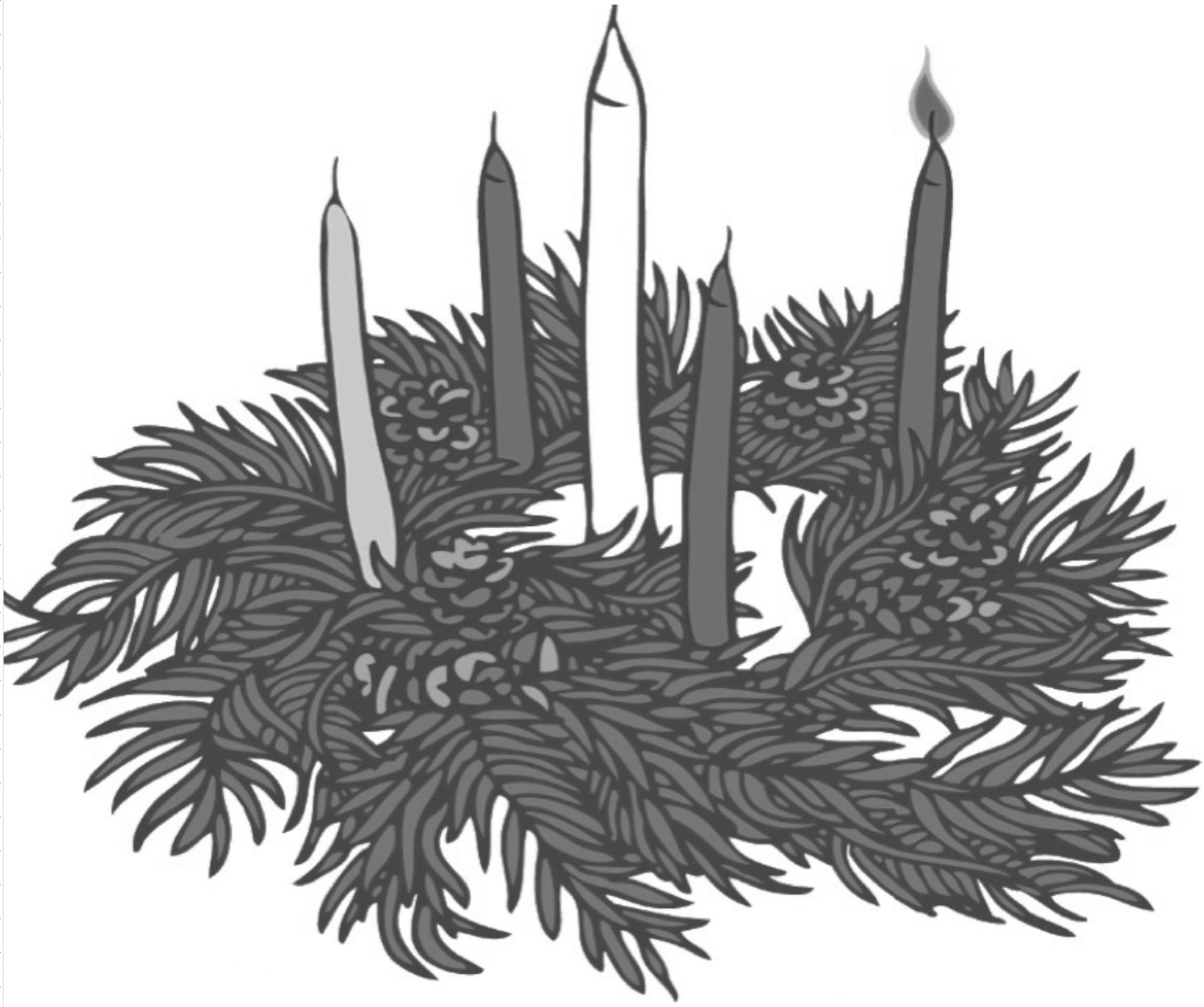
St. Hilda's Church

Advent

A New Normal Christmas – Light in the Darkness



Devotional Booklet 2020

❖ What is Advent?

The literal meaning of "advent" is "coming" or "arrival". During this time, we look back to the first coming of Jesus Christ and look forward to his second coming. Jesus came to show us God's Kingdom and to bring forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who believe in him. He will come again in power and authority to receive the church and to judge the nations.

Advent marks the beginning of the Church Year. It lasts for four Sundays, ending on Christmas eve.

❖ A Spiritual Journey

Advent is a spiritual journey that Christians take through passages of Scripture that point to the birth of the Messiah, to a reaffirmation that he has come, he is with us in Spirit and will come again in glory. It mirrors the journey of faith that Christians take as we look forward to our own destination, which is to be in his presence forever!

We observe Advent as a time of reflection and anticipation that Jesus has already arrived and look forward to that great Second Advent of the Lord! You will find a short devotion for your meditation each week.

❖ Colours

The liturgical colour of Advent is purple. It is the colour of penitence and royalty. As the Church waits for Christ's return, we reflect on our sinful state, and the world's, with repentant hearts. We are thankful to Jesus for taking away the sins of the world when he died on the cross. We are now looking forward with joyful hearts to the return of Jesus, the King of Kings.

❖ The Advent Wreath

Many churches use an Advent wreath as part of their worship. The origins of the evergreen wreath are ancient and probably pagan, but there is a symbolism with the wreath and its five candles that is useful in retelling the Christmas story. The circle of greenery reminds us that God is eternal, the Alpha and Omega without beginning or end, and also of the hope we have in God, of newness, renewal and eternal life.

The candles symbolize the light of God entering the world through the birth of Jesus. It reminds us that we are called to be a light to the world as we reflect the light of God's love and grace to others.

The center candle is called the Christ Candle. It is traditionally lit on Christmas Eve.

❖ What Do We Do?

As Christians, we observe Advent as a time of reflection on the promises of God and anticipation of the new beginnings that Christmas brings. Let us remember examples of God's faithfulness in thanksgiving. Let us be mindful of the brokenness of the world and the fact that many Christians cannot go through Advent in peace and prosperity. Let us dream of a fully restored, new creation under Christ's reign.

We can set time aside, for example on a Sunday evening, to do a short Advent devotion together. This will help our children to get caught up in the real spirit of Christmas.

❖ How Do We Do It?

Wreath Preparation

Decorating the wreath often brings much joy. The décor can be very elaborate or quite simple. There is no one correct way. If in doubt, the internet has many samples, or you could search the term 'advent' on our SHC Facebook page.

Candle Lighting

For the four Sundays in the season of Advent, one candle will be lit at the beginning of our Sunday service, with the fifth candle being lit on Christmas Day. You can do the same at home with your family.

Week One-

1. Light the 1st candle
2. Read the Bible passage in the devotion – take turns reading the verses and use a version that is easily understood by all, especially the children
3. Read the devotion as printed
4. Pray the prayer pointers, taking turns, as a family
5. Pray the collect printed in the church bulletin together as a family
6. Sing the recommended carol together as a family (or you could choose a suitable one that you prefer)

Week Two- light the 1st and 2nd candle and follow steps 2-6

Week Three- light the 1st, 2nd and 3rd candle and follow steps 2-6

Week Four- light all four candles on the wreath and follow steps 2-6

Christmas Eve or Day- light all candles, including the white Christ Candle and bless each other with a prayer.

Read more at: http://www.faithandworship.com/Advent_themes_and_resources.htm

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*There is no specific amount of time to let the candle burn, but do not leave it unattended.

Foreword

Dear St Hilda's Family,

What a year it has been for all of us! If anybody would have suggested to us this time last year that in 2020, the world would almost come to a standstill because of a virus, most of us would have dismissed this as an exaggerated sci-fi scenario. But it has become reality. More than 60 million infections and 1.4 million deaths worldwide, lock-downs in many countries including Singapore, travel restrictions, masks, safe distancing, work-from-home etc, along with these, an enormous global economic downturn that affects many businesses and families in Singapore as well. The greatest social cost is loneliness, especially among our senior generation.

The past few weeks have seen promising news about vaccines – thanks be to God – that may eventually provide immunity to Covid19 and allow us to get back to normal, a new normal as we call it.

We can't wait to leave this dark year behind us and move on into a more promising 2021. Isn't it wonderful that our church year 2021 already begins with the first Advent on 29 November 2020?

Israel during the time of Isaiah was in a worse situation. They had been taken from their treasured homeland into exile in Babylon, many had been killed in two wars, Jerusalem had been destroyed completely. They would be there for more than

50 years, that's more than two generations. And there comes God's voice through his prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others, pointing Israel to a glorious future. This promise will become reality because He is a promise-keeping God. The promise of the return into the homeland will eventually be superseded by an even greater promise of bringing his Son Jesus, the light of world that stepped down into darkness. Jesus will return as the eternal ruler at his 2nd coming!

I love Isaiah 60:1-3, our passage for the fourth Advent. It describes the picture of a warm light that changes everything. Like the first sunbeams after a long night, like the spring-sun after a long winter. It will be an attractive light that draws rulers and whole nations. It will trigger a celebration among those who know Jesus already: 'Arise and shine, for your light has come!'

As we stand at the threshold to a new year, it is great to start it with celebrating Advent and Christmas, to give our attention and devotion to Jesus afresh. With this posture of worship onto our King, we can enter into a new year in January.

"Lift up your eyes all around, and see … then you shall see and be radiant!" (Isaiah 60:4-5)

Blessed Advent!

Ps Martin

Advent Devotion Week 1

"The Light Will Come Again"

Genesis 1:1-5

I think that all of us can relate to how challenging this year has been. We have never been in the situation we faced (still facing) this year - DORSCON Yellow, then Orange, and then the Circuit Breaker was thrust upon the entire nation because of COVID-19. Even with the loosening of measures in phase 1 and phase 2 after the Circuit Breaker, struggles remain.

Church ministry has changed rather drastically. Online services have been the norm for more than 7 months, preachers have to learn to preach in front of a camera, our ministry teams (especially the media team) have been forced to learn new skills so we can continue to run services online. Our social lives were barely in existence until recently, improving slightly because we are allowed to have 5 persons per gathering. Even so, gatherings for larger families are still being affected. Businesses have been affected, the jobs situation uncertain for many, and the economy is weak. All in all, darkness seems to prevail, and one needs to look really hard to see the light.

This week's Scripture passage draws us back to the beginning of time when ***"the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep"*** (Gen 1:2). A bleak picture of lifelessness, emptiness and desolation. There was no life present, nor was the earth habitable in this condition. Yet above this darkness, emptiness and chaos (waters symbolises chaos here), is the Spirit of God.

Then ***"God said, "Let there be light," and there was light""*** (Gen 1:3). Take a moment to appreciate the power of God here.

He spoke light into the darkness. A word from God the Creator changed the entire atmosphere. An uninhabitable environment would be flourishing in no time because He spoke.

Psalm 139:12 -
"even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you."

also reminds us that darkness is not dark to the Lord. As far as the Lord is concerned, darkness and light are the same! What comfort we receive from knowing that our God is powerful, able and sovereign over any darkness in the atmosphere and situation. But more than that, He is able to transform our hearts!

2 Corinthians 4:6 tells us:
" For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."

Only God, the One who spoke light into the darkness, can speak light into our hearts, so that we may know His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. We were in the darkness, but now we are able to see because of Christ's birth, crucifixion and resurrection. It is in this truth that we live out this Advent season. Light came on earth 2000 years ago with the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this year's darkness, we continue to look to the Light that's already in our hearts and also look forward to His second coming.

Take heart, the Light has come and will come again.

Reflection

a) Pause and give thanks to the Lord for being sovereign over darkness and for speaking light into your heart.

b) Take time out to pray for those who may be struggling this season. Pray also that God will shine in their hearts so that they may know and receive the Living God.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, we stand amazed that You, our Creator spoke and there was light. We are thankful that You are sovereign over all the challenging circumstances that we may face. We pray that You will continue to shine in our hearts, that we may know You better, love You deeper and trust You wholly. Help us also to shine Your light so that we can be a source of light to those who are struggling in the darkness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Ps Wendy

Christmas Carol

<u>O Come O Come Emmanuel</u>

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear

(Chorus)
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Day-Spring
Come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight
(Chorus)

O come, desire of nations bind
In one the hearts of all mankind
Bid thou our sad divisions cease
and be Thyself our King of Peace
(Chorus)