



**God's
Unstoppable
Purpose**

Adapted, compiled and
written by Elsie Rempel



God's Unstoppable Purpose

Advent 2005–Epiphany, 2006–Lectionary Cycle B

Mennonite Church Canada

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HWB = Hymnal: a Worship Book

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Introduction:

During the season of Advent, God's children approach Christmas with a unique focus. Advent connects us with God's people of the past, present and future. This year, we are reminded to focus on God's surprising, faithful, restorative, inviting, unimaginable and unstoppable purposes which break forth anew.

Fragile as the baby, yet gracing God's earth with beauty and strength, flowers are an apt metaphor for God's Unstoppable Purpose. The six different flowers representing this season and shown in the following pages, may be added one each week.

The prayers and activities in this booklet are adapted from the Worship resources developed by the Advent 2005 writing team from Saskatchewan for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA.

Use the resource as a guide for your family's devotional time. If your family has younger children, feel free to simplify, shorten and paraphrase the prayers and pondering thoughts. Repeat the weekly litany each day of the week as you move through the list of daily Scriptures.



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

Creating Holy Space in your Home

The following items can help create a holy space in your home and your hearts for Christ this Christmas season. Adapt them as you see fit.

1. A **theme poster** that is decorated with stars that fill the Christmas sky and flower photographs, drawings, or cut outs from seed catalogues or the pattern page in this booklet. Encourage children to add symbols that they associate with Christ's birth and with each week's specific theme. Suggestions for each week are in the activity sections.
2. A **crèche**: If you don't have one, create a simple A-frame or lean-to with rough lumber or bark. Add toys or play dough figures to the scene throughout the season. Add the baby Jesus at Christmas and the wise men on Epiphany.
3. A **family Advent journal**: The activities section provides the opportunity to reflect on the gospel reading from a different character's perspective for each week's theme. Responses can be drawings or writing. If you haven't kept a journal before, consider starting one for this season.
4. **Advent Lights**: Create or decorate an advent wreath with a floral theme. Options include attaching floral stickers to your candles, cutting pictures of each week's flower out of seed catalogues and attaching them to the outside of glass candle jars, or adding dried or silk flowers into the greenery of a wreath made from cedar or pine boughs. A larger Christ candle in the centre could be decorated with poinsettias. Purple, pink and white are the liturgical colours for symbolizing the move from repentant preparation to celebration.
5. A **Bible** and this **booklet**.

God's Unstoppable Purpose Surprises

First Advent – November 27, 2005



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: God comes to meet us and surprise us as we work, play and wait. Watch for God's surprises all around. Powerful, gentle, surprising God, reveal yourself that all may believe and that your peace might reign on earth as it does in heaven.

Candle lighter: We light this first Advent candle to remind us to watch and wait for God's unexpected and awesome deeds.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on God's peace through these texts this week:

Isaiah 64: 1 – 4, 5 – 9, Psalm 80: 1 – 3, 4 – 7, 17 – 19, 1.
Corinthians 1: 3 – 9, Mark 13: 32 – 37.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

1. What surprises me about God in today's reading?
2. I wonder what God's purposes for my life are this week.
3. How does looking for God in everything change my attitudes?

Sing or play:

HWB 163 *Obey my voice*, or

HWB 175 *O Savior, rend the heavens*, v.1 – 3.

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

Teach us to see you in the people we meet, in the nature we enjoy, in the gifts you provide. Grant us patience and strength as we wait for you and joy as we meet you in surprising ways.

Candle snuffer: *(lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise)* This smoke reminds us of the surprising Spirit of God going out all over our family, (your town), and the world. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Begin your Advent poster by writing the Theme, “God’s Unstoppable Purpose” in the middle of it. Surround it with six star outlines for each week’s sub theme. Decorate and add the word ‘surprises’ to the first star. You will decorate the other signs of God’s unstoppable purposes during the coming weeks.
2. Start setting up a Christmas crèche. Begin with the figures of those who were waiting for the Messiah.
3. Begin your family Advent journal by reflecting on how the pregnant Mary could have responded to this week’s readings. Write as Mary, or draw cartoons of her.
4. Surprise someone with a random act of kindness as your way of participating in God’s surprising and unstoppable good news.
5. Plant some crocus bulbs in a pot that is at least 20 cm deep, and anticipate their cheerful greeting in February.
6. Use modeling or potter’s clay to express what each person in your family understands as God’s purpose for them.
7. Make a difference by beginning a refugee project with a several families in your congregation or neighbourhood. Ask for the project brochure **Colombia: Hope for Displaced Children** at church or download it at: <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/5/7072>

God's Unstoppable Purpose is Faithful

Second Advent, Dec 4, 2005



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: God compassionately waits for us to turn and come back. Watch for reminders of God's faithfulness all around. Strong and gentle, faithful God, help us have the courage to receive your love today.

Candle lighter: *Review the meaning of the first candle. Then say, We light this second Advent candle to remind us to watch and wait for God's faithfulness.*

Listening to God's Word:

Reflect on God's faithfulness through these daily texts:

Isaiah 40: 1 – 5, 6 – 11, Psalm 85: 8 – 13, Luke 1: 5 – 14, 57 – 66, Mark, 1: 1 – 8, 2. Peter 3: 8 – 15.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

1. I wonder how the imagery in today's reading helps me understand God's faithfulness.
2. I wonder which word picture about God has a new message for me today?
3. I wonder how we reflect God's faithfulness to others, and what they would compare us to.

Sing or play:

HWB 174 *Bless'd be the God of Israel* and the Advent theme song, *He came down that we may have love or*

HWB 172 *O come, O come Immanuel*

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

Strong and gentle God, you wait for us to turn and come back to you so we can taste your faithfulness.

As we experience your love, help us share its aroma with others and participate in your work in the world.

Candle snuffer: *(lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise)* This smoke reminds us of the faithful Spirit of God going out all over our family, (your town), and the world. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Continue your Advent poster by decorating and adding the word 'faithfulness' to the second star.
2. Add to your Christmas crèche. Add 'grassy' hills and a 'stream' for the shepherds and think of how they had to be faithful in caring for their sheep.
3. Continue your family Advent journal by reflecting on how Mary's older cousin Elizabeth could have responded to this week's readings. Write as Elizabeth, or draw cartoons of her.
4. Practice faithfulness by making a promise to help your family with one specific task and try to keep your promise all week.
5. Enjoy a picture book about faithfulness for one of this week's bedtime stories.
6. Make a list of good things people are waiting for.
7. Remember to be faithful with your Advent giving project that other children of God are waiting to receive.

<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/5/7072>

God's Unstoppable Purpose Restores

Third Advent – December 11, 2005



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: We come into God's presence with laughter and joy, rejoicing in the great things God has done and keeps on doing.

Candle lighter: *Review the meaning of the first two candles. Then say: We light this third Advent candle to remember God's restoring touch for everything that needs fixing in our world.*

Listening to God's Word:

Reflect on God's restorative (fixing) power with these daily texts: Isaiah 61: 1 – 4, 8 – 11, Psalm 126, Luke 1:46 – 56, 57 – 66, 1. Thessalonians 5: 16 - 23, John 1: 6 – 8, 19 – 28.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

1. What kinds of repair or restoration does God desire in your home, neighbourhood or beyond?
2. How can our God of peace equip us to become part of restoring or fixing the world?
3. Imagine how your home, your congregation and the world would improve if everyone lived by God's values.

Sing or play:

HWB 184 *Hark! The glad sound!* and
HWB 614 *In the bulb there is a flower, or the Advent theme song.*

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

Renewed by your love and favour toward us, we offer you our lives for your holy work of making things right. We praise you for your power that helps us be righteous, too. We pray for our congregation, for our family and friends.

Candle snuffer: *(lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise)* This smoke reminds us of the restoring Spirit of God going out all over our family, (your town), and the world. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Continue your Advent poster by decorating and adding the word 'restoration' to the third star.
2. Add to your Christmas crèche by making sure everything in the stable is fixed and ready for the coming visitors.
3. Continue your family Advent journal by reflecting on how Joseph could have responded to this week's readings. Write as Joseph, or draw cartoons of him.
4. Fix an old toy and give it to the local thrift store or charity.
5. Write and send a letter to your political representative that encourages him/her to support human rights or caring for the earth.
6. Reflect on and give thanks for things in your family and congregation that God has helped make right.
7. Draw a picture about things being fixed in one of our Bible texts and give it to someone who needs encouragement.

God's Unstoppable Purpose Invites!

Fourth Advent – December 18th, 2005



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: Holy and Awesome God, you invite us, like Mary, to be the dwelling place of Jesus, the Son of God. Help us join your holy, inviting and life-giving purposes.

Candle lighter: *Review the meaning of the first three candles. Then say:* We light this fourth Advent candle to remember that God invites us to be a part of salvation's dance.

Listening to God's Word:

Reflect on God's inviting power with these daily texts:

2 Samuel 7: 8 - 16, Psalm 89: 1 – 4 and 19 – 24, Romans 16: 25 – 27, Matthew 1: 18 – 25, Luke 1: 26 – 38, 47 – 55, (Christmas Eve) Luke 2: 1 – 7.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

1. I wonder how David, Mary and Joseph felt when God chose them for their special jobs.
2. I wonder what it feels like to be chosen by God for a special job.
3. I wonder for what jobs God has chosen us.

Sing or play:

HWB 178 *Come, thou long-expected Jesus,*

HWB 181 *My soul proclaims with wonder* and begin adding other favourites from 189 – 215 this week.

Prayer: (Use echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer.)

Mighty God, you invite us to join your ways of fairness and peace and forgive us when we fail. Thank you for your invitation and gift of forgiveness. Help us share that gift with others. We want to join you by helping this world become a fair and peaceful place.

Candle snuffer: (lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise) This smoke reminds us of the inviting Spirit of God going out all over our family, (your town), and the world. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Continue your Advent/Christmas poster by decorating and adding the word 'invites' to the fourth star.
2. Add a special Jesus stocking to your other Christmas decorations. Invite guests and family members to donate money to this stocking. Add these proceeds to your Advent project and mail it as your gift for Jesus.
3. Continue your family Advent journal by reflecting on how the donkey could have responded to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.
4. Recall and share stories of how people have been invited to join God's purposes in your congregation during this last year.
5. Memorize the Luke passages as a family by writing portions of the text on index cards. Take turns hiding and finding them and putting them into correct order each day.
6. Enjoy some Christmas story picture books. Books that are suited to this year's theme are Walter Wangerin's *Angels and All Children: A Nativity Story in Words, Music and Art*, © 2002 Augsburg Books, and Joyce Dunbar's *This is the Star* © 1996, Transworld Publishers, for younger children. Available for loan from the Resource Centre or for purchase through Amazon.ca.

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 sing one of the Christmas songs in the Jubilee Songbook (Sunday School Curriculum early childhood 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. Save adding the wise men for a date closer to Epiphany.
- 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”.
- During this Christmas week, you may want to plan a party and invite people from your neighbourhood to attend. Playing the old game “Red Light, Green Light” could help you talk about God’s unstoppable purposes. Gather around your worship center, light all candles from the Christ candle, and talk about the different ways you have noticed God’s love and faithfulness through your neighbours. Tell them about the different ways you have thought about God’s purposes during this Advent and invite them to share their ideas about how God surprises us, is faithful, restores things and invites our participation. Then invite them to make, and eat, surprising individual pizzas together.

God's Unstoppable Purpose is Unimaginable!

Christmas Week – December 25th, 2005



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader: God has come as an ordinary baby boy.
What an unimaginable, happy and inviting surprise!
Thanks be to God for this extraordinary beginning.
Please set us free and bring your reign to birth in our lives,
our home and our community.

Candle lighter:

Review the meaning of the four Advent candles. Then say:
As we light this Christ candle, we remember that Jesus is God
with us, who saves and restores the world.

Listening to God's Word:

Reflect on God's unimaginable ways with these daily texts:
(Christmas Day) Luke 2: 8 – 20, 21 – 40, Isaiah 52: 7 – 10,
Isaiah 9: 2 – 7, Psalm 96, Psalm 97, John 1:1 – 14.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

1. I wonder what it is like to see God's glory.
2. I wonder what good things God imagines for our world.
3. I wonder how God's good news can help us imagine and be part of a better world.

Sing or Play:

HWB 201 *Hark! Tthe herald angels sing,*

HWB 189 *To us a Child of hope is born,*

HWB 212 *O come, all ye faithful* and other favourites.

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

God of creation, the earth rejoices at the good news of Jesus' birth. We rejoice in the birth of our promised Saviour. We are grateful for what we have received. Prepare us for all the different ways you want us to join your plans.

Candle snuffer: (*lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise*) This smoke reminds us of the unimaginable Spirit of God going out all over our family, (your town), and the world. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Continue your Advent/Christmas poster by decorating and adding the word 'unimaginable' to the fifth star.
2. Listen to or make music that helps you connect with what life can be like when God is in charge. Bryan Moyer Suderman's CD, *God's Love is for everybody*, is a great resource for this. With the accompanying song and activity guide (© 2002 Mennonite Church Canada), you can play and sing these songs yourself.
3. Imagine together what the angels or the shepherds saw and experienced.
4. Continue your family Advent journal by writing as angels and shepherds, or draw cartoons of them.
5. Go for a walk or ride into the countryside and think about how the land, the plant and animal life praises the Lord. Rewrite Psalm 98 for your area.
6. Send notes of thanks to people in your church family who have worked hard to share the good and saving news of Jesus during Advent.
7. Choose characters from the Christmas story and act out the story for family, friends or neighbours.

God's Unstoppable Purpose Breaks Forth Anew!

New Year's Week – January 1, 2005



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader:

God of the past, the present, the future,
your word keeps breaking forth in new ways.
As a sunflower pivots towards the light,
help us centre our lives in you and join your purpose
in the new ways to which you call us.

Candle lighter:

Review the meaning of the Advent and Christ candles. Then say:
We light this candle of your epiphany, remembering that your
light is unstoppable and is the light we adore.

Listening to God's Word:

Read and reflect on God's purpose breaking forth anew through
these daily texts: John 1:1–3, 14–18, Hebrews 1:1–12, Matthew
2:1–12, Luke 2:22–40, Isaiah 61:10–62:3, Psalm 111.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

1. I wonder about the ways God was present and active at the beginning of time.
2. I wonder about the faith of the wise men who recognized and followed the new sign of God's coming.
3. I wonder if we will have the eyes of faith to see God with us.

Sing or play:

HWB 192 *On this day earth shall ring,*

HWB 215 *What child is this.*

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

O God, we have seen and heard your salvation, but we tend to get distracted from praising and joining your purposes. Forgive us and help us to share the gifts you give us to continue your work here on earth. Help us to see the world anew through your eyes.

Candle snuffer: (*lift the Candle snuffer high so the smoke can rise*) This smoke reminds us of the Spirit of God breaking out anew all over our family, (your town), and the world. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Complete your Advent/Christmas Poster with a final star containing the words “New Ways” or “Breaking Forth”.
2. Retell the story of Mary and Joseph hiding in Egypt with Jesus to keep him safe while you clean up and put away the crèche and the other objects that have helped you celebrate Christmas. This will add a spiritual meaning to cleaning up for young and concrete thinkers.
3. Enjoy the Clay animated DVD, “The First Christmas”, by Billy Budd to experience the Christmas Story from the wise men’s perspective. Available at the Resource Centre. Then add to your Family Advent journal by writing or drawing from their point of view. You may want to finish it with a reflection comment by each member of your family.
4. Wrap a gift and give it to a foreign student or lonely neighbour.
5. Reflect on new ways you have experienced and shared the Christmas season this year. Ponder them in your heart.
6. Give a gift to the birds that have stayed around for winter by putting up or refilling a birdfeeder with suet and seeds.
7. 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.

Flowers to copy, cut out and colour



Week 1



Week 4



Week 2



Christmas Week



Week 3



Week 6



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