Advent Series: Hope Is on the Way

This seven-week series for the beginning of Advent through Epiphany Sunday is based on the Gospel readings from Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary, and emphasizes themes of watchfulness, looking backwards and forwards in time (at the same time), joyful repentance, trust, and hope.

Advent is a season of anticipation as we spend a lot of time with prophecy from Christ and John the Baptist, so when it comes to building up the Christmas theme in hymns and preaching - pace yourself. Remember, Advent is a season of past and future collision in the present ... A time of already here (as in Christ did come and is here) and not yet (Christ will come again). If you focus on Christmas too early, you miss the point of the season.

# December 1: “Managing Un-expectations” Matthew 24:36-44

**Key verse:** Matt 24:44 - “[Jesus says] Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”
**Key words:** prophecy (Jesus prophesies his own arrival!!), watchfulness, readiness
**Theme:** Jesus, close to the end of his earthly life, prophesies another beginning. Jesus, the Messiah, tells the people to watch out for the Messiah. Jesus goes meta. An excellent introduction to the Advent theme of past and future colliding in the present and the difficulty of living in expectation while not being quite sure what to expect.

## Lighting the Candle of Expectation

It was Jesus Christ himself that told us to be ready at any time.
So, today we remember that call. The call to look for God in unexpected places, at unexpected times.
And even though we wait, we can expect Our Savior to show.
This morning, we light the Candle of Expectation.
**Let this fire remind us that while we wait for the Lord, truly the Lord is already here.
Hope is here. Love is here. Family is here.**
Call to WorshipWe gather this morning as a people waiting for the Lord.
**The one who died, rose, and will come again.**Yes, this is the truth, and the great mystery of our faith!
**Yes! Lord Jesus, come into our hearts again this Advent Season!**
Call to Confession
Everlasting God, we confess that we haven’t been watching. We haven’t been looking out for you. Like a thief in the night, you could pass us by and we would never know. We have forgotten to look for you in the faces of our children, of the homeless around us, in the immigrants who struggle as they serve even us. Forgive us, we pray, and make us ready to greet you in everyone we see on the street as we leave this place. Amen.

# December 8: “We Work While We Wait” Matthew 3:1-12

**Key verse:** Matt 3:2 - "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."
**Key words:** Promise, strength, hope, readiness, repentance
**Theme:** We journey backwards to before Jesus’ baptism, to John the Baptist prophesying the Messiah’s coming – a Messiah already here. Now is the time to get right with God, to prepare ourselves for the kingdom that is coming, the kingdom already here.

Lighting the Candle of Prophecy
John the called on God’s people to repent, for the Messiah was near.
The people had prayed for it, yet they didn’t see the one they had been waiting for was truly among them.
That prophecy was being fulfilled in their midst.
This morning, we light the Candle of Prophecy
**Let this fire remind us that while we wait for the Lord, truly the Lord is already here.
Hope is here. Love is here. Family is here.**
Call to Worship
Today we to turn to God.
**Lord, have mercy on us!**The Kingdom of Heaven is near.
**Lord, help us to spread the good news!**
Call to Confession
Merciful God, though your prophets still call out to us, millennia later, we still don’t change our lives. As John the Baptist shouts to the people, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven as come near!”, we know that you are here, and still we don’t change. Still we don’t hear the cries of the needy, still we don’t prioritize serving the poor, and still we refuse to meet the needs of those who are truly hungry and thirsty around us. And yet, merciful God, you still count on us to carry out your mission, you still encourage us to follow you, you still are near. Help us, Lord, as we seek your way. Amen.

# December 15: “Hope in the King” Matthew 11:2-11

**Key verse:** Matt 11:3 - [John in prison asks] "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"
**Key words:** Joyful repentance, fulfillment, hope
**Theme:** The ministry of John the Baptist is validated in Christ. The hopes in John’s heart are fulfilled in the statements of Jesus, the one the world had been waiting for – who was, who is, who is to come. Our hearts quicken and expectations rise as the time of Christ’s appearance draws closer.

Lighting the Candle of Hope
Even John the Baptist asked Jesus, “Are you the one we’ve been waiting for?”
All of the hopes and dreams of God’s children were wrapped up in that question.
And the answer was, yes, the Hope of the Nations was there, and is here.
This morning, we light the Candle of Hope.
**Let this fire remind us that while we wait for the Lord, truly the Lord is already here.
Hope is here. Love is here. Family is here.**
Call to Worship
Together, let us be a people unafraid to hope!
**Christ comes to us in the unexpected!**Let us keep the faith together – that Christ will come again.
**Lord, keep us on the straight and narrow path that leads to you!**
Call to Confession
Our Lord and Our Hope, we know that we often fail you. We forget to watch. We forget to wait. We make the holiday season more about ourselves than sharing the hope that only you can bring. We get so caught up in what we’re supposed to get this season, we forget what we’re called to give. Help us to remember that this season is about the message and ministry of your son, Jesus Christ, the one who came to heal, liberate, and share the good news of your faithful love. Call us to be faithful only to you this season. Amen.

# December 22: “A Surprise Adoption” Matthew 1:18-25

**Key Verse:** Matt 1:20 - "But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."
**Key words:** Trust, Faith, Christmas
**Theme:** What about Joseph? Here we have the more rarely-read birth narrative from Matthew, focused on the choices of Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph. What can his awkward circumstance tell us about keeping the faith, trusting even when we do not understand?

Lighting the Candle of Joy
As we wait for Emmanuel, God with us to arrive, we remember the fears of his earthly parents.
We remember the commitment of Joseph, we remember the commitment of Mary.
We remember that the Lord sent angels to comfort and to guide – with joy.
In that spirit of joy, of expectation and hope, we light the Candle of Joy.
**Let this fire remind us that while we wait for the Lord, truly the Lord is already here.
Hope is here. Love is here. Family is here.**
Call to Worship
With joy we call Emmanuel down to meet with us this morning!
**Christ be with us!**Through the birth of Christ, we know God’s love for us.
**Thanks be to God!**
Call to Confession
God of our salvation and author of our hope, it’s hard for us to see the blessings you have for us. We think that our plans are better, that the things and desires of the world are higher than your ways. You, Lord, are the great interrupter and sometimes we can feel inconvenienced by the calls you put on us to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with you. Remind us that this season that leads to Christmas wouldn’t be here at all if it weren’t for you loving this world that you made. Thank you for loving us, God. Amen.

# December 24: “Hope Has Arrived” Luke 2:1-20

**Key verse:** Luke 2:10-11 - “But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”
**Key words:** Christmas, watchfulness, peace, love, hope, joy
**Theme:** The shepherds were awake to receive the good news, while the rest of the world was asleep. Let us open our eyes to the truth of God with us, seeing and living in that hope, even when others do not.

Lighting the Christ Candle
With this lighting of the Christ Candle we rejoice with prophets, angels, and Mary and Joseph in welcoming Christ!
**Our hope has arrived!**
Thank you God, for sending us your Son.
**May this light remind us of the hope we all carry because you love the whole world!**

# December 29: “We Are Family” Hebrews 2:10-18

**Key verse:** Hebrews 2:17 - “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.”
**Key words:** Family, Christmas
**Theme:** In Paul’s writings, he looks at Christ’s life, Christ who called us brother and sister with him as we are children of the Father. Christ our teacher also called us family. Immanuel is even more real to us as we experience God with us in the form of a Christ who is like us and walks the human road along with us.

Call to Worship
Through the birth of Christ …
**… God stands with us.**Through the raising of Christ by Mary and Joseph …
**… God shows faith in us.**
We are all family in Christ, and with Christ.
**Thanks be to God, for this amazing news!**

# January 5 [Epiphany Sunday] “What gift did God bring?” John 1:1-18

**Key verse:** John 1:16 – “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”
**Key words:** Giving, New Year, Beginnings
**Theme:** Since the beginning of all things, God has been giving to us. And God hasn't stopped giving to us. God’s grace is made new every day, filling us with hope to live each day in the promises of God.

Call to Worship
The Word of God has been with us from the start!
**Praise the Lord!**The Word of God is with us even now!
**Praise the Lord!**May the Lord’s grace and peace be with us in the start of this New Year!
**Amen!**