

# The Four Gospel Voices in Advent

A Liturgy for the Lighting of the Advent Candles

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## First Candle - The Gospel of Mark

Today we light the first candle of the Advent Season, the candle of hope.

The hope symbolized by the coming of the birth of Jesus is a reminder and a promise that God is not done with creation - even now.

And as we claim the hope of this Advent Season in lighting the first candle it is good we remember that our earliest Gospel, Mark, dispenses with any story at all of Jesus' birth. Mark speaks to us in simple Greek, in the present tense, urgently, almost breathlessly - John the Baptist appears and then Jesus proclaiming the Kingdom of God - as if to say "What precisely happened before does not matter - we are all called now and have work to do to make hope real. Advent is now. Hope is now. And we are part of it."

Amen.

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## Second Candle - The Gospel of Matthew

Today we light the second candle of the advent season, the candle of peace.

And as we light the second candle, it is good to remember the voice of what many say was the second Gospel to be written, Matthew. For Matthew it is crucial that we not forget that Jesus comes to us both as something radically new and also deeply rooted in tradition: The fulfillment of the law and the prophets. In Matthew's birth narrative alone we see the new star heralding the Messiah, wise men bringing gifts (not lowly shepherds), a violent threatened king, and a journey into and out of Egypt – all as is fitting for the new Moses, for Immanuel - God with us. In Matthew we hear echoes of the Hebrew Scriptures with wonderful and new meanings in Christ.

As we prepare our hearts on our Advent journey we remember Matthews voice. We look back to our ancestors in faith and we look forward to peace in the ongoing new creation we are a part of in God.

Amen.

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### Third Candle - The Gospel of Luke

Today we like the third Advent candle, the candle of joy.

And as we light the third candle we remember the voice of the writer of the Third Gospel, whom we call Luke. In Luke's birth narrative we recall the astonishing "good tidings of great joy" are found in the birth of a child, witnessed by humble shepherds, not kings or Wiseman. In Luke it is the unwed peasant girl, Mary, not her husband to be, who receives the good news.

As we celebrate the joy of Advent, Luke's voice reminds us God's good news is for everyone, not just the powerful, not just those of the "right" religion - and that fundamentally God works and is present in ways we least expect:

"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." - Luke 2:12

Amen.

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### Fourth Candle - The Gospel of John

Today we light the fourth Advent candle, the candle of love.

And as we light the fourth candle we remember the voice of the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John. In John we also find no birth story - as if to say, with Mark, something more important is at work than might be found in such details. John starts like Genesis in the beginning. And in words simple to say but difficult to fully understand, the advent John proclaims, the true advent, is no less than the Logos, the Word of God, and the Light of the World, coming into the world. Amazingly we hear John's voice assuring us that we may abide in this Logos, this Light, as one -- as branches on a vine. And lest we lose our way in this wonderful and dizzying promise, we do well to remember that to abide in this One we must follow the commandment - given as told in John the night before Jesus was betrayed -- to love one another.

As we live into this promise and command, we also remember the letter written in John's name and voice proclaiming simply - God is love.

Amen.