

## Celebrating Advent in 2020

Local churches will have many different Advent routines and traditions. As it becomes increasingly likely that much, if not all of the season of Advent will be experienced in Lockdown, or Tier 3, recreating and maintaining those traditions are likely to be important. We, as a fellowship, have sometimes found the symbolism of an Advent wreath and candles, helpful, so this year we look afresh at The Candles of Advent. You may wish to light your own candles, in your own home, as we remember together the coming of the light of the world.

Advent candles are a relatively new innovation - the first Advent wreath is believed to have appeared in the mid 19th century, when a Lutheran minister, working with children made one from the wheel of a cart. In our Baptist tradition it is only in recent decades that they have been commonly used. There are therefore a variety of traditions and ideas that are attached to the various Advent candles. Over the years, we have developed readings and resources around the framework that follows: Hope, love, peace and joy.



We light candles in advent as a sign of expectation amidst reality. The fragile flame of a candle reminds us that we, as yet, have only glimpses of the hope that is to come. Yet this tiny flame is able to dispel darkness - darkness does not exist - it is simply the absence of light. You cannot switch on the darkness - you can only switch off the light! For all its fragility, a candle flame is able to pierce the darkness and hold our attention in its midst. The candles are set in a circle of evergreen - representing for us the love of God - unending and unchanging. We are held and founded in the love of God.

Today then we light the candle of Hope - hearing hope in the narratives of history. Hope is something that echoes through our history, so it is not surprising that we attach to the candle of hope, the "stories of our ancestors". We can trace the story of God's salvation into some of the earliest narratives of the Old Testament, and see them echoed again in the early chapters of the New. We can also pause to remember stories of the Early believers and stories from our own local histories of God's faithfulness. As we remember God's faithfulness in the past, and as we hear God's promises echoing from history and fulfilled on our Gospel narratives - so our hope for the future is rekindled.



“It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord “

From the onset of time, the dawn of creation, at the root of existence, the source of all things: **our hope is in the Lord.**

At the end of history, revealed in majesty, reigning in eternity; opening the door to an everlasting kingdom: **our hope is in the Lord.**

As our friend and companion, walking by our side, present in all things, through sunshine and storm: **our hope is in the Lord.**

“It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

When the task overwhelms us and the road we should follow unclear, when answers elude us and explanations are nowhere to be found: **our hope is in the Lord.**

When encouraged to trust in our own ability or believe that we can fathom your divine purpose; when we enjoy the praise of others and the pleasure of our own achievement: **our hope is in the Lord.**

When others disappoint us or become those that we let down, when despair becomes the easy option and failure seems inevitable: **our hope is in the Lord.**

When success comes quickly and familiar tasks are completed with ease; when seduced by the obvious, locked in tradition and cosseted by routine: **our hope is in the Lord.**

In the world that is wracked with uncertainty, and struggles to place trust before suspicion; where fear prevails and proof is demanded and our earthly solutions perpetuate as much as they resolve: **our hope is in the Lord.**

As those who have seen its first light dawning in the face of Mary's outcast child and the torn flesh of a thorn-crowned head, as those who journey to its consummation, and are called to be signs of his coming: **our hope is in the Lord.**

“It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”