

## Advent Prayer and Reflection

### **About the Materials we will use**

We will use the material found in Christmas in the Four Gospel Homes by Cynthia Campbell, pastor and preacher, who originally preached the material in the book as sermons during Advent.

The artwork and reflections are done by Kevin Burns, an architect and knowledgeable Bible Teacher.

The poetry we will share is by Ann Weems from her book, Kneeling in Bethlehem. Pastor Becky will distill the wisdom from these authors and artists and lead a discussion using quotes from their materials.

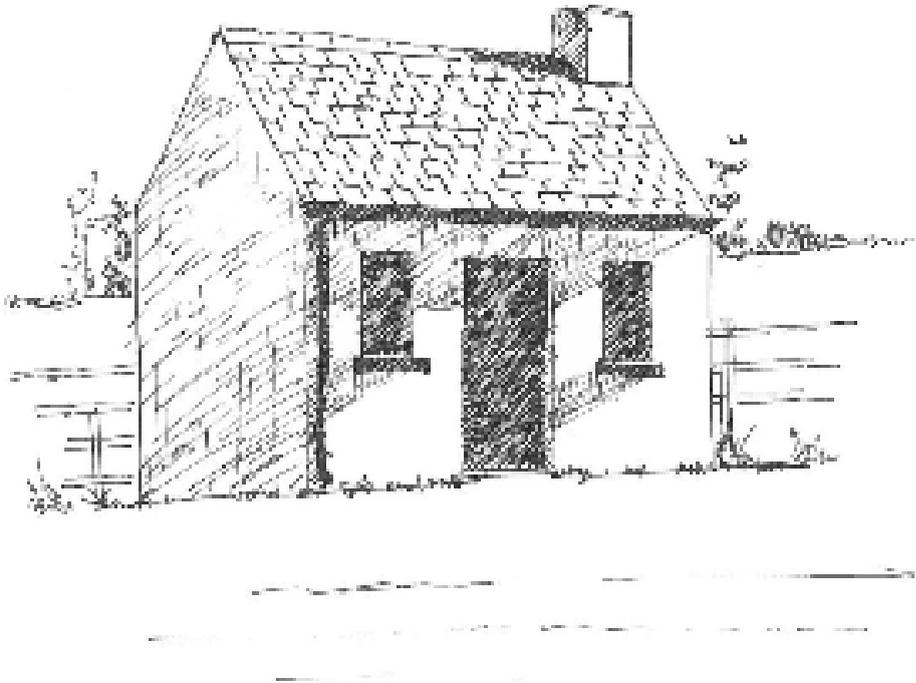
### Week 1: Christmas in the Home of Mark

#### **Opening Prayer**

#### **Warm Up Question:**

How do you decorate for Christmas in your home? How do your decorations indicate what you cherish? How do they reflect your family's personality?

#### **Mark's House, drawing by Kevin Burns.**



What do you notice about this drawing of a house? Does it remind you of any houses you have visited or lived in?

## Scripture Warm Up Question

What do you know about Mark's gospel?

What makes it an odd choice for a book about Advent or Christmas?

### Read Mark 1:1-11

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

1. What do you notice in this passage of scripture?
2. Why do you think there's no Christmas narrative in Mark?
3. What do you think is meant by the statement that Mark's gospel is a “passion narrative with a long introduction?”
4. React to this statement from the author: “The good news of the gospel is not only the birth of a child. The good news is that the man who was the Son of God laid down his life for his friends and that God raised him from the dead as a sign that God's love conquers death.”

“The Cross in the Manger” by Ann Weems

*If there is no cross in the manger,  
There is no Christmas.  
If the Babe doesn't become the adult,  
There is no Bethlehem star.  
If there is no commitment in us,  
There are no Wise Men searching.  
If we offer no cup of cold water,  
There is no gold, no frankincense, no myrrh.  
If there is no praising God's name,  
There are no angels singing.  
If there is no spirit of alleluia,  
There are no shepherds watching.  
If there is no standing up, no speaking out, no risk,  
There is no Herod, no flight into Egypt.  
If there is no room in our inn,  
Then "Merry Christmas" mocks the Christ Child,  
And the Holy Family is just a holiday card,  
And God will loathe our feast and festivals.  
For if there is no reconciliation,  
We cannot call Christ "The Prince of Peace."  
If there is no goodwill toward others,  
It can all be packed away in boxes for another year.  
If there is no forgiveness in us,  
There is no cause for celebration.  
If we cannot go now even unto Golgotha,  
There is no Christmas in us.  
If Christmas is not now,  
If Christ is not born into the everyday present,  
Then what is all the noise about?*

5. “Hope is to be found in the manger, only because it is first found on the cross.”  
--Cynthia Campbell. Where do you find hope this season?

## **Sharing Joys and Concerns**

## **Thanksgiving and Intercession**

One: Mighty God of mercy, we thank you for the resurrection dawn bringing the glory of our risen Lord who makes every day new. Especially, we thank you for  
The beauty of your creation...

The new creation in Christ and all gifts of healing and forgiveness...

The sustaining love of family and friends...

The fellowship of faith in your church...

(Individual prayers of thanksgiving may be shared)

Merciful God of might, renew this weary world, heal the hurts of all your children, and bring about your peace for all in Christ Jesus, the living Lord. Especially we pray for  
Those who govern nations of the world...

The people in countries ravaged by strife and warfare...

All who work for peace and international harmony...

All who strive to save the earth from destruction...

The church of Jesus Christ in every land...

(Individual prayers of intercession may be shared)

God of all wisdom, our hearts yearn for the warmth of your love, and our minds search for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our Savior, and strengthen us to grow in love, that at the dawn of his coming we may rejoice in his presence and welcome the light of his truth. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Closing Litany**

One: May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**All: Amen.**

One: Bless the Lord.

**All: The Lord's Name be praised.**