

## Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy

1 Advent 3 December 2017

**Song:** sing verses 1 and 2 of “Light a Candle in a Darkened Place” by Care Stainsby

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

*<sup>4</sup> I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup> For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— <sup>6</sup> God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. <sup>8</sup> He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Regardless of the persecution Paul suffered, God is rich in faithfulness and love; which by turn keeps us strengthened as we walk with God and as we follow God’s guidance and leading. As we meditate on God’s faithfulness this season, let us, like Paul, have hearts full of encouragement towards those we serve, lead and shepherd. May we humble ourselves before the Lord, put others first and open our eyes to those who need uplifting and encouragement, and may we open our hearts and arms to embrace all with the love of the Lord.

The circumstances on the ground continue to be difficult in this part of the world, and around the world, however; we have a great mission to present ourselves blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since God has called us into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ, then surely, we are also called to fellowship with one another through Christ.

**Light the 1<sup>st</sup> candle.**

*Let us pray, “come Lord Jesus, transform us in God’s image in order that we can faithfully reach out to all in need. This Advent, prepare our lives for your amazing grace to be realized in us, so that we can stand for justice and love in this world.” Amen.*

**Written by** Michael Arteen who is serving with the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church serving as chaplain at Bethlehem Bible College.

**Candle lighting liturgy** provided by the Methodist Liaison office in Jerusalem, through the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, The Methodist Church of Great Britain, and the World Methodist Council of Churches.

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## Candle Lighting

2 Advent 10 December 2017

**Song:** sing verses 1 and 3 of “Light a Candle in a Darkened Place” by Care Stainsby

Prophets are needed today in our world, in our churches. They awaken us to realities that we would rather stay hidden. They challenge our comfort and complacency and, as Jesus did, turn our worlds upside down. And because of that, they are usually rejected and marginalized. Their words are difficult to hear, and yet...

*Isaiah 40:1-2 “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended...”*

What I see are words of tenderness, comfort, gentleness, of not being afraid. Words of love and hope. Every day, as I walk the streets of East Jerusalem, I feel the noose tightening. I hear stories from locals of how difficult life is becoming, of their despair as they have less and less cause for hope. And what do I have to offer? What candle can I light in this dark time and place?

What is your candle? How are you a light in the darkness?

**Light the 2<sup>nd</sup> candle.**

**Let us pray.** *Lord, our realities are difficult. Despair and lack of hope wherever we look. But you brought a Light into the darkness and have promised that the darkness will not overcome it. For this we give you thanks and praise. Amen.*

**Written by** Tina Whitehead, a member of the Western Pennsylvania United Methodist Conference, Individual Volunteer serving in Palestine and Israel for 11 years.

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## Candle Lighting

### 3 Advent 17 December 2017

**Song:** sing verses 1 and 4 of “Light a Candle in a Darkened Place” by Care Stainsby

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-22**

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.*

**Pray without ceasing...**

Did we include time to rejoice, time to pray, in our lists?

Life under occupation (limited access to sufficient supply of clean water, to reliable electricity, and to freedom of movement), life in our own contexts, do we realize how people are living in other places around the world? Do we realize how people are living today in the place where Jesus was born? Jesus was born in a place which was occupied by the Roman empire... the people were praying for a savior; the people were praying for something to change. Today we continue to pray for salvation and for life circumstances to change for the better, for justice and peace to prevail in all the world.

As we journey through Advent, Bethlehem, and places around the world, people seek moments to shine, to share joy and life. The challenges of barriers, walls, check points, lack of clean water, etc. may for a moment be on hold, as the joy of anticipation in welcoming the Christ Child fills the hearts of people here and around the world. We pray. We pray for God’s transformation. We pray for a world in need. We pray, we rejoice always!

**Light the 3<sup>rd</sup> candle.**

*Let us pray, Amazing and gracious God, help us to seek joy in the midst of life’s challenges. Help us find real time to pray, in order that we may listen to your call on our lives and be transformed by your love and grace. Amen.*

**Written by** Rev. Kristen L. Brown, Methodist Liaison in Palestine and Israel, serving through the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church

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## Candle Lighting

### 4 Advent 24 December 2017

**Song:** sing verses 1 and 5 of "Light a Candle in a Darkened Place" by Care Stainsby

***Luke 1:30-35** But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*

Mary isn't the only one.

As I look at this world- the violence and the oppression, the injustice and the poverty- I, too, start to question. When I look at my own life- my unmet desires and relational challenges, my personal struggles that threaten to swallow me up- the questions of 'how?' stream from my mouth. "How will the lion lay with the lamb? How will the captives be set free? How will You be my refuge? How will it all be okay?"

I'm sure I'm not the only one.

Though we all question, I think we can learn something from Mary. Even in her fear and confusion, her question was grounded in faith. She did not ask if it was possible. She did not ask if it would really happen. She did not even ask why she was chosen. She trusted that it would be, even though she did not understand how.

"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

As I ask my questions, I will do so in faith, believing that the fruit of my labor together with the power of God's love, will bring forth God's great vision.

**Light the 4<sup>th</sup> candle.**

***Let us pray,** Lord, renew our faith in your promise and allow us to participate in your vision. Ignite the Holy Spirit in us and overshadow us with your presence. Amen.*

**Written by** Elizabeth Heft, a United Methodist Global Ministries Missionary serving as a teacher and mentor at Jerusalem School Bethlehem. She also serves at the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem, connecting with locals and internationals, helping them to see the complexity of this place.

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## Candle Lighting

Christmas Eve 24 December 2017

**Song:** sing verses 1 and 6 of "Light a Candle in a Darkened Place" by Care Stainsby

**Luke 2:8-20, 10-11, 20**

*"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'... And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."*

In the village of the night watchers, down the hill from Bethlehem, the shepherds were gathered... and behold the most amazing news they had ever heard was given to them by the angels.

One of my friends likes to remind people that this message came to the simple ordinary people. The shepherds... it was not given to one, but to many... they had a big choice to make. They responded by walking uphill to Bethlehem with joy, anticipation and wonder in their hearts... would they see the new born child? How would their lives change in those moments?

They returned with joy and praise... they returned with the big news of the anticipation of hope, not knowing fully what would happen, but believing that indeed God was doing something different through the life of this child we know as Jesus!

### **Light the Christ candle.**

*Let us pray, "May the anticipation of hope and justice be realized through the transforming life in Jesus Christ. This Christmas, prepare our lives for your amazing grace to be realized in us, so that we can stand for justice and love in this world." Amen.*

**Written by** Rev. Kristen L. Brown, Methodist Liaison in Palestine and Israel, serving through the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church

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## Candle Lighting

Christmas Morning 16 December 2017

**Song:** sing verses 1 and 6 of "Light a Candle in a Darkened Place" by Care Stainsby

**John 1:5** *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."*

Bethlehem can be a darkened place that needs candles of hope lit to burn brightly.

Christmas brings something new each year. Manger square is packed. The bands play, people come from all over the world to spend Christmas in the very place where the birth really happened. Jesus being born here was God giving hope to a place and a time that also seemed pretty hopeless. But that birth gives hope to every age and every time. God has lit God's flame of love and though history has so often attempted to blot it out, that flame of love burns on. Today it burns on.

Of course not everyone can come to Bethlehem. The fears and frustrations of this town cannot be felt by everyone. But wherever we are, we need the hope that God sustains. His Kingdom is coming - Jesus is a herald of it and that is at the heart of the Good News of which the angels sang here on Christmas night.

Jesus is born, born anew in every heart that hears the message of that Good News. Yes as the Hymn says, "God has lit his flame of love, through his Son from Heaven above. So let it burn."

Will you let it burn in your heart this Christmas Day?

**Light the Christ candle.**

*Let us pray, Lord give new hope to us this Christmas. We need hope of better times here in Bethlehem. We need your hope all over the world. So may your light of love truly shine out from every one of us this Christmas. Amen.*

**Written by** Rev. John Howard, a Mission Partner of the Methodist Church in Britain, serving in the Methodist Liaison Office, Jerusalem.

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