

An Advent Reflection: A Promise of Peace

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Background: This program is designed for use as a one night advent worship service. The focus is as an intergenerational program. The hope is for worshippers to consider peace as a joyous concept that rises up during the Christmas season, drawing in and including those of all faiths, sweeping everyone along with its power.

Time Frame: The time frame would vary depending on the length of your dinner/ station portion of the night, and which portions of the service you follow.

Book used: *Amazing Peace*

Author: Maya Angelou

Illustrators: Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher

ISBN: 978-0-375-84150-7

Publisher: Schwartz & Wade Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

Illustrations: Oil, acrylic, and fabric on canvas

Included CD: Poem read by the poet at the lighting of the National Christmas Tree, Dec, 1,2005.

Subject Matter: A message of peace and spirit that can be passed throughout the community during the Advent season and beyond. Originally read at the 2005 White House tree-lighting ceremony and published as a Christmas book, it celebrates the spirit of the season—a time to learn to look beyond complexion and see community—with a resonating call for hope, unity, and, above all, peace. This poem was largely inspired by the terrible natural disasters occurring throughout the world when Angelou was invited to read at the 2005 White House tree-lighting ceremony. Thus, the opening lines rumble and roil almost menacingly to illustrate the climate of doubt and anxiety into which the spirit of Christmas arrives. Hope enters as a whisper and grows until it is "louder than the explosion of bombs." The harsher aspects of the world fade as people of all faiths and races join together in trust and brotherhood. The richly textured acrylic, oil, and fabric collage illustrations reflect the sentiments of the poem while also telling their own story, as a family makes their way through a snowy small town to join their multicultural community in a celebration at the town hall. From the strings of Christmas lights on buildings ingeniously constructed from textured fabric to the glorious washes of candlelight on the carolers' faces, these illustrations are an integral part of the worship service. Each station prepares the worshipper to follow a journey throughout the book.

Spaces and Materials Needed:

Fellowship Hall/ dining area and Sanctuary/ worship space

Dining area set for buffet style dinner. The dinner can be bringing a family favorite casserole, international flavors exhibiting cultures within your community, or favorite Christmas foods.

Station#1

- **Materials Needed:** Glass candle holders. (2 per person), Small pieces of tissue paper (various colors), glue, white tapered candles.
- **Activity:** Glue the tissue paper pieces to the inside of the candle holders to represent stained glass. Create two per person/ family. Place a candle into each finished holder.

One holder will be for people to take home, and one will be used in the worship service and then given afterward to shut-ins or new members.

Station #2

- Materials Needed: Knitting needles or crochet needles, Quilting supplies, yarn, fabric scraps
- Activity: Creating fabric. Have members who can knit, crochet and or quilt give mini lessons on how to create a fabric.

Station #3

- Materials needed: Purple paper/index cards, pencils, pens or markers
- Activity: Write a poem or statement with your personal reflections on the Advent season.

Station #4

- Materials needed: Supplies to make an advent wreath.
- Activity: Make an advent wreath.

Station #5.

- Research and provide a representation of a culture in your neighborhood. How do they celebrate the Advent season?

Station #6

- Materials needed: Precut fabric strips, dark markers
- Activity: Write a peace prayer on the fabric strips. Tell participants that the strips will be used in worship.

WORSHIP

- Sanctuary Set Up: Lights need to be dimmed. Wooden manger to be placed front and center, but needs to be accessible to all to reach. Place three large candles behind the manger, slightly elevated but still accessible. (ALTERNATIVE: Use three candles from the sanctuary advent wreath OR 7 glass ornaments.)
- Material needed: Reflections questions, and worship bulletin.

Order of Service:

Lights need to be dimmed and will gradually be turned up until the end of the book is read. The sanctuary will be fully illuminated at the end of the reading. One person is needed to control the sanctuary light switches.

Each person/family will bring a candle holder into the sanctuary and place them in 7 groupings around the manger.

As people arrive to worship a solo saxophone or jazz band plays appropriate Christmas music quietly in the background. This continues throughout the time when reading the poem.

Opening Prayer. One person or leader.

Scripture Reading. One or two people.

John 16:32-33. (NRSV) the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!

Romans 5: 1-5. (NRSV) Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Reflection of peace. Place at least four people throughout the sanctuary randomly to read the poem passages. Preferably one man, one woman, one child, and one youth or any grouping that represents the intergenerational community.. Make sure to pause for a silent reflection after each mentioning of the word **PEACE**. (Readers can be especially dramatic during the last three lines of the poem.) This will happen 7 times throughout the poem, correlating with the 7 candle group lightings.

Light the candles in the holder groupings each time the word **PEACE** is mentioned in the poem. Light the final three larger candles as the three ending lines in the poem are read. Two people, one on each side of the sanctuary may be needed for this activity.

Moment of Silence.

Discussion of the Reflection Questions.

Placement of the peace prayer strips. Have the soloist begin playing again, individually have the people come forward to the manger and weave their prayer strips together loosely, as a blanket to cover the manger. Reposition the candle groupings if needed.

ALTERNATIVE: Hand out several glass ornaments randomly to people as they enter the sanctuary. During the poem reading have these people come forward one at a time as the word **PEACE** is read out during the poem. Hang the ornaments on the Christmas tree, as a reminder of the peace prayers of / for the community.

Closing Hymn.

Benediction: 2Corinthians 13:11-13. (Read in unison.)(NRSV) Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Passing of the peace with your neighbors.

Reflections Questions for a Promise of Peace

What phrases stood out to you?

What images comes to your mind from the poem or the Scripture verses?

What message do you hear in this reflection?

What do you hear God calling you to do as a result of hearing this reflection or Scripture reading?