

# CROSSWAYS

*"Making Christ Visible in His Community."*

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## INCARNATION

The angels sing at the birth of Jesus, and the shepherds get this wonderful message of peace and hope. After all, who doesn't love Christmas? It is a season of love, of giving, of peace and tranquility.

It seems that we lose sight of the real "reason for the season" all too quickly. The beautiful story of Mary and Joseph and the babe in the manger fills us with a sense that all is well. And yet the mystery and majesty of the Incarnation is so much more than that.

One of the Christmas prophecies says, "And he shall be called Emmanuel, God with us." This is the center of the story of the Incarnation. God comes among us as one of us. As it says in John's gospel, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." God shows up in human form to lead us to a life of salvation, a life of wholeness, a new life in God's love.

So perhaps the angels are not singing because of a birth, but instead are singing because of a wondrous mystery that is taking place among us. God has arrived – in the flesh!

Advent is the season that is intended to focus on anticipation – we wait for the coming of the Lord. We know the story of the Incarnation. We know that God came and lived among us and died for us, and as our creed tells us, "he will come again...."

We live in an "in between" time in God's story. Christ has come, Christ has lived, Christ has died, and Christ will come again. "Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;" (Rom 8:19) God is still at work in us and among us. God is still in the process of coming into the world through us, the children of God, the followers of Christ Jesus.

*Glory to God in the  
highest heaven,  
and on earth  
peace among those  
whom he favours!*

*Luke 2:14*

So as we wait for the coming of the Lord at Christmas, may we also be waiting in hopeful anticipation of whatever God is going to “birth” in us, in our hearts and souls. God desires to continue the work of Incarnation within each of us. We become more Christ-like each day as we “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving [our] neighbor as [ourselves]”.

May this season of Advent be a season of waiting with hopeful expectation on the new life that God desires to “birth” in our lives.

Mike+

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Comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Corinthians 1:4

## REFLECTIONS ON FAITH AND LIFE

THE REVEREND LINDA GOSNELL,  
ASSISTANT RECTOR FOR PASTORAL CARE

### PRACTICING THE FAITH – OBSERVING ADVENT AND KEEPING THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

The season of Advent, which began on Sunday, November 29, always begins four Sundays before Christmas and is a season of preparation for Christmas. During this time, we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ (daily in our lives as well as at the end of time) while we also prepare for our annual celebration of the incarnation of Christ among us. In the church, we observe this season with several notable changes: our liturgical color changes to blue, parts of the Sunday liturgies change (one example, we say the Kyrie rather than the Gloria), and we light one additional candle on the Advent Wreath each Sunday.

As are so many things in the church, Advent wreaths are filled with symbols. There are five candles: one for each of the four Sundays of Advent – three are typically either blue or purple, placed equidistant around the circle, with a center white one for Christmas Eve. The circular shape of the wreath reminds us that God’s love is eternal, having no beginning and no end. The evergreen plants covering the wreath can be a reminder of our own eternal life, which is God’s gift to us. The color of the blue or purple candles is a reminder to us that Advent, like Lent, is a season of preparation. The pink candle represents joy at the approaching birth of Jesus. Finally, the white candle reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world.

One way of observing Advent is to have your own Advent Wreath – perhaps on the table where meals are typically eaten. If you didn’t make one at church last Sunday, assemble your own and begin now. Light the first candle each day for the rest of this week and use a devotional from one of the devotional books that are available in the parish narthex or simply say a prayer (the Lord’s Prayer perhaps) and a simple meditative response (such as “Let us await with joy the coming of the Lord”).

Another simple way to observe Advent is setting up a home crèche and leaving the cradle empty until Christmas Eve. Place the Wise Men far away, moving them slightly nearer throughout the month, having them arrive at the Epiphany on January 6.

A special observance is provided by our choir and special guests who will offer us a wonderful choral Advent Evensong on Wednesday, Dec. 2 at 7:00 p.m. Come, bring a friend, and worship with us.

Taking the time for these observances of the hope of Advent can be a reminder of our ever-present desire for Christ’s presence with us and can increase our Christmas joy.

Christmas is a season as well as a day. The “twelve days of Christmas” was an observance of the church before it was a song about gifts. Christmas only begins on Christmas Eve. It doesn’t end until the celebration of the Epiphany on January 6. Here are a few ways you can keep the season of Christmas.

Christmas Eve, light the white Advent Wreath candle, place the infant Jesus in your crèche. Invite someone to worship with you on Christmas Eve (Family service at 4:30 pm; Candlelight service with incense at 10:30 p.m.).

December 26 is the Feast of St. Stephen: Read the account of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 6:8-7:60). Sing the carol Good King Wenceslas. Pray for all Christians who are persecuted or killed for their faith.

December 27 is the Feast of St. John: Remember how John was the beloved disciple and also that John was a “fisher of men.” Read and pray John 1:1-18. Invite someone to join you in a Life Group.

December 28 is the Feast of the Holy Innocents: Read the account of the slaughter of the baby boys at Bethlehem by King Herod (Matthew 2:13-18). Pray for all refugees and children who are victims of war, violence and abuse.

January 1 is the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus: Remember how Jesus was named and circumcised on the 8th day (Luke 2:21). Give thanks for the motherhood of Mary from whom our Savior received his humanity. Pray for your parents (and your own ministry of parenting). If you are married, come renew your marriage vows at the 11:00 service.

January 2: Keep your Christmas lights burning through the 5th and intrigue the neighbors. 9

January 5, Twelfth Night: Give Christmas gifts today or tomorrow (perhaps a gift of your time) as Christians do in much of the world.

January 6, Epiphany: Remember the foreign magi who sought to worship the Christ Child (Matthew 2:1-12). The Wise Men finally arrive at the stable in your crèche. Extinguish the lights on your Christmas tree and begin to remove the Christmas decorations from your home. Some people may choose to keep their crèche up through February 2, the Feast of the Presentation (Luke 2:22-40).

Don't forget that Fran McKendree will be with us on January 6 for a special Epiphany service.

May your Advent and Christmas seasons be blessed and holy.

Linda+

## CHRISTIAN FORMATION

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**ADMINISTRATION, STEWARDSHIP,  
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## FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

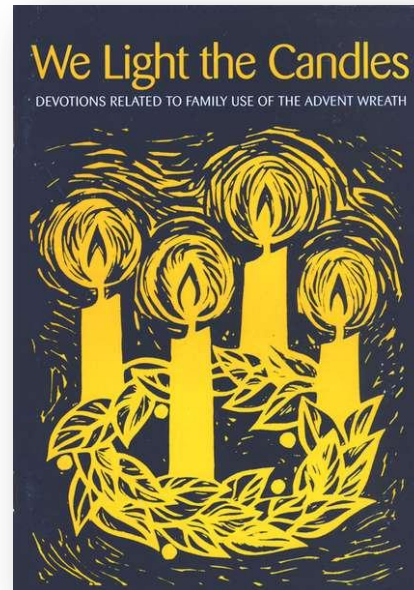
*We Light the Candles*

by Catherine Brandt

*We Light the Candles* is explicit devotions related to family use of the advent wreath. The circle of boughs is a reminder of God's unending love for us and of the gift of everlasting life he gave us through his Son Jesus Christ.

~ [www.Christianbook.com](http://www.Christianbook.com)

Send an email to [kclconnor@gmail.com](mailto:kclconnor@gmail.com) if you have a book, music, or movie that has been a special part of your spiritual journey.



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## HOLY CROSS CONTACT INFORMATION

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