



Advent 2022 to Epiphany 2023
At Home Worship Guide



RESTORATION

is *Near*



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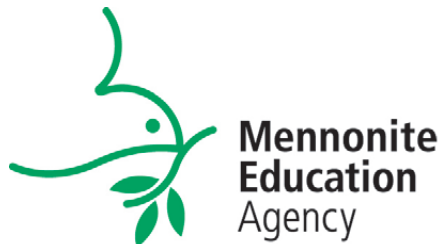
Advent 2022 to Epiphany 2023
At Home Worship Guide

Advent to Epiphany At Home 2022
November 27, 2022 through January 8, 2023

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Where do you see God's love incarnate? Where do you see a need for restoration? Who are the wise ones, the people seeking to be witnesses to the incarnation of God?

- Context Question from Leader: Where, beyond your community, do you see God's restoration taking place? How can you spotlight it and give thanks?

- Restoration Project:** How might you use your restoration project to share the good news beyond your household?

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light all your candles and say, "Jesus brings hope, Jesus brings peace, Jesus brings joy, Jesus brings love. Jesus is born." You may want to add, "Jesus is here, born for the whole world."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Prayer: Jesus, sometimes we want to hold you to ourselves, to think we're the ones with all the answers about you. Remind us of how big your love is. Help us to seek wisdom beyond ourselves. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of light, or of God's love for the whole earth.

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Introduction to Advent at Home

Advent to Epiphany, Nov. 27, 2022-Jan. 8, 2023

Restoration is near

During Advent, we prepare for the birth of Jesus. But as many a child has pointed out, Jesus has already been born. Advent is a practice of the “in-between.” This year’s theme, developed for Leader magazine, makes that “in-between” concrete by inviting us into the process of restoration. Jesus has come and brought about restoration! And...we live in a world in need of restoration.

Restoration has seasons of intense work and of maintenance mode. It’s active. It requires something of us. It’s transformative. And, in our understanding, it is inspired and guided by Divine Creativity.

During this year’s Advent and Christmas seasons, we invite you to join in God’s work of restoration, discovered ultimately in the infant Christ.

What is Advent

- It is a season of preparation in which we recreate the longing people felt before the birth of Jesus. Christians prepare for the celebration of Jesus’ birth by remembering the longing for a Messiah.
- The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming” or “visit.” During the Advent season, we keep in mind both “advents” of Christ: the first one in Bethlehem and the second one yet to come.
- During Advent, we move from darkness to light — right at the time of year when the days are reaching their shortest in the Northern Hemisphere, leading up to the winter solstice. We don’t do this to equate light with goodness and darkness with evil. Rather, light is a symbol of illumination, helping us to see more clearly.

The Messiah came for the whole world. When he was born, the earth was changed. The Magi, seekers of wisdom in a faraway land, saw the signs of Jesus’s birth, followed their curiosity, and journeyed far to worship him.

Tell the story: Matthew 2:1-2

If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this story is found on page 170.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- This story is out of order; it comes before last week’s story. But maybe that’s okay. The big arc of God’s story ends with worship and restoration.
- Notice the uses of the title “King” in the first couple of verses. What do you think the writer of Matthew might be trying to point our attention to?
- The Magi probably came from Persia. Find that on the map and trace the journey of the Magi to Bethlehem.
- What in the world were these Magi/Wise Men/Kings? Magi were a class of Zoroastrian priests, known as great astrologers. Interestingly, early Jewish readers would have regarded Persian astrologers as foolish, not wise.
- And what was this star? A supernova? A comet? An alignment of the planets? We don’t know. We do know that the star “stopping” over the house is probably symbolic. If a star literally stopped over a house, it would incinerate it!
- Imagine: Go outside at night and look at the stars. Imagine people across the globe seeing those same stars in the sky when it’s nighttime for them. Try to comprehend the vastness of God’s love reaching the whole universe.
- What do these gifts mean? Gold has much the same meaning and value today, but frankincense and myrrh take a little more explanation. They were often used for religious rituals, including anointing kings and burying the dead. These gifts may have had different symbolic meanings at different points in Jesus’ life. Wonder: Do you think Mary, Joseph, and Jesus ever used these gifts?
- Look beyond your household, beyond your immediate community.

RESTORATION is *Near* *The Wisdom of God for the World*

Epiphany, January 6

Focus Scripture: Matthew 2:1–12

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 60:1–6; Psalm 72:1–7,
10–14; Ephesians 3:1–12

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”:

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom – peace with justice!

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They hoped for a Messiah. As Christians, we believe that Messiah came in the form of a tiny baby...Jesus!

Why celebrate Advent

- The four weeks of Advent help us make sure we are making Christmas about Jesus and more than a present-opening party.
- Living in the Advent season slows us down and helps us remember that December is not just about frantic preparations for Christmas.
- Advent is the beginning of the Christian calendar and gives shape to our entire year.

How to use this worship guide

- This resource accompanies the worship planning materials in *Leader* magazine. The themes and Scriptures are the same, which will connect your worship at home to your worship at church. If your congregation is not following the *Leader* resource, that’s not a problem; this worship guide will still make sense to you.
- This guide refers to the *Shine On* story Bible from MennoMedia. If you have this resource, you can find correlating stories in it. If you don’t have it, no problem. Reading straight from the Bible or from another story Bible is also great!
- This guide refers to the *Voices Together* and *Sing the Journey* songbooks, both of which are from MennoMedia. Again, having these is not necessary for using this resource.
- This guide can be used weekly, daily, or a combination of both.
- Choose the rituals and ideas that are helpful for your household and skip the ones that aren’t. To remind you that you can choose what works for your household, there are empty checkboxes next to each option.
- No need to be perfect; aim for persistence. If “daily” means “every few days,” that’s ok!
- Fit these materials into your schedule. If the only thing your household

can manage is a daily lighting of candles, singing a song, or saying a quick prayer, that is enough!

The Advent Wreath

Create your own version of an Advent wreath that looks similar to this:



- The wreath is circular like God's eternal love. It has no beginning and no end.
- Wreaths are traditionally dressed with evergreens, symbolizing endless life and rebirth. Since actual evergreens are highly flammable, consider using some artificial greenery, or decorate your wreath in a different way.
- The purple candles represent both repentance and royalty, and the pink candle, used the third week, is Mary's candle.
- We often use a word for each week of advent as we light each candle. Week 1 is "hope," week 2 is "peace," week 3 is "joy," and week 4 is "love."
- The white candle in the center is the "Christ candle."
- There are many stories recounting the history and symbolism of the Advent wreath and even multiple colors that are used. If you're intrigued, look it up!

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light all your candles and say, "Jesus brings hope, Jesus brings peace, Jesus brings joy, Jesus brings love. Jesus is born." You may want to add, "Jesus is here."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Prayer: God, sometimes we see such hope, only to have something that feels hopeless happen. It's hard to live in this in-between. When we are discouraged or worried or scared, remind us that you are here, bringing restoration to all. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of light, or of Jesus's birth.

But the Roman ruler Herod felt threatened when he heard about the baby Messiah. He acted out of fear, and Jesus's life was in danger. Joseph and Mary needed to flee their home to protect their baby. They became refugees in Egypt. And **in the middle of all of that, God was there**, protecting them.

Tell the story: Matthew 2:13-23

If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this story is found on page 173.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- Because the story of the Exodus looms so large for us, we often think of Egypt as a place to escape from. But in much of scripture, it's actually a place of refuge.
- Read Matthew 2:13-14. What other story does this remind you of? (Hint, check out Exodus 2.) The original hearers would have connected this and seen Jesus as the "new Moses."
- Verses 16-18 are devastating. The story evokes Exodus 1:16.
- This passage sets baby Jesus up as a refugee. We live in a world that does not make life easy for those who flee as Mary and Joseph did. How can this scripture be "good news" in our world?
- Imagine: Get out a map and find all the places mentioned in this passage. Trace the journey of Mary and Joseph. Imagine all the disruption in the earliest years of Jesus' life.
- Context Question from *Leader* (paraphrased): We live in the in-between. Christ brought restoration, and there is suffering in the world. Both things are true. Where do you see this dual reality around you and within you?

Restoration Project: Examine your finished project. When did you get frustrated? As you look back, can you see times when God was with you and working in you?

Progressive Advent Wreath Option

Restoration is a process. If you like, you could reflect that process in your Advent wreath. Begin the first week with just the wreath and candles. Add decorations each week. Take a picture the first week so you can look back at it and see the transformation!

The Restoration Project

Restoration invites activity! In your household, choose one restoration project to work on throughout advent. Your project can be anything that is broken and needs some mending. Here are some project ideas:

- A piece of furniture
- A messy closet
- A relationship
- A routine that brings you closer to Jesus that you may have dropped and could 'restore'
- Clothing
- A vehicle
- Depending on where you live, there might be a garden or other outdoor project
- Books

You may want to keep your restoration project visible and allow people in the household to work on it on their own time. Or you may choose to make it a weekly household project which becomes part of your weekly advent ritual.

Journey to the Manger

This is a simple daily or weekly ritual that people of all ages have found meaningful. It's a visual way to anticipate the birth of Christ.

1. Set up a simple, unadorned nativity crèche. Maybe you have a nativity structure you want to use, but this could also be something you create.
 - a. "Simple and unadorned" is enough! But if you want an extra challenge, you could decorate the crèche a little more each week to prepare it for Jesus.
2. Place Mary and Joseph somewhere in your home to the north of the manger and place the Magi somewhere to the east. Hide Jesus for now.
3. Each day of Advent, move Mary and Joseph a little closer to the manger, letting them land there on December 24.
4. You may want to also place your shepherds nearby instead of at the manger so that you can move them in to worship Jesus on Christmas Day.
5. On December 25, Christmas Day, add Jesus.
6. After Christmas, begin moving the Magi closer each day, letting them arrive to worship Jesus on January 6, Epiphany.

Note: If you don't have a Nativity set, make a simple one! You can paint rocks for different characters or create them out of sticks or clothespins and fabric scraps. Find a free downloadable Nativity set to print on paper and cut out, as well as other child-friendly Nativity set options at www.MennoniteUSA.org/adventathome.

RESTORATION is *Near* *Jesus is Here in the Middle of it All*

Christmas Week 2, Beginning January 1

Focus Scripture: Matthew 2:13–23

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 63:7–9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10–18

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the "big story":

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn't always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom – peace with justice!

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They hoped for a Messiah. As Christians, we believe that Messiah came in the form of a tiny baby...Jesus!

- Context Question from Leader: How is the Spirit empowering you to bring about God's restoration?

Restoration Project: Finish your household restoration project!

Journey to the Manger and Progressive Advent Wreath:
If you're adding decorations to your manger scene or Advent wreath, complete it this week.

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light three purple candles, a pink candle, and your Christ candle and say, "Jesus brings hope, Jesus brings peace, Jesus brings joy, Jesus brings love. Jesus is born!"
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Journey to the Manger ritual: Place Mary and Joseph in the scene and add Jesus. Bring the shepherds to worship him, too!
- Prayer: Jesus, you are the light of the world! Make us reflections of your light as we join in your ministry of restoration. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song about Jesus' birth.

Weekly worship ritual

Four Scripture passages will be listed for each week. We encourage you to read all of them at some point during the week. The weekly worship ritual will focus on one Scripture passage each week.

- Connect to the "big story." We begin by remembering that the Bible tells one big story that leads to Jesus. By reading this section each week, we can learn where this week's Scripture belongs in the big story.
- Tell the story. Read the Scripture passage from your Bible and/or a corresponding version in a story Bible.
- Talk about it. Choose a few "Talk about it" prompts, provided in this guide, to explore. These will include the "context questions" that are offered in the Leader resource.
- Restoration Project: Work on your project together! You may want to do your "talk about it" prompts while you work.

Daily Worship Ritual

- Light the candle(s) of the Advent wreath, saying aloud the corresponding Advent word.
- Read one (or part of one) of the week's Scripture passages, or read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Optional: "Journey to the Manger" ritual
- Pray the simple suggested weekly prayer or another prayer of your choosing.
- Blow out the candles. Maybe you would like to sing a song here. "He Came Down" (#239 in the *Voices Together* hymnal and #31 in the *Sing the Journey* songbook) is a simple song that can be altered for each week by using that week's Advent word in the lyrics. For example, the first week's version would be, "He came down that we may have hope..."

RESTORATION is *Near*

Watch for Hope

Advent Week 1, Beginning November 28

Advent Word of the Week: Hope

Focus Scripture: Romans 13:11-14

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 2:1–5; Psalm 122; Matthew 24:36–44

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”:

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom – peace with justice!

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They hoped for a Messiah. As Christians, we believe that Messiah came in the form of a tiny baby... Jesus!

Today, and for the rest of this week, we celebrate the birth of that baby. **Sing for joy, Jesus is born!**

Tell the story: John 1:1-14

If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this story is part of the story of light found on page 10.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- The writer of John wrote this “prologue” to the gospel. A prologue is something we read before the main story, usually something that helps the main story make more sense or helps us read it differently. This prologue introduces the story of Jesus’ life here on earth. It has lovely, poetic language, but it sure is confusing! It’s okay if it’s hard for you to understand what this scripture “means.” People of every age struggle with understanding it. Like all poetry, it’s meant to help us feel things, ask questions, and see things differently. It’s not meant to explain everything, but to point us in a direction.
- Imagine: Go into a very dark place like a closet or dark room. As your eyes adjust, start to notice the little bits of light. Where is the light, even when it seems completely dark? Shine a flashlight and notice how bright it seems.
- “In the beginning was the Word...” Does that phrase remind you of anything? This scripture passage mirrors and quotes a lot of other scripture, and Genesis 1 is one of those scriptures. Read Genesis 1:1-5 and John 1:1-5 and notice the similarities and differences.
- We think of time in a “linear” way. We like to put events in order along a timeline like this: “First I woke up, then I ate breakfast, then I went to school...” Try to put events in order as you read this scripture passage. It’s a little challenging, isn’t it? This is a prologue to the story of Jesus’ life, but it says Jesus has been around *from the beginning*. And what’s the beginning? Mind-blowing! God’s time is bigger and way more complicated than our time.
- Verse 10 says, “yet the world did not know him.” Jesus is the source of everything, including our life, yet we don’t recognize him. This is part of the bigger story of the Bible. Humans miss the mark at every point of God’s story, and each time, God sticks with us. Even with all that missing of the mark, Jesus came to live among us and bring peace.

RESTORATION is *Near*

Sing for Joy, Jesus is Borne

Christmas Week 1, Beginning December 25

Focus Scripture: John 1:1–14

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 52:7–10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:14, (5–12)

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”:

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom – peace with justice!

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They hoped for a Messiah. As Christians, we believe that Messiah came in the form of a tiny baby... Jesus!

After Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, what we know now as the church began to form. The church in Rome was one of these early churches that followed Jesus. Leaders like Paul wrote letters of encouragement and instruction to the early churches, and this week’s scripture comes from a letter he wrote to the church in Rome.

The early church struggled with identity. Jews and Gentiles (a general term for anyone who was not Jewish) were coming together, and it was hard to know how to form a common culture. It seems that the Christians from Gentile backgrounds in Rome were struggling with how to relate to the Christians from Jewish backgrounds. Paul is attempting to help them sort through all of this in his letter. In this week’s passage, he encourages them to glimpse the hope of restoration that is near and to change their attitudes and behaviors to live into that hope. He points the way for them to **watch for hope!**

Tell the story: Romans 13:11-14

This passage is not found in very many story Bibles, but if you have the Shine On story Bible, you can find Isaiah 2:1-5, another lectionary passage for this week, on page 137.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- Find the verbs in the passage and write them down. What do you notice? How can these verbs inspire you to discover hope?
- Write down the directive verbs - like “wake” and “lay aside.” What would happen if those verbs guided you this week? What would it mean to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ?”
- Imagine: Play dress up! Use your imagination and “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- This passage calls for some change in actions for the people in Rome. How might “noticing hope” mean changes in your actions?
- The people are being asked to see the world with the eyes of Jesus. Sometimes that’s the first step to finding glimmers of hope. Look around you and try to see with the eyes of a Creating God who loves creation with tender love. What needs restoration? How might you partner with God in that restoration?
- Context Questions from Leader: Where is your community earnestly

longing for restoration? What is your role in that context of brokenness?

- Restoration Project:** Begin working on your household project! Take a picture of it this week so you can look back at your progress.
- Journey to the Manger and Progressive Advent Wreath:** If you're adding decorations to your manger scene or Advent wreath, make this part of your weekly ritual time.

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light one purple candle and say, "Jesus brings hope."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Journey to the Manger ritual: Move Mary and Joseph toward the Nativity scene.
- Prayer: God, help us to look around this world with your eyes. Show us the glimmers of hope and help us follow them to bring your restoration. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of hope.

saves." In the prophecy, the baby is named Emmanuel, which means "God with us." Put these two names together. What does that stir up in you?

- Context Question from Leader: Where do you see echoes of Mary and Joseph's bravery around you?

- Restoration Project:** Work on your household restoration project!
- Journey to the Manger and Progressive Advent Wreath:** If you're adding decorations to your manger scene or Advent wreath, make this part of your weekly ritual time.

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL ---

- Light three purple candles and a pink one and say, "Jesus brings hope, Jesus brings peace, Jesus brings joy, Jesus brings love."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Journey to the Manger ritual: Move Mary and Joseph toward the Nativity scene.
- Prayer: God, sometimes we know what needs to happen, but we're too afraid to do it. Give us courage to act out of love in your restoration work. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of love.

The origin story of that tiny baby is a strange one! Mary, as we learn in today's scripture, was "found to be with child from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18). Joseph, who was engaged to Mary, had some choices to make. Would he publicly disgrace her? Would he take care of it quietly? Or would he act out of love and grace and adopt this child as his own? Through a divine visit, Joseph was able to put aside his fear and **act out of love**.

Tell the story: Matthew 1:18-25

If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this story is found on page 162.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- It's hard to hear all the nuances of Joseph's situation through our 21st-century ears. We can understand that he had a predicament: the woman he was engaged to was pregnant, and he was definitely not the father! Here are a few clues about the complexities:
 - The marriage process in Jewish culture was very different from ours and seems to have happened over the course of several years. First came the family's agreement to a match, which involved negotiations over a bride price and a dowry, then there were two legal procedures. The first was a binding betrothal, and the second involved celebrating the wedding and beginning life together. Mary and Joseph seem to have done the first of these two procedures when she was found to be pregnant.
 - While Hebrew law prescribes stoning as the punishment for adultery, the actual practice seems to have been divorce.
- Joseph's dream: Messengers frequently come in dreams in the biblical story. Look up the dreams of Jacob in Genesis 28 and another Joseph in Genesis 37 and see what similarities and differences you can find.
- Imagine: Act out the story of Joseph's dream a couple of times and see what discoveries you make. Was he tossing and turning as he tried to fall asleep with this huge decision looming? Did he startle awake after the dream, or wake up peacefully? What do you imagine the angel in his dream looked like?
- Joseph is told that the baby will be named "Jesus." This is a common Hebrew name (translated sometimes as Joshua) that means "God

RESTORATION is *Near*

Prepare the Way of Peace

Advent Week 2, Beginning December 4

Advent Word of the Week: Peace

Focus Scripture: Matthew 3:1–12

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 11:1–10; Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19; Romans 15:4–13

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the "big story":

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah's family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God's law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

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Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They hoped for a Messiah. As Christians, we believe that Messiah came in the form of a tiny baby... Jesus!

Around the same time that Jesus was born, there was another miraculous birth. Jesus' cousin John was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah. We sometimes call him John the Baptist. He came before Jesus and **prepared the way of peace.**

Tell the story: Matthew 3:1-12

If you have the *Shine On* story Bible, this story is found on page 177.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- John called people to “repent.” To repent is, quite literally, a 180-degree turn – to “turn back.” It’s not just confessing; it’s making a change. What role do you think repentance might have in restoration? If you have a restoration project, is there any turning back, discarding, or change-making that has to happen?
- Imagine: Look at the description of John the Baptist. Make your own depiction of him by drawing him or building him with playdough. Or dress up a person in your household as John the Baptist!
- The Jordan River is a familiar place in the big story of the Bible. Look it up in a concordance to see what else has happened there.
- Look up Isaiah 40 to understand Matthew 3:3 better.
- Read John’s speech in verses 7-12 out loud. If you can, go outside to read it. How does reading outside change it for you?
- There is a lot to unpack in John the Baptist’s words. Here are just a few tidbits:
 - Viper’s brood: Newborn vipers were believed to eat through their mother’s stomach, killing her.
 - Wrath to come: This is eschatological (end times) language.
 - Fruit: This means good deeds and actions. It’s not enough to be baptized; John exhorts the people to also bear fruit.
 - “We have Abraham as our ancestor”: One theory in Judaism was that an ancestor’s faith would influence God’s judgment favorably. John seems to disagree with that theory.
 - Fire: Usually symbolizes purification.
 - Winnowing fork: This was an agricultural tool that was used to toss the threshed grain into the wind, separating the wheat from the chaff.

RESTORATION is *Near* *Do Not Be Afraid, Act Out of Love*

Advent Week 4, Beginning December 18

Advent Word of the Week: Love

Focus Scripture: Matthew 1:18–25

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 7:10–16; Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19; Romans 1:1–7

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”:

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom – peace with justice!

Eventually, the exiled people were allowed to return home. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, so we call this the Second Temple Period. They hoped for a Messiah. As Christians, we believe that Messiah came in the form of a tiny baby... Jesus!

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light two purple candles and one pink candle and say, "Jesus brings hope, Jesus brings peace, Jesus brings joy."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Journey to the Manger ritual: Move Mary and Joseph toward the Nativity scene.
- Prayer: God, point us to joy. Help us notice what you are doing and proclaim it to all the world, encouraging everyone in your work of restoration. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of joy.

- Context Question from Leader: What do you need to clean or discard as you prepare for this different kind of king?

- Restoration Project:** Work on your household restoration project!
- Journey to the Manger and Progressive Advent Wreath:**
If you're adding decorations to your manger scene or Advent wreath, make this part of your weekly ritual time.

DAILY WORSHIP RITUAL

- Light two purple candles and say, "Jesus brings hope, Jesus brings peace."
- Read one of the lectionary Scriptures for the week. Alternatively, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1-20.
- Journey to the Manger ritual: Move Mary and Joseph toward the Nativity scene.
- Prayer: God, help us see the work of repentance and change that needs to happen to bring about your restoration. Make us partners in preparing your way of peace. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Blow out the candles.
- Sing a song of peace.

RESTORATION is *Near*

Tell the Good News of Joy

Advent Week 3, Beginning December 11

Advent Word of the Week: Joy

Focus Scripture: Psalm 146:5–10

Additional Lectionary Scriptures: Isaiah 35:1–10; James 5:7–10; Matthew 11:2–11

WEEKLY WORSHIP RITUAL

Connect to the “big story”:

God created a good world. We were created to live peacefully, but we often miss the mark. When that happens, we have to deal with the consequences, but God sticks with us. Our whole story is a story of God sticking with us. In the Bible, God called Abraham and Sarah’s family to be a blessing to the earth, and even when they missed the mark, God stuck with them. When the people were in slavery and cried out to God, God stuck with them by sending Moses to lead them. When the people of God had a hard time understanding how to live God’s law of love in community, God sent leaders like Joshua, judges like Deborah, and prophets like Samuel to bring the people back to God.

The people wanted to be ruled by kings. Things didn’t always go well under kings, and the kingdom divided in two. Both of these kingdoms were eventually invaded by other nations. Some of the people were taken away into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the land. God continued to stick with the people, often through calling prophets, who pointed the people back to God and back to a community of shalom – peace with justice!

Throughout all of the drama and the turmoil, the people of God found ways to worship God together. The book of Psalms contains the words that the people sang and spoke in the worship life. Today’s scripture is a psalm of praise – a way for the people to express their joy to God. In singing this psalm, God’s people **told the good news of joy!**

Tell the story: Psalm 146

This psalm is not found in the Shine On story Bible, but on pages 129–132, you can read some other psalms that tell the good news of joy.

Talk about it: Choose a few of these prompts to explore:

- The psalmist says that hope is not found in mortals. Read the psalm to find where that hope/help/joy is found. Where do you find your hope?
- Read verses 7–9. Who is God attentive to? What is God doing? What is the good news that this psalm proclaims?
- In biblical literature, there is a trio of people that we are consistently called to care for: the sojourner (resident alien, or stranger), the widow, and the orphan.
- Imagine: Take a walk, maybe in nature or maybe in a place that has a lot of people. Imagine Jesus walking with you, pointing out what God is doing. What good news of joy might he be encouraging you to share?
- In this Advent week, we pay particular attention to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary sang a song of joy after she was visited by the angel. Read her song in Luke 1:46–55 and find the similarities with Psalm 146.
- Context Question from Leader: What stories do you have to share to encourage the community of faith?

Restoration Project: Work on your household restoration project!

Journey to the Manger and Progressive Advent Wreath:

If you’re adding decorations to your manger scene or Advent wreath, make this part of your weekly ritual time.