

Christmas Devotional

Courtesy of the Montreat Program Department

As we sit down to a meal this Christmas, chances are our celebrations look different this year – Christmas Eve service via screen, canceled travel plans, empty chairs at our tables. And yet, the Good News persists! Christ is born and we can celebrate the warmth he brings to our lives even as they are disrupted.

“Judaism has the concept of hiddur mitzvah, or making a ritual beautiful—the idea being that cooking delicious food and using beautiful ritual objects for observing or celebrating holidays makes them all the more holy. In the grim landscape of COVID, we need that moment of beauty more than ever.” (S. Bear Bergman)

In the spirit of hiddur mitzah, we offer you this ritual for your meal this Christmas. We hope it adds warmth, joy, and meaning to your time at the table.

Ritual

Opening Prayer: Creator God, thank you for coming to us in the body of Jesus Christ. We remember today that he was born to parents in need of shelter and was offered warmth by the hospitality of strangers. We celebrate that he shared himself, teaching and showing the world the miracles that arise from your love. As we eat our meal, remind us of the many meals Jesus shared, including those with Levi, Zaccheus, Mary, and Martha, the thousands who came to hear him teach, and especially the meals with his disciples. Send us your Spirit that this meal may be like those -- ordinary food filled with love and grace. Amen.



Light a candle or candles. Leave the lighted candles throughout your meal. Optionally, have one candle per person and pass the light and peace of Christ as you might in church saying to one another, “The peace of Christ be with you.” “And also with you.”

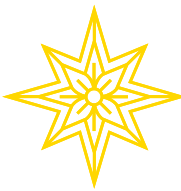


Scripture John 1:1-14: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

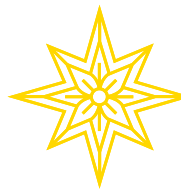
Optional: If you won't be able to attend a Christmas service at a church, consider reading Luke 2:1-20 included at the end of this document, the birth of Jesus.

Ritual Continued

Reflection: In silence or aloud, reflect on the ways you have felt the presence of the Christ child and/or reflect on the ways you can share the warm light of Christ with others. If you are alone or with only those in your household, sing a verse of a Christmas hymn you know by heart -- perhaps “Joy to the World”; “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” or “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” (If you are in a mixed gathering, be careful. Singing allows germs to spread easily.)



Closing Prayer: Loving God, we are grateful for the bounty we receive at this meal-- bounties of food, love, and warmth. As we celebrate your birth among us, keep us mindful of those who experience hunger, pain, and cold. Help us to see your face in theirs and give us the courage to reflect your love and grace. For this food we are about to eat, we give thanks. May every hand that prepared it know your comfort. May it strengthen us and feed not only our bellies but our faith as well. In Jesus Christ, we pray, amen.



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Luke 2:1-20: In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.