

SPIRITUAL LIFE HIGHLIGHTS

Communion served at in-person service

LA GRANDE — St. Peter's Episcopal Church will meet for worship at 11 a.m. on Sunday, Dec. 5. The service will include Holy Communion. Masks and social distancing are required.

The service will be livestreamed, and the link to that stream will be posted on the church's Facebook page on Saturday, Dec. 4. That same link can be used to watch the service at a later time.

Advent observance features special reading and music

LA GRANDE — First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will celebrate Peace on the Second Sunday of Advent, Dec. 5, during the 10 a.m. worship service. Pastor Archie Hook's message will be drawn from John 14:27-29: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

SUBMISSIONS

Churches and faith-based groups are encouraged to submit Highlights for the Spiritual Life page by 4 p.m. Tuesday for publication Thursday. Submit by email to news@lagrandeobserver.com (with Highlights in the subject line).

The Advent reading and candle lighting will be done by Ginger Webster, Nicole Wallace and Brody and Kennedy Wallace, and the service will feature a special musical number by Liz Cooper and Vicki Grammer.

Fellowship time follows worship

LA GRANDE — Zion Lutheran Church's worship service on Sunday, Dec. 5, begins at 9 a.m. The service, which will include Holy Communion, will be followed by a time of fellowship. Masks and social distancing are required.

The service will be streamed live to YouTube, and the link for that stream will be posted on Zion's Facebook page and website on Saturday, Dec. 4.

Attend Dec. 5 stake conference virtually or in person

NORTHEASTERN OREGON — Elder Gary Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will speak at a special stake conference on Sunday, Dec. 5, accompanied by Elder Ken Firmage, Area Seventy. This meeting will start at 9 a.m. (PST) and can be attended in person or virtually. The meeting will also be broadcast to Baker City, John Day, Enterprise and Pine Valley. The virtual link for the meeting will be sent out via email — contact your ward's leadership if you are interested and have not received it by Saturday.

The "Come, Follow Me" lesson for the week of Dec. 6 will be based on the Articles of Faith (in the Pearl of Great Price) and Official Declarations 1-2 (in the Doctrine and Covenants). Declaration 1 ended the practice of plural marriage in 1890, and Declaration 2 removed all restrictions with regard to race that applied to the priesthood prior to 1978.

Members are encouraged to visit www.lighttheworld.org to learn about special ways to celebrate this season as we celebrate the birth and life of Jesus Christ.

Dec. 8 Advent service includes soup supper

LA GRANDE — The sermon at Faith Lutheran Church's La Grande service on Sunday, Dec. 5, beginning at 10 a.m., will expound on John the Baptist's ministry of preparing people for the arrival ("advent") of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. His ministry included the warnings about things that were to come. With Jesus' first coming,

the Messiah did the necessary work to grant salvation to humankind; with his next coming, there will be wrath. Following the Divine Service will be a meeting and a meal.

On Wednesday, Dec. 8, Faith Lutheran's midweek Advent service will focus on the "Cloud in the Tabernacle." A soup supper is served at 5:30 p.m., and the service begins at 6:30 p.m.

Facebook page provides access to service, sermons

LA GRANDE — The First Presbyterian Church will celebrate the Second Sunday of Advent at 9:30 a.m. Dec. 5. Pastor Laura will preach from Ezekial 37:1-4 with a sermon titled "The Spirit's Peace." Masks and social distancing are required.

The service is also available online, at www.facebook.com/groups/fpclagrande. Access to the sermons are available at that link anytime.

— The Observer

Waiting, watching and preparing for the advent of the Messiah



ROBERTA SMYTHE
WALKING WITH THE SHEPHERD

In liturgical churches such as mine (Lutheran and Episcopal in my case, though there are others), this past Sunday was the beginning of a new church year. For these liturgical denominations, the church year begins with the first Sunday of Advent. Of course, you don't have to be part of a liturgical tradition to be familiar with some Advent practices, like an Advent wreath or an Advent calendar, both used to count down to Christmas.

But for liturgical churches, Advent is more than a countdown to Christmas. It is a season in its own right. Depending on a given congregation or pastor within the liturgical tradition, there may be little or no Christmas music during the four Sundays of Advent (with the possible exception of the children's Christmas pageant). Rather, Christmas music is saved for Christmas Eve and

the Season of Christmas (which lasts the 12 days of Christmas, beginning on Christmas, not ending on it). Of course, even folks in liturgical churches are often ready for Christmas music and decorations long before Christmas Eve. And there's nothing wrong with enjoying the Christmas atmosphere well before Christmas. (I certainly do.)

But in worship, we have a different focus. The season of Advent is a time of waiting, watching and preparing. It is a time of hearing the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah, of God's desire to save humankind, and hearing John the Baptist cry out "Prepare the way of the Lord." In fact, many of the texts for the Christmas portion of Handel's Messiah are from these Old Testament texts, not from the New Testament Christmas narrative. So, in our worship, it won't be until the fourth Sunday of Advent, less than a week before Christmas, that we will start to hear about Mary, Joseph and angelic visitors.

And yet Advent (which

means "coming") goes beyond waiting and preparing for the coming of Jesus as an infant. It is also about preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ into our lives today. Additionally, it is about watching, waiting and preparing for when Jesus will come again in the future.

Though we may listen to Christmas music in our cars and homes during Advent, may put up Christmas decorations and lights, may be engaged in the more traditional Christmas preparations of gifting and celebrating during Advent, we also set ourselves apart for a time each week in worship, to focus on the larger narrative that shows how much of biblical history was leading up to Jesus' birth, and why his birth was necessary. Once we hear and learn of the "reason for the season" over the course of Advent, we can then better appreciate the awe and wonder of that precious birth.

Roberta Smythe is the pastor of La Grande's Zion Lutheran and St. Peter's Episcopal churches.

What is the season of Advent?

The Observer

Advent, which begins the church's liturgical year, began Nov. 28, 2021. Advent encompasses the four weeks leading up to the celebration of Christmas. The season of Advent, which means "coming," is observed by many as a time of preparation of hearts and minds for the anniversary of the Lord's birth on Christmas.

Many congregations celebrate Advent by putting up an Advent wreath and lighting candles each week. The use of the wreath and candles during Advent are a longstanding tradition that was originally adopted by Christians in the Middle Ages as part of their spiritual preparation for observing Christ's birth.

The wreath and candles are full of symbolism tied to the Christmas season. The wreath itself signifies continuous life. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, in the Advent tradition symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul and the everlasting life found in Christ.

The candles also have their own special signifi-



Getty Images

In the Christian tradition, Advent candles are lit on the four Sundays preceding Christmas, representing hope, faith, joy and peace. A white candle, which often is added on Christmas Eve, is a symbol of the purity of Christ.

cance. Often congregations light one candle on each of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas.

The first candle symbolizes hope. It is sometimes called the "Prophesy 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.

The second candle represents faith. It is called the "Bethlehem Candle," as a reminder of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

The third candle symbolizes joy and is called the "Shepherd's Candle." The third Sunday of Advent is sometimes referred to as Gaudete Sunday ("gaudete" means "rejoice"). It is meant to be

a reminder of the joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus.

On the fourth week of Advent, the final candle is lit to mark the final week of prayer and penance as the faithful wait for the Messiah. This final candle, the "Angel's Candle," symbolizes peace. It is a symbol of the message of the angels: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men."

Some traditions place a white candle in the middle of the wreath that is lit on Christmas Eve. This candle is called the "Christ Candle" and represents the purity of the life of Christ.

Celebrating the season of Advent is a way to open your mind and heart to welcome the Christ child.

— This article was adapted from www.mercyhome.org.

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Services This Week