



*Intergenerational Advent Worship*

## Preparing a Path for God

by Leslee Alfano

This service invites participants to consider preparations for Advent. How did people in biblical times prepare for Advent? How can people in our times prepare so that God may be discovered in the world and in daily life? Advent declares the presence of God in real ways. How do we make a path toward that reality?

Designed for a multi-age group, this two-hour event was held on the first Sunday of Advent, 9:30—11:30 a.m., at Toronto Chinese United Church. Small-group activities enabled participants to consider scriptures and create a short story or drama with a symbol. These were shared in total group worship. The service concluded with an informal lunch.

### Preparation

The worship space was a large auditorium. It was divided into four areas:

1. entry path and prayer chain activity table
2. large circle of chairs with undecorated tree as focal point, along with Advent wreath
3. four or five activity areas with tables and chairs for small groups
4. refreshments and lunch area

### Entry Path and Prayer Chain Activity

Participants arrived gradually for this service. The opening section was designed to have something

immediate for focus. Large ovals of grey and brown bristol board were cut, and wadded newspaper was stuck to the back of each to form “stones.” A variety of things were glued or printed on the stones, such as ads for goods, newspaper images of world situations, and words such as fear, greed, racism, bullies, and busy. These were placed on the floor at the entrance to the auditorium, spaced so that no single path was obvious.

The “Big Question” was printed in big letters on a sheet of newsprint in the midst of the stones: “How do we clear a path for God in our lives?”

### Paper Chain

Lots of strips for paper chain links were cut from newspaper advertising flyers. Plain white paper links were also cut. Small staplers, glue, and markers were made available. Instructions were printed as follows: “Add links to make a paper chain. Include one plain white paper link on which you can write a prayer or hope that you have for our world or for your life as we get ready for Christmas.”

This activity also gave participants of various ages something to do throughout the service time. It grew into a giant paper chain.

### Activity Areas

Tables and chairs were set up to create four activity areas. After the activity choices were explained,

participants were invited to make their own path to one of these areas.

### Activity Areas 1–3

These activities were based on small groups. Each studied a different scripture passage and story/article:

- Activity Area 1: Jeremiah 1:4–8 and a modern story about children and youth, such as a story about Free the Children, the organization started by Craig Kielburger
- Activity Area 2: Luke 19:1–8 and a good-news story from *Mandate Special Edition* or another stewardship resource
- Activity Area 3: Matthew 2:13–15 and a good-news story chosen from an issue of *Mandate*, especially one with a focus on support for refugees

Here is the activity all three groups did:

1. Read the scripture and consider these questions:
  - What blocks the path for God’s good news?
  - What opens a path for God’s good news?
2. Read the good-news story and consider the same two questions.
3. Make a symbol of one or both stories.
4. Create a new story or drama by placing the biblical story in a modern setting or telling it from an eyewitness’s point of view as if it happened today.

Sheets of plain paper, markers, and scissors were provided, as well as a paper chain link to glue onto the symbol so it could be attached to the paper prayer chain.

### Activity Area 4: Quiet Reflection

Not everyone feels like working in a group. Quiet personal reflection or sharing with one or two others can be a choice. In this activity area were copies of the scriptures and good-news stories from



Activity Areas 1–3 and the two questions for quiet reading and personal reflection.

### Activity Area 5: Prayer Chain Writing and Sorting

In this area, participants could work on adding more links to the paper chain and sorting out prayers written on it into two categories. Two sheets of paper were provided, with headings at the top of both. Prayers that offered thoughts on clearing a path to welcome God in our lives in this season were written down on one page, and prayers that were about clearing a path to share God’s love for the world were written on the other.

# WORSHIP

## Service Outline: Preparing a Path for God

### The Advent Journey Begins

Welcome to this service of worship for all ages celebrating the first Sunday of Advent. As you enter the worship space, let your preparation for this season begin. You will be making a path around many stones. Take time to view the stones and quietly consider the “big question” in the midst of the stones.

### Making a Prayer Chain

Here you can add links to form a paper chain. Try to include one plain paper link on which you have written a prayer or hope that you have for our world as we get ready for Christmas. Leave your prayer chain at the table to be joined to others later.

Continue your journey to the worship circle.

### Gathering for Singing

(A selection of songs, including the following:)

- “This Little Light of Mine”
- “For All Your Goodness, God” (*Voices United*, #549), sung as a round

### Introduction and Announcements

#### Invitation to a Holy Time

- “Kum Ba Yah (Come By Here),” chorus only
- We listen for the shofar. (*Give explanation of shofar, including a picture and a recorded sound, or use a trumpet or create your own sound in place of the shofar.*)

**One:** For God’s people long ago, every Sabbath was a holy time, a worship day that began at sunset on Friday and continued all day Saturday. Every Friday at sunset, the shofar was played. The sound of the shofar said:

**All: A holy time is about to begin. Get ready.**

**One:** The prophet Isaiah lived in the wisdom of ancient times. He heard that shofar each Sabbath. Maybe one day, he went along a rocky path on a grey, cloudy day and looked at the faraway hills, the ups and downs, the twists and turns of the dusty road. Maybe he saw, far away, a patch of blue sky and a ray of sun breaking through and then the shofar sounded. Like that patch of blue sky on a cloudy day, it sounded bright and hopeful. It said:

**All: A holy time is about to begin. Get ready.**

**One:** And Isaiah heard these words of hope rise up in his heart:

**All: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.** (Isaiah 40:3–5)

### Musical Reflection

“Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord” from *Godspell*

### Lighting of the Advent Candle for Hope

As the candle is lit, please join in singing the first verse of “Hope Is a Star” (VU #7).

### Prayer

Holy One,  
help us to make this Advent a hopeful time to become more aware of your Spirit in our lives.

**You are good news for our journey and good news for our world.**

Sometimes this season brings pressure to buy and get more and more things.

**Help us to keep finding our way back to you,  
to make room for your Spirit.  
Help us to keep our hearts centred on what really matters in this time  
by sharing your love along our paths.  
Amen.**

### We Greet Each Other

The peace of Christ be with you.

### Choose Your Path

*(Explain the activity areas, and let everyone know gathering music will signal the time to return to the large group.)*

### Hymn

“Prepare the Way of the Lord” (VU #10)

### Presentations from Activity Areas

*(The prayer chain is brought into the circle of chairs and gradually placed around the tree. Attach each group’s symbol to the prayer chain as the group winds a section of the chain around the tree.)*

*(Activity Area 1: Story and prayer chain symbol)*

*(sung response)* **You are speaking, Lord, help us hear...** *(tune: “Kum Ba Yah”)*

*(Activity Area 2: Story and prayer chain symbol)*

*(sung response)* **You are teaching, Lord, help us learn...** *(tune: “Kum Ba Yah”)*

*(Activity Area 3: Story and prayer chain symbol)*

*(sung response)* **You are loving, Lord, help us care...** *(tune: “Kum Ba Yah”)*

*(Activity Area 4: Give participants an opportunity to share insights from their reading.)*

### Offering and Prayer

*(Read the prayers collected from the prayer chain.)*

### Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (VU #1)

### Benediction and Challenge

**One:** Clear a path! Make a way for God to be in your life.

**All: God has come and God is coming into the world.**

**One:** How would God come into the world? As a king? leader? servant? prince?

**All: A baby, child, youth, adult—that was Jesus, but there was more. The Spirit is in you. You are God’s special one.**

**One:** God needs you to be light in this holy time. The Spirit is already here. We don’t have to wait, but maybe God is waiting for us—to discover hope, to see what good we can do, and to make our lives a welcome place for God.

Let’s work together and clear the stones away so that a path appears to the door outside where we will continue our Advent journey to share God’s good news of hope wherever we go. **E**

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