Advent Prayer and Worship Ideas

## Worship Ideas

# Memory tree

It is important as we focus on light to remember that darkness remains and can feel more prevalent around the festive period. During a time of reflection, give people the opportunity to come forward and remember a loved one. There are a few ways you may choose to respond at this time, for example:

* Display a lit bare tree at the front where people can come forward and write a name on paper hearts, gift tags or baubles. Once they have written the name they can hang it on the tree.
* Offer people the opportunity to come forward and take a star for them to carry with them during this festive season. May it act as a reminder to continue to shine the light.
* If you don’t have a small tree available, you could use tealights to help remember a loved one. Carefully space out lots of tea lights laid out for people to come forward and light. This would act as a reminder to keep close to the light through dark times.

# Fragility of modern sources of light

Have a few different types of light sources – for example, a candle, a light bulb and phone torch. All of these sources of light need something else to make them useful. For example, the candle needs a spark or match, the light bulb needs power and the phone torch needs charging. Like all these objects, we must be fuelled by regular encounters and conversations with God to allow us to shine his love and light as bright as we can.

# Remember the light

Have a tray with different ‘light’ sources on it (torch, candle, matchstick, light bulb, glow stick, night light, mirror, star cookie cutter). Show everyone the tray of items and then cover them with a cloth. Ask people to try and name as many of the items that they can remember within 10 seconds.

When we see the light, we are told to bear witness to it and share with others. Sometimes it isn’t always easy to remember everything we see or to recognise each light source for what it is, but when Jesus came as the everlasting light, it was for everyone. If we remember his love for us, and seek him with all our hearts, we will grow in his light and likeness and others will know we are his children.

# Shine through your daily life

Invite a volunteer to mime different activities for the congregation to guess (eg brushing teeth, vacuuming, baking, driving, swimming etc). Then ask them to mime ‘Jesus loves you’. Now try and ask your volunteer to do all of those things and mime ‘Jesus loves you’ at the same time. Sometimes it can feel difficult to combine your daily activities with telling others about the love of God. However, we want God’s light to shine through all of our actions, thoughts and words so that others can see his love no matter what we are doing.

## Poem

**‘Yet in the dark street’ – written by Major Jo Thompson**

It was busier than usual in the little town of Bethlehem. The pushing, the shoving as people fought their way into inns and guest houses, ready to register for the census. The sights, sounds and smells of tired and weary travellers, building in intensity.

Donkeys, animal waste, human sweat, and other bodily odours – the fragrant atmosphere almost choking, breath-stealing, pungent and stale.

Yet, when evening emerged so unapologetically, the sky grew dark without a sound; the din and chaotic chatter became a hush – the babble, gentle snores. The hum of people finally bunkering down for the night became the backdrop of this unassuming darkness.

The odd animal snort, the grunt of a beast, the rustling sound of straw and hay, as slowly, pacing hooves became a rhythmic drone – tap-tap, tap-tap … then … sleep.

How still the town was in that moment – hushed, calm, motionless.

Astonishingly, amid peace and tranquillity, under the cover of night, the emergence of the brightest light shone dazzlingly over the sleeping town. A blanket of luminosity bringing celestial radiance to the streets below.

Yet in the dark street, this blindingly bright star shone down over all that was bleak; nowhere for darkness to hide. The everlasting light – the life, the love, the gift – was there in plain sight for all to see, witness, and experience firsthand; the dawning of life-changing, eternal hope.

In that very moment, everything changed, magnificently, gloriously, spectacularly, for ever!

‘Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.’

## Prayer ideas

# Lighting ceremony

On the first Sunday of Advent, spend time as a congregation turning on the Christmas lights around the building for the first time. You may choose to build up the excitement before turning on the lights by having a drum roll, countdown or have different people turning on different switches. During this time take a moment to pray for your community. Pray especially they will see Jesus’ light through The Salvation Army whether it be through the building itself or out in the street during carolling.

# Pray through the day

Challenge the congregation to pray at sunrise and sunset throughout Advent. At the start of the day pray for the day ahead and ask God to enter the day alongside you. As the sun sets, give thanks for the day that has been. Pray that God will reveal his plan through the challenges and give thanks for the good moments.

# Glow stick prayers

Equipment: glow sticks <https://www.bakerross.co.uk/glow-sticks>

Give everyone a glow stick and turn off/down the lights to enter into this fun and creative way to pray. Have the congregation pray through the different topics listed below. They may want to respond by writing/drawing in the air or finding someone with the same colour and praying with them.

All glow sticks have to be broken to make them shine to their full potential. Sometimes it is difficult in the dark nights around Christmas, and with so much busyness going on around us, to remember that simply stopping to pray reconnects and revitalises the light of God inside of us.

Lord, please show your light to *(write the name with a glow stick)* this Advent.

Lord, shine your light in *(place name).*

Lord, help us to shine brightly to/in *(situation / group of people)*.

*(All write and say ‘Amen’)*

# G**low in your local area**

Equipment: map and battery-operated tealight

Have a large map of the town/city where you live and invite people to come and place a battery-operated tealight close to where they live or somewhere they spend a lot of time. By doing so, we can show our willingness and commitment to ‘seeing the great light dawning’ in that area.

# Love from the manger

Equipment: manger, wooden hearts (<https://www.bakerross.co.uk/wooden-hearts-value-pack>)

Before the service, give everyone two wooden hearts. Throughout Advent we are reminded how much God loves us, by giving us his own son Jesus to come into the world. Sometimes we wonder just what we can give him to say thank you for this amazing gift, for the gift that he is.

Today why not place one heart into the manger as a sign that you belong to Jesus or that today at this Christmas time you want to give him your heart and say that he is the everlasting light in your life. Then give the second heart to someone else and assure them of your prayers for them throughout this Advent time.

# Star light, star bright

Equipment: glitter star stickers / glow-in-the-dark stars / wooden stars, large dark piece of paper.

There were stars already created by God, that shine in the sky each night. When the special star appeared on that most holy of nights, the other stars may have seemed insignificant. Do we sometimes feel that we are not significant or important enough to shine for Jesus and spread his light?

Spend some time reflecting on how you can commit to shining Jesus’ light to the people in your life. People may choose to write their own name or just to choose a star to represent themselves, then add it to a large piece of dark paper, to show that you want to be a shining light in this dark world. Where can you shine? Where can you share God’s ‘everlasting light’? Where can you be a witness to the light?

## Written prayers

# Responsive Prayer

Leader: God of grace, today we pray for our homes and the houses around this area, but also for our town/city/village itself.

**All: Lord, come, bring your everlasting light here.**

Leader: We thank you that your light still shines even in the dark streets, and in the goodwill of people and those who make plans for peace.

**All: Lord, come, bring your everlasting light here.**

Leader: At Christmas the eyes of the world turn to Bethlehem and remember the birth of the Prince of Peace. We pray for our own town here in [INCLUDE THE NAME OF YOUR AREA] and places around the world which need your peace today.

**All: Lord, come, bring your everlasting light here.**

Leader: May we radiate your light this Christmas time in all we do and all we are – in our homes, in our area and here in this your church.

**All: Lord, come, bring your everlasting light here.**

**Amen.**

# Responsive Prayer

Leader: Lord, we want to be like you, as lights for the world.

**All: As we pray, live, and give,** **shine your everlasting light.**

Leader: Help us to remember during this Christmas season to let our light shine for all the people we see.

**All: As we pray, live, and give,** **shine your everlasting light.**

Leader: Help us to say the right words, act like you, and understand others’ problems as you would.

**All: As we pray, live, and give,** **shine your everlasting light.**

Leader: Help us to shine and be decorated for Jesus. Decorate us with your love, patience, care, compassion and strength.

**All: As we pray, live, and give,** **shine your everlasting light.**

**Amen.**

# Spoken Prayer

Heavenly Father,

In this blessed season of light and love, we come before you with hearts eager to spread the joy of your Son’s birth. Help us, Lord, to be witnesses and beacons of your luminous presence, sharing the warmth of your love with those who wander in the cold shadows of life. Grant us the courage to shine brightly in a world that often dims your splendour, illuminating paths with your grace and truth. May our words and actions reflect the peace and hope Jesus brought to earth, touching hearts and sparking flames of faith where despair dwells. Empower us to carry your light, not just in grand gestures, but in everyday acts of kindness, patience and generosity. Let our lives radiate the star of Bethlehem, guiding others to the ultimate gift of Christmas – your everlasting love made flesh in Jesus Christ. Amen.

# Spoken Prayer

Transforming God, whose light always penetrates the darkness and whose love always overcomes hate, we ask that you sustain us as we struggle to make your light visible in an angry and frightened world, and in particular in this area where we live and worship.

Nurture us daily as we work for your justice in unjust places and for your peace in places where no peace is to be found.

Give us courage and strength when we are fearful and weak.

Give us hope and forgiveness when we feel hopeless and angry.

And guide us every step of the way as we walk toward the light.

In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

# Spoken Prayer

*Includes the last verse from ‘In the bleak midwinter’, Christina Rosetti.*

What I can give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him – give my heart.

Lord, in our world we see darkness in so many places. We can feel helpless and left wondering how we could help. Our offerings may seem insignificant, but help us to realise that giving our all means everything to you. Help us to open our eyes to the ways that we can share your love and be your light. Take our hearts and shine your everlasting light in and through us, so that we can give ourselves to you. May we be ready to do your will and be your light in a world that needs love. Amen.

## Song suggestions

* ‘Light of the world’ by Lauren Daigle, sung by Caleb and Kelsey <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd8R9Q31QwY>
* ‘Light of the world’ (Behold version), Lauren Daigle <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XC1MRiNU_g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cLhaZIBSpo> (lyric version)

* ‘O little town of Bethlehem’, Chris Tomlin (with lyrics) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqwe97RJ-bg>
* ‘Oh Light’, Gungor featuring All Sons and Daughters (with lyrics)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcZGS8sfEFk>
* ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come’, The Worship Initative <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHZpdzkOGOE>
* ‘Behold (Then sings my soul)’, Hillsong Worship (with lyrics)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDNrouqSGjY>
* ‘O Holy Night’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QbYBM2yjrI>

# Transmission

This worship band from The Salvation Army in the US Southern Territory have produced an album of songs celebrating and reflecting on the light around Advent. There are a range of songs for different moments throughout Advent. <https://www.ussmusicandarts.org/the-light-has-come>