

Love's Revelations

**1st Advent 2006 – Epiphany, 2007
Advent 2006 – Lectionary Cycle B**

Adapted, compiled and written
by Elsie Rempel



Formation

Mennonite Church Canada Formation
600 Shaftesbury Blvd. Winnipeg MB R3P 0M4
Toll-free: 1-866-888-6785
T: 204-888-6781
F: 204-831-5675
E: office@mennonitechurch.ca

Love's Revelations: 2006 At-Home Advent Resource by:
Adapted/compiled/written by: Elsie Rempel

Sources: Advent writing team, Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA.

Design and Layout: Lynette Wiebe

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HWB = Hymnal: a Worship Book

SJ= Sing the Journey

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Introduction

During the season of Advent, God's children approach Christmas with a unique focus. This year, we are reminded to focus on God's revelations of love. God's love lights the darkness, invites repentance, gives freedom from fear, promises the kingdom and reveals the way. These gifts of God bless the church so that it can pass on those blessings to the world.

The prayers and activities in this booklet are adapted from the Worship resources developed by the Advent 2006 writing team from Kansas for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA.

Use the resource as a guide for your family's devotional time, repeating the weekly litany each day of the week, as you move through the list of daily Scriptures. If your family has younger children, simplify, shorten and paraphrase the prayers and pondering thoughts. Or, consider using the *Early Childhood Birth Narrative Ritual*, downloadable at www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView.

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 you 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 with a large star on it, made from five drinking straws, pipe cleaners, or bamboo skewers. Embellish the star each week to reveal more of what God's love reveals into our lives. The weekly themes can be added as text and/or pictures that surround the star.

2. Make a set of Chrismons. A Chrismon is a Christian symbol that is traditionally gold and white. Chrismons can be cut out of stiff white paper with glitter or sparkles added. Attach a string to the top of each Chrismon to hang on the Jesse Tree. The Chrismons for each week are pictured beside the Heading. Add those two Chrismons to your Jesse tree for that week.

3. A Nativity corner. With boxes, crumpled newsprint and some sheeting, you can recreate the setting for that first crèche. If you don't have one, create a simple A-frame with rough lumber or bark and add toys or salt 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. A Bible and this booklet.

Blessing Ritual:

Learn and use this ritual as part of these devotions or as your supper table 'grace'. The first person turns to the person on their right, covers the prayerfully folded hands of that person and says "May God's love be revealed to you". They answer "And also to you". Then they turn to the next person and repeat this sequence until everyone has blessed and been blessed.

Love Lights the Darkness

First Advent – December 3, 2006



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases that other family members echo.)

Leader:

From the darkness, we seek God.
We want to know God's ways.
We are waiting for God's son,
whose love lights the darkness.

Candle lighter:

We light this first Advent candle
to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world.

Reflect on how love brings light to the darkness through these texts this week: Jeremiah 33:14-16; 17-20; Psalm 25: 1-5; 6-10; 11-15; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21: 25-28.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- I wonder where we see the light of God's love in today's Scriptures?
- I wonder what areas of my life need brightening by God's love.
- I wonder how God's loving light will replace darkness in this neighbourhood?

Sing or play:

HWB 172 O come, O come, Immanuel and SJ 109 There is more love somewhere.

Prayer:

Lord of Light, we lift our hearts up to you. Help us know and follow your ways. Love's light can help us do and say the right and loving things because God's love is good and upright. Thank-you for your love.

Blessing ritual: see bottom of page (3)

Candle snuffer:

May God's love shine in and through us, even as we blow out this candle and it gets darker again. Amen

Activities to choose from:

1. **Create a star** out of drinking straws for your advent poster, and decide on how you will embellish and brighten this star from week to week. Staple the star to the poster paper and add the title with fancy lettering. Add the words and a picture of this week's theme in a suitable spot.
2. **Mark the coming of God's light** into our world by hosting a Christian Season New Year's party on the first Advent where you make Chrismons together. Chrismons are gold and white Christian symbols. They can be cut out of white paper with glitter or sparkles added. For symbols, see the graphics in this booklet or www.zianet.com/fpc/chrismons.htm.
3. **Set up a Jesse tree**, using a small green artificial tree, approximately two feet in height, or a tree stump from which a branch is shooting out from the side (old hedges are full of these). Add the chrismons you make each week to the Jesse tree.
4. **Start setting up your Nativity Corner.** With boxes, crumpled newsprint and some sheeting, it is not hard to recreate the setting. Add some stars to the 'sky' above the stable and the figures of the 'sky watchers'.
5. **Start out on God's Advent path** by looking for the light of God's love in your home and neighbourhood. Record these 'love sightings' in a Family Advent journal.
6. **Write a poem** about light, love, God and you. Psalm 25 might give you some ideas.
7. Pick parts of the Christmas story to **memorize** so that you can recite most of it as a family on Christmas day.



Love Gives us Chances to Start Over

Second Advent – December 10, 2006



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases, which other family members echo.)

Leader:

We seek a chance to start over from out of darkness. Help us understand what it means to live by your love. Guide our feet into the ways of peace and truth as we work and play together.

Candle lighter:

We light this second Advent candle to help us remember your ways of peace and truth.

Reflect on love's chances to start over through these texts this week: Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-75; 76-79; Philippians 1:3-6; 7-11; Luke 3:1-6.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- I wonder what parts of our life need cleaning.
- I wonder what it means for God to guide us into paths of peace.
- I wonder about the ways God is helping others in my church and neighbourhood start over on paths of truth and love.

Sing:

HWB 208 Love came down at Christmas and SJ 105 Don't be afraid.

Prayer:

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

Lord of love and truth, we wait for the birth of your son who invites us to start over in loving and truthful ways. Give light to those who live in darkness and guide our feet into the way of peace.

Blessing ritual: see bottom of page (3)

Candle snuffer:

May God's love and truth shine on in us, even as we blow out this candle. Amen

Activities to choose from:

1. **Outline the star** on your poster with a bright design and add the words and a picture of this week's theme.
2. **Add a path** of little stones leading to your stable. Write words or draw symbols on the stones to show the path God wants us to follow.
3. **Add to the 'love sightings'** in your journal by listing true and loving actions that you notice in others.
4. **Write a letter** or send an e-mail to your political representatives, encouraging them to support truth and love in our world.
5. **Pray daily** for a person with whom you need to start over. Ask God to prepare you for that new start.
6. **Care for God's creation** this Advent by living in the light of God's love without using extra electricity.
7. **Try something that is hard.** Start over and try again. Think about how God keeps on giving us chances to start over.



Love Frees from Fear

Third Advent – December 17, 2006



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases that other family members echo.)

Leader:

Lord God, we trust in you and ask you to help us not be afraid.

We come here looking for freedom, for love, for you.

Candle lighter:

We light this third Advent candle to remember that God can free us from our fears.

Listening to God's Word: Reflect on how God's love frees us from fear through these texts this week. Zephaniah 3:14-18; 19-20; Isaiah 12: 2-4; Isaiah 12: 5-6; Philippians 4: 4-7, Philippians 4: 8-9, Luke 3: 7-18.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- I wonder what made the writers of these texts so happy.
- I wonder what you think about the Bible's promise that God's love will win in the end.
- I wonder how trusting God with our worries would lead to joyful hearts.

Sing:

SJ 109 There is more love somewhere and
HWB 198 Let our gladness have no end.

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

Lord of Love, we thank you for your peace, peace that is deeper than we can understand. Guide our hearts and minds so that we can live free from fear and be ready to share the joy of your salvation.

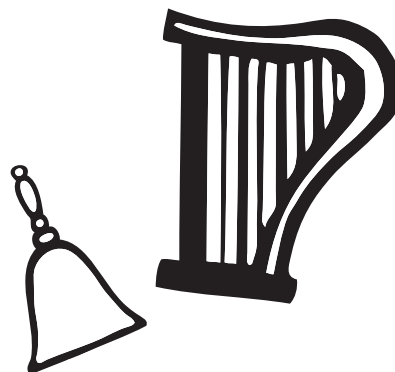
Blessing ritual: see bottom of page (3)

Candle snuffer:

May God's love free us from fear and stay with us, even as we blow out these candles. Amen.

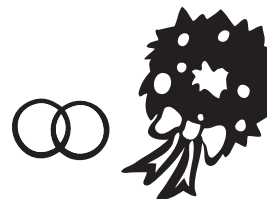
Activities to choose from:

1. **Add another outline** to the star on your poster. Perhaps an outline of bold red hearts will show that love overcomes fear. Then add a picture or the words of this week's theme.
2. **Reflect** on how love overcomes fear in your family and congregation. Make pictures or a song about it.
3. **Help** a frightened person overcome their fear by providing them with the kind of help they need.
4. **Sing** the theme song, There is more love somewhere, with the words "There is less fear somewhere".
5. **Add more stars** above the roof of your stable. Let each star remind you of loving actions that would make God smile.
6. As you wrap Christmas gifts or **bake and share** goodies, think about the list of good things in Philippians.
7. In your **journal**, list tips for overcoming fear. Then share these ideas with another family.



Love Promises the Kingdom

Fourth Advent – December 24, 2006



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases that other family members echo.)

Leader:

Lord God, we believe your promises and want to be part of your loving Kingdom. We are willing to follow you.

Candle lighter:

We light this fourth Advent candle to remember that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Reflect on love's promises of the kingdom in these texts this week: Luke 1: 39-45; 46-55; Luke 1: 57-66; Micah 5: 2-5a; Psalm 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 2:1-20 (for Christmas eve).

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- I wonder what Mary and Elizabeth said to each other about their special babies.
- I wonder how these writers would talk about the promised rule of God if they were living today.
- I wonder what it means for us that Jesus lives and wants to rule in our lives.

Sing:

HWB 208, Love came down at Christmas, HWB 209 O how Joyfully, HWB 181, My soul proclaims with wonder and favourites from #189 – #214 this week.

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

Thank-you, God that you make your children holy; for encouraging us with your promise of an everlasting kingdom of love and peace. Please help us do your will and live according to that kingdom now.

Blessing ritual: see bottom of page (3)

Candle snuffer:

May God's kingdom of love and peace keep growing, even as this candle stops glowing. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

During Christmas Week:

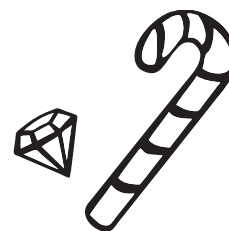
1. **Create** a border for your advent poster by adding a gift sticker or picture for every act of love you observe this week.
2. **Add** a special Jesus stocking to your Christmas decorations. Invite guests and family members to donate money to this stocking. Then send the proceeds to a place your family thinks Jesus would want his "gift" to go.
3. **Bring** Mary and Joseph, Jesus (on Christmas Eve) and the shepherds, to the stable.
4. **Recall** and share stories you have learned about love during this last year.
5. **Thank** an older person in your life for what they have shown and taught you about love.
6. **Give** the gifts of time, friendship and a hug to someone who does not have family around.

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 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 shepherd's party and invite people from your neighbourhood to attend. Dress up like shepherds, gather around your desert theme worship center, and eat bread, cheese, olives, figs or dates on a picnic blanket or in a blanket tent. Use the candle lanterns from the worship center for your only light.

Love Produces Growth

First week after Christmas – Dec 31, 2006



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases that other family members echo.)

Leader:

Lord God, we praise you with all of creation! We want your love to grow in and through us. We are eager to discover and want to follow your plan for us.

Candle lighter:

We light this fifth Advent candle to remind us that God has a plan for us.

Reflect on how Love produces growth through these texts this week: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Luke 2: 33-40; Luke 2:41-52; Psalm 148:1-6; Psalm 148:7-14; Colossians 3:12-17.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- I wonder what Samuel thought and felt when he wore the robes his mother made for him.
- I wonder how Samuel and Jesus discovered God's plan for their lives.
- I wonder what it means for our family to wear robes of compassion, kindness and humility.

Sing:

HWB 506 I sought the Lord, or HWB 479 Lord of our growing years and SJ 73 The Lord lift you up.

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

Thank-you God that your love helps us grow into the blessings you have called each of us to be. We want to respond to your gift of Jesus with praise and lives of thankful service.

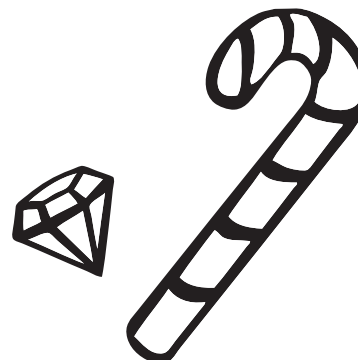
Blessing ritual: see bottom of page (3)

Candle snuffer:

May God's love grow in us, shine in us and shine through us, even after we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. **Make robes** out of towels or extra fabric. Play in them to help you remember that each of us can be clothed with compassion, kindness and humility.
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 1 Corinthians 13: 4 -7.
3. **Write notes** to family members, telling them what you think God's plan for their lives might be. Hide these under their dinner plates.
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. **Make a list** of God's wonderful gifts in your life and thank God for them in your prayers.
6. **Send notes** of thanks to people in your church family who have worked hard and shared their gifts during Advent.



Love Reveals the Way

Epiphany- Jan 7, 2007



Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases that other family members echo.)

Leader:

Arise, shine, for our light has come, and we shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. Like the kings who honoured Jesus with gifts at his birth, we now bring our lives to honour you.

Candle lighter:

We light this sixth candle, the candle of your epiphany, remembering that your love lights the darkness of the world.

Reflect on how love reveals the way through these texts this week: Matthew 2: 1-6; 7-12; Psalm 72:1-7;10-14; Ephesians 3:1-6; Ephesians 3:7-12; Isaiah 60:1-6.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- I wonder how God's love led the wise kings to Jesus.
- I wonder how reading the Bible is like following God's star.
- I wonder what it will be like when all people in all nations have found their way to Jesus.

Sing:

SJ 109 There is more love somewhere, HWB 319 nJesus shall reign, or HWB 218 As with gladness men of old.

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

Lord of Radiance, we worship and adore you with the wise of every age. We thank you for lighting the darkness in our world. We pray for peace in our world; for peace within these walls; with our family and friends and with ourselves.

Blessing ritual: see bottom of page (3)

Candle snuffer:

May God's peace reveal the way through the darkness in our world, even as we blow out this candle. Amen.

Prayer: *(Ask one person to prepare and read this longer summary prayer on the last day you use this material.)*

God, as we extinguish these candles, help us remember and live what they told us. The first candle helped us notice that your love lights the darkness. The second candle reminded us how you help us say we're sorry and give us chances to start over. The third candle reminded us that your love can free us from fear. The fourth candle reminded us of the kingdom that you have promised and that is taking root among us. Your love produces growth in us. That is the promise we claimed with the fifth candle. This sixth and final candle celebrates that you keep showing your church the way. Thank-you God, for love's revelations! Amen.

Candle snuffer:

God, as we blow out and clean up these candles, help us see and participate in your loving revelations in our world. Amen

Activities to choose from:

1. 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.
2. Make a family plan for listening and responding to God in your daily routines, now that the Christmas season has ended.
3. Invite a foreign student, or a neighbour who may be lonely, into your home.
4. Respond to what God has revealed to you by supporting a congregational or denominational mission project.
5. Think of and act on one way your family can participate in God's loving and right intentions for our world.
6. Play your favourite Christmas music while you clean up and put away the objects that have helped you celebrate love's revelations this Christmas season.

Chrismon Patterns

