Call to Worship by Slettom Jeanyne

How shall we prepare this house for the birth of Jesus?

**With branches of cedar, the tree of excellence and strength.**

How shall we prepare this house for the eternal Christ?

**With garlands of pine and fir, whose leaves are ever living, ever green.**

How shall we prepare this house for the prophet of Galilee?

**With wreaths of holly and ivy, telling of his passion, death and resurrection.**

How shall we prepare our hearts for this revelation of God?

**By hearing again the words of the prophets and the promises of God.**

Today we wait with Hope for the light of Christ to shine in the dark places of lives and memories.

**We wait in Hope for God’s vision of wholeness, justice, and peace for all creation to be born again in Bethlehem.**

The meaning of Hanging of the Greens adapted from Slettom Jeanyne

Over 2,000 years ago, the story goes, a group of sleepy shepherds were watching over their sheep on a star-light hillside in Palestine. It was a still, uneventful night until suddenly the darkness was filled with a strange light. The stillness was broken by angel voices singing “Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, goodwill to all.” A baby had been born who they proclaimed to be the promised Messiah. This event became so important and central to the Christian faith that our ancestors thought a time of preparation was necessary before we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Advent (from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming") is the season of expectant waiting that we prepare for today. Both the seasons of Advent and Christmas have customs developed through many centuries and many countries. Old customs have been refined and renewed and new ones are added.

This morning we’ll begin to prepare our sanctuary for this holy season, but this is simply an outward reminder of our inner preparations. Whether or not we decorate, Christ will still come. The question we must consider in the coming weeks is, ‘Are we ready to receive The Christ?’ As we work together today to prepare our church with these holy symbols, may our working together, our singing together, and hearing God’s Word proclaimed together, prepare you to accept the gift of Christ again this Christmas.

Before each hymn we’ll announce how you can help and then while we sing we will add symbols of the season to our décor!

So, let’s begin! First, we’ll bring in the evergreen garlands reminding us of ever-lasting life even in the cold, dark days of winter. Anyone who would like to help hang our ever-green garland, please come forward as we sing...

Hymn  *Wild and Lone the Prophet’s Voice*  FWS #2089
Prayer for Illumination: **Good-Gift-Giver, help us receive the gift of your Truth and fill us with your Light so that we might bring your Love to all the world. Following Christ we live and pray, AMEN.**

First Bible Reading - Matthew 3:1-3
In those days John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea announcing, “Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!” He was the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke when he said: The voice of one shouting in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight.”

Las Posadas is a time of celebration in Mexico and the Southwestern United States. During the celebration “pilgrims” journey from house to house led by an “angel” symbolizing the journey of Mary and Joseph who went from house to house seeking shelter while singing songs. Finally, the last house, the “inn”, welcomes all of the pilgrims in for prayers, feasting, and festivities.

The Poinsettia, which children carry along the procession route during Las Posadas, is native to North America. The people of Mexico and Central America call the brilliant tropical plant the “Flower of the Holy Night,” and its shape – a many-pointed star – has become a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem. Because these plants turn bright and lively in the cold, short days of winter, we see echoes of a Christmas miracle. We’ll now bring in the Flowers of the Holy Night as a reminder that Christ brings life to a suffering world.

Let’s have the children bring in these shining stars of Bethlehem as we sing our next hymn, and then they can stay up front for children’s time...

**Hymn**  
_Toda la Tierra (All Earth Is Waiting)_  
UMH #210

Teaching our Children - Explaining and assembling the Advent wreath. Plugging in the lights!

Isaiah 61:1-3
The Lord God’s spirit is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release for captives, and liberation for prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and a day of vindication for our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for Zion’s mourners, to give them a crown in place of ashes, oil of joy in place of mourning, a mantle of praise in place of discouragement. They will be called Oaks of Righteousness, planted by the Lord to glorify himself.

As we sing our next hymn let’s decorate the Christmas trees and assemble the nativity! As is tradition we’ll wait to add the Baby Jesus until Christmas Eve as a visual remind of our expectant waiting during Advent.

*Hymn*  
_People Look East_  
UMH #202

Giving our Tithes and Offerings  
Doxology  
UMH #95  
Prayer of Dedication

Stewardship Minute
Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem by Dr. Maya Angelou

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.
Flood waters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche
Over unprotected villages.
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.
What have we done to so affront nature?
We worry God.
Are you there? Are you there really?
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters,
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the corner.
Flood waters recede into memory.
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.
At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.
We hear a sweetness.
The word is Peace.
It is loud now. It is louder.
Louder than the explosion of bombs.
We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence. It is what we have hungered for. Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace. A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies. Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas. We beckon this good season to wait a while with us. We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come. Peace. Come and fill us and our world with your majesty. We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian, Implore you, to stay a while with us. So we may learn by your shimmering light How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time. On this platform of peace, we can create a language To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ Into the great religions of the world. We jubilate the precious advent of trust. We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope. All the earth’s tribes loosen their voices To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortal’s, Believers and Non-Believers, Look heavenward and speak the word aloud. Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud. Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Pastoral Prayer ending with The Lord’s Prayer

As we sing our closing hymn let’s extend the welcome for others to join us in the holy season of preparation by hanging the wreaths on our doors.

*Hymn  
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus  
UMH #196

*Benediction