

## Ideas for Contemporary Worship in Advent

*All music suggestions are from Sing the Faith (Geneva Press, 2003).*

### Preparing for Worship

- Study and pray. Gather with other worship leaders to study the Bible lessons that will be proclaimed in these services, so there is a shared sense of the good news you will tell together. Pray together for the work of the Holy Spirit in your community of faith, for one another, and for those who will attend the worship services.
- Growing light. Advent is a season of growing light, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, the light of the world, and look with hope for the dawning of God's new creation when Christ comes again in glory. In these services of worship, you can illustrate this sense of growing light, hope, and joy by adding bright banners, candles, or other sources of illumination throughout the weeks from Advent to Christmas (or better yet, Epiphany). This is especially effective in an evening service.
- Ribbons or stars. Gold and white ribbons or paper stars provide another way to generate this effect. You might prepare paper stars or ribbons in advance, giving them to each person who arrives for worship. At an appropriate point in the service (see Response, below), you may invite them to write their names or prayers on the stars or ribbons and hang them throughout the worship space.

### **Gathering**

- As people gather for worship, begin with a time of singing. A few song suggestions are provided below. As the season of Advent continues toward Christmas, you may begin introducing more familiar Christmas carols (perhaps arranged in a contemporary setting).

Arise, Shine	<i>STF 2005</i>
Glory to God	<i>STF 2033</i>
All Hail King Jesus	<i>STF 2069</i>
He Came Down	<i>STF 2085</i>
Wild and Lone the Prophet's Voice	<i>STF 2089</i>
Advent Song	<i>STF 2090</i>
The King of Glory Comes	<i>STF 2091</i>
Star-Child	<i>STF 2095</i>
Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow	<i>STF 2096</i>
One Holy Night in Bethlehem	<i>STF 2097</i>
The Baby in a Manger Stall	<i>STF 2098</i>
Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mine	<i>STF 2099</i>
Carol of the Epiphany	<i>STF 2094</i>
There's a Song	<i>STF 2141</i>

- Light Advent candles: one purple candle for each Sunday of Advent, and a central, white Christ candle on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. (Some churches use a pink candle on the

Third Sunday of Advent.) Here is a sample Advent candle lighting litany, using themes and images from the prophet Isaiah (readings from Revised Common Lectionary Year A):

*At each successive lighting of the Advent candles, all texts from the preceding lightings are read in addition to the text introduced that day.*

*On the First Sunday of Advent and following Sundays:*

In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains;  
all the nations shall stream to it. *Isaiah 2:1-5*

*And on the Second Sunday of Advent, and at successive lightings:*

They shall not hurt or destroy on all God's holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea. *Isaiah 11:1-10*

*And on the Third Sunday of Advent, and at successive lightings:*

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. *Isaiah 35:1-10*

*And on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, and at successive lightings:*

Look, the young woman is with child,  
and shall bear a son,  
and shall name him Immanuel: God is with us. *Isaiah 7:10-16*

*And on the eve of Christmas, or on Christmas Day:*

A child has been born to us, a son given to us;  
and he is named Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. *Isaiah 9:2-7*

*On each occasion the lighting of the candles is concluded with:*

(Unison) Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! *Isaiah 2:1-5*

- Continue with a time of prayer. Since this opening prayer takes the place of several other prayers in this streamlined order of worship, it can and should include several themes (while being as brief as possible): thanks and praise for God's calling us to worship in the presence of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit; acknowledgement of sin in the presence of the Holy One, and prayer for God's saving grace in Jesus Christ; seeking the illumination of the Holy Spirit as we approach God's Word in Scripture.

### ***The Word***

- The Revised Common Lectionary provides a disciplined and time-tested way to read the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments through the seasons and festivals of the Christian

Year. You can find the lectionary texts for the Season of Advent at <http://gamc.pcusa.org/devotion/revised-common-lectionary/>.

- The Sermon in contemporary or emerging worship services is often less formal, sometimes taking the approach of a Bible study or discussion. Nevertheless, be sure that the love of God in Christ is shared, the good news of the gospel is proclaimed, and the grace and challenge of Christian life is expressed.

### **Response**

- A song or affirmation of faith may follow the proclamation of the Word.
- Next we pray for the church and the world. There are a variety of ways to pray; try to find an approach that encourages full, active, and conscious participation, engaging worshipers' hearts, minds, and even bodies. Here are some possibilities:
  - The prayer may begin with an invitation to prayer that is tied to the scriptures for the day, or inspired by the sermon or one of the songs in worship.
  - The prayer leader (a deacon, elder, or pastor, e.g.) can make brief petitions and invite people to respond spontaneously, silently or aloud, with their own related concerns. (This is sometimes called a "bidding prayer.") Appropriate topics for prayer include: the church (local and universal), the community or city, nations and leaders, peace in the world, the healing of creation, people who are poor and oppressed, those who are sick or suffering, and any other prayers that worshipers may offer.
  - A musical refrain may be used after each prayer as a congregational response. For instance, see "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" (*STF* 2193) or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer" (*STF* 2200). Or a spoken response may be used, such as "O come, O come Emmanuel." (With the familiar chant, this might also make a good musical refrain.)
  - If you have distributed stars or ribbons earlier in the service, during a time of silence or instrumental music you may invite worshipers to write down their prayers on these items and hang, tape, or pin them throughout the sanctuary. (This might also happen in a separate time before or after the prayers of the people.)
  - Conclude this time of prayer with the Lord's Prayer, if it is not used elsewhere in the service.
- This is a good time in the service to take up a collection for the ministry of the church and the service of the poor. Especially during the winter months of the Advent season, you might encourage worshipers also to bring blankets and warm clothing for a local homeless shelter, or canned food or dry goods for a food pantry.
- If the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated at one or all of these services, it appropriately follows the proclamation of the Word, the prayers of the people, and the offering. It is possible to celebrate in the Lord's Supper in such a way that is both consistent with a contemporary style of worship and still faithful to the Reformed theological and liturgical tradition. With special care and thoughtful preparation, the outline below can be

the basis for a more informal or even spontaneous communion liturgy. An ordained minister of Word and Sacrament (or in special circumstances, a designated elder) should lead this part of the service.

- The institution of the Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:23-26) is remembered with thanksgiving, in one of three places: (a) at the invitation to the table, (b) during the prayer of thanksgiving, or (c) at the breaking of the bread.
- We give thanks for God's creative power, redeeming love, and providential care throughout the ages, from the history of Israel to the church, and especially through the coming of Jesus Christ, God's Word made flesh.
- With thanksgiving, we remember the birth, life, death, and resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and pray for his coming again in glory to reign. If not spoken elsewhere (see above), the words of institution are said. We offer our lives to God in thanksgiving and praise as we remember Christ and celebrate this meal.
- We pray for the power of the Holy Spirit: that Christ might be spiritually present in this meal; that we might be spiritually nourished by the body and blood of Christ; that we might be united with Christ and be one in his body, the church; that we might go forth to feed and serve others as we have been fed and served; that we might remain faithful and watchful in prayer until we feast with Christ in glory.
- The prayer of thanksgiving concludes with a statement of praise to the Triune God, and the people's "Amen." The Lord's Prayer may follow if not used elsewhere.
- For communion music, see *Sing the Faith* pages 2254 – 2269. Instrumental versions of Advent songs or Christmas carols may also be appropriate.
- A concluding prayer of thanksgiving is offered.

### ***Sending***

- Follow the response to the Word with a song that sends worshipers out into the world, full of hope and joy and ready to share and show the good news of the gospel in word and deed. One suggestion (appropriate to repeat throughout the season of Advent) is "The Trees of the Field" (*STF* 2279), which is based on Isaiah 55:12.
- The pastor offers a blessing in the name of God (see Numbers 6:24-26 or 2 Corinthians 13:13).
- The pastor or another worship leader (perhaps a deacon or elder) offers a charge or statement of dismissal—inviting worshipers to go forth to love and serve God and neighbors. (See below for ideas about concrete ways to serve.) A good dismissal for the season of Advent is found at the conclusion of the epistle reading on the Second Sunday of Advent:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.  
(Romans 15:13)

### Other Ideas to Explore

- Art in worship. If your congregation uses projection equipment in worship, find artistic images related to the scriptures for the day to project as people are gathering for worship or during a time of meditation. This can be a good way of awakening worshipers' imaginations to biblical themes and images, as well as engaging young people and others who are not primarily auditory learners (i.e. listening to scripture lessons and preaching).
- Worship and service. Find ways to connect Christian worship to the service of others in Christ's name. Before or after the service, you might encourage people to write Christmas cards for people who are sick, homebound, in prison, or serving overseas. You might organize a service project, such as working in a soup kitchen, food pantry, homeless shelter, or construction project.