

Be Alert: God is on the Move



(1st Advent 2003 – Epiphany, 2004 – Lectionary cycle C)

Adapted, compiled and written by Elsie Rempel

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Be Alert: God is on the Move
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HWB = Hymnal: a Worship Book

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Introduction:

When worship as a household supports congregational worship, our relationship with God and God’s people is strengthened. We realize that God is indeed very near; God is with us and among us.

During the season of Advent, God’s children prepare for the coming of Christ and Christmas in ways that set us apart from our society. We prepare to celebrate in ways that remind us of our hope of Christ’s second coming. This year, we are reminded to be alert, for God is on the move! We are encouraged to sit, linger, tarry, ponder, wait, behold and wonder to become aware of God’s life-giving Spirit, which brings healing and hope to us and through us.

The prayers and activities in this booklet were inspired by many sources, but they are based on the Worship resources which were developed by the Advent 2003 writing Team from the mid - Texas region of South Central and Western District conferences for Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

Use the resource whatever way best fits into your home’s routines and life stage realities. If your family has younger children, feel free to simplify, shorten and paraphrase the prayers and pondering thoughts. Repeat the weekly litany each day of the week, but change the scripture passage to the passages listed in #1 of the activities section.

The **pondering questions** are designed to allow God to speak to each household member in a personal way. Enjoy a short time of silence after each question and feel free to share or ponder these thoughts in your heart as Mary did.

You may want to add our recommended worship props to your home's Christmas decorations. The collection of the following items can help you make a holy space in your home and your hearts for Christ this Christmas season. Feel free to adapt them to suit your home.

1. A camping or picnic blanket to cover the worship area.
2. An Advent poster which begins with a barren branch in the desert and is added to weekly.
3. A Christmas cactus plant.
4. Six miniature camping lanterns. You can make these quite simply by nailing decorative holes into small tin cans and then placing tea lights or votive candles inside. Or, craft an advent log by attaching six candles to a small log. Purple, pink and white reflect the move from repentant preparation to celebration.
5. A Bible and this booklet.

What time is it?



Sprouting Time!

Advent 2003

Week One Sprouting Time!

Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader:

Be alert!
Wait for God's promise to make things right!
Lord of Life, come near to us.
Be our world's salvation.

Candle lighter:

We light this first candle to help us be alert to see the sprouting of God's movement in and among us.

Listening to God's Word:

Read Jeremiah 33:14-16 from the Bible.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- How do we see God on the move in our family?
...in our neighbourhood? ... in our congregation? ...in our world?
- Think about being on the lookout for God. How does it feel?
- Is preparing for Christ's return frightening, encouraging, or comforting for you?

Sing or play:

HWB #56 *Awake, arise, O sing a new song*
HWB #185 *Hail to the Lord's Anointed* v.1 (this year's theme song)
HWB #178 *Come Thou long-expected Jesus.*

Prayer:

(Use echo form or ask one person to read this prayer.)

Guiding God, sometimes we lose the path that leads to you.
Teach us your paths, O Lord.
Lead us in your truth and guide us.
God of our salvation, we wait for you.

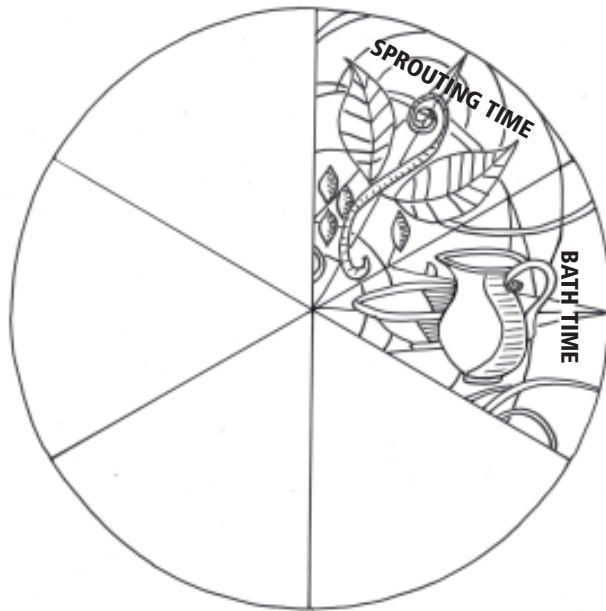
Candle snuffer:

May God go with us and help us stay on God's path
after we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read these other texts about watching for God's presence:
Psalm 25: 1 - 5, Psalm 25: 6 - 10, 1st Thessalonians 3: 9 - 13,
Luke 21: 25 - 28, Luke 21: 29 - 33, Luke 21: 34 - 36.
2. Draw and paint a big branch in a desert on your advent poster.
Wait to add more signs of life to it during the other weeks.
2. Find ways you can bring the light of God's love into someone else's life today.
3. Begin planning a camping trip that will honour God's earth.
4. Start setting up a Christmas crèche.
Add the figures of those who were waiting for the Messiah.
5. Start out on God's Advent path by planning and beginning to make a gift for a lonely person.
6. Keep a journal where you record situations where you notice God is on the move.

What time is it?



Bath time!

Advent 2003

Week Two **Bath time!**

Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader:

Be alert!
Wait for God's promise to make things right!
Return to the Lord,
who is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love. (Joel 2: 13)

Candle lighter:

We light this second candle
to remember how God cleans us
and guides us in paths of peace.

Listening to God's Word:

Read: Malachi 3: 1 - 4.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- Is God's cleaning in your life more like soap or refining fire?
- How is God's tender mercy guiding you into paths of peace?
- What good work is God doing in your church this Advent?
- Are there any rough ways that God wants you to help make smooth?

Sing:

HWB #647 At break of day
HWB #185 Hail to the Lord's Anointed v.2
or your favourite Advent song that sings about God's cleansing grace.

Prayer:

(Use echo form or ask one person to read this prayer.)

Refining God, we often forget
to look for your presence in our lives.
We're sorry.
Be patient with us,
cleanse and forgive us.
Guide our feet into the paths of peace. Amen.

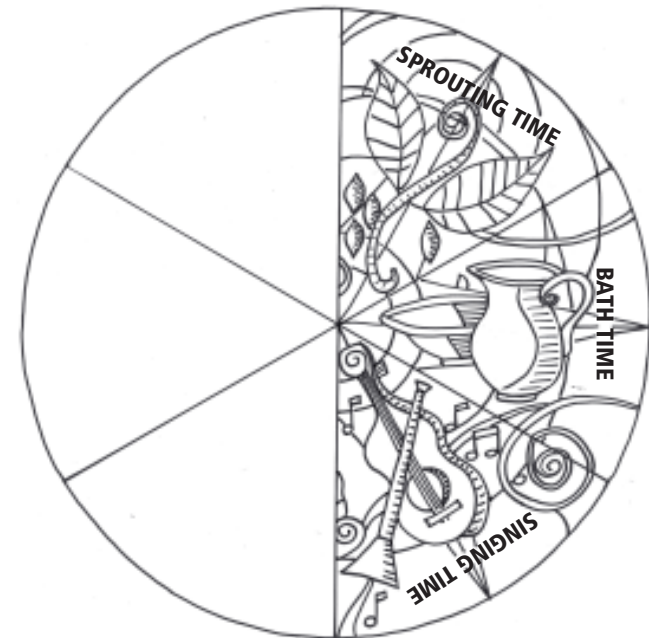
Candle snuffer:

May we go forth in paths of peace,
knowing that God is completing good things in and among us,
even as we blow out these candles. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read these other texts about God's willingness to forgive and cleanse us: Luke 1: 68 - 79, Luke 3: 1 - 6, Philippians 1: 3 - 8, Philippians 1: 9 - 11, Mark 1: 1 - 8, John 1: 29 - 34.
2. Add some cleaning, nourishing rain to your poster.
3. Add a path of little stones for your crèche. Write words or draw symbols on them to show the path God wants us to follow.
4. Make lists of good things that God is completing in and through your family.
5. Write a letter or send an e-mail to your political representative that encourages them to clean up our world.
6. Pray daily for a person you find it hard to forgive. Ask God to prepare your heart to forgive that person.
7. When you take a bath and clean your home this week think about God's cleansing work in your life.
8. Celebrate the cleansing of God by helping someone else clean up.

What time is it?



Singing Time!

Advent 2003

Week Three **Singing Time!**

Call to Worship:

(Leader can speak this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader:

Be alert!
Wait for God's promise to make things right!
We come to draw water
from the wells of salvations with joy!
We will make God's mighty deeds
known among the nations!

Candle lighter:

We light this third candle
to celebrate the joy of knowing and obeying God.

Listening to God's Word:

Read Zephaniah 3: 14 - 18 from your Bible.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- When did God give you a joyous victory?
- How does knowing and believing that God's love will win in the end help your family?
- Can we really trust God with our worries and have joyful hearts?
- I wonder how having God's joy in our hearts helps us share and live more simply?

Sing:

HWB #318 Joy to the world
HWB #185 Hail to the Lord's anointed, v. 3

Prayer:

(Use echo form or ask one person to read this prayer.)

Liberating God,
we do not always live in freedom.
Sometimes we forget to sing your praises.
We're sorry.
Move in our hearts.
Renew us in thankfulness, love and joy.
We want to join you in bringing
joy, freedom, and peace to your world. Amen.

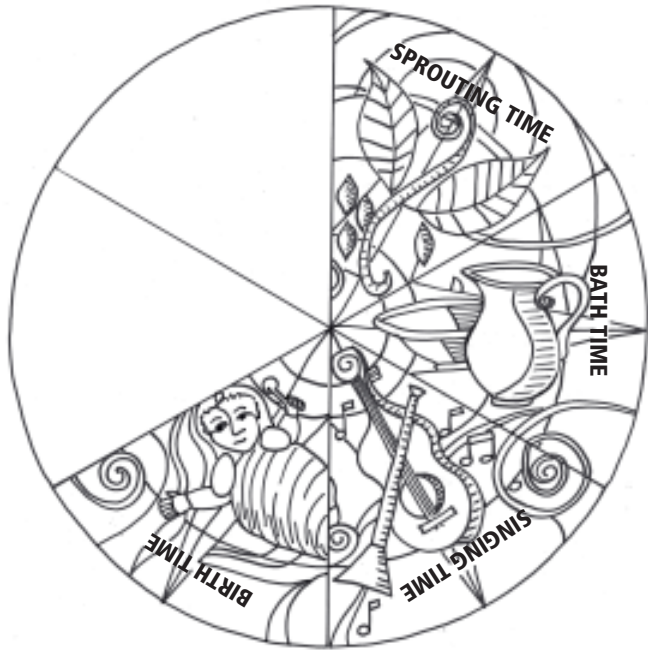
Candle snuffer:

May your peace guard our hearts and minds
so that your joy will shine through us,
even after we blow out these candles. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read these other texts about joy, trust and thankfulness this week:
Zephaniah 3: 19 - 20, Isaiah 12: 2 - 4, Isaiah 12: 5 - 6,
Philippians 4: 4 - 7, Philippians 4: 8 - 9, Luke 3: 7 - 18.
2. Add some fresh green grass, budding leaves and singing birds to your poster.
3. Reflect on God's victories in your family and congregation.
Make pictures or write a song about them.
4. Help a sad or lonely person remember God's goodness by visiting them.
5. Listen to John the Baptist's advice by sharing some of your clothes or food with a poorer family.
6. Add stars to the roof of your crèche. Let each star remind you to do something that would make God smile.
7. As you wrap Christmas gifts or bake goodies, think about the list of good things in Philippians.
8. Make a list of good ways that your family can help your congregation rejoice.

What time is it?



Birth Time

Advent 2003

Week Four Birth Time

Call to Worship:

(Leader speaks this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader:

Be alert!
Wait for God's promise to make things right!
Rejoice in God our Savior!
The Mighty One, whose name is holy,
is doing great things for all people.

Candle lighter:

We light this fourth candle
to remind us that God is on the move,
birthing a surprising new world order
of mercy, truth and peace.

Listening to God's Word:

Read: Luke 1: 39 - 45

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- Jesus' growing in Mary can remind us that Jesus also wants to live in us. Think about what that means for you.
- I wonder how surprised Mary was that she was becoming the mother of Jesus.
- What surprise is God inviting you to add to your life?

Sing:

HWB #397 God loves all his many people
HWB #190 'Twas in the moon
HWB #211 Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
and other favourites from HWB #189 - #215

Prayer:

(Use echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer.)

Mothering God, the time of birth draws near.
Our world is not ready to receive you.
Even our hearts are not completely prepared to receive you.
Lord of life, look with favor upon your servants.
Help us to do your will
and to remind the world of your will today. Amen

Candle snuffer:

May your love surprise us,
and shine through us,
even after we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

Read: Luke 1: 46 - 55, Luke 1: 57 - 66, Luke 2: 1 - 20 (for Christmas),
Micah 5: 2 - 5a, Psalm 80: 1 - 7, Hebrews 10: 7 and 10.

During Christmas Week:

1. Add a special Jesus stocking to your Christmas decorations. Invite guests and family members to donate money to this stocking. Then send the proceeds to a place your family thinks Jesus would want his "gift" to go.
2. Create Christmas ornaments from self-hardening modeling material to represent the themes of this Advent and hang them on your tree.
3. Recall and share stories of God's good surprises that you experienced during this last year.
4. Thank an older person in your life for the ways they have made you aware that God is on the move.
5. Give the gifts of time, friendship and a hug to someone who does not have family around.
6. Make a poster about surprising acts of love. Add a heart sticker for every act of love that surprises someone else this week.

7. Pick parts of the Christmas story to memorize so that you can recite most of it as a family on Christmas day.
8. Read and enjoy some of the beautiful Christmas story picture books. One favorite is *The Pine Tree Parable* by Liz Curtis Higgs. ISBN #: 0-8499-1480-9, © 1997

Christmas home worship:

1. As you light the Christ Candle in your worship centre for the first time, light a candle on a birthday cake for Jesus, too. Sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, or one of the Christmas songs (see pages 38-41 of the Jubilee songbook, from the Jubilee Sunday School Materials).
2. Bring Mary and Joseph from the path into the stable.
3. Gently place the baby Jesus into the crèche, then add the angels and bring the shepherds into the stable.
4. Pick an appropriate carol to sing as you carry out each of these actions.
5. You may want to sleep in the living room on Christmas Eve, near the crèche and the tree, as a way of identifying with Mary and Joseph sleeping in an unusual place this night.
6. Repeat or create your own special rituals and traditions to mark the importance of "Emmanuel - God with us."
7. On Christmas Day, you may want to plan a Shepherd's party and invite people from your neighbourhood to attend. Dress up like shepherds, gather around your desert theme worship center, and eat bread, cheese, olives, figs or dates on a picnic blanket or in a blanket tent. Use the candle lanterns from the worship center for your only light.

What time is it?



Celebration time!

Advent 2003

Week Five Celebration time!

Call to Worship:

(Leader speaks this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader:

Be alert!
Wait for God's promise to make things right!
Christ, the Child King has come
and shown us God's glory.
God's Holy Spirit is still on the move in our world!

Candle lighter:

We light this fifth candle
to celebrate that God continues to be on the move
in our lives and in our world.

Listening to God's Word:

Read: 1 Samuel 2: 18 - 20, 26 from your Bible.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- What did the boy Samuel think and feel when he wore the robes his mother made for him?
- How were Samuel and Jesus similar?
- How do robes of compassion, kindness and humility transform us as Christians?

Sing:

HWB #210 Good Christian friends, rejoice
HWB #201 Hark! the herald angels sing.

Prayer:

(Use echo form or ask one person to prepare to read this prayer.)

Leader:

In these days of joy,
let us join the praises of all creation.
We want to be God's partners,
and are thankful that God wants to use us
to help make things right. Amen

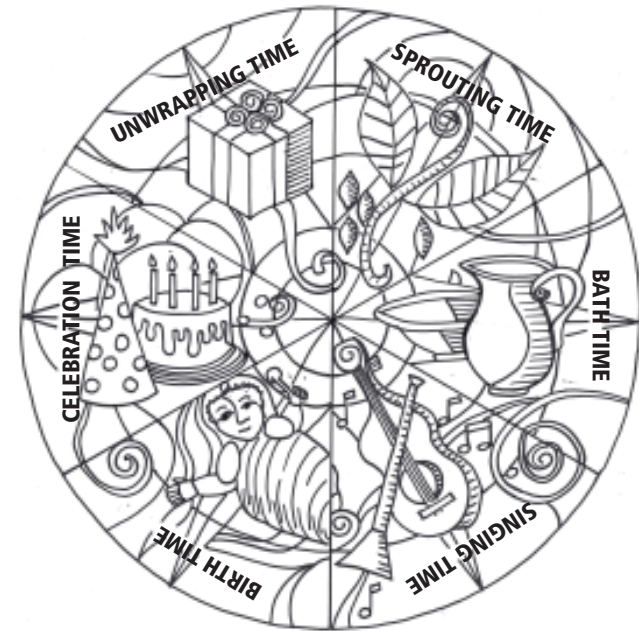
Candle snuffer:

May you be pleased with us,
shine on us and through us
even after we blow out this candle. Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read: Luke 2: 33 - 40, Luke 2: 41 - 52, Psalm 148: 1 - 6, Psalm 148: 7 - 14, Colossians 3: 12 - 17, Isaiah 61: 8 - 11.
2. Make robes out of towels or extra fabric. Play in them to help you remember that each of us can be clothed with compassion, kindness and humility.
3. Have a robe party with the friends who joined you for the shepherd's party. Label each robe with a quality that helps make things right in the world.
4. Write notes to family members that tell them how you think God is using them to make things right in the world. Hide these under their dinner plates.
5. Send some of your clothing to a homeless shelter, or buy a blanket for Mennonite Central Committee to send to refugees.
6. Make a list of God's wonderful gifts in your life and thank God for them in your prayers.
7. Send notes of thanks to people in your church family who have worked hard and shared their gifts during Advent.

What time is it?



Unwrapping time!

Advent 2003

Week Six **Unwrapping time!**

Call to Worship:

(Leader speaks this in phrases which are echoed by the other family members.)

Leader:

Be alert!
Wait for God's promise to make things right.
A new year, a new day has come
where all nations are invited to God's light.

Candle lighter:

We light this sixth candle
to remember that God is on the move
bringing justice and peace to the world through the church.

Listening to God's Word:

Read: Matthew 2: 1 - 6.

Pondering thoughts to choose from:

- Why did the wise kings bring gifts to Jesus?
- What gifts could you offer Jesus?
- What are the "endless treasures" available to us in Christ?
- How can we share these treasures in a world where the innocent still suffer?

Sing:

HWB #192 On this day earth shall ring
HWB #202 The virgin Mary had a baby boy
Rise, Shine from p.7 of the Jubilee songbook.

Prayer:

(Ask one person to prepare to read this longer summary prayer on the last day you use this material.)

God, as we extinguish these candles,
help us remember and live what they told us.
The first candle helped us notice the sprouting of God's Kingdom.
The second candle reminded us how you cleanse us
and guide us in paths of peace.
The third candle showed us the joy of knowing and obeying you, God.
The fourth candle reminded us of how you birthed a new world order
of mercy, truth and peace through your son, Jesus.
We lit the fifth and sixth candles to celebrate
that you continue to be on the move
through the Holy Spirit and the church,
bringing peace and justice to the world.
Thank you, God, that you are on the move! Amen.

Candle snuffer:

God, as we blow out and clean up these candles,
help us see and participate in your "being on the move" in our world.
Amen.

Activities to choose from:

1. Read Matthew 2: 7 - 12, Psalm 72: 1 - 7, Psalm 72: 10 - 14, Ephesians 3: 1 - 6, Ephesians 3: 7 - 12, Isaiah 60: 1 - 6.
2. Make a plan with the members of your household to find new ways of listening to God and worshipping together, now that the Christmas season has ended.
3. Invite a foreign student, or a neighbour who is lonely, into your home.
4. Offer some of your best to the church or a church mission project.
5. Think of ways your family can participate in God's plans for peace and justice in our world.
6. Have a party, with friends or neighbours, and invite them to add to your treasure chest of gifts for peace and justice. Send the gifts to Mennonite Church Canada, or use them in a local project.
7. Play your favourite Christmas music while you clean up and put away the objects that have helped you celebrate Christmas.



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