

# DECEMBER

## *Advent & Winter Solstice | Darkness & Light*

*Wendy Janzen*

### OVERVIEW

In the Northern Hemisphere the season of Advent and Christmas line up with the winter solstice. Part of what we do at forest church gatherings is reconnect with the rhythms of the Earth and its seasons and consider how they intersect with our faith. We understand that the wisdom of the Creator is displayed in creation.

In this dark season, we are invited by the earth to embrace the gifts of darkness. We celebrate the coming of the Light, but we do not demonize the darkness. The earth, plants, trees, and creatures all understand darkness as essential to life. Darkness is a place of reprieve and rest, of mystery and trust. We need to receive the gifts of both darkness and light.

You will want to plan ahead to see when sunset happens on the day you are gathering and plan to meet as twilight shifts to darkness. If you wish to create an Advent wreath of greenery, you will need to gather boughs ahead of time (from a sustainable source). You will also need a small candle in a safe candle holder for each participant. Candles may not be safe in all settings.

See the [Introduction](#) to this series of worship services for further background and insights into planning this kind of outdoor worship service.

### GATHERING & GROUNDING

Take some time to welcome the participants and introduce the leaders. Also name the watershed where you are meeting and offer a land acknowledgement.

We are gathered here at a liminal time - in the last hour of day before night. By the time we leave here, we will be in darkness. This is an in-between time, a time of transition from sun to moon, day to night, activity to stillness, light to darkness. And at this time of year we are only days away from the shortest day and the longest night of the year and the winter solstice.

We ground ourselves here among these trees, near the water, under the setting sun, and with the birds and animals. Take a look around, take in what you see - look around at each other, and at all of the other species. Take some deep breaths and focus on your breathing. Notice the feel of the air entering your body, and leaving again to rejoin the sky. Now close your eyes so your other senses are heightened.

As you breathe in the air of this place, notice the smells of the Earth.  
Listen to the sounds around us.  
Feel the temperature of the air on your skin.  
Feel the ground beneath your feet, and how your feet connect you to the earth and to this particular place.

As our senses have been awakened to our bodies and our surroundings, let's also be awakened to the divine Presence here in this place, living and moving and breathing among us.

Let's pray:

God of deep and dazzling darkness, present here on earth, life within all life, be our guide and companion in our time of worship. Reveal yourself to us in new ways and in new insights. May we be attentive to your wisdom revealed to us here this evening. Be a light guiding our way. Amen.

## READINGS & REFLECTIONS

Read one of these Advent texts, or a different scripture of your choice.

Psalm 134; Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:16; Luke 1:76-79; John 1:1-5

[If you have an advent wreath, invite someone to light the appropriate number of Advent candles as the scripture is being read.]

Offer a short reflection on the theme, possibly incorporating or referring to any of the following quotes:

Quote from Gayle Boss in [\*All Creation Waits: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings\*](#)  
“The practice of Advent has always been about helping us grasp the mystery of a new beginning out of what looks like death [and darkness]. Other-than-human creatures--sprung, like us, from the Source of Life--manifest this mystery without

question or doubt. The more I am with animals and the more I learn about them the more I know they can be more than our companions on this planet. They can be our guides. They can be to us a 'book about God...a word of God,' the God who comes, even in the darkest season, to bring us a new beginning [to shine light within the dark]."

Quote from Joan Chittister and Rowan Williams

"Darkness deserves gratitude. It is the alleluia point at which we learn to understand that all growth does not take place in the sunlight."

Quote from Barbara Brown Taylor in [\*Learning to Walk in the Dark\*](#)

"I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there really is only one logical conclusion: I need darkness as much as I need light."

## WANDERING & WONDERING

Invite people to wander for 20-30 minutes to ponder the mysteries of light and darkness, of incarnation, of the wisdom of the earth that speaks of God's wisdom. See what draws your attention. What feelings and questions arise in you as the sun sets and darkness starts to settle in around us?

[While people wander, add enough lit candles around the periphery of the Advent wreath so that there will be enough for one for each person.]

## SHARING & CANDLE LIGHTING

Invite sharing around the circle from their experience and reflections during the wandering time. Give people the option to pass. As people share, invite them to take a lit candle from around the Advent wreath.

## SENDING

O God, in the quiet, sacred, darkness of this moment we tenderly hold your sacred light that shines on in and through us. May we go from here as witnesses of the darkness and bearers of light and hope in the world.

Amen.

[If you have a walk from your gathering place to a parking lot or starting point, invite people to carry their lights with them.]

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