

This downloadable resource from Concordia Publishing House includes fully customizable resources for the pastor and musician, designed to lead the Christian congregation through the season of Advent in preparation for the Christmas celebration. Concordia Publishing House also offers coordinated Daily Devotion booklets and standard size bulletin covers that may be used to enrich the worship of those congregations using this series. More information about coordinated products may be found at cph.org/advent. This preview document contains excerpted portions of the major components for Midweek of Advent 1.

PEACE CAME TO EARTH

Resources for Advent–Christmas Preaching and Worship

Sermon series by Rev. Dr. Daniel E. Paavola

Additional contributors: Rev. Jeff Alexander, Mary K. Laesch, and
Timothy Shaw

SERIES INTRODUCTION

[For use in newsletters or announcements of the Advent–Christmas series:]

PEACE CAME TO EARTH

[PASTOR: ADAPT AS USEFUL FOR YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.] Peace is our common pursuit. As Advent leads us to Christmas, we are especially seeking a distinct season of peace. We need a quiet place to rest during this restless time. Year after year, with each Advent season, we wonder if this year will bring a peace that endures. We crave the reassurance that God knows all our needs and will provide for them, not just for these short weeks but for every season.

Often, we grow impatient as we seek peace. Despite knowing the promises of God to provide for us, we might try to find peace on our own. We then define peace according to the ways we seek it. We might imagine that peace comes when we finally have enough of all the things we plan to buy. Or we might look for the perfect place where peace is an undisturbed solitude, the cabin beside a still lake. We might seek peace by escaping memories of the past. Or peace might be an elusive future where everyone does exactly what they should. These are our many ways of defining peace, but sadly, each of these directions could go on and on without ever being fulfilled.

To illustrate both our pursuit of peace and God's plan for us, our Advent series this year uses a five-point star for each sermon and children's message. Each message will emphasize a different point of the star. Overall, the star reminds us of the Christmas star of Matthew 2 and that wonderful light that guided the Wise Men to find Jesus. Their long journey ended with the blessing of a lasting peace. Just as the Wise Men followed the star, so we will go to each point in this Advent star. This won't be a useless journey that never ends. We will find that God meets us at each point of the star, knowing our needs and bringing us the peace we are seeking.

Since the five-point star will guide our journey, picture yourself drawing such a star. Start in the bottom left corner and draw up to the top center point. Stop and draw downward to the bottom right corner, then upward to the middle of the left side. Draw across to the right, and back to the bottom left corner, eventually reaching each point. Every point goes a certain distance but then is stopped. In the same way, each of our paths to peace could go on and on, never being fulfilled. There won't be enough possessions or perfectly calm places to give us lasting peace. But as we seek peace in these many ways, God intersects us with a peace that both passes our understanding and yet meets our needs. God knows the many ways and directions by which we seek peace. As we journey, God meets us, halts our endless pursuits, and gives us a new understanding of His gift of peace. That peace comes always through the birth of Jesus, the Word become flesh who steps into the world and fulfills our desire for peace.

In the end, we find our lasting peace and treasure. God's peace doesn't send us on an impossible search. God's peace is not an invisible needle buried in a haystack. God's peace is a treasure laid in the straw of the manger. God's peace is the priceless Son of God, born in the stable and laid in plain view for us all. He is the diamond found in the manger's straw. As the Prince of Peace, He is the peace that we seek.

FEATURES OF THE SERIES

Peace Came to Earth: Resources for Advent–Christmas Preaching and Worship from Concordia Publishing House includes fully customizable resources for the pastor and musician. It is designed to lead the Christian congregation through the season of Advent in preparation for the Christmas celebration. It consists of the following components:

PREACHING AND TEACHING RESOURCES

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1

Sermon: Look Up! The Star of Peace Draws Near

Children's Message: Look, There's the Star!

Bible Study: Look Up! The Star of Peace Draws Near

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 2

Sermon: Peace to All, Near and Far

Children's Message: Peace to Everyone, Far and Near

Bible Study: Peace to All, Near and Far

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 3

Sermon: Our Peace Rests on Him Alone

Children's Message: There's More than Enough Peace

Bible Study: Our Peace Rests on Him Alone

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Sermon: The Diamond Found in the Manger

Children's Message: The Diamond of Peace in the Manger

Bible Study: The Diamond Found in the Manger

WORSHIP AND MUSIC RESOURCES

The hymn "Peace Came to Earth" is suggested as a theme hymn to use throughout the series. This text by noted hymn writer Jaroslav J. Vajda has been paired with a new tune by Timothy Shaw. Hymn accompaniment and congregational page files are provided.

Peace Came to Earth_text.docx: Text only

Peace Came to Earth_hymn.pdf: Hymn accompaniment for new tune

Peace Came to Earth_hymn_cong.tif: Congregational page for new tune

Peace Came to Earth_hymn.mp3: Sample recording of new tune

Peace Came to Earth_choral.pdf: Choir arrangement for Two-Part Mixed, Piano, optional Congregation

Peace Came to Earth_choral_cong.tif: Congregational page for use with choral setting

WORSHIP NOTES

Peace Came to Earth: Resources for Advent–Christmas Preaching and Worship incorporates the readings that are referenced with the sermons.

The working assumption of this worship resource has been the availability of *Lutheran Service Book* in the congregation. All the suggested hymns can be found in *Lutheran Service Book*. The more general liturgical practices of Advent and Christmas are assumed and considered, but they are not necessarily specified in connection with each of the particular services of this series.

This resource provides a full set of both traditional worship services and creative worship services for Advent and Christmas. The traditional services use Vespers and the Divine Service from *Lutheran Service Book*. The Order of Vespers (*LSB*, pp. 229–34) has been followed for the midweek offices, and Divine Service Setting One (*LSB*, pp. 151–66) has been followed for Christmas. The Order of Vespers should be easily adapted for use with Matins, Morning Prayer, or Evening Prayer. Likewise, while the order for Divine Service is modeled on Setting One, it can be easily adapted to work with any setting of the Divine Service.

Worship services in the second set are generally more creative in their setting and are less demanding musically by having both the congregation and the pastor speak their parts of the service.

TRADITIONAL SERVICE RESOURCES

- Midweek of Advent 1
- Midweek of Advent 2
- Midweek of Advent 3
- The Nativity of Our Lord

CREATIVE WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

- Midweek of Advent 1
- Midweek of Advent 2
- Midweek of Advent 3
- The Nativity of Our Lord

Those planning the worship can choose freely between the resources offered in both sets of services as fits local customs and needs.

Finally, the services are also available through *Lutheran Service Builder*. [Links for the services, list of additional resources, and summary of additional Advent resources from CPH are all available with purchase]

CHILDREN’S WORSHIP SERVICE AND RESOURCES

The Children’s Worship Service provides speaking parts, rhymes, and songs and hymns for children of all ages, from preschool age to youth. Additional resources include leader notes, a children’s message, song lyric pages, digital images, a planning timeline, and recordings of the songs and hymns.

PREVIEW OF MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1: CHILDREN’S MESSAGE

Look, There’s the Star!

TEXT: MATTHEW 2:1–2, 9–10



VISUALS: DRAW A FIVE-POINT STAR ON A LARGE SHEET. IF POSSIBLE, GIVE EACH CHILD PAPER AND A PENCIL TO DRAW THE STAR WITH YOU.

SUMMARY: THE CHRISTMAS STAR MENTIONED IN MATTHEW 2 GIVES US DIRECTION AND JOY AS WE BEGIN ADVENT. WE FIND OUR PEACE WHEN GOD SHAPES THE COURSE OF OUR LIVES.

Let’s draw a five-point star. How do you draw a star? Where do you start? I start in the bottom-left corner, then go up to the top, and down to the bottom-right corner. Then I go up to the far-left point, across the middle to the far-right point, and finally, down to the bottom where I started. There, how does that look? *If possible, depending on the setting and number of children, let children draw their own star.*

This Advent, we’re going to talk about the Christmas star, which the Wise Men saw. These men followed it, and it led them to the newborn baby Jesus. They had traveled a very long way,

all to follow the promise of the star. They knew Jesus was the greatest gift the world would ever receive.

The Christmas star is like the stars that we drew tonight. To make a star, you draw five long lines, but every line stops when it meets another line. It's when the two lines meet that we have a point in our star. Like making the points of a star, God meets us when we go off on our own, trying to make Advent and Christmas perfect. We could go on and on, trying to get all the right gifts and all the right toys for Christmas. But chasing all the toys and gifts could go on forever. *Here, repeatedly trace over the top-most point of the star as a reminder that we often think getting enough gifts and toys is the most important part of Christmas. . .*[Full children's message available with purchase]

PREVIEW OF MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1: SERMON AND NOTES

SERMON BULLETIN INTRODUCTION

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1: LOOK UP! THE STAR OF PEACE DRAWS NEAR

We begin our Advent journey with the most common way to seek peace: possessions. This is the top of our star, the most obvious pursuit of peace, shooting upward without an end in sight. The Advent season knows all about seeking more things. Shopping is in full swing and the promise is that if only we had all the right things, then we would be complete and at peace.

To counter that pursuit of peace by gathering more and more, God intersects us with the words of contentment from Paul. “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” (1 Timothy 6:6-8) Join all who have heard His invitation and have followed His star. In Him we have a lasting peace.

OVERVIEW

Text: Matthew 2:1–2, 9–10

Sermon Theme: While we often seek peace through more possessions, God’s great gift has already come. God stops us as a wise Father and says, “Look up and see a lasting star and treasure, the gift of My Son.”

Sermon Goal: As we begin our Advent journey, we focus on the star of peace, which points us to the Prince of Peace, who was born in a stable.

Service Lectionary:

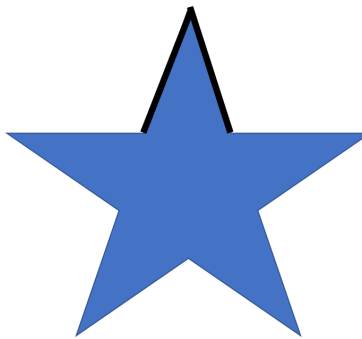
Midweek of Advent 1 readings: Epistle: 1 Timothy 6:6–8; Gospel: Matthew 2:1–2, 9–10

The Midweek of Advent 1 readings are set within the readings for the Sundays in Advent, Series B. The readings for the three-year lectionary for the First Sunday in Advent are

Old Testament: Isaiah 64:1–9

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Gospel: Mark 11:1–10 or Mark 13:24–37



SUMMARY OF THE SERMON THEME

© 2023 Concordia Publishing House. Permission granted to purchaser to reproduce this page for use in congregational setting. All other rights reserved.

We can begin with the most common way we seek peace: the more possessions, the better. This is the top of our star, the most obvious pursuit of peace, shooting upward without an end in sight. People often seek more things during Advent. Shopping is in full swing. The world tries to promise us that if we have all the right things—gifts, lights, and decorations—we will be complete and at peace.

To counter that pursuit of peace by gathering more and more, God instructs us with the words of contentment from Paul. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–8: “But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” Follow the joyful path of the Magi, who saw the star and were more than content, knowing that the King had been born. The peace of God comes as He meets us and says, “Follow Me.” Joyfully, we join all who have heard His invitation and have followed His star.

SERMON STUDY NOTES

1 TIMOTHY 6:6–8

As noted above, this sermon draws on two texts: 1 Timothy 6:6–8 and Matthew 2:1–2, 9–10. The words in 1 Timothy 6:6–8 speak to our common attempt to gain peace and security through an abundance of possessions. This upward climb to more and more is seen in the top point on the star (noted above). As we gather possessions, we imagine we are gathering peace. And if last year’s gifts weren’t enough to gain that peace, we are tempted to take in more.

In response to that, Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 6:6–8 of true contentment. The context flows from 1 Timothy 6:3–5, where Paul describes the one who, puffed up on his own imagined wisdom, seeks gain through imagined godliness. The Greek word for “gain,” *porismos*, is only used in 1 Timothy 6:5–6 in the New Testament. The arrogant man seeks gain by a constant grinding against others, using his vain, imagined knowledge as a division between himself and others. His false godliness is marked by envy and dissension—the very opposite of the peace we are seeking throughout this Advent. In contrast to this divisive pursuit, Paul describes true contentment in verse 6 with the Greek word *autarkeias*, which means “contentment” or “self-sufficiency.” It is only used in 1 Timothy 6:6 and in 2 Corinthians 9:8 in the New Testament. This contentment rings true when we consider Paul’s life of imprisonment and hardship. A similar description of contentment is found in Philippians 4:11: “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have

learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” Paul’s summary of need in 1 Timothy 6:8 shows us he was often uncertain what the next step in his journey would be. And yet he can say, “If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (1 Timothy 6:8).

Just after this description of contentment in 1 Timothy 6:8, Paul gives the opposite image of the destructive pursuit of riches. Chasing after riches casts many into “a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9). The Greek word *buthizo*, meaning “to plunge,” is especially interesting in this description. The word is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Luke 5:7, when the first disciples’ miraculous catch of fish was so great that it threatened to plunge both boats into the sea. What a contrast. The wise fishermen knew enough to offload much of their catch lest they sink from the weight. However, the fool pursuing greater riches grasped for more gold while his life was already sinking from what he had. . . [Full sermon notes available with purchase.]

SERMON OUTLINE

The sermon follows the pattern of Goal—Malady—Means.

- I. Goal: Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have it all? Wouldn’t it be great if all the things we pursue throughout the year brought us peace?
It would be fitting to have these in hand at Christmas. Bring on the brightest lights, the perfect tree, and the largest stack of gifts.
- II Malady: But God stops us in our futile pursuit.
He reminds us that if we have food and clothing, we have all we need for contentment.
He especially points out the danger of pursuing peace through endless possessions as our life sinks beneath that golden load.
- III. Means: God gives us more than we could imagine through the Savior resting beneath the star.
The Magi recognized the promise of the guiding star.
The newborn Savior provides peace for the whole world.
We open our treasure as the Magi did, having received far more by the Savior’s coming and work.

SERMON

I.
Christmas starts earlier every year. Not Christmas itself, which is still December 25, and not Advent, which begins four weeks before Christmas. Those dates are fixed, but the buildup to Christmas has been starting earlier year after year. Stores compete to be the first to put up Christmas colors and have Christmas sales. Your co-worker in the next cubicle has been playing Christmas songs for two weeks now. Christmas cookies have already been made and, in our house, one batch of the melted chocolate cookies has already disappeared.

© 2023 Concordia Publishing House. Permission granted to purchaser to reproduce this page for use in congregational setting. All other rights reserved.

We start early because we have a long way to go. Christmas can be a pursuit and search to achieve so many goals. Your personal goals might be to get the shopping done early or to have all the cards sent before December 10. Those are good goals, but for our Advent worship, we're going to have a bigger goal for these coming weeks. This Advent, we're going to focus on how we seek peace and how we define the peace we're seeking. Christmas peace can be thought of as a five-point star. Each point is a direction or pursuit that seeks one dimension of peace. Left to ourselves, that pursuit would never end. But the good news is that God meets us, stops our endless chase, and gives us a new understanding of His gift of peace. That peace always comes through the birth of Jesus, the Word who became flesh, stepped into our world, and fulfills our desire for peace.

So let's start by drawing out the first point in our star of peace. Let's make the top point of the star a very common way to seek peace: possessions. The more possessions, the better. For many, this is the most obvious pursuit during Christmastime. Getting ready for Christmas can mean getting more and newer stuff than we already have. The promise of "getting" is that Christmas will be right if we have all the right things. That can include all the gifts we can imagine or enough decorations to stock our own Christmas store. After all, if one gift is good, five will be better and ten may finally be enough.

II.

Picture this as the top of the star and one of the lines that makes this uppermost point. When will this line ever stop? How far and high does it need to go for us to find peace? We've already found that out, even as children. Yesterday's toys lay broken and forgotten. Tomorrow's toys won't last any longer. Before we go any further in this pursuit, God stops us and says, "Enough!" To counter our pursuit of peace by gathering more and more, God instructs us with words of contentment from Paul: "But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content" (1 Timothy 6:6-8). God is a watchful Father who sees us dashing off, gathering more and more, building up speed as we drive ahead. But He knows the dangers in our journey and snatches us up, saying, "Enough!" God is like a father watching his children slide down a snowy hill. They shoot down the hill on their plastic sleds, and it's all wonderful. But at the bottom of the hill is a pond that hasn't quite frozen yet. What's a father to do but play goalie and catch each child before they reach the edge of the pond? His message is the same as our heavenly Father's: "I know you want to go on and on, but you have no idea of the danger. Let's stop right here." So our heavenly

Father stops us out of love and His knowledge of the dangers before us. The words of Paul fit perfectly: “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9). See how our Father catches us firmly before we plunge into ruin. But besides catching us, our heavenly Father also provides. He has already given us the food and clothing we need, and many other things that fill our homes and garages. He could say, “There, you have what you need, so be content.” But beyond that, He gives us His Son, leading us by the light of the star. . . . [Full sermon available with purchase]

PREVIEW OF MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1: BIBLE STUDY

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1: LEADER'S GUIDE

LOOK UP! THE STAR OF PEACE DRAWS NEAR

Text: Matthew 2:1–2, 9–10

OPENING

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, You have given us wonderful gifts throughout this Advent season with a view toward Christmas. While we often focus on the gifts found under a Christmas tree, point us to Your Son, the true gift. By His coming, You have brought us lasting peace. Make that peace the uppermost point of our Advent preparations. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

“Peace on earth.” What a wonderful phrase of promise and hope. We yearn for peace in every season, but perhaps especially in the weeks before Christmas. In these busy, even frantic weeks, we seek peace in many ways. In our Bible studies and other Advent materials, we’re going to use a five-point star as our central image. Each point on the star happens when two lines intersect, and it’s that intersection that brings us a point of peace. We expect certain things will bring us peace. God meets us in each expectation and says, “Here. This is real peace.”

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q1 When you were younger, what was one special gift that you especially wanted for Christmas? If you received that gift, how did it compare to the hopes you had for it?

A1 This question is intended to get the group to speak about childhood memories. They will likely have a wide range of answers, from simple books to elaborate dollhouses. There will likely be a range of answers as to how satisfying each gift was. For one, the puppy that came one year became a faithful family friend for the next fifteen years. For another, the toy they received was broken before New Year's Day.

The point of this discussion is to reflect on our desire for a lasting gift. Remind the group that we are using the five-point star as a picture of different aspects of peace. One common thought is that we will have peace if we have enough possessions. Give us the right gift, and we'll be content and at peace. But we know that those gifts rarely last and never fully satisfy. So there must be a greater gift that brings peace. The desire to find that peace leads us to the journey of the Magi and the star that pointed toward Jesus.

Q2 The Magi traveled a great distance while following the star. What sort of celebration might they have expected in Jerusalem, given the birth of the King of the Jews? How was their experience far different from what they might have expected?

A2 The Messiah's birth as the King of the Jews might reasonably have brought a celebration by the people of Israel. We might assume that the newborn Messiah would be found in the temple or the home of the richest and most powerful citizens. In Matthew 2:3–8, the Magi are brought to King Herod, but there they find only a tired king desperate to hold onto his power, not the newborn Messiah. You might note that King Herod was notorious for his paranoia and therefore killed several of his own family members.

Q3 How was the Magi's experience with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph different from their experience in Jerusalem?

A3 In Jerusalem, we find all the trappings of power and wealth, the temple, and the palace of Herod. There certainly is power in the threat that Herod would find the Messiah and kill Him. The city was distraught over the news of a true king of the Jews, born to the title and not merely placed, as King Herod had been through Roman power. But in Bethlehem, we find another setting altogether. Mary and Joseph, likely resettled into a house rather than the stable, were probably alone with the infant Jesus.

Q4 When the Magi met with Mary and Joseph, how do you think their conversation went?

A4 What a meeting as the Magi finally reached the goal of their long journey. We can imagine the sharing of miraculous stories between Mary, Joseph, and the Magi. They could've told of angel visits, visions in dreams, and the guiding of a single star. Now is a good time to summarize the account leading up to the visit of the Magi, which is found in Matthew 1 and 2. What a wonderful time, all focused on the infant Savior.

[Full Bible study (both Leader and Student sections) available with purchase.]

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SERVICE

PEACE CAME TO EARTH

Children may process to the front of the church during the processional hymn.

+ PREPARATION +

HYMN

“O Come, All Ye Faithful” (LSB 379:1–3)

INVOCATION

P In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

OPENING SENTENCES

Isaiah 9:6

P For to us a child is born,

C to us a son is given;

P and the government shall be upon His shoulder,

C and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor,

P Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

C Prince of Peace.

CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

The pastor may offer a brief meditation or use the children's message for this service.

OFFERING

Children in preschool–kindergarten and Readers 1–4 assemble during the offering.

THE MESSAGE PRESENTED BY THE CHILDREN

+ THE PROMISE OF PEACE +

Project the Bible symbol or display the Bible poster or banner.

Reader 1: In the beginning, God created a perfect world filled with sparkling stars, majestic mountains, verdant valleys, and amazing animals. There was no sickness, no pain, and no death. The people God had made lived at peace with the animals, with each other, and with God. Then one day, the people were tempted to doubt God's Word and to question the gifts He had already given them. They disobeyed God and took what God had commanded them not to take, bringing sin into the world.

Reader 2: When sin entered the perfect world God had made, perfect peace was lost. The man and woman hid from God and blamed each other and God for what they had done. Peace was replaced by shame and hurt and sickness and death. But God did

not give up on the people He had made! He promised to send a Savior to bring back the peace that had been lost.

Reader 3: We read about God's first promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15, when He spoke judgment on the serpent who had deceived Adam and Eve: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." The Savior would take upon Himself the punishment that man deserved. He would defeat sin, death, and Satan and restore the relationship between God and man.

Reader 4: Hundreds of years passed while God's people waited, sometimes wondering if God had forgotten the promise He had made in the Garden of Eden. But God had not forgotten. He sent prophets such as Isaiah to remind the people that He would one day fulfill His promise to restore peace. Isaiah prophesied about the promised Savior, saying, "For 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" (Isaiah 9:6).

ACTION RHYME

"To Us a Child Is Born" (OAR 181)

To us a Child is born
To us a Son is given.

(Rock arms, as if holding a baby.)
(Hold both arms out, as if giving something.)

This Christmas we receive
The blessed gift of heaven.

(Place hands on heart.)
(Point up.)

CHILDREN'S SONG

"God Loves Me Dearly" (LSB 392:1, 3; OAR 182:1, 3)

God loves me dearly,
Grants me salvation,
God loves me dearly,
Loves even me. *Refrain*

Refrain:

Therefore I'll say again:
God loves me dearly,
God loves me dearly,
Loves even me.

He sent forth Jesus,
My dear Redeemer,
He sent forth Jesus
And set me free. *Refrain*

Text: August Rische, 1819–1906; tr. composite. Public domain.

HYMN

"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" (LSB 338)

During the congregational hymn, preschool–kindergarten children and Readers 1–4 return to their seats. Readers 5–7 and children in Group 1 get into place.