

You Can't Do Advent Wrong Readings

By Ruth Ann Stites.

The Candle of Hope



The Prophecy candle: Our Hope of the first Sunday of Advent is both past, present, and future. It is from ages past when God spoke in the Old Testament. It records hundreds of prophecies Jesus fulfilled. As we prepare for Christmas, it is good to recall ones like this: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14)

"When Christ was born so was our hope." Max Lucado

Our Hope is present. When we look forward to Christmas from the perspective of a place at the foot of the cross, having already received the greatest gift of salvation, we rejoice in the hope he brings into our lives.

"And when we give each other Christmas gifts in His name, let us remember that He has given us the sun and the moon and the stars, and the earth with its forests and mountains and oceans—and all that lives and move upon them. He has given us all green things and everything that blossoms and bears fruit and all that we quarrel about and all that we have misused—and to save us from our foolishness, from all our sins, He came down to earth and gave us Himself." Sigrid Undset

"Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world." C.S. Lewis

Not only is the Hope of Christmas *from* the past and *in* the present, it is *for* the future. "We celebrate the first Christmas because we know there's a second coming" Matt Chandler

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2)

As Micah reminds us, the prophecy fulfilled by Jesus was not just for his birth but for his coming kingdom. Another promise reminds us that we have a Helper to ignite our hope, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (John 16:13).

Let us rejoice and give thanks that the hope of Christmas brings us all the rest of the rewards of the season. "Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas." Calvin Coolidge, 30th President of the United States

Prayer for Lighting the First Candle - Hope: Let us pray this prayer: “God, thank you for sometimes reminding me that in the center of chaos lies the seed of new opportunity and that things are not always as awful as they seem at first. I often forget that what starts out bad can end up great and that it is all a matter of my own perspective. Amen”



The Candle of Peace

The Bethlehem candle: The Second candle of Advent reminds us that the baby born in Bethlehem so long ago was the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). It is he who said near the end of his earthly life, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). His peace is for us. It is not to be grasped and hoarded but shared.

His coming to Bethlehem was as peaceful as a quiet night. Max Lucado said it this way, "He came, not as a flash of light or as an unapproachable conqueror, but as one whose first cries were heard by a peasant girl and a sleepy carpenter. God tapped humanity on its collective shoulder, 'Pardon me,' he said, and eternity interrupted time, divinity interrupted carnality, and heaven interrupted the earth in the form of a baby. Christianity was born in one big heavenly interruption."

Let There Be Peace On Earth,
And Let It Begin With Me.
Let There Be Peace On Earth,
The Peace That Was Meant To Be!

With God As Our Father,
Family All Are We.
Let Us Walk With Each Other
In Perfect Harmony.

From “Let There Be Peace On Earth” written by Jill Jackson Miller and
Sy Miller

"Let us have music for Christmas...
Sound the trumpet of joy and rebirth;
Let each of us try, with a song in our hearts,
To bring peace to men on earth." Mildred L. Jarrell

Mary's boy child, Jesus Christ, was born on Christmas Day
And man will live forevermore because of Christmas Day

Long time ago in Bethlehem, so the Holy Bible said
Mary's boy child, Jesus Christ, was born on Christmas Day

From "Mary's Boy Child" by Frank Farian / Fred Jay / Jester Hairston

Prayer for Lighting the Second Candle - Peace:

"Your peace is like the sweet calm air after a storm, like a warm blanket on a cold winter day, like a happy smile of someone I love on a day when nothing has gone right. Your peace brings me the comfort and strength I need to get through the hardest of times and the thickest of situations. I am so grateful, God, for the kind of peace your presence offers me, a peace so deep and abiding I know that no matter what is happening, that peace is there for me to tap into. Like an overflowing well at the center of my being, your presence is the water that quenches my thirst and gives me renewed vigor and life. Thank you, God, for your everlasting peace. Amen"



The Candle of Joy

The Shepherds candle: The Third Candle of Advent is focused on joy. In this world many things trouble our hearts. It's often easy to let circumstances steal our joy, but the message of Christmas is that our joy will never end. Instead, it will overflow into heartfelt thanksgiving and praise for the King of kings born on Christmas! Even now, let us allow that joy to seep into our lives regardless of the stresses and sorrows they may contain, and follow in the shepherd's footsteps to his lowly manger bed.

"God goes to those who have time to hear him—and so on this cloudless night he went to simple shepherds." Max Lucado

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger....And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12, 15-16)

"The giving of gifts is not something man invented. God started the giving spree when He gave a gift beyond words, the unspeakable gift of His Son." Robert Flatt

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." (Col. 2:6-7)

"Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. His life and death made salvation possible for us. What a glorious, selfless gift! I ponder this blessing every day, and gratitude and joy fill my very being." (A Year of Gratitude, Mar. 23)

Prayer for Lighting the Third Candle - Joy: "Gracious God, as we light the third Advent candle of joy, may the joy of your salvation fill us with gladness. Help us to share this joy with others, especially those in need. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."



The Candle of Love

The Angels candle: The Fourth candle of Advent represents love. I associate the Christmas Angels with glory. "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:9, 13-14). This glory suggests the shekinah glory or Presence of God with us, shekinah literally means "to dwell." And who had come to dwell with us, Jesus, the incarnation of God's love to humanity. Thus, those who angels who came to announce the birth of love incarnate, for God is love (1 John 4:8), are fittingly representative of love.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:7-11).

Wondrous gift of heaven: the Father sends the Son
Planned from time eternal, moved by holy love
He will carry our curse and death He'll reverse
So we can be daughters and sons
And who would have dreamed or ever foreseen
That we could hold God in our hands?
The Giver of Life is born in the night
Revealing God's glorious plan
From "Who Would Have Dreamed" written by Bob Kauflin / Jason
Hansen

"The story of Christmas is the story of God's relentless love for us." Max Lucado

"Best of all, Christmas means a spirit of love, a time when the love of God and the love of our fellow men should prevail over all hatred and bitterness...." George F. McDougall

"Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love." Hamilton Wright Mabie

"Who can add to Christmas? The perfect motive is that God so loved the world. The perfect gift is that He gave His only Son." Corrie Ten Boom

“Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord most dear,
as thou wast once an infant here,
so give this child of thine, we pray,
thy grace and blessing day by day.
O holy Jesus, Lord divine,
we pray thee guard this child of thine.”
(Heinrich von Laufenberg, trns. Catherine Winkworth)

Prayer for Lighting the Fourth Candle - Love: “Father God, I thank you for your guiding love for me, the love of a father who wants what’s best for his child. Your love is the foundation of my life. I thank you for all the gifts you have given me, but most of all, the gift of your love and abiding presence.”



The Christ Candle

The candle of Christmas: Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, is born, he is with us, Immanuel, today even as he was on the night of his birth. May this be the Greatest Good News to all people!

Some Children See Him

Written by A. Burt and W. Hutson

Some children see Him lily white,
The baby Jesus born this night.
Some children see Him lily white,
With tresses soft and fair.
Some children see Him bronzed and brown,
The Lord of heav'n to earth come down.
Some children see Him bronzed and brown,
With dark and heavy hair.
Some children see Him almond-eyed,
This Savior whom we kneel beside.
Some children see Him almond-eyed,
With skin of yellow hue.
Some children see Him dark as they,
Sweet Mary's Son to whom we pray.
Some children see him dark as they,
And, ah! they love Him, too!
The children in each different place
Will see the baby Jesus' face
Like theirs, but bright with heavenly grace,
And filled with holy light.
O lay aside each earthly thing
And with thy heart as offering,
Come worship now the infant King.
'Tis love that's born tonight!

**Prayer for Lighting the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve:
Christmas Eve Benediction**

Go forth to share the Light of Christ in a world that needs more light.

Be of good courage.

Hold fast to that which is good.

Render to no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the faint-hearted.

Support the weak.

Honor all people.

Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And may the blessing of God – Creator, Son & Holy Spirit, remain with you this night and
always. Amen.

Merry Christmas!



Now, for those who are “too late” to prepare for Christmas all month, if you have at least four days remaining before Christmas, light one candle each night and contemplate one of the great themes of Christmas represented by that candle ending with the Christ candle on Christmas. (You can use the devotional above or simply read the verses listed below related to the meaning of each candle.) Not enough time for that, well, do all the candles on that fair day, Christmas itself! Make a dramatic ceremony of reading the Christmas story (Luke 1:26-38 and 2:1-20) and lighting the candles (all at once or one by one) as you read.

Here are some verses illustrating the meaning of each candle:

First candle: Hope—Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 1:26-38

Second candle: Peace—Micah 5:2 and Luke 2:1-7

Third candle: Joy—Luke 2:8-20

Fourth candle: Love—1 John 4:9-19

Christ Candle: John 1:18

Just remember, if you are using the preparation time of Advent to anticipate and rejoice and worship at the Birth of Jesus, you can’t do it “wrong.”