

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.

THE EVERLASTING LIGHT

Preaching, Worship, and Children's Christmas Service

Sermon series by R. Reed Lessing

Additional contributors: Jonathan Kern, Mary K. Laesch, and Rev. Lance Klammer

SERIES INTRODUCTION

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

THE EVERLASTING LIGHT

Overview of the Sermon Series

This year's Advent and Christmas theme is based on Isaiah 60 and employs Phillips Brooks's cherished hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (*LSB* 361).

Isaiah famously promises that "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed" (Isaiah 40:5). In chapter 60, this glory explodes with radiant color. Divine glory rises upon Zion, who is addressed as a woman throughout chapter 60. She is quite the lady to behold!

Brooks's masterpiece beautifully describes Bethlehem on a December night. The hymn moves back and forth from a description of Christmas to the meaning of Christmas. It ends with the prayer, "O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!" (st. 4).

When you connect Isaiah 60 to “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” what happens? A wonderful weaving together of biblical hope and Christian hymnody!

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FEATURES OF THE SERIES

The Everlasting Light: Preaching, Worship, and Children’s Christmas Service 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

Coordinated components include a four-part Bible study on Isaiah 60. Everything points to Phillips Brooks’s Christmas acclamation: “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight” (st. 1).

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1

Sermon: A Street Called Light
Children’s Message: A Street Called Light
Bible Study: The Book of Isaiah

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 2

Sermon: A Street Called Beautiful
Children’s Message: A Street Called Beautiful
Bible Study: You Can’t Keep a Good Man Down

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 3

Sermon: A Street Called Impossible
Children’s Message: A Street Called Impossible
Bible Study: “I Will Never Abandon You”

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Sermon: A Street Called Forever
Children’s Message: A Street Called Forever
Bible Study: Upside Down

WORSHIP AND MUSIC RESOURCES

Stanzas of the theme hymn, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (*LSB* 361), are suggested for use in each of the midweek services, and the entire hymn is suggested for use in the Christmas service. Several new musical resources composed by Rev. Lance Klammer have been provided to support the singing of this hymn and carol.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O Little Town-Intro and Harmonizations.pdf: Introduction and two harmonizations

O Little Town-Piano and Instrument.pdf: Prelude for piano and instrument

O Little Town-Choral Stanza.pdf: Two-part choral stanza with organ

O Little Town-Hymn.tif: Full congregation page

O Little Town-Hymn with Choir.tif: Congregation page designating choir on stanza 3

WORSHIP NOTES

The Everlasting Light: Preaching, Worship, and Children's Christmas Service 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 the 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 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. The links for the services may be found on the digital content landing page.

CHILDREN’S WORSHIP SERVICE AND RESOURCES

The Children’s Christmas 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.

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1

THE EVERLASTING LIGHT

A Street Called Light

Luke 2:32

What are some of your favorite Christmas songs? How many of you like the songs “Silent Night, Holy Night”; “O Come, All Ye Faithful”; and “Joy to the World”?

One of my favorite Christmas songs is called “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” And guess what? It was written for children! Phillips Brooks wrote the song for a Sunday School Christmas program at the church he was pastoring.

Brooks wrote these words for children to sing: “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light” (*LSB* 361:1). Let me say that again. This time, I’ll say it a little bit slower. “Yet

in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light” Can you say it with me? “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.”

God shines His light in the dark. And let me say *that* again. God shines His light in the dark.

And He shone it on a little town called Bethlehem. Does anyone know who was born in Bethlehem? Jesus! That’s right. Jesus.

God shines His light in the dark through Jesus. Jesus would grow up to witness many dark times. By that, I don’t mean the dark that appears at nighttime. I mean dark as in scary times. Jesus saw people who were very sick. Some couldn’t walk. Some couldn’t talk. Some couldn’t see. Some couldn’t hear. What did Jesus do? He loved them. He prayed for them. Jesus healed them... [Full children’s message available with purchase].

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Everlasting Light—Bulletin Art

The Everlasting Light—Bulletin Blurbs

Traditional Gospel Collects for Advent and Christmas

Advent Catechesis

WORSHIP RESOURCES—GENERAL COMMENTS

Advent is the first season in the Time of Christmas. The calendar of the church begins with Advent (from Latin *adventus*, which means “coming into”), a four-week period of preparation before Christmas. The Savior’s birth is second in importance only to His resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Traditionally, Advent encompasses a spiritual preparation for the celebration of the nativity of Jesus Christ at Christmas. The Western Church sets the season of Advent as beginning on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, or the Sunday that falls closest to November 30, and lasting through the daytime services of December 24. Christmas begins with the evening services (Vigil) on December 24 and extends through the twelve days of Christmas. The Christmas octave (eight days) includes the Nativity on December 25; the Feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr, on December 26; the Feast of St. John, apostle and evangelist, on December 27; the Feast of the Holy Innocents on December 28; and the Festival of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus on January 1.

ADVENT

“Behold, your king is coming to you.” (Matthew 21:5)

Like the season of Lent, Advent affords the penitent a time of preparation for celebrating the fulfillment of the Father’s plan of salvation in the incarnation of His Son, Jesus. Though Advent is not as “deep” as the preparatory season of Lent, the church does exercise some restraint in the Divine Service during Advent.

- In keeping with the tone of repentance, the Hymn of Praise/Gloria in Excelsis (the angel’s proclamation at the birth of Christ) is omitted from the Divine Service, even on the Sundays in Advent.
- Responses appointed for Advent may replace the general responses.
- Depending on local custom, the organ playing may be restrained before and after the service.
- In many places, flowers are not used at the altar.
- Christmas hymns and carols are not sung until Christmas Eve.

PARAMENTS

The traditional color of Advent, and that which still best fits the historic pericopes of Advent, is violet/purple, which is both the color of repentance and the royal color of the coming King—the two main themes of the one-year lectionary. When possible, the paraments used in Advent should

be different from those used in Lent, as the symbols used to express the character of the seasons are quite different. The only symbol common to both is the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God.

Since the adoption of Vatican II reforms of the liturgy by much of the Western Church, the use of blue as the color of Advent has been adopted as well by many Lutheran congregations. There is a historic tradition of Advent blue among the Swedish Lutheran churches. Blue suggests the color of anticipation and hope, a theme that is seen in the readings of the three-year lectionary. A congregation should be attentive to the use of the paraments that carry the theme of the lectionary being used.

THE ADVENT WREATH

The Advent wreath is an arrangement of four candles, originally used in home devotions to count the weeks of Advent and symbolize the approach of the Coming One. The traditional Advent wreath featured white candles, but the custom of using seasonally colored candles has become common. If the church's Advent paraments are blue, four blue candles should be used. If the paraments are violet/purple, then three violet/purple candles should be used, with a rose candle included as part of the set. The rose candle is placed in the Advent wreath at the three o'clock position, and the candles are then lit from week to week starting with the violet candle in the nine o'clock position. The rose candle is lit on *Gaudete* ("Rejoice"), the Third Sunday in Advent in the historic lectionary. With its colored candles, the Advent wreath is better displayed in the nave than in the chancel.

"The use of the 'Christ Candle,' . . . is definitely to be discouraged. First, it should be discouraged because it is an importation of the idea of the paschal candle; second, because the Advent wreath belongs to the season preparatory for Christmas, and on the festival of our Savior's birth the wreath should be removed from the chancel or nave."* Removal of the Advent wreath for the services of Christmas allows the two seasons to be well defined and distinct.

DECORATIONS DURING ADVENT

The decoration of the church during Advent should not be too elaborate. A problem has arisen in many congregations when the cultural celebration of Christmas in the season between Thanksgiving and Christmas is followed. The season of Advent helps us prepare for something greater. While not as austere as Lent, Advent does call for some restraint in deference to the

*Lee A. Maxwell, *The Altar Guild Manual: Lutheran Service Book Edition* (Concordia Publishing House), 46.

“tidings of great joy” that will be proclaimed on the Nativity of Our Lord and during the season of Christmas. Candles as decoration should be kept to a minimum. Greenery may be hung but should remain undecorated. Banners may be hung but should be simple in style and decoration in keeping with the mood of the season. If the press of obligations makes it absolutely necessary to erect the tree before the Fourth Sunday in Advent, the lights should not be turned on until after service on the Fourth Sunday to help guide and highlight the transition from Advent to Christmas.

CHRISTMAS

The Christmas season follows as the fulfillment of the Advent expectation. The long-expected first coming (the nativity) and birth in Bethlehem is the promise and guarantee of the second and final coming on the Last Day (see Propers for the First Sunday in Advent).

Christmas is the celebration of the victory of the True Light, born into a world darkened by sin. God Himself visits us in our darkness. Heaven and earth are to be renewed by God’s coming.

The Gloria in Excelsis is the preferred Hymn of Praise. The restraint that characterized Advent is lifted. Second only to Easter, Christmas is observed in great joy and with high celebration.

DECORATIONS

The color of Christmas and its season is white. Seasonal flowers and greens may decorate the area around the altar.

Beginning with the Christmas Eve service, the Advent wreath has been removed. A crib or crèche may be set up in the nave; it remains in the church through Epiphany, when the Magi join in the adoration of the Christ Child.

Because of the association of light with Christmas, one of the most effective decorations of the church building is the candle. If candelabras were removed during Advent, they are returned. If extra candelabras or candle stands are available, these can be placed around the altar. Candles on the windowsills or candle stands lining the center aisle of the nave would be fitting.

Much could be said about decorations appropriate for use in the church and the need to exclude anything gaudy or cheap. Also, it should be kept in mind when decorating the church that the altar always remains the center of attention and focus, and anything that fights for that attention or distracts the focus should not be used.

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1

A STREET CALLED LIGHT

Isaiah 60:1–3

INTRODUCTION

This evening we begin our Advent and Christmas series called *The Everlasting Light*, which is inspired by Isaiah 60 and beautifully summarized by Phillips Brooks’s hymn “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (*LSB* 361). Brooks’s masterpiece beautifully describes Bethlehem on a December night. The hymn moves back and forth from a description of Christmas to the meaning of Christmas. Tonight the series begins with brightness and beauty bursting forth. It all comes from the prophet Isaiah’s clarion call, “Arise, shine for your light has come” (Isaiah 60:1).

We desperately need this jolt of joy. Why? Our world is filled with dark streets—streets leading to despair and death. We know what it’s like to live on streets like those.

Isaiah continues, “And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you” (60:1). Divine glory, in Jesus, conquers our darkness, our every darkness, even the darkness of death. Why? Christ faced His own dead-end street called Calvary, but He rose again on the third day. In Holy Baptism, God calls us out of darkness and into His glorious light. The upshot? Phillips Brooks tells us: “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight” (st. 1). ...[Full sermon available with purchase].

LEADER GUIDE

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1

THE EVERLASTING LIGHT

The Book of Isaiah

Isaiah 56–66

INTRODUCTION

The Everlasting Light is the title of our Advent and Christmas series centered on Isaiah 60. It's fitting, then, that our first Bible study provides an overview of the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 56–66, and specifically Isaiah 60. What do these sections of the book have in common? This theme: Give God the burdens He wants to carry.

We all have baggage. Is yours a suitcase of guilt? It's common to live with regret especially when we compare our lives with the Ten Commandments. Do you carry a sack of frustration? There are times when people get upset with their spouse, their children, their boss, or a teammate. Maybe we've got a duffel bag of doubt. That, too, breaks God's holy law because we fail to trust His promises. And we all know what it feels like to drag around a bag of blame. Adam and Eve perfected this in the Garden of Eden.

No wonder we're so tired at the end of the day. Lugging luggage is laborious! Through Isaiah, God addresses our heavy load and promises relief.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q1 What kind of baggage do you carry?

A1 Answers may include guilt, sin, doubt, and blame.... [Full Bible study available with purchase].

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1

A STREET CALLED LIGHT

AS WE GATHER

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MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1

VESPERS

A STREET CALLED LIGHT

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CHILDREN’S CHRISTMAS SERVICE

THE EVERLASTING LIGHT

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

+ PREPARATION +

HYMN

“O Come, All Ye Faithful” (LSB 379)

INVOCATION

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

C Amen.

OPENING SENTENCES

LSB 375:1

P Come, your hearts and voices raising,

C Christ the Lord with gladness praising;

P Loudly sing His love amazing,

C Worthy folk of Christendom.

CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

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

OFFERING

Preschool–kindergarten children and Readers 1–3 assemble during the offering.

THE MESSAGE PRESENTED BY THE CHILDREN

+ LIGHT +

HYMN

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” (LSB 361:1)

Consider having some lights to shine—turn on some lights around the greenery, give speakers electric candles, or similar. Another option is to place a small Christmas tree at the front and drape a strand of white lights on it.

Reader 1: This time of year, things get darker . . . and brighter. For everyone living in the top half of the world, the nights become longer and colder. But something else happens too: Homes, towns, and even big cities begin to put up more lights. In Bethlehem, the best light of all brightened the streets: “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.”

Reader 2: The prophet Isaiah foretold this wonderful night: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall

cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isaiah 60:1–3).

Reader 3: The disciple John wrote about Jesus’ birth: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). In the dark streets of Bethlehem, Jesus was born into a world made dark with sin. He is the light of the world that will conquer darkness!

Preschool–kindergarten children recite and sing.

ACTION RHYME

Stars were brightly shining	<i>(“Twinkle” fingers in the air.)</i>
Late that special night.	<i>(Rest head on folded hands to “sleep.”)</i>
Mary’s baby Jesus	<i>(Pretend to rock baby in arms.)</i>
Is the perfect light!	<i>(Hold up finger.)</i>

Even in the darkness	<i>(Cover eyes.)</i>
We don’t need to fear.	<i>(Shake head and finger “no.”)</i>
Jesus Christ, our Savior,	<i>(Make a cross with fingers.)</i>
Always will be near!	<i>(Hug self.)</i>

CHILDREN’S SONG

“The King Is Here” (*Sing & Wonder*, p. 29)

Angels filled the sky with singing,
Shepherds’ hearts were filled with fear,
All around loud voices ringing:
“Peace on earth, the King is here!”

“He has come to take your worries;
He has come to give you joy.
Seek the King of glory—hurry!
You will find a baby boy.”

Wond’ring at the invitation,
Shepherds ran to see the sight:
Jesus, King of all the nations,
Born for us that very night.

Like the angels, we have Good News:
“Jesus came to die for you!”
Sing and tell of how He rescues
Those who trust His Gospel true.

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During the congregational hymn, preschool–kindergarten children return to their seats and children in Group 1 and Readers 4–6 get into place.

