

Fractals: Alternative Resources for Worship in the Emerging Culture (Mark Pierson, 2004)

Advent

(1402)

Introduction

Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year. It was introduced as a Christian season in the sixth century. It is a time of preparation for the coming of Christ – which can relate both to the first coming at Bethlehem and the expected second coming of Christ as judge and redeemer of history. The word ‘advent’ comes from ‘*adventus*’, meaning to reach for, or to come. The themes are to do with waiting and hopeful expectation. Looking forward. It is a good time to consciously slow down and resist the hype and bustle of the pre-Christmas season.

Symbols, Colours, Music, Images, Ritual Actions, Miscellaneous Ideas

Colour: Violet (and sometimes blue) –, traditionally the colour of dignity and penitence. Sometimes the absence of decoration at Advent is used to emphasise a mood of restraint before the church is decorated for Christmas.

The Advent Wreath – a ring of four red or purple candles around a central white or gold candle (the ‘Christ Candle’). On each Sunday of Advent an additional candle from the ring is lit, together with a reading, prayer or song. The central candle is lit on Christmas Day (as we don’t usually have a Christmas Day service we light this candle at our 11pm Christmas Eve service). The circle of the wreath points towards the eternity of God, the evergreen of the wreath is a symbol of eternal life (although the use of evergreen as a symbol in New Zealand has slightly less significance), and the candles symbolise the light of the world – Christ.

It’s useful to attach a different theme to the candle lighting on the four Sundays in Advent. This theme could be drawn on throughout the service. For example:

1. Jesus the Coming One
2. Jesus the Promised One
3. Jesus the Given One
4. Jesus the Present One

OR

The coming of Christ as proclaimed...

1. In Creation
2. In the Bible
3. By the Prophets
4. By John the Baptist

OR

The coming of Christ in...

1. Hope
2. Faith
3. Love
4. Joy

We generally put together a short liturgy for each week that involves a brief scripture reading, candle lighting, and responsive readings by the congregation and leader, perhaps followed by a song. We often use this as our Call to Worship.

At Cityside, different people are invited to ‘dress’ i.e. decorate or create a visual display, using the 5-branched candlestick and wreath for each Sunday. They can use the theme of the liturgy if they wish.

The lighting of the candles as a ritual act is a good way of reflecting different aspects of the waiting congregation too – for example by having people of different ages lighting the candles each week. I like to select the oldest person on week one ending with a young child or mother and baby on week four or for the Christ Candle.

We have recorded on video tape a series of candle lightings. This row of two candles either side of a larger central candle shows a taper coming in and lighting one candle, then two candles etc. These short clips are

looped up and run as background on our multiple television setup during the appropriate Sunday worship in Advent.

Advent is a 'pregnant' season – a process has been set in motion that will come to fruition. Some relevant readings are the fig tree in Luke 21, the fruits of righteousness in Philippians, Elizabeth to Mary "Blessed is the fruit of your womb" in Luke 1. Useful symbols here are blossoming or budding, also images of pregnant women.

One year we projected images onto the outside street wall of our church building for a few hours each night in the weeks preceding Christmas. These were a mixture of children's artwork, calligraphy, cartoons, pithy texts, and jokes designed to put user-friendly religious Christmas imagery and ideas into the public space, outside the church. (The projector was inside and shone through a window onto an angled mirror that reflected the image parallel to the wall and onto another wall at right angles. This wall had a screen stretched over it. The projector was on a slide-timer.)

Advent Carols and Music Tracks:

There are many meaningless and overworked carols that contain bad theology and inaccurate historical references! There are also some interesting and not overused carols that particularly relate to Advent. The Iona Community has published some excellent songs using both traditional and new tunes. They also have some excellent responsive readings, drama and monologue scripts.

Cloth For the Cradle: Worship Resources and Readings for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany (Wild Goose Worship Group, Wild Goose Publications: Glasgow, 1997).

Heaven Shall Not Wait, Enemy of Apathy, Love from Below (John Bell and Graham Maule, with the Wild Goose Worship Group, Wild Goose Publications: Glasgow, 1987-9).

(See Section 7: Resources, for more references)

Advent in Art series:

We've run this the last three years. Each Sunday of Advent, during the morning service in the 'sermon' slot, someone introduces us to a piece of art on some aspect of the Christmas theme. The people doing this aren't necessarily artists or art historians, just people with an interest in art. Their task is to choose any art relating to the Christmas story, and introduce us to the art, the artist, some of the history of the period, and so on.

In 2001, week one was da Vinci's *Annunciation*, week two La Farge's *Halt of the Wisemen*, week three Van der Goes' *Portinari Altarpiece*, and week four *The Massacre of the Innocents* by Baboun (painted just that year by a Palestinian). In 2003, week one was Colin McCahon's *Angel of the Annunciation*, week two Piero Della Francesca's *Madonna Del Parto*, followed by Duccio's *Crevoles Madonna* and Chagall's *Fraumunster Christ Window*.

We print up postcards advertising the series as a whole and each week give everyone a postcard to take home with a colour copy of the art being presented and the relevant biblical text on the reverse. In 2003 we added a reflection and a ritual for each week and put the postcards in a blank CD case. The weekly art is also shown on TVs and Overhead Projector during the service. Each presenter uses a different approach, e.g. lecture style, stations, questions, meditation, and so on.

Although I have never done it, I like the idea of making large cardboard or plywood cutouts of the main characters in the Christmas story and each week moving them through the congregation, closer to the front of the building where the manger rests.

Texts, Prayers, Readings

For lectionary texts consult your lectionary or www.textweek.com

Readings for the Lighting of the Advent Candle

Hope

First Sunday in Advent

God, we wait
as Israel waited
stranded, scattered, exiled, shamed.
Waiting with the poor and captives,

waiting with the lost and lamed.

God, we wait
- as prisoners wait
for words to set them free -
for glimpses of your kingdom
in the midst of our debris.

God, we wait
as prophets wait,
for death to unfold into life
and signs of beauty to appear
in places torn apart by strife.

This Advent time,
we wait,
and hope...
that, just as God was found on earth,
so all that we've been longing for
and waiting for
shall come to birth.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

People: We light this candle of hope to proclaim that God's light is coming into our darkness.

(Candle is lit)

Leader: At times the shadows of this world's pain overwhelm us. We are overcome by our fears and wonder if life has purpose. This Advent, let us be reminded once again that darkness cannot prevail against the light of God.

People: Immanuel shall come and dwell with us. We look for you, we wait for you. Our hope is in you.

Peace

Second Sunday in Advent

We know the story God,
the shepherds and the angels
and the proclamation:
'Peace on Earth.'

But on the news tonight
another bomb
and lying words to mask the blame.

While on the street
or in the house next door
are voices raised in hate -
a bottle smashed,
the glint of knives.

We want to help,
but in the treadmill of our days
there is not even time
to calm the noise inside our heads.

Come nearer, God,
and grant to us new life and love
as we pursue your peace on earth...
...one person at a time.

Scripture reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

People: We light the candles of hope and peace to proclaim that God's light is coming into our darkness.

(Candles are lit)

Leader: Peace! Is there any message we long so much to hear? Every day we experience brokenness in our world: painful personal relationships, strife within our country, war and mistrust between nations. This Advent, may Christ draw near to us, so that we may draw near to one another.

People: Immanuel shall come and dwell with us. We look for you. We wait for you. Grant us peace.

Joy

Third Sunday in Advent

Joy to the world!
the EFTPOS handset beeps
among the tinsel, lights,
and shoppers shoulder-jostling...
purchasing the ghost of Christmas Past.

In vain we seek the
Christmas spirit
lurking in a cup of punch,
the parties,
and the smell of pine.

This Advent, God,
teach us again
where joy is found at Christmas:
wrapped in swaddling bands
and held within the gaze
of two new parents
marvelling at the life new born before them.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 35 (whole chapter)

People: We light the candles of hope and peace and joy to proclaim that God's light is coming into our darkness.

(Candles are lit)

Leader: How often joy enters our lives when we least expect it. In the midst of sorrow, or pain, or everydayness, joy may suddenly come to us. This Advent, whatever our circumstances, let there be moments of true joy, as we embrace the presence of Christ in our world.

People: Immanuel shall come and dwell with us. We look for you. We wait for you. We rejoice in you.

Love

Fourth Sunday in Advent

For God so loves the world
God comes to us –

indwelling our humanity,
challenging our self protection,
speaking to our frailty.

And just as breathing through the chaos
God made life out of the dark,
God's energy of recreation
births in us a vital spark.

And we – encouraged into being -

find God's image in ourselves
and so renewed
bring life to others...

God with us,
is love for all.

Scripture Reading: Zephaniah 3: 14-19

People: We light the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love to proclaim that God's light is coming into our darkness.

(Candles are lit)

Leader: Christmas is the miracle of God's love made flesh among us. The story of Jesus is a message of God's great love for the world. This Advent, let us make room for God's love, in our hearts, in our homes, in our relationships together.

People: Immanuel shall come and dwell with us. We look for you. We wait for you. We receive your love.

(Brenda Stone)