

**December 24, 2017—Fourth Sunday of Advent: God makes this world our home**

Are we willing to receive Christ into our hearts? And are we willing to live with Mary's courage? Can her song be our song too? Can we refuse to give into the fear that the world screams constantly into our lives? Can we reject the notion that everything is spinning out of control, and embrace that the world is simply about to turn, just as God intends it? Can we admit that there are things about our world that need to be turned upside down for the sake of others? On this fourth Sunday of Advent, Christmas Eve, we light this candle, turning with courage toward the One who makes a home among us. No matter who we are or where we live, no matter whether we have come down home for Christmas or we are celebrating with a

family we have made for ourselves. No matter what our state of sinfulness or station in life, no matter what our status or identity or background or culture or beliefs, no matter whether we live in a mansion that has been in our family for generations or in an apartment or a car or a tent or a shelter, the fact is, all of our earthly homes are temporary.

There is only one home that is permanent, and that is the home we make with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate tonight, and whose coming again we will not fear, but rather, will look for with the hope of Joseph, and the joy of Mary, and the curiosity and conviction of the Magi, and the boldness of the shepherds in the field.

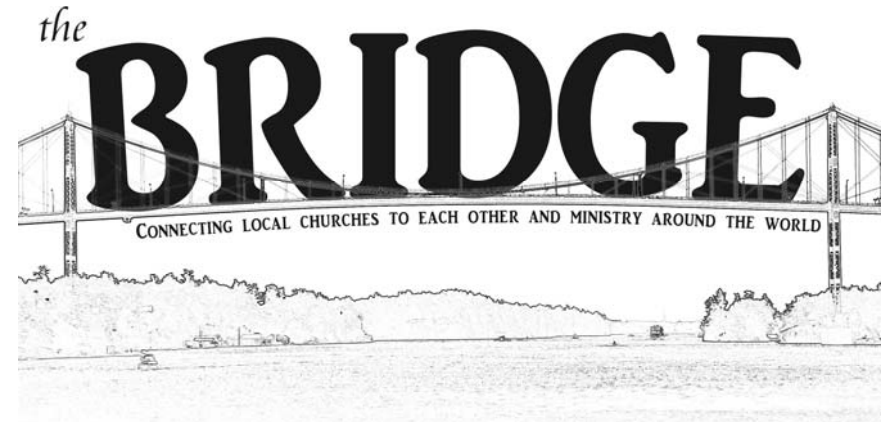
Let us gather around the manger. Let us gather around the Table of our Lord.



*The **Bridge** is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world.*

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The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

## A look inside!

Advent Worship Series

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# Coming home for the season of Advent

*Editor's Note: The article below is a condensed version of UMC Discipleship Ministries' suggestion of how to celebrate the season of Advent in worship services.*

In the United States, Christmastime and thoughts of home just go together. *I'll be Home for Christmas* and *There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays* are two of the most popular holiday songs, year after year. Christmas movies and television shows regularly feature stories of people going to their family home or extended family home over the holidays. Among the rituals we create for this darkest time of the year in the Northern hemisphere, perhaps the majority of them are associated with either going home or doing special things at home-- whether lighting candles and having a time of family prayer during Advent, or decorating a Christmas tree, or caroling through a neighborhood, or hosting festive "open house" parties for friends, neighbors, and colleagues. It's all about home.

Advent and Christmas Season are about another kind of homecoming, the homecoming of Christ to redeem and renew us, this earth, and all creation till "heaven and nature sing" with joy eternally. The Scriptures the church uses for Advent focus first on the final fulfillment, and later on the beginning of that fulfillment in Jesus.



As they seek God's joyous desire, they also make plain just how far from it we have been and challenge us with just how far we have to go, ourselves, to begin to live into it.

Below are some suggested reflections to consider each week of Advent using the metaphor of "Coming home."

## **December 3, 2017—First Sunday of Advent: Come down home**

As we light the first candle in our Advent wreath today, officially enacting this annual ritual reminder, and as we move toward the celebration of the birth of the one God sent to save us from the law of sin and death, let us take seriously God's call on our lives. Let us make our confession of sin, as individuals and as a

human community. Let us pray that God will have mercy on us. And let us embrace our need for a Savior.

## **December 10, 2017—Second Sunday of Advent: Home is where we meet**

On this second Sunday of Advent, we light this candle to remind us that the God of Creation calls us home to love all that we meet. What is home? Home is anywhere we meet God, face-to-face and hand-in-hand. Home is the assurance that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, thus proving God's love for us. Home is knowing that we are saved by the grace of God. Home is anywhere that we meet God's people and welcome them in with the love of Christ.

## **December 17, 2017—Third Sunday of Advent: Joy is our true home**

On this third Sunday of Advent, we light this candle, knowing that joy is our true home. Let it be in a spirit of grace that we acknowledge that for many of us, welcoming guests or going home, will never resemble in any way the pictures of perfect familial bliss that we see in the constant holiday barrage of Photoshopped advertisements, holiday television specials, and Christmas movies. Nevertheless, let us enter into this time with rejoicing, prayer, and giving thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us. For no matter how hard the journey may be some days, we know that joy is our true home.

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