

# Planning



Sunday, December 18 – Saturday, December 24 • 2022

## God with Us

Matthew shares the good news that Joseph will become a father of a child he is to name Emmanuel, God is with us, and we become more aware of how God is with us in our everyday lives.

### This week...

#### Ecumenical prayer calendar

People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Macao

As listed in *Pilgrim Prayer: The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle*, edited by Ester Pudjo Widiastih and Karen L. Bloomquist. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2018). <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/prayer-cycle> offers valuable aids for intercessory prayers, prayer on behalf of and in solidarity with others.

#### Special days ([commentary](#) on p. 72)

**December 18** – Chanukah begins (*Judaism*)

**December 24** – Christmas Eve

#### Personal reflection

This last Sunday before Christmas finds us anxious and excited. Adults may be wondering about the details of celebrations while children are growing more excited for Christmas morning. This week, we remember the good news that came to Joseph in a dream. We see how God is present with us in our everyday lives as we consider the ordinary ways we see God every day. We also contemplate how much names matter and how much our names matter to us. Does the origin of Jesus' name as "God with us" change how we worship the Christ?

*The planning page is provided in text format for copying, adapting, and adding to your bulletin or online worship resources or website or social media (see Text folder, Worship Outline).*

#### December 18

Advent 4

#### Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Isaiah 7:10–16

Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19

Romans 1:1–7

**Matthew 1:18–25**

the focus in age-level materials

**Liturgical colour** purple or blue

#### Notes

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### Online Resources

#### Lection Connection

Essays and discussion prompts linking current events with this week's scriptures. Use for sermon preparation, Bible studies, and small groups or share on social media at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/10/>.

#### Nurturing Faith and Spirituality at Home

An easy-to-share, weekly online resource supports the spiritual lives and faith formation of individuals and families at home. It is provided in the [Nurturing Faith and Spirituality at Home](#) folder.





Isaiah 7:10–16

Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

Romans 1:1–7

Matthew 1:18–25

the focus in age-level materials

O come, O come, Emmanuel. In these waning days of Advent, grant us the patience to seek you. Free us from our fears, and give us the strength to give names to things that matter. In these waning days of Advent, may our minds turn towards Christ as we prepare for his birth. Amen.

# God with Us

**M**atthew shares the good news that Joseph will become a father of a child he is to name Emmanuel, God is with us, and we become more aware of how common this name is in our ordinary lives. The angels tell Joseph to be not afraid, which perhaps feels like an impossible task. How do our dreams (daydreams, night dreams, dreams for the future) help us to see Christ?

The readings from the Hebrew Scriptures this week suggest a variety of impulses that we might imagine stirred in Joseph as he made the critical decision to stand with Mary and name the Son of Humanity, the Liberator born among us. In **Isaiah 7:10–16**, we hear encouragement from the prophet that we “weary mortals” should stay vigilant and keep the faith that even though storms and wars may be ahead, God is so faithful that a child will be born and named God-with-Us. In **Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19**, the refrain “Restore us, O God: let your face shine, that we may be saved” is repeated three times. We all have a sense of longing in us, the deep emptiness so native to our very humanity, we long for a saviour.

**Matthew 1:18–25** The gospel accounts of Jesus’ birth differ in their emphases. Mark skips any birth story, Luke highlights Mary, whereas Matthew features Joseph as the primary actor. Like Mary, Joseph must trust God with the loss of his life as he knew and imagined it and lean into an entirely new way of being.

Theologians and Christian communities through the centuries have always struggled with how to hold Joseph, husband of Mary. It feels awkward – Matthew makes clear in the preceding passage that only via Joseph is Jesus the son of David. Without Davidic lineage, the power of Jesus as the messianic fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures falls apart. But to say Joseph is Jesus’ father is awkward in light of the birth stories that suggest otherwise.

Some biblical commentators have solved this paternity paradox by concluding that Matthew presumes that the Christmas miracle included not only Mary’s pregnancy by

the Holy Spirit, but also, inexplicably, the incorporation of Jesus into Joseph’s family. Joseph naming Jesus is a clue; at that time, it was customary for mothers to name their babies. What matters for Matthew is that Jesus fulfills scripture by coming from the Davidic line and that Jesus is unquestionably divine as well as human.

It is important to remember that in Jesus’ time (and in many cultures and traditions today), naming someone’s ancestors gives clues to their very essence, the kind of person they are, even the sort of occupational talents they will innately possess. But one part of the Christian story is the upending of the constraints of heritage. **Romans 1:1–7** illustrates this beautifully – even Gentiles are “called to belong to Jesus Christ” and “called to be saints.” In other words, the new reality Jesus introduces is universal access to God’s family.

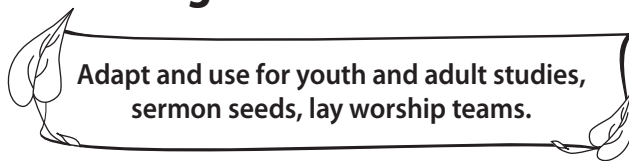
Besides lineage, another piece of world view that differs so much between Jesus’ time and now is the place of dreams. In Jesus’ day, dreams were considered a legitimate channel by which God revealed divine will to individuals. The church fathers wrestled with what to make of dreams. Tertullian asked how one can tell whether a dream comes from the devil or from God. Synesius of Cyrene distinguished between ordinary, unimportant dreams and those sent by God as warnings or prophecies. In our time, Carl Jung named the critical connection between our dreams and our sense of God, and the difference between “big dreams” and smaller dreams. Joseph had a big dream, and he heeded it. Despite the call to defy convention and risk social and economic disaster, Joseph trusted God.

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At the end of our Advent journey, a saviour is born. As we think anew about our dreams, our sense of belonging to God’s family, and about the mysteries and miracles of the Holy Spirit, may we also consider the ways we need a saviour. From what are we saved? For what are we saved? How does our recognition that Christ is God-with-us change us?



## Reflecting on the Word



### Connecting with life

Yearn: to desire, long for, crave, ache, hunger, thirst, hanker. Someone once defined yearning as “wanting something so much it hurts.”

- **For what have you yearned this week?**

### Scripture

**Isaiah 7:10–16** and **Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19** Allow these two readings to be in dialogue with each other about how God is revealed in our world. Using the refrain from the Psalm (“Restore us, O God, let your face shine, that we might be saved”), how would you pray for the dangers you perceive in your church, in your community, in your nation, in the world?

**Matthew 1:18–25** Before reading, think about how angels appear as messengers to all kinds of people in our faith story. Joseph’s angel comes when he is sleeping.

- **When have you puzzled over a dream?**
- **Have you ever felt that you received a message in a dream?**
- **Did you act on the message (as did Joseph), or did you dismiss it as “only a dream”? How might your life be different now if you had chosen the other course?**
- **What would need to happen in a dream for you to awake believing you had heard God’s voice? If that were to happen, what do you think the voice might say to you?**

Joseph is between a rock and a hard place. He is engaged to Mary, and we are told the couple does not yet live together. But Mary is pregnant. According to Deuteronomy 22:20–21, it is a disgrace to marry someone who is not a virgin. By law, she is destined to be stoned to death. Joseph, both righteous and compassionate, chooses to spare Mary’s life. The know-

ledge of this child’s liberating, saving work does not make Joseph’s life any easier, but it does shed divine light on the human predicament.

- **When have you heard about a divine message shedding light on a difficult situation? What difference did it make?**

The coming together of God’s “yes” with our “yes” is called the place of Holy Desire in Christianity’s spiritual or mystical traditions. This is not simply a quiet, sacred space but the launching pad of a transfigured and highly creative life.

- **How do you see this Holy Desire reflected in Mary and Joseph’s “yes” to God?**

The phrase “God with us” was a powerful message of hope to the Hebrew people in exile and to the early Christian community.

- **How do you sense that God is with us in our time?**

**Matthew 1:18–25; Isaiah 7:10–16; Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19; Romans 1:1–7** strike a couple of common notes: a longing for God’s saviour to come and longing to belong to God’s saving family. Theologians have sometimes defined sin as, in one way or another, thinking we do not need God or as being disconnected from our desire for God.

- **In what ways is this true (or not)?**
- **How can/do you connect with your own longing for God?**

### Connecting scripture and life

In Jesus, God’s reign comes among us. The lives of Joseph, Mary, Paul, and the believers in Matthew’s community and in Rome were changed in radical ways when they chose to embrace God’s promised one. As we ready ourselves to receive this gift of Christmas again, we are called to choose how we will respond.

- **How do you experience God’s love and call in Jesus the Christ?**
- **How do you perceive your role in the story of God’s saving love as an individual and as the church?**
- **When is it easy to be faithful to this calling? When is it challenging?**

## Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

This week, we celebrate the fourth Sunday in Advent. The period of waiting is almost over. What emotions does this time of year bring: anticipation, stress, loneliness, excitement? As we prepare for Christmas, we hear the story of Joseph’s surprising preparation and change of heart. Joseph plays an important role in this birth story, provid-

ing support, protection, and naming the child yet to be “God with us.” When in our lives have we felt conflicted like Joseph? When have we had a softening of our hearts? How does God work in us and through us to shift our perspectives and open our hearts? What might this Advent season be birthing in us?



# God with Us

## Prepare

**NOTE:** The following suggestions are mere starting points. You are invited to adapt, delete, add according to your local needs and context. If a community is gathered in person, they may speak the **bolded** lines. If worshippers are not physically present, consider having a different individual say the bolded responses. Instructions are *italicized*.

- ❑ Recruit volunteers needed for worship.
- ❑ Choose an option for hearing Matthew 1:18–25. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present “[A Baby Is Born](#)” on p. 74. Alternatively, for younger children, arrange for a storyteller to present “[Joseph’s Dream](#)” in Exploring Our Faith at the end of this week’s materials. For the guided meditation, provide pens/pencils and paper and arrange for someone to lead.
- ❑ Bring items for setting the worship space: Advent wreath from Advent 3 and this week’s items for building the wreath – gold metallic beads. See “[Advent Wreath Prayers](#)” on p. 14.
- ❑ You might choose to print [Earth Has Hope](#) on or in your bulletin. See “[Connecting with the Art](#)” on p. 8 for background to the art and artist.
- ❑ Bring song such as “I Am Becoming Peace” (*Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9, #6 on *Seasons Music CD*, vol. 9, and avail-

able for purchase as an MP3 download at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order>.

- ❑ Set [stations](#) as described on pp. 75–76.



## Music Suggestions

### I Am Becoming Peace

Linnea Good; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

### Jesus, Face of God

James Maher; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

### The Peace of the Earth

John L. Bell; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

### And God Said Yes!

Norman Habel, Richard Koehnke; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 1

### No Wind at the Window

John L. Bell



A chart that shows the licence holder(s) for each song in each of the 9 *Seasons of the Spirit* Music Volumes can be found at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca). Click on Library; Seasons Music Information. Please contact a licence holder for permission to duplicate.

## Gather

### Call to worship

God’s people ask for signs of God’s presence.

*(whispered)* **Emmanuel! God with us!**

From ancient times, they have called upon God for salvation.

*(a little louder)* **Emmanuel! God with us!**

“Shine your face upon us,” they cry.

*(louder still)* **Emmanuel! God with us!** And an angel said to Joseph:

*(full throttle)* **Emmanuel! God with us!** Come, let us worship God!

### Opening prayer

Amazing, embodied God,  
whose spirit rested upon Joseph,  
we praise and adore you.  
Word in flesh, Emmanuel,  
always you are with us.  
We praise and adore you.  
Amen.

### Advent candles

See “[Advent Wreath Prayers](#)” on p. 14 for instructions on building an Advent wreath.

### Invitation

Come and let us build  
a new creation because  
a child will be born to us.  
Mary and Joseph will name  
him Jesus, and he will be our Emmanuel.  
This child will remind us  
through all the bleakness  
of this world. God is with us.

*Invite the people to come forward to a basket full of gold metallic beads. Without moving anything on the table, invite the people to add beads. When all who have chosen to participate and have added their beads, continue with these words.*

In this moment,  
as the great Season of Advent  
nears its end, and we prepare  
to welcome this child  
into the bleakest corners  
of our ordinary lives,  
salvation is nearer



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## Worship Outline • December 18, 2022

than it has ever been.

That light comes into the world  
and is never extinguished  
and so today we bring one candle  
to join our HOPE, our PEACE and JOY  
to open ourselves to LOVE again.

*Invite one person to come forward and put an unlit candle on the table among metallic beads.*

### Prayer

With this one light, we pray:  
**O God, we place this light in this holy space  
as a reminder that we are on this journey together.  
Be light along all our paths.  
Lead us to a more just world  
and help us to stay awake  
and present to your love  
in each ordinary day. Amen.**

*Candles are lit or switched on.*

**Sing** song, such as “I Am Becoming Peace”, changing the word “peace” to “love” (*Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9, #6 on *Seasons Music CD*, vol. 9. Printed music and recording are also available at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order>).

### Prayer of confession

Friends, knowing that we pray to a God who longs for us to draw closer, who longs for us to always be more honest and courageous in naming our failings as well as our strengths, let us unburden our hearts with the ways we have fallen

short of God’s vision for our lives.

God who is with us, closer even than our breath,  
**reveal to us the Saviour.**

Like so many before us, we fall short of your hope for us and need the hope of salvation.

**Reveal to us the Saviour.**

Like David and the prophets of old, we need your promise of love.

**Reveal to us the Saviour.**

Like Mary and Joseph, may we have peace and joy.

**Reveal to us the Saviour.**

Like all the saints who have gone before us, grant us the gift of life.

**Reveal to us the Saviour.**

Free us from the ways we have failed to be your people, your children. Free us from the ways we have hurt, ignored, and fallen short.

**Reveal to us the Saviour.**

**Amen.**

### Words of affirmation

*Adapted from Isaiah 7:14*

Friends, hear these words from scripture.

The prophet Isaiah declares, “A young woman is with child, and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel,” which means “God with us.”

May we take the radical realities of God’s forgiving love deep into our hearts and know that we are indeed forgiven, freed from our sins and freed for God’s love!

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## Engage

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### Opening the word

**Matthew 1:18–25** the focus scripture for age-level materials in **ENCORE**

Choose from the following.

**Bible story** Arrange for a storyteller to present “[A Baby Is Born](#)” on p. 74. Alternatively, for younger children, tell the story “[Joseph’s Dream](#)” (in *Exploring Our Faith* at the end of this week’s materials).

**Guided meditation** After the reading, lead the gathered community in this guided meditation.

*Distribute pencils/pens and slips of paper, and invite worshippers to seat themselves comfortably. The main purpose is to experience “letting go” in whatever ways God is calling us to release the attachments of our present lives. Just as Joseph had a lot to “let go of,” so it is with all of us, especially in the Christmas season. Invite worshippers to write (encourage them to do 2, 3, 4 or more!) the things, people, fears, and whatever else they need to release and*

*“let go of” today, on the brink of Christmas. After slips of “attachments” are complete, have people fold the papers and place them near their own feet.*

Close your eyes and take some long deep breaths.

Internally scan your body, from the top of your head, your facial muscles through your neck, shoulders, torso, all the way to your toes, and try to consciously release, release, release tension.

*Pause. Invite people to reach down and grasp their “attachments” in their hands.*

Think about other attachments you might have: attachment to our particular ideas of how Christmas “should” go this year; attachment to an idea of who we are supposed to be; attachment to our ideas of what will make us happy; attachment to our ideas of what will make us safe.

Now grasp your attachments you’ve written very tightly. Tighter. Tighter! Now take a deep breath. Tighten every muscle in your body.





Now release! Let those attachments fall from your hands to the floor. Again, scan your body for any tension, and release all of it. God calls us to turn over every attachment – every attachment can be a barrier to experiencing and receiving the love and life God has for us.

*Pause.*

Now, let us receive. Beyond relaxing, open the palms of your hands, and rest them on your knees. If you would like, you

can even extend your arms over your head. Think about what God might be offering you...

What might be a new experience of Christmas? ...a new idea about our emerging selves?...a new sense about how it is we might live into a troubled relationship in our lives?...a deep knowledge that we have enough; enough love, enough life? *Close with prayer, or by giving some minutes of silence for people to journal about their experience. They may choose to list what they released, and what they received.*

**If gathering in person, invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word. For those participating at home, you might encourage them to use materials that have been sent.**

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## Respond

**Sing** or listen to a song, such as “I Am Becoming Peace,” changing the word “peace” to “love” (*Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9, #6 on *Seasons Music CD*, vol. 9. Printed music and recording are also available at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order>).

### Prayers of the people

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel! We are so close to your arrival. Be with us as we finish waiting.

You told people for eons not to fear, and yet sometimes we do. You gave us dreams to guide us and to pull us closer to your vision of the realm you create.

We see places of injustice, poverty, oppression, and pain in the world.

Come to us in them. Come to us and show us what we need to do to change them.

Come to us and be with us as we find that sometimes all we can do is watch and wait and see you at work in the ordinary parts of our lives.

O come, o come Emmanuel and be with us, restore us, help us.

In Christ's name, we pray, Amen.

### Invitation to the offering

We see God in the ordinary places of our lives – sometimes without realizing it. We see God with us when we hold a hand, offer a smile, feed a stranger. God is with us when we offer the first fruits of our labours, as God's people have done for generations. Let us give God the fruits of our labours as an act of worship and gratitude.

### Prayer of dedication or offering prayer

God, may these ordinary gifts of paper and card swipes, of coins and electronic transactions, honour you.

May the everyday gifts of our lives honour you and the work we do in your name. Amen.

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## Bless

An angel came to Joseph and proclaimed:

**Emmanuel! God with us!**

In this final week before Christmas day, may our waiting proclaim:

**Emmanuel! God with us!**

Go forth in joy to tell the world:

**Emmanuel! God with us!**

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## Special Day Commentary

### December 18 – Chanukah begins (*Judaism*)

Chanukah is a holiday that cannot be found in the Hebrew Bible or Tanach. Its scriptural roots are found in the books of I and II Maccabees, which appear in some Christian Bibles in a section called the Apocrypha. These books detail a small group of Jewish zealots who feared that the rest of the Jewish community was too ready to adopt aspects of Hellenistic culture into their Jewish lives. In turn, these zealots despised ideas that were not purely Jewish.

Unfortunately, the Syrian Greeks who ruled Judea were not satisfied with integrating the two cultures but preferred

annihilating Jewish culture and religion. The Syrian Greeks, led by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, defiled the Temple in Jerusalem. The zealots, known as the Maccabees, fought a guerilla war against Antiochus in 164 BCE, recaptured the temple, and rededicated it. However, when the Maccabees finally rededicated the temple, they were not in time to observe the festival of Sukkot – which lasts, you guessed it, eight days.

Today, Jews light a nine-canded menorah, known as a *chanukiah*, in observance of these events. (The ninth candle, known as the *shamesh* or “servant,” is used to light the other candles.) Today Chanukah concentrates on the themes of religious freedom, the balance of living as Jews in a dominant non-Jewish culture, and even miracles, too. *Rabbi Adam Morris*



# Walk Like a Toddler

If you have ever ventured out of the house with a toddler to run errands or just saunter around the neighbourhood, you have already witnessed their insatiable curiosity for this world. Everything is worth exploring. There isn't a crack in the sidewalk that isn't worth spending extra time considering.

In these days, before the good news becomes fully known in Christ's birth, take a walk through your neighbourhood with a toddler's delight.

Here are some tips to inspire your walk:

- Search below your feet for rocks and sticks. Pick them up and stuff them in your pockets as if they are a treasure.
- Walk slowly, as if there is no destination to reach.
- Look down.
- Jump and splash in puddles and or any pile of snow.
- Drag a stick along the wall or a fence and delight in the noise that it makes.
- Practice saying aloud the names of each thing that you see.
- Pick up leaves and twirl them from the stem.
- Look for spiders and be careful not to step on any ants. Notice any other creepy crawlies and behold what you find with wonder.
- Name all the colours you see.
- Use any small (public) walls or curbs as a balance beam. Complete your act by jumping off with your arms in the air. Bow, as you feel so moved.
- Point at anything that seems amazing.
- Learn names for new discoveries. Tuck these treasures in your pocket or snap a picture to look up the proper name when you get home, as needed.
- Look up.
- Notice how different each plant is.
- Practice wonder.

Just two weeks ago, you were invited to go on a scavenger hunt. Notice how different this experience is to when you are hunting for something in particular. On this walk, what surprised you? What delighted you? What did you learn about wonder?



# A Baby Is Born

Based Matthew 1:18–25

Joseph was in his carpenter's shop sitting on a stool that he had just finished making. The sun was streaming through the window. Joseph was thinking about all that had happened to him the day before and last night.

Mary had come to him to tell him that she would have a baby; the baby was from God. Joseph didn't know what to say or do. He had promised to marry Mary, but he wasn't sure he could anymore. Joseph decided that he would tell Mary that he couldn't marry her, but the more he thought about this, the more he didn't know what to do. He decided that he would have to go to sleep that night and tell her the next morning.

While he was sleeping, Joseph had a dream. In the dream, he saw an angel of God who told him to go ahead and marry Mary because she had told him the truth. The baby she would have was from the Holy Spirit, sent by God.

The angel also told him that the baby's name would be Jesus, which in Hebrew meant Saviour. Jesus would save all the people from any bad things going on in their lives.

Joseph was surprised by all this, but the angel told him even more. The angel said that these things were happening just like one of the prophets had said. The prophet said that a young woman would give birth to a child and that the child would be known as Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."

Joseph was a faithful and caring man. He went to Mary's place and told her what had happened. He said that he would marry her and have the baby and call him Jesus.

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder.



## Bible story

### Materials

- Basic supplies
- Paper or drawing pads
- Recording of today's story "[A Baby Is Born](#)"
- Alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story

## The practice of storytelling

### Directions

1. Listen to the story "A Baby Is Born."
2. Invite listeners to name what Joseph may have seen in his dream.
3. Invite listeners to name what Joseph may have heard in his dream.
4. Ask them to draw a picture of Joseph's Dream and take it home as a reminder of God coming to us when we are asleep.





## Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space, or in other places around the church, in your home, or outdoors. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the [directions](#) for all to see onscreen or in person. Adapt stations for use when physically distancing and above all, follow the safe practices of your congregation and local health officials.

For your convenience, directions are formatted for printing and available in the Stations folder.

### Health and Safety Practices

**Basic supplies** pens, pencils, markers, crayons, white glue/glue sticks, scissors, hand sanitizer, wipes placed in a basket or bin, two containers marked “clean” and “used”

**Setting the space** Utilize large spaces where people can maintain a safe physical distance. Spread out chairs around a large table or use tape to mark off the space around stand alone chairs.

**Keep it clean** Wipe down and disinfect places used for stations. Provide enough arts and crafts supplies to reduce sharing and mark containers “clean” and “used.” Remind people to use hand sanitizer as they begin and as they end stations.

### Stepping stones on God’s path of love

#### Materials

- Beautiful cloth from previous weeks
- Permanent markers
- One large candle with several small candles
- Images of people and nature from around the world set around the large candle
- Small stones large enough to write on and set along the table with a sign “God’s path of love” near it
- Use different images from previous weeks if you are continuing the path of hope, peace, and joy.
- Hand sanitizer or wipes



Suitable for  
all ages

#### The practice of prayer

##### Directions

1. Looking at the candle and the images, pause and take a deep breath. You may want to close your eyes and think about what and where there is a need for prayers for love at this time.
2. Once you have decided for what you want to pray, take a moment to imagine those hurting places as something beautiful and fragile that also evokes your appreciation (such as a flower, a butterfly, or an infant). Imagine this delicate object is resting in your arms, and you are sending all your care and attention towards it. Picture sending feelings of love, happiness and peace as well.
3. When you are ready, open your eyes. You are welcome to light a candle and imagine sending love and light and joy to the places and people for whom you are praying.
4. Using one of the markers, write a word on one of the stones lined along the table like a path, continuing the path from the previous week. These are words of prayer and intention, ways we want to act and be as we try our best to follow “God’s path of love.”

This is an extension of the path of joy from last week.

### Banner of love

#### Materials

- Basic supplies
- Magazines
- Large piece of banner paper with the word “LOVE” outlined on it, hung on a wall or laid on a table so that pieces may be glued to it
- You may hang this banner next to the ones from previous weeks if you choose.



Suitable for all ages  
working together

#### The practice of creativity

##### Directions

1. Cut out pictures of objects and people that inspire love or remind you of love.
2. Glue the pictures inside the outlines of the letters of the word “LOVE.”
3. As you cut and paste, wonder to yourself or with others:
  - Whom do I love, and who loves me?
  - What does God’s love look like?
  - Where does the world need love?



## Story of your name

### Materials

- Basic supplies



**Suitable for all ages  
working together**

## The practice of sharing who we are \_\_\_\_\_

### Directions

1. Reflect on the story of your name.
  - **What do you know about your name?**
  - **Are you named after someone?**
  - **What does your name mean?**
  - **How did you get your name?**
2. Write your first name down the left margin of a sheet of paper from top to bottom. Make an acrostic poem using the letters of your name.
3. Choose a word for the first letter of your name to reflect something about you, your personal gifts, or a blessing you hope to offer the world.

For example:

New to the community  
Attentive listener  
My friend  
Every day I wish you peace.

## In a manger

### Materials

- Child-friendly nativity scene with pieces children can hold and move
- Children's Bible with the Christmas story



**Suitable for all ages,  
with someone to read  
the story**

## The practice of pretending \_\_\_\_\_

### Directions

1. Arrange the nativity scene on the table with the stable in the middle and other pieces scattered around it.
2. Ask a reader to read the story out loud.
3. Participants may choose a figure and place it in the stable where they think it belongs. If there are multiple participants, they may take turns placing figures and answering questions.
4. Ask these questions and listen for answers:
  - **Why did you pick this figure?**
  - **Where did you put it?**
  - **What did the figure do in the story? (If the answer is "I don't know," encourage the use of imagination. Were they sleeping? Eating hay? Looking at the stars?)**
  - **What did the figure see?**
  - **If you were in the stable when Jesus was born, who would you have wanted to be? Why?**

## Love notes

### Materials

- Basic supplies
- Multi-coloured paper cut into heart shapes that will fit into envelopes when folded in half
- Envelopes



**Suitable for all ages  
with help writing**

## The practice of sharing God's presence and love with others \_\_\_\_\_

### Directions

1. Take a heart and write the words "God is with you, and God loves you" on it. (Preschoolers may need assistance from adults.)
2. Decorate it with markers or crayons.
3. Fold it so that it fits in an envelope.
4. Write a person's name on the outside. Make two or more of the "love letters."
5. Deliver the hearts to the people whose names are on the envelopes.

*The article "Connecting with the Art" on page 8 provides background to this season's posters and art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might add an Art station and select one of the art engagement ideas.*



Story and activities for the very young to use in church or at home.

## Joseph's Dream

A story based on Matthew 1:18–25

Once upon a time, there was a woman named Mary and a man named Joseph. They were planning to get married. It was an exciting time. Mary and Joseph were getting ready, and their families were getting ready.

Joseph sometimes worried about how everything would turn out. One night, he had a dream. In the dream, an angel said, "Don't be afraid. Everything is going to be fine."

Joseph was happy to hear this. Then, the angel said something that made Joseph even happier. The angel said, "Mary is going to have a very special baby and you should name him Jesus."

When Joseph woke up from his dream, he wasn't worried anymore. Joseph and Mary had a wonderful wedding. Time passed, and one day Mary had a beautiful baby boy.

Joseph gently picked the baby up and rocked back and forth.

Joseph hummed a little lullaby and then said, "I have been keeping a special name ready for you. Your name is Jesus." When Joseph held baby Jesus, he knew that God's love was right there with them.

## Good News Bell

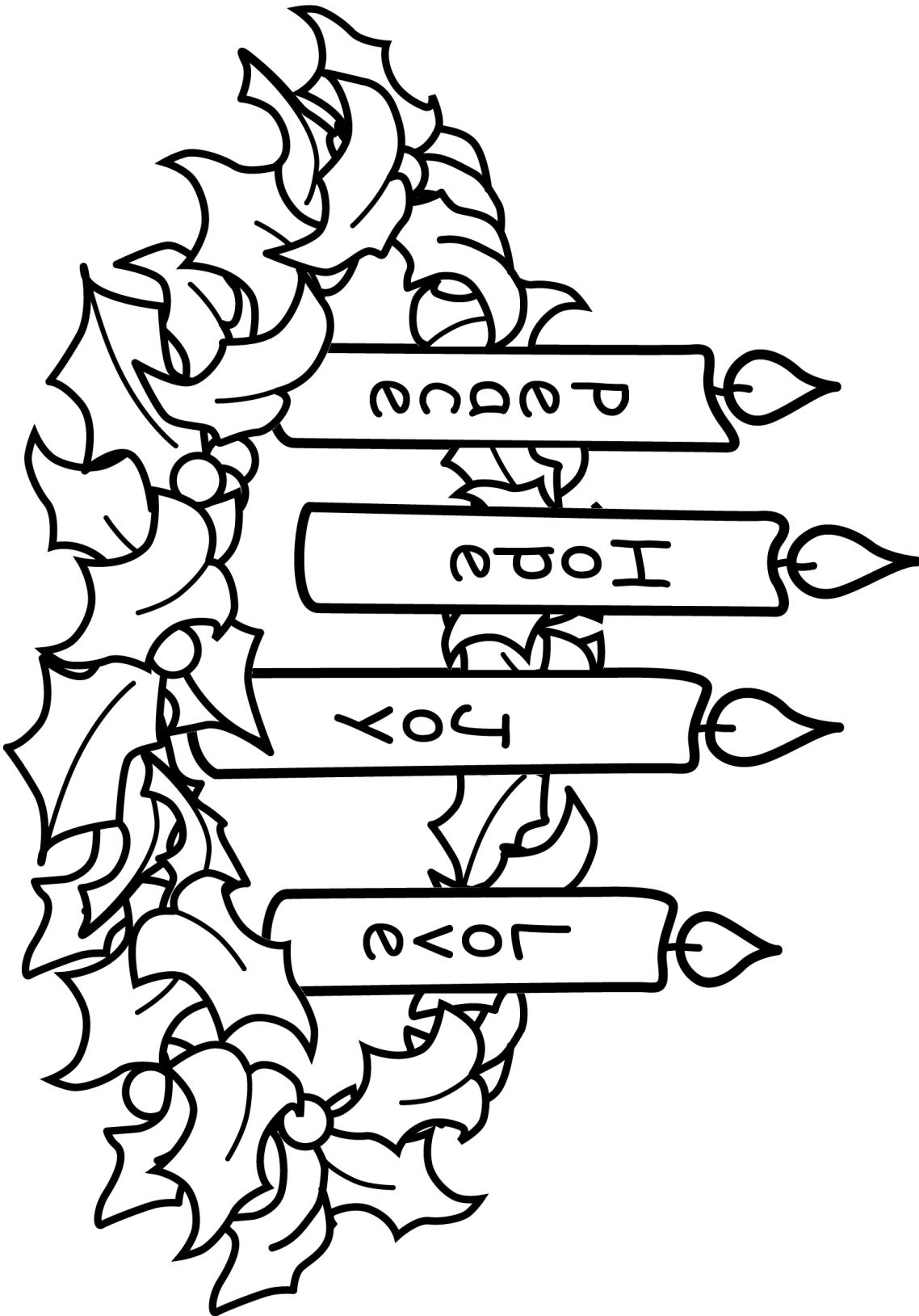
**You will need** disposable paper cup, Christmas self-adhesive stickers, one long pipe cleaner, permanent marker, tinsel, kitchen foil (optional), jingle bell.

### Directions

1. Push a small hole in the base of the paper cup.
2. Loop the pipe cleaner through the hole to create a hanger, twist the ends inside the cup to prevent the hanger from coming loose.
3. Use a permanent marker to print a message such as, "Celebrate Joseph's good news" on the outside of the cup.
4. Attach a jingle bell to the end of the pipe cleaner inside the cup.
5. **Option:** Cover the cup with kitchen foil before decorating with stickers.



Decorate the picture of the Advent wreath below. Each candle is labelled. Decorate the three candles that have the words, "Peace," "Hope," and "Love" with purple or blue markers or crayons. Decorate the candle that has the word "Joy" with pink. Draw a heart around the candle with the word, "Love."



*Emmanuel! God is with us.*

