

## **Advent 2023 Year B: Traditional themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, Love**

### **First Sunday in Advent (December 3)**

Hope is assertive, even aggressive at times. Hope fueled the prophet to call upon God to tear open the heavens and shake the mountains so that we would all tremble, remembering that there is a God, because the world has forgotten. But we have not. We cling to this hope that interrupts and shakes our lives out of monotony, out of complacency, and out of despair. We light this candle, a spark of flame that ignites a rebellion of hope against empire, against hate, against fear. This is the fire that kindles inside of us and will not die.

#### *Light the first candle*

Prayer: God of Hope, our world has grown cold with despair, with hopelessness, with weariness and dread. Alight in us the fire of Your Spirit, a reminder that death never has the final word, so we might pursue justice and live into Your ways and become living hope in a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

### **Second Sunday in Advent (December 10)**

Hope is assertive, but peace is subversive. The psalmist reminds us in Psalm 34:14 that we must seek peace and pursue it. We must search for it like a treasure hidden in a field, like it is the most precious, fragile thing we can imagine. But peace doesn't live only in dreams. Peace whispers into our ear that there is always another way, another path from rage and hate and fear. Peace calls us to have patience, but to not give up. Peace is not passive, but always lurking, just waiting for us to recognize we can grasp it. We light this candle as a reminder that peace is something we must pursue, for we follow the Prince of Peace.

#### *Light the second candle*

Prayer: God of Peace, our world is full of angry voices calling for vengeance, calling for retribution masked as justice, calling for destruction as a lie for peace. But we know the true peace that comes from You is available for us all, if we seek it. If we follow You. May peace light our way in this world that desperately needs it. Amen.

### **Third Sunday in Advent (December 17)**

Hope is assertive, and peace is subversive. But joy? Joy is rebelliously provocative. How dare joy make its way into our dreary, despairing world? How dare joy show up in all its flashiness—it even gets a pink candle for crying out loud! How dare we, in the midst of war and hate and despair, deep division and grief and violence, come together and rejoice? How dare some shepherds start speaking of good news and the heavenly host declaring peace on earth in the midst of a violent Roman occupation? But if they did it, why can't we? Why can't we sing for joy that God is breaking open into our world again? Why can't we be rebellious against the politicians and news anchors and doomsday sayers that there is joy for the world—no—joy to the world! We light this candle because God is provoking us to sing for joy, to sing and dance and laugh so hard we have tears, because there is peace and hope in this world.

*Light the third candle*

Prayer: God of joy, call us to sing, remind us to dance, tickle us into fits of laughter, because You are in our world and in our lives and doing something new, right now. Death and despair have nothing on You, and we rejoice in You, our Savior. Amen.

### **Fourth Sunday in Advent (December 24)**

Hope is assertive, and peace subversive, and joy provocative. But we know that faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love. Love is all these words and all the things we cannot say. Love is transformative. Love is the only thing that can change the world because love has changed us. Love has come to us as a God who became one of us, lived and died for us, and lives again. Love has come to us as a God who risked everything to make us understand that nothing is impossible. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. We will never give up because love is real. Love simply is there. God's love in us is a fire that never dies. God loves you so, so much, that God sent the only Son for us, so that we might all know God's love eternally. We light this candle because God is love.

*Light the fourth candle*

Prayer: God of love, remind us that love is transformative, but it must be shared. We must love one another as You have first loved us, for You loved us so much You sent the Son to us, so that we might know that love can never die, that Your steadfast love remains forever. As Your love transformed the world long ago, Your love continues to transform us into Your children, and we await the promise that love will change the world again. Amen.

### **Christmas Eve (December 24)**

Hope is assertive, peace is subversive, joy is provocative, and love is transformative. God tore open the heavens as hope became alive in us with the cry of the newborn babe. The heavenly host, the army of God, showed up and instead of declaring war, said “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill to all.” Joy was shared by parents and visitors in the midst of an empirical census and under the rule of an insecure puppet king. And love—love from God, love for one another—the Christ-child taught us that the greatest love is to lay down one’s lives for one another, to set aside the things of this world that would tear us apart and instead look to what draws us together. This is the kind of love that still transforms the world when we share it. On this night, we light the Christ-candle, a reminder that hope, peace, joy, and love are not merely words for this season of the year, but promises of God that are alive in us for eternity, and that God’s steadfast love endures forever.

#### *Light the Christ-candle*

Prayer: O come to us, abide in us, our Lord, Emmanuel. God with us, make Your presence known to us, now and always. Shine bright in the shadows and despair, and may the warmth of Your love carry us forward. You changed the world forever that night long ago when You were born, and You are changing our lives, right now. On this Christmas Eve, we pray for Your transformative love to be renewed, for our own hope, peace, joy and love to be restored. We ask for Your guidance in helping each of us live into Your reign on earth as it is in heaven, for Your reign is at hand, and it is coming. Lead us into ways of participating in Your reign now by doing justice, practicing compassionate love and kindness, and walking humbly with You, our Savior and Redeemer, the Living God, Jesus Christ. Amen.