



ENTERTAINING ANGELS

Christ's Birthday Observance

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

HEBREWS 13:1-2



RESOURCE GUIDE



ENTERTAINING ANGELS

Christ's Birthday Observance

Instructional Note

Welcome to Christ's Birthday Observance. We are glad that you have chosen to participate in this important celebration of Christ's birth. The goal of Christ's Birthday Observance is to focus attention and devotion on the birth of Jesus Christ. We hope that you will find materials and ideas throughout this guide a help to your congregation as you celebrate Christmas.

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MAKING THE MOST

of the Christ's Birthday Observance Materials

The Advent season is a special time in the life of the church. It is a time where we celebrate Jesus, but also the time of waiting that preceded the coming of Christ. We are so excited for this year as we plan to gather together to celebrate Jesus. This year, the season of Advent begins on November 27, 2022.

Advent is a time of preparation that is marked by prayer. We offer prayers of humble devotion, submission, and supplication for deliverance for those walking in darkness and awaiting the birth of Christ. This year we are offering resources for the whole congregation to celebrate and experience Jesus together.

Note: Local congregations are permitted to make copies of materials for use with Christ's Birthday Observance. Materials will also be available online at www.christianwomenconnection.org. For any other use, please contact Christian Women Connection for permission at (866) 778-0804.

Planning Team

Early in October, call a meeting to discuss Christ's Birthday Observance. In many churches, the team consists of the women's leader and the senior pastor. Consider involving your worship arts pastor or minister of music, other women from Christian Women Connection, or representatives from every ministry area to help incorporate all aspects of church life into the experience. Christ's Birthday Observance is much more than the offering. It includes prayer for missions, meditations, sermons, worship, and much more.

In the planning meeting, you should discuss and review the orders of worship, Advent readings, and Project Prayer. At this meeting, review the materials your church will need to order to make this event successful. We also recommend you show your senior pastor all the materials available on our website. These materials can aid your senior pastor by providing all they need for a great Advent sermon series. You will find the order form in the materials packet with the Resource Book. Several materials are also available in Spanish, offering an opportunity for inclusiveness within your church or outreach.

Promotional Calendar

Read through the promotional calendar first. This will help you know what to do each month as the Advent season draws near. It will also give you ideas about what to do each week of Advent and how to make your event benefit your church's goals as much as possible.

Project Prayer

Project Prayer is an event that helps to unify churches across the globe in prayer during the Advent season. Each state and country has been assigned a specific day to pray. Early planning enables you to host a great Project Prayer event at your church. You may even want to send notes of encouragement to Church of God representatives in the other states or countries assigned to pray on the same day as your church. (See the "Project Prayer" section on page 18 for more information.)

For Pastors and Church Leaders

The Sermon Starters in this Resource Book and online are meant to help you plan for Advent. They are a great starting point and can be altered to fit your community, experience, and preaching style. Please visit our website for additional worship planning materials at www.christianwomenconnection.org

Advent Readings

Advent readings are found in your Resource Book and can be used each Sunday of Advent. They are intended to be read aloud while lighting the Advent candles. Leaders are encouraged to use a variety of readers for this special season. Everyone, regardless of age, race, culture, marital status, etc., should be considered to serve as readers. (Refer to the "Advent Readings" section and the Promotional Calendar for more ideas and information.)

PROMOTIONAL CALENDAR

Planning Ahead

Each year, we all strive to avoid the frenzied rush that precedes the celebration of Christmas. Planning helps to reduce stress and bring into focus the real reason for our celebration: the gift of Christ. Keep your plans on track by adding dates from this itemized list to your church's calendar, automated software, or your personal datebook or phone calendar.

October 2022

- **Read over the materials.** Familiarize yourself with the theme and available resources.

Theme: Entertaining Angels

Theme Scripture: “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” - Hebrews 13: 1-2 (NRSV)

- **Get ideas.** Visit the website at www.christianwomenconnection.org. Click on the “Christ’s Birthday Observance” promotional page to view ideas that will enhance the Observance in your local congregation.
 - **Order materials early!** A key element to a fruitful experience is ordering your materials early. Seeing displays or receiving handouts of brochures, bookmarks, meditation journals, offering envelopes, and downloadable letterhead helps your congregation become excited about the offering. Waiting too long can prevent the materials from arriving in time for Advent, especially after the pandemic slowed down the postal service. Therefore, please place your orders early.
 - **Serve Sunday** – Plan your outreach ideas in October. See page 7 for details!
 - Celebrate last year’s accomplishments! You will receive your appreciation certificate for the previous year’s Christ’s Birthday Observance in October. Please share our appreciation with your congregation.
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November 2022

- **Prepare for Project Prayer.** Early in November, begin promoting and preparing for Project Prayer. It can be a wonderful experience for your congregation as you stand together to pray for the world. Refer to the “Project Prayer” section of the Resource Book to help plan this event.
 - **Begin promoting the Observance.** This year’s CBO theme is an opportunity to be aware and look with holy awe at those among us. The everyday passerby on the street, the person who cuts you off in traffic, the homeless person on the curb, the angry parent at the basketball game. This is an opportunity for us to pause and notice where the goodness of God is at work and how we can partner with Him. Because when we do, we might catch glimpses of gossamer wings and angels - messengers of God unaware.
 - **Start promoting Entertaining Angels by showing videos of our Global Strategy personnel sharing about this year’s CBO theme.** You can download these videos from our website at www.christianwomenconnection.org
 - **Consider purchasing meditation journals and bookmarks for your entire congregation.** Please encourage them to use the meditation book throughout the Advent season. Mail to families who are not able to attend services in person.
 - **The Observance Begins.** Whether you use slides, skits, bulletin information, verbal announcements, or all the above, make sure that each Sunday, the congregation is informed that Christ’s Birthday offering will be collected on or before December 18, the final Sunday of Advent that is titled “Make a Place.”
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December 2022

- **Christ’s Birthday offering collection will be on December 18**

PROMOTIONAL CALENDAR

November 27, 2022: FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Theme: Make Ready - Matthew 24:36-44

Advent Candle: Hope

- Introduce the “Entertaining Angels” theme to your church.

The CBO theme this year is an opportunity to be aware and look with holy awe at those who are among us. The everyday passerby on the street, the person who cuts you off in traffic, the homeless person on the curb, the angry parent at the basketball game. This is an opportunity for us to pause and notice where God’s goodness is at work and how we can partner with Him. Because when we do, we might catch glimpses of gossamer wings and angels - messengers of God unaware.

- Introduce the meditation journals. These are designed to help your congregation focus on Jesus, the Son of God. In these journals, you will find inspiring stories and meditations with questions for reflection after each day’s reading.
- Introduce the bookmarks and the concept of the individual goal for the Observance Offering.
- Consider placing a manger in the chancel where everyone can see. Each week add a bit more to the scene, layers of hay, swaddling blankets, and fabric for Mary and Joseph to sit upon, until Christmas day when you place a baby or small doll into the manger, teaching the congregation about preparation.

December 4, 2022: SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Theme: Make Peace – Isaiah 11:1-10

Advent Candle: Love

- Consider asking your congregation to participate in an experiment this week. Ask each person to sit down with, invite to coffee, or call on the phone someone they have recently found themselves in a disagreement with. Ask them to intentionally sew peace into the world and report back next week on how it felt and what they learned from their encounter.

December 11, 2022: THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Theme: Make Praise - Luke 1:46-55

Advent Candle: Joy

- Consider placing note cards in the seats before worship and have congregants write miracles they are currently praying for and praising God in expectation of. Have them come forward and place them in the manger. Offer a prayer of praise over the miracles that have come to pass and those you believe will come to be.
- Ask the congregation to begin considering what they will give next week to help share the miracle of Jesus.
- Whether you use slides, skits, bulletin information, verbal announcements, or all the above, remind the congregation that Christ’s Birthday Offering will be collected next Sunday, December 18, the final Sunday of Advent.

December 18, 2022: FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

This is the week of Christmas and the final week of the Christ's Birthday Observance.

Theme: Make a Place – Matthew 1:18-25

Advent Candle: Peace

- Encourage your congregation to plan a place of service in their Advent rituals and practices—partner with a local domestic violence shelter, homeless drop-in, or food pantry. Encourage congregants to sign up to serve and make a place for folks who may reveal themselves to be a part of the glory and wonder of the story of God. Share about your experiences afterward.
- This morning, the offering will be taken using the adult and children's offering envelopes. Provide all morning service attendees with a brochure that shows how the offering is used to share God's love around the world. You may want to include this in your announcements and bulletin or have ushers hand out the flyers before the service so that people can prepare for the offering.
- Also, consider having your congregation bring forward their gifts and place them in the manger to represent their offering to make a place for the work of God in the lives of the most vulnerable in our neighborhoods and around the world.

December 24 or 25, 2022: CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

Theme: The Nativity of the Lord – Isaiah 9:2-7 & Luke 2: 1-20

Advent Candle: Christ Candle

- Consider placing the doll in the manger before service.

January 2023

- Remit an Offering. (See page 6 on ways to do that.)
Remittance Deadline for 2022: April 30, 2023
- Thank your congregation for a job well done. If you want to send us a story about your church or ministry, visit us online at www.christianwomenconnection.org, email us at frontdesk@wchog.org, or call us toll-free at (866) 778-0804. Please help us serve you by filling out a quick CBO survey found on our website.
- Encourage your congregation to dream about how they can impact their neighborhood and the world for 2023!



Attention CWC Officer (women's ministry leader through CWC):

Please remit your congregation's CBO offering to your **state treasurer** of Christian Women Connection, which was mailed inside the CBO Materials Packet. Please follow the instructions on the form and send to your CWC State Treasurer listed on the form.

The form is used to record your congregation's Christ's Birthday Offering by April 30, 2023. The form and offering should be mailed to your Christian Women Connection State Treasurer listed on the form unless otherwise stated. She will send it to the national Christian Women Connection (formerly Women of the Church of God) office.

If you do not know where to send the offering or your state does not currently have a CWC Treasurer, please use the **remittance form** listed in the CBO materials packet, or you can download a form on our website. Fill out the form and then send it to the CWC National Office. Following this process will ensure that your state has a record of your congregation's offering, **and your church will receive Church of God Ministries' giving credit.**

Attention Individuals, Pastors, and Lay Leaders:

We appreciate your partnership with Christian Women Connection and Church of God Ministries! If you do not have a local CWC group, you can still give a gift to the far-reaching worldwide ministries of Christ's Birthday Observance through Christian Women Connection by sending it to:

www.christianwomenconnection.org



MAIL

(Endorse checks to Christian Women Connection or CWC)

Memo: CBO 2022

Christian Women Connection
PO Box 2328, Anderson, IN 46018



PAYPAL | CREDIT CARD



SCAN-TO-GIVE

Scan this QR code with your camera or smart phone QR app.



TEXT-TO-GIVE
Text "CBO2022"
to 44321

We want to thank everyone who participated in the Christ's Birthday Observance (CBO) during this Advent season! Together, we celebrated Advent with hundreds of churches with a united theme! We encourage you to continue to share the stories, experiences, and testimonies from your church services, events, and personal devotions.



SERVE SUNDAY

Christmas brings out the givers in each of us. Here are some ideas that your congregation can show hospitality and serve your community this year.

Serve Sunday is about finding and meeting a need in your community!

Check out a few of these outreach ideas:

- Collect new or gently used luggage for kids in Foster care.
- Host a coat drive and hand out coats to disadvantaged individuals and families.
- Purchase donuts and deliver to an organization or individuals working on Christmas Eve.
- Shovel snow for neighbors.
- Purchase items from a Christmas wish list for a woman or a family at a domestic violence shelter.
- Contact your local school to see if a family needs groceries this Christmas. The school counselors are usually the first to know if a family needs support.
- Donate new socks to your local shelter. These are always a high need for homeless individuals.
- Collect feminine hygiene items & diapers for women at a shelter.
- Pay hospital or utility bills of individuals in your church or community within your church's zip code.
- Visit your local nursing home and give out handmade cards, and sing Christmas carols.
- Purchase items off a teacher's Amazon wish list.
- Collect supplies for a school in your community.
- Pay it forward in a drive-thru.
- Volunteer at a local food pantry.

***Please note**, if you do not know of a local shelter or organization to donate to in your community, you can call 211, and they can assist you in finding a shelter or organization to support.

We would love to hear how your congregation celebrated Serve Sunday. Please send us pictures and stories so we can celebrate with you!

SERMON THOUGHT STARTERS

These sermon starters are a great starting point and can be altered to fit your community, experience, and preaching style.

Whether you use slides, skits, bulletin information, verbal announcements, or all the above, make certain that each Sunday the congregation is informed that the Christ's Birthday Offering will be collected on December 18, the final Sunday of Advent.

November 27

By: Rev. Dr. Kimberly Majeski

First Sunday of Advent

Sermon Title: Make Ready

Advent Candle: Hope

Scripture Reference: Matthew 24:36-44 NRSV

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Sermon Thought Starter: This text comes from what we call “the little apocalypse” in Matthew. Those passages where Jesus is talking about the coming of the end. The focus here is on his words, though they are on preparation, the notion that wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we must be ready so we don't miss the wonder, the revelation, the miracle of what is to come.

The message is the same in Advent. Sometimes we are lulled to sleep by the commonplace rituals of this season, and we walk through without realizing the importance of the season we're about to experience. Sometimes we're busy working, grinding out the activities, the busyness of the parties and the gift giving, the extra jobs to make ends meet, and we miss the wonder of what the next few days and weeks are really meant to remind us.

Instead, let us be like Noah, who was building the ark, getting ready, and making preparations for what he knew would soon come to be.

****Consider:** Placing a manger in the chancel where everyone can see. Each week add a bit more to the scene, layers of hay, swaddling blankets, and fabric for Mary and Joseph to sit upon, until Christmas day when you place a baby or small doll into the manger, teaching the congregation about preparation.

Second Sunday of Advent

Sermon Title: Make Peace

Advent Candle: Love

Scripture Reference: Isaiah 11:1-10 NRSV

“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.”

Sermon Thought Starter: This is Isaiah’s enduring vision of the Peaceable Kingdom, the prophetic image of an unimaginable future where a dead and decaying stump shall burst forth new life and beasts who have long held enmity against the other will live in harmony. What is more, a little child shall lead us into this new world order.

If this blissful and beautiful kingdom sounds lovely, it is because it is. If it sounds wistful, hopeful, familiar, if a bit romantic, it is because it is, given that we live in both the realized and not yet space of the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus. In this kingdom, the poor are blessed, the meek are exalted, righteousness and justice prevail, and there is no need to fear because the love and goodness of God reign in our hearts and the world.

We know that our world is unlike anything we can fathom: school shootings and viral pandemics, floods and earthquakes, wars and warlords, and children caught in the upheaval of political strife and invasion into their homeland.

And yet, we have this vision. To depict the kingdom that Jesus announced and invited us into, a prophetic one, we must ask ourselves, how are we living to build it? How do you and I contribute to this vision? How do we live in this reality? Is life more peaceful for those who live in proximity to you and me? This Advent, ask yourself this question, how am I an emissary of peace?

****Consider:** Ask your congregation to participate in an experiment this week. Ask each person to sit down with, invite to coffee, or call on the phone someone they have recently found themselves in a disagreement with. Ask them to intentionally sew peace into the world and report back next week on how it felt and what they learned from their encounter.



Third Sunday of Advent

Sermon Title: Make Praise

Advent Candle: Joy

Scripture Reference: Luke 1:46-55 NRSV

“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.’ And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.”

Sermon Thought Starter: This story is traditionally known as the Magnificat, or Mary’s song, and it is written in the style of Hannah’s song in the Hebrew canon. We remember that Hannah was giving thanks for God’s answer to her prayer in the gift of her son Samuel, and here Mary, too, considers herself blessed as she stands in the presence of her kinswoman Elizabeth who also, though beyond childbearing years, has been granted the gift of a child. In the vignette of this narrative, we see three feminine figures faced with impossible realities, wrapped up inside miraculous unexplainable wonder and flooded with praise.

Hannah, long barren and bereft, waiting for a child, grateful that God had seen her plight and answered her prayer. She had also promised to give him away and return him to God and the tabernacle once he could eat solid food. Well past mid-life in the ancient world, Elizabeth was blessed with a child in her womb, though her husband had been struck mute, and she must have feared the travail of birth given her advanced years. And Mary, not yet wed, we think, probably sent to visit with her family outside her village to give some time and space and protection given her delicate condition—and yet, she, believing and trusting in God. However, she did not yet know how things would work out and considered herself blessed.

In the ancient world, the inability to conceive and birth a child, particularly a male child, was thought to be some sort of punishment of God upon women. We know now that this is not the truth, but in their time, women were dependent upon the care of husbands and fathers and/or sons for their survival which made their roles as wives and mothers critical to their existence. We can see here that each of these women has had the blessing of the need of a child answered, and yet, also some hardship that the very same miracle will bring about.

We live in different times and places, but we all have needs. Some of us are praying for children, healing, and asking God to restore relationships and help us find employment and stability. Many of us understand what it is to be in need of a miracle, and many of us know what it is to have been granted a miracle, to know God is at work, yet life is still hard. There is still another complication: one more diagnosis, another fallout, one more phone call, and one more hardship to face. This text calls us to believe in the God of miracles this Advent and to follow these women in singing our praise.

****Consider-** Place note cards in the seats before worship and have congregants write miracles they are currently praying for and praising God in expectation of. Have them come forward and place them in the manger. Offer a prayer of praise over the miracles that have come to pass and those you believe will come to be.

Fourth Sunday of Advent - This is the week of Christmas and the final week of the Christ's Birthday Observance.

Sermon Title: Make a Place

Advent Candle: Peace

Scripture Reference: Matthew 1:18-25 NRSV

“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel’, which means, ‘God is with us.’ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.”

Sermon Thought Starter: In Matthew’s text, we see Joseph’s point of view, the notion that an already with child woman is betrothed to him. This follows on the heels of the Genealogy, which names the four scandalous women in Jesus’ family tree who have some sort of sketchy past but show up nonetheless as named, remembered women in Jesus’ story of origin. So let us come to this story with fresh eyes, to peel back the layers and see the scandal that this really is...that the one God of heaven chose to come into the world through a dark-skinned, unmarried, poor girl from a backwater town in Galilee. The mother of Jesus is literally, in the earliest days, an unwed teen. And Joseph, from what we can tell, a good man, wants to do right by her but also wants to preserve his good name and intends to put her away quietly—hide her, so nobody knows what is really going on because it’s disgraceful.

Except the angel comes and says hold up, Joseph; this is not what you think this is! This is actually the in-breaking of the kingdom of God; this is God coming into the world; this child, Mary’s child who will also be your child, is the son of God, and you will call his name Jesus because this child is actually who the prophet was talking about when he said, the virgin shall bear a son and call him Emmanuel which means God with us.

And Joseph could have missed it all, dismissed her, and left her in the country with Elizabeth. He could have followed the prescribed rules for what you do with women who were found to be pregnant outside of wedlock...or he could open his heart to the notion that God was doing something miraculous and holy in and through the most unexpected and vulnerable kind of person there was in his day, a young, poor, un-wed girl from Galilee.

Maybe he thought back to the other women in the family tree...Tamar, who had broken the rules of widowhood to save the house of Israel; Rahab, the prostitute who had welcomed the enemy spies into the city of Jericho; Ruth, who was an Edomite but who saved her mother-in-law from famine and continued the family line in wedding Boaz, and Bathsheba who became the wife of David and mother of Solomon after David had her husband killed.

Sometimes we have to make a place for the truth that there is more to the story than we know or can see. Sometimes, we have to reorient ourselves to the biblical narrative and the work of God through history so that we remember God has always made a place for the weak, the poor, and the lowly. Sometimes, we have to refocus our lens on the story of how this God came into the world so that we begin to see the way he sees and love the way he loves

****Consider:** Encourage your congregation to plan a place of service in their Advent rituals and practices—partner with a local domestic violence shelter, homeless drop-in, or food pantry. Encourage congregants to sign up to serve and make a place for folks who may reveal themselves to be a part of the glory and wonder of the story of God. Share about your experiences afterward.

- This morning, the offering will be taken using the adult and children’s offering envelopes. Provide all morning service attendees with a brochure that shows how the offering is used to share God’s love around the world. You may want to include this in your announcements and bulletin or have ushers hand out the flyers before the service, so people can prepare for the offering.
- Also, consider having your congregation bring forward their gifts and place them in the manger to represent their offering to make a place for the work of God in the lives of the most vulnerable in our neighborhoods and around the world.
- We also offer a text-to-give option, where people in your congregation can text CBO2022 to 44-321 in order to give to the Christ’s Birthday Offering. These donations go directly to the CWC office and do not require an additional remittance.
- Before the offering is taken, remind the congregation of the meaning of the offering. Pass out the offering envelopes and allow time for people to make decisions and complete their offering envelopes. You may have a time of silence, or you may want music playing softly.

December 24/25

By: Rev. Dr. Kimberly Majeski

CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

Sermon Title: The Nativity of the Lord

Advent Candle: The Christ Candle

Old Testament: Isaiah 9:2-7

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

New Testament: Luke 2:1-20

“In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

****Consider:** Before service place doll in the manger

ADVENT INTRODUCTION

For Christians, Advent is a season of waiting and reflecting on preparing our hearts and homes. It is a time to remember the true meaning of Jesus' birth. Advent is a season of anticipation when we recognize the waiting that the people of Israel endured.

We anticipate the coming Messiah each week by lighting one of the candles on the Advent wreath. The Advent wreath is a circular, evergreen wreath with five candles: four around the wreath's circumference and one in the center. There are four Advent readings and one sermon starter on Christmas to coincide with the five candles. There is a reading for each week of Advent (the four Sundays preceding Christmas) and one for Christmas Eve, which is in the sermon starter section. Ready-made wreaths with candles can be purchased, or perhaps someone in your congregation would like to create the Advent wreath.

The flames of the candles point to the coming of Jesus as the Light of the World. Consider using three purple candles and one pink candle arranged around the wreath. The purple candles represent royalty and are lit on Advent's first, second, and fourth Sundays. A pink candle is lit on the third Sunday, representing the shift to joy in welcoming the Christ child's coming. The fifth candle is white, the color associated with angels and the birth of Jesus. This candle is placed in the center of the Advent wreath and is lit on Christmas Eve. These Advent readings were created to coincide with the sermon series and other Christ's Birthday Observance materials.

ADVENT READINGS

By: Rev. Jennifer Wilson

November 27

First Sunday of Advent: The Candle of Hope

READER ONE: "Company is coming!"

READER TWO: Have you experienced the thrill of house guests? What needs to be done to get a home ready?

READER ONE: Turn on some lights! Practice hospitality.

READER TWO: Advent is a time of preparation, celebrating the arrival of Jesus as a baby in our midst and looking forward to His return as the soon and coming King.

READER ONE: This year, we center our thoughts on Hebrews 13:1 and 2, "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it."

READER TWO: On this first Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of HOPE. The prophet Isaiah announced, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined." (Isaiah 9:2)

READER ONE: A simple act of hospitality is to leave a light on. A candle in the window, a lamp by the door, a light in the bedroom, a nightlight in the hall. Illumination guides the eyes and steps. Showing the way to move forward, a glimmer of hope in times of darkness.

READER TWO: Where is it deeply dark in our world today?

READER ONE: Who is behind bars of shame or addiction?

READER TWO: Who is stuck in the darkness of debt or despair?

READER ONE: Is someone lonely or afraid? Discouraged or grieving?

READER TWO: Left out or overlooked? Who feels hopeless, confused, and in the dark?

READER ONE: “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” (Isaiah 60:1)

READER TWO: “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5)

READER ONE: “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)

READER TWO: You who believe in Jesus are the light of the world. The light of hope is in you.

READER ONE: This Advent season, let us be light bearers as we entertain strangers in our midst.

READER TWO: Shine light in dark places.

READER ONE: Punch holes in the darkness.

READER TWO: Offer the hope of Jesus.

READER ONE: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

READER TWO: We give glory to God for hope.

December 4

Second Sunday of Advent: The Candle of Love

READER ONE: A place to lay your head. Warmth and shelter from the elements. Rest and welcome. A spot at the table. Food to eat. Conversation.

READER TWO: These are essentials of good hospitality. We focus this Advent season on “Entertaining Angels,” showing hospitality to one another and strangers in our midst.

READER ONE: Surely Joseph and Mary, making their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem, longed for a place to stay. Their arrival at the busy, crowded inn resulted in closed doors and no room except the cattle stall.

READER TWO: Using what they had, these new parents created a bed in a manger with straw and swaddling clothes, transforming a trough into a treasure chest. What wonderful love is this! Little is much when God is in it.

READER ONE: On this second Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of Love. Who in our midst shall we make space for? Who needs to open a card of greeting or find a seat at the table? What place will be prepared in our homes or in our hearts to show and share love?

READER TWO: The writer to the Hebrews exhorted, “Keep on loving each other...Stay on good terms with each other, held together by love. Be ready with a meal or a bed when it’s needed.” (Hebrews 13:1-2 MSG)

READER ONE: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)

READER TWO: God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)

READER ONE: In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

READER TWO: Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; (1 John 4:12)

READER ONE: If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” (1 John 4:12)

READER TWO: We give glory to God for love.

December 11

Third Sunday of Advent: The Candle of Joy

READER ONE: As we gather to worship, we prepare ourselves to sing, to listen, to pray, and to respond.

READER TWO: Are we prepared to be surprised? Are we prepared to experience sudden joy?

READER ONE: The shepherds were doing what they had always done. Watching over their flocks by night, when suddenly there appeared an angel with “good news of great joy!” (Luke 2:10)

READER TWO: They were shocked, surprised, intrigued, and some might even say “tickled pink.”

READER ONE: This good news of great joy was for all people. Their follow-up to the manger unleashed their amazement and praise. They told everyone about it, and God was glorified.

READER TWO: On this third Sunday of Advent, we light the pink candle of Joy. We are challenged this season to share hospitality with strangers; in doing so, we may be surprised at the angels among us. We may not even realize who they are, but we will feel joy, gladness, and a sense of fulfillment and honor as we extend hospitality.

READER ONE: The widow of Zarephath opened her home and her table to the prophet Elijah. The last of her flour and oil, shared in obedience, miraculously and joyfully sustained them for many days until the rains came again. (1 Kings 17:8-16)

READER TWO: The young boy among the five thousand, shared his loaves and fish, then joyfully watched the blessing, the sharing, and the gathering of twelve baskets of leftovers. Leftovers from his little lunch. (Matthew 14:13-21)

READER ONE: What joy God has for those who love, share, and care for others. Our sharing may be disguised as time waiting in a long line at the store,

READER TWO: eye contact with a stranger, a co-worker, or a neighbor,

READER ONE: pausing to listen, move at a slower pace,

READER TWO: Our sharing may include a growing anticipation that this season will not make us blue with melancholy or green with envy, red with anger, or white with fear.

READER ONE: Rather, what God has in store when we are kind to strangers makes us “tickled pink” with joy, for we have “entertained angels without even realizing it.”

READER TWO: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” (Hebrews 13:16)

READER ONE: “A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.” (Proverbs 11:25) Be prepared for what God has in store.

READER TWO: We give glory to God for joy.

December 18

Fourth Sunday of Advent: The Candle of Peace

READER ONE: You have heard the adage, “Never talk to strangers.” While that is a careful word of warning, our season of Advent causes us to prepare for Jesus’ coming in a unique way.

READER TWO: We are on the lookout for those we do not know well, and we offer hope.

READER ONE: We open our hands and hearts to share love.

READER TWO: We make space to talk and to listen.

READER ONE: We find a spot at the table, a place to sit and rest, and in doing so, we find ourselves recipients of joy.

READER TWO: On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of Peace.

READER ONE: When he was grown, Jesus gathered his disciples and instructed them to spread out among the cities, proclaiming the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” And those who generously welcomed the disciples into their homes were blessed with peace. (Matthew 10:7-13)

READER TWO: Often, when a host or hostess throws a party, they offer a gift or a favor for coming into their home.

READER ONE: Yet it is God who offers the gift, the favor of peace, to those who practice hospitality in His kingdom. On that starry night to the frightened shepherds, the heavenly host joined the angel of the Lord, declaring, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!” (Luke 2:14)

READER TWO: As we have been preparing for Christ’s coming,

READER ONE: Christ is preparing to come and to give us a gift, his favor, his peace.

READER TWO: We need a visitation.

READER ONE: If ever in our world, there was a time for God’s peace, it is now.

READER TWO: When world events, financial strain, uneasiness, and strife mount to frightening levels,

READER ONE: when the end of our rope is frizzled and frayed from too much hanging on,

READER TWO: we need the promise of the grown-up baby in the manger, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

READER ONE: This is what lies in store for those who love one another, who “entertained angels without knowing.” The peace of Christ.

READER TWO: We give glory to God for peace.

December 24 or 25

Christmas Eve or Christmas Day: The Christ Candle

The suggested reading for December 24 or 25 can be found on page 12 under the Sermon Thought Starters.

Rev. Jennifer Wilson

Rev. Jennifer “JJ” Wilson thrives on finding a path through a problem. She is an activator and motivator, positive and productive. A wife and mother, Jennifer trained as an elementary educator and served as an associate pastor and worship leader. She earned her MDiv at Anderson University School of Theology and is an ordained pastor in Church of God. Currently she serves as the administrator for The Center for Pastoral Formation for the Free Methodist Church. She lives in southwestern Illinois with her family and enjoys singing, reading, walking, and chatting with friends over a cup of tea.

PROJECT PRAYER



Project Prayer provides a unique opportunity during the Christ's Birthday Observance for the Church of God worldwide to join together in a 25-day prayer vigil. With so much division in our world, how powerful it is for the church to unite and pray for our leaders, the Church, and the world!

This list shows states and countries where the Church of God has a presence. On your assigned day, please join in a day of prayer with the other states and countries listed for that day. Also, listed are the names and assignments of several leaders in the Church of God. We ask that you pray specifically for each of these individuals and the teams they represent—for their leadership, protection, and provision as they serve God and the church in their respective areas, locally, and around the world. You may want to plan a midnight prayer vigil or establish a prayer group in which different persons commit to pray for a block of time during your designated 24-hour period.

Daily Prayer Schedule for December 2022

Date, State, or Country

1. Alabama, New Mexico, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Kenya, Belize
2. Alaska, North Carolina, Bulgaria, Tanzania, Nepal, France
3. Arizona, North Dakota, Paraguay, India, Cayman Islands, Serbia
4. Arkansas, New Hampshire, Australia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Ghana, Argentina
5. California, New York, South Korea, Dominican Republic, New Zealand
6. Colorado, Ohio, Peru, Sudan, Bermuda, Côte d'Ivoire
7. Connecticut, Michigan, Oklahoma, Canada, Indonesia, Northern Mariana Islands
8. Delaware, Oregon, Bangladesh, Antilles, Barbados, Eurasia
9. Florida, Pennsylvania, Singapore, Cuba, Congo (DR), Russia
10. Georgia, Rhode Island, Panama, South Africa, Philippines, Uruguay
11. Hawaii, South Carolina, Bhutan, Japan, Antigua, and Barbuda
12. Idaho, South Dakota, Cambodia, Jamaica, Angola
13. Illinois, Tennessee, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Vietnam
14. Indiana, Texas, Mexico, Rwanda, Italy, Egypt
15. Iowa, Vermont, Zimbabwe, Laos, United Kingdom, Venezuela
16. Kansas, Virginia, Central Asia, Haiti, Thailand, Netherlands
17. Kentucky, Washington DC, Virgin Islands, Colombia, Hungary
18. Louisiana, Washington, Honduras, Mozambique, Ukraine
19. Maryland, Wisconsin, Zambia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Denmark
20. Massachusetts, West Virginia, Guam, Guyana, Greece
21. Missouri, Wyoming, Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Switzerland
22. Minnesota, Nevada, Guatemala, Malawi, Bolivia
23. Montana, Mississippi, Uganda, Myanmar, Germany
24. Nebraska, Puerto Rico, Hong Kong, Grenada, Spain
25. New Jersey, Lebanon, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Brazil, Montenegro



LEADERSHIP

OF THE CHURCH OF GOD



Jim Lyon
General Director
Church of God Ministries



Rev. Dr. Kimberly Majeski
Executive Director
Christian Women Connection



Mike & Heather Webb
Co-Directors
Children of Promise



Jim O'Bold
President
Servant Solutions



Eric King
President
Warner Christian Resources

For more information about the ministry and the mission of the Church of God,
visit www.jesusisthesubject.org.

CHRIST'S BIRTHDAY OBSERVANCE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is important about the Christ's Birthday Observance?

- Project Prayer

Each day in December, a selection of states and countries with a Church of God presence are assigned to pray for the ministry of the church around the world.

- Offering

The Christ's Birthday Observance Offering is collected the Sunday before Christmas as a gift to the Christ child. The money collected touches nearly every ministry in the Church of God.

2. Why should our church participate in the Christ's Birthday Observance?

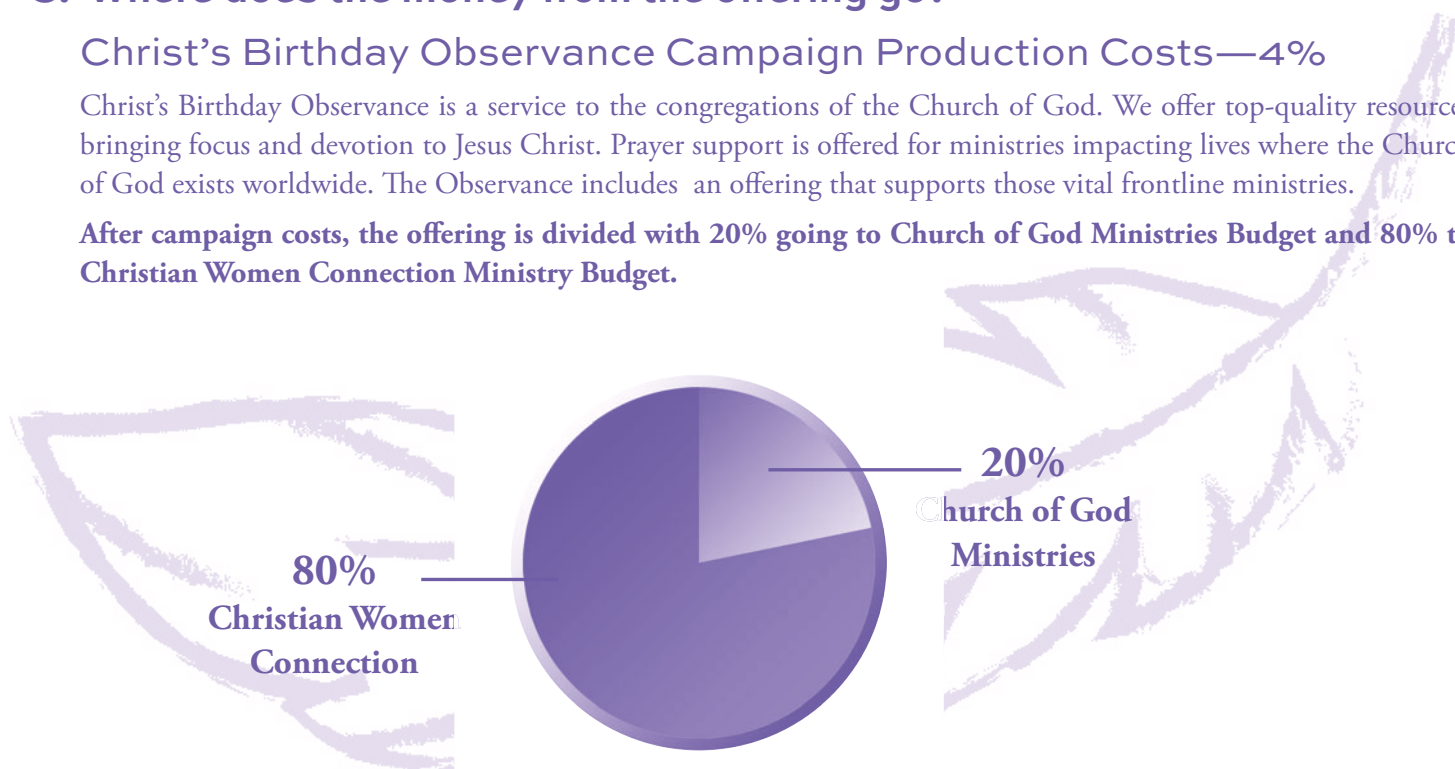
- Focus on Christ during the season of Advent (which is often overtaken by commercialism).
- Share the story of Christ's birth.
- Celebrate Advent in concert with Church of God congregations around the world.
- CBO has deep roots in the Church of God. The Observance, which began in 1949, continues to be one way that Church of God congregations come together for the benefit of the kingdom.
- In addition to prayers and devotions CBO offers an opportunity to give to the combined ministry efforts of Christian Women Connection and the Church of God in the largest offering in the Church of God.

3. Where does the money from the offering go?

Christ's Birthday Observance Campaign Production Costs—4%

Christ's Birthday Observance is a service to the congregations of the Church of God. We offer top-quality resources bringing focus and devotion to Jesus Christ. Prayer support is offered for ministries impacting lives where the Church of God exists worldwide. The Observance includes an offering that supports those vital frontline ministries.

After campaign costs, the offering is divided with 20% going to Church of God Ministries Budget and 80% to Christian Women Connection Ministry Budget.



Church of God World Ministries Budget—20%

GLOBAL STRATEGY: Global Strategy works to walk alongside the local church globally as it gives life in more than 90 countries around the world.

- **Disaster Relief & Restoration** - Collectively responding to human suffering and pursuing the restoration of all that is broken.
- **Global Table** - Bringing together the Church of God around the world in 2023.

CARE: Clergy Advocacy & Resource Effort - CARE seeks to address economic challenges facing early-career pastoral leaders through free finance and compensation coaching for the pastor and the congregational board.

CHAPTER 4 INSTITUTE - An immersive, cohort-based leadership experience that challenges leaders to reimagine how the church might earn its place as an essential ally—alongside local government, community-based organizations, businesses, and others—to change the story in their communities.

CHRISTIANS BROADCASTING HOPE - Broadcasting the hope of Christ in 10 languages around the world.

LEADERSHIP FOCUS - Online ministry development tool designed to equip and strengthen leaders in the Church of God.

CHURCH OF GOD FOUNDATION - Offers gift planning and management support for endowments, charitable gift annuities, charitable trusts, and wills/bequest planning—all to encourage lifelong stewardship.

PODCASTS

- All That to Say—fearless conversations with fresh minds on the front lines of what matters.
- A World of Good—stories from and about people who love Jesus, care about the church, and travel the world.

Christian Women Connection Budget—80%

MISSIONS: Global and Local

- Operation of 'Linen Chest' – provides housewares, clothing, appliances to career missionaries around the globe, as well as supplies for the Missionary Apartments in Anderson, IN
- Hunger & Disaster Relief Fund – funds provide resources worldwide – food, housing for homeless after disasters, clothing, medical and community development for the most devastating situations
- Missionary financial support
- Missionary projects (e.g., schools, churches, health services/clinics, job skills training programs)
- Support of Domestic anti-trafficking efforts and domestic violence abuse shelters

EMPOWERMENT: Spiritual Formation, Education, Leadership Training

- ARISE program provides leadership, support, and empowerment to commissioned, licensed, and ordained women in the Church of God
- ARISE Academy, a new online education program for women clergy or ministry leaders
- Linen Chest provides first-year college assistance for missionary teens
- Special Grants are given to support domestic and overseas women pursuing ministry education

- Development of resources - literature, videos, and devotionals (includes Suicide Prevention resources)
- Annual development of Christ's Birthday Observance advent programming

CONNECTION: Relationships, Events

- Conferences, Conventions, and Retreats to connect and equip women around the globe
- Connection with teens and young women – internships, IYC, NIYC, and Young Influencer program
- Website and social media connecting women around the globe
- Membership and Annual Planning Guide for groups
- Friday Connection weekly e-newsletter – publishing regular news, project updates, and resources for women of the Church of God

FUTURE INVESTMENT: Fund Development, management, general

- Investment in Leadership and Governance team with global Board of Directors representation
- Investment in stewardship of resources
- Investment in technology for continued and future connecting of women and resources around the globe the Church of God



ENTERTAINING ANGELS

Christ's Birthday Observance

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Christ's Birthday Observance



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