



# ADVENT IN THE VALLEY

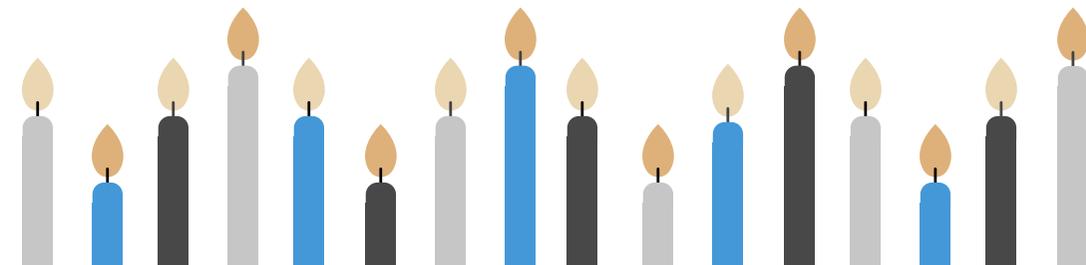
## WEEK 1: HOPE

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a time of waiting and preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth. It is also a time for us to work together for peace among the nations, and peace with each other. It is a time for us to walk in the light God gives us. As part of our Advent waiting, we will light a candle in our Advent wreath to remind us of the hope this season brings.

Today, we light the first candle. The flickering flame reminds us that our hope is lived out in prayer and action.

Let us pray.

Dear God, through your Spirit, you spoke to the prophets of a vision of peace. You spoke to Mary and Joseph of a child who would bring new life to the world. Speak to each of us this day, and fill us with Advent hope as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth. Amen.



"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:34-36

Week One Reflections from Bishop Michael Bird

Over a year ago, Susan and I had the unfortunate experience of hitting a deer on our way up to Barry's Bay. It would be more accurate to say that the deer hit us! It happened in what seemed to be a fraction of a second and the impact required thousands of dollars of repairs to the car. That collision still affects and influences the way each of us drive to this day.

As I travel around the Parish, I find myself far more watchful and alert as I move along the roads and highways, especially at night. It is not uncommon for me to find that I have a sore neck from the intense way I hold my head in constant vigilance. It seems like I know every single twist, turn and incline on the road between Barry's Bay and Cobden.

The Gospel reading on this first Sunday of Advent may well be pointing God's people to the end times or the final fulfilment of the kingdom of God. The phrase, "when these things begin to take place" may also be referring to more current crises like the ongoing persecutions that people were subject to or the siege of Jerusalem that took place in 70 AD. On the first Sunday of Advent 2018, we could point to a number of local, national or international "crises" that God's people need to be concerned about and aware of, as we continue to proclaim Christ's message of love and hope and peace to a troubled and broken world!

For me the Gospel lesson also challenges us to reflect upon just how alert and watchful we are for the Christ's coming into our lives and into our world on a daily basis. Sometimes it seems that our awareness of the signs of God's abundant presence is rather hit and miss and lackadaisical.

I wonder what my life would look like and how our parish and congregations would be impacted if we all were more vigilant and alert to the signs of the coming of God's kingdom at this very moment. As we begin our journey through the Advent season will you commit yourself to pay greater attention to every twist and turn on that road? Let us all stay alert so that: "when you see these things taking place, you will know that the kingdom of God has come near."

### Questions for further reflection:

1. What are some of the local, national and international crisis taking place at the present time and what do the Gospel and our Christian faith have to say about these things?
2. When have you been aware of Christ's coming or a sign of the kingdom of God in your life this past week or past month?
3. What will you do to be more alert or attentive to these signs in this Advent season?