



Community of Christ

Practices of Discipleship for Advent

Advent is a season of familiarity, and yet the very nature of Advent is expectant waiting and preparation for what is to come, be it known or unknown. We fall into familiar rhythms of the season in various forms of preparation and celebration. We live in the promise of hope, love, joy, and peace claimed in God's gift of Jesus the Christ child. We journey in our own way toward the manger and find renewed hope in *what can be*.

Advent is a perfect time to prayerfully consider how we are being formed as disciples of Jesus Christ. How are we preparing to receive the peace of Jesus Christ? How are we preparing to *live, love, and share* the peace of Jesus Christ?

The following practices of discipleship can be adapted for use as personal spiritual formation or with families, small study groups, and congregations. Consider new ways to incorporate practices which renew the significance of Advent and invigorate your journey of discipleship.

Scripture and Theological Study

- Dedicate time each day to read the lectionary text recommended for each Sunday of Advent. Refer to *Sermon & Class Helps* for further study.

What questions arise as you spend time with each text? What new insights are revealed? How are you being challenged in your discipleship through the text?

- Read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth found in Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1-12; Luke 2:1-20; and John 1:1-18. With which account do you most closely connect and why? How does the story become real for you today? How does the story find expression in your life and discipleship?
- Create an Advent calendar with children and focus on a different aspect of receiving and sharing the hope, love, joy, and peace of Jesus Christ each week of Advent.

Missional Encounters

Dedicate a portion of time and resources during Advent to support Christ's mission in your local community and throughout the world.

- Designate a contribution to Worldwide Mission Tithes as part of your gift-giving budget.
- Support charitable organizations which honor the Sacredness of Creation, Worth of All Persons, and promote human and community development.
- Volunteer your time, talent, treasure, and testimony in service to others in your congregation and your community.

Personal Spiritual Practices

- **Lectio Divina:** Practice Lectio Divina with an Advent hymn text from *Community of Christ Sings* such as CCS#397 "God Almighty, We Are Waiting" or CCS#407 "Comfort, Comfort Now My People". Instructions for engaging in this spiritual practice can be found at www.cofchrist.org.
- **Pregnant Waiting:** Metaphors of pregnancy and labor emphasize the new life forming within us. Each week, find time to write in a journal or reflect on the following questions:
 1. What new thing is God doing within and around you?
 2. What do you expect in your own spiritual life?

3. How does the season of Advent prepare you to recognize Christ's presence more abundantly in the world?
 4. What are you being invited to wait for? How does Advent remind you of the importance of patience in the spiritual journey?
 5. How do you see Christ being born in the world today?
 6. Consider the metaphor of pregnancy and labor. What are you laboring to bring forth in your spiritual life?
- **Darkness & Light**
Winter Solstice: If you are in the Northern Hemisphere, pay special attention to the increasing darkness that envelops the days during Advent. Allow that darkness to represent your own expectant waiting for the light of Christ. December 21 is the shortest day of the year for those living in the Northern Hemisphere. Since this day falls during Advent, spend time in prayer, appreciating the darkness, and giving thanks for the light that is to come.
Summer Solstice: If you are in the Southern Hemisphere, pay special attention to the increasing light that envelops the days during Advent. Allow that light to represent the light of Christ that is entering the world in abundance during this season! December 21 is the longest day of the year for those living in the Southern Hemisphere. Since this day falls during Advent, spend time in prayer, giving thanks for the light of Christ and the hope this light will bring, on days to come that are darker.

Community Spiritual Practices

- Participate in worship services each Sunday of Advent, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day in your congregation or with another faith community.
- Participate in family or small group devotions each Sunday of Advent focused on the Advent themes of hope, peace, love, and joy. Encourage all ages to develop their own ideas and practices.

Personal Relationships

How is the Holy Spirit encouraging you to grow in your relationship with God, with others, and with all creation? Consider at least one relationship you will develop, nurture, or reconcile during this season of Advent.

Shared Experiences in Community

- Organize a group to go caroling. Learn at least one new hymn from *Community of Christ Sings* to add to your list of carols. Consider creative ways in which the Mission Initiatives can find expression through this activity.
- Support members of your congregation in community or school events such as music performances, plays, or hanging of the greens.

Witnessing and Storytelling

- Spend time in personal reflection on what Jesus' birth means to you. Consider a specific person with whom you can share this story, inviting them into a deeper awareness and understanding of God's gift of love through Christ Jesus. Think about what you want to say and make arrangements to meet them at a time and place that is comfortable and convenient for sharing together.
- Make a connection with a child or youth in your congregation or community by sharing what the birth of Jesus means to you and hearing what the story means to them.

Lifelong Learning

- Share the gift of learning with someone in need by mentoring or tutoring a young person in your congregation or community.
- Find and support organizations which promote education as part of community development worldwide.