Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease.

Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise his holy name!

Christ is the Lord! Oh, praise his name forever!
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!

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Sun, Dec 25 • Christmas Day



PRAY

God of light, you sent your Son, Jesus, to shine bright like the sun, lighting the way for all who walk in darkness. May the light of Christ's hope, peace, joy, and love shine bright in us, that we may be ready to welcome him today and every day. Amen.

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