

FREEDOM BOUND!

Advent At-Home 2015



**Mennonite
Church
Canada**

FREEDOM BOUND!

Advent At-Home 2015

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Advent at Home, 2015

Freedom Bound

1st Advent 2015 - Epiphany, 2016

Lectionary Cycle C

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Download additional copies at www.commonword.ca/go/143

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HWB = *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

SJ = *Sing the Journey*

SS = *Sing the Story*

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Introduction:

During this season of Advent, our worship resources invite you to approach Christmas by living toward God's freedom. As God's children, we are freedom bound.

However, life still includes the varied burdens of sin we carry, and keeps us longing for the fuller freedom for which we are bound.

This Advent, the theme of God's freedom will lead us down pathways of justice, mercy, trust, love, service, and inclusion. These themes encourage us to act confidently because we know that the freedom of God is breaking out within and among us.

The prayers and activities in this booklet are adapted from the worship resources developed by the Advent 2015 writer, Ken Beidler, a member of West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship, for *Leader: Equipping the Missional Congregation*. To access *Leader* and other MennoMedia resources, see

www.commonword.ca/go/136

Use the resource in whatever way best 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. Or, consider using the **Early Childhood Birth Narrative** Ritual, downloadable at

www.commonword.ca/go/137

The **pondering questions** foster a contemplative attitude of listening to the nudging of the Holy Spirit. Feel free to share or ponder these thoughts in your heart as Mary did.

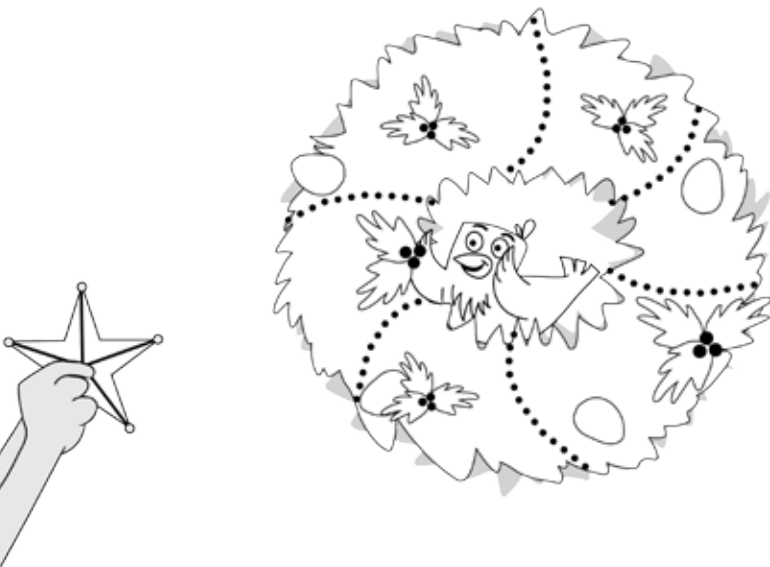


Creating Holy Space and Time in your Home

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. A Theme Poster: "Freedom Bound." Begin your poster by placing a stable into a landscape with a large sky. As the season progresses you will draw or paste six converging paths onto and from it.
2. Advent Lights and Wreath: place an advent wreath or log into a tray of sand, and surround it with smaller candles for each member of your family.
3. 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 will have a reflective question for each week's theme. If you haven't kept a journal before, consider starting one for this season.
5. Mennonite Hymnals such as *Hymnal: A Worship Book (HWB)*, *Sing the Journey (STJ)*, and *Sing the Story (STS)*, and downloads from www.smalltallmusic.com
6. A Bible, and this booklet. (NRSV has a lovely children's Bible – see www.commonword.ca/go/138)

For additional free downloadable copies – www.commonword.ca/go/143



Freedom Bound: The Path of Justice

Week One (November 29 - December 5)

Call to Worship

Come, turn your hearts toward a manger where the face of God shines brightly and clearly.

Candle lighter: *Light the Advent candle, then say:* We light this first candle of Advent in the hope of God's fair way breaking into our world. Now, we will light our own small lights from it and place them in the sand, as signs of joining God's fair way. *Light individual candles.*

Leader: God of Advent, in these dark days and nights of the year, fill our hearts with your light as we listen to your word. Amen.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's dream through these texts this week: Jeremiah 33: 14-16, Psalm 25: 1-5, 6-10; 1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13; Luke 21: 21-24, 25-28, 29-36.

Pondering thoughts:

- I wonder how we see God's desire for fairness in today's Scriptures.
- I wonder what areas of my life need more of God's fairness.
- I wonder how I can help God make things fair in my neighbourhood.

Sing or play: STJ 109 *There is more love somewhere*, HWB 172 *O come, O come, Immanuel*, or STS 15 *Hope is a candle*

Prayer: *Use an echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer.*

God of fairness and freedom, help us walk your road to freedom. Please fill us with more love, more hope, more peace, and more joy, so we can share it with your world. Amen.

Candle snuffer: May God's freedom shine in and through us, even as we blow out these candles. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. Begin your advent poster. Title it "Freedom Bound." Draw, or cut and paste, a stable into the middle of a landscape with a large sky. Make your first path to the stable and call it "Justice Way" or "Fair Way".
2. Bring the fairness of God's way into someone's life today by helping them imagine a better way of solving a problem.
3. Choose a way of responding to God's fairness by picking a family service or gift project. For family friendly projects see: <http://donate.mennonitechurch.ca/projects>.
4. Set up a Nativity corner. With boxes, crumpled newsprint, and some sheeting, it is not hard to recreate the setting. If you want, recreate the paths from the poster.
5. Start out on God's Advent path by looking for signs of God's fairness right in your home and neighbourhood. Record these 'God sightings' in a Family Advent journal.
6. Pick some favourite verses from Psalm 25 and rewrite them as a poem.
7. Pick parts of the Christmas story to memorize so that you can recite most of it as a family on Christmas day.



Freedom Bound: The Path of Kindness & Mercy

Week Two (December 6 - 12)

Call to Worship:

Come, turn your hearts toward a manger where the mercy (kindness) of God shines brightly and clearly.

Candle lighter: *Light two Advent candles, then say.*

We light the second candle of Advent in the hope of God's mercy breaking into our world. Now, we will light our own small lights from it and place them in the sand, as signs of joining God's way of mercy. *Light individual tea lights.*

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's mercy (kindness) through these texts: Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-75, 76-79; Philippians 1:3-6, 7-11; Luke 3:1-6.

Pondering thoughts:

- I wonder how you sensed God's kindness in these texts.
- I wonder what else you noticed in these texts.
- I wonder how these texts can help me be kind.

Sing or play: STJ 109 *There is more love somewhere*, STJ 78 *Sizohamba naye (We will walk with God)*, and HWB 151 *Marvelous grace of our loving Lord*.

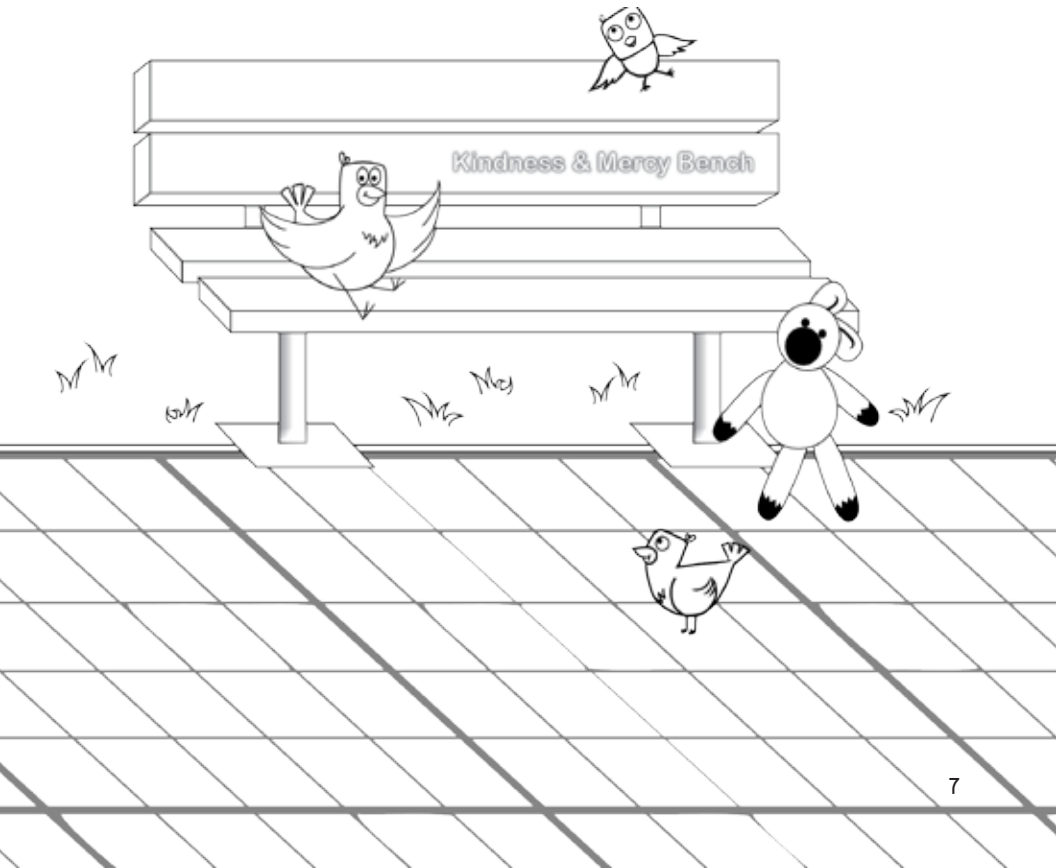
Prayer: *Use echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer:*

Jesus, as we prepare for your coming, we know we need to change.
Help your kindness grow in us, so we can live toward your freedom. Amen.

Candle snuffer: May God's mercy shine in and through us, even as we blow out these candles. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the second path to the stable and label it "Mercy Way."
2. Add small toy animals and bushes to your crèche landscape. Put together animals that are natural enemies to show the kind ways God will make possible one day.
3. Do something kind for God's creation, like putting out food for hungry birds.
4. Add to the 'God sightings' in your journal by listing kind actions you notice in others. Encourage each other when you notice each other practicing these good ways.
5. Read the story, Feeding the Neighbouring Enemy: Mennonite Women in Niagara during the War of 1812, by [Jonathan Seiling](#), illust. [Cynthia Disimone](#), www.commonword.ca/go/139
6. Pray daily for a person who needs some kindness. Ask God to help you be kind to them.
7. Write a letter or send an e-mail to your political representative that expresses your commitment for more kindness in our world.



Freedom Bound: The Path of Trust

Week Three (December 13 - 19)

Call to Worship:

Come, turn your hearts toward a manger where the trustworthiness of God shines brightly and clearly.

Candle lighter: *Light three Advent candles, then say:*

We light this third candle of Advent in the hope of God's trusting way breaking into our world. Now, we will light our own small lights from it and place them in the sand, as signs of joining God's way of trust. *Light individual tea lights.*

Listening to God's Word:

Reflect on how God's trustworthiness is clear in this week's texts:

Zephaniah 3:14-18, 19-20; Isaiah 12: 1-4, 5-6; Philipians 4: 4-7, 8-9; Luke 3: 7-18.

Pondering thoughts:

- I wonder what helped the writers of these texts trust God.
- I wonder what you noticed about God trusting us.
- I wonder how trusting God can help us trust each other.

Sing or play:

STS 39 *Will you come and follow me*, STJ 105 *Don't be afraid*,
or HWB 184 *Hark! The glad sound!*

Prayer: *Use echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer:*

God of trust, forgive us for times when we don't trust you. Set us free from unhealthy fear and help us welcome you as Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Candle snuffer: May God's freedom shine in and through us, even as we blow out these candles. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the third path to the stable and label it "Trusting Way."
2. Reflect: How is God helping you trust each other in your family and congregation? Draw a picture or make up a song about it.
3. Take turns blindfolding each other and spinning each other around. Then lead the blindfolded and dizzy person to an agreed-upon place. Compare this to the way trusting God can help us stay on God's good way.
4. Ask someone in your family to trust you to do something good for them. Remember to do it the next day.
5. Plan conversations between the shepherds in your Nativity set that show how trusting each other helps them care for their sheep.
6. In your journal, list tips for living in freedom by trusting God's way. Then share these ideas with another family.
7. As you wrap Christmas gifts or bake and share goodies, think about the list of good things in Philippians.



Freedom Bound: The Path of Love

Week Four (December 20 - 26)

Call to Worship:

Come, turn your hearts toward a manger where the love of God shines brightly and clearly.

Candle lighter: *Light four Advent candles, then say:*

We light this fourth candle of Advent in the hope of God's loving way breaking into our world. Now, we will light our own small lights from it and place them in the sand, as signs of joining God's way of love. *Light individual tea lights.*

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on the ways that God's love shines through this week's texts: Luke 1: 39-45, 46-55, 56-66; Micah 5: 2-5a; Psalm 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 2:1-20 (for Christmas Eve).

Pondering thoughts:

- I wonder what Mary and Elizabeth said to each other about the special babies they were delivering.
- I wonder what these texts say to you today.
- I wonder what it means for us that Mary gave birth to Jesus.
- I wonder how we share in God's love for our suffering world.

Sing or play:

HWB 181 *My soul proclaims with wonder*, STJ 13 *My soul is filled with joy*, STJ 109 *There is more love somewhere*, and other favourites from HWB (189 – 215) this week.

Prayer: *Use echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer:*

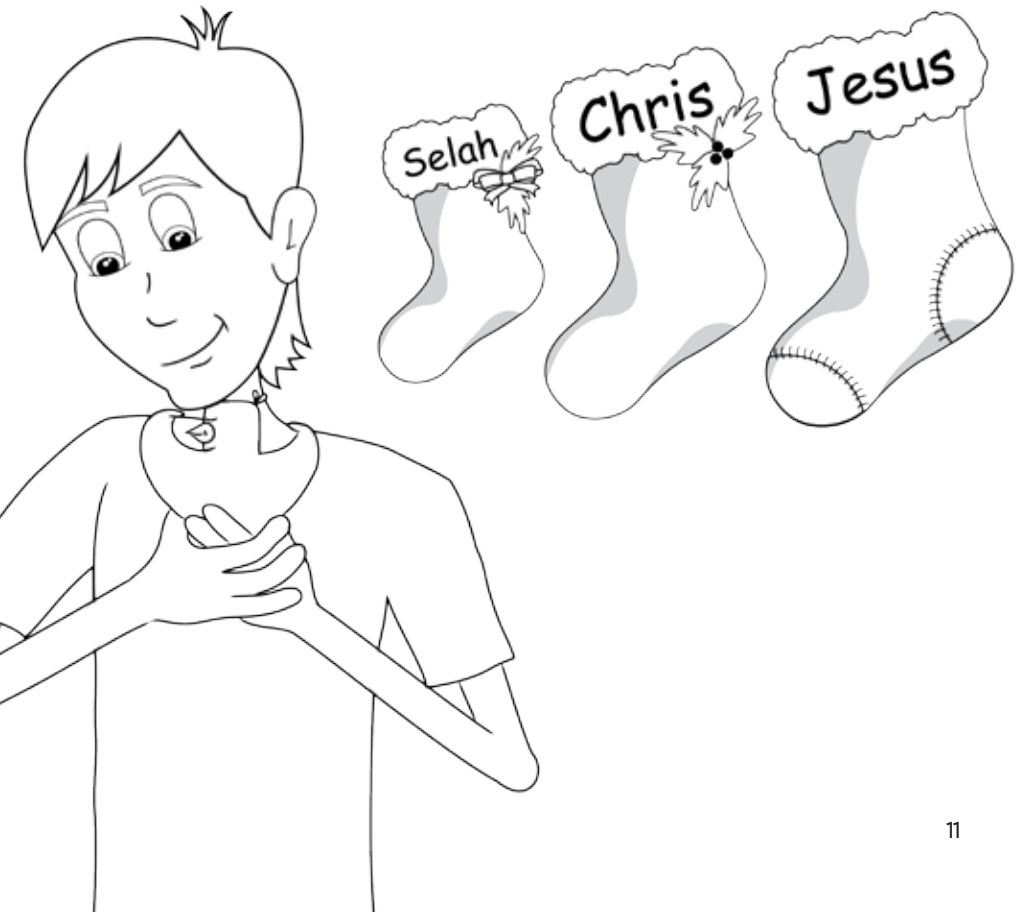
Loving God, set us free to walk your road of freedom. Thank you for your son who gives us more love, more hope, more peace, and more joy. Amen.

Candle snuffer: May God's freedom shine in and through us, even as we blow out these candles. Amen.



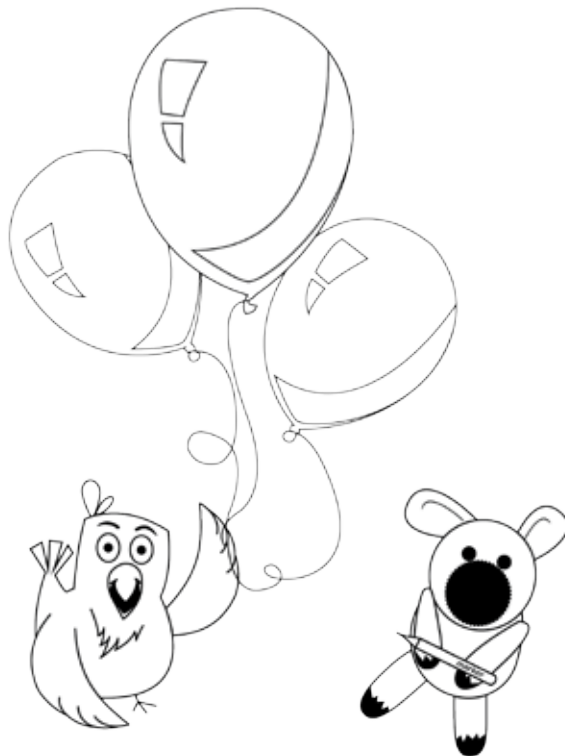
Activities to choose from during Christmas Week:

1. On your poster, add the fourth path to the stable and label it "Loving Way."
2. Add a special Jesus stocking to your Christmas decorations. Invite guests and family members to donate money to this stocking. Then deliver the proceeds to your Advent gift project. If you haven't picked one yet, do so now at <https://donate.mennonitechurch.ca/projects>
3. Bring Mary and Joseph, Jesus (on Christmas Eve), and the shepherds, to the stable.
4. Recall and share stories about God's love in your community this last year.
5. Read *Modestita's Gift: A Christmas Story* by Inez Torrez Davis, for a moving modern parable about giving your best, even though you know it will get broken. (www.commonword.ca/go/140)
6. Spend time with an older person in your life, wondering together about God's love.
7. Offer gifts of time, friendship, and a hug to someone who does not have family around, and let God's love over flow through you.



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 another appropriate Christmas song.
- 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 poster, 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, you may want to plan a God's freedom theme party and invite people from your neighbourhood to attend. Give each person a balloon and invite him or her to imagine what God's full freedom will be like while they blow up the balloon. Write words about that on the balloons. Bundle them and hang them near your worship centre. Then, light all candles, including your individual ones, from the Christ candle, and talk about the different aspects of God's freedom that have become important to you this Advent. Finish by having a shepherd-style snack together.



Freedom Bound: The Path of Service

Sunday after Christmas (Dec. 27/15 - Jan 2/16)

Call to Worship:

Come, turn your hearts toward a manger where the servant heart of God shines brightly and clearly.

Candle lighter: *Light the Advent candles, plus the Christ candle, then say:*

We light this first candle of Christmas in memory of God's serving way breaking into our world. Now, we will light our own small lights from it and place them in the sand, as signs of joining God's way of service. *Light individual tea lights.*

Listening to God's Word:

This week, reflect on how these texts rejoice about God's goodness: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Luke 2:33-40, 41-52; Psalm 148:1-6, 7-14; Colossians 3:12-17.

Pondering thoughts:

- I wonder what Samuel thought and felt when he wore the robes his mother made for him.
- I wonder what you noticed about Samuel and Jesus serving God with their lives.
- I wonder what it means for our family to serve God with our lives.

Sing or Play:

HWB 48 *All creatures of our God and King*, HWB 197 *Angels we have heard on high*, STS 26 *Helpless and hungry* and other favourites.

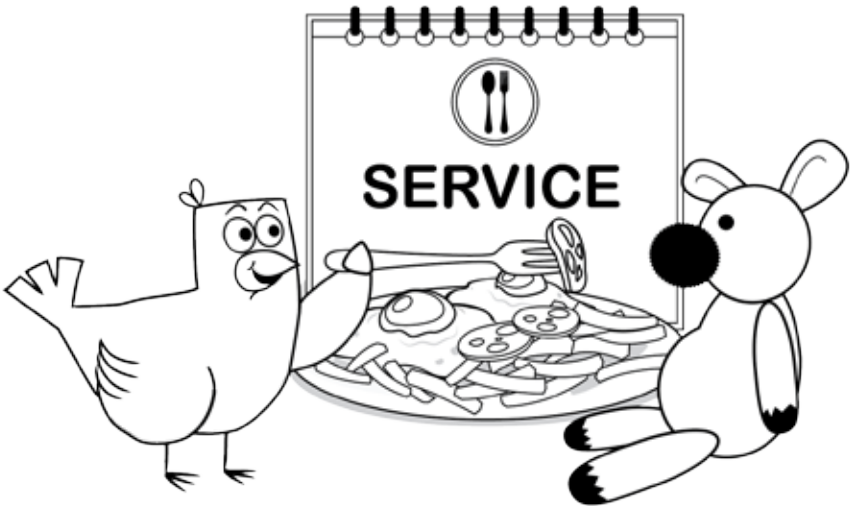
Prayer: *Use echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer:*

God of service, as we walk this road of freedom, help us serve like Jesus. May his peace rule in our hearts, so that whatever we do we will do it in his name. Amen.

Candle snuffer: May God's freedom shine in and through us, even as we blow out these candles. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the first path from the stable to the horizon and label it "Service Way."
2. Have a robe party with the friends who joined you for the shepherd's party. Label each robe with a characteristic of love from Colossians 3: 12-17.
3. Write notes to family members, telling them how ways they help others remind you of God. Hide these under their dinner plates and share them after the meal is finished.
4. Make a plan for growing some vegetables that you can share with a local food bank, or grow some sprouts that you can share with a neighbour.
5. Rewrite Psalm 148 so it refers to the land, plants, and animals where you live.
6. List God's wonderful gifts in your life and thank God for them in your prayers.
7. Send notes of thanks to people in your church family who have served God by sharing their worship gifts during Advent.



Freedom Bound: The Path of Inclusion

Epiphany Sunday (January 3 - 9/16)

Call to Worship:

Come, turn your hearts toward a manger where the welcoming heart of God shines brightly and clearly.

Candle lighter: *Light the Advent candles, then say:*

We light this sixth candle in the hope of God's inclusive way breaking into our world. Now, we will light our own small lights from it and place them in the sand, as signs of joining God's way of including others. *Light individual tea lights.*

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on the mystery of God's welcoming heart through these texts: Matthew 2:1-6, 7-12; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-6, 7-12; Isaiah 60:1-6.

Pondering thoughts:

- I wonder how welcome the wise men felt when they found Jesus.
- I wonder how we can welcome strangers as visitors.
- I wonder what it will be like when all people worship Jesus together.

Sing or play:

HWB 66 *O worship the King*, HWB 202 *The virgin Mary had a baby boy*, or STS 31 *Jesus, be the center*.

Prayer: *Use echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer:* God of welcome, along with the wise of every age, we worship and adore you. But we sometimes lose our way. Help us. Forgive us. Help us be welcoming lights in our world. May the light of Christ be in us and among us to guide us and bless us, now and always. Amen.

Candle snuffer: May God's welcome shine in and through us, even as we blow out these candles. Amen.

Activities from which to choose:

1. On your poster, add the second path from the stable to the horizon and label it "Welcoming Way."
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*, (G.B. Putnam, New York, 1983) www.commonword.ca/go/141 or Mary Hoffman's *Three Wise Women* (Francis Lincoln Children's Books, GB, 2002) www.commonword.ca/go/142.
3. Make a family plan for listening and responding to God in your daily routines, now that the Christmas season has ended.
4. Welcome a foreign student, or a neighbour who may be lonely, into your home. Invite them to teach you something from their country, or their childhood.
5. Respond to the ways people are sharing God's welcome all over our world by supporting a Mennonite Church Canada ministry project. See the world map for ideas at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2479.
6. Help wintering birds feel welcome 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 objects that have helped you celebrate and worship this Christmas season.



If you found this material helpful, or would like to tell us how you used it, please let us know by filling out this short questionnaire at [surveymonkey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/RevealYourMystery)

www.surveymonkey.com/s/RevealYourMystery.

Or, contact Elsie Rempel directly at erempel@mennonitechurch.ca



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