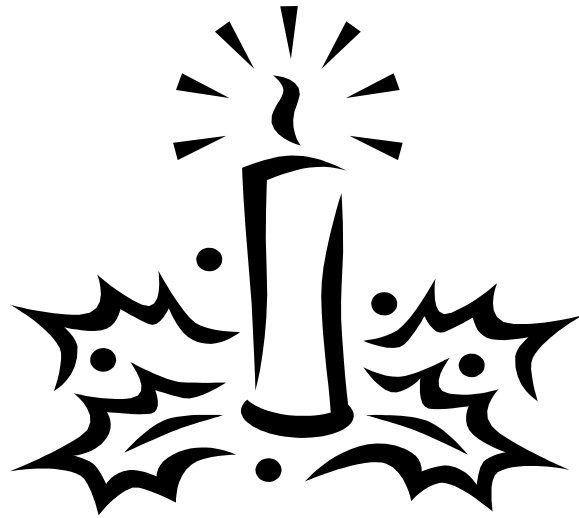


*Preparing for a
New Light*

*Caring for God's Creation
During Advent*

A Study Guide



Light a Candle

and

Change a Bulb



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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 (75 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 20 watt bulb for a 75 watt incandescent) 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!

First Sunday in Advent

Cleaner Air

Who would ever guess that the way we light our homes could affect the quality of the air we breathe?

By installing this compact fluorescent light, you are keeping 1.6 pounds of nitrogen oxides and 4.3 pounds of sulfur dioxide out the air.

*Shower, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation may spring up,
and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also;
I the Lord have created it.*

Isaiah 45:8

A Midnight Clear

Most electricity comes from coal-fired power plants that emit a mix of gases and microscopic particles that not only clouds your view, but invisibly irritates the lungs, increases risks of cancer and heart disease, and damages crops and trees.

One of the biggest threats to the global atmosphere comes from a gas that is both invisible and harmless to breathe, carbon dioxide (CO₂). Whenever a fuel is burned—coal to generate electricity, gasoline in our cars, natural gas to heat our water—CO₂ is the main exhaust gas released. It blankets the planet to trap heat. Global temperatures rose by about a degree last century, and climate experts believe temperatures will rise 9 - 22 degrees by the end of the 21st century. Global warming could endanger agricultural lands, forests, and coastal areas not able to adapt to the increasing temperatures, changes in precipitation, and rising seas.

Each CFL bulb saves enough energy to avert 730 pounds of Earth-warming CO₂ emissions, and 6 pounds of the nitrogen oxides and sulfur oxides that form smog and haze.

Heavenly Spirit, you have created a world of teeming variety whose interconnections are often difficult for us to grasp. Give us the wisdom to see that our smallest actions can have large consequences so that we can be wise stewards of the Earth. Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent

Cleaner Water

We depend on clean water for drinking and bathing and baptizing. How can we baptize our children in polluted water? As you change this light bulb and light this candle you are doing a small thing to clean the water.

You will make a difference.

Then he said to me, "It is done!

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."

Revelation 21:6

Living Water

The same coal-fired power plant exhaust also forms acids in the atmosphere, which can be blown hundreds of miles before falling as "acid rain." In lakes and streams, the damage is twofold: acid rain can make waters too acidic for sensitive fish and plants to survive, while excess nitrogen deposition can "fertilize" algal blooms that deplete the waters of oxygen.

Coal-burning power plants also represent the largest man-made source of mercury emissions in the United States. Mercury deposits from the air onto soils, lakes, and streams, and accumulates in animals along the food chain. That means that as large fish eat smaller fish, which have eaten even smaller creatures and algae, mercury becomes more concentrated. When people and birds eat fish at the top of this food chain, the concentrated mercury can damage the brain and harm fetuses, babies, and young children. That's why health advisories often warn pregnant and lactating women, women of child bearing age, and young children against consuming certain types of fish, like tuna, and why there is a surprising link between which light bulbs you choose and which fish are safe to eat.

Each CFL saves 9 mg of hazardous mercury emissions.

Holy God, we know that the voice of the Lord echoes over the waters, and the Lord is over the mighty waters. Help us to honor the water you have given us and be mindful of it in all we do. Amen.

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. 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 or Kentucky, 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.

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 you are slowing global warming and preserving the earth 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 live in harmony 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.

The post-fossil fuel civilization will live off solar, wind 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 light bulb?

One, since his hands are in the air anyway.

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

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 light bulb?

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

11. How many atheists does it take to change a light bulb?

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 slow global warming and preserve the earth that all God's creatures share.

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.

*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

An Inconvenient Truth, Al Gore (both book and movie)

New York Interfaith Power and Light's web site: www.nyipl.org for information on CFLs.
Contact nyipl@ymail.com for advice on how to assemble your Advent kits for your Advent program.

Want to do more?

*Have your congregation join New York Interfaith Power and Light - communities of faith working together to halt global warming and reduce the impacts of global climate change.

*Enroll your congregation in New York Interfaith Power and Light's **"COOL CONGREGATIONS" - AN EARTH STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM**. It's a stewardship program where congregants pledge to take energy efficient measures which prevent global warming pollution and often save money in the process. Contact nyipl@ymail.com, (315) 256-0078.

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