

Week One – Hope

(The Prophecy Candle)

Waiting

“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.” James 5:7

Waiting can be a mixed experience, ranging from joyful anticipation to anxious longing.

Waiting for Christmas is a classic example of joyful waiting, filled with excitement, traditions, and the hopeful anticipation of what the day will bring. The holiday season, especially for children, is often more about the build-up and the magical expectations than the day itself.

Conversely, waiting for significant life events or changes, such as medical results, employment, relationship improvements, or relief from personal struggles like depression, can be filled with anxiety and uncertainty. These periods of waiting can be emotionally challenging, and the outcomes are often uncertain.

For centuries the Jews waited for the Messiah in Jewish history. Despite the lengthy anticipation, when Jesus finally arrived, many did not recognize him because what they hoped for did not align with the reality of his arrival.

As you walk the labyrinth, look at your anticipation for the fullness of God’s Kingdom, reflect on your hopes for the world and the changes you desire within yourself.

This waiting period can be seen as a time of spiritual preparation and growth, much like the months leading up to the birth of Jesus.

When you reach the center, be still and reflect on the hope for the world, as well as the ways new life and change are being birthed within you. Try to find joy in the journey and the preparations, recognizing that growth and transformation often occur during the waiting period.



Week Two – Peace and Preparation (the Bethlehem Candle)

Messy Nativity

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.” Luke 2:6-7a

The concept of messiness in both the arrival of a baby and the Christmas season can be a profound metaphor for the messiness of life itself. Life is full of unexpected challenges, changes, and imperfections. Just as childbirth is a mix of joy and discomfort, life often presents us with a blend of happiness and difficulties.

The Nativity scenes we see at Christmas are indeed picturesque and idealized representations. In reality, Jesus came in all the messiness that babies come with. In reality, our lives are filled with imperfections, whether they are messy relationships, financial struggles, unmet expectations, or personal shortcomings.

However, the message of hope and grace in the Christmas story is that God enters into our messy lives. He doesn't wait for us to have everything together or for our lives to be perfect. Instead, God meets us where we are, in the messiness of our existence, and loves us unconditionally.

Ultimately, the Good News here is one of acceptance, grace, and the reassurance that we don't need to be perfect for God to love us. He embraces us with all our imperfections, just as we are, and that is the true meaning of Christmas – a celebration of the birth of hope and love in the midst of life's messiness.

As you walk the labyrinth think of your own life journey, which often feels like a winding path with unexpected turns and twists. Acknowledge messy areas of your life.

When you reach the center of the labyrinth, pause and reflect on the unconditional love and peace that God offers us.



Week Three – Joy

(The Shepherd’s Candle)

Too Good To Be True

“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” - Luke 2:10

Promises and claims are pervasive in our world. Every day we are bombarded by advertisement, people, and institutions making promises leading to disappointment. Contrast this with the remarkable promise made by the angels to the shepherds in the Nativity story. The proclamation of "Good News, Great Joy, For All People" is indeed a profound and, for some, unbelievable declaration about the birth of Jesus in humble circumstances.

The disillusionment that can arise from witnessing harm done in the name of Christianity or from the shortcomings of human institutions and individuals is a valid concern. However, Christmas reminds us of the enduring and unwavering nature of God's love and mercy. God doesn't struggle with our faith as we do but instead sees us with transcendent love and compassion.

As you walk the labyrinth, reflect on how you can bring Good News to All people through your mercy and love as a follower of Christ. Reflect on how you can embody the core teachings of Christianity, which revolve around love, forgiveness, and compassion. By living out these principles in your daily lives, you can become beacons of hope and joy, much like the birth of Jesus brought hope to the shepherds and to the world.

Reaching the center of the labyrinth, take a

moment to pause, reflect, and express gratitude for the demonstrations of this Good News. Reflect

upon the people, experiences, or moments in our lives that have shown us the reality of God's love and the promise of great joy, even amidst life's challenges.



Week Four – Love **(The Angel’s Candle)** **The Sound Love Makes**

“If I could speak all the languages of earth and angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” – 1 Corinthians 13:1 (NLT translation)

What Paul underscores in this message is that, regardless of how much "religious" knowledge or practices we may have mastered, if we haven't demonstrated love and compassion towards others, we have missed the essence of the Good News. In many parts of the world, Christians can sometimes come across as noisy and divisive rather than loving and inclusive.

Advent is a valuable time that offers us an opportunity to step back and reflect. It's not about delving into doctrinal, theological, or belief systems, but about assessing whether our lives are resonating with the love and teachings of Jesus.

As you embark on your labyrinth walk, ponder the life of Jesus and the love he exemplified. Ask yourself if you are truly open to receiving this love and consider how your life reflects this love. Identify areas where your actions might be discordant, like clanging noises.

When you reach the labyrinth's center, take a moment to pause and reflect on the words of Zephaniah 3:17: "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." Let these words reaffirm the profound love and delight that God has for you, and how His love can bring peace and joy to your life.

