

# *Tidings of comfort and Joy*



Small Group Faith Sharing Guide  
Advent 2025



“Life is Advent.

Life is recognizing  
the coming of the Lord.”

Henri Nouwen



## **Welcome to Advent: A Season of Comfort and Joy**

This booklet is designed as your companion through the four Sundays of Advent 2025.

It is an invitation to take a few moments each week to pause and reflect with others on the scriptures of the season. It is an invitation to experience the comfort of cherished traditions while also discovering the joy of God's presence in new ways.

In the pages ahead you will be invited to consider how God meets us in the ordinary moments of our lives, how we balance patience with our expectations, how hope can spark change, and how signs and wonders reveal the mystery of faith.

My hope is that the spiritual richness that comes from sharing your faith journey with others in this way will deepen your bonds of community and nurture a collective spirit of faith, support, and encouragement.

May it bring comfort to your soul and fill you with a joyful sense of anticipation as we prepare our hearts to celebrate the Nativity.

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## Faith Sharing Guidelines

Faith sharing is a unique kind of conversation, so we set aside some of our usual conversational habits in order to allow room for the Spirit.



1. Please try to show up on time. But don't hesitate to quietly join late, we just won't be able to catch you up as it takes away from the flow of the faith sharing.
2. What is shared in the group is confidential and stays in the group.
3. Everyone's input is valuable, but no one is required to speak.
4. Please only share at the level at which you are comfortable.
5. Please limit your sharing time (two-to-four minutes) and wait until everyone else has had the opportunity to share before you share again.
6. As a group, we give the facilitator permission to gently intervene if someone is speaking for too long, so that everyone has a chance to contribute and our time together remains balanced and respectful.
7. Only one person speaks at a time.
8. Please, no cross talking, which means no commenting on another person's sharing. We are not here to fix each other. We accept anything said as a gift we hold for the other person. "I" statements are better than "you" statements.
9. Please do not ask for advice. It tends to move the group into "fixing" mode and takes us away from faith sharing.
10. Please, no side conversations. Value one another by listening.
11. For zoom meetings, please mute your speaker if there is outside noise.
12. Periods of silent are natural and allow the Spirit to work. Resist the urge to fill in the silence unless you have something meaningful to say.

## Guide for Group Leaders

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate this faith sharing group. Here are a few hints for creating a comfortable environment for prayer and faith sharing.



1. Honor everyone's commitment to this group by starting and finishing on time.
2. When the group members first gather, read through and discuss the guidelines.
3. Reiterate the guidelines when a new person joins your group, or whenever you feel a reminder is needed.
4. It may help the meeting flow if each week five people volunteer to read the three scripture readings, reflection piece and Christmas connection before beginning.
5. Begin each meeting with prayer. (An Opening Prayer is provided on page 6).
6. Don't feel like you have to get to all of the questions, or that they have to be taken in the order they are written. Let the Spirit guide you here.
7. If the conversation gets off track, gently pull it back to the question at hand. One technique to refocus a group is to move to another question.
8. Gently encourage participation. After a period of time, you might ask if anyone who hasn't had a chance to share might like to speak.
9. Be willing to share your own faith experience.
10. End each meeting with participants offering their personal prayer intentions.  
Close by leading the group in the "Our Father."
11. Enjoy yourself!



## Opening Prayer for Meetings

Come, Lord Jesus.  
You are God's gift of love for us.  
Help us live in that love.

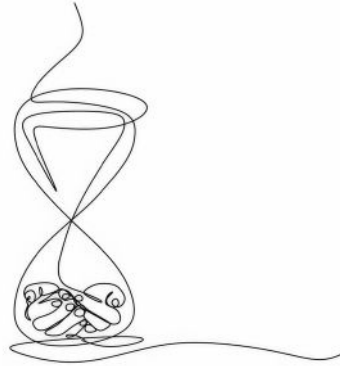
Come, Lord Jesus.  
Abide in us  
so that, like the shepherds and wise men,  
we may experience Your awe and wonder.

Come, Lord Jesus.  
Open our hearts and minds  
to Your guidance and love.  
Let Your light and peace shine through us  
for all the world to see.

**AMEN**

# First Sunday of Advent

## The Sacrament of the Moment



### Reading 1 Isaiah 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz,  
saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come,  
the mountain of the LORD's house  
shall be established as the highest mountain  
and raised above the hills.

All nations shall stream toward it;  
many peoples shall come and say:  
"Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may instruct us in his ways,  
and we may walk in his paths."

For from Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,  
and impose terms on many peoples.

They shall beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
one nation shall not raise the sword against another,  
nor shall they train for war again.

O house of Jacob, come,  
let us walk in the light of the Lord

**Reading 2 Romans 13:11-14**

Brothers and sisters:

You know the time;

it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep.

For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed;

the night is advanced, the day is at hand.

Let us then throw off the works of darkness

and put on the armor of light;

let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day,

not in orgies and drunkenness,

not in promiscuity and lust,

not in rivalry and jealousy.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.

**Gospel Matthew 24:37-44**

Jesus said to his disciples:

“As it was in the days of Noah,

so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

In those days before the flood,

they were eating and drinking,

marrying and giving in marriage,

up to the day that Noah entered the ark.

They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away.

So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man.

Two men will be out in the field;

one will be taken, and one will be left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill;

one will be taken, and one will be left.

Therefore, stay awake!

For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.  
Be sure of this: if the master of the house  
had known the hour of night when the thief was coming,  
he would have stayed awake  
and not let his house be broken into.  
So too, you also must be prepared,  
for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

### **Scripture Reflection: The Sacrament of the Moment**

We begin the season of waiting and joyful expectation with Isaiah’s famous vision of universal peace. Swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

The Lord’s house will be established on the highest mountain. In scripture, mountains are sacred spaces where God’s presence and authority are revealed. Isaiah foresees countless peoples climbing the Lord’s mountain. When that time comes, war will end.

As we continue to wait for that day, the second reading urges us to awaken and live as people of the light. Paul reminds the Romans, and us, that our salvation is nearer than we think, calling us to be present and intentional, rather than drifting through our days half-asleep.

Finally, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus reminds his disciples of the story of Noah. Before the flood, people were eating, drinking and marrying, and living their everyday lives up to the day that Noah entered the ark. Jesus calls us to remain vigilant, reminding us that nothing is certain except this moment.

The Sacrament of the Moment is the spiritual practice of being fully present and embracing each moment as a manifestation of God’s grace. Every moment, no matter how ordinary or challenging, holds divine grace and holds an opportunity to encounter God. Experiencing God is not always a mountain top moment – grand and mysterious. God is also to be found in the ordinary, unspectacular moments of our day.

During Advent many people find themselves overwhelmed by the expectations they place upon themselves about how Christmas celebrations “should” be. Others feel a deep sense of isolation or loneliness during this season. By embracing each moment as a sacrament – a sign of God’s invisible grace – some may find themselves experiencing the season with a calmer, more peaceful heart.



### Christmas Connections

When we speak about the Sacrament of the Moment, it brings to mind Mary’s “moment” at the Annunciation. When the angel Gabriel announces that she is called to conceive and bear the Son of God, Mary – despite any fear or confusion – embraces God’s will completely. She responds with the words, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).



### Faith Sharing Questions

1. Are you able to find divine grace in the ordinary moments of your day? How or when?
2. What practices or rituals help you stay spiritually present?
3. Can you share a time when being fully present led to a deeper spiritual insight or connection?
4. How do you balance the anticipation of future promises with living fully in the present?
5. What can we learn from Mary’s example of saying “yes” to God?



### Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: Faithful God, present to us in each moment of our lives, we bring our prayers before you.

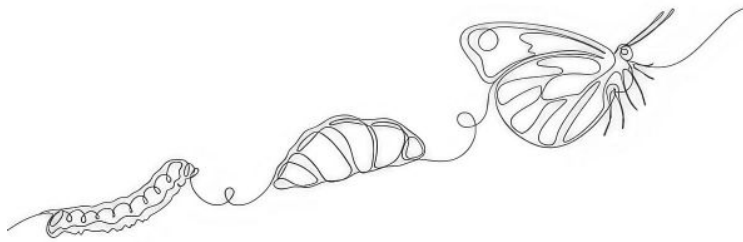
Petitioner: (Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord

Response: Lord, Hear Our Prayer

Leader: (after the final petition) “Our Father”



## Second Sunday of Advent Hope and Change



### Reading 1 Isaiah 11:1-10

On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,  
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:  
a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
a spirit of counsel and of strength,  
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,  
and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

Not by appearance shall he judge,  
nor by hearsay shall he decide,  
but he shall judge the poor with justice,  
and decide aright for the land's afflicted.  
He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

Justice shall be the band around his waist,  
and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.  
Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;  
the calf and the young lion shall browse together,  
with a little child to guide them.

The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,  
together their young shall rest;  
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.  
The baby shall play by the cobra's den,  
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.

There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,  
as water covers the sea.

On that day, the root of Jesse,  
set up as a signal for the nations,  
the Gentiles shall seek out,  
for his dwelling shall be glorious.

## Reading 2 Romans 15:4-9

Brothers and sisters:

Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction,  
that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures  
we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and encouragement  
grant you to think in harmony with one another,  
in keeping with Christ Jesus,  
that with one accord you may with one voice  
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you,  
for the glory of God.

For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised  
to show God's truthfulness,  
to confirm the promises to the patriarchs,  
but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written:

Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles  
and sing praises to your name.

## Gospel Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea  
and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"  
It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:  
A voice of one crying out in the desert,  
Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight his paths.  
John wore clothing made of camel's hair  
and had a leather belt around his waist.  
His food was locusts and wild honey.  
At that time Jerusalem, all Judea,  
and the whole region around the Jordan  
were going out to him  
and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River  
as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees  
coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers!  
Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?  
Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.  
And do not presume to say to yourselves,  
'We have Abraham as our father.'  
For I tell you,  
God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.  
Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees.  
Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit  
will be cut down and thrown into the fire.  
I am baptizing you with water, for repentance,

but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I.  
I am not worthy to carry his sandals.  
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.  
His winnowing fan is in his hand.  
He will clear his threshing floor  
and gather his wheat into his barn,  
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

### **Scripture Reflection: Hope and Change**

Hope is the expectation and desire for a positive future outcome, and it is a powerful driver of change. It fuels our desire to improve our own circumstances and those of the world around us. Unlike passive optimism, which expects that good things will happen, hope is action oriented. It calls us to work actively toward a better future, even when we face setbacks. It requires a vision of what could be, giving our efforts direction and purpose.

Just as last week’s scriptures offered Isaiah’s vision of swords turned into plowshares, this Sunday we encounter another of Isaiah’s images of hope for universal peace. In Isaiah’s time, when people feared for the safety of their families and animals, the prophet spoke of a world where even natural enemies would live together in harmony. The wolf and the lamb, the cow and the bear, and even a child with a serpent. This is the peaceable kingdom we are invited to hope for during Advent.

Paul’s letter to the Romans reminds us that hope is nurtured through endurance and the encouragement found in scripture. His call to action for the community is to live in harmony so that all, whether Jew or Gentile, might speak with one voice of faith.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we meet one of the New Testament’s most striking agents of change: John the Baptist. His call to “prepare the way of the Lord” is no longer about a physical journey, but a transformation of human hearts. The hope in his message is the promise of a renewed life.



### **Christmas Connections**

The entire Nativity story is a living example of hope in action. From the Annunciation to Joseph’s acceptance of Mary, to the joyful reality of Jesus’ birth, the story embodies trust in God and hope in the possibility of something transformative. The story parallels God’s invitation to live out hope in our own lives, with trust, anticipation and the willingness to let ourselves be shaped by something new.



### Faith Sharing Questions

1. In what ways can you actively cultivate a hopeful outlook during Advent?
2. This Advent, how can you prepare your heart, like John the Baptist suggests, for a renewed sense of life and purpose?
3. How does the call for all who follow Jesus to live in harmony and speak with one voice personally resonate with you?
4. Do you see John the Baptist's message as one of hope? Why or why not?
5. Does the Nativity story inspire you to trust in God's plan? Why or why not?



### Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: Faithful God, you are our hope and our strength. Trusting in your love, we bring our prayers before you.

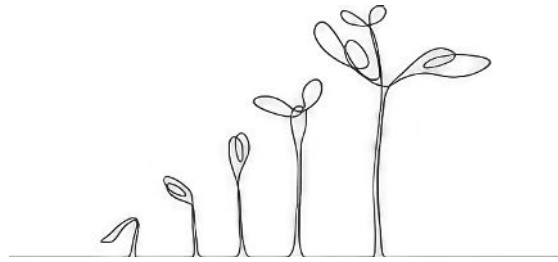
Petitioner: (Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord

Response: Lord, Hear Our Prayer

Leader: (after the final petition) "Our Father"



## Third Sunday of Advent Patience and Expectation



### Reading 1 Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

The desert and the parched land will exult;  
the steppe will rejoice and bloom.  
They will bloom with abundant flowers,  
and rejoice with joyful song.  
The glory of Lebanon will be given to them,  
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;  
they will see the glory of the LORD,  
the splendor of our God.  
Strengthen the hands that are feeble,  
make firm the knees that are weak,  
say to those whose hearts are frightened:  
Be strong, fear not!  
Here is your God,  
he comes with vindication;  
with divine recompense  
he comes to save you.  
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,  
the ears of the deaf be cleared;  
then will the lame leap like a stag,  
then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return  
and enter Zion singing,  
crowned with everlasting joy;  
they will meet with joy and gladness,  
sorrow and mourning will flee.

### Reading 2 James 5:7-10

Be patient, brothers and sisters,  
until the coming of the Lord.  
See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth,  
being patient with it

until it receives the early and the late rains.  
You too must be patient.  
Make your hearts firm,  
because the coming of the Lord is at hand.  
Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another,  
that you may not be judged.  
Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates.  
Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters,  
the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

**Gospel Matthew 11:2-11**

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ,  
he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question,  
“Are you the one who is to come,  
or should we look for another?”  
Jesus said to them in reply,  
“Go and tell John what you hear and see:  
the blind regain their sight,  
the lame walk,  
lepers are cleansed,  
the deaf hear,  
the dead are raised,  
and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.  
And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

As they were going off,  
Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John,  
“What did you go out to the desert to see?  
A reed swayed by the wind?  
Then what did you go out to see?  
Someone dressed in fine clothing?  
Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces.  
Then why did you go out? To see a prophet?  
Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.  
This is the one about whom it is written:  
Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;  
he will prepare your way before you.  
Amen, I say to you,  
among those born of women  
there has been none greater than John the Baptist;  
yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”



### **Scripture Reflection: Patience and Expectation**

On the journey of faith, patience and expectation work hand-in-hand, each one strengthening and sustaining the other. Rather than insisting God provide a specific result at a specific time, patience allows the journey to unfold. Hopeful expectation provides the drive that sustains our faith and reinforces our belief in a positive outcome.

As we look at the readings for this Sunday, we find that for the third Sunday in a row, we are presented with more of Isaiah's visions of peace and harmony. Isaiah invites us to hold both patience and expectation together, trusting that the unfolding of God's peace will come in due time. This week, Isaiah describes the lush splendor of Mt. Carmel, a mountain range overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, and the Sharon plain, a fertile coastal plain situated at its foot. Together, these regions are famous in biblical literature for their beauty and fertility, symbolizing God's abundant blessings.

In the second reading, James invites us to cultivate patience as we anticipate the coming of the Lord. He paints a portrait of how righteous people live through a season of waiting: they do not resist the timing of God, much like a farmer who trusts the natural rhythm of the harvest. And, like the prophets of old, righteous people speak the truth and continue to act justly, even in the midst of hardship.

Finally, in the Gospel, Jesus asks the crowds about their expectations regarding John the Baptist. "What did you go out to see?" Were they expecting to find someone easily influenced and swayed, like a reed in the wind? Were they expecting someone powered by wealth, wearing fine clothing? Or were they expecting to see a prophet? It is a reminder that our expectations are just that – expectations – and must align with God's vision.



### **Christmas Connections**

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth teaches patience and expectation through their long period of faithful waiting, Zechariah's temporary muteness, and Elizabeth's steadfast, quiet hope. They were described as "righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly" (Lk 1:6). Despite this, they were advanced in years and childless, a hardship that carried significant social stigma in their culture. Their faithfulness demonstrates that patience is not a passive surrender to fate, but an active, steadfast trust in God's timing, even when a blessing is long delayed.



### Faith Sharing Questions

1. Can you think of a time when you had to wait patiently for something important?  
What was that waiting like for you? Was faith a comfort, or not, during that time?
2. The Gospel challenges us to consider whether our expectations are in line with God's vision.  
How do you discern when your expectations might need to shift?
3. Regarding John the Baptist, Jesus asks the crowd "who they came out to see?"  
Who acts as a prophet in your life today?
4. When you hold both patience and hopeful expectation together, how does that shape the way you meet challenges or delays in your life?
5. What personal or social attitudes might you, like Zechariah and Elizabeth, need to let go in order to deepen your trust in God's timing in your life?



### Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: God of patience and understanding, we bring our prayers before you.

Petitioner: (Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord

Response: Lord, Hear Our Prayer

Leader: (after the final petition) "Our Father"



## Fourth Sunday of Advent Signs and Wonders



### Reading 1 Isaiah 7:10-14

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying:  
Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God;  
let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky!  
But Ahaz answered,  
“I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!”  
Then Isaiah said:  
Listen, O house of David!  
Is it not enough for you to weary people,  
must you also weary my God?  
Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign:  
the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,  
and shall name him Emmanuel.

### Reading 2 Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus,  
called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God,  
which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,  
the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh,  
but established as Son of God in power  
according to the Spirit of holiness  
through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Through him we have received the grace of apostleship,  
to bring about the obedience of faith,  
for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles,  
among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ;  
to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy.  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Gospel Matthew 1:18-24**

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.  
When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,  
but before they lived together,  
she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.  
Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,  
yet unwilling to expose her to shame,  
decided to divorce her quietly.  
Such was his intention when, behold,  
the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,  
“Joseph, son of David,  
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.  
For it is through the Holy Spirit  
that this child has been conceived in her.  
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,  
because he will save his people from their sins.”  
All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:  
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,  
which means “God is with us.”  
When Joseph awoke,  
he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him  
and took his wife into his home.

### **Scripture Reflection: Signs and Wonders**

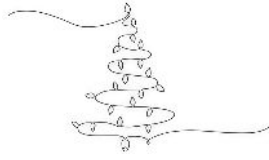
The Nativity story is filled with signs and wonders, the very elements that make our Christmas celebrations so warm and nostalgic. We sing phrases like “Gloria in excelsis Deo,” “Sleep in heavenly peace,” “Star of wonder,” and of course, “Tidings of comfort and joy.” Yet at its heart, the Nativity presents us with a theological mystery that far outpaces human reasoning. Emmanuel, “God is with us,” is a paradox we will never fully grasp with logic alone. Instead, these signs and wonders invite us to see mystery, not as a problem to be solved but as a reality to step into – deepening our personal relationship with the Divine.

The first time that Emmanuel, “God is with us,” appears in Scripture is found in this Sunday’s first reading (Isa 7:10-14). The Lord instructs Ahaz, king of the southern kingdom of Judah, to ask for a sign. Ahaz, uncertain about this kind of assurance refuses, but God gives him a sign anyway. “The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.”

In the letter to the Romans (Rm 1:1-7), Paul affirms Jesus as the promised Messiah. First, he reminds his readers that Jesus is descended from David’s line, a nod to his human, Jewish heritage. Then Paul affirms this Messiah as the Son of God by recounting the signs and wonders of Jesus’ resurrection and the power received from the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospel, Matthew (Mt 1:18-24) recounts Joseph’s place in the Nativity story. Joseph has no spoken lines in Scripture, but four times he is the recipient of angelic visits in dreams, each with specific instructions and warnings related to Jesus’ birth and safety.

The Nativity story encourages us to see “God is with us” in ways that surpass our understanding and to recognize the quiet wonders in our everyday lives.



### Christmas Connections

Many common Christmas traditions have roots in the signs and wonders of the Nativity story.

- Candles and Christmas lights: Represent Christ, the Light of the World, who overcomes darkness.
- Candy cane: Its «J» shape represents the shepherd's crook, while the red and white stripes symbolize Christ's sacrifice and purity.
- Christmas tree and wreath: The evergreen tree represents everlasting life, while the circular wreath symbolizes God's eternal love.
- Gift giving: The tradition of exchanging gifts is rooted in the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh brought to Jesus by the Magi.



### Faith Sharing Questions

1. How do you balance faith and reason in your spirituality?
2. Can you recognize any “sign and wonders” that have affected you personally?
3. What does the word “Emmanuel” (God is with us) mean for you personally?
4. Reflecting on Ahaz's sign from God, what does it mean to you that God offers signs even when we don't ask for them?
5. How might you better appreciate the signs and wonders of Christmas this year?



### Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: Faithful God, you are our hope and our strength. Trusting in your love, we bring our prayers before you.

Petitioner: (Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord

Response: Lord, Hear Our Prayer

Leader: (after the final petition begin the) “Our Father”



*Arise,  
Shine,  
For your light has come!*



*May the peace of Emmanuel,  
God is With Us,  
Bless your Christmas and New Year*





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