

REFLECTIONS BY CANDLELIGHT

by Henry Paetkau



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Reflections by Candlelight

Readings for the Sundays
of Lent and Easter

by **HENRY PAETKAU**

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PRODUCTION NOTES

These seven readings are designed to count down the Sundays of Lent to Easter. Like a serial Tenebrae service (or like the reverse of an Advent wreath), one candle is extinguished each week until Easter Sunday when the Christ candle is relit, signifying Christ's resurrection.

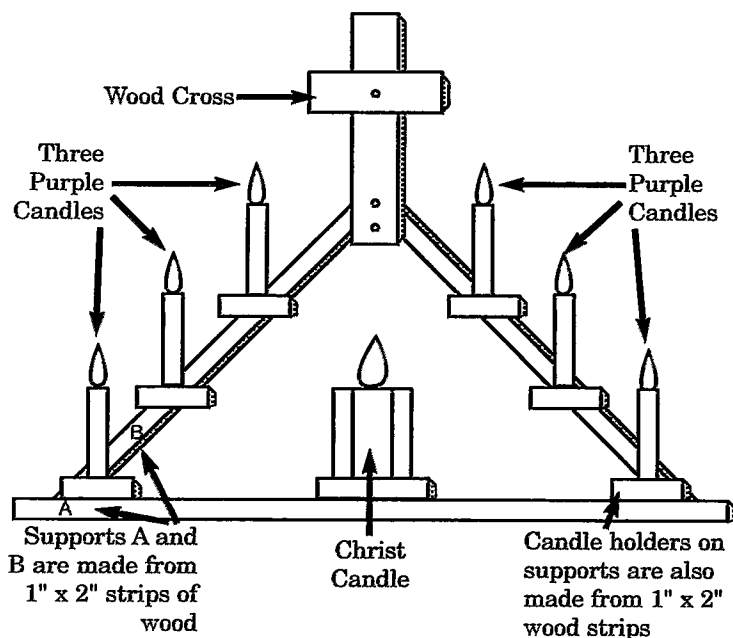
CAST

Seven readers, male or female. When originally done, two different persons (young people in our case) were assigned to each Sunday. One did the reading and the other extinguished the candle. (The appropriate number of candles was lit by a designated person prior to the worship service each week.) If desired, you could use the same reader each week.

PROPS

The only "props" needed are the six purple tapers, larger white Christ candle, and a candle snuffer. For a simple approach, the candles may be arranged in an inverted "v" with the Christ candle in the middle using individual candle holders. Another option is to use a "crown of thorns" grapevine wreath with the Christ candle in the center. For a slightly more complex but dramatic effect, the following instructions detail how to construct a special candle holder. Its triangular design symbolizes the Trinity. The cross on top is a reminder of Christ's suffering for the sins of the world. The Christ candle is in the center, just as Christ is at the center of Christians' lives. The mirror behind each flame carries out the "reflections" theme for the self-examination of the Lenten season. Your congregation will "see" themselves (literally and figuratively) in these candlelight readings.

Front View Candle Stand Holder

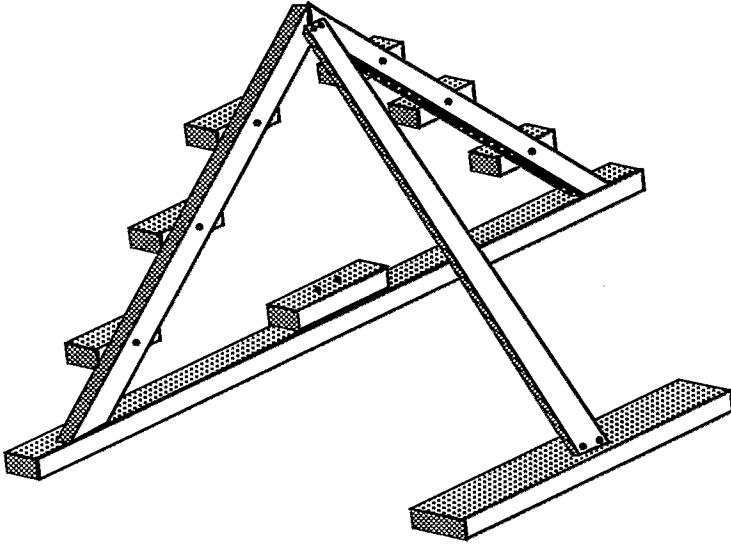


NOTES

The mirror panel may be omitted and the candle stand may be used as shown here, if desired.

With construction adjustments, the positions of the Christ candle and the cross may be reversed, if desired, so it appears that the purple candles are leading up to the Christ lighting on Easter.

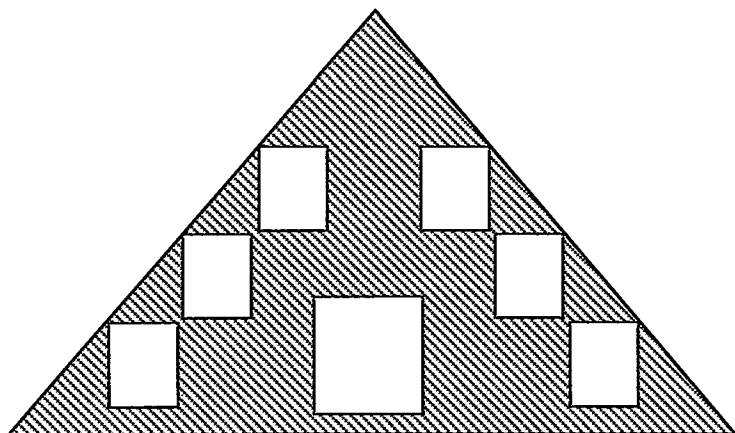
Rear View of Candle Stand
(¾ Rear View)



Candle stand supports are 1" x 2" wood strips, diagonal support. Extending to rear is also a 1" x 2" strip attached diagonally to a 1" x 4" flat support base.

**Front View of
Mirror Panel**

**Rear View of
Vertical Support**



Complete flat, vertical panel can be made of $\frac{1}{8}$ " Masonite or $\frac{1}{4}$ " plywood. The mirrors are attached to the panel with Velcro strips (adhesive on one side, Velcro on the other).

INSTRUCTIONS

After completing the construction of the candle stand holder (except for its back diagonal support), lay the candle stand triangle over a flat piece of Masonite or plywood and mark the outline for cutting the mirror panel to size. Next mark where on the panel the mirrors should be placed to reflect the candles' flames. The mirror panel may then be attached to the rear of the candle stand holder or finished as a second unit with its own rear support. If separate, the mirror panel slides under the candle stand holder's diagonal support and is adjusted for the best reflections of the candlelight. Mirrors may be purchased at craft or hobby stores.

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FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

(All seven candles have been lit prior to the beginning of the service.)

READER 1: The season of Lent is the forty-day period preceding Easter (not counting Sundays). The number forty was chosen to represent the forty days of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as well as the forty years Israel wandered in the desert.

The color for the season is purple. Purple is the symbol of passion and repentance, as well as royalty. It reminds us, therefore, to prepare our hearts and lives for the coming of the king of glory, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Of him we read in John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus came as the Light of the World, but the world resisted his illumination.

This series of readings reverses the Advent observance, where we light one additional candle each Sunday. Instead, we will be extinguishing one more candle each week, reminding us of Jesus' verdict on the world in John 3:19, 20: "Light has come into the world, but the people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

As we extinguish the first Lenten candle, let us ponder whether our lives are bringing darkness or light into this world.

(Extinguish a candle, leaving five purple candles and the Christ candle lit throughout the service.)

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

(Five purple candles and the white Christ candle have been lit prior to the beginning of the service.)

READER 2: On this second Sunday of Lent, we are reminded that the light of faith is feeble and sometimes fickle. Like a flare or a firecracker, our joyous zeal for Jesus may burn brightly and with beauty for a time, only to fizzle and fade amid the adversity or monotony of life. These words from John 6:63-66 illustrate that tendency among Jesus' followers. Jesus said to his disciples:

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.

The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. As we extinguish the second candle, we ponder the fate of those whose light of faith burned out. Let us also consider whether our faith in Jesus is born of the spirit or of the flesh. "The Spirit gives life," Jesus said. "The flesh counts for nothing." The question is: does my life, my faith, count for something? *(Extinguish a candle, leaving four purple candles and the Christ candle lit throughout the service.)*

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

(Four purple candles and the white Christ candle have been lit prior to the beginning of the service.)

READER 3: As we approach the midpoint of Lent, we are reminded of the power of evil in the world, even in holy places and among religious people. Mark 11:15-18 records Jesus' confrontation with those powers of darkness.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

How tragically ironic that the center of faith in Israel, the temple in Jerusalem, should become a source of fear and the center of evil intentions against Jesus. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:19 that our body "is a temple of the Holy Spirit." As we extinguish the third candle, let us consider whether that temple, my temple, is a center of faith or a source of fear.

(Extinguish a candle, leaving three purple candles and the Christ candle lit throughout the service.)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

(Three purple candles and the white Christ candle have been lit prior to the beginning of the service.)

READER 4: For some, Judas has become the symbol of Satan incarnate because he agreed to betray his master for a price. Luke 22:1-6 records the fateful decision:

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

Judas made a choice on that day. He chose to abandon Jesus and to join the opposition. They offered him a more lucrative contract, it seems. And Judas, the longtime disciple, abandoned his first love. The forces of darkness prevailed. But maybe Judas isn't that unique. Maybe he is also the prototype of those whose love for Christ grows cold. As we extinguish the fourth candle today, let us consider our own commitment to Jesus. Let's ask ourselves, "Have I always been consistent in my allegiance, or are there times when the payoff was better elsewhere?" Perhaps we betray Jesus still — for a price, of course!

(Extinguish a candle, leaving two purple candles and the Christ candle lit throughout the service.)

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

(Two purple candles and the white Christ candle have been lit prior to the beginning of the service.)

READER 5: As the forces of darkness sweep relentlessly over Jesus, even Peter, the Rock — the disciple who first recognized and confessed Jesus as Messiah, Son of the living God — even this Peter falters in his allegiance. Mark 14:66-72 recounts the events of that evening.

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priests came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

The fifth Lenten candle represents the light of our confession of Jesus as Lord. Perhaps the words of the children's song express it best.

Jesus bids us shine first of all for him,
Well he sees and knows it
If our light grows dim.
He looks down from heaven
To see us shine,



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by Henry Paetkau.

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