

THE LENTEN CANDLES

by Paul Dyck



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The Lenten Candles

by PAUL DYCK

A series of Lenten calls to worship

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**"We thank Thee that darkness
reminds us of light.**

**O Light Invisible, we give Thee
thanks for thy great glory!"**

**— T.S. Eliot
The Rock**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

READER 1

READER 2

READER 3

READER 4

PRODUCTION NOTES

I wrote these call-to-worship readings for a sixth grade Sunday school class, although teens or adults would perform them well also. The class members were very enthused about doing them, and they provided a sense of continuity throughout the Lenten season and focused attention on the worship services that followed.

As the first reading explains, the idea is to do the opposite of Advent. On the first Sunday of Lent, the service opens with all six purple candles (and the Christ candle) lit. Following the reading, a candle is snuffed out, meaning that the next Sunday you will start with five purple candles lit. An additional candle is snuffed out each Sunday of Lent until on Good Friday, only the Christ candle remains lit. After the reading, it, too, is snuffed out, representing Jesus' death. The effect is that of a serial Tenebrae service. Easter is a joyous celebration as two white-robed persons relight the Christ candle and a triumphant hymn is sung.

Use a brass candle snuffer (long pole with a bell-shaped cup at the end) to extinguish the candles. Set the wreath in a visible spot, such as on your Communion table or wherever you normally place your Advent wreath. The lights may be dimmed for the reading, adding to the overall drama. (Note specific lighting instructions for the Good Friday and Easter readings.)

The readers may wear dark choir robes for each of the six Sundays of Lent and Good Friday also. This provides a nice contrast with Easter Sunday, when the two candle lighters dress in white robes.

To make the crown of thorns wreath, purchase an unadorned grapevine wreath about 15" outside diameter. These are readily available at craft supply and hobby stores. If you wish, you may twist barbed wire (painted brown) through the wreath to represent thorns. You will need six purple tapers and one large white candle for the Christ candle. Pull the grapevine wreath apart and push the purple tapers through at evenly-spaced intervals. Anchor with modeling clay so the candles stand upright. You may want to further secure the candles with a hot-glue gun. Another option would be to use a special round, clear plastic candleholder made specifically for wreaths. This type of candleholder has spikes around the circumference, and the candles

may be pushed onto the spikes. These are sold at craft supply stores (often on the wedding aisle).

It is best if you can assemble the wreath where it will be placed throughout Lent and Easter as it does not travel well. Set the white Christ candle in the middle of the wreath — perhaps on some wood blocks so that it may readily be seen. You may wind a length of purple fabric around the wreath for a celebrative touch on Easter morning.

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Scripture References

A Sober Season

(First Sunday of Lent)

(The service begins with all the candles on the crown of thorns wreath lit.)

NARRATOR: During the weeks before Christmas we celebrate the anticipation of the coming of the Christ child with candles. One by one during Advent, we light the candles of:

READER 1: Peace,

READER 2: Hope,

READER 3: Joy,

READER 4: And love,

NARRATOR: All in preparation for the beginning of Christ's life on earth. All this culminates on Christmas Day, a holy day, when we light the Christ candle itself. It represents the light of Jesus Christ's

READER 1: Shining in the world,

READER 2: Living in our midst,

READER 3: Coming forth to save us,

READER 4: Inviting us to its warmth.

READERS 1-4: That is a joyous season.

NARRATOR: Today we are in another season — the season of Lent.

READER 1: Lent is the season before Easter.

READER 2: It is in some ways the opposite of Advent.

READER 3: It is a sober season.

READER 4: It is the time of preparation for the coming of Christ's Passion Week.

NARRATOR: During Lent, we

READER 1: Tune in to the dark days

READER 2: That got darker,

READER 3: And even darker,

READER 4: And ended in Christ's death.

NARRATOR: They were days of

1 **READER 1: Rejection**

2 **READER 2: And suffering,**

3 **READER 3: Conflict**

4 **READER 4: And betrayal,**

5 **NARRATOR: And ended with the extinguishing of the light**
 6 **of the Christ candle that was lit at Christmas.**

7 **That light would be rekindled and lit again in each**
 8 **of us, but in these coming weeks, let us tune in to the**
 9 **darkening days of Lent, as we one by one extinguish the**
 10 **candles set before us, until on Good Friday, the flame on**
 11 **the Christ candle dies. (*NARRATOR extinguishes the flame***
 12 ***of one purple candle.*)**

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The Greatest Love

(Second Sunday of Lent)

(The service begins with all the candles lit except for one purple candle.)

NARRATOR: Jesus said: I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch that does not bear fruit he takes away and every branch that bears fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit. Abide in me, a branch cannot bear fruit on its own, so neither can you, unless you abide in me.

I am the vine and you are the branches.¹

And Jesus said: This is my commandment that you love one another just as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than that one lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends.

I chose you.²

The world said:

READER 1: Who gives you authority to do these things?³

READER 2: Is it lawful to pay a tax to Caesar or not?⁴

NARRATOR: And the world

READER 3: Lied and cheated,

READER 4: Plotted and schemed

NARRATOR: To do away with the One

READER 1: Who would have chosen them,

READER 2: Who would have been their friend,

READER 3: Who loved them

READER 4: And would lay down his life for them.

READER 1: The days of Lent grow darker

READER 2: As the cross comes into focus,

READER 3: Where the One with the greatest love

READER 4: Laid down his life for us, his friends. *(READER*

1 extinguishes the flame on another purple candle.)

Light of the World

(Third Sunday of Lent)

(The service begins with the Christ candle and four purple candles lit.)

NARRATOR: Light. Without it, we stumble blindly in the darkness. With it, everything is illumined and clear.

READER 1: Sometimes the light is dim.

READER 2: Sometimes it flickers, ready to die.

READER 3: But as long as we have it to guide our path,

READER 4: We are safe.

NARRATOR: Christ is called the Light of the World, and we, as his followers, are instructed to walk in the light, as he is in the light.

READER 1: You are the light of the world!⁵

READER 2: Let your light shine before men.⁶

NARRATOR: Jesus was living out his last days, yet his light never wavered.

READER 3: If we were in his place, knowing death awaited us soon, would we still reflect our light?

READER 4: Would our brightness shine against the darkness of the world?

NARRATOR: And what about now? Does our faith — our light — burn brightly? Or does it flicker uncertainly in the tumult of our daily lives? Would we rather stay in the darkness after the candles are extinguished, or do we yearn for the light?

READER 1: For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

READER 2: “Wake up, O sleeper,

READER 3: Rise from the dead,

READER 4: And Christ will shine on you.”⁷

NARRATOR: Let us gather strength from the example of Jesus as he faced the darkness of his own death. *(READER 2 extinguishes the flame on another purple candle.)*

Saying Good-bye

(Fourth Sunday of Lent)

(The service begins with the Christ candle and three purple candles lit.)

NARRATOR: Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent. In three short weeks, on Easter Sunday, we will celebrate the end of Lent with a jubilant chorus of

READERS 1-4: The Lord has risen indeed!

NARRATOR: But that victory is not yet in sight as Jesus walks toward the deathly darkness of Good Friday, alone, so very alone. The disciples did not seem to understand what was really going on and what was going to happen in these coming days. So, Jesus tried

READER 1: To teach them,

READER 2: To show them,

READER 3: To explain to them,

READER 4: To prepare them,

NARRATOR: For the coming crisis. Jesus knew what was already unfolding and began to say good-bye. He said good-bye

READER 1: By taking a basin and a towel and washing all their feet,

READER 2: Even Peter's feet

READER 3: And Judas' feet.

READER 4: And he said, "I give you an example that you also should do as I did to you."⁸

NARRATOR: He said good-bye by saying:

READER 1: Little children, I am with you a little while longer.⁹

NARRATOR: By saying:

READER 2: A new commandment I give to you that you love one another even as I have loved you.¹⁰

NARRATOR: By saying:

READER 3: Let not your heart be troubled, I go to prepare a place for you.¹¹

1 **NARRATOR:** By saying:

2 **READER 4:** Peace I leave with you; not as the world gives do
3 I give to you.¹²

4 **NARRATOR:** In these darkening days of Lent, let us hear
5 these words of Christ. Let us see God's love and care,
6 shining brightly against the black Good Friday horizon
7 that looms up in the background. (*READER 3 extinguishes*
8 *the flame of another purple candle.*)
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In the Garden

(Fifth Sunday of Lent)

(The service begins with the Christ candle and two purple candles lit.)

NARRATOR: The Garden. Gethsemane. "Come with me to pray," Christ said, and they did:

READER 1: Peter, James, and John;

READER 2: Thomas, Andrew, and Philip;

READER 3: Bartholomew, Matthew, and James, son of Alphaeus;

READER 4: Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James.

READER 1: Only one of the twelve was missing: the other Judas — Judas Iscariot.

NARRATOR: There, in the growing darkness, beneath gnarled olive trees, Christ knelt and poured out his heart to his father.

READER 2: "If it is your will, Father, please take this cup from me."

NARRATOR: And they slept.

READER 3: "If it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, then your will be done."¹³

NARRATOR: And they slept.

READER 4: "Not my will, but your will, O God."

NARRATOR: And still, they slept.

ALL: For the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.¹⁴

READER 1: "My soul aches with sorrow . . ."¹⁵

READER 2: Lord — we are here for you.

READER 1: "Stay with me a while."

READERS 3 & 4: Lord, you know we will.

READER 1: "Can you not even stay awake long enough to keep watch with me?"¹⁶

READERS 2, 3 & 4: But Lord . . .

READER 1: "Behold, the hour is at hand.¹⁷ Here is my betrayer now."

1 NARRATOR: Lord, we acknowledge the times we have failed
2 you, just as the disciples did so long ago in the garden. As
3 the flames are taken away from these candles, so remove
4 our sins from us. We remember your pain as we snuff out
5 yet more of your light. (READER 4 extinguishes the flame of
6 another purple candle.)

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