



Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
(30-45 minutes, preferably just before or after dinner)

Helpful Elements:

Christmas hymnbook
White table covers
Individual electric candles (one for each person)
Instrumental Christmas music
Advent stand with colored electric candles
Advent banner
Nativity scene (separate table)

Welcome: I want to welcome all of you to our worship service this Christmas Eve, a holy night to celebrate Christ's birth. My name is _____, and I'll be leading us in worship tonight. Thank you all for coming. Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening prayer: Almighty God, we thank you for the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem, as announced by the angels on this holy night. May the mystery of the Word made flesh fill our souls with wonder and yearning. Change our hearts from a busy inn to a quiet chamber for your glory. May we who are gathered here join in song with the angels, share the delight of the shepherds, and adore him with the wise men. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Hymn: Joy to the World

Lighting the Advent Candles: Now is the time to light the Advent Candles. This past Sunday was the final Sunday of Advent, and we lit four candles: the candle of Hope (purple), the candle of Love (purple), the candle of Joy (pink), and the candle of Peace (purple). Tonight, Christmas Eve, we now light the white candle, the Christ candle, which symbolizes **the Light** – and the hope, love, joy, and peace – that Christ brought into the world.

Passing out electric candles: We have candles here to hand out to everyone to remind us of Christ's light that spread through all creation and touched each of us. *[If you use electric pillar candles, add:]* These candle bulbs are fragile glass, so please be sure to hold the candle only on the white or gold parts.

[Play instrumental music while passing out electric candles]

Hymn: O Come O Come Emmanuel

First reading: Isaiah 9

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

³You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest ...

⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

We Three Kings

Second reading: John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of the world. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymn: The First Noel

Interactive Message:

- What is it like to be in a dark room?
 - scary; cold; unsure; anxiety; boring
- What's it like when you or someone else finally flips on a light?
 - relief! you can see; you're reassured; things aren't scary anymore
- What does light do? Why is it important?
 - enables you to see; lights the way; brings warmth and comfort; without it, you're blind, walking in shadow
- Where does light come from?
 - Lightbulbs, flashlights, flames, sun, moon
 - In John 1, Christ is described as "the light of the world, shining in the darkness." I wonder what that might mean? How is Christ like light in our dark world?
 - Genesis 1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." And after God made light, he made something else: What was that? PEOPLE! As the Bible says,
 - ²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness."
 - Because you are made in the image of God, every single one of you carries within you a bit of Christ's light. God's Spirit of light

and love lives within you! Scripture tells us to let our lights shine, to not hide them under a bushel. We all have light to share, no matter our situation, our health, our age, or our ability.

[Everyone can now turn on their electric candles. Then encourage residents and families to share joys and concerns:]

What we can be praying about together this evening? How would you like to see more light in your world and our world?

Let's pray silently about these hopes and needs for a moment.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, in your love and mercy, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

Lord's Prayer: 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 forever, Amen.

Hymn: Angels We Have Heard on High

Third Reading: The Christmas Story, Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered...³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a

manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among those with whom God is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

Fourth Reading: “Christmas Bells” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Longfellow wrote this well-known poem in 1864, right in the middle of the Civil War. *[This is a fairly long poem; bracketed sections may be omitted.]*

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

[Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!]

Then from each dark, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

[It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!]

And in despair I bowed my head;
“There is no peace on earth,” I said;
“For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men.”

Hymn: Away in a Manger

Optional Reading: Christmas Truce of 1914¹

¹ adapted from History.com

On December 7, 1914, Pope Benedict the Fifteenth suggested a temporary cease-fire of World War I for the celebration of Christmas. The warring countries refused to create any official cease-fire, but on Christmas the soldiers in the trenches declared their own unofficial truce.

Starting on Christmas Eve, many German and British troops sang Christmas carols to each other across the lines, and at certain points the Allied soldiers even heard brass bands joining the Germans in their joyous singing.

At the first light of dawn on Christmas Day, some German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines across no-man's-land, calling out "Merry Christmas" in English. At first, the Allied soldiers feared it was a trick, but seeing the Germans unarmed they climbed out of their trenches and shook hands with the German soldiers. The men exchanged presents of cigarettes and plum puddings and sang carols and songs. There is even a documented case of soldiers from opposing sides playing a good-natured game of soccer.

The so-called Christmas Truce of 1914 came only five months after the start of war in Europe and was one of the last examples of chivalry between enemies in warfare. It was never repeated—officers quashed future attempts at holiday ceasefires with threats of disciplinary action—but it served as heartening proof, however brief, that beneath the brutal clash of weapons, God's gift of peace endured.

[If possible, dim the lights a bit:] How does your candlelight look different when we dim the lights a little? The light shines even brighter.

On this most holy night, long ago in the city of Bethlehem, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, was born. He brought his own life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Hymns:

What Child is This Silent Night

May the blessing of this holy light be upon you tonight and always. Go in peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[put on instrumental Christmas music; collect candles and hymnbooks]