

*Advent Barn Stations*

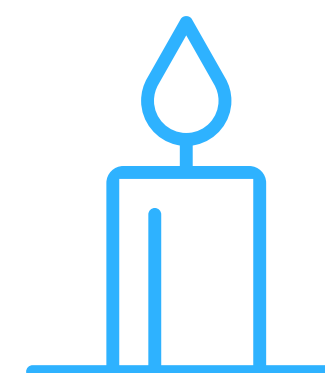
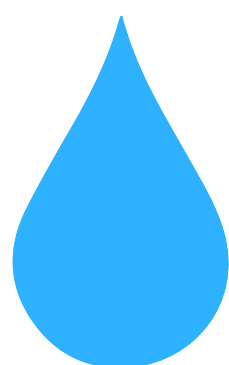
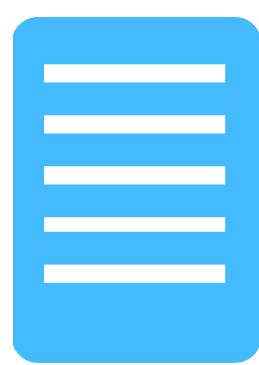


# THE ADVENT EXPERIENCE

*Sensory Stations to Guide You  
Through the Advent Experience*

DARKNESS | ABSENCE  
WAITING | TENSION | LIGHT

*That leads us to Christmas*



**THE FARMHOUSE**  
FOSTERING THE HEALTH OF OUR PLACE

# WELCOME TO ADVENT BARN STATIONS

A SENSORY PROCESS TO HELP US UNDERSTAND, EXPERIENCE,  
AND PARTICIPATE IN THE SEASON CALLED ADVENT.

## WHAT ARE BARN STATIONS?

Barn Stations are a style of event we do three times a year to take us through the process of something: Lent and Good Friday, the process of mourning and death, or, for today, Advent; and we use tactile stations to help our whole selves to go through the journey.

Especially concerning Advent, we find it necessary to capture the meaning of this season in a unique way - because Advent is a strange season.

## WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent is, essentially, an experience that conveniently mimics what is currently happening in creation. It is cold and the days are getting shorter. Darkness lingers way more than we would like. You see, the Church has a season in which, before we celebrate incarnation and the entrance of Messiah into the world, we take time to experience a world of darkness, absence, and waiting.

Advent is often compared to the experience of exile which Israel endured in various forms for centuries. Though we live in a moment of history in which we will, eventually, celebrate that incarnation has started, there are many ways that we are still waiting for the experience of Christmas and the ensuing Kingdom of God to be finished.

We exist in the space between the promise of incarnation and the fulfillment of that promise.

We exist in a world where we still need Jesus to come.

We still need God to finish what was started in creation and in the coming of Messiah.

Advent is where we take time to make space for God to, again, continue to intrude our lives and the world and move us a bit closer to the fullness of our hope.

But we have to start here - by being honest about the darkness, the absence, and the waiting.

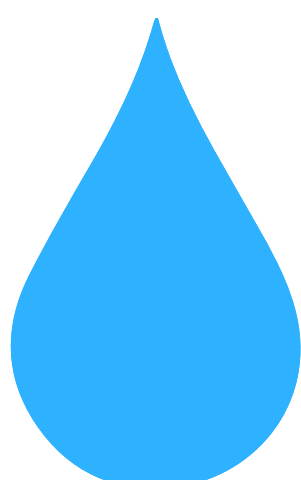
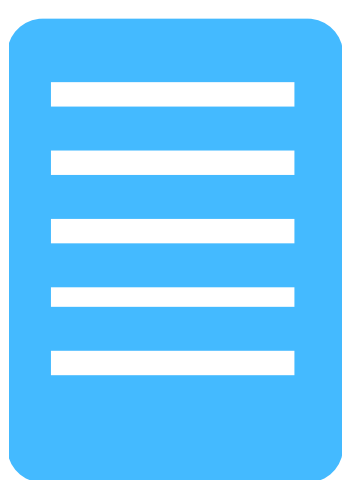
## HOW WILL THIS WORK?

There will be various texts to portray a specific component of the Advent experience, culminating with the anticipation of Christmas. Accompanying each text is a reflection with a tangible act for you to do, if you choose. The aim is to engage as many senses as possible so that you don't just experience Advent with your head, but also with your hands.

If you would like to do the reflective actions, here are some suggested materials you may need if you are doing this at home:

## ITEMS NEEDED FOR DOING THE STATIONS AT HOME:

- A candle and incense:
  - To help create a meditative atmosphere and engage your olfactory senses. You'll also need a way to extinguish and re-light the candle.
- For Station 1:
  - Notecard or piece of paper and writing utensil.
  - A separate candle (a votive candle is best, if you have it).
- For Station 2:
  - A jar of something that smells strong and/or unpleasant.
    - We usually use raw onions, spicy peppers, and horseradish blended together.
- For Station 3:
  - Two mediums for art (ideally, they will be the same) – paper, canvas, or something more decorative.
  - Crayons, markers, or paint.
- For Station 4:
  - A candle and a firesafe container (metal bowl, ceramic bowl)
    - You need something you can put a piece of paper which is on fire into without causing a problem.
- Station 5:
  - A small cup of juice.
- Station 6:
  - The same candle you extinguished in Station



# A FINAL WORD BEFORE YOU BEGIN

OUR HOPE, THROUGH THESE STATIONS, IS THAT WE WILL EMBRACE THIS SPACE BETWEEN THAT IS THE SEASON OF ADVENT.

## **ADVENT IS THE FIRST SEASON IN THE CHURCH'S YEAR FOR A REASON:**

Because when you enter this raw, honest experience, you are setting the foundation for truly embracing what it means to join God in the healing of the world and the furthering of God's Kingdom on earth.

But before we can embrace God's work in the world, we must pay attention to how and where that work is still necessary; we must enter the space between the start of God's Kingdom and all the ways it has yet to be finished.

## **IN SOME WAYS, ADVENT IS THE INVITATION TO RELIVE THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE OF EXILE THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE REALITY BEFORE JESUS' INCARNATION OCCURRED.**

And, in our culture, especially in how we jump straight into Christmas with a month full of the bright lights and joyful noises of our culture's Winter Festival atmosphere, Advent can seem difficult and, even, unnecessary.

Yet, it may be true that, by fully anticipating the coming of God's world, by entering the uncomfortable feeling of darkness, and by being honest about the reality of the world, we will be more apt to do what our culture often fails to do - truly understand, appreciate, and join the meaning of Christmas.

## **SO WE HAVE TO START HERE.**

We have to make space for God to come if we are going to celebrate that God is with us. We enter the darkness of our lives and our world, the absence of how God's Kingdom is both unfolding but not fully here, and the waiting that orients us to the light of Christmas.

## **ALLOW ADVENT TO LINGER – EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS LIKE CULTURAL TREASON**

Because we will be more in tune with what it means for Jesus to be born and for God to still be at work in a world that desperately needs to be transformed and still yearns for Jesus to come.

But we ought not forget one of the most important reasons we need to be honest about the difficult realities of our world. Because when we pay attention to the darkness, it catalyzes the very healing we are hoping for. Alexander Shaia put it this way:

**"THE DEEPEST DARK IS NOT WHERE GRACE GOES TO DIE.  
THE DEEPEST DARK IS THE PLACE WHERE GRACE GOES TO BE REBORN."**

Alas, it may be true that the Divine dwells in the darkest places.

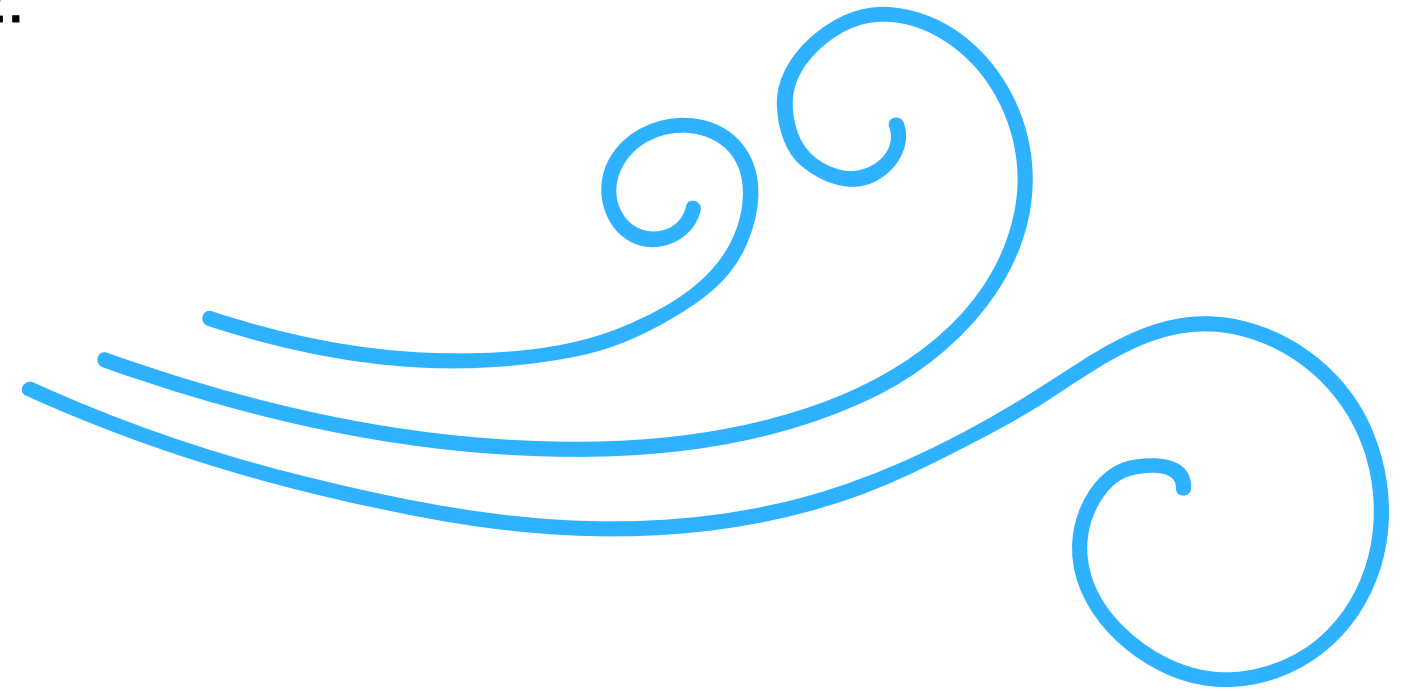
May you encounter the difficult beauty of Advent and may you find the God who meets us in those difficult places. Because, if we do, we will ensure that the world will never be the same.

# PREPARATION

PLEASE BEGIN BY FINDING A SPACE TO SIT & REFLECT  
BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE STATIONS, WE INVITE YOU TO SIT IN SILENCE.

Give yourself permission to breathe for a few minutes.  
Take multiple long and deep breaths,  
notice how the space feels,  
hear the sounds of the room.

And transition yourself from wherever you were today  
to where you are now.



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## BARN STATION PROCESS

IF YOU ARE IN THE BARN:

AROUND THE ROOM ARE SIX STATIONS THAT WILL TAKE YOU THROUGH THE JOURNEY OF ADVENT.

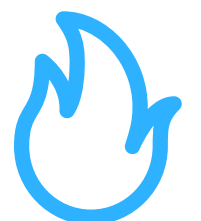
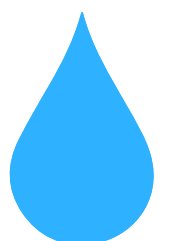
Each station will have a piece of paper with a text and an explanation of a sensory action to help you engage with and be transformed by that part of Advent.

PLEASE BEGIN WITH **STATION I** AND WORK YOUR WAY TO **STATION VI**.

Each station will have a piece of paper with a text and an explanation of a sensory action to help you engage with and be transformed by that part of Advent.

You may go through the stations as many times as you would like and, when you are finished, feel free to sit in the space for as much time as you need.

*Please maintain a spirit of somberness and silence  
in respect for the sacredness of this space  
and for those in prayer or meditation.*



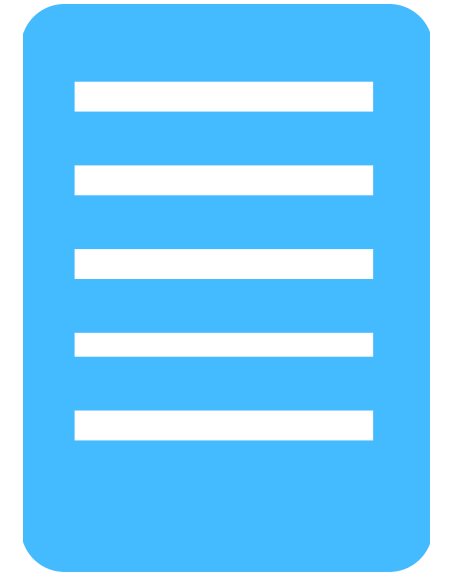
# STATION I: DARKNESS

## BEGIN BY EXTINGUISHING A VOTIVE CANDLE

### ADVENT IS A SEASON OF ANTICIPATING THE COMING OF GOD'S WORLD.

As we look to our world's future, we become aware of everything that is not yet good and whole and beautiful and right. We are forced to see what we and the world desperately need to become.

By admitting what is wrong, by seeing all the ways we have wandered off course, and by acknowledging the darkness, we can then begin moving towards a world that can, again, be called good. By starting here, transformation is now possible.



### THE FIRST STEP OF THIS PROCESS IS TO MAKE SPACE FOR THIS TRANSFORMATION TO HAPPEN.

In order for God to come, we must make space for God to come.

Therefore, we begin by entering the darkness of our lives & of the world.

As you smell the scent of smoke and watch the light of the candle flicker to an ember of absence, allow it to be a symbol for the darkness of your life and of the world around you - for this darkness is the space by which the hoped-for transformation begins.

### FOR ISRAEL, THIS WAS "EXILE".

It is the experience of all that has gone wrong, the experience where there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Today, the world is not all it is meant to be and the state of exile Israel experienced is still very real. We still need Jesus to come.

The world is a mess and Advent is the invitation to enter the mess, pay attention to the chaos of the world, and be honest about the wounds, the difficulty, and all that is not God's light.

For that is how the process of transformation always begins.

### ISAIAH CHAPTER 9 SAYS IT THIS WAY:

"

**"THOSE WHO WALK IN GREAT DARKNESS WILL SEE A GREAT LIGHT.  
THOSE WHO LIVE IN A DARK LAND, THE LIGHT WILL SHINE UPON THEM."**

During this season, we allow this darkness to linger; revealing to us what needs changed. And as we enter, feel, and confront that darkness of our world's midnight, we begin facing the East, waiting & watching for the first rays of the sunrise to emerge.



# STATION I RESPONSE

**ON THE PROVIDED NOTECARD - LIST OUT YOUR DARKNESS:**

**WHAT ARE ALL THE WAYS WE STILL NEED JESUS TO COME?**

**WHAT IS THE DARKNESS OF YOUR LIFE AND OF THE WORLD?**

War? Violence? Oppression? Inequality? Greed? Affluence?

Your marriage? Your family? Your physical health? Your mental or emotional health?

Your ego? Your daily rhythms? Are you stuck? What about the way you treat others? The way others treat you? The various kingdoms we participate in with what we do, what we buy, or what we associate with?

Is it selfishness? Or our ecological disaster? The uncertainty of your future? The weight of your past?

**Write out anything in your life, your community, or the world that isn't the way it's supposed to be.**

Begin Advent in solidarity with the world before Jesus was born by writing out the ways you feel the same as the candle you've just extinguished. Transformation begins here - by entering the darkness & anticipating the light that needs to come.

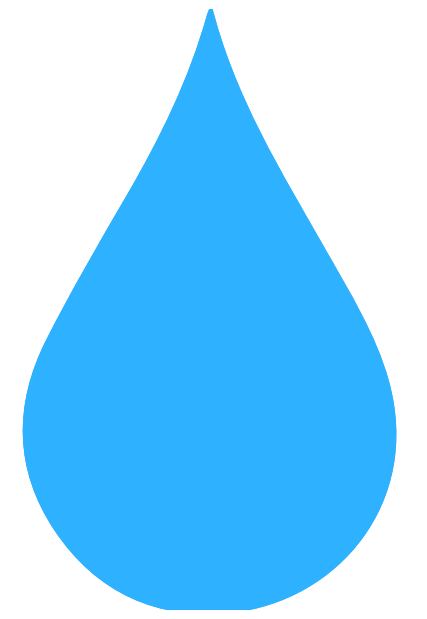
*\*Please take your candle & notecard with you as you go to each station.*

# STATION II: ABSENCE

## THE CRY OF ADVENT

### A READING FROM LUKE 1V78-79:

By the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from the heavens to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.



### THERE IS A BOOK IN THE BIBLE CALLED LAMENTATIONS THAT PROCLAIMS:

God has made me grind my teeth on gravel,” and later, “Is it nothing to you, all who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which has been brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.”

### OUR FAITH INVITES US TO CRY OUT; TO RAISE OUR FISTS IN THE FACE OF PAIN, DESTRUCTION, EVIL, AND SORROW.

In our world today, we read about “peace on earth”, but it is in stark contrast to a world that has not chosen peace. Peace on earth just doesn’t seem to be working and our invitation is to cry out – just as Israel did in exile – in response to all that has gone wrong.

Isaiah 64 says it this way – make this your prayer as you experience Advent:

**"AFTER ALL THIS, WILL YOU RESTRAIN YOURSELF,  
OH LORD? WILL YOU KEEP SILENT?"**

Though on that first Christmas, we experienced that God is with us in Jesus’ incarnation, there is still an absence. Jesus’ entrance began something, but it isn’t finished and so as we begin Advent’s journey, we must acknowledge all that still feels like it is missing.

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## STATION II RESPONSE

### SMELL THE CONTENTS OF THE JAR. (DON’T EAT IT!)

**AS YOU SENSE THE BURNING STENCH AND POSSIBLY THE EMERGENCE OF TEARS, CRY OUT TO ALL THAT HAS GONE WRONG. LIKE LAMENTATIONS, ASK, “WHERE IS GOD?”**

When they got cancer. In the murder or the kidnapping or the violence. When mother’s have to bury their children. When the medicine failed. When the miscarriage happened. In the mass shootings. In inequality or slavery or an economy that exists at the expense of our brothers and sisters and neighbors. In the oppression and racism and sexual harassment. In the eviction or foreclosure. In the lack of safety or the car accident or the business failing. In our division. In our broken families.

Peace on Earth? It doesn’t always seem like it. God is with us, but God seems to be a little bit absent, too. In recognizing the absence, we are invited to feel it, to sit in it, and to enter into it. Use this smell to reflect on the reality of all that still seems to be missing.



# STATION III: WAITING

## ADVENT IS LIKE A PRISON CELL

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, A GERMAN THEOLOGIAN, WHILE BEING KEPT IN A NAZI PRISON CELL FOR CONSPIRING AGAINST HITLER, EXPRESSED ADVENT THIS WAY:

"LIFE IN A PRISON CELL MAY VERY WELL BE COMPARED TO ADVENT. ONE WAITS AND HOPES, BUT THE DOOR IS SHUT AND CAN ONLY BE OPENED FROM THE OUTSIDE."



There are two people who recognized Jesus as Messiah while he was still an infant – a man named Simeon and a woman named Anna. Of all the people who saw Jesus, only they saw his divine identity and, in the Gospel of Luke, we are told the reason they recognize Jesus is because they had been waiting, every day, for their entire lives.

### WE BEGIN IN THE DARKNESS – LIKE GOING TO A PRISON CELL

And when we do, it creates a powerlessness where the only thing we can do is wait.

Acknowledging the darkness & absence now enables us to see what we are waiting for...because our eyes are fixed on the door we hope to be opened.

We take a season to wait because, like Simeon and Anna, waiting will orient us to what we are waiting for.

So, in your life & in the world, what are you waiting for?

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## STATION III RESPONSE

### CREATE TWO IDENTICAL PIECES OF ART

**PAINT, DRAW, OR USE WHATEVER MEDIUM WORKS BEST FOR YOU.**

Create one on the item provided (or on your first medium, if at home) & one on the piece of paper provided that captures what you are waiting for.

What images or colors express what you desperately hope to happen?

And as you create the art, may it orient you towards its coming. May it be your way of staring at the prison door, preparing & anticipating for it to be opened.

*[ take your 2nd art piece on the paper with you to the next station - along with your unlit candle + notecard ]*

# STATION IV: TENSION

## THE DESCENT OF MARY

### WAITING ORIENTS US, BUT IT ALSO DISRUPTS US

At this point in the journey of The Advent Experience, we begin moving towards the light and, therefore, the change that comes with Christmas.

But we also acknowledge that this change will be difficult...in fact, it will feel like a loss.

Because change is hard and it happens slowly.

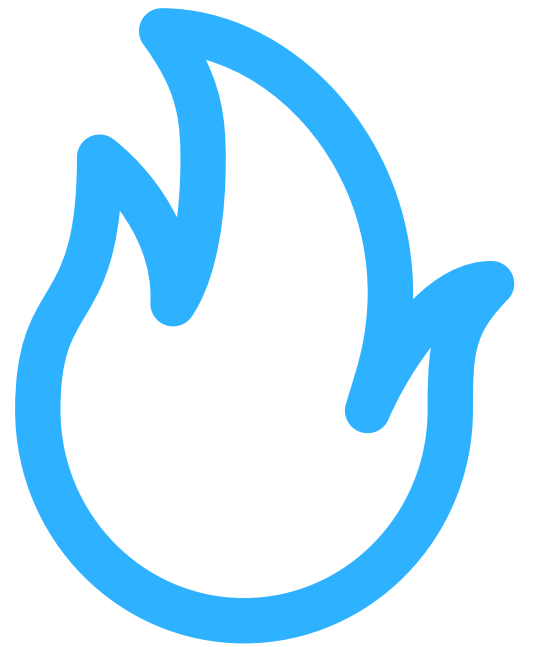
A tension arises as we sit in the space between the promise of Christmas and the difficulty of waiting for its fulfillment.

### MARY EXPERIENCED THIS IN THAT FIRST CHRISTMAS

As she left her home, she was leaving her family for the rest of her life as her decision to go through with this birth would leave her rejected by her family forever. Mary's trip to Bethlehem was a journey of descent. What we are waiting for will be slow and it will cost us something. To bring forth light from the darkness will be like Mary traveling to Jerusalem. Gregory of Nyssa once said that,

**"WHAT HAPPENED IN THE BODY OF MARY  
WILL HAPPEN TO ALL WHO RECEIVE THE LIFE OF GOD."**

We are all conceiving the life of God in the world and when we do, it will be scary and dangerous - that is the tension this journey now takes us on. But we must also remember God's words to Mary in the face of this journey, **"Do not be afraid."**



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## STATION IV RESPONSE

### TAKE YOUR ART PIECE AND PLACE IT IN THE FIRE.

**MAY THIS BE A SYMBOL THAT WHAT WE ARE WAITING FOR IS OVERWHELMING AND SLOW AND DIFFICULT AND THAT, THOUGH IT IS COMING, IT WILL OFTEN FEEL LIKE IT IS NOT.**

But as you stare at the flame, may it also become a beacon for the hope that we are still watching for our art piece and if we continue to wait, we will be sure not to miss it.

Jesus' disciples often questioned Jesus on why God's Kingdom seemed to be taking so long and Jesus' response was always that God is still at work, even when it doesn't seem like it, even when what we are waiting for seems to be burning in flame...but we must keep watch and be ready. We must allow that flame to be a light for what we are moving towards.

This flame captures the tension of Advent - the space between where we are & where we are going.

# STATION V: RESPOND

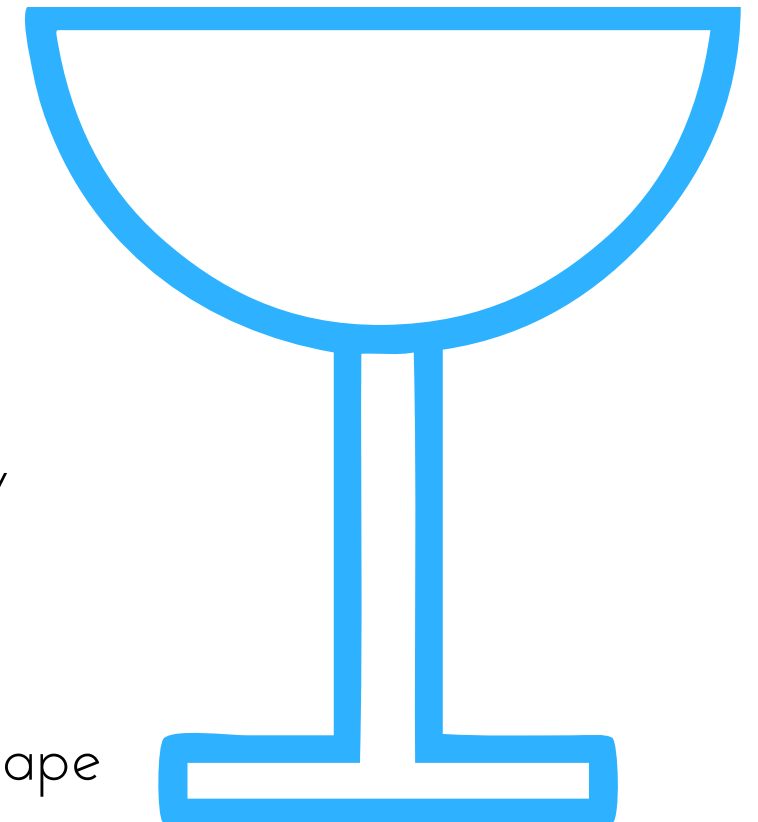
## THE MAGNIFICAT

THERE IS A PRAYER BY ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI FROM THE 14TH CENTURY THAT BEGINS:

“LORD, MAKE US INSTRUMENTS OF YOUR PEACE...”

This prayer is set on something to come in the future. But it also compels that future reality to begin unfolding now.

When you go through this process, what you are anticipating and waiting for begins to shape you. When we actively wait for the prison door to be opened, it becomes the lens through which we see our lives. The space of darkness offers us the possibility of transformation.



### WE NOW ARE INVITED TO CONTINUE TO RESPOND AS MARY DID.

In facing the darkness and the absence, the waiting and the difficulty that lied ahead of her, Mary responded with something called, “The Magnificat”:

**“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things and holy is his name...”**

Mary’s had tasted the future reality of where the story was going and she said yes to it. Mary’s waiting brought forth hope...and Mary made the decision to join the hope.

When we begin in the darkness, it leads to this transformation – where we begin to join God in bringing forth the future hope of what we are waiting for just like the prayer that St. Francis taught us to say.

May we say, “Yes,” just as Mary did and may our present situation begin moving towards where the story is going – towards that future hope becoming more a reality in the present because we made space for God to come, we paid attention to what God is up to in our current darkness, and we decided to, like Mary, join God in that hoped-for future becoming a reality today.

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## STATION V RESPONSE

### BEFORE YOU IS A CUP OF JUICE.

**DRINK THE CUP – AND AS YOU TASTE THE SWEET LIQUID IN YOUR MOUTH  
MAY IT SYMBOLIZE THE HOPE THAT YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN.**

May this juice, with the taste of its goodness, symbolize your preparation for Christmas & God’s Kingdom – that this future will begin to shape who you are now because you’ve said yes to it, just as Mary did.

# STATION VI: LIGHT

TAKE THE CANDLE YOU EXTINGUISHED AT THE BEGINNING AND, AGAIN, LIGHT IT.

READ THIS POEM ON THE HOPE ADVENT BRINGS US IN PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS:

**Those living in darkness  
have seen a great light.**

**But it is yet a small glowing ember,  
distant on the horizon as if it is barely alive.**

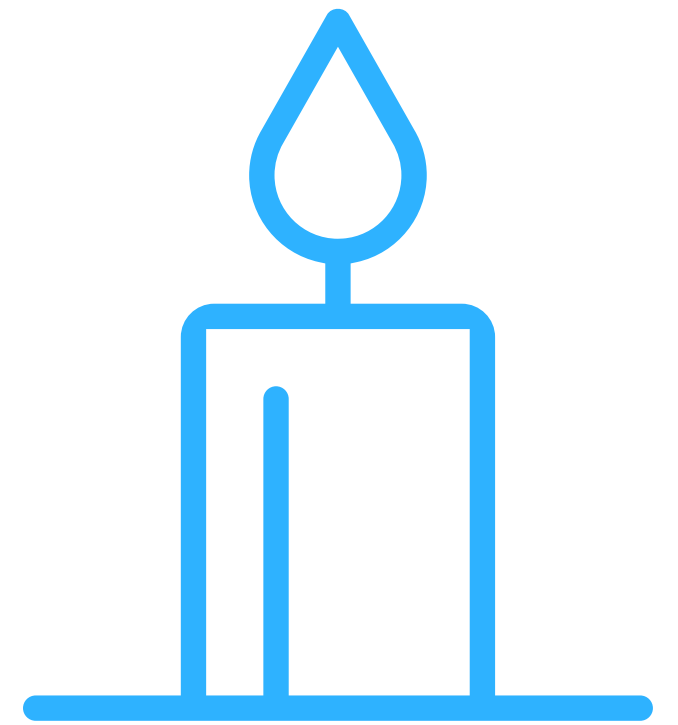
**So we wait.  
And watch.  
That hopelessness will fade into hope.  
Hate into love.  
Evil into peace.  
Destruction into goodness.**

**Just as midnight grows into dawn  
that it might become a brightness so strong and overwhelming  
that the darkness becomes impossible.**

**May the light grow ever so boldly,  
that all wrong will be made right  
and, in this world,  
God's world, again, be made full.**

May you join in the rest of Advent's season – walking through the journey of darkness, absence, waiting, and tension - so that you will move closer and closer to this light that is our hope.

If you do, you will arrive at Christmas and it will be like a baby has born...  
...and the world will never be the same.



# STATION VI RESPONSE

AS YOU DEPART, PLEASE REFLECT ON YOUR LIST,  
IMAGINING THE LIGHT YOU DESPERATELY HOPE FOR  
AND SAY THIS FINAL PRAYER IN PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS:

## **God who is Emmanuel -**

Our world is broken. Suffering reigns. Hope feels lost and the manger is still empty:

**Come.**

In hunger and injustice, poverty and the loss of dignity of all humans who are your creation:

In evil and the systems of oppression that cause so much destruction. In terror and violence, in the shedding of blood and the failure to bring peace on earth:

In hatred and division. In deceit and lies. In all the ways we have gotten off track, wandered from our true selves, missed your beauty, and disconnected what you intended for connection:

In our failure to choose peace.

In our failure to choose love.

In our failure to choose joy.

In our failure to choose hope.

In our broken families:

In our failed marriages:

In the inability to reconcile bruised relationships:

In our dehumanization of one another:

In the destruction of this earth which you have called "good":

In our lack of self worth - in not loving you, our neighbor, or ourselves:

In all that sucks:

**Come.**

**Come Emmanuel - our world needs you...and we are waiting.**

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Feel free to go through the stations again or simply sit in this space.

And may today, the first day in the church's calendar of a new year, set the stage for who we will become and where the world will go because we began with Advent.

And, as Incarnation has promised, may the world never be the same because we have chosen to start here.