

The Common Rule

www.thecommonrule.org



Advent
Edition!

This year's habits
curated in
collaboration with

Arrabon

www.arrabon.com



Habits of Light for a World of Darkness

THE COMMON RULE ADVENT EDITION is a set of four daily & four seasonal habits designed to help ordinary people live missional lives of love for God & neighbor during Advent. This year's habits are focused on themes of justice & reconciliation, & curated with help from friends. The Advent Edition also contains a daily **Prayer & Reading Plan** below and online. Rooted in the idea that our most ordinary of habits are forming our souls in the most extraordinary of ways, The Common Rule invites you to a new set of habits for Advent. Practicing the Advent Edition will help us celebrate that the King has come & wait for him to come again.

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How to try The Common Rule for Advent:

1 **ADMIT CHRISTMAS IS CRAZY**

Our rituals are bizarre, we need new ones.

3 **READ ABOUT THE HABITS**

Read this PDF to learn about the four daily & four seasonal habits. There is even more information on each habit on www.thecommonrule.org. So go there & subscribe to the mailing list as well.

2 **INVITE SOME FRIENDS**

Communal habits are formational habits.

4 **CELEBRATE & WAIT**

Starting on December 2, practice the eight habits with your community for a new kind of Advent.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ADVENT COMMON RULE:

Dear Reader,

“Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.” We sing this every year. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” We read this every year. But despite its central place in the Christmas story, **justice & reconciliation** are still words that seem a bit uncomfortable at Christmas time. While Jesus came to tell a story of shalom, our Christmas traditions tell us a different story.

Traditions function like habits. Because, of course, they are habits. Collective habits. Like all habits, traditions can obscure or clarify significant meaning. For example, Jesus came to renew the brokenness of our humanity, to “tear down the dividing wall of hostility,” and set us into a renewed community with each other. But the busyness of the holidays often draws us into a strange isolation. American habits & traditions of Christmas thus often obscure one of the core messages of Advent - that Christ came to set relationships right. That when he comes again he will come with justice for all.

The Common Rule is all about aligning mundane habits to magnificent truths so that our hearts & our heads can align. We always have the power to change traditions & habits. But there is only one way to do that - we must adopt new ones. Hence this year's Advent Edition of The Common Rule.

This year's Advent Edition! is a collaboration with [Arrabon](#), & focused on longing for the justice & reconciliation that King Jesus inaugurated in his first coming, & celebrating what he will bring to completion in his second coming. There are two sides to this: waiting & celebrating.

Advent should disturb us. Advent is the declaration that something is broken in the ways we treat each other. Intentionally & unintentionally, we design systems that oppress each other. On purpose or not, we cultivate habits & traditions that prevent us from seeing each other. So at Advent, we wait and long for this world to be redeemed. **But Advent also breaks the chains.** Advent is the astonishing declaration that ALL chains will break. Those are the chains of our unbelief. The chains of our addictions. The chains of our worship of idols. But they are also the chains of formal & informal traditions that perpetuate

racial segregation & inequity in American cities. They are the chains of our blindness to the suffering of the vulnerable. Both in America & in the world. Yet advent reminds us that King

Jesus will set ALL THINGS right, so our true laments can turn to true celebration.

The habits of The Common Rule this Advent will draw you into this often obscured theme of the promise of justice. Some of the habits will be the same - like the daily habits of reading scripture before phone or avoiding using your phone while waiting. Some habits will be new, like habits of befriending someone across cultural or economic boundaries, or partnering with an organization that supports efforts for racial reconciliation.

All the habits aim to change you & your Advent season. I hope that by adopting some new communal habits, you will enter an Advent that makes you long for justice with a depth like never before. Because the King of justice is coming!

With much hope,



Justin Whitmel Earley

FAQs

www.thecommonrule.org

WHAT ARE THE HABITS? The Common Rule habits for Advent are summarized in visual form on the following two pages, but you can find much more detail for each of the habits by visiting the website at <https://www.thecommonrule.org/advent-edition>.

WHY ADVENT? Advent is the season where the church celebrates the King who has come, & waits for the King who is coming again. The holiday season is filled with rituals that seem to sparkle on the outside, but underneath aren't celebrating anything but consumerism. Further, they are often filled with such busyness that we end up spending the season cultivating perpetual rush rather than patient longing. We need a new set of rituals for Advent, & that is exactly what The Common Rule - Advent Edition! has in mind.

WHEN IS ADVENT? Advent starts on December 2, 2018 & lasts for the four weeks leading up to Christmas day.

WHY HABITS? Habits - even our most mundane ones - are matters of worship, & thus powerfully formational. This is even more true during the holidays. Many of our rituals & customs are rooted in the worship of consumerism & greed while thinly cloaked in Christian words. The Common Rule - Advent Edition! is one way to resist how these customs form us, & embrace the way the incarnation of Christ the King forms us.

ISN'T THIS LEGALISTIC? No! Legalism is the misguided idea that doing the right things will earn us God's love. We reject it. The incarnation is the astounding truth that though we were lost God came to us anyway. Practicing a new set of habits is not going to earn you His love - you already have it! It is a response to that love. It is an expression of thanks, hope, & a desire to practice the love that the incarnation has announced.

Advent Starts

DECEMBER

2

Sunday

THE 4 DAILY HABITS

www.thecommonrule.org

#1 KNEELING PRAYER

3X A DAY:

Ora et labora, or “work & pray” is the motto of the Benedictine monks. Regular, carefully placed prayer is one of the keystone habits of spiritual formation. Interspersing work with prayer is the reminder that *Laborare est Orare* - *To work is to pray*. Here, we are trying to punctuate our day with prayer so that our day is framed by something besides rush & busyness. On page 7 is the **Prayer & Reading Plan** that includes a daily waking, midday & bedtime prayer. (*Daily prayers curated in collaboration with Arrabon.*)

#3 SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE:

Refusing to check our phones until after we read a passage of scripture means that we refuse the question “*What do I need to do today?*” & ask different ones: “*Who am I, & who am I becoming?*” “*What is this world, & what is it becoming?*” The Advent Edition provides a short scripture reading to go through for five minutes - before you take out your phone - so you begin your day by celebrating the incarnation of the King & cultivating the longing that He would come again. I suggest printing out the **Prayer & Reading Plan** on page 7 & keeping it beside your bed or on your coffee table. (*Readings curated in collaboration with Arrabon.*)

#2 BE A REGULAR:

Most of us are regulars somewhere already. But we are often bound to habits that keep us in the same kinds of routines with the same kinds of people. This Advent, consider embracing a new regular routine that puts you in proximity to the vulnerable, or simply people unlike you. Make a habit of getting coffee in a neighborhood you don't usually go to. Or routinely take the drive home that cuts through the “bad” part of town. Eat lunch at a place where people speak a different language. Learn someone's name & say hi each time. It's difficult to love the neighbor we do not know. But it's a beautiful thing to - like our savior - become incarnate in a world that needs us. (*This habit was inspired by & curated with the help of my friend Drew Cleveland*)

#4 NO PHONE WHILE WAITING:

Life often asks us to wait. In traffic & elevators, at stoplights & grocery lines. But we don't know how to wait. We don't like to wait. So we fill the time with useless, distracted glances at our phones. Through the season of Advent, do not touch your phone while waiting. Learn to wait. Look around you, look at all the people with their stories & their lives just as real, as beautiful, and as painful as yours. See them. Be present. Talk to them. Learn to wait, learn to long, learn to remember that all of creation waits for the King to return.



THE 4 SEASONAL HABITS

www.thecommonrule.org

#1 CHRISTMAS MORNING LITURGY:

Sometimes we get to the big day & we have no idea what to do. We long to lean into the significance, but we've developed habits & traditions that detract or even push us away from it. Try the Christmas morning liturgy with your family & friends to push into the sparkling wonder of the incarnation of the Son of God. It is written to be done with a group of adults & children. You can find it on page 16 of this PDF. It is also available for viewing or download on the website.

#3 LISTEN:

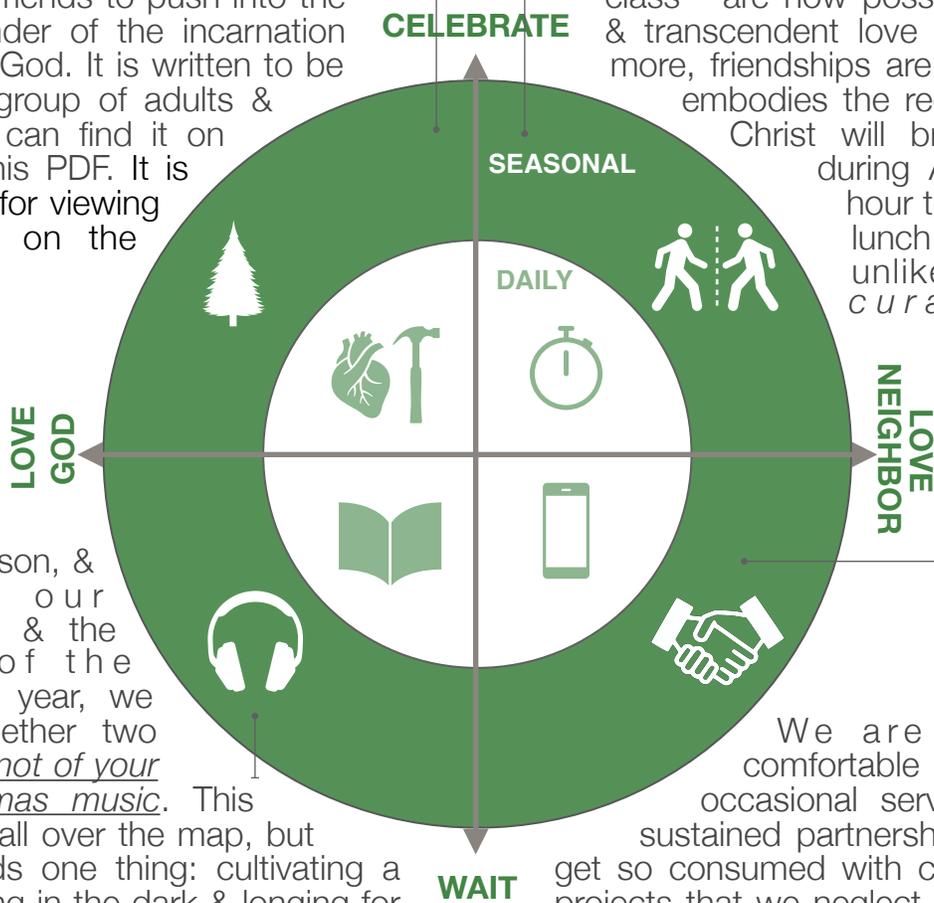
Music is central to the Christmas season, & it shapes our experience of & the meaning of the holidays. This year, we have put together two playlists - *but not of your typical Christmas music*. This music is from all over the map, but geared towards one thing: cultivating a sense of waiting in the dark & longing for the light. Advent is about waiting, which is both acknowledging the raw pain of this world & looking for deliverance. Both playlists are available on the website, Spotify & Apple Music. Take an evening this season to sit down, listen & feel the weight of waiting. (*Playlists curated with the help of my dear friend Katie Pennock.*) ***Note** that the "Waiting in the Darkness" playlist has an explicit language warning. Read more about why at www.thecommonrule.org/advent-listen.

#2 FRIENDSHIP ACROSS BOUNDARIES:

Sin has broken us up. Separated us from God & each other. This habit celebrates the fact that because of the incarnation, brotherhood & sisterhood are made possible once again. Friendships - even across deep divides of race or class - are now possible in the unity & transcendent love of Christ. Even more, friendships are a practice that embodies the reconciliation that Christ will bring. Sometime during Advent, find an hour to have coffee or lunch with someone unlike you. (*Habit curated in collaboration w/ Arrabon.*)

#4 PARTNER:

We are much more comfortable with the idea of occasional service rather than sustained partnership. We can also get so consumed with creating our own projects that we neglect to see the ways that God is already at work in lasting organizations. This Advent, we invite you to anticipate Jesus' return by choosing to practice active expectation through partnership with an organization of reconciliation. We see partnership as a mix of learning, encouraging & giving. Check out the website to see some examples of how you might do this. (*Habit curated in collaboration with Arrabon.*)



SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE

DAILY ADVENT READINGS & PRAYERS

All prayers & readings also available on www.thecommonrule.org

DAILY KNEELING PRAYERS

MORNING: *Jesus, you came down to reconcile all things. Show me how I can join in your work of reconciliation today. Amen.*

NOON: *Holy Spirit, the world is dark, and longs for light. Show me your light. Give me your eyes for my neighbor, for my enemy, and for those on the margins. Amen.*

BEDTIME: *Father, I pray that I would rest in the promise of your coming kingdom. Let me rest in the peace that you came, and that you're coming again. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE READINGS

First Week of Advent | Dec. 2-8

Sunday **Isaiah 9:2**
Monday **Ephesians 2:13-16**
Tuesday **Matthew 2:16-18**
Wednesday **Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 / Romans 12:15**
Matthew 9:36
Thursday **Exodus 3:7-9 / Joel 1:13 & 14**
Friday **Psalms 83:1 / Exodus 2:23-25**
Saturday **O Come, O Come, Emmanuel**

Second Week of Advent | Dec. 9-15

Sunday **Romans 7:14-25**
Monday **Joel 2:28-29 / 1 Peter 2:9-10**
Tuesday **Psalms 19:14 / Matthew 12:36**
Wednesday **Philippians 4:13 / John 15:5**
Thursday **Psalms 139:1,7-12**
Friday **Jonah 3:10-4:4**
Saturday **Angels From the Realms of Glory**

Third Week of Advent | Dec. 16-22

Sunday **Luke 3:1-6**
Monday **Luke 4:16-21**
Tuesday **Isaiah 11:1-10**
Wednesday **Luke 2:25-33**
Thursday **Isaiah 25:6-8 / 26:4-6**
Friday **Romans 13:11-14**
Saturday **O Holy Night**

Fourth Week of Advent | Dec. 23-30

Sunday **Luke 1:67-75**
Monday **John 1:1-14**
Tuesday **Christmas Morning Liturgy**
Wednesday **Romans 8:35-39**
Thursday **Galatians 3:26-29**
Ephesians 2:17-22
Friday **Colossians 1:15-20**
Saturday **Psalms 98:1-6**
Sunday **All the Earth is Hopeful**

**Note: Each reading is paired with a song. [You may access all readings online](#), & the YouTube links to each song are available there also.*

a collaboration with 

With special thanks to Elena Aronson and Abigail George for the work on the Prayers & Scripture Readings

Week 1 | December 2-8
CULTIVATING LONGING

In the shadow of darkness, a light has dawned.

Sunday | December 2 **Isaiah 9:2** The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

We will never understand how good the light is, until we admit that darkness is real, and that we live in it. That Jesus has come to redeem us is not such good news until we see what bad news it is to be without him. This first week of Advent, we will read scriptures that help us cultivate a longing for what we lack - wholeness.

Song: A Light by The Brilliance (Song links embedded in PDF & on the [reading page of www.thecommonrule.org](http://www.thecommonrule.org))

Monday | December 3 **Ephesians 2:13-16** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

*One of the deepest realities of our world of darkness is that we are cut off from each other. In some way, all of history can be read as one sad story of the things we do to each other: we hurt each other, we kill each other, we enslave each other, and we oppress each other. The hope of Advent is that in Christ, the dividing wall of hostility between fellow human beings will be torn down. We cannot be unified until we are unified **in Christ**. In a culture that understandably despairs over its own deep divisions, we cultivate a longing for Christ.*

Song: All Things New by Red Mountain Music

Tuesday | December 4 **Matthew 2:16-18** When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

On the night of Jesus' birth, the heavenly hosts proclaim "Glory to God in the Highest! Peace on earth! Good will to men!" Yet in the midst of such great joy & expectation, Herod massacres innocent children. It is startling. This should make us ask: "What does it mean to proclaim 'Peace on earth, good will to men' in the very moment of horrible injustice?" In our own time, the massacre of children & the oppression of the vulnerable continues. We must learn to truly lament the brokenness while truly proclaiming the truth of the coming Kingdom.

Song: Run by The Brilliance

Wednesday | December 5 **Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 / Romans 12:15 / Matthew 9:36** There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. / Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. / When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

We spend much of our time in a relentless pursuit of personal happiness. This is a particular pressure around the holidays. We hope that our gifts and our feasting will make us happy. Yet the rumble of suffering beneath all things persists. Sometimes it's in our families. Sometimes it's in our neighborhoods. Sometimes it's across the tracks or the river. Sometimes it's in another country. Injustice prevails and our light in the world sometimes seem like just a flicker. Imagine what it would be like if we regularly entered into seasons of

mourning. How would our communities be different if we mourn with those who mourn? If we looked for the vulnerable the way Jesus did.

Song: Break My Heart by Antioch College Worship

Thursday | December 6 Exodus 3:7-9 / Joel 1:13 & 14 The LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them.” / Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.

God is a God who sees the suffering of his people. But often it is precisely God's people who ignore that suffering. We in the church have often veiled our complicity in the advancement of injustice, all while we keep on with our religious rituals and pious attitudes. But God calls us out of this. He calls us to mourn for his children who are broken, May we fall on our faces before the Lord, weeping over the devastation of our communities, of the poor, of the broken, of the orphan! May we, then, grieve as God grieves. Hear our cry, Oh God!

Song: Purge Me by Urban Doxology

Friday | December 7 Psalm 83:1 / Exodus 2:23-25 O God, do not remain silent; do not turn a deaf ear, do not stand aloof, O God. / During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Sometimes it seems like the silence of God accompanies the lingering pain of injustice we see in our world. Our weeping goes on, but is it heard? Our hearts ache, but will they be healed? To long for God to rise up is not the sign of the faithless, but the faithful.

Song: Silence of God by Andrew Peterson

Saturday | December 8 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appears. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny. From depths of hell Thy people save, and give them victory o'er the grave. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high, and cheer us by Thy drawing nigh. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home. Make safe the way that leads on high and close the path to misery. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

When hymns become too familiar, we can stop paying attention to the words. This familiar advent hymn has a hauntingly beautiful melody but its words should challenge us. Consider the pain expressed in this hymn as it is contrasted with the faith and hope that Emmanuel will come and make things right. What are your laments? How do you maintain hope in God's promises in the midst of pain?

CULTIVATING CONFESSION

It is not just the world that is broken, it is we who are broken.

Sunday | December 9 Romans 7:14-25 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Lord, we confess that even when we want to do good, we cannot carry it out without Your power. If we cannot fix ourselves, we surely cannot fix this broken world around us. We long to see the redemption of deeply rooted systems of injustice and oppression, but we can't even solve ourselves. We look to You for transformation.

Song: Civil War by lamSon (Song links embedded in PDF & on the [reading page of www.thecommonrule.org](http://www.thecommonrule.org))

Monday | December 10 Joel 2:28-29 / 1 Peter 2:9-10 I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. / But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

We were created in God's image. God chose to imprint his image on humanity and, even in our brokenness, we display refractions of His glory in the world. In His mercy, God has poured out his Spirit on all people and has made us into a royal priesthood. However, we often neglect to recognize God's image in the people around us. We exalt some while minimizing others. Lord, we confess our tendency to construct You in our image, rather than recognizing Your image in our neighbors.

Art: Collection of Stained Glass Works by Kehinde Wiley (Today visual art has been chosen over song because of the emphasis on visually seeing the image of God in men & women.)

Tuesday | December 11 Psalm 19:14 / Matthew 12:36 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. / I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.

Lord, we confess that we long for wholeness, but we mediate on brokenness. We are addicted to controversy. We get excited over online fights. We preach about reconciliation, but we post about division. We speak and write carelessly. Our speech builds a wall of division rather than a bridge to reconciliation. We tear the world down with our words. Lord, purify our hearts so that we may think and sound more like you, that we may seek liturgies of love and reconciliation, rather than anger and fear.

Song: Clean Heart by David Bailey and Kim Williams

Wednesday | December 12 Philippians 4:13 / John 15:5 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. / I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.

Lord, we confess that we often try to do kingdom work in our own strength. We've made the work of reconciliation all about us, our efforts and strategies. Forgive us, Lord, and remind us daily that it's only because of our connection to you that anything we do can flourish.

Song: *Abide in Me* by Urban Doxology

Thursday | December 13 Psalms 139:1,7-12 You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Lord, we confess we hide from your presence. For we know that in your presence, our eyes will be opened to the things you care about. In your presence you invite us to join you in your Kingdom work and require us to "learn to do right; seek justice, defend the oppressed, take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." Lord, we confess that we would rather tend to our own concerns, needs and struggles. So, we hide. Forgive us, Lord. Remind us of your constant pursuit of a face-to-face encounter with us.

Song: *Psalm 139* by Kings Kaleidoscope

Friday | December 14 Jonah 3:10-4:4 When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened. This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. So he complained to the Lord about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? This is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. Just kill me now, Lord! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen." The Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry about this?"

Jonah knew the character of God was one of compassion, mercy, and unfailing love. But he was angry at God for displaying these attributes to his enemies - particularly his oppressors. He failed to recognize that he was entirely in need of the grace and mercy of God, just like the Ninevites were. Who are you quick to condemn and slow to offer forgiveness to? Lord, we confess that we often desire mercy for ourselves and condemnation for others.

Song: *Brother* by The Brilliance

Saturday | December 15 Angels From the Realms of Glory

Saints, before the altar bending, watching long in hope and fear. Suddenly the Lord, descending, in His temple shall appear. Come and worship. Come and worship. Worship Christ, the newborn King.

Sinners, wrung with true repentance, doomed for guilt to endless pains. Justice now revokes the sentence, mercy calls you - break your chains. Come and worship. Come and worship. Worship Christ, the newborn King.

Though an infant now we view Him, He shall fill His Father's throne. Gather all the nations to Him. Every knee shall then bow down. Come and worship. Come and worship. Worship Christ, the newborn King.

All creation, join in praising God, the Father, Spirit, Son. Evermore your voices raising to the eternal Three in One. Come and worship. Come and worship. Worship Christ, the newborn King.

These verses of *Angels From the Realms of Glory* are rarely sung and often left out of hymnals. This Christmas hymn places humanity in a posture of confession and repentance - finding that the good news of Jesus' birth will mean that "Justice now revokes the sentence, mercy calls you - break your chains!"

Week 3 | December 16-22
CULTIVATING HOPE
Remembering that hope is alive.

Sunday | December 16 Luke 3:1-6 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiber'i-us Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturae'a and Trachoni'tis, and Lysa'ni-as tetrarch of Abile'ne, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Ca'iaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechari'ah in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Jesus came so that the way - the way that the whole wilderness of this world has been looking for - might be found. And that all might be invited to come along. Hope is alive.

Song: Salvation is Created by Bifrost Arts (Song links embedded in PDF & on the [reading page of www.thecommonrule.org](http://www.thecommonrule.org))

Monday | December 17 Luke 4:16-21 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

When Jesus announces himself to the world, he proclaims that he is the answer to the darkness. He is the one who will restore the brokenness. He is a living hope.

Song: Father Let Your Kingdom Come by Porter's Gate

Tuesday | December 18 Isaiah 11:1-10 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

Poverty is coming to an end. Systemic injustice is being removed. Cessation of Evil is imminent. Unity and reconciliation – at hand. True shalom – impending. It's coming! He's Coming!

Song: When Death Dies by Gungor

Wednesday | December 19 Luke 2:25-33 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the

Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

Salvation is near. All will be made right. The vision of what we have longed for has been glimpsed. So we can be at peace.

Song: *The Lord is My Salvation* by Shane & Shane

Thursday | December 20 **Isaiah 25:6-8 / 26:4-6** On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. / Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal. He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust. Feet trample it down—the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor.

In God's Kingdom, we will all get a seat at the banquet table and feast on His best. Our mourning clothes will be removed, and the tears of death and suffering will be no more. Shame will no longer exist. The poor and the oppressed will be lifted from their lowly place and their oppressor will be humbled. Oh Lord, we long for your return!

Song: *Come to the River* by Housefires

Friday | December 21 **Romans 13:11-14** And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here... Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

As we anticipate the coming of our Lord, let us wear Him well, so that when the world sees us they may be drawn to Him and not repelled by our flesh.

Song: *I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me* by Bishop G.E. Patterson

Saturday | December 22 **O Holy Night**

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining, It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth; Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices! O night divine! O night when Christ was born. O night, O holy night, O night divine.

Truly He taught us to love one another. His law is love and His gospel is peace. Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother. And in His name all oppression shall cease. Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we. Let all within us praise His holy name.

Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever! His power and glory evermore proclaim! His power and glory evermore proclaim!

These verses of O Holy Night remind us that Christ's advent brings both spiritual and physical deliverance! "Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother. And in His name all oppression shall cease!" We await the fullness of God's rule and reign in the Kingdom of God! Let the words of this Christmas hymn give you a greater longing for Christ's second coming.

Week 4 | December 23-30
CULTIVATING CELEBRATION
The King is coming!

Sunday | December 23 Luke 1:67-75 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”

May we never forget that Jesus fulfills the promises of redemption, salvation and fearless living. So, let us boldly continue do to the work of reconciliation in holiness and righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Song: Your Spirit by Tasha Cobbs (Song links embedded in PDF & on the [reading page of www.thecommonrule.org](http://www.thecommonrule.org))

Monday | December 24 John 1:1-14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

A light has come! Hallelujah! God is with us! The One we waited for made His dwelling among us!

Song: Oh Light by Gungor

Tuesday | December 25 Extended Communal Readings from The Gospels of Luke, John and Matthew
See the Christmas Morning Liturgy on page 16 below or at www.thecommonrule.org

Wednesday | December 26 Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We have no reason to fear, for nothing can separate us from the love of God! No matter what the world may say, no one is “too poor, too dirty, too broken, too naked, too stupid, too drunken to be thrown outside His love!”

Song: Give Me Your Hand by Enter the Worship Circle

Thursday | December 27 Galatians 3:26-29 / Ephesians 2:17-22 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. / He came

and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Praise the Lord! Where once we were strangers, now we are family. The dividing wall of hostility has been destroyed and God's people can come together in unity because of the peace of Christ. Let us celebrate that what was once impossible is now made possible because of the blood of Christ! While we still see division and brokenness around us, in faith we proclaim a new way. We can live into this Kingdom reality!

Song: We are One by City Harmonic

Friday | December 28 Colossians 1:15-20 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

In light of this passage, meditate on and live according to 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

Song: Make Us One by Jesus Culture

Saturday | December 29 Psalm 98:1-6 Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, 6 with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn— shout for joy before the Lord, the King.

Praise the Lord that Jesus Christ brought salvation to us with strength and power. We can sing with joy a new song that proclaims His Justice and Righteousness. Praise the Lord!

Song: Glory to Glory by Fred Hammond

Sunday | December 30th All Earth Is Hopeful

All earth is hopeful, the Savior comes at last! Furrows lie open for God's creative task: this, the labor of people who struggle to see how God's truth and justice set everybody free.

People of Israel, you heard the prophet tell: "A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel"; she conceived, "God with us," our brother, whose birth restores hope and courage to children of this earth.

Mountains and valleys will have to be prepared; new highways opened, new protocols declared. Almost here! God is nearing, in beauty and grace! All clear every gateway, in haste, come out in haste!

We first saw Jesus as a baby in a crib. This same Lord Jesus today has come to live in our world; he is present. In neighbors we see our Jesus is with us, and ever sets us free. Amen!

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The Common Rule

Habits of Light for a World of Darkness

A CHRISTMAS MORNING LITURGY



Instructions: This Christmas Morning Liturgy is a way to lean into the celebration of the incarnation on Christmas day. Work it in after Christmas breakfast, before you exchange gifts, or even after Christmas dinner if that is best. It takes about 10-15 minutes.



You will need: Print copies of this liturgy for everyone, or go to thecommonrule.org/advent-xmas-morning-liturgy to read on a phone.



For Reading: You will need a Leader & one Reader. All scripture readings are printed here.



Small Children: This is written to involve small children, who have one repeated line: on your signal (perhaps the raising of your hand) they will act surprised & yell "Wow!!!" Make sure to practice one or twice beforehand. Older children might prefer to simply read along with the adults.



Supplies: In the case of small children, chocolate milk & marshmallows may be involved, if desired. This will help with excitement and attention span. Have milk poured in appropriate cups & plenty of marshmallows ready in advance.



For Songs: If the group is comfortable with signing the song verses, do so! If that will not be comfortable, just have everyone read them together.

A CHRISTMAS MORNING LITURGY

Leader: Merry Christmas!

People: Merry Christmas!

Leader: It was a real morning, with real people, with real bodies, like the ones sitting in this room, when a baby was born. This is how it happened:

Reader: *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. Joseph also went up from Galilee to Bethlehem to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

[Leader signals children.]

Children: Wow!

Leader: I know! It was remarkable! This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read): *Away in a manger no crib for a bed.
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay.
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

Leader to Children: Do you think baby Jesus had milk in the barn? (*Entertain answers.*) Do you think he had chocolate milk? (*Entertain answers.*) Do you all want some chocolate milk while you hear more of the story? (*As chaos dies down, hand out chocolate milk.*) Now, everyone keep listening for the rest of the story:

Reader: *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths 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, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.*

[Leader signals children.]

Children: Wow!

Leader: I know. Can you believe it? A baby and a star. Fire and song. This is when the world was forever changed. It's this baby, who will save us from our sins. Can you believe it?

People: We believe it!

Leader: This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read): *Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains*

Gloria, in excelsis Deo

Gloria, in excelsis Deo

Leader to Children: Do you think the shepherds had sheep? (*Entertain answers.*) Are sheep white and fluffy? (*Entertain answers.*) What else is white and fluffy? (*Provide hints until marshmallows are guessed, hand out said marshmallows.*) Now, eat some marshmallows while we hear more.

Leader to All: Because there is much more! This baby grew up. Just like these children here. He became a boy who became a man who became a teacher. When he spoke - people were amazed! Listen to the kinds of things he said. He said that, because of him, we could finally be reconciled to God:

Reader: *Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Leader: He said that, because of him, the vulnerable would finally be protected:

Reader: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Leader: He said that, because of him, we can all finally rest:

Reader: *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Leader: Are you tired?

People: We are.

Leader: Then rest in Jesus. This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read): *Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.*

(Second round of marshmallows optional here.)

Leader: Hear now the good news of this baby that was born: He was not just born, but he lived. And he did not just live, but he died. And he did not just die but he rose again. And he did not just rise again, but he will come again. To set all things right.

People: Let it be so!

Leader: Now, because of him, all that we've done and all that we've failed to do; all the good things and all the bad things, now they all fade away in the bright shadow of the love of Jesus the resurrected Son of God.

[Leader signals children.]

Children: Wow!

Leader: And when he comes again all people will beat their spears into plowshares. Melt their guns into spoons for food. Chains will break. War will be no more.

People: We are waiting for a day when the sun will rise on a new world. With no tears, no dying, and no pain.

Leader: It is Jesus who will bring this world. Can you believe it?

People: We believe it!

[Leader signals children.]

Children: Wow!

Leader: This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read): *Joy to the world, the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing*

Leader: How we long for you to come again. For you we will celebrate. For you we will wait.

All in Loud Voices: *King of kings. Mighty God. Counselor. Emmanuel. Come again soon. Today, for you, we will celebrate. Tomorrow, for you, we will wait. Amen!*

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