

# Advent 2024



# *What is the Season of Advent?*

by Rev. Lara Musser Gritter

We always began Christmas morning in our jammies opening our stockings. We would unload candy, small gifts, and often an orange, a small throwback to the stockings of my parents' childhoods. Then we would move to the Christmas tree where my dad would play Santa and give out one gift at a time, allowing each person to open their gift, talk about it, and offer thank yous before moving on to the next. Once the gifts were open and the dog was covered in bows, we'd make Christmas waffles.

Now with two kids of our own, Josh and I are beginning to create our own family traditions around Christmas. What are your traditions and expectations of the season? Christmas time is a season full of expectation and tradition.

Expectation abounds. As it should. Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day, is a time of expectation and waiting. We wait for the festivities of Christmas. In worship, we wait like family for the birth of Jesus. His arrival reminds us that no matter how dire things may seem, God does not forsake this world. His birth reminds us that God draws close to the human experience, so much so that Jesus himself endured labor, delivery, and all the trappings of newborn infancy. His birth reminds us that God's love knows no bounds.

How stunning then that the events of the first Christmas were completely unexpected. Sure, the prophets told of a Messiah, a Prince of Peace, who would be born in David's city. But no one expected that Savior to be born of an unwed mother claiming to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Mary herself asks the angel with wonder, "How can this be?" No one expected the king to be born in a barn. No one expected full divinity to abide in a baby with full pants. No one expected.

Turns out, surprise is at the heart of Christmas. God's way of saving the world was not something anyone expected, and yet it was a beautiful, wonderful, incredible surprise. God, the living God, does unexpected and surprising things. In the Chronicles of Narnia, Mrs. Beaver describes the Jesus-figure named Aslan by saying, "He'll be coming and going . . . one day, you'll see him, and another, you won't. He doesn't like being tied down . . . he'll often drop in. Only you mustn't press him. He's wild, you know. Not like a tame lion."

My prayer for you this Advent is, that in the midst of all of the traditions and all the expectations, you would be surprised by the astounding love of God, by the utter humility of Jesus, and by the wonderful presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

# *Countdown to Christmas*

*Join us Sunday, Dec 1  
in Fellowship Hall*

9:15-10am Advent Gatherings in Fellowship Hall  
Food & Fellowship- Hosted by EMBC & Gather Team

9:45-10:30am Countdown to Christmas  
Join us & make a fresh green advent wreath,  
applesauce ornaments, and cinnamon crosses...  
plus several crafts for kids.





# *Longest Night - A Service of Advent Reflection*

by Dr. Randy Kirby

The holidays are upon us. By the time you read this, you may be recovering from the Thanksgiving stuffing and getting ready for the Christmas celebrations. Most years, the holidays are a time for gathering with friends, singing joyful songs, and enjoying your favorite holiday foods. It is the season of celebration!

However, for some of us, the songs of celebration simply intensify the difficulties of the year. Perhaps a loved one died, and this is the first holiday without them. Or maybe there was an unexpected diagnosis that has left the future uncertain. For some, it is simply the daily news of war and disaster. If you can relate to any of these feelings, I invite you to attend the "Longest Night: A Service of Advent Reflection" on Saturday, December 21, at 7:00 pm, in Lewis Hall.

During the last few years, the Longest Night has become a special part of our Advent Services. It is a service of prayers, special music, and reflection. Participants are invited to a time of prayer for their needs and for the world. You will also have the opportunity to light a candle for those individuals and concerns on your heart in this year's season.

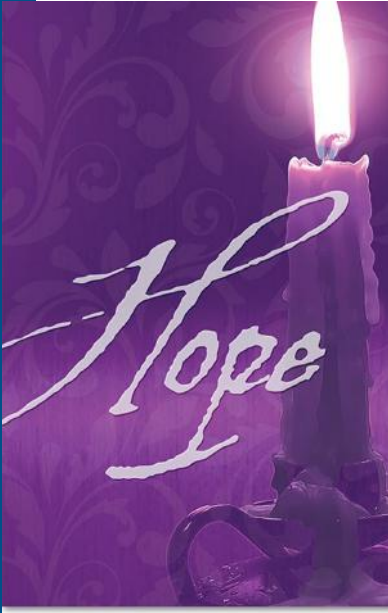
The liturgy we follow describes the longest night this way: "For those who have experienced loss, the holidays can be a particularly painful time, stirring up grief in acute ways. As a result, churches around the world have adopted the practice of having a "Blue Christmas" or a "Longest Night" service during the Advent season. In the Northern hemisphere, this service is often observed on or around the Winter Solstice, which is the longest night of the year."

"A Longest Night service is designed to provide space for prayer, reflection, and remembrance amidst the holiday hustle and bustle...We hope that this service of worship can be a gift to individuals and communities, providing a space of calm, quiet, and healing" (adapted from "The Longest Night," a Liturgy by Rev. Sarah Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org))."

I hope you will consider joining us on December 21. Let us wait in hope together for the Christ that is Coming!



# *The First Sunday of Advent*



## **Sunday, December 1**

We light the first **PURPLE** candle of HOPE! With Christians around the world, we use this light to help us prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of God's Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Christians can often confuse the word hope for wishful thinking. If we hope something will happen, we have no control over whether or not it will take place. But the biblical sense of hope is very different. Hope, in the Bible, exists as a secure assurance, a trust placed in a trustworthy God. God has not failed us in the past, and therefore, if He claims He will do something in the future, we can have a hope that He will fulfill that claim. May we receive God's light as we reflect on our scripture readings. Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

### **Sunday, December 1**

**8:30am** - Contemporary Worship with Communion in Lewis Hall

**9:15-10am** - Advent Gathering in Fellowship Hall (Gather Team & EMBC)

**9:45-10:30am** - Countdown to Christmas in Fellowship Hall

Advent Wreaths & Christmas crafts for ALL (NO Children/Youth Sunday School)

**11am** - Traditional Worship with Communion in Sanctuary

### **Wednesday, Dec 4**

**12-1pm** - Office Volunteer Christmas Appreciation Lunch in Fellowship Hall

# *The Second Sunday of Advent*

## **Sunday, December 8**

We light the second **PURPLE** candle of PEACE! As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, we remember that Jesus is our hope and our peace. Jesus brought about peace, in the most unexpected ways, when he arrived on earth. The Jews, particularly the zealots, wanted a rebellion. They wanted their Savior to overturn the oppressive rule of the Romans and bring about peace in a violent way. But Jesus had something else in mind. Jesus gives us inner peace. Because of his work on the cross, we receive peace through grace and salvation. We also have the peace of mind knowing God will heal this broken world and will come again. We are also reminded to have peace with others. We must put aside our differences and have the



same purpose: to let others know about the peace of Christ. May we receive God's light as we reflect on our scripture readings. Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8

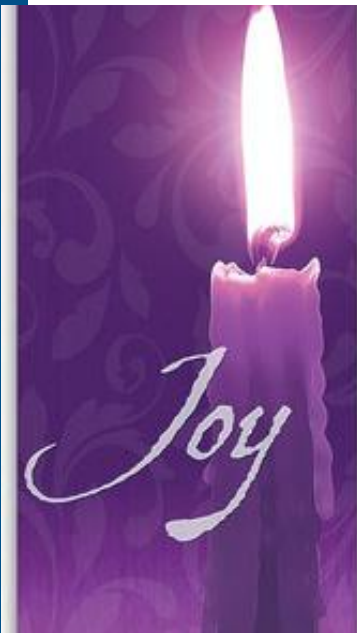
### **Sunday, December 8**

- 8:30am** - Contemporary Worship with Lessons & Carols in Lewis Hall
- 9:15-10am**- Advent Gathering in Fellowship Hall (Sisters and Mary & Martha)
- 9:45-10:45am** Sunday School for all ages
- 11am** - Traditional Worship with Lessons & Carols in Sanctuary
- 4pm** - JOY Christmas Party at The Gables
- 5pm** - Race & Justice Ministry Christmas Party at Debbie Collins' home
- 5-6:30pm** - Youth Christmas Party

### **Thursday, Dec 12**

- 4-6pm** - Three-Wide Christmas Dinner in Fellowship Hall

## *The Third Sunday of Advent*



### **Sunday, December 15**

We light the third PINK candle of JOY!! We remember that the good news of Jesus' birth has the power to bring us great joy. Our joy isn't dependent on what is going on in our life, in our world, or the people that we are with. It doesn't depend on the gifts we give or the gifts we find under the tree. No earthly thing can ever give us complete joy. Our joy comes from Jesus. That joy that flooded the hearts of the shepherds, the angels, the wise men, the hosts of heaven, and Mary and Joseph is the joy that still has the power to overwhelm our hearts with rejoicing. May we receive God's light as we reflect on our scripture readings. Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28

### **Sunday, December 15**

**Take your Christmas family picture. Photo opportunity in Welcome Center**

- 8:30am** - Contemporary Worship in Lewis Hall
- 9:15-10am** - Advent Gatherings in Fellowship Hall (Open Horizons & Discovery)
- 9:45-10:45am** - Sunday School for all ages
- 9:45-10:45am** - Breakfast & Bible for Youth
- 11am** - Traditional Worship in Sanctuary
- 5pm** - Christmas Extravaganza Party in Lewis Hall, bring a side dish (RSVP by Dec 9) - GREAT PHOTO BOOTH OPPORTUNITY TOO!

### **Wednesday, December 18**

- 6:30pm** First Kids Christmas Pageant in Lewis Hall (congregation is invited)

### **Saturday, December 21**

- 7pm** - Longest Night Service of Reflection and Healing in Lewis Hall

# *The Fourth Sunday of Advent*

**Sunday, December 22**



We light the fourth **PURPLE** candle of LOVE! Jesus focused on preaching love throughout his ministry. Two of his greatest commands involve love: Love God, love your neighbor. Love encompasses Jesus' entire purpose for being on earth. God is love. They know we are Christians by our love. Love sacrificed Jesus' son for our sins. Love is patient, kind, it does not envy, etc. We cannot walk with Christ without it, and we cannot have the Christmas story without it. May we receive God's light as we reflect on our scripture readings. Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-14

**Sunday, December 22**

**8:30am** - Contemporary Worship in Lewis Hall

**9:15-10am** - Advent Gathering in Fellowship Hall (Outlook & C. Christians)

**10-10:30am** - Acolyte Training for Candlelight Service - Sanctuary

**10-10:45am** Pageant Rehearsal for Family Christmas Eve Service in Lewis Hall  
(Children & Youth)

**10am** - Karl Hales Christmas Stories in Fellowship Hall  
(All Adults & Youth, please join the story fun!)

**11am** - Traditional Worship in Sanctuary

## *Christmas Eve Worship*

**Tuesday, December 24**

### **The Christ Candle**

We light the **WHITE** Christ Candle during our Candlelight & Communion Worship Service. The Christ candle represents Christ and the role He plays in the Christmas story. Jesus Christ connects all the Advent candles. Through Him, we have Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Jesus brought light into the world through His arrival on earth as a baby, and He continues to be our **LIGHT!** Because of Him, we can be a light unto others, showing them the true meaning of Christmas.



**4pm** - Contemporary Worship with Children's Pageant in Lewis Hall

**8pm** - Candlelight & Communion Worship Service in Sanctuary  
(Prelude Music begins at 7:30pm)



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