



PILGRIM PAPERS

Mt. Zion Lutheran Church

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ACE the Holidays: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany

The busy holiday season is upon us, and before you get overwhelmed with all the many commitments that come with the season, this edition of Pilgrim Papers is here to help you get oriented for the reason for the season! I suggest that you try adopting at least one new tradition for each of the Christian seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. May this list of ideas inspire you to find new ways to observe this sacred time of year.

What is Advent?

- The official beginning of each new church year, there are always four Sundays before Christmas Day (December 25th)
- A time of patient waiting for Christ our Lord to come again. While no one knows when that may be, the church spends these four weeks awake and alert for signs of Christ's love made real in the world.
- While Advent is really about the second coming of Christ, the church also spends the four weeks preparing for Christ's birth. We journey with the prophets, Elizabeth, Mary Mother of Our Lord, Joseph, and all the other witnesses.
- The color is blue to symbolize Christian hope. Blue is also the traditional color associated with Mary. The ELCA adopted blue as the liturgical color for Advent in the late 20th century. Many other denominations still use purple (a traditional color for repentance and royalty).
- Other Holy Days in Advent: St. Nicolas Day (Dec. 6th), Our Lady of Guadalupe (Dec. 9th), St. Lucy (Dec. 13th)
- Read Mark 13:24-37

Let's Celebrate Advent!

- You've probably at least heard of an Advent wreath, even if you don't have your own. But how about try a Jesse Tree? Based upon Isaiah 11, this tradition calls for the family to decorate a bare branch or small tree each day of Advent. If you want to go the extra mile, you can create your own ornaments that symbolize the life and ministry of Christ (star, manger, sheep, bread, wine, cross, etc...)
- If you are tired of the same old Christmas decorations, why not celebrate Advent as the Christians of China do by stringing Chinese lanterns around the house? They could be any color but many Lutherans in North America use blue for Advent as a sign of hope and expectation.

- If you enjoy singing, Advent is a good time to honor God's faithful servant Mary by singing her song as recorded in Luke 1. There are many musical versions of Mary's Song in our hymn-books. Make plans to attend Wednesday night soup and prayer this Advent: Dec 4, 11, 18. Soup starts at 6:15pm and worship at 7pm. The theme of our worship will focus on Mary Mother of Our Lord and we will sing her song together as a congregation.
- Saint Nicholas was a real bishop who served the church of Turkey in the 4th century. He was famous for his dedication to the orthodox faith and the poor people in his community. He is the patron saint of children and his feast day is December 6th. There are hundreds of different ideas and resources for honoring this faithful servant of Christ found on this website: www.stnicholascenter.org My personal suggestion is that you encourage your kids on or around that day to give a gift to a worthy ministry or charity that helps children in need. At Mt. Zion this year, we will encourage the children to collect coins from Dec. 6th through Epiphany Day Jan. 6th. All donations will go to ELCA Good Gifts.
- Believe it or not, many Christians, such as the Assyrian Christians, have traditionally fasted during Advent until Christmas Eve. In a season of excess, you might find that giving up certain foods a helpful way to center you and focus on the movement of the Holy Spirit. If you do fast, I encourage you frame it not as a diet (to achieve a beauty standard or health status) but instead as a prayer discipline that helps you focus on sacrifice. However, if you have struggled with eating disorders in the past, please consider this with caution! No one is obligated to fast and it may or may not be the best prayer practice for you.

What is Christmas?

- Not just a day (December 25th) but a whole season of the Church. The season of Christmas is twelve days long and ends on Epiphany Day (January 6th)
- A time for celebration as we marvel at the wonderful surprise of God taking on human life to live here with us. The Incarnation of God's Word is the most incredible gift!
- A time for charity and centering the neediest people in our community. We marvel that Jesus was born a poor peasant in a manger and not a rich nobleman in a palace. Christ became poor for the sake of the poor.
- The liturgical color is white to symbolize the light of God's Word shining in the darkness (John 1)
- Other Holy Days in the Christmas Season: St. Stephen (Dec 26th), St. John the Evangelist (Dec 27th), The Holy Innocents (Dec 28th), Name of Jesus (Jan 1st)
- Read Luke 2:1-20 and John 1:1-14

Let's Celebrate Christmas!

- If you have had a difficult year or the holiday demands have become overwhelming, you might want to take inspiration from the Amish, a conservative Christian sect who shun technology and outside culture in order to focus on their own Christian community within. There is no Santa Claus, no elaborate parties, and little shopping. Usually the Amish focus on singing hymns, reading Scripture, simple decorations of greenery, and exchanging home-made gifts. A simple Christmas is still Christmas!
- Despite what American stores are telling us, Christmas doesn't start the day after Halloween. According to the church calendar Christmas starts on Christmas Day, December 25th, and lasts for 12 days in total! Instead of trying to overload the 25th, you might want to try to spread out family meals, gift giving, and parties through the New Year. And keep your decorations and Christmas tree up until January 6th!
- If you are familiar with Shakespeare, you may know that he wrote a play titled "Twelfth Night". It's a rowdy play filled with love triangles, disguises, and practical jokes. The reason Shakespeare wrote such an outrageous plot for "Twelfth Night" is that in England, the final night of the Christmas season had become a rowdy holiday unto itself. In that same spirit, Twelfth night is a good evening for a party. Traditionally, revelers on twelfth night often wore masks, sang Christmas carols, drank wassail, and played party games. It's a night for silliness and belly laughs before the church begins its serious journey through Epiphany, and then Lent.
- Mt. Zion will celebrate Christmas Eve this year with a musical prelude beginning at 7:30pm and worship with Holy Communion beginning at 8:00pm.

What is Epiphany?

- Epiphany Day is always January 6th (twelve days after Christmas Day), but it is also a short season in the liturgical calendar.
- An "epiphany" is like a "light-bulb moment" when a great idea hits you in an unexpected moment. Or it is a sudden revelation of some new truth that strikes like lightning. The stories that the church tells during the season of Epiphany center around the good news of Jesus being revealed as a sudden surprise to the whole world. The central story for Epiphany Day is always the arrival of the wise men to honor the Christ child.
- The liturgical color is white for Epiphany Day and then green for the Sundays after Epiphany. Light is another very important symbol of the season celebrating the one true Light, Jesus Christ, shining for the whole world to see.
- Other holy days during the season of Epiphany include: Baptism of Our Lord (First Sunday after Epiphany Day), Martin Luther King Jr., renewer of society (Jan 15th), Confession of Peter (Jan 18th), Conversion of Paul (Jan 25th), Presentation of Our Lord (Feb. 2nd)
- Read Matthew 2:1-12 and Mark 1:4-11

Let's Celebrate Epiphany!

- The story of the Wise Men (Gospel of Matthew) is not read during Christmas, but celebrated on Epiphany Day, January 6th. If you have a nativity set at home, I suggest holding back the wise men figures, bringing them out for display only on the appropriate day. If you have small children in the house, you might take the wise men figures and place them far away from the nativity set in a different part of the house. Every day, move them a step closer, until finally they reach their destination on the 6th.
- Epiphany is a traditional time of year to have your home blessed by the church. If a pastor or priest isn't available, you can gather your family and say your own prayers of blessing. It is also traditional to chalk the beam over the front door. Writing the year and letters symbolizing the names of the three magi kings, the chalking message is both a blessing and a reminder of the gift of Christ our Lord. 20 + C + M + B + 25. If you would like Pastor Kristen to bless your house in January, let her know!
- The Baptism of our Lord Sunday is a major festival in the church. You can take the time during the Epiphany season to give thanks for the gift of water, remember your own baptism, and contribute to ELCA World Hunger, who is working to make safe clean water available to communities in need. Click [HERE](#) to visit ELCA World Hunger.
- If you hate to see the Christmas decorations, go back into storage, or you are prone to the winter blues, consider decorating your house with Bethlehem stars for the rest of January. Keep your house cheerful and festive with lots of battery powered candle lights. The light of the star and candles will remind you to keep honoring Epiphany and give thanks to God for the light of Christ which illumines the whole world.