

St Philip's Prayer Circle

Prayers for God's gift of His Son



As we begin this Prayer Circle, we acknowledge that we gather on the unceded territory of the Mississauga Nation, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Haudonosaunee, Algonquin and Huron Wendat Nations. May we honour the Indigenous stewards of this land, and work to grow in right relationship with all Indigenous peoples. We recognize that our Creator God moves us forward together in healing, respect, and unity for future generations.

ALL: AMEN

The word “Advent” is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming,”. Scholars believe that during the 4th and 5th centuries in Spain and Gaul, Advent was a season of preparation for the baptism of new Christians at the January feast of Epiphany, the celebration of God’s incarnation represented by the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus (**Matthew 2:1**), his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (**John 1:29**), and his first miracle at Cana (**John 2:1**).

READER: During this season of preparation, Christians would spend 40 days in penance, prayer, and fasting to prepare for this celebration; originally, there was little connection between Advent and Christmas. By the 6th century, Roman Christians had tied Advent to the coming of Christ.

READER: But the “coming” they had in mind was not Christ’s first coming in the manger in Bethlehem, but his second coming in the clouds as the judge of the world. It was not until the Middle Ages that the Advent season was explicitly linked to Christ’s first coming at Christmas¹.

READER: With the help of theologian Fredrick Buechner, and ibelieve.com, today’s prayer circle will focus on preparing our hearts and minds for a deeper understanding of this blessed season of Advent.

¹ Christianity.com

READER: A reading from Isaiah 9 on the Righteous Reign of the Coming King
(to be read responsively)

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time He brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time He will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;

those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;

**they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.**

For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,

**the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.**

For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood

shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders;

and He is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually,

and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness

from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

READER: The First Sunday of Advent Brings us Closer to HOPE

READER: Fredrick Buechner wrote about Hope in this way:

FOR CHRISTIANS, hope is ultimately hope in Christ. The hope that He really is what for centuries we have been claiming He is. The hope that despite the fact that sin and death still rule the world, He somehow conquered them. The hope that in Him and through Him all of us stand a chance of somehow conquering them too. The hope that at some unforeseeable time and in some unimaginable way He will return with healing in his wings.

READER: No one in the New Testament calls a spade a spade as unflinchingly as Saint Paul: *"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile,"* He wrote to the Corinthians. *"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied"* (1 Corinthians 15:17,19). That is the possibility, in spite of which Saint Paul and the rest of us go on hoping even so.

READER: That is the possibility that led Dostoyevski to write to a friend, *"If anyone proved to me that Christ was outside the truth, and it really was so that the truth was outside Christ, then I would prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth."*²

READER: Father God, every word in scripture points to the gift of hope that we have because of Christ Jesus. The Christmas story wasn't the beginning of that message of hope because the Old Testament is full of glimpses of your plan to redeem your people and restore us into a relationship with you. But we are able to truly begin to see and understand just how great your love for us is when we read the story of Jesus' birth in scripture.

READER: Father, you showed us a glimmer of that hope as you chose to send your Son into this earth through a family tree that was a little bent and bruised. We glanced it again as you chose a tribe that was small and a city that was lowly. It can be seen when we recognize that you don't send your Son to be birthed in a fancy palace among the wealthy and the elite, but our King of Kings and Lord of Lords was born among common shepherds and livestock in a barn.

READER: The family wasn't ideal. The surroundings weren't grand. The situation wasn't without its' difficulties; however, you came in the midst of all of that. Emmanuel. God with us. God in the messy. God in the dirty. God in the difficult and the troubled.

READER: Lord, your plan to redeem and restore human kind was to dwell among us, fully God and fully human. You chose to come to earth enrobed in the fragile soft skin of a newborn baby and set aside all of the glory of heaven for one purpose. You came to be with us. You came to love us. You came to die for us so that we might live.

READER: Father God, help us to see that you are with us. Nothing is too difficult, too messy, or too dirty for you. Jesus came to give us the gift of eternal life through the salvation that only you, our Heavenly Father, can give when we believe in your Son, repent of our sins, and confess Jesus as our Lord and Saviour³.

READER: From John 1:14 we hear *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

Let us say together a prayer for Hope:

**Loving, liberating God,
When darkness obscures our future, give us hope.
When despair numbs our souls, give us hope.
When doubt assails our faith, give us hope.
Make ready our hearts for your coming,**

**O Lord, and receive our prayers in the name of the one who comes, our gracious
Saviour, Jesus, the Christ. AMEN**

² Fredrick Buechner, Originally published in *Wishful Thinking* and later in *Beyond Words*

³ <https://www.ibelieve.com/faith/>

READER: The Second Sunday of Advent Brings us Closer to PEACE

Fredrick Buechner writes: PEACE HAS COME TO MEAN THE TIME when there aren't any wars or even when there aren't any major wars. Beggars can't be choosers; we'd most of us settle for that. But in Hebrew peace, *shalom*, means fullness, means having everything you need to be wholly and happily yourself.

READER: One of the titles by which Jesus is known is Prince of Peace, and He used the word himself in what seems at first glance to be two radically contradictory utterances. On one occasion He said to the disciples, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). And later on, the last time they ate together, He said to them, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27).

The contradiction is resolved when you realize that, for Jesus, peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle, but the presence of love⁴. Once again, “for Jesus, peace seems to have meant NOT the absence of struggle, but the presence of LOVE.

READER: So, we pray for Peace.

Lord, you are the God who gives peace. This second week of Advent, causes us to remember that because of Jesus we can experience a Christmas free from turmoil and chaos. Regardless of our circumstances or our situations, you offer us a peace that passes understanding.

READER: That first Christmas, when you sent your Son, you sent the one who is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Even the angels cried out, 'Glory to God in the Highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.' The angels knew your purpose. They know the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love that Christmas held. They recognized the fullness of God was wrapped in the tiny flesh of an infant as you humbled yourself and dwelt among us. Emmanuel. God with us, as the baby Jesus.

READER: That baby would grow to be the same God-man, Jesus, who would again humble himself to face death on a cruel cross as payment for our sin. He would triumphantly defeat sin and death and hell, in order to cancel our sin debt and reconcile us to you, Father.

That is why you sent to us, your Son, Jesus. Because you loved us, you sent Jesus, that we might believe in Him and receive eternal life. Jesus was the first Christmas gift and still remains the only gift worth truly having.

READER: You exalted Him and gave Him a name above all names. Every knee in heaven and earth and under the earth must bow to the name of Jesus. The winds and waves obey Him. He rules and reigns as king over all. No situation or circumstance that we find ourselves in, is a match for Jesus.

We are able to have the fullness of peace in our hearts on Christmas day, and every day, because that same Jesus sits at your right hand in heaven and makes intercession for us. Not only that, but He paid our sin debt. He loves us with a love that is unfathomable. Nothing can separate us from His love. He is good, and his plans for us are good.

ALL: AMEN

⁴ -Originally published in *Wishful Thinking* and later in *Beyond Words*

READER: From Luke 2: 14 we hear “*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.*”

Together let us say a prayer for Peace

**Dear Lord, we know that peace is the only battle worth raging.
We know that peace cannot be kept by force,
but is achieved by understanding.
We know that the world will never be the dwelling place of peace,
until peace has found a home in the heart of each and every person.
Guide those who make decisions for the nations of the earth
with your pure and peaceable wisdom;
so in tranquility, your kingdom may go forward,
until the earth be filled with the knowledge of your love.
We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.**

READER: The Third Sunday of Advent Brings us Closer to JOY

Fredrick Buechner writes: IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, Jesus sums up pretty much everything by saying, "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full*" (John 15:11). He said it at the supper that He knew was the last one at which he'd have a mouth to eat with.

READER: Happiness turns up more or less where you'd expect it to—a good family relationships, a rewarding job, a pleasant vacation. Joy, on the other hand, is as notoriously unpredictable as the one who bequeaths it⁵.

READER: Let us pray for Joy

Heavenly Father, let us remember that the good news of Jesus' birth has the power to bring us great joy this Christmas season. 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.

READER: Our joy comes from you. The 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.

ALL: AMEN

READER: Father, those who gathered around the new baby were blessed because they believed that you had fulfilled your promises. Mary and Joseph believed and were able to feel the joy of holding baby Jesus in their arms. The shepherds and wise men believed the angels and the signs and experienced the great gladness of worshipping their Messiah.

READER: Those who knew Him and recognized Him were overjoyed at the coming of Jesus. They saw the prophecies fulfilled and their fear was replaced with happiness as they gazed on the face of the one who would be their Saviour.

READER: They trusted in your promises and their hearts were filled with gladness as they watched your loving-kindness manifested in the face of a tiny baby in a lowly manger.

⁵ -Originally published in *Wishful Thinking* and later in *Beyond Words*

READER: Let us pray for Love

Heavenly Father, the whole meaning of Christmas can be explained in one little four-letter word...L O V E.

You sent your gift of pure love to us that first Christmas. Love descended from heaven to be born of a virgin. Love laid in the scratchy hay of a manger in a meager barn in Bethlehem.

READER: All of your love, God, was robed in the delicate skin of a baby and wrapped in swaddling clothes. In the fourth week of Advent, help us to reflect on the magnitude of love that was made manifest in Jesus.

READER: Your word became flesh and you made your dwelling among us when Jesus was born. You set aside all of the glory and splendor of heaven and chose the humblest way to enter into your kingdom.

Beneath the stars, surrounded by all of the hosts of heaven, love came. Welcomed by an earthly mother and father, shepherds and wise men, love came.

READER: You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords, The Messiah and Ruler of All, yet you came not as a lion, but as a lamb. You came as an innocent baby whose purpose was to walk this earth in complete love and then to sacrificially give your life as an atonement for the sins of your children. Love in the form of a human. Emmanuel. God with us.

READER: Lord God, that was your plan. From beginning to end, you knew every minute of Jesus' life. You knew that the cross of Calvary was waiting for Jesus, yet you still sent your only Son so that our sin debt could be paid. So we could walk blameless because of the blood shed of Jesus.

READER: Lord Jesus, there is no greater gift than this, that one should lay down his life for another. You willingly gave the gift of your life because of your love. Your righteous blood covered our sin. You redeem and restore us when we confess you as Lord and Saviour of our life. At that moment you give us the gift of your love for all eternity. We receive grace upon grace and mercy upon mercy in that moment.

READER: The greatest gift of all came that first Christmas. It wasn't wrapped in a beautiful package and set under a brightly decorated tree. The greatest gift came wrapped in the flesh of baby Jesus and laid in the rough wood of a manger. Our perfect gift would later be rewrapped in the scars of our sin and nailed to the rugged wood of a cross on Calvary, all because of love.

READER: Father, when we reach the final week of Advent, fill our hearts and minds with the significance of that truth. Thank you, Lord, for loving us enough to send Jesus. In Jesus' precious name we pray.

ALL: AMEN

READER: From John 3:16 we hear “*For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*”

Together let us say a prayer for LOVE

**Lord, we thank you that your love is patient.
Help us show patience with those around us.
Lord, we thank you that your love is kind.
Help us to extend kindness to others.
Lord, we thank you that true love is not jealous.
Help us cast aside feelings of jealousy or hatred towards others. AMEN**

READER: And now, our Lord's Birth Narrative from the Gospel of Matthew:

All: Glory to you Lord Jesus Christ

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when He had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to Him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name Him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; He took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and He named Him Jesus.

This is the Gospel of Christ,

All: Praise be to you Lord Jesus Christ

In closing, let us pray the prayer Jesus, our Lord and Saviour gave us:

**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 trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever,
AMEN**