Worship Service Theme: First Sunday of Advent: HOPE

Helpful Elements:
Christmas hymnal and sing-along recordings
Purple table covering
Advent stand and electric candles
Advent banner
Nativity scene (separate table)

Welcome: Welcome! My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time today. Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The word "advent" comes from the Latin term "adventus" which means "arrival" or "coming." Advent is the season when the church remembers and celebrates the coming of Christ to Earth, as well as anticipating his Second Coming, his return in glory.

(Turn on the candle of Hope – or have someone in the front row "light" it.)

Today we light the **PURPLE** candle that represents hope, remembering how the birth of Jesus brought hope into the world. Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening prayer: God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells among us.
God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells among us.
God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells among us.
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the center, the focus of our lives

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always, and particularly during this Advent season. We pray in your holy name. Amen.[1]

Hymns:
Joy to the World
O Come O Come Emmanuel
Angels from the Realms of Glory

First reading: Isaiah 11:1-6

1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. …
6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat …
and a little child shall lead them.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:
It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
The First Noel

Second reading: Mark 13:32-36. This is how Jesus described his eventual return to his followers:

32 "But concerning that day or that hour [when I return], no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. **34** It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. **35** Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— **36** lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. **37** And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

[1] http://faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm

Hymns:
Angels We Have Heard on High
O Little Town of Bethlehem

Interactive Homily: Let's talk together a bit about hope and waiting.

- What sorts of things do you wait for?
    - Birthdays; holidays; Christmas morning; a visit from someone you love; a baby; resolution to a problem; your next meal ☺
- What circumstances or feelings can make waiting hard?
    - When you're or anxious worried
    - When something is a long way off
    - When you're in pain
    - When you're alone
    - Even when you're exceptionally excited, like kids for Christmas!
- What can make waiting easier?
    - Waiting with someone else or others
    - Talking with others for encouragement and reassurance
    - Praying for patience
    - Knowing that what you wait for *will come*
- In the Bible, the Isaiah passage we read predicts a time when "the wolf will dwell with the lamb." How would the world be different than it is today, if righteousness and equity were the norm and enemies were at peace?
- That is God's promise for how the world *will be*. But we're not there yet, are we? Jesus said that waiting for the fulfillment of God's kingdom is like when a master leaves the house "and puts his servants in charge, each with his own work."
- What do you think we can do to help bring God's kingdom to where we live, here and now? What is our work to do while we wait for God to make all things new?
    - Pray for God's kingdom to come.
    - Help and love others. That includes loving and blessings our enemies! Be kind, humble, and loving without prejudice.
    - Listen and learn. We are never done learning! Listen to wise words and teachings and act on them.
    - Stay awake. What do you think "stay awake" means in terms of faith?

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        - Don’t close your eyes to things that are not part of God’s wholeness. Be peaceful in strife, loving in hate, humble in pride.
        - Don’t be lulled into thinking you have no role to play! Look around for what God is doing and join him.
        - Wait and work <u>together</u> for peace and justice on Earth.
- Advent is all about waiting for an arrival. First came the wait for the Christ Child on Christmas morning. This certainty – God came to us in the flesh! – becomes a guarantee of our ultimate hope: Jesus’ second arrival to establish God’s kingdom of shalom: wholeness and peace.

… Let’s pray to God silently for a moment, for patient endurance to wait and work for God’s kingdom in hope.

(Silent Prayer) … Lord, in your love and mercy, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord’s prayer together:
Lord’s Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Hymn: Go Tell It on the Mountain

Third Reading: A Season of Hope, by Raymond A. Foss
We are waiting, expectantly
for the coming of the angels,
His parents,
the shepherds, the animals,
the Star, the Babe,
and the wise men, the coming
of the Christmas miracle,
the telling of the same story,
never old in the remembering
of the moment when Mary gave birth
to the one who was to come
to save His people, the one God
the only begotten son

to rescue us all from our sin,
from the divide we created
between us and God, the father, the mother
the holy mediator, arbitrator,
sacrificial lamb of God
Waiting as they did, even in the retelling
because it is a timeless story
of infinity love and good
that we need to hear,
until we all get the message
and believe

Hymns:
What Child is This
Silent Night

Fourth Reading: An essay: "Whom Do We Await?"[2]
Whom do we await this Advent? What special things come at this time of year? Holly, ivy, Christmas trees, parties, candy, food, crafts—all these things are special. But *who* is coming? A baby was promised and was delivered many years later. He, Jesus, the Messiah, centered his ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles. This land had been overrun by the Assyrians who took captive the northern kingdom. It is to this very land that the Light would dawn.

Imagine what those people had seen, what they had gone through, yet God had not forgotten them. Their land would be restored, and the Messiah would come and walk on that currently desolate ground someday.

But that is also the problem for them and for us. *Someday* is a long time away. The people waiting for the Messiah stood between the desolation and the promised Light much as we stand today between the Messiah's first coming and His promised return. Some days all we can see is the desolation and destruction, and some days we get so caught up in the cleanup that we forget the promise.

So, for whom do we wait? We are waiting for the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the Wonderful Counselor, the victor over every battle inside us and outside us. This is one who came and who is coming again, the one who died for us, the one who is alive and dwells in our hearts.

It is by Immanuel—God with us—that we are sustained in hope.

[2] Adapted from LaVerne Heights Presbyterian Church Advent Devotions, by Sue Nordine, LaVerne, CA

Hymn:
Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word "Lord")
The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymns:
O Come All Ye Faithful
(optional) We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Extra material:

Poem: What We Heard on Christmas Day *with a line from Longfellow*, by Julie L. Moore

Silence like early morning, like indigo
deepening at the bottom of the sea.
For hundreds of years.
No voice to say *this is the way*.
Or *tomorrow, he comes*. They raised
their questions, rose each morning, found
no answers. Unless you count
Wait. But after the hush
of prophecy, the long line of law,
exile centuries ago just a bitter aftertaste
in their empty mouths, sting
of dust on their ribs dulled, almost imperceptible,
a baby wailed. And if you listened close,
you knew your ears did not deceive you.
He had entered the ebony tomb
of Earth, loosening at last his long-held tongue,
the star a halo of song blaring overhead,
God is not dead, nor doth He sleep.

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