

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

*As we gather in the name of Jesus to we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather.*

Advent Candle Lighting

*The season of Advent begins, and we celebrate the hope we find in the good news of the Gospel.*

***Through the birth of a tiny and helpless child, God comes to save the world.***

*While we watch and wait for Jesus,  
we join God's mission by bringing grace and mercy to those who need it most.*

***We engage the poor and the poor in spirit, letting Christ's light shine through us.***

*We speak words of comfort and love to a world in need of hope and healing  
as we share our stories of God's transforming Spirit.*

***Together, we are a sign of God's hope for the world. (The candle is lit)***

***Let us pray...God of surprising grace, when we least expect it you bring fresh new life; and where we feel that all is lost, you bring redemption. Give us courage as we share all you have done, all you are doing, and all you will accomplish through Jesus Christ. Amen***

➤ ***Prepare the way of the Lord***

***112 (repeat)***

† Prayer

*O holy Hope, deep-seated Desire of nations, O inner Yearning, Come! You hold before us a promise, Lord. We give you thanks for this Advent time of waiting and watching for Christ's coming.*

*Although your promise shines as a beckoning, guiding light, sometimes we ignore it. We turn away from its illumination and grope about in our chosen darkness. We stray and wander from the path of Christ. We succumb to temptations to go in other directions and we set ourselves on dangerous detours. Forgive us, we pray. Help us to hear your promise with the will to heed it. Make possible within us the faith we so desire.*

*Fill us now with such a strong need of you that our hungry hearts might receive you gladly. Make our satisfaction a sign to the world that our God fulfills our hopes and be with us always in Spirit as we boldly pray in Jesus' name... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen****

## Words of Hope

Friends, the God of Hope hears our cries and responds to our yearning with the assurance that in Christ Jesus we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!

➤ **Hope is a star**

119

### † Prayer for Understanding

**Eternal God break into our hearts and lives today as we read your Holy Word. Through your unexpected and awesome deeds, guide us to know you as our God and know ourselves as your grateful people. Amen**

### Scripture    **Isaiah 64: 1-9**

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence — as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil — to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways.

But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself, we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### Message

One of the problems with being a Christian – if you can call it a real problem – is that we are expected to believe that God is **always with us** and are expected to believe it **all the time!** I'm not sure who sets those expectations – perhaps it is those who look in as outsiders or perhaps we set them for ourselves. The truth is that there are moments when we might wonder where God is – when the tsunami strikes, when hurricanes ravage, when disease and drought decimate whole populations, when cruelty to children fills our newspapers and corruption invades our institutions, when petty concerns overwhelm pertinent issues, when funeral follows funeral, when disappointment and despair cloud our hopes, when families feud or loved ones suffer or die. Where is God then? We are reluctant – even loathe – to express our fear that God seems

far away. Some of us may have been feeling like that since this pandemic began – others have only recently started feeling that perhaps it has been long enough now and we would like a greater sense of God’s intervention **right away, please and thank you!**

In the reading from Isaiah the people are feeling just this sort of disconnection from God. The exiles have returned from their banishment in Babylon. Jerusalem and its temple are being rebuilt. A sense of normal life is coming back – what would that be like I wonder. Yet, the people are forlorn, despondent, despairing. Life is hard and God seems to be far, far away.

The author of these verses speaks the prayer of the people. How long before the people return to glory? How long before God’s presence shines before the nations? All hopes were pinned on the time of restoration from the exile. Coming home to Jerusalem was going to mean the end of all Israel’s shame and discontent. However, problems multiply rather than disappear – ugliness and evil continue to exist. The people feel cut off from God and the blessings of God. They blame God – *because you hid yourself, we transgressed.*

In their lament they express our own longing: *You seem to have abandoned us God – turned your back on creation, left the people to their own devices and forsaken each individual to his or her own evil ways.* Our hopes are pinned on the Christ child anticipated throughout the season of Advent – on the fact that Christ has come – and will come again. But life remains imperfect. The problems of the world persist, and we are not all that we should be. In fact, these days things are unsettled all around – politically, economically, physically, racially – in every aspect of life we might wonder where God is.

Usually we think of Advent as a time of patient, hopeful waiting for the joyous event of Christmas. God comes to us as a little child. Now we wait. Then God comes. All is right with the world. Except that all is not right with our world – and we know it! So perhaps rather than being out of step with our advent mood – our Christmas hope – perhaps this lament from Isaiah more accurately expresses that which we are yearning to say. We are feeling a bit sad and disillusioned because in the “real world” things don’t seem to be going so well.

We are not looking for a gentle, tactful, harmonious appearance of God. Our call is not for God to come as a child. We want God to come with power and might – to show up in personal splendour. That is what Isaiah is calling for: *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!*

Don’t you ever get so frustrated and disappointed with the way of the world that you want to call on God to break in on the scene and rile things up? I’m with Isaiah – I want serious

intervention! **And yet...** God hardly ever comes in the ways we're expecting. God's ways are not our ways – with God we must be ready and waiting for the surprising and the unanticipated.

The plea for God to intervene – to show divine presence in human history – is a cry from the heart in this prayer of the prophet Isaiah. There are times in all our lives – in the lives of families and nations – when God seems remote. In these times of darkness it can appear that the glorious light of the presence of God – the source of all life and joy – is all shut up in heaven, and we long to tear open the heavens to allow God's glory to shine in. It was like that in the life of the nation of Israel – there is a background of war and desolation – God's holy cities have become a wilderness – Jerusalem is a desolation. The temple is in ruins and the people fear that God will keep angry silence forever.

The thing is that the people of Israel know that God is justified in keeping silent. They know their sin – they admit it and confess their frailty. They might try to blame God, but they know that they have failed to call on the divine presence. Their desperate plea now is marked with a certain ambiguity – along with God's presence is the admission of their own weakness – the consciousness of sin. The prayer is filled with such despair as the prophet concedes that the people have no one to blame but themselves since God has saved them and still, they do not call on God's name.

It would be entirely logical for the prayer to end here in futility – they are unworthy, they are sinners, they feel alone because of their own failure to seek God. But logic entirely misses the point of faith and so the prayer continues with a mighty **and yet** that makes hope possible when logic and circumstance dictate a harsh ending.

Despite everything God is *father* – the one from whom we are born. Despite everything God is *potter* – the one who makes and shapes and forms us. God has complete authority and God overcomes the logic of futility with the truth of everlasting presence. Even though we may be in the depths of despair about our world today – even though we may fail to participate as God desires in loving the world and one another – even though we confess that we may not deserve to expect God to show up – despite it all we hope that God will show up anyway.

We have Advent Hope. We wonder where God is in all of this and yet we join with the ancient people of Israel and their prophet Isaiah in confessing God's continuing care – God's everlasting rule – God's abiding presence. Despite everything we believe that God will ultimately show up – and so we wait and call out in prayer.

May we continue to pray with Advent Hope. May we continue to pray for God to come among us as fire and earthquake – as avenger to the nations – as silent surety – as swaddled child. Our Advent Hope is that God will come – again and again and again. **Amen**

† Prayer

O God of Advent hope help us this season to receive Christ anew. Though the carols will be familiar, the story will be one we have heard countless times before, and the celebrations will be shaped by tradition, open us to understandings surprising and fresh.

We often forget that your arrival as an infant was more improbable than predictable. And we tend to confine our feelings about the coming of Christ to small interior places. Grant us, we pray, spirits awakened, started and struck by the wonder of your love. Fill us with the kind of joy that resounds with your praise – that stretches horizon to horizon across our lives.

Lead us to accept the presence of Christ as a call to en flesh our beliefs, to let a body of deeds form around the framework of faithfulness. Our world needs all the love and compassion we can muster – conflicts rage among and within nations – physical ailments and diseased systems plague so many people – abuses of defenceless individuals and fragile environments abound, dishonesties and injustices seem to flourish, prejudices lurk. Fill us with the spiritual courage to address issues with prayer and with action. Instead of offering commentary on the problems we see, enable us to offer energetic commitment. Move us this Advent closer to Christ, closer to faith incarnate and alive with the power to accomplish change by your grace and to your glory.

God of Advent hope, we pray in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen

PWS&D Sharing    **We Are Role Models**

There is no question how important sexual reproductive health awareness is to help create healthy communities.

In Malawi, topics such as sexually transmitted diseases and other reproductive health questions are often considered taboo.

Thokozani, Peter and Mafuno are peer educators who are challenging the stigma surrounding reproductive health by teaching youth about family planning, preventing teenage pregnancy, HIV testing and accessing contraceptives. They have begun seeing the impact of their work. *“The participants want to start engaging in better and healthier behaviour,”* Peter reports. *“They are now getting tested and treated for sexually transmitted diseases.”*

The three educators also realize their roles are much bigger than just teaching, *“we are role models to these people,”* Mafuno shares proudly.

This Advent season help PWS&D support community volunteers as they educate and empower young people on important health issues. Go to [www.werespond.ca](http://www.werespond.ca) / (416) 441-1111

† Offering and Prayer

**Gracious God, implant within us the kind of generosity that surprises our spirits, enlivens our faith, and strengthens our mission. Permit us through our giving to prepare the way for One whose realm and reign we honour. Amen**

Blessing

Through this season of Advent, may our faith grow from flicker to flame, our hope from glimmer to glow. May our love for God and neighbour be brave and bold and bright. And may the boundless love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *We will go out with joy*

*539 (PCUSA)*

**Advent Wreath**

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emmanuel	jesse	bethlehem	angel
light	hope	green	evergreens
god	candle	wreath	sunday
celebrate	savior	christ	christmas
messiah	isaiah	prepare	jesus
advent			