

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:1-5

Welcome

Together, we are beginning the Season of Advent - a time of preparation and expectation. We can prepare the Earth - God's Creation - for Christ's coming, just as we prepare our homes and spirits. It is appropriate for us to prepare by caring for God's Creation and taking action to clean the air we all breathe and the water we all drink.

You have chosen to change one light bulb in your home for the five times you light an Advent Candle.

Through this act of preparation, you can talk in your family or your Church School class about other acts of preparation you may wish to take for the Earth, its creatures, the water, and the air.

Thank you for joining us in preparing for Christmas by helping to restore the air and water of God's Creation.

Here are some suggestions for using this study guide with the lighting of the Advent Wreath.

In your home:

1. Locate and remove a light bulb (60 watts or 100 watts), not on a dimmable, enclosed, or outdoor fixture.
2. Light the candle on the Advent Wreath and read the prayers for this Sunday of Advent.
3. Install the new light bulb (a 13 watt bulb for a 60 watt fixture, a 25 watt bulb for a 100 watt fixture) and read from the Study Guide. Don't forget the light bulb jokes (found at the end of this booklet)!
4. Let the new light bulb be just the beginning of your action. Think about other little things you could do for the Earth in preparation for Christmas.
5. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for all God has given us.

In your Church School:

1. Find light bulbs you might change. This can be like a scavenger hunt. Make a list of all the bulbs that can be changed.
2. Choose one bulb for each Sunday in Advent. Proceed to install the new bulb and read from the Study Guide.
3. As a group, brainstorm other actions you could take to restore the Earth in preparation for Christmas. Don't forget the light bulb jokes!

For more ideas, go to our website: www.gipl.org. When you are finished, e-mail us at info@gipl.org and tell us what you've done. We'll add up how many pounds of CO₂ we've kept out of the air by working together.

Third Sunday in Advent
A Gift of Power

As you light this candle in the Advent Wreath and change one light bulb, you can know that you are giving a small gift to the earth. Your greenest gift is the energy you don't use.

By changing this light bulb you are not using 2 quarts of petroleum and 1,437 cubic feet of natural gas. You have not bought 82 kwh of nuclear generated electricity. The earth is a tiny bit safer because of your gift.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

Romans 1:19-20

Dousing the Fire

Coal-burning power plants are leading sources of pollution to our air and water. But other energy sources are problematic as well. Today, nuclear energy accounts for only 8% of the U.S. energy mix due to the high cost of safeguards and the hazards of waste disposal. But, nuclear wastes remain deadly for thousands of years. In addition, more than one nation has used nuclear electricity generation to cloak nuclear weapons programs.

U.S. oil production peaked in 1970, and the U.S. Geological Survey estimates that 89% of world oil reserves lie elsewhere – largely in the politically unstable Middle East and former Soviet Union. The U.S. now imports 54% of its oil, and is looking to import greater quantities of natural gas to meet growing demand. It is difficult to know how our dependence on foreign energy hampers our national security and fans the flames of international conflict.

By using CFLs and other energy-efficient devices, you are reducing our nation's dependence on nuclear and imported energy as cleaner sources, like wind and solar, become commercially viable.

Creator of the Universe, your creation is too wonderful and great for our small and finite human minds to comprehend. We find that the only response to the magnificence of creation we can muster is a humble awe. O God, help us to realize our smallness in the face of a vast universe. Help us to join with the rest of your creation in singing your praises to eternity. Amen

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Bountiful Land

As you light the candle in the Advent Wreath and replace one light bulb, picture all of the creatures in their homes in the forests, in the air or in the streams. Because of the coal you have decided not to burn, more of that land, probably in West Virginia, is undisturbed.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

Deuteronomy 8:7–11

An Intact Earth

In West Virginia, layers of coal often lie not far below the top of flat-topped mountains. With gargantuan earth moving equipment (and cheap diesel fuel!) it is not difficult to remove the “overburden” to get at the coal through “mountaintop removal” mining. But what if the overburden includes the forest home of plants and animals? And where will all that rock go as the landscape is reshaped?

Reclamation laws are sometimes ignored, but even when they are followed, a diverse ecosystem has been replaced by a few grass species, and mountain headwaters lie buried under piles of rock that can release acid downstream. Ironically, some of these windswept sites are being considered as locations for the wind turbines that someday will help make coal obsolete.

Each CFL saves enough coal to save about 30 square inches of land from mining.

God of Light, you created this world and called it good. Help us to be faithful stewards of the land that you have given us. Give us the strength and wisdom to honor your work and to use it, not according to our own will, but according to yours. Amen.

Christmas Eve

A Look to the Future

In this season of gift-giving, we invite you to see this observance as a present to future generations.

By using this energy-efficient light and keeping natural resources in the ground, you are preserving resources for today's children and their children's children.

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord.

Jeremiah 29:11-14a

A Peaceful World

If civilization exists a hundred years from now, it will be because people have learned to make peace with the natural systems on which we and all life depend. Such a civilization will have the know-how and the will to keep pollutants out of the biosphere, even as it uses petroleum's valuable organic molecules to make plastics and other synthetics.

The post-fossil fuel civilization will live off solar and other renewable sources, but is expected to store and transport energy in the form of hydrogen. Quiet hydrogen fuel cells will replace the internal combustion engine, emitting only water vapor. As the cheapest source of hydrogen, natural gas can provide the bridge to the hydrogen economy. Saving natural gas can buy time to develop economical ways to extract hydrogen from water.

Someday, people will be amazed that our generation burned up so much irreplaceable oil and natural gas, like burning the furniture to heat the house!

God of Infinite Love, we think too often of our own comfort without considering the well-being of future generations. Help us to broaden our vision and preserve a world that meets the needs of our children and grandchildren. Amen.

Light Bulb Jokes

Here are some sample light bulb jokes. These are low watters. You can do better. Please share any new ones you create. Laughing makes the work lighter. (Get it?)

1. How many United Methodists does it take to change a light bulb?

Undetermined. Whether your light is bright, dull, or completely out, you are loved – you can be a light bulb, turnip bulb, or tulip bulb. Church-wide lighting service is planned for Sunday. Bring bulb of your choice and a covered dish.

2. How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb?

None. Lights will go on and off at predestined times.

3. How many Brethren does it take to change a light bulb?

*****Change???*****

4. How many Amish does it take to change a light bulb?

What's a light bulb?

5. How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb?

Ten. One to change the bulb, and nine to say how much they liked the old one.

6. How many Catholics does it take to change a light bulb?

None. They always use candles.

7. How many Unitarians does it take to change a light bulb?

We choose not to make a statement of either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb; however, if in your own journey you have found that a light bulb works for you, that is fine. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship to your light bulb and present it next month at our annual light bulb Sunday service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions, including incandescent, fluorescent, three-way, long-lived, and tinted; all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence.

8. How many charismatics does it take to change a lightbulb?

One, since his hands are in the air anyway.

9. How many TV evangelists does it take to change a lightbulb?

One. But for the message of hope to continue to go forth, send in your donation today.

10. How many campfire worship leaders does it take to change a lightbulb?

One. But soon all those around can warm up to its glowing.

11. How many Atheists does it take to change a lightbulb?

One. But they are still in darkness.

Now you are truly ready for Christmas

You have been preparing yourselves. You have been paying attention to God's Creation and taking an action to clean the air that all God's creatures breathe.

Almighty God, who has poured upon us the new light of thine incarnate Word; Grant that the same light, enkindled in our hearts may shine forth in our lives. Amen.

*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together.*

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 40:5

We are all together in this work.

We will keep finding each other and we will keep finding new people joining us. This Advent kit has given you an opportunity to learn about the damage that has been done to God's Creation and the ways that we can help to repair and heal Creation. We hope you will want to learn more. We hope you will want to do more, individually, in your families, in your schools and in your congregations.

More Resources

For further reading you might try:

Dream of the Earth and Befriending the Earth by Thomas Berry

Models of God by Sallie McFague

Belonging to the Universe by Fritjof Capra, David Steindl-Rast, and Thomas Matus

Living by Surprise by Woody Bartlett

Natural Capitalism by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins

Cradle to Cradle by William McDonough and Michael Braungart

The Natural Step Story by Karl-Henrik Robert

You will also find resources at Georgia Interfaith Power and Light website:

www.gipl.org. This guide will be posted on our web site. You are welcome to download it. Contact us (info@gipl.org) to schedule your Advent program and order your light bulbs.

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