

From
A Advent
to
Epiphany:

With
Arms
Outstretched....

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From Advent to Epiphany: With Arms Outstretched

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From Advent to Epiphany: With Arms Outstretched

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From Advent to Epiphany: With Arms Outstretched

(December 1st, 2002 – January 6th, 2003)

Introduction:

When regular worship as a household supports the weekly worship in our congregations, our relationship with God is strengthened and all of our spirits are nurtured. Healthy connections grow between the home and the congregation.

During the season of Advent, God's children prepare for the coming of Christ and Christmas in ways that set us apart from our society. We prepare to celebrate in a way that reminds us of our hope of Christ's second coming. This year, we are reminded of the way God continues to approach us with outstretched arms. We are also encouraged to stretch out our arms to God and to others whom God would have us embrace.

This resource for the home is adapted from the Advent to Epiphany congregational resource, which is available in the Mennonite Church resource: ***Builder – an educational magazine for church leaders.***

Use the resource whenever and however it fits into your home's routines and life stage realities. If your family has younger children, feel free to simplify, shorten and paraphrase the prayers and pondering thoughts. To use this booklet for daily worship times, repeat the litany for each day of the week, but change the scripture passage to the passages listed in the activities section. The activities correspond loosely to the scripture selections listed there.

The **pondering questions** are designed to allow God to speak to each household member in a personal way. Enjoy a short time of silence after each question and feel free to share or ponder these thoughts in you heart as Mary did.

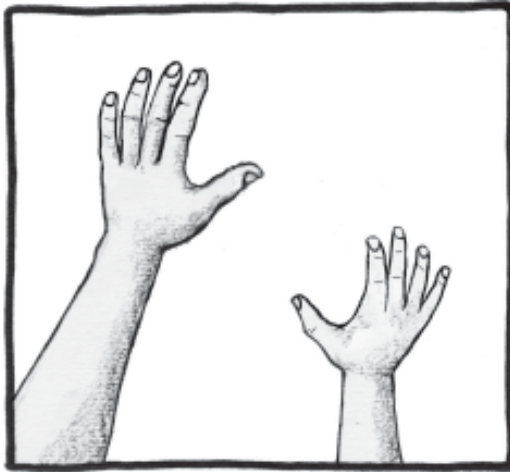
Worship symbols:

The collection of the following items can help you make a holy space in your home and your hearts for Christ this Christmas season. Feel free to adapt them to suit your home.

1. A festive cloth to cover worship area. A border could be created of people stretching out their arms and holding hands. Fabric paint, markers and paper cutouts could all be used.
 2. Some families may want to visit the **Builder** web page <http://www.mph.org/builder/> to find a design, which can be used to create a paper-cutting Advent calendar on this year's theme.
 3. Set one larger white Christ candle in the centre and six votive or tea candles in transparent candleholders around it. Alternatively, use a friendship candle ring with six tea lights around it. Purple, pink and white reflect the move from repentant preparation to celebration, but you can also use other colours.
 4. A Bible and this booklet.
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Week One

Longing Expectation



Call to Worship:

One:

With arms outstretched, we gather.

All: *(holding up hands)*

We are all God's people,
all the work of God's hands.

We long to see your face, to hear your name.

Open the heavens and come down.

One:

We light this first candle to help us pay attention
and wait to be aware of God's presence.

Listening to God's Word:

Read Isaiah 51:4–8 from the Bible.

Pondering thoughts: *(choose one)*

- Why were the people in this story waiting for God?
- Think about stretching out your arms to God. How does it feel?
- How does it feel to wait for something you really want? That is how God waits for our love.
- Get ready to notice and accept God's loving embrace.

Singing:

HWB 178 "Come, Thou long-expected Jesus", verse one
or a favourite Advent song about waiting.

Praying:

One:

Powerful and awesome God,
we praise your name above all.
We thank you for your love
and long to know it more deeply.
Help us prepare our hearts
for the wonderful message of Christmas.
We stretch out our arms to you
and long to know your embrace.

All:

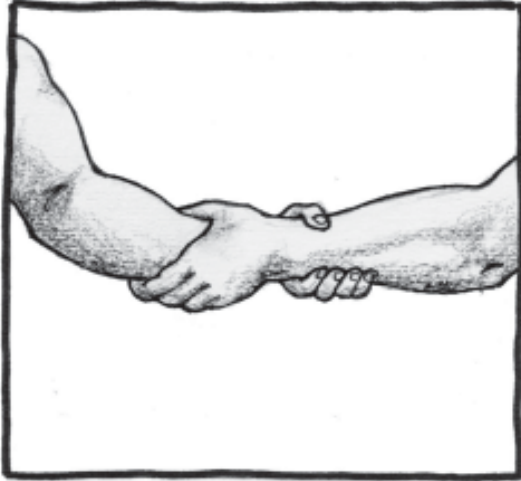
May your love find us and shine through us
even after we blow out this candle. AMEN

Activities to choose from:

1. Read these other texts about our longing for and expectation of God's presence. Isaiah 42: 1-4, Isaiah 30:18–26, Isaiah 64:4–9, Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19: Corinthians 1:3–9, Mark 13:24–37.
2. Think about some other people God wants to embrace and give them a hug from God.
3. Plan and carry out a way per day of sharing God's love with someone who needs it.
4. Find/draw and put up some pictures about waiting.
5. Start setting up a Christmas crèche. Add the figures of those who were waiting for the Messiah.
6. Stretch out your family's arms to someone new by planning and making a gift for them.
7. Keep a journal where you record your thoughts and feelings about waiting for God with outstretched arms.
8. Do something good for your body by doing some stretches while you reflect on this week's readings.

Week Two

Pardoning Grace



Call to Worship:

One:

With arms outstretched,
we gather to worship our forgiving God.

All: *(holding hands)*

We wait for God to make things right in our world.
We want to accept God's embrace,
so we can find forgiveness for the wrong we do.

One: We light the first candle to help us wait.

We light this second candle to remember how God forgives us
and helps us forgive others.

Listening to God's Word:

Read Isaiah 40:1–11

Pondering thoughts: *(choose one)*

- Is God like a parent who patiently, gently washes the wounds of a child to accomplish the cleansing that is necessary for healing?
- What can this show us about suffering as part of the healing of our spirits?

- What does it mean for us to let God get even with the people who insult us?
- Why is it so hard to say “Sorry”?

Singing:

HWB 182 “Oh, How Shall I Receive Thee”, verses 1 & 3, or your favourite Advent song about God’s pardoning grace.

Praying:

One:

Forgiving God, we trust you because you last forever. We want to receive and pass on your forgiveness. We wait for your grace to cleanse and save us. Forgive us for resisting your loving kindness and fairness.

All:

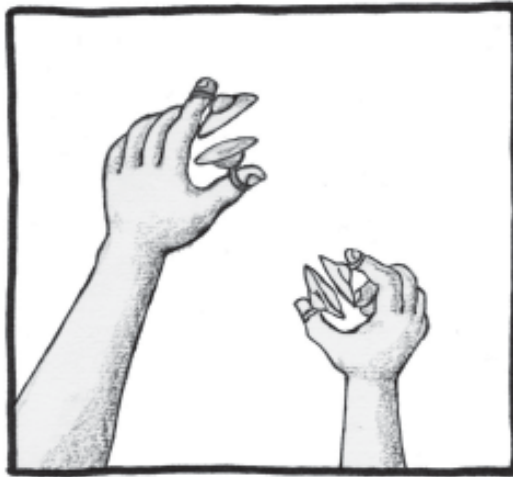
May your forgiveness cleanse us and shine through us even after we blow out these candles. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read these texts about our longing for and expectation of God’s forgiveness: Psalms 25:8–14, 65:1–5, 79:8–13, 2 Peter 3:8–15a, Mark 1:1–8.
2. Make a path of little stones for your crèche. Write words or draw symbols on them to show the path God wants us to follow.
3. Make a list or a poster of good things about following God’s way.
4. Write a letter or send an email to your political representative that encourages him/her to make choices that are loving, fair and peaceful.
5. Pray daily for a person you find it hard to forgive. Let God help you share his forgiveness with that person.
6. When you wait in line this week, think about God waiting for us to trust him.
7. Make and send a Christmas card to someone who needs your forgiveness.
8. Celebrate the freedom God offers us by forgiving us for our bad choices.

Week Three

Receiving Gladness



Call to Worship:

One:

With arms outstretched,
we gather to be purified by God's oil of gladness.

All: *(Holding hands)*

We are glad in the Lord,
who anoints us to bring good news,
freedom, justice and peace.

One:

We light the first candle to help us wait
and the second candle to help us with forgiveness,
and we light this third candle to reflect the gladness
God wants to kindle in our hearts.

Listening to God's Word:

Read Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11 from your Bible.

Pondering thoughts:

(choose one)

- What is it like when God's joy or oil of gladness penetrates our lives through the Holy Spirit?

- Can knowing and believing that God loves your family make it happier and more loving?
- What gift of God is penetrating your family?
- How can it help you participate in God's redeeming and gladness- giving work?

Singing:

HWB 184 "Hark! The Glad Sound!"

Praying:

One:

Joy-giving God, you fill our mouths with laughter;
you do great things among the nations.

Now we want to receive your true joy and share it with others.

Forgive us when the glitter that pretends to bring joy
distracts us from the joy that lasts.

All:

May your gladness shine through us
even after we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read these other texts about the gladness God gives: Luke 1:46–56, Romans 5:1–5, 1 Peter 1:6–9, Psalm 126, 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24, John 1:6–8, 19–28.
2. Dress up like Jerusalem, which the psalmist describes as the bride of the LORD.
3. Reflect with Mary on the great things God has done for your family. Make pictures or a song about them.
4. Share some of God's glory by visiting a sad or lonely person.
5. Thank God for the wholeness of life in Christ, by caroling on the street or at a shelter.
6. Add stars to the roof of your crèche. Let each star remind you to do something that would make God smile.
7. As you wrap Christmas gifts or bake goodies, compare it to the harvesting with joy referred to in Psalm 126.
8. Make a list of factors that help you decide if a toy will have good or evil influences on members of your family.

Week Four

Embracing Love



Call to Worship:

One:

With arms outstretched, we gather to embrace God's son
(fold arms as if cradling a baby).

All:

We are all God's people, all the work of God's hands.
We open our arms to receive God's secret gift:
Jesus, who is God's son, our saviour,
a king who will reign forever.

One:

We light the first candle to help us wait,
the second candle to help us forgive,
the third candle to reflect God's gladness in our hearts
and this fourth candle
to remind us of how God embraces
the world through Jesus.

Listening to God's Word:

Read : Luke 1: 26-38

Pondering thoughts: *(choose one)*

- Jesus' growing in Mary can remind us that Jesus' spirit also wants to live in us. Think about what that means for you.
- I wonder what Mary thought about as she waited for Jesus to be born?
- What do we have in common with Mary?

Singing:

HWB 180 "The Angel Gabriel"

HWB 181 "My Soul Proclaims with Wonder"

HWB 197 "Angels We Have Heard on High"

and other favorites from #189 – 215 this week.

Praying:

One:

Gracious God,
we give thanks for the birth of your son Jesus.
As our hearts gently embrace your gift,
we are filled with joy.
May your gift of love remind us to love our families
and to carry your love into the world.

All:

May your love find us and shine through us
even after we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

Read: Luke 1:39–45, 1:47–55, Luke 2:1–20 (*for Christmas Day*),
2 Samuel 7:1–11, Psalm 89:1–4, Romans 16:25–27.

During Christmas Week:

1. Add a special Jesus stocking to your Christmas decorations.
Invite guests and family members to donate money to this stocking. Then send the proceeds to a place your family thinks Jesus would want his "gift" to go.
2. Create Christmas ornaments from self-hardening modeling material to represent the themes of this Advent and hang them on your tree.

3. Recall and share stories of God's love that you experienced during this last year.
 4. Find ways of thanking the older people in your life for the ways they have made you aware of God's embrace.
 5. Give the gifts of time, friendship and a hug to someone who does not have family around.
 6. Make a poster about acts of love you see around you. Add a heart sticker for every act of love you see someone else do this week.
 7. Pick parts of the Christmas story to memorize so that you can recite most of it as a family on Christmas day.
 8. Read and enjoy some of the beautiful Christmas story picture books. One favourite is Max Lucado's *Jacob's Gift*.
-

Christmas Home Worship:

- As you light the Christ Candle in your worship centre for the first time, light a candle on a birthday cake for Jesus, too. Sing Happy Birthday to Jesus, or one of the Christmas songs in the Jubilee songbook (pp 38 - 41).
 - Bring Mary and Joseph from the path into the Stable.
 - Gently place the baby Jesus into the crèche, then add the angels and bring the shepherds into the stable.
 - Pick an appropriate carol to sing as you carry out each of these actions.
 - You may want to sleep in the living room on Christmas Eve, near the crèche and the tree, as a way of identifying with Mary and Joseph sleeping in an unusual place this night.
 - Repeat or create your own special rituals and traditions to mark the importance of Emmanuel - God with us.
 - On Christmas Day, plan a Shepherd's party. Invite people from your neighbourhood to come. Dress up like shepherds and eat bread, cheese, olives, figs or dates on a picnic blanket or in a blanket tent. Use a candle lantern or an electric candle for light.
-

Week Five

Inheriting Salvation



Call to Worship

One:

With arms outstretched, we thank God for adopting us
as royal heirs with Christ!

All: (*Holding hands as you say this*)

We are all God's people, the work of God's hands,
and we are invited into God's family.

Praise and thanks to God, that we can be children of God!

One:

We light the first candle to help us wait,
the second candle to help us forgive
and the third candle to reflect God's gladness in our hearts.

The fourth candle reminds us
how God embraces the world through Jesus.

The Christ candle shows us
that Jesus reigns as the Light of the world.

Now we light this fifth candle to remind us
that God adopts us as sisters and brothers for Jesus.

Listening to God's Word:

Read: Luke 2:21–32 from your Bible.

Pondering thoughts: *(choose one)*

- How do you feel when you think of being “a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.” (Isa.: 62:3)?
- How is God’s joy in us like that of a very, very proud parent or grandparent?
- What pleases God about the way God made you?

Singing:

HWB 212 “O Come, All Ye Faithful”, verses 1 and 4.

Praying:

One:

Adopting God, we are glad that you are pleased with us. Thank you for showering us with love and grace.
Help us live so that we can shower others with your love, and can make you proud.

All:

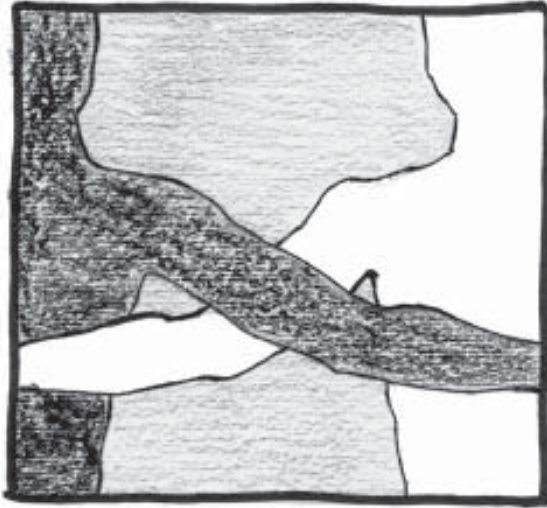
May you be pleased with us and shine through us even after we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read Luke 2: 33–40, Isaiah 61:1–7, 8–11 plus 62:1-3, Psalm 148, Galatians 3:26–29, 4:4–7.
2. Learn about the blessings of adoption, from an adopted friend or from a storybook.
3. Make and decorate some crowns. Wear them to help you remember that each of us can be a royal heir in God’s family.
4. Have a royalty party with the friends who joined you for the shepherd’s party. Dress up as Kings, Queens, or other royal family members.
5. Write notes to family members that tell them why you think God is proud of them. Hide these under their dinner plates.
6. Send notes of affirmation to people in your church family who have worked hard during Advent.
7. Make lists of things that make God proud and not proud of you. Then ask God to help you with the ‘not proud’ list.
8. Take pride in making music that praises God.

Week Six

Scattering Grace



Call to Worship:

One:

With open arms,
let us receive and scatter Christ's justice,
righteousness, peace and light.

All:

A new year, a new day has come
where all nations are invited to God's light.

One: *(light the first five candles and the Christ candle silently.*

As you light the sixth candle, say:)

This sixth candle shows us that God scatters grace
inside and outside of the church family.

Listening to God's Word:

Read: Matthew 2:1–12.

Pondering thoughts: *(choose one)*

- What does it mean for your household that God honoured the gifts of the Magi, who were outside of the Jewish faith community?
- How can outsiders help us understand who God is?

- Where we can find Jesus today?
- How can a friend that doesn't go to church do things for Jesus?
- What does it mean to live in a world where the innocent suffer?

Singing:

HWB 318 "Joy to the World", #216-222 and
"Rise, Shine" from p.7 of the Jubilee songbook

Praying:

One:

As we extinguish these Candles,
we remember what they told us.
We lit the first candle to help us wait,
the second candle to help us forgive
and the third candle to reflect God's gladness in our hearts.
The fourth candle reminded us
how God embraces the world through Jesus.
The Christ candle showed us that Jesus reigns
as the Light of the world.
We lit the fifth candle to remind us
that God adopts us as sisters and brothers for Jesus.
The sixth candle showed us that God scatters his grace
outside the church as well as inside it.

All:

God, as we blow out and clean up these candles,
help us take the gift of your love
and scatter it to everyone we meet. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read Matthew 2:13–18, 19–23, Psalm 72, Ephesians 3:1–2, Isaiah 60:1-6, Revelation 21:15–27.
2. Make a plan with the members of your household to find new ways of listening to God and worshipping together, now that the Christmas season has ended.
3. Invite a foreign student, or a neighbour who doesn't know Jesus, into your home.
4. Use a magnifying glass or kaleidoscope to look at objects in a new way.(p.25, Stutzman)

5. Think of ways your family can help scatter and discover God's scattered grace in our world.
 6. Have a party, with friends or neighbours, at which you scatter foil covered chocolate hearts as a symbol of God's scattered grace.
 7. Play your favourite Christmas music while you clean up and put away the objects that have helped you celebrate Christmas.
 8. Order in food from another culture to celebrate some of its riches.
-

coming soon!
a gift of song...



In this lively collection of songs, Bryan Moyer Suderman leads us in a celebration of God's great project in the world and invites everyone, small, tall and in-between, to join in. Come and be part of the adventure! Share the gift of song with your loved ones this Christmas. (CD only, \$16.95 + gst & shipping, CD plus Song & Activity Guide, \$24.95 + gst & shipping)

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