

Introduction

Advent begins this year on Sunday 28th November.

The words of the prophet Isaiah, *“the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; for those living in a land of deep darkness, a light has shone upon them”* (Is. 9:2) are very significant ones. They speak of the coming of new hope in difficult times. The words foretell the coming of the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah is an ‘Advent’ prophet for our times too and his words remind us that in the darkest of times we are called to be people of hope.



What does being a person of hope look like in our CEIST schools? It looks like gentleness with one another, kindness shown to those most in need of kindness. It isn't the endless smiles of the incurably optimistic. Rather it's the fortitude and confidence that comes from knowing that God walks with us and that the plans God has for us in our lives are to, in the words of another Old Testament, Jeremiah, “prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jer. 29:11). Hope then is the deeply human capacity we have to endure, to keep going, and in this endurance to love one another because deep down we know as human beings that love is what makes life bearable and beautiful.

Hope in a CEIST school is also about community. The Christmas story is the story of Emmanuel – Christ with us. The ‘us’ matters here hugely. We are to be Christ to one another and particularly to be Christ to those on the margins. The call is simple but challenging. How are we to be community together in a way that shows the whole world what faith, hope and love look like? How are we to do in *now* in this time and in this place when these qualities are so badly needed in our families, communities and in our world?

In our Advent resource for CEIST schools this year, we offer 3 different prayers, each for the lighting of the Advent candle for that week. We also offer a prayer for the final day of school. All four prayers are suitable to be read over the intercom or with a small group as part of an RE class or a Tutor period. Each prayer service/reflection takes no more than 7 minutes. For each of them you'll need your Advent Wreath and the assistance of two students. As usual, adapt as you wish.

The three prayers are outlines here:

Week 1: A people that walked in darkness (light candle 1- purple) – any day the week beginning the Monday 29th November 2021.

Week 2: Have seen a great light (light candle 2 – purple) – any day the week beginning 6th December 2021.

Week 3: On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned (light candle 3 - joy) – any day the week beginning 13th December 2021.

Week 4: The people rejoice before you! (light candle 4 – purple) (Suggestion: the last day of school)

Finally, interspersed in this resource for you, the Principal are some poems about hope, Christmas, Advent and community. They can be used as part of your weekly prayers or posted on your social media account or around the physical building.

If you are posting on social media about any aspect of Advent it would be great if you could use the hashtags #AdventCEIST, #hope, #CEISThope. That way we can link up with one another as CEIST schools and help build our sense of community together.

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Week 1: The people that walked in darkness

Principal: We began the season of Advent on Sunday. Advent marks the time of preparation for Christmas. And the Advent Wreath with its four candles is the way we count down the weeks of Advent. So this week, we mark the first first week of Advent by lighting the first candle on our Advent Wreath.



We welcome _____ (student) and _____ (student) to help with our lighting ceremony.

As we stand here together to light the candle, we are reminded of the words of Anne Frank, *“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.”* The darkness in our world is obvious and yet light defies it. Again, the very famous quotation, *“Better to light a candle than curse the darkness”* springs to mind.

Student _____: Advent is the start of a new year in the Christian calendar. It also recognises that this is a dark time of the year and these days are particularly challenging for a lot of us. There is a definite sense of darkness in our world at the moment. The prophet Isaiah writing thousands of years ago talking about a ‘people who walked in darkness’. As we pray this morning we pause to reflect together on the struggles we face and the hope we look towards. The response to our prayer is **‘Lord graciously hear us’**.

Student _____:

We pray for those who are sick in our families, school and in our community. May God’s healing touch bring consolation in mind and body. **Lord hear us.**

We pray for those who are struggling at the moment in all kinds of ways. May they beware always of our care for them and of God’s unfailing love. **Lord hear us.**

Student _____:

We pray for our country as we continue to struggle against COVID. We pray in particular for those who work in our hospitals, nursing homes and our GP practices. We pray that in the midst of the darkness of this time, they will have a deep sense of our support for them and of God’s love for them in all that they do in our communities. **Lord hear us.**

Principal:


As our short service draws to a close and we move now to light the first candle of our Advent wreath. The first candle, which is purple, symbolizes hope. It is sometimes called the “Prophecy Candle” in remembrance of the prophets, especially Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ. It represents the expectation felt in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

As we light our candle, we remember again the words of Anne Frank, *“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.”* We pray together words of challenge and consolation as we say together, “Our Father...”

I now invite _____ (student) to light our candle for us.

I cannot tell you how the light comes, by Jan Richardson

I cannot tell you
how the light comes.
What I know
is that it is more ancient
than imagining.
That it travels
across an astounding expanse
to reach us.
That it loves
searching out
what is hidden
what is lost
what is forgotten
or in peril
or in pain.
That it has a fondness
for the body
for finding its way
toward flesh
for tracing the edges
of form
for shining forth
through the eye,
the hand,
the heart.
I cannot tell you

how the light comes,
but that it does.
That it will.
That it works its way
into the deepest dark
that enfolds you,
though it may seem
long ages in coming
or arrive in a shape
you did not foresee.
And so
may we this day
turn ourselves toward it.
May we lift our faces
to let it find us.
May we bend our bodies
to follow the arc it makes.
May we open
and open more
and open still
to the blessed light
that comes.
~ Jan Richardson 
(From *Ten Poems for Difficult Times*
by Roger Housden)



Week 2: Have seen a great light

Principal: Welcome to our prayer today, marking the second week of Advent. This week we reflect on some more words from the Prophet Isaiah. Last week we heard about Isaiah describing ‘a people that walked in darkness’. Today we listen to the second part of Isaiah’s words where he tells us that this people ‘have seen a great light’. Jesus is described to us as ‘the light of the world’ (John’s Gospel 8:12). We take a candle into the room to dispel darkness, likewise Jesus comes into the world to dispel hopelessness, fear, hate, sin and sorrow. In this way the prophet Isaiah foretells the coming of Christ.

Now I welcome _____ (student) and _____ (student) to help with our lighting ceremony. And we pause to reflect on ‘light’

Student _____:

The poet Jan Richardson tells us that she “*doesn’t know how the light comes but it does, that it will*”. Every night we sleep in darkness and in the morning light eventually comes. So now we pray for an awareness of light. It is this awareness of light that can help bring us hope. **Lord hear us.**

Student _____:

We pray in gratitude for our families, and friends, and for anyone in our life who brings with them a feeling of light and joy, who makes our life a little bit easier simply by being themselves. We pray in gratitude for the ways we each have been this person for one another in our school over these difficult few months. **Lord hear us.**

Student _____:

We pray in gratitude for our teachers in our school and the ways in which they shine the light of knowledge and learning in and through all the subjects they teach us. And more than that for the kindness, and good humour they show us in all that they do. **Lord hear us.**

Student _____:

Finally, we pray in gratitude for the faith that we have, that was given to us and shared with us by your families, teachers and friends. In challenging times, we turn to our faith, to the God who is love, to console and help us in all that we do. **Lord hear us.**

Principal:

As we light this second candle, a candle marking hope in darkness, we remember in particular in our school _____ (you might insert a special intention here or something about your school’s own particular history/heritage as an example of hope).

_____ will now light our second candle.

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Week 3: On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned

Principal:

Today we light our third candle. The third candle is pink and symbolizes joy. The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday and is meant to remind us of the joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus.

We welcome _____ (student) and _____ (student) third candle.

We know from planting bulbs in the deep, dark earth that then slowly grow and break through that darkness into light. Think also of the image of sunrise. The slow brightening of the sky after the long, dark night. This is the image the prophet Isaiah used when he said, *"On those living in the light of deep darkness a light has dawned"*. And so again this week, this time as we light our rose coloured candle, we pray for the peace that comes from know light comes after darkness and that Jesus is that light for our world.

Student _____ :

Today we pray for one another, that we might realise the light that is in us as we try to bring hope and peace to one another. We pray in gratitude for the joy in our own lives; in what we learn, through our sports, music and other hobbies. Through our friendship and in our family life. May we always appreciate simple moments of joy when they come to us. **Lord hear us.**

Student _____ :

We pray for our community here in _____ (school name), that we would live together as a community focused on helping one another become people of joy and hope.

We pray for those who have died over the last year. We pray for Resurrection light and that they might rest in peace. **Lord hear us.** (You can insert the names of specific people lost to your school community here but feel free to leave it more general).

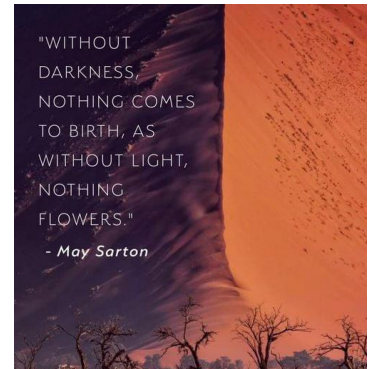
Student _____ :

The poet May Sorton wrote, *"Without darkness nothing comes to birth, as without light nothing flowers"*. As we reflect this Advent, and as we approach Christmas, may we take time out in nature to be healed and helped to understand the wisdom of these words. **Lord hear us.**

Principal:

As we light this third candle, a candle marking joy, we remember in particular in our school _____ (you might insert a special intention here or something about your school's own particular history/heritage as an example of joy). **Lord hear us.**

_____ will now light our third candle.



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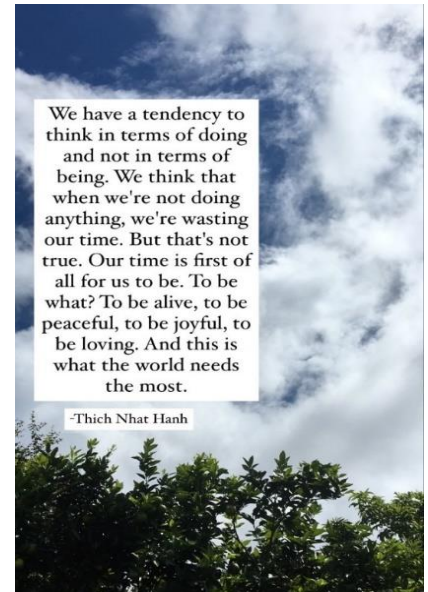
Week 4: The people rejoice before you!

Principal:

We continue to look forward to Christmas which is only now a few days away! We've the Christmas tree up, the presents wrapped, the cakes made, the shopping done (*or words to this effect!*). Today's final candle is going to be shortly lit by _____ (student).

We pause to reflect a little bit on the meaning of the prophet Isaiah's words, "the people rejoice before you!"

Why does Jesus's birth bring such joy to the world? Why is it such an important moment not just in the history of Christianity but in the history of the world? What broke through in that moment. Christians believe God became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ in this who created the entire universe, became one of us so that we would know how much we are loved. Christians all over the world will contemplate this on Christmas day in a particular way and we invite you to consider two things you can take from this for the two weeks of your Easter holidays.



Student _____:

The mystic Thich Than Nan wrote, "*We have a tendency to think in terms of doing and not in terms of being. We think that when we are not doing anything, we are wasting our time. But that is not true. Our time is first of all for us to be. To be what? To be alive, to be peaceful, to be joyful, to be loving. And that is what the world needs most.*" This Christmas, we pray that we can simply 'be'. Christmas teaches us that to be human is a most amazing thing. God blesses all of humanity in becoming one of us. We pray that we can rest and take some time just to relax. And in those moments of quiet, to remember what an amazing thing it is simply to be.

Student _____:

The second thing that Christmas teaches us is that to be together, to be part of a family or a community is amazing. Some people may well be lonely this year. The writer, Michael Meade had this to say about the last few months, "*The world as we knew it is already gone. The point now is to live a bigger truth in which the words, 'we're all in this together', have genuine heartfelt meaning*". And so we pray that we would take these few weeks of holidays to really reach out to one another and to enjoy one another, to enjoy being part of our families, friendships, communities. This is the ultimate message if Christmas. Emmanuel, God with us, God with us together.

Principal _____:

To conclude our four weeks of Advent prayers, we listen now to the reading from the Book of Isaiah in full.

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Student _____:

A reading from the Book of Isaiah

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as people rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

The word of the Lord.

Principal:

And so we pause to pray in our own time in our hearts for our own intentions this Christmas. *(Take a few moments of silence).....Lord hear us.*

Principal:

And now we light our fourth candle. We light this candle as a symbol of the love, peace, joy and hope of Christmas. This is what I wish for you and your families over these two weeks and this is what we as an entire community here in _____ (name of school) wish for one another.

_____ will now light our final candle.

