

How do YOU imagine
the mystery of God's dwelling?

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S DWELLING

Advent At-Home 2013

Please help us serve you better by completing a short
5 question evaluation of *The Mystery of God's Dwelling* at
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MysteryOfGodsDwelling>



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THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S DWELLING

Advent At-Home 2013

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Advent at Home, 2013
The Mystery of God's Dwelling
1st Advent 2013 - Epiphany, 2014
Lectionary Cycle A

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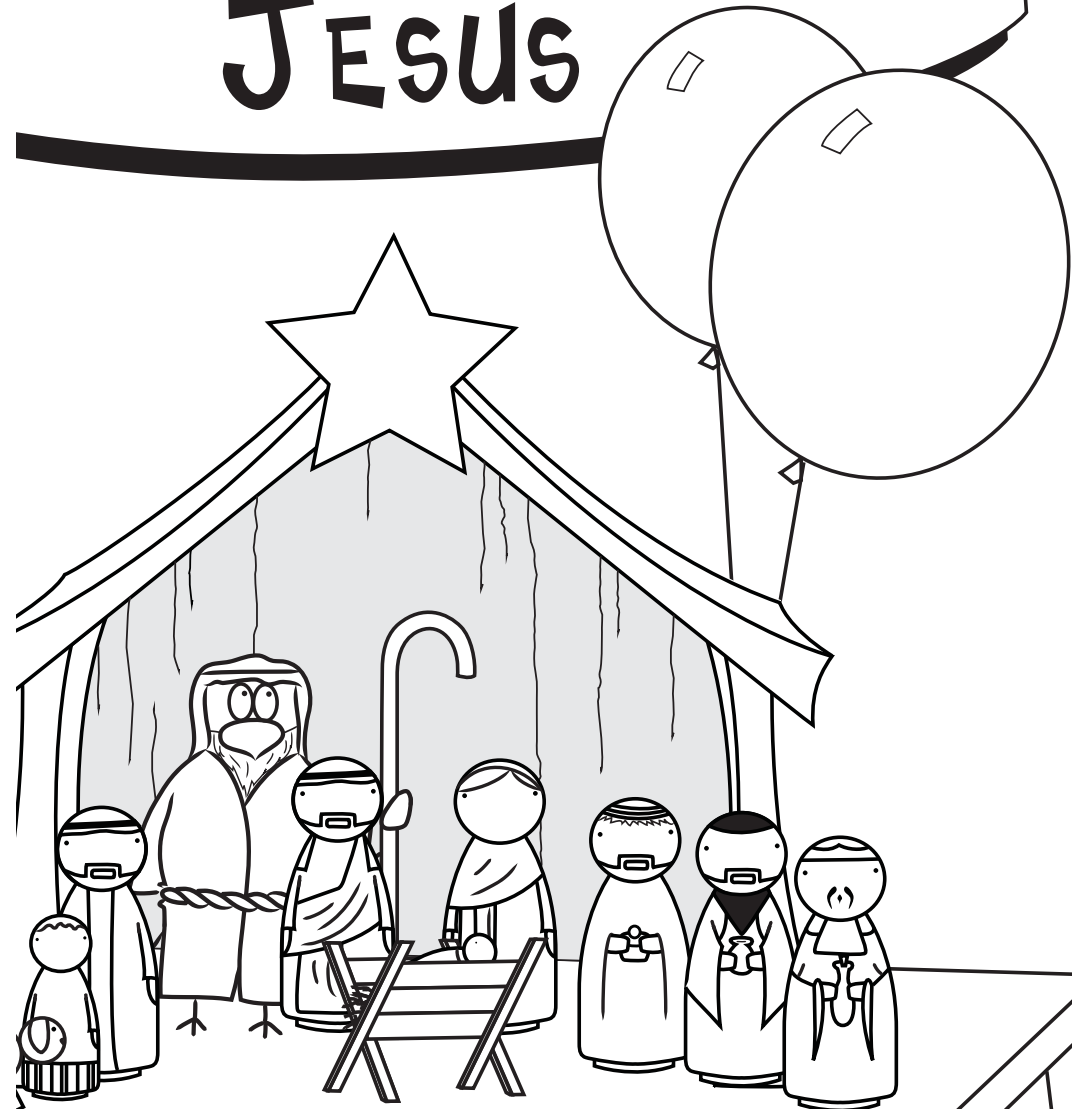
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HWB = *Hymnal: A Worship Book*
SJ = *Sing the Journey*
SS = *Sing the Story*

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APPY BIRTHDAY JESUS



Christmas Day, December 25, 2013

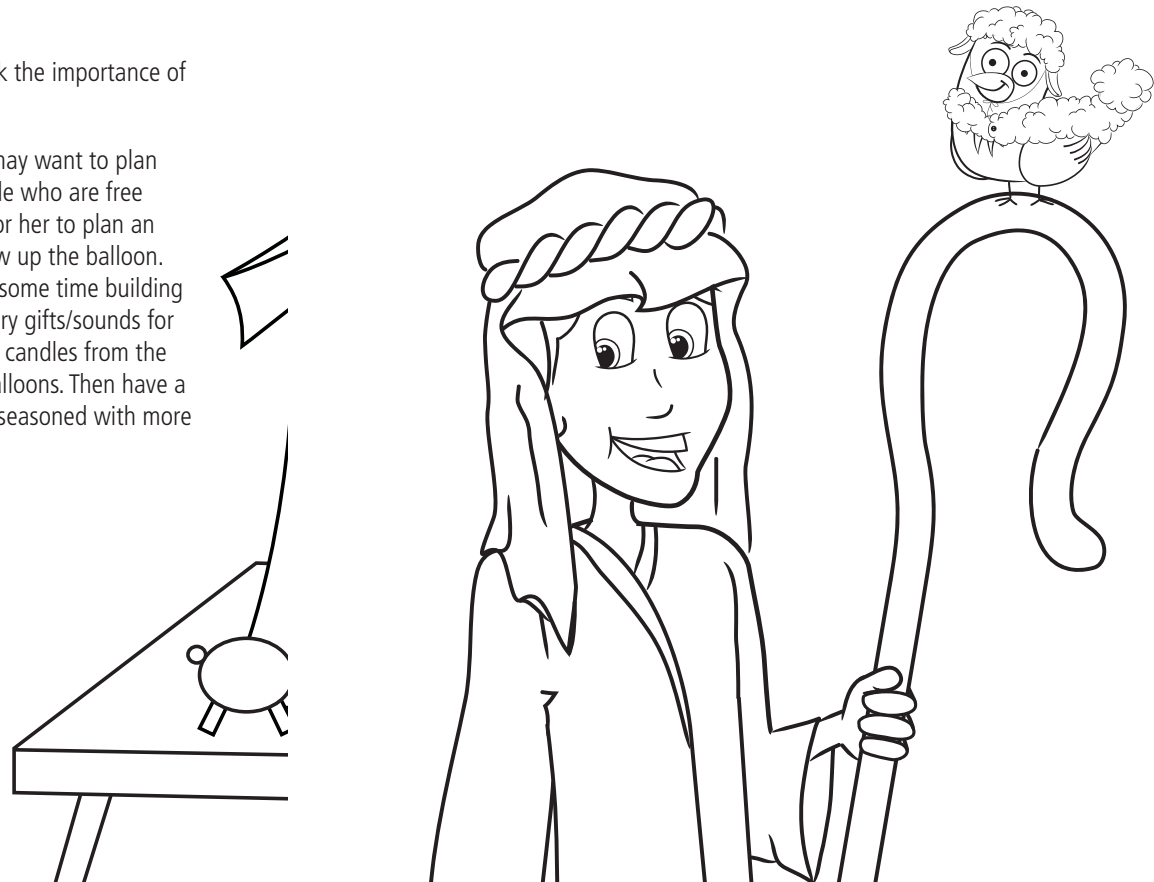
Christmas home worship:

1. 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 another appropriate Christmas song.
2. 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.
3. Consider learning and singing a newer song such as SS 25 *A stable lamp is lighted*.
4. You may want to sleep in the living room on Christmas Eve, near the poster, the crèche, and the tree, as a way of identifying with Mary and Joseph sleeping in an unusual place this night.
5. Repeat or create your own special rituals and traditions to mark the importance of "Emmanuel - God with us".
6. On Christmas Day, if you are free to plan your own party, you may want to plan a "God's Mystery Dwelling" theme party and invite other people who are free that day to attend. Give each person a balloon and invite him or her to plan an hour they would like to spend with and for God while they blow up the balloon. Collect the balloons into a hanging "balloon bouquet." Spend some time building and playing in a blanket tent in which you hide or create mystery gifts/sounds for others to guess at. Gather around your worship centre, light all candles from the Christ candle, and talk about the plans people blew into the balloons. Then have a shepherd-style snack together of cheese, breadsticks, and figs, seasoned with more stories of unexpected good surprises.



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Introduction:

Advent means “coming” or “arrival.” It is in this spirit of expectancy that we seek to connect families in our congregations with God’s mysterious offer to dwell with us this year. In our society, we often think of time as money; we feel pressure to be busy and productive, and reluctant just to *dwell*. This affects our lives at home, and many children and their parents suffer stress as they juggle schedules that are full of too many good activities.

This Advent, we invite you to a four-week period of introspection where you ponder what is needed to redeem us from evil’s hold on our lives. What do we need to become more aware of God’s dwelling with us? Instead of experiencing the stress created by trying to do too many good things, focus on what is really needed to live faithfully into God’s mystery this season, the season which starts the church’s worship year. Enter God’s time. Mark your willingness to do so by ringing a bell or chime as part of your family devotions this year. Children will respond positively to this ritualized action.

In these resources, you will experience two major themes: the theme of a home as God’s dwelling, and the theme of wilderness as the place where God dwells to meet and redeem us. The noun and verb form of *dwell* help to span the mystery of living with God.

The readings begin and end with universal visions of God’s rule. The central readings move into the nitty-gritty specifics of this world, including the specific place where Jesus was born and God took on specific flesh and blood.

The prayers and activities in this booklet are adapted from the worship resources developed by the Advent 2013 writing team from Freeman, South Dakota, Mennonite Church USA, for *Leader: Equipping the Missional Congregation*. To access *Leader* and other Mennonite Publishing Network resources, see www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/367.

Use this booklet in whatever way it fits best into your family’s routines and life stage realities.

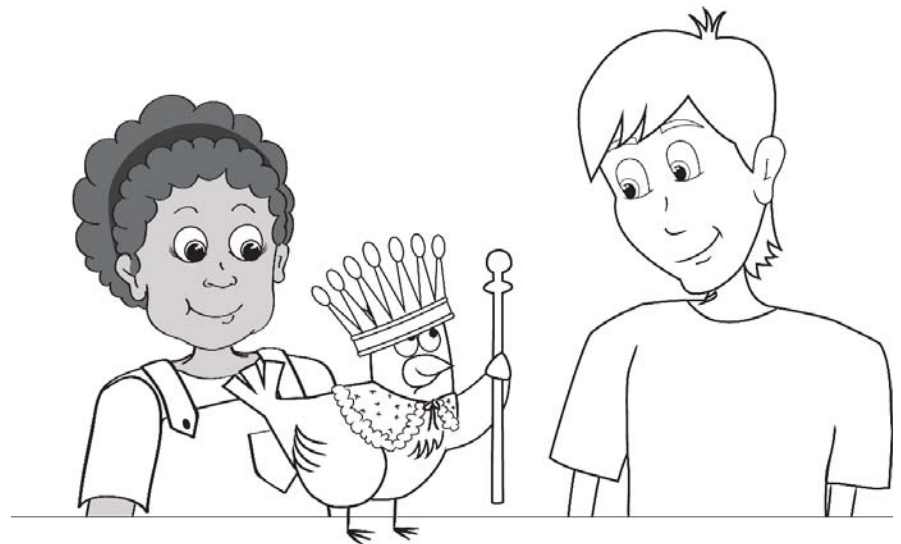
If your family has younger children, feel free to simplify, shorten, and paraphrase the prayers and pondering thoughts.

Or, for the really young, consider using the *Early Childhood Birth Narrative Ritual*, downloadable at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/364.

The **pondering questions** foster a contemplative attitude of listening to the nudging of the Holy Spirit, and affirm children’s intuitive awareness of the divine. Feel free to share these thoughts with each other, after a short time of silence, or savour and ponder them in your heart, as Mary did.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the week’s theme and draw an inviting fireplace in it in the sixth room of your floor plan. Draw people from different places around the fireplace.
2. Have a Three Kings Party. Invite friends and neighbours, dress up with crowns and robes, and read Tomie de Paola’s *The Story of the Three Wise Kings* (Putnam, New York, 1983, www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/369). Or, enjoy the picture book *Three Wise Women*, by Mary Hoffman, illus. by Lynne Russell (2002, Francis Lincoln Children’s Books), www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2069, which parallels the story of the wise men and brings more of the world to Jesus’ manger.
3. 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.
4. Wrap a gift brightly and give it to a foreign student or a lonely neighbour as a sign of God’s love.
5. If you have been gathering money for a mission project, as recommended during the first week of Advent, this would be a great time to bless and send in your donation.
6. Provide birds that have stayed around for winter with a sign of God’s care for them by putting up or refilling a birdfeeder with suet and seeds.
7. Play your favourite Christmas music while you clean up and put away the items that have helped you celebrate Christmas.
8. Reflect on highlights of this year’s Advent to Epiphany worship time and record them in your family worship journal, or send a note to Elsie Rempel, Mennonite Church Canada, and share these highlights as an encouragement with the broader church, at erempel@mennonitechurch.ca.



God dwells with all kinds of people

Christmas 2: January 5-11, 2014

Call to Worship:

Leader: *(Statement can be presented in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)* Come, awake to the mystery that in Christ all kinds of people are one!

Candle lighter

(Light all of the candles and then speak.) This sixth candle around the Christ candle reminds us that God's light attracts and unites all kinds of people.

Bell ringer

(Ring the bell or chimes and pray silently for 30 seconds or more before listening to the Bible text.)

Listening to God's Word:

Read and reflect on the mystery of God's glorious presence in these daily texts: Matthew 2: 1-12; Isaiah 60: 1-6; Psalm 72: 1-7, 8-14, 15-20; Ephesians 3: 1-6, 7-13.

Pondering thoughts from which to choose:

- I wonder why God created so many different kinds of people.
- If all people are made in God's image, I wonder what God looks like.
- I wonder how knowing God loves each of us might help us get along.

Sing or play

HWB 322 *For we are strangers no more*, SS 29 *Brightest and best*, or SS 32 *Oh, beautiful star of Bethlehem*.

Prayer

(Use echo form as with the Leader's statement above, or invite one person to practice reading this prayer.) God, thank you for showing your saving mystery to all kinds of people, and for dwelling with us in Jesus. Help us all share the hope, love, joy, and peace of knowing Jesus with the people we meet. Amen.

Candle snuffer

(Snuff the candle and then speak.) May God's saving mystery shine in and through us, even as we blow out and put away these candles. Amen.

Creating Holy Space and Time in your Home

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

- 1. Create a Theme Poster:** Title the poster "Oh, the mystery of God's dwelling." Start your poster by drawing the floor plan of a house with six rooms. The rooms will feature each week's theme by focusing on a window, a table, a bed, a cradle, a mess, and a fireplace.
- 2. Advent lights and a wreath:** 3 purple, 1 pink, and a central white Christ candle can be placed around a wreath to reflect the move from repentant preparation to celebration. Candles for Christmas 1, the first Sunday after Christmas, and Christmas 2, the second Sunday after Christmas, could be added in white and gold to celebrate the presence of God with us.
- 3. A Simple Crèche:** If you don't have one, create a simple A-frame with rough lumber or bark and add appropriate toy or play-dough figures to the scene throughout the season.
- 4. A Family Advent Journal:** The activities section of this resource will offer a reflective question for each week's theme. If you haven't kept a journal before, consider starting one this season and record your family's responses to those questions.
- 5. Mennonite Hymns** such as *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (HWB), *Sing the Journey* (SJ), and *Sing the Story* (SS).
- 6. A bell or set of wind chimes.**
- 7. A Bible and this booklet.**



God dwells in our present

Advent 1: December 1 – 7, 2013

Call to Worship:

Leader: *(Statement can be presented in phrases which are echoed by the other family members).* Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord and look with hope to the coming of Christ, who came into our darkness with marvellous light.

Candle lighter: *(Light the candle and then speak).* This first Advent candle is the candle of hope. It reminds us to look for signs of God's light among us.

Bell ringer: *(Ring the bell or chimes and pray silently for 30 seconds or more before listening to the Bible text.).*

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's dream of hope through these texts this week: Isaiah 2: 1-5; Psalm 122: 1-5, 6-9; Romans 13: 11-14; Matthew 24: 36-44; Luke 1: 26-38, 39-45.

Pondering thoughts from which to choose:

- I wonder what we hear God saying in today's reading.
- I wonder where we will next see signs of God.
- I wonder what new things God is doing in my life.

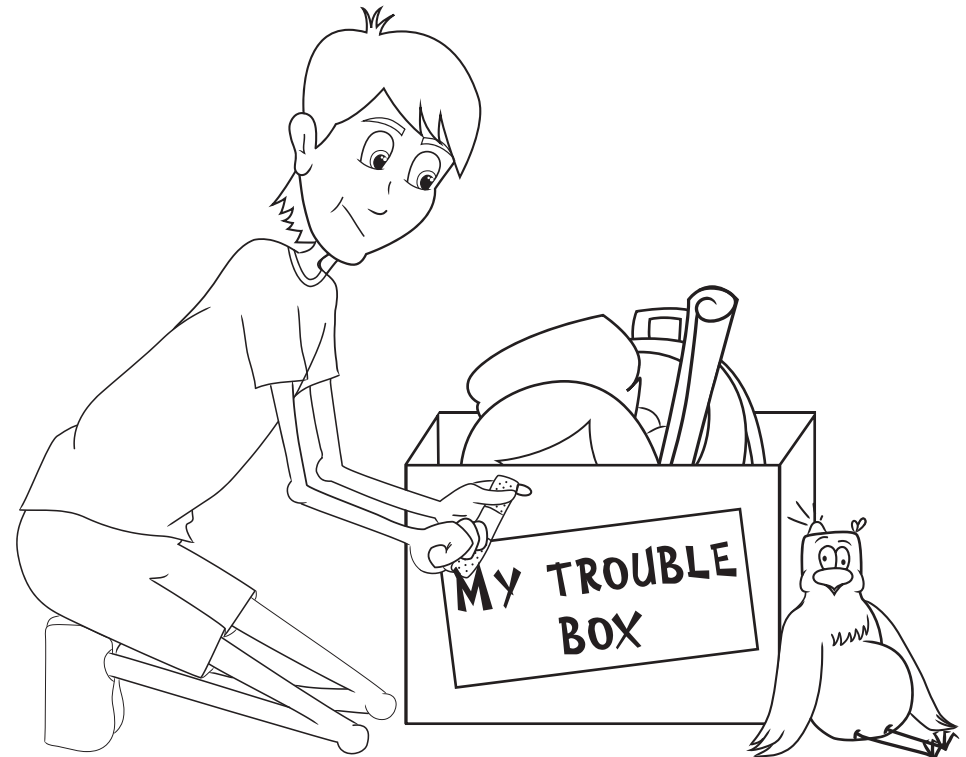
Sing or play: SS 10 *Come! Walk in the light* or HWB16 *God is here among us.*

Prayer: *(Use echo form as with the Leader's statement above, or invite one person to practice reading this prayer).* God, thank you for dwelling with us and giving us hope. For your sake, we will seek the good. Amen.

Candle snuffer: *(Snuff the candle and then speak.)* May God's hope shine in and through us, even as we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the week's theme and draw a messed-up room with crying people in it in the fifth room of your floor plan.
2. Listen to and learn Bryan Moyer Suderman's song, "Christ was born in Bethlehem," to help you think about Jesus as a refugee. Available at Mennonite Church Canada's website at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/357.
3. Read about or hear a live story from refugees who have been saved from violence.
4. There's a place in the Philippines called Mindanao where kids have to move away from their homes to live in tents - sometimes because of war, sometimes because of flooding or hurricanes. You can help buy these kids a Healing Colouring Book: www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1944.
5. Get out into the country and look for signs of joy and suffering in God's creation. Think of ways you can help relieve creation's distress.
6. Rewrite Psalm 148: 7-10 so it refers to the land, plants, and animals where you live.
7. Send thank-you notes to people in your church family who have worked hard to share the mysteries of God's good and saving news of Jesus during Advent.



God dwells in our troubles

Christmas 1: December 29, 2013-January 4, 2014

Call to Worship:

Leader

(Statement can be presented in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)
Come, awake to the birth of our Saviour, the one who helps in times of testing, and dwells with us in our troubles.

Candle lighter

(Light the candles, including the Christ candle, and then speak.) The fifth candle around the Christ candle reminds us that God's gift of Jesus is with us as we weep and rejoice.

Bell ringer

(Ring the bell or chimes and pray silently for 30 seconds or more before listening to the Bible text.)

Listening to God's Word:

Reflect on the presence of God in the joy and the grief described in these daily texts: Isaiah 63: 7-9, 15-19; Isaiah 64: 1-5a; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2: 10-13, 14-18; Matthew 2: 13-23.

Pondering thoughts from which to choose:

- I wonder how God's heart can hold so much grief and so much joy.
- I wonder if someone I know feels distressed today.
- I wonder how I could help show God's love to someone who is distressed.

Sing or Play:

HWB 209 *Oh, how joyfully*, SS 15 *Hope is a candle*, and HWB 215 *What child is this* and other favourites.

Prayer

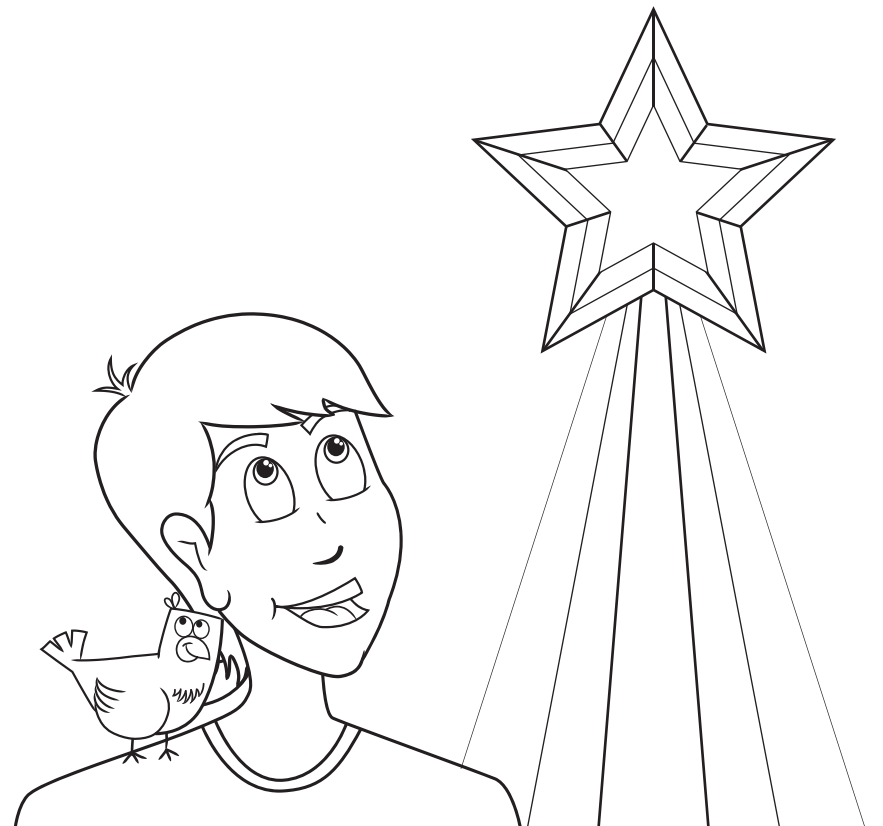
(Use echo form as with the Leader's statement above, or invite one person to practice reading this prayer.) God, thank you for being with us in our joy and our grief. Thank you for loving us no matter how we feel. Amen.

Candle snuffer

(Snuff the candle and then speak.) May God's constant love shine in and through us when we are happy and when we are sad even as we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. Draw the floor plan of a house with six rooms and title your poster. Then, add this week's theme and draw a window in its first room.
2. Spend some time learning to look at solving a problem God's way. Ask God to guide your imagination.
3. Imagine what God's creation care plan is for your community this Advent. How can your celebrations fit in with that plan?
4. Start setting up a Christmas crèche. Add the figures of those who were looking and listening for the Messiah.
5. Start out on God's Advent path by looking for evidence of God's presence in your home and neighbourhood. Record these signs of God's presence in your Family Advent Journal.
6. When you wake up, spend some time remembering if you had a dream. If you did, think about it when you gather around the Advent wreath.
7. Pick a family giving project from <http://donate.mennonitechurch.ca/at-home-family> and discover the difference your gifts could make for families and congregations in other countries this Advent. Invite other families to join you.



God dwells in our relationships

Advent 2: December 8-14, 2013

Call to Worship

Leader

(Statement can be presented in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Come and welcome each other in the name and peace of Christ. Mysteriously, God dwells in our relationships.

Candle lighter

(Light the candles and then speak.) The second Advent candle is the candle of peace. It reminds us that God can create peace where there is conflict and trouble.

Bell ringer

(Ring the bell or chimes and pray silently for 30 seconds or more before listening to the Bible text.)

Listening to God's Word

Reflect on God's dream of peace through these daily texts: Isaiah 11: 1-10; Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19; Romans 15: 4-13; Matthew 1: 18-25; Luke 1: 57-66, 67-80; Matthew 3: 1-12.

Pondering thoughts from which to choose

- I wonder what a hug from God would feel like.
- I wonder how we can feel God is with us even when someone is mean to us.
- I wonder when all enemies will learn to co-operate and become friends.

Sing or play

HWB 172 *O come, O come, Immanuel* and SJ 87 *Put peace into each other's hands*

Prayer

(Use the echo form as with the Leader's statement above, or invite one person to practice reading this prayer.) God, thank you for dwelling in our relationships, helping us forgive each other, start over, and live in peace. Amen.

Candle snuffer

(Snuff the candle and then speak.) May God's peace keep growing in and through us, even as we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the week's theme and draw a cradle with a baby in it and people smiling at the baby in the fourth room of your floor plan.
2. Add a special Jesus stocking to your other Christmas decorations. Invite guests and family members to donate money to this stocking. Then send the proceeds to the mission project your family chose during the first week of Advent as a place Jesus would want his "gift" to go.
3. Bring Mary and Joseph to the stable in your crèche.
4. Recall and share stories about signs of God's joy in your congregation during this last year. One of many good options, that takes you right to the current manger square, is *Bethlehem's Star*, by Christie Hoover Seidel (2007, Open Bethlehem).
5. Thank an older person in your life for the ways they have been a source of joy for you.
6. Create joy by giving time, friendship, and hugs to someone who doesn't have family around. A good book to enjoy together would be or one of the many books that show up on Amazon.com on a search of "Christmas Joy and Children."



God dwells in The Baby

Advent 4: December 22-28, 2013

Call to Worship:

Leader

(Statement can be presented in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)
Come; let us receive with joy the Child who came to build the house of the Lord.
Mysteriously, God's came to dwell with us as a baby.

Candle lighter

(Light the candles and then speak.) The fourth Advent candle is the candle of joy.
It reminds us to wake up to God's joy.

Bell ringer

(Ring the bell or chimes and pray silently for 30 seconds or more before listening to the Bible text.)

Listening to God's Word:

Search for signs of God's joy in these daily texts: Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 14-19; Romans 1: 1-7; Matthew 1: 18-25 (Christmas Eve); Luke 2: 1-7 (Christmas Day); Luke 2: 8-20.

Pondering thoughts from which to choose:

- I wonder why God decided to come to earth as a baby.
- I wonder what it would be like if baby Jesus had been born into my family.
- I wonder if God still shows up on earth.

Sing or play:

HWB 202 *The virgin Mary had a baby boy*, SS 10 *Come! Walk in the light*, and other favourites from HWB (189-215) this week.

Prayer

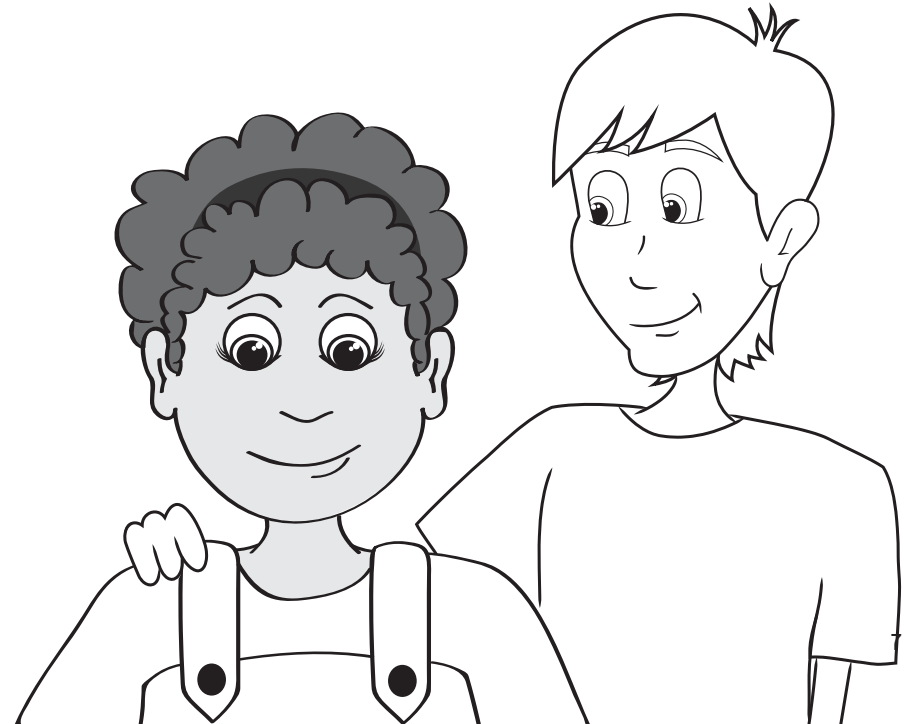
(Use echo form as with the Leader's statement above, or invite one person to practice reading this prayer.) God, thank you for blessing us with your joy and coming to us as a baby. Help us take care of people, just like your family took good care of you. Let your face shine on us that your will may be done. Amen.

Candle snuffer

(Snuff the candle and then speak.) May God's joy shine in us and through us, and help us know God is always with us, even after we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the week's theme and draw a table with people getting along in the second room of your floor plan.
2. Add small toy animals and bushes to your crèche landscape. Put together animals who are natural enemies, to show the new ways that God will make possible one day.
3. Make a chart of the times when your family wakes up this week and of some things you think God wants you to watch for as you wake up.
4. In your Advent journal, make a list of good actions and relationships which your family is practising. Encourage each other when you notice efforts in this direction.
5. Write a letter or send an e-mail to your political representative that expresses your commitment to peacemaking. Support an initiative such as the Department of Peace (www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1139) or support the Conscientious Objection to War Taxes Campaign (www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/413).
6. Pray daily for your relationship with someone you need God's help to get along with.
7. Get together with your neighbours or another family from your church to share God's gifts of hope and peace in a nearby seniors' home or food bank.
8. Take the peace pledge found at <http://www.liveforpeace.org/node/3>



God dwells in Mysterious Transformation

Advent 3: December 15-21, 2013

Call to Worship:

Leader

(Statement can be presented in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)
Come; strengthen your hearts, for the Lord is near. Mysteriously, God's dwelling changes us for deeper love.

Candle lighter:

(Light the candles and then speak.) The third Advent candle is the candle of love. It reminds us to partner with God in deeply loving all creatures and all creation.

Bell ringer

(Ring the bell or chimes and pray silently for 30 seconds or more before listening to the Bible text.)

Listening to God's Word:

Reflect on God's love at work in these daily texts: Isaiah 35: 1-7, 8-10; Psalm 146: 5-10; Luke 1: 39-56; James 5: 7-10; Matthew 11: 2-6, 7-11.

Pondering thoughts from which to choose:

- I wonder how God decides which things need changing.
- I wonder if God's changes always make things more beautiful.
- I wonder how God wants our help for changing our neighbourhood with love.

Sing or play

HWB 208 *Love came down at Christmas* or STJ 13 *My soul is filled with joy*

Prayer

(Use echo form as with the Leader's statement above, or invite one person to practice reading this prayer.) God, thank you for changing things with your love. Help us see and join your love at work, even when we are waiting for change. Amen.

Candle snuffer

(Snuff the candle and then speak.) May God's fair love work in and through us even as we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the week's theme and draw a bed with a person in it who is being renewed, or changed, through sleep in the third room of your floor plan.
2. Reflect on and give thanks for the ways people in your family and congregation partner with God to change suffering situations with love.
3. Draw a picture about love in action from one of our Bible texts and give it to a sick or lonely person.
4. Practice James' advice about being patient by waiting patiently for Christmas.
5. Add figures to your crèche that represent people or animals that are being changed by God's love and pray for them.
6. Read Derek Munson's story, *Enemy Pie*, (2000, Chronicle Books) www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1887 as an example changing an enemy.
7. As you bake Christmas goodies and prepare gifts, share some of these with people who have less than your family.

