



PREPARING TO BECOME THE
**BELOVED
COMMUNITY**

ADVENT-YEAR C

Preparing to Become the Beloved Community

Year C

Advent 2024, 2027, 2030

Session One: Advent 1 - Telling the Truth about Our Churches and Race

Session Two: Advent 2 - Repairing the Breach in Institutions and Society

Session Three: Advent 3 - Practicing the Way of Love in the Pattern of Jesus

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Session Five: Christmas Eve or Christmas Day – Lighting the Candle

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Prepared by the Reconciliation, Justice, and Creation Care Team,
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Lelanda Lee, and Florian Jones-Stamm. Special thanks to the Rev. Kyle Oliver
and the Church Divinity School of Pacific.

Learn more about Becoming the Beloved Community and The Episcopal Church at
www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation.

Share reflections and queries by writing to reconciliation@episcopalchurch.org or
on social media using #belovedcommunity.

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ABOUT THE ADVENT WREATH LITURGY

The Advent wreath is believed to have originated with a Lutheran pastor working among the poor in Germany in the late 1800s. Tradition states that the children would ask every day if Christmas had arrived, so he arranged candles (four large candles for the weeks and then smaller ones for the days) to help the children mark time and journey with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem without leaving Germany. The wreath came to appear as it does today through the adoption of the practice by German Catholics, who decreased the wreath to just the candles we use today. Different traditions attribute different meanings to the candles, and even use different colors, but the purpose remains the same: to provide Christians with a way of marking time through the season of anticipation until we reach the birth of Jesus. For some, the wreath is a visual pilgrimage through Advent, similar to the idea behind the recreation of the creche in churches and homes started by St. Francis of Assisi as a way of helping the poor experience holy sites from home. For many, this Advent will be spent at home and lighting the Advent wreath will serve as a method for journeying with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. Our liturgy comes from a place of social justice and Becoming Beloved Community. It is our hope that the prayers throughout this document will help you journey through this time of waiting and anticipation for when Christ is born again in our hearts and in our world. This liturgy is written for a literacy level of 5th grade and up. For smaller children, you can adapt the liturgy by saying the “Reader 1” section and lighting the candles.

WELCOME

*In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God...
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together. - Isaiah 40:3, 5*

Advent is a season of preparation: shopping for gifts, decorating our homes and sanctuaries. Advent is also a time to prepare our hearts and communities for the coming of Christ, the Almighty God who came among us poor and homeless, a stranger and a child. There may be no better time to reflect on how we as the Episcopal Church embrace the Holy One who continues to draw near in the neighbor, the stranger, the refugee, or the one who seems most “other” to you. It is the ideal season to commit to becoming Beloved Community and growing loving, liberating, life-giving relationships across the human family of God.

We make the journey not only as individual Christians and congregations, but as a whole church. This spring, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and President of the House of Deputies Gay Clark Jennings and their supporting officers shared “Becoming Beloved Community,” a new vision document that lays out the Episcopal Church’s long-term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation, and justice. A second resource — “Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are” — details many ways for individuals and congregations to take concrete steps toward change and healing. Both are available at www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community, along with a host of resources for faithful reflection and action.

The journey is framed around the labyrinth. Why? In the ministry of racial healing and justice, none of us walks a straight line. We enter the labyrinth wherever God has provided an opening – telling the truth about our church’s story around race; discerning and proclaiming God’s dream of Beloved Community where we are; learning and practicing Jesus’ way of healing and love; and bravely working to transform systemic racial injustice. We keep moving from one quadrant to another and back. No one is ever really finished. That is the way of ongoing spiritual formation.

As you “walk” sections of this labyrinth, gather a group, and together engage the scriptures, reflections, and activities. Designate a facilitator who will carefully preview the session. Set aside at least 45 minutes for each session, and consider these **Conversation Tips**:

Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

You will find printer-friendly online resources and alternative activities for a variety of contexts – at www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community. Feel free to also explore daily offerings and ongoing conversation about Becoming Beloved Community on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry regularly welcomes us to live not just as the church but as the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement: the ongoing community that follows Jesus into loving, liberating, life-giving relationship with God, each other, and creation. May God bless and grow us into vibrant embodiments of the Christ we welcome and follow, this Advent and always.

Prayerfully offered,

The Episcopal Church’s Racial Reconciliation Team
www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation - reconciliation@episcopalchurch.org

ADVENT I

Telling the Truth about Our Churches and Race

Contributor: The Rev. Jeffrey A. Tooke, deacon, Episcopal Diocese of Western of New York

Pray the Collect for This Sunday

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Read the Scripture Together: Psalm 25:1-9

- 25** ¹ To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;
my God, I put my trust in you; *
let me not be humiliated,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- ² Let none who look to you be put to shame; *
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.
- ³ Show me your ways, O LORD, *
and teach me your paths.
- ⁴ Lead me in your truth and teach me, *
for you are the God of my salvation;
in you have I trusted all the day long.
- ⁵ Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love, *
for they are from everlasting.
- ⁶ Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; *
remember me according to your love
and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.
- ⁷ Gracious and upright is the LORD; *
therefore he teaches sinners in his way.
- ⁸ He guides the humble in doing right *
and teaches his way to the lowly.
- ⁹ All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness *
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Reflection: From Polarization to Common Ground through Truth-telling

Truth-telling is difficult. We need a truthful perspective of our past to know who we are today and where we are going in our future. Our world today is full of mistrust and suspicion within social media, political debate, and ordinary conversation. We often appear to be losing our ability to connect with others with different opinions, perspectives, and voices than our own. Division and divisiveness are affecting our cities, neighborhoods, and families. How do we take a stand for truth when there is so much polarization in our midst? How do we sift through the continuous news cycle and perpetual information overload to find the kernels of truth that lead us to mutual understanding and compassion for others in the world, especially people on the margins of society?

The psalmist suggests we look toward God, who will show us the path toward the truth-telling we need to engage with, for ourselves and our communities. It is not an easy path, and there may be times when we journey nearly alone, apart from others we love and care for deeply who hold a different perspective. How

do we seek common ground to engage in truth-telling that helps us to bring people together rather than add to the division we see and encounter, trusting that “all the paths of the Lord are love and faithfulness”? How do we come to value and promote connection and truth-telling over defensiveness and division?

— The Rev. Jeffrey A. Tooke, deacon

In the Labyrinth: Truth-telling through Exploration

We cannot become what God created us to be unless we also examine who we have been and who we are today. Who are you as a church community? What groups are included and excluded? What things have you as a church done and left undone? What are the prophetic voices among you saying? How can we help ourselves and others to hear the difficult truths around us?

Make It Real: Sharing a Difficult Truth

Gather in a discussion circle of no more than 10 to 12 people in which members can be paired off in groups of two. Share the **Conversation Tips**:

Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

Take a couple minutes to reflect silently on a moment when you shared or received a difficult or challenging truth about your faith community.

If you were the one who **shared** the truth:

- a) How did you know the person(s) connected with you or the truth you shared?
- b) What was their reaction to the truth you shared?
- c) What was their reaction to you?
- d) How did you know if you were being heard?
- e) How did you know when, and if, you, or the truth you shared, were being dismissed?

If you were the one who **received** the truth:

- a) How were you connected with the person(s) sharing the truth and with the truth being shared?
- b) What was your reaction to this challenging truth?
- c) What was your reaction to the person(s) telling you the truth?
- d) How did you let the person(s) know that you were hearing them?

In groups of two, each person should take about three minutes to share the moment they thought of and their reflections to questions A-E. The listener in the pair refrains from asking questions or providing other listening cues or prompts. Once each person in the pair has shared, each listener in the pair should share a momentary reaction or insight to the other. How did the listener’s reaction or insight make the speaker feel?

After each pair has shared with one another, regather as an entire group and discuss any themes you noticed emerging in these conversations. Consider and share ways to encourage connection and being heard during truth-telling. What are some ways to let a listener know that you feel heard or not heard? What are some ways that you can tell a difficult truth while encouraging connection and being heard? All group members should be encouraged to share their thoughts, but sharing by each individual is not required.

How did this exercise help to provide you with a new perspective on Beloved Community and your role within it? Have you learned anything new from this experience about being Beloved Community?

Lighting the Candle

Readings can be said by one or two different people depending on the needs of your family or congregation.

All: Light of the world, in grace and beauty,
mirror of God's eternal face,
transparent flame of love's free duty,
You bring salvation to our human race.¹

Reader 1: Sacred Mystery, we light the first candle of Advent for hope and truth.

The first candle is lit.

Reader 2: We kindle your light with hope that it may allow the truth to shine brightly for the world.
Help us break down walls, so that we live in compassion, justice, and peace.

All: Sacred Mystery, break through all that keeps us from you. Help us to see the truth about oppression, as we prepare to become the beloved community. We ask for your mercy and to see your image in one another. This Advent, visit us with your justice, love, and peace. Amen.²

¹ Throughout the liturgy, the prayer said at the beginning is slightly adapted from the Phos Hilaron on page 23 of *Enriching Our Worship 1*, the word "human" was added before "race".

² Throughout the liturgy the prayers said by Reader 2 and at the end have been adapted from the Liturgy for Lighting Advent Candles from the United Church of Christ: https://www.ucc.org/worship_worship-ways_year-a_ace_advent-liturgy-for

ADVENT II

Repairing the Breach in Institutions and Society

Contributor: The Rev. Becki Casey, candidate for the priesthood, Episcopal Diocese of Virginia

Pray the Collect for this Sunday

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Read the Scripture Together: Canticle 16, The Song of Zechariah; Luke 1:68-79

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; *

he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior, *

born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old,

that he would save us from our enemies, *

from the hands of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers *

and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, *

to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear, *

holy and righteous in his sight

all the days of our life.

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, *

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation *

by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God *

the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, *

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Reflection: Repairing the Breach Requires Faith and Action

Mere months before the birth of Jesus, Zechariah prophetically commissions his son John to be a herald of the Gospel. John's role was to proclaim the Good News, the fulfillment of the promises given to God's people from ages past, and remind the people of their inheritance as children of the Eternal God. Those who were the beloved of God had experienced dehumanizing, disempowering violence and oppression for generations. But Jesus was coming, and his arrival would forever alter their stories of pain and loss.

Jesus' redemptive work, salvation from the enemy's destructive violence, and protection from the hater's wrath, would not be curbed by the distant legislation of a far-off deity. No. His revolutionary gospel would be the ministry of presence. His nearness, his compassionate love, would change the world forever. And it is that same intimate connection we are called to offer to others.

To take our place alongside God's people, to participate in healing and peace, is the fundamental message of the Gospel. It takes deep faith to step into this work. Jesus shines brightly, cutting through the shadow of

death in practical ways by the work we accomplish together as God's children. But there can be no peace without justice. Our participation in the Gospel is to create freedom and flourishing for all people who are oppressed, mistreated, and silenced.

God promises to guide our feet into the way of peace. Guided feet move. How are our movements impacting those suffering from injustice?

— The Rev. Becki Casey

In the Labyrinth: Practice Makes Perfect

Loving our neighbor takes formation, practice, and commitment. How will each of us learn to be reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers in Jesus' name? How could we practice sharing stories, growing relationship across dividing walls, and seeking Christ in the "other"?

Make It Real: Sharing Stories

Imagine Zechariah, silenced for months because he failed to believe Gabriel's prophetic message of God's promise that was soon to be fulfilled. What would it feel like to sit in silence, hoping to see the promises of God, after waiting so long? Many people in our communities spend their lives waiting for God's justice, hoping for the solidarity and support of others while feeling isolated and alone.

Take a few moments to sit in silent solidarity with those whose human dignity has not been rightfully upheld. Allow yourself to feel the grief, alienation, and shame.

Take a few moments to pray for God's guidance. Are there times you wish you had responded differently in a situation where justice was on the line? Are there times when your response was especially in line with movement of the Spirit? You may wish to ask God's forgiveness, to praise God's presence, or seek God's strength and perseverance.

Once again review the **Conversation Tips**:

Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

Break into small groups with two to five others.

Make sure everyone has something to write on and something with which to write or draw.

- As people share, have participants write or draw images reflecting the words they hear repeated or that stand out to them.

Allow each person who wishes to share a story of an injustice that they experienced personally or that happened to someone they love.

- Share: What happened? How did it feel?
- Discuss: Can you identify any systemic causes or underlying factors that led to this event? Can you imagine how the situation would have been different if one person with power had behaved differently? What about if one structural factor had been different, like a cultural norm, law, or policy?

After listening to these stories and considering their causes and effects, take a moment to pause.

- Examine the words or pictures on your paper to note which ones stand out or are repeated.
- What thoughts are coming to mind?

- How do these stories and words make you feel?

Allow each person a brief moment to share their reflections.

Spend some time in silent prayer.

- Ask God to reveal one specific action item for you to implement.
- Example: Do you feel motivated to learn more about the injustices around you, to change something about your reactions of behaviors regarding injustice, or to participate with a particular group involved in healing broken systems?

Take a moment to allow anyone who wishes to share their action step with the group.

Lighting the Candle

Readings can be said by one or two different people depending on the needs of your family or congregation.

The first candle is lit.

All: Light of the world, in grace and beauty,
mirror of God's eternal face,
transparent flame of love's free duty,
You bring salvation to our human race.³

Reader 1: Sacred Mystery, we light the second candle of Advent for peace and justice.

The second candle is lit.

Reader 2: We hear and affirm the confidence in Zechariah's proclamation of shalom / peace through the salvation and forgiveness of God.

All: Sacred Mystery, you promise us the freedom to worship without fear. Grant to us your courage and creative vision to make this a reality for all people through your tender compassion. Amen.⁴

³ Throughout the liturgy, the prayer said at the beginning is slightly adapted from the Phos Hilaron on page 23 of *Enriching Our Worship 1*, the word "human" was added before "race".

⁴ Throughout the liturgy the prayers said by Reader 2 and at the end have been adapted from the Liturgy for Lighting Advent Candles from the United Church of Christ: https://www.ucc.org/worship_worship-ways_year-a_ace_advent-liturgy-for

ADVENT III

Practicing the Way of Love in the Pattern of Jesus

Contributor: Lelanda Lee, lay leader, Episcopal Church in Colorado

Pray the Collect for This Sunday

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Read the Scripture Together: Zephaniah 3:14-20

3 ¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
¹⁷ The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
¹⁸ as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.
¹⁹ I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
²⁰ At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the Lord.

Reflection: Practicing the Way of Love

Practicing the Way begins with *remembering*. Zephaniah makes two points to remember. First, remember all that God does to protect us from harm and oppressors. Second, remember the spiritual gift of joy—to “sing aloud” and “rejoice and exult.”

Note that Zephaniah used more than double the verses to recite God’s grace toward humanity than to tell us to be joyful. Was it because Zephaniah doubted that humans would *believe* in God’s grace if they didn’t have more words to commend God’s graciousness?

Practicing the Way and its attendant actions are about the *embodiment* of being followers of Jesus—of embodying the hope we find in Jesus Christ. We share the Good News of God in Christ *because* it is good news that is too life-saving to keep secret from our fellow humans. We Christians strive to be the carriers and advocates of the hope found in Christ because its all-loving, incarnational perspective aligns us with God’s command to love God and love our neighbors.

Zephaniah reminds us to *remember* to be joyful in our sharing the hope that Christ brings us. Zephaniah tells us to “sing aloud” and to rejoice and exult. Practicing the spiritual gift of embodying joy enhances our advocacy of hope in Christ.

Remember, says Zephaniah, to be joyful because of everything that God does for us.

— Lelanda Lee

In the Labyrinth: Practicing the Way of Love in the Pattern of Jesus

Loving our neighbor takes formation, practice, and commitment. How will each of us learn to be reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers in Jesus’ name? How could we practice sharing stories, growing relationship across dividing walls, and seeking Christ in the “other”?

Make It Real: The Far by Faith Exercise

Gather in circles of no more than 15 people. Review the **Conversation Tips:**

Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

Now reflect on ways your congregation or ministry engages in loving your neighbors, within and outside the church. Make a list of the most significant ministries (no more than three). For each...

- Recall the story of how your church took up this ministry. Who had the idea? Why did others say “yes”?
- Describe the process of beginning the ministry. What was hard? What made it work?
- What (and who) did you not know at the beginning that you know now?
- How has God blessed you and your church through these ministries?

Now consider your conversations over the first two weeks. Think about people groups - racial, ethnic, and cultural, but also socioeconomic, ideological, and theological - with whom your church has experienced separation or even tension. With which of these do you wish your church would develop deeper relationship? Once the circle has decided, reflect together:

- How could the ministry experiences you described before help you to approach the challenge of forming these challenging new relationships? How are those experiences a gift you can offer?
- What new learning and practice would help you to prepare for relationship across difference and division? Book study? Dismantling racism training? Story-telling training? Pilgrimage? Prayer? (For specific information, check www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation)

Lighting the Candle

Readings can be said by one or two different people depending on the needs of your family or congregation.

The first and second candles are lit.

All: Light of the world, in grace and beauty,
mirror of God's eternal face,
transparent flame of love's free duty,
You bring salvation to our human race.⁵

Reader 1: Sacred Mystery, we light the third candle of Advent for joy and grace.

The third candle is lit.

Reader 2: We kindle it with joy. We kindle it with joy. We recall the times we have struggled to practice your Way of Love and yet we continue to joyfully walk on the journey you set before us.

All: Sacred Mystery, visit us and fill us with your Spirit. Bring your good news to life within us. Give us courage to walk in the way of the beloved community that you set before us. Amen.⁶

⁵ Throughout the liturgy, the prayer said at the beginning is slightly adapted from the Phos Hilaron on page 23 of *Enriching Our Worship 1*, the word "human" was added before "race".

⁶ Throughout the liturgy the prayers said by Reader 2 and at the end have been adapted from the Liturgy for Lighting Advent Candles from the United Church of Christ: https://www.ucc.org/worship_worship-ways_year-a_ace_advent-liturgy-for

ADVENT IV

Proclaiming the Dream of Beloved Community

Contributor: Florian Jones-Stamm, candidate for the diaconate, Episcopal Diocese of Virginia

Pray the Collect for This Sunday

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Read the Scripture Together: Luke 1:39-55

I³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Reflection: Embodying Mary

Advent is a season of preparation and proclamation. Like Mary, who carried and proclaimed God in Christ, we are called to bring Christ into our world, especially in difficult times and places.

In her song, Mary praises God's mighty deeds, mercy and justice, emphasizing the fulfillment of God's promises through the coming of Jesus. Mary reveals God's vision of justice, where the lowly are lifted and the powerful are brought down, where the hungry are satisfied and the rich are sent away empty.

As we prepare ourselves and our community for Christ's coming, how we can embody Mary's courage and faith, proclaiming the transformative power of God's love and justice?

— Florian Jones-Stamm

In the Labyrinth: Finding the Dream

Healing, reconciliation, and justice are big ideas, but they all begin with exploring our stories, shared history, and deepest longings. By listening closely to our church, neighbors, and civic partners, we can discern a shared vision of Beloved Community.

- What experiences have people had around race, ethnicity, and culture?
- Is there a shared vision of Beloved Community?
- What collective commitments and behaviors could you all make that would begin to foster Beloved Community?

Make It Real: Writing Your Own Magnificat

Gather in groups of ideally no more than four people each. Review the **Conversation Tips:**

Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.

Reflect on Mary's words (Luke 1:46-55) and their significance in understanding and proclaiming Beloved Community.

Discussion Questions:

- a) What elements of the Magnificat resonate with you?
- b) How do Mary's words challenge our societal structures?
- c) What does it mean for us to lift up the lowly and bring down the powerful in our context here and today?

Activity - Write a Magnificat for Today:

- Using Mary's Magnificat as a template and focusing on the "he has" statements, compose your own group's version that reflects your vision of the Beloved Community.
- Incorporate elements of justice, mercy, and God's transformative power.

Example Framework:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

God has . . . _____

God has... _____

God has... _____

God has... _____

Lighting the Candle

Readings can be said by one or two different people depending on the needs of your family or congregation.

The first, second, and third candles are lit.

All: Light of the world, in grace and beauty,
mirror of God's eternal face,
transparent flame of love's free duty,
You bring salvation to our human race.⁷

Reader 1: In Mary's song, God's justice rings, lifting the lowly, as hope it brings.

The fourth candle is lit.

Reader 2: We light this candle, peace in sight, proclaiming God's dream, with love and light.

All: Eternal God, with justice bright,
Transform our hearts, and end our strife.
Help us proclaim, with voices strong,
Your love and peace, our Advent song. Amen.⁸

⁷ Throughout the liturgy, the prayer said at the beginning is slightly adapted from the Phos Hilaron on page 23 of *Enriching Our Worship 1*, the word "human" was added before "race".

⁸ Throughout the liturgy the prayers said by Reader 2 and at the end have been adapted from the Liturgy for Lighting Advent Candles from the United Church of Christ: https://www.ucc.org/worship_worship-ways_year-a_ace_advent-liturgy-for

CHRISTMAS EVE OR CHRISTMAS DAY

Lighting the Candle

Readings can be said by one or two different people depending on the needs of your family or congregation.

The first, second, third, and fourth candles are lit.

All: Light of the world, in grace and beauty,
mirror of God's eternal face,
transparent flame of love's free duty,
You bring salvation to our human race.⁹

Reader 1: Rejoice, people of God. The Light has come into the world. Sacred Mystery, we now light the candle of your nativity.

The Christ candle is lit.

Reader 2: With the company of heaven and with sounds of great joy, you come to us. Now is the time of celebration and joy.

All: Blessed Jesus, our Life and Light, thank you for coming this night (day) to us. Fill us with joy at your coming and make us instruments of your love. Help us to love those you loved, the least, the last, and the lost. Amen.¹⁰

⁹ Throughout the liturgy, the prayer said at the beginning is slightly adapted from the Phos Hilaron on page 23 of *Enriching Our Worship 1*, the word "human" was added before "race".

¹⁰ Throughout the liturgy the prayers said by Reader 2 and at the end have been adapted from the Liturgy for Lighting Advent Candles from the United Church of Christ: https://www.ucc.org/worship_worship-ways_year-a_ace_advent-liturgy-for