



Light & Darkness

Gatherings

Spiritual
✦
Traditional

Spiritual & Traditional



Vibe: This framework provides for a comprehensive, liturgical style gathering. It includes spiritual readings from the Bible, prayer and traditional hymns. This template is a near replication of the December 4th special Advent services.

Length: 40 - 50 minutes

Materials: Post-it notes (purple & yellow), candles

Resources:

- Slideshows of lament and hope
- Literary: Psalm 74 (NLT), Isaiah 9: 1-7 (NLT), “I Will Light Candles this Christmas”
- Songs: “Hallelujah”, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”, “Oh Light”

Opening Invitation to Group (5 minutes)

Leader Script: “Welcome to this gathering of Light & Darkness. During these weeks leading up to Christmas, we remember and reflect upon the life of Jesus, as the Light of God made flesh and entering into the darkness of our world. In this season of Advent, we find value in making space for our own identification of lament and hope.

This evening we will spend some time together reflecting on wherever you’ve experienced darkness this year - both on a personal front as well as in the public realm. We’ll take time to think about those things, write them down, and share some of them with one another. We’ll offer those to God in prayer, trusting that God hears our anger and our complaints and our disappointment and can engage with us and with those problems.

As a way to transition, we’ll sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” together, and we’ll make space for hope. We remember Jesus’ entry into our world as Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus may have first entered our world as a Jewish baby in a remote, rural area of Palestine, over two thousand years ago. But in the Christmas season, we reflect with wonder on the significance of Jesus’ life and Jesus’ presence with us. We hope in Jesus’ capacity to shape life out of death and to shine light into our collective darkness. And, best as we can, we lean in toward Jesus, to trust Jesus to stir hope, faith, love in us to face our worlds with courage.”

Time of Lament

Visual Meditation (3 minutes)

Read Psalm 74, while playing lament slideshow.

Leader Script: “Many of the psalms are songs and poems of lament. They hold words that express the rawest of emotions and feelings. While these ancient words reference times from long ago - they also stretch and name much of what we identify in our current contexts. These words express confusion, pain, grief and anger - written by psalmists who are crying out to God to act. As I read this psalm of lament, while a visual slideshow plays, allow these ancient words to draw out your own lament.”

Personal Reflection (5 minutes)

Play “Hallelujah” in background, while people write laments on purple post-its.

Leader Script: “I invite you now to write as many laments on the purple post-its as you want. If you finish early, hold your post-its and sit quietly as the song finishes playing.”

Smaller group response (5 minutes)

Play instrumental music in background (option: Piano Guys, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”)

Leader Script: “In your groups now (if you have multiple groups), we invite each of you to read as much or as little of what you’ve written on your post-its as you want. The person talking should simply read the laments. Don’t comment on them or tell stories or expand. Just read what you’ve written. If you are not sharing, please simply honor and hold the lament being read, by listening. Refrain from offering advice or suggestions or comfort; simply listen. At the end of each person’s individual sharing, together simply say, “We hear you,” and then move to the next person. Again, share to the degree you wish, and if you finish early, simply hold the silence.”

Release of Lament & Song (5 minutes):

Release lament by sticking your post-its on a wall and/or other designated area.

Collectively sing, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” (verses #1, 2, 6 & 7)

Leader Prayer: *Note to leader* - pray as you feel led, for a movement of God to see and respond to the laments named and spoken.

Leader Script: “Please use this next stretch of time to release your laments by posting them in the designated area. We will invite you into singing the song, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”, as you are ready. As you post your laments, please know that this act does not suggest that your laments are immediately gone or disappear; rather it is an act that signifies your desire not to hold the weight of them on your own. As we name and release our laments in this space, we are offering them up to each other to know, to recognize and acknowledge - and we are offering them up to God to hear as well.”

Time of Hope

Visual Meditation (3 minutes)

Read Isaiah 9: 1-7, while playing hope slideshow.

Leader Script: "We'll now transition to a naming of our hopes. Again, we'll look to the words from the Bible, this time from the prophecy of Isaiah, that sages for centuries have seen as a hint of the hope of Jesus' life and work in our world. Take time during the reading of Isaiah and the viewing of the slideshow to make space for your own hopes to rise up."

Personal Reflection (5 minutes)

Play "Oh Light" in background, while people write hopes on yellow post-its.

Leader Script: "I invite you now to write as many hopes, desires, prayers, and longings on the yellow post-its. Name what it is you'd like God to do in your life or in the public sphere in the year to come. If you finish early, hold your post-its and sit quietly as the song finishes playing."

Smaller Group Response (5 minutes)

Play instrumental music in background (option: Chris Rice, "Joy to the World")

Leader Script: "In your groups now (if you have multiple groups), I invite each of you to read as much or as little of what you've written as you want. The person talking should simply read the hopes written on their post-its. Don't comment on them or tell stories or expand. Just read what you've written. If you are not sharing, please simply honor and hold the hope being read, by listening. Refrain from offering advice or suggestions or comfort; simply listen. At the end of each person's individual sharing, together simply say, "may it be so," and then move to the next person. Again, share to the degree you wish, and if you finish early, simply hold the silence."

Declaration of Hope & Candle Lighting (5 minutes)

Declare hopes on wall and/or designated area.

Reading: "I Will Light Candles this Christmas"

Leader Script: "I will read a short poem by the civil rights activist and philosopher Howard Thurman, "I Will Light Candles This Christmas," and lift our hopes up to God in prayer. As I read, please use this next stretch of time to declare your hopes by posting them in the designated area. As you declare your hopes by this act, please know that this does not suggest that your hopes are immediately gone or disappear; rather it is an act that signifies your desire not to hold the weight of them on your own. As we name and release our hopes in this space, we are offering them up to each other to know, to recognize and acknowledge, and we are offering them up to God to hear as well. As you declare your hopes, please light a candle as a symbol of your hope, and as a symbol of the spirit of prayer in which we offer these hopes to God."

Leader Prayer: Note to leader - pray as you feel led, for a movement of God to see and respond to the hopes spoken and not yet realized.

Resources

Spiritual & Traditional Gathering: Resources

Visual

Slideshows:

Lament - where to find? ON WEB SIGHT OR BLOG?

Hope - where to find?

Literary:

Reading of Lament:

<p>Psalm 74 (NLT)</p> <p>1 O God, why have you rejected us so long? Why is your anger so intense against the sheep of your own pasture?</p> <p>2 Remember that we are the people you chose long ago, the tribe you redeemed as your own special possession! And remember Jerusalem, your home here on earth.</p> <p>3 Walk through the awful ruins of the city; see how the enemy has destroyed your sanctuary.</p> <p>4 There your enemies shouted their victorious battle cries; there they set up their battle standards.</p> <p>5 They swung their axes like woodcutters in a forest.</p> <p>6 With axes and picks, they smashed the carved paneling.</p> <p>7 They burned your sanctuary to the ground. They defiled the place that bears your name.</p> <p>8 Then they thought, "Let's destroy everything!" So they burned down all the places where God was worshiped.</p> <p>9 We no longer see your miraculous signs. All the prophets are gone, and no one can tell us when it will end.</p> <p>10 How long, O God, will you allow our enemies to insult you? Will you let them dishonor your name forever?</p>	<p>11 Why do you hold back your strong right hand? Unleash your powerful fist and destroy them.</p> <p>12 You, O God, are my king from ages past, bringing salvation to the earth.</p> <p>13 You split the sea by your strength and smashed the heads of the sea monsters.</p> <p>14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan and let the desert animals eat him.</p> <p>15 You caused the springs and streams to gush forth, and you dried up rivers that never run dry.</p> <p>16 Both day and night belong to you; you made the starlight and the sun.</p> <p>17 You set the boundaries of the earth, and you made both summer and winter.</p> <p>18 See how these enemies insult you, Lord. A foolish nation has dishonored your name.</p> <p>19 Don't let these wild beasts destroy your turtledoves. Don't forget your suffering people forever.</p> <p>20 Remember your covenant promises, for the land is full of darkness and violence!</p> <p>21 Don't let the downtrodden be humiliated again. Instead, let the poor and needy praise your name.</p> <p>22 Arise, O God, and defend your cause. Remember how these fools insult you all day long.</p> <p>23 Don't overlook what your enemies have said or their growing uproar.</p>
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Reading of Hope:

Isaiah 9: 1-7 (NLT)

1 Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

2 The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.

3 You will enlarge the nation of Israel,
and its people will rejoice.

They will rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest
and like warriors dividing the plunder.

4 For you will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

5 The boots of the warrior
and the uniforms bloodstained by war
will all be burned.

They will be fuel for the fire.

6 For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His government and its peace
will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!

Candle Lighting Reading:

"I Will Light Candles this Christmas", by Howard Thurman

Candles of joy despite all sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all the year long.

Auditory:

Song of Lament: "Hallelujah", performed by Jeff Buckley, written by Leonard Cohen

Transition Song: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

<p>Verse #1 Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!</p> <p>Verse #2 Oh, come, our Wisdom from on high, Who ordered all things mightily; To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!</p>	<p>Verse #6 Oh, come, our Dayspring from on high, And cheer us by your drawing nigh, Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!</p> <p>Verse #7 Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind In one the hearts of all mankind; Oh, bid our sad divisions cease, And be yourself our King of Peace. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!</p>
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Song of Hope: “Oh Light”, by Gungor and All Sons & Daughters

<p>Lyrics: Oh light Come to reconcile Come in like a child Holy night</p> <p>Oh light Our hopes and all our fears Met within your sight Holy night</p> <p>Hallelujah God is with us Hallelujah A light has come</p> <p>Oh light God and man entwine Of earth and of divine Holy night</p> <p>Oh light Mending fractured earth The soul now felt its worth Holy night</p>	<p>Hallelujah God is with us Hallelujah A light has come</p> <p>Hallelujah Holy God is with us Love is always born within</p> <p>Hallelujah Light will chase and find us Love is facing us again</p> <p>Hallelujah Holy God is with us Love is always born within</p> <p>Hallelujah Light will chase and find us Love is facing us again</p> <p>Hallelujah God is with us Hallelujah A light has come A light has come Oh a light has come</p>
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Additional Songs from December 4th service:

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent
 Come Thou Long Expected Jesus
 Bread of Heaven
 Go Tell It on the Mountain