Christmas Fund liturgy

This is a text version of the electronic worship resources are available, including ready-to-use Power Point presentations at www.christmasfund.org.

Advent Candle lighting

*Advent Candle Lighting resources are provided in multiple leader or single voice leader formats. There is also an optional reflection piece that allows for congregational personalization and participation.*

Week One: Hope – The Prophet Isaiah – Isaiah 2:1-5

*Multiple Voices (Leader 1 and Leader 2) and Congregation:*

L1 Isaiah’s people probably thought he was peculiar – even for a priest.

L2 I am pretty sure we would find him unsettling, too. He had a habit of pacing the King’s courts, yelling out his dreams:

L1 “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks…O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”

L2 But then it happened. In the midst of the occupation of Israel, in all the darkness of the first century, the dreams of the eccentric young priest came true.

God’s light was born.

And people actually *followed* it.

L1 And now we call Isaiah a prophet.

L2 By speaking his dreams of a better future, Isaiah bore the light of God in the darkness. He brought HOPE.

*\*Optional Reflection from page 15 may be inserted here.*

L1 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who followed the light of Hope – the mentors and medics, poets and pastors – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. May their lives remind us that we light the candle of HOPE knowing Isaiah’s words are not just prophecy but – promise?

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these prophets in spreading the light of Hope beyond these doors. Amen.

*One Voice (Leader) and Congregation:*

L Isaiah’s people probably thought he was peculiar – even for a priest. I am pretty sure we would find him unsettling, too. He had a habit of pacing the King’s courts, yelling out his dreams:

All “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks…O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”

L But then it happened. In the midst of the occupation of Israel, in all the darkness of the first century, the dreams of the eccentric young priest came true.

God’s light was born. And people actually followed it.  
So now we call Isaiah a prophet. By speaking his dreams of a better future, Isaiah bore the light of God in the darkness. He brought HOPE.

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[Light blue candle of HOPE]

All This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these prophets in spreading the light of Hope beyond these doors. Amen.

Week Two: Peace – John the Baptist – Matthew 3:1-12

*Multiple Voices (L1 and L2) and Congregation:*

L1 Did you know the Christmas story has two Miracle Babies?

L2 Of course the angel Gabriel appeared first to his father, not his mother, and his parents were too old, not too young.

L1 But from the time when Mary visited and he started kicking in his mother’s womb, John the Baptist was a sign that Isaiah’s HOPE was happening.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

L2 Judea had been conquered by soldiers. The people of John’s day were overworked, underfed, and angry. But John didn’t preach rebellion. He preached metanoia (met-uh-noi-uh) – transformation, conversion, repentance.

L1 “Change your life!” he said. “God’s Realm is here!”

L2 And it was. John the Baptist bore the light of God in the darkness because he poured out God’s holy waters of forgiveness, and brought PEACE – one soaking tunic at a time.

*\*Optional Reflection from page 15 may be inserted here.*

L1 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who followed the light of Peace – the activists and administrators, mediators and ministers – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. May their lives remind us that we light the candle of PEACE knowing John’s pathway to peace begins right here – with each one of us.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these peacemakers in spreading the light of Peace beyond these doors. Amen.

*One Voice (L) and Congregation:*

L Did you know the Christmas story has two Miracle Babies? Of course the angel Gabriel appeared first to his father, not his mother, and his parents were too old, not too young.

But from the time when Mary visited and he started kicking in his mother’s womb, John the Baptist was a sign that Isaiah’s HOPE was happening.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

Judea had been conquered by soldiers. The people of John’s day were overworked, underfed, and angry. But John didn’t preach rebellion. He preached metanoia (met-uh-noi-uh) – transformation, conversion, repentance. He cried out,

All “Change your life! God’s Realm is here!”

L And it was. John the Baptist bore the light of God in the darkness because he poured out God’s holy waters of forgiveness, and brought PEACE – one soaking tunic at a time.

*\*Optional Reflection from page 15 may be inserted here.*

L Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who followed the light of Peace – the activists and administrators, mediators and ministers – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. May their lives remind us that we light the candle of PEACE knowing John’s pathway to peace begins right here – with each one of us.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

All This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these peacemakers in spreading the light of Peace beyond these doors. Amen.

Week Three: Joy – Mary of Nazareth – Luke 1:47-55

*Multiple Voices (L1 and L2) and Congregation:*

L1 Parents, if you want your kids to stay out of trouble, you should leave now.

L2 Just ask Mary’s parents. They warned her about everything: strangers, boys.

L1 But they forgot to warn her about God.

And God is the biggest trouble of all.

L2 One minute you will have a normal, moody teenager, and the next you will have a religious revolutionary – pregnant with God.

L1 When you worry about what the neighbors will say, she will remind you that, “God has scattered the proud.”

L2 And no matter what the world expects, or how hard life gets, she will declare only, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”

L1 And it will. Because she will have the HOPE of Isaiah, passed down through the generations.

[Light blue candle of HOPE.]

L2 And the PEACE of John, poured over her in baptism.

[Light blue candle of PEACE.]

L1 And, confident in herself, she will have faith that God is most visible in the dark. Following Mary, she will carry the light of God into the darkness with her JOY.

*\*Optional Reflection from page 15 may be inserted here.*

L2 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who followed the light of JOY – the deacons and dancers, musicians and missionaries – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. As we light the candle of JOY, may their lives remind us that it is not only Mary’s darkness that gives birth to God, but also our own.

[Light pink candle of JOY]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these faithful ones in spreading the light of Joy beyond these doors. Amen.

*One Voice (L) and Congregation:*

L Parents, if you want your kids to stay out of trouble, you should leave now. Just ask Mary’s parents. They warned her about everything: strangers, boys. But they forgot to warn her about God. And God is the biggest trouble of all.

One minute you will have a normal, moody teenager, and the next you will have a religious revolutionary – pregnant with God. When you worry about what the neighbors will say, she will remind you,

All “God has scattered the proud.”

L And no matter what the world expects, or how hard life gets, she will reply only,

All “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”

L And it will. Because she will have the HOPE of Isaiah, passed down through the generations.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

And the PEACE of John, poured over her in baptism.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

And, confident in herself, she will have faith that God is most visible in the dark. Following Mary, she will carry the light of God into the darkness with her JOY.

*\*Optional Reflection from page 15 may be inserted here.*

L Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who followed the light of Joy – the deacons and dancers, musicians and missionaries – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. As we light the candle of JOY, may their lives remind us that it is not only Mary’s darkness that gives birth to God, but also our own.

[Light pink candle of JOY]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these faithful ones in spreading the light of Joy beyond these doors. Amen.

Week Four: Love – Joseph – Matthew 1:18-25

*Multiple Voices (L1 and L2) and Congregation:*

L1 The townspeople must have thought he was a gambler. How else could he wager his wrecked heart on the woman who had broken it?

L2 But Joseph had something the others didn’t. He had the knowledge that it might hurt but, with God, LOVE is never risky…at least not in the long term.

L1 He also had the HOPE of Isaiah, promising a bright future.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

L2 And the PEACE of John, leading him to forgive.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

L1 And how could he ignore Mary’s JOY?

[Light pink candle of JOY]

L2 Joseph bore the light of God in the darkness because he loved – unreservedly and unabashedly – when others would have been too afraid.

L1 Thanks to him, Jesus’s understanding of God was as a parent who took you in and loved you, no matter who – or whose – you were.

*\*Optional Reflection from page 16 may be inserted here.*

L2 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all those who have been the light of Love – the camp leaders and caseworkers, teachers and preachers – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. May their lives remind us, as we light the candle of LOVE, that it has the power to illuminate even the darkest of places – our broken hearts.

[Light blue candle of LOVE]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these leaders in spreading the light of Love beyond these doors. Amen.

*One Voice (L) and Congregation:*

L The townspeople must have thought he was a gambler. How else could he wager his wrecked heart on the woman who had broken it? But Joseph had something the others didn’t. He had the knowledge that it might hurt but, with God, LOVE is never risky…at least not in the long term.

He also had the HOPE of Isaiah, promising a bright future.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

And the PEACE of John, leading him to forgive.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

And how could he ignore Mary’s JOY?

[Light pink candle of JOY]

Joseph bore the light of God in the darkness because he loved – unreservedly and unabashedly – when others would have been too afraid. Thanks to him, Jesus’s understanding of God was as a parent who took you in and loved you, no matter who – or whose – you were.

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All We give thanks for all those who have been the light of Love – the camp leaders and caseworkers, teachers and preachers – who lived it and carried it right down through the ages to today. May their lives remind us, as we light the candle of LOVE, that it has the power to illuminate even the darkest of places – our broken hearts.

[Light blue candle of LOVE]

All: This week, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to join these leaders in spreading the light of Love beyond these doors. Amen.

Christmas!

*for use on Christmas Eve or the Sunday After*

*Multiple Voices (L1 and L2) and Congregation:*

L1 Later, there would be questions…

L2 …why them? why there?

L1 Later, there would be visitors…

L2 …relatives, friends, and strange strangers.

L1 Later, there would be celebration…

L2 …choirs of little angels, and well-intentioned gifts.

L1 But right in that moment…

All Right in this moment…

L2 It was just them…

All It is just us…

L1 …and God.

L2 Let us pray.

[Time of Silent Prayer]

L1 God, we give you thanks for all those who, like Isaiah, believed in a better future.

All Their lives give us HOPE.

[Light blue candle of HOPE.]

L2 Help us to recall the hands that, like John, showered us with the waters of your grace.

All Their lives lead us to PEACE.

[Light blue candle of PEACE.]

L1 We light this candle in remembrance of the people who, like Mary, taught us to see you in the darkness.

All Their lives bring us JOY.

[Light pink candle of JOY]

L2 And, for all those who, like Joseph, welcomed us as a parent, no matter who we were or what we had done, we ask your blessing.

All Their lives teach us that LOVE always wins.

[Light blue candle of LOVE]

Amen.

L1 There have been many before us who have borne your light, bringing the sacred Christmas story to life in each new generation.

L2 These are the ones who have been our witness, calling out to us in our longest night, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy!”

L1 They have been ministers and missionaries, disciples and deacons, youth pastors, lay leaders, and saints of the church.

*\*Optional Reflection from page 16 may be inserted here.*

L2 Let us pray.

All We give thanks for all who have borne your light, God. May we remember the faces and names of all those we have known who lived your light, who carried it and passed it down right through the ages to this moment, now, as we light the final candle, the candle of CHRIST.

[Light the white CHRIST candle]

All For all those whose lives have been beacons in our darkness, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to be the same for them and others. May your light of Christ be born not simply to us, but in us – all – this night. Amen.

*One Voice (L) and Congregation:*

L Later, there would be questions…

All …why them? why there?

L Later, there would be visitors…

All …relatives, friends, and strange strangers.

L Later, there would be celebration…

All …choirs of little angels, and well-intentioned gifts.

L But right in that moment…

All Right in this moment…

L It was just them…

All It is just us…

L …and God. Let us pray.

[Time of Silent Prayer]

L God, we give you thanks for all those who, like Isaiah, believed in a better future.

All Their lives give us HOPE.

[Light blue candle of HOPE]

L Help us to recall the hands that, like John, showered us with the waters of your grace.

All Their lives lead us to PEACE.

[Light blue candle of PEACE]

L We light this candle in remembrance of the people who, like Mary, taught us to see you in the darkness.

All Their lives bring us JOY.

[Light pink candle of JOY]

L And, for all of those who, like Joseph, welcomed us as a parent, no matter who we were or what we had done, we ask your blessing.

All Their lives teach us that LOVE always wins.

[Light blue candle of LOVE]

Amen.

L There have been many before us who have borne your light, bringing the sacred Christmas story to life in each new generation. These are the ones who have been our witness, calling out to us in our longest night,

All “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy!”

L They have been ministers and missionaries, disciples and deacons, youth pastors, lay leaders, and saints of the church.

*\*Optional Reflection from page 16 may be inserted here.*

L Let us pray.

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[Light the white CHRIST candle]

All For all those whose lives have been beacons in our darkness, we covenant with you, God, and with each other, to be the same for them and others. May your light of Christ be born not simply to us, but in us – all – this night. Amen.

OPTIONAL REFLECTIONS FOR ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

*for congregational personalization and participation*

Week 1—Hope

L As in the time of Isaiah, the world is still dark and in need of hope. Where do you see the need for hope?

All (Call out the places in your life and community where you see the need for hope. Examples: We need hope for those in the darkness of disease; for the problem of unemployment.)

L But, like Isaiah, there are people who give us HOPE. This week, (fill in the blank) gives me hope.

*(Example: a peaceful family Thanksgiving dinner!)*

Who has helped you see or experience hope this week?

All (Call out the people in your life and community who have helped you see or experience hope.)

Week 2—Peace

L As in the time of John, the world is still dark and in need of peace. Where do you see the need for peace?

All (Call out the places in your life and community where you see the need for peace. Examples: We need peace in our relationships; we need peace to illuminate the darkness of poverty.)

L But, like John, we have also seen people working for PEACE. This week, I see peace in (fill in the blank). (Examples: our exchange student; in my child’s “big sister” mentor.)

Who has helped you see or experience peace this week?

All (Call out the people in your life and community who have helped you see or experience peace.)

Week 3—Joy

L As in the time of Mary, the world is still dark and in need of joy. Where do you see the need for joy?

All (Call out the places in your life and community where you see the need for joy. Examples: for those who are in mourning; for those for whom the holidays are hard.)

L But, like Mary, there are those who have helped us see JOY. This week, I see joy in (fill in the blank).

*(Examples: the way kids like boxes more than presents; the time I got to spend*  *with my mother before she died.)*

Who has helped you see or experience joy this week?

All (Call out the people in your life and community who have helped you see or experience joy.)

Week 4—Love

L As in the time of Joseph, the world is still dark and in need of love. Where do you see the need for love?

All (Call out the places in your life and community where you see the need for love. Examples: those who are not able to be home for Christmas; those going through a divorce.)

L But, like Joseph, we have also seen an abundance of LOVE. This week, (fill in the blank) has helped me see love. (Example: my minister visiting those who are homebound.)

Who has helped you see or experience love this week?

All (Call out the people in your life and community who have helped you see or experience love.)

Christmas!

L For me, it was (fill in the blank) who showed me the light of God. Who was it for you? Call it out!

All (Call out the people in your life – mentors and relief workers, etc. – who have shown you the light of God. Example: the Rev. Fischer, my childhood minister.)

Calls to the Offering  
*for use on Christmas Eve, the Sunday After, or any Sunday*

*Call to the Offering for Christmas Eve or Christmas*

L “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks!”

All Like Isaiah, they gave us Hope.

L “Change your life!” they preached. “God’s Realm is here!”

All Like John, they taught us Peace.

L “My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior!”

All Like Mary, they brought us Joy, even in the darkest places.

L When others walked away,

All Like Joseph, they stayed with us in Love.

L Today we give our money to support our congregation and community as well as a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ called the Christmas Fund. For over 111 years, the Christmas Fund has been there to be a light of Christ to our United Church of Christ clergy and lay employees who are facing difficult financial situations. The Christmas Fund gives direct support so that retired and active church workers will have quality health care and an adequate monthly income in retirement, as well as emergency assistance when those big burdens come up at any point in life.

They gave their lives bringing us the light of God.

All What we do now is give of our livelihoods, that they might receive that light back.

L The offering will now be given and received.

*Call to the Offering for the Sunday After Christmas*

2,181,561 is the number of dollars the Christmas Fund distributed to active and retired clergy and lay leaders in 2012.

1,344,635 is the number of dollars that went to meeting basic needs.

228 is the number of leaders who relied on the Christmas Fund for health care subsidies.

45 is the number of families who received emergency grants.

Over 1,000 is the number of households who received God’s message of new life from the Christmas Fund last year.

But the mystery we proclaim this day is:

1 is the number of people it will take to do it again.

1 is the number of people it takes for God to spread this message of light and life to the whole world.

Because that one person…is you.

The light of Christ is in our hands. It is in the dedication of our lives – and our livelihoods – to bearing – and being – the light of Christ.

The offering will now be given and received.

*Call to the Offering for Any Sunday*

They were with your mother when she died.

They have held your hands, your babies, and your secrets.

When you pledged your vows to your beloved, it was at their prompting.

When you weren’t able to travel to Oklahoma or Newtown…when you couldn’t be with the victims of Sandy or Irene…they were the body of Christ to and for all of us.

When you couldn’t find the money for the heat, they could.

For our active and retired leaders in the same situation, let us now do the same.

Today we give our money to support our congregation and community as well as a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ called the Christmas Fund. For over 111 years, the Christmas Fund has been there to be a light of Christ to our United Church of Christ clergy and lay employees who are facing difficult financial situations. The Christmas Fund gives direct support so that retired and active church workers will have quality health care and an adequate monthly income in retirement, as well as emergency assistance when those big burdens come up at any point in life.

They gave their lives bringing us the light of God.

What we do now is give of our livelihoods, that they might receive that light back.

The offering will now be given and received.

Prayers of Dedication

*Christmas Eve*

We have followed the magi, the wise ones, to this point, right up to the cradle, where we place our very hearts down at your wrinkly, baby feet, praying that somehow…somehow…this gift will express our praise, express our gratitude for the miracles of this night – the miracles of flesh and bone and life and breath. We place our very hearts down, praying that the miracle of this night might transform us, just as it has transformed all the wise ones who we have followed. They bore their gifts to you, God, and in so doing, bore your gifts to us. As we give our lives, this night, to your light, we pray that we might also give your light to their lives. Not simply this night, but always. Amen.

*Prayer of Dedication for the Sunday After Christmas*

(Can be read in unison, or split into call/response)

Holy one, we give you thanks:

For the insight of Isaiah

…and all your servants who have hoped for your realm on earth, as it is in heaven.

For the work of John

…and all your servants who have prepared us for your way of peace.

For the wonder of Mary

…and all your servants who have taught our hearts to sing with joy.

For the faithfulness of Joseph

…and all your servants who have grounded us in love.

In our gratitude, we bring the very best gifts we have

…we bring ourselves.

That we might know the light of the Christ child

…and carry it to all your servants who are in need this day.

Amen.

*Prayer of Dedication, Any Sunday*

Before you now, God, rests our money. Before you now, God, rest little green pieces of paper – our present for the one who literally has it all. But they have your name on them; and we do, indeed, trust that in your hands, they can be so much more. So take our hands, God, and turn them into your hands. Take this offering, take our very lives this day and whisper your blessing on them, that we might be your people, your hope and peace, your joy and love, and especially your light, to your faithful servants – and to a whole world – just waiting to be made new. Amen.

Offering Ourselves as Points of Light  
*for use on Christmas Eve, the Sunday After, or any Sunday*

As a way of making visible and tangible the covenants you are making, make “offering cards” and place one in every bulletin each Sunday of Advent. Immediately following the Advent candle lighting liturgy, or during the time of offering, invite congregants to write on the card their promises – how they will be “points of light” that week – and place their cards into the offering basket.

Praying over them, displaying them on a bulletin board, or making a “chain of light” (by stapling, taping, or gluing them into interlocking circles) will be a visual reminder of the growing anticipation – and the growing light – of Advent.

On Christmas Eve, or the Sunday after Christmas, use the provided Christmas Fund envelopes instead. Giving to support our clergy and lay leaders in need is the covenant!

*Sample offering card. Reproducible cards are available at* www.christmasfund.org

AUTHOR Of Worship Resources

Our special thanks to the Rev. Elissa Johnk, the author of the 2013 Christmas Fund worship resources. Rev. Johnk serves as Senior Pastor of the Old Meeting House in East Montpelier Center, Vermont.

Elissa grew up in Iowa and is a graduate of Wellesley College and Harvard Divinity School. While at Harvard, she received a presidential scholarship and an award for Excellence in Liturgical Reading of Scripture. Previously, she has served as the Pastoral Resident at the Wellesley Congregational Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts, through a two-year grant from the Lilly Endowment’s Transition into Ministry Program. She also has held a ministerial internship at the Old South Church in Boston, served as a chaplain intern, worked with Habitat for Humanity, and as a Fulbright ambassador in Korea. Elissa is currently a member of the Class of 2023 in the Next Generation Leadership Initiative: Target 2030, the Pension Boards’ leadership development program for young clergy. She is also a writer for the United Church of Christ’s “Feed Your Spirit” webpage, including, at times, the Daily Devotional.