Peacemaker's Advent



by Ann Keeler Evans

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The amulet pictured on the cover was a gift from
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A Peace Advent

by Ann Keeler Evans

My Friends,

Welcome to Advent! How I love this season of Anticipation! Growing up, it was a church holiday for our family. I didn't learn until later, that it's the start of the Christian liturgical calendar. There was nothing happening in our home then that unlocked the Joy and Peace of Advent. My family was fortunate enough to host exchange students from Scandinavia. Through them we experienced new ways of celebrating Advent that made us appreciate it as a season in our home rather than just in the Church Sanctuary.

In my senior year of high school, I got to be the exchange student in Sweden. While Advent there is a church holiday, its pagan roots are more visible. Their Advent candle-holder is often a straight line. Each Sunday, one more candle is lit joining the one(s) that already burn. Throughout the week people keep burning and replacing the candles. They are a hopeful reminder that Light will return. Ancient stories are told of those who went to bring back the Light. These days, even though we are not dependent upon candle light to break through the gloom of long nights, there is something lovely about sitting in a quiet, candlelit room, snuggled under a blanket, cup of winter

warmth in our hands, allowing ourselves to dream about what might come to be.

In Christianity, Advent is a quiet time that anticipates the arrival of salvation in the form of an infant. As a woman, there's something wonderful about considering this the period when pregnancy makes you too big to do much more than dream about the coming of the baby, who it might be, how your world will change, and what you can offer new life. Men obviously do not have the same physical impetus to sit and rest, but they also profit from taking the time to savor this time of quiet anticipation. The coming of a baby in response to a request for a powerful king to defeat one's enemies is a lovely understanding of the fragility of the Divine and our obligation to care for and to nurture it. Below, you'll find a chapter that offers meanings and prayers for the four advent candles and the fifth candle for Christmas.

In Pagan traditions, this time is a reminder of the return of the light in the midst of deepest Dark. As the Sun moves toward its southern-most resting place, one candle after another is lit to reassure us that light will return. Since Christmas was set on this date, understanding the need for holidays of the Winter Solstice, many of the traditions we now assume to be Christian find their roots in Pagan traditions. Bonfires, fir trees with lights, and presents of warmth and sustaining foods for the passersby… all of these were part of the Northern countries practices before Christianity arrived.

Over the years, I find I worry less about assigning an absolute meaning to Advent and focus instead on enjoying the observance and the practice of it. I don't limit my candle burning to Sundays; I follow the practices of the families I lived with in Sweden and burn them all week long. I celebrate the sweet, small lights in the dark. I invite you to be profligate with your candlelight, too — there's nothing that says we can't be cozy in our anticipation.

I've found two meanings that give me comfort in this observance.

1. **Enjoying the Dark.** Unlike many, I don't fret during this time for the light to return. Those are January/February occupations. During this month, I enjoy the quiet, velvet Dark, the opportunity not to be involved in constant busy work and to savor the beauty of the increasing shimmer of candle-light. Why I find more Mystery in early December than in late January when the light is about the same, I don't know. But I do, and I treasure this quiet embrace of the sweetest, simplest Peace. There are many wonderful stories from this season about animals talking to one another and to humans, to special accords between the wee-folk and the humans. I never think about whether I believe these stories, I simply cherish the sweetness. Even in the midst of winter we long for Peace. I would even suggest that perhaps we can even find it more easily in the Silence.

2. **Gestating a dream**. For many years now, I have done a meditation that asks what I want to bring into fruition in the new year (Let's mix all the traditions, I say!) As the year wanes, I sort through the "seeds" I'm keeping or have acquired to plant in the year ahead. I tuck them "in the Dark" to work. I write down a dream or a desire, wrap it in a scarf and tuck it in a basket beside my advent candles or in a drawer completely out of sight and let it work in me. Then, around the beginning of the year, I pull out the talisman and share it and the dream it represents. Once it's made public, I claim responsibility for that dream and start bringing it into focus, allowing it to shape the way I will work in the year ahead.

Either or both are lovely explanations — as are Advent's more traditional meanings. Why not explore and give yourself time to explore the Beauty of the Stillness and the Dark. As you begin to celebrate Advent, its meaning may evolve for you as well — and I invite you to dig into it. I think you'll find there's nothing wrong with sitting around with candles burning and thinking about life a little. Cherish it and it will enrich your life. I think I can guarantee that!

These days, if you asked most people what Advent is, they would explain that it was the 24 days before Christmas. Advent calendars developed to offer small gifts of sweetness for every day. Life used to be simpler, and sugars were saved for deep winter revels. At that point you knew how many days it would be before the sap would rise in the trees again

and new sugars could be procured. Originally the calendars were boxes sometimes with drawers, sometimes without and a bit of loveliness appeared every day. Now, of course, it's become an industry! But I'm looking to unlock a bit of wonder for you every day on my site annkeelerevans.org.

As a Peacemaker, I started to look for ways to bring my Peacemaking into my beloved traditions — to expand their meaning and increase their joy. There-for, I'm offering an on-line calendar that offers a Peacemaking word to dwell on each day and a verse that considers it. Most of them are verbs and they are invitations to appreciate the world we live in.

Let's look at what most people understand the Advent Season to be and the ways it is celebrated, first in the Christian tradition and then more widely.



A Liturgy for Weekly Advent Candle-lighting

by Ann Keeler Evans

In Christianity, Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year, as well as a quiet time that anticipates the arrival of salvation in the form of an infant. As a woman, there's something wonderful about considering this the period when pregnancy makes you too big to do much more than dream about the coming of the baby, who it might be, how your world will change, and what you can offer new life. The coming of a baby in response to a request for a powerful king to defeat one's enemies is a lovely understanding of the fragility of the Divine and our obligation to care for and nurture it.

The four candles are placed in a circle. Often there's a fifth candle for Christmas Day and the baby Jesus. The fifth candle is always white. (In Scandinavia, four white candles appear in a row.) In some traditions, the first, second and fourth candles are purple (the color of royalty) and the third candle is a dusky rose (At one point, the pope gave someone a rose on that Sunday and the clerics soon wore rose vestments that day.

As Advent was traditionally a solemn fast in preparation for the coming of the King, this third Sunday's lighter color served as a welcome break in the month-long fast.) I learned and still love to use white candles. It is only recently that people have assigned meanings to the candles. Before that they served as simple markers of the time.

There is a prayer for each candle. You may want to repeat each prayer as you light successive candles. That way, by Christmas Day, you'll have five prayers to say.

Week One

The first candle is Hope. What are the dreams you harbor for your life, for your family and for the world? This week's prayer might be something like this:

> May I be a person who believes that the world is a good place, that things can be made better and that I can be an instrument of Hope in the world. Blessed Be.

Week Two

The second candle is Love. Will you surround your dreams with loving approval? Can you accept the world and all its brokenness? This week's prayer might read this way:

> May I be generous, quick to open my heart to new friends, new places and new ways of doing things. May I treasure what brought me to today. May I be known as a lover of life, one who embraces all there is in this world. Blessed Be.

Week Three

The third candle is Joy. Part of life's journey is enjoyment. Are you quick to smile at a baby and laugh at a joke? It amazes me how much better a day I have when I make the effort to be joyful. People respond to joy. Life is short, live into it!

> May I take joy in the dailiness of life, revel in its opportunities and in the people I encounter. May I be filled with wonder and amazement at life's beauty. Blessed be.

Week Four

The fourth candle is Peace. Do you understand yourself to be responsible for being a Peacemaker in the world? That doesn't mean smoothing things over, although it can be that. It means acknowledging our similarities and celebrating our differences.

> May I be a person who encourages that which is right and just. I will stand fast for what I believe in and I will cherish the work of Peace. Blessed be.

Fifth Candle

For Christians, the fifth candle represents the Christ. It is white, representing the birth of the Divine Infant and all the attendant miracles, pondered in a mother's heart. Unitarian Universalists or Free Thinkers might think of the fifth candle as Possibility. Our 7 principles affirm an astonishing world that needs us to evolve into something even better.

> May I be one who believes in possibility and strives for transformation in a disappointed world. Blessed be.

Please enjoy this Advent season of waiting in the dark. Part of life is waiting with an expectant heart and ready hands. Since you are tired from a year of activity, may it be a time of restful contemplation. People can hardly fault you if you explain that you weren't just staring into a candle but were instead doing religious observance!

The Twenty-Four Days of A Peacemaker's Advent

When I first did this work, I assigned a word to reflect on during the day. But later, I did what I delight in doing, which is write poems for each of the 24 days. What of the last 7 days of the year? Well, that's work for another year, isn't it?

Holiday Blessings. Wishing you a wonderful, happy and expectant Advent Season.

Ann
Peacemaker and Priestess

1

notice

Snuggled in your warm and
Cozy bed, breathe in and
Allow your eyes to open.
What catches your attention?
What do you Notice? Noticing
Is the first word of invitation
On the Advent Peacepath.
What scents pervade
Your house? How does light
Fall differently this season?
Open your front door, take in
The Day. It is your day, a day
Of deliberate awareness of all
That invites you into Peace. Notice.

1



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2

accept

Accept, my friend, that you
Are worthy of the wonder
This world offers. Accept
That you offer gifts that
Enable others to see that
Wonder and to breathe it in.
This will change their lives.
Accept responsibility for all
The amazing gifts that you
Have developed into skills,
That are now simply reflexes
For you to call on. Accept,
Oh, Beautiful One, that you
Are here to accept Peace.

2



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3

forgive

Asch. Forgiveness is hard.
But it stands in front of Peace
Every single time. Being unwilling
To Forgive is judgementalism.
What is that part of? That is part
Of all that leads to war. Are you
Not worthy of the Universe's Love
And Beauty? Are you not meant for
Delight? And if you're not, then you
Can easily find those who are less
Worthy, less human, less perfectly
Made. And then you're playing war
Games. That is not what we want.
Forgive, make room for Peace.

3



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4

acknowledge

Acknowledge the wrongs
That interrupt growth in this
World. See them. Release them.
Acknowledge the Possibilities
That can transform life, if only
We're willing to see them.
Too many of us have a rather
Uncomfortable relationship
With Truth (well, unless we're
Sharing hard truths with others
About their foibles. Oh, Ick.)
Acknowledge that Truth as well.
And then Acknowledge all the Beauty,
All the Possibilities, on the Peacepath.

4



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anticipate

When we become adults
We begin to think. To Anticipate
Is to plan for everything that
Can go wrong. But do you
Remember what it felt like in
Childhood? You anticipated
Playing with your friends,
A long summer of swimming,
Your grandparents' arrivals,
And all the special family holidays.
What if we were to wake up every
Morning and anticipate Peace?
What if our hearts quivered when
We anticipated Peace's Possibilities?

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6

believe

I believe. I believe in wonder,
I believe in Love. I believe
In the power of a fresh peach
To transform a bad day — even
If it's only a sweet recollection!
I believe in the wee folk and the
Faire, that animals talk at Midwinter,
And that, together, you and I are
Going to change the world. Oh, yes.
I believe. I have seen your gifts.
I know my own. Let's practice together
And let's master that dance step that
Makes the Peacepath fun and possible!

6

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7

appreciate

I appreciate the way that
Winter quiets the Earth and
Invites us to dream. I appreciate
The rising and the setting of
The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars.
I appreciate the changing Seasons.
I appreciate the magnitude of the
Problems that lie before us as well as
The combined powers and strength
Of this group to make the needed
Differences. My Friend, I appreciate you.
I appreciate that we are making Peace.
And of all things, I appreciate that we
Are making Peace together.

7



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8

enjoy

Far too infrequently, do we
Take the time to enjoy being
Exactly where we are with
Exactly this group of people.
A song from the 1940s said
“Enjoy yourself, it’s later than
You think.” It’s right. Life is
Unpredictable — so enjoy each
Little bit you can. Do you want
To be remembered only as the
One who organized everything
Or as the one who taught us to enjoy?
Trust me, organization matters —
Still, I say enjoy Life. Enjoy Peace.

8



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9

cherish

To cherish. To bring the past
Into loving perspective and value
Those things that made us who
And what we are, even when they
May have been damned challenging.
Cherish and carefully protect the
Life you have, the relationships you
Nourish, the community that encourages,
And the Earth on which you live. Cherish.
Remember them. Honor them. Go ahead,
Spoil them a little (no, not a lot, a little.)
Use Winter's chilly beauty as an opportunity
To settle down inside and tell stories of
Peace gone by. And then learn from them.

9



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10

honor

Honor the sacrifices. Honor
The fact that people, no matter
How badly they chose, probably
Made the best choices they knew
How to make in the moment. It's
Uncomfortable, isn't it. This honoring
Doesn't mean those choices were
All okay or without grave consequences.
It doesn't mean we need to make them
Our life's companion. Honoring seems
To be a recognition from some distance
And some wisdom that people despite
Their flaws did their best. Honor that in you.
And then step onto the Peacepath. Flourish.

10



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11

surrender

We are just so busy. So much
To do. So many things to think
About before (insert next date.).
What if we were simply to
Surrender to the Quiet and the Dark?
What if we were to build safe spaces
And safe relationships so that surrender
Didn't look so horribly intimidating?
Too often we think that to surrender
Means to submit to power over us.
How often is that power over us our
Own rigid control — so that no one
Ever touches our tenderness?
What if we, you and I, surrendered to Peace?

11



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12

encourage

Look at you. You've learned
So much in such a short time.
You've mastered that skill —
What's next? How strong and
Gentle you are... I don't know
Anyone who does that as well.
To encourage! May I be one
Who encourages others to
Find their feet, steady themselves,
Reach for their dreams, and then
Accomplish them. You can do that,
I know it! Just look how far you've
Already come. Let me encourage you:
Join the Peacepath and encourage others!

12



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13

please

It pleases me very much to
Invite you to join me in Peace —
Would it please you to join me?
While I am a people-pleaser,
By nature, I don't much care to
Please the status quo. No offense,
It pleases me to take another route.
Think I'll stick to the Peace route —
It pleases me. The home I reach,
Pleasing Peace, pleases me greatly.
It's not about only pleasing myself,
It's really about learning what the
World needs and pleasing it.
Peace is made for pleasing and pleasure.

13



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14

thrill

For once, just allow it to happen.
Allow yourself to notice and then
Thrill to the abounding Possibilities.
Or the marvelous Achievements.
Or the sheer Beauty of this instant.
Let the hair raise on the back of
Your neck or your heart stop and
Then restart in the magic. How many
Things thrill you? When was the last
Time you made a list? Been a while?
This is Advent. Peace is coming. How
Is than anything other than thrilling?
More than that, you're helping to make
Peace the Truth we can all thrill to.

14

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15

elate

When you consider the hair-raising
Thrills of the Peacepath, consider
The last time you allowed yourself
To be elated? Elation seems like it
Sticks around for a while, perhaps
Even long enough to empower you
To try something new, to try harder
At something you're finding you've
Mastered, or to invite another along
As you experiment with the heady
Elation of a new journey. Being elated
Means that someone is going to
Notice and be drawn toward you and
And the invitation you extend to Peace.

15



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share

What if we considered Power,
Like the holidays, as something
To be shared. Shared with those
We love, certainly, but also with
Those we'd like to know, and,
Perhaps, with those we'll never
Know other than by the changes
They make in this World. Sharing
May be exactly what brings about
The Advent of Peace. I have an image
Of Peace as a glass of champagne
Bubbles bursting, making us giddy
With Hope, with Joy, with Possibility.
Come, share a glass of Peace with me.



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revel

Considering Champagne Peace,
What else can you do but revel
In all the Possibilities? Now, when
The news is so grim. Now, when
We all feel so isolated. Now is
Exactly the time for reveling, for
Allowing the contagion of Joy to
Overflow and spill out over the edges
Of the tiny vessels in which we have
Up-till-now bottled our dreams
For Peace. In this time of preparation
And waiting, why not revel in becoming
Exactly what the world needs from us?
We are the Peacemakers.



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connect

In our Power and in our Joy
Look around the room and
See who else's eyes are
Sparkling and who is feeling
Truly confident. (No, not the
Faux stuff!) Reach out to them,
Invite them for tea, invite them
Into Peace: Connect. Find
The places where your work
And lives intersect. Figure out
How you can make each other
Stronger, more excited, more
Joy-filled. Fall in Love in that
Peace-filled, Friendship kinda way.

18



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calm

There is so much frenzy in
This war-filled, holiday-filled
Way. Seems an odd combination
No, but if you 'Focus on Fun'
Enough, you don't notice the
War quite as much. But it's still
Right there. Take a deep breath.
Calm. See the Beauty; calm.
Consider what you'd like to see
Come True; calm. Only then can
You purposefully turn your head
Toward Peace and the Invitations
You'd like to issue to those you Love.
There is a Deep Calm in Peace.



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20

harmonize

What does Peace sound like?
Oh, so many things, of course!
But what if it you asked someone
To find a note. Then you harmonize.
Any way that works. You change your
Harmony or you don't. Invite another
To join you. More harmony, but now
It's more difficult to harmonize —
And more fun. Keep adding people,
Keep resolving into harmony.
Listen to you, you're Peacemaking!
That work of harmonizing translates.
Your hearts and mind come to harmony.
Careful! Harmonizing just might lead to Peace.

20



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21

quiet

Hush. It is the Winter Solstice.
Listen for the Quiet. Calm your heart,
Breathe in the Stillness. Even when
The wind dies the trees creak and
Groan as the sap freezes. Still.
The snow muffles your footsteps
But tells tales of animals moving
From place to place. Calm your heart.
How else will you notice the Quiet
And the Dark? How else will you
Notice the stars wheeling overhead?
How else will you catch the Magic
Moving in the depths of Winter.
Calm your heart, welcome the Peace.

21



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22

join

Won't you join me? Just a
Simple, positive invitation to
Get to know one another or
To share a cup of tea or to
Simply look at an incredible
Piece of nature before you.
Won't you join me? As you
Go off to visit a friend or see
The Sunset on the river.
May I join you is equally powerful.
Coming to know one another
And the things that give us Joy
Are slow, certain ways of
Peacemaking. Won't you join me?

22



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23

expect

I'm slowly learning not to
Live my life being afraid,
Substituting, instead,
Expecting Joy. Expect Joy,
They say, you'll be disappointed.
Will I? Or is it possible that I
Might encounter all kinds of Joy
I had never expected? It is true
That trouble roils the world and
That we have work to do. That
Is no reason to forego Joyous
Expectation. If we are paralyzed
By fear and depression, we won't
See Peace exceeding all expectations.

23



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wonder

I believe I am constitutionally
Incapable of smelling fir trees,
Hearing my feet crunch on snow,
Or seeing all the fair lights without
Being overcome with wonder. Now
I can also be astonished by music
Or a painting, or the sweet conversation
Of friends, old and new, trading secrets
Over a cup of warmth, a glass of bubbles.
I love Winter and its deep Quiet and Dark.
I like childhood tales of fairies and gnomes
And more than half believe them. Why not?
Facts can explain why wondrous things happen
But they don't capture the Wonder and Peace.

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