

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS

SESSION V

**WORSHIP SERVICES AND
LITURGICAL OBSERVANCES**

" And so from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Colossians 1:9 - 10 RSV

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Just as the calendar year is marked off into seasons, so the church year also has seasons which annually inspire moods for worship. Focusing on incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus, these worship seasons establish what is known as the Church Year, which is a kind of biography of Jesus that annually proclaims that God became flesh and walked among us.

ADVENT

The beginning season of the Christian Church Year is Advent, meaning "the coming." Originally the Advent season was forty days long, just like Lent, but with time it has been changed to the four weeks before Christmas. These four weeks provide a period of preparation for the coming of Christ culminating in the celebration of the incarnation at Christmas.

Advent is the season of anticipation and preparation for the Christ event in the universe and in our lives. Christmastide takes the Christian faith community from the eve of nativity through Epiphany, which is God's manifestation to all of human kind as light and life.

THE ADVENT WREATH

One beautiful tradition of Advent is the lighting of the Advent wreath. The purpose of the wreath is to deepen the understanding of Christmas. The wreath evolved from the use of a simple spray of evergreen placed near the hearth. The evergreen came to symbolize everlasting life found in Christ. The bending of the branch so that the ends touched further symbolized life without end. So came about the circle, a wreath.

Customarily, there are four candles for the four weeks of Advent, and sometimes a central candle, known as the Christ candle. The Advent candles are lighted throughout Advent, but the Christ candle is not lighted until Christmas Eve.

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The candles signify God's Son as the light of the world. Candles have been used for centuries as the symbol of light. The traditional act of lighting one more candle each week tells of the increasingly brighter light of Christ's coming, and leads gradually to the blaze of light at the dawning of Christmas.

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

Hartford celebrates the birth of Jesus during a beautiful candlelight service on Christmas Eve. The taking of Communion is also a part of this celebration, just before the lighting of the candles at midnight.

CHRISTMAS

Early Christians celebrated the birth and baptism of Jesus on Epiphany, January 6. Christmas as we have it today on December 25, developed from a pagan festival celebrating the birth of the sun god. The first day of winter is the shortest day of the year because the sun is shortest in appearance.

At this point, according to pagan belief, the sun has a "rebirth" because its appearances increase each day after that. The early Christians related this to the Son of Righteousness. In the fourth century the Christians at Rome celebrated the birth of Christ on December 25 (then the first day of winter). The custom and date spread throughout Christendom.

WATCH NIGHT SERVICE and INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

In preparation for the new year, church officers are installed just prior to the start of the Watch Night Service. At 12:00 midnight we are on our knees, giving thanks to the Lord for bringing us safely into a new year.

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EPIPHANY

Epiphany literally means "shining upon". The occasion highlights the manifestation or appearing of God to the Gentiles through Jesus. The gift of God's grace is sudden and surprising in character.

The word "epiphany" means an appearance or a manifestation, especially of a deity. When the Christ Child was presented in the temple, the aged Simeon prophesied that Jesus, be "a light to lighten the Gentiles". (Luke 2:32) This prophecy received its first fulfillment in the coming of the Magi.

The Wise Men, the intellectuals, behold the star and the promised child. The people of Jerusalem lift up their eyes and see by the new light of God their daughters and sons returning and the nations coming bearing their gifts.

In short, God's purpose has been revealed to enlighten everyone--the high, the low, the rich and the poor. The radiance of God's love generates quality relationships, creates equal opportunities, ends aggression, banishes greed and eliminates misery. Correspondingly, our inheritance is ~~the power to love, to forgive, to turn stumbling blocks into~~ stepping stones, to triumph over temptation and to overcome evil with good. These treasures and many more are guaranteed if we are willing to follow the star that leads us to "the unsearchable riches of Christ". (Ephesians 3:8)

SHROVE TUESDAY

Shrove Tuesday is the culmination of the three day Shrove-tide season which begins on the Sunday preceeding Ash Wednesday. The name comes from the Middle English "Shriving" which relates to confession and absolution (forgiveness). Shrove Tuesday, also referred to as Fat Tuesday became the occasion where people consumed food items that were formally forbidden during the Lenten season.

This is why pancakes and sausages, for example, became a staple for the eve of Ash Wednesday, especially in England. Each national group, however, has produced different foods based on their culinary tastes.

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L E N T

The Lenten season is the forty-six day period from Ash Wednesday to the eve of Easter. The Sundays of the period are considered commemorations of the first Easter and are excluded from the fasting season which is the remaining forty days. The last week in Lent, which begins with Palm Sunday, is called Holy Week. Just as Advent is a period of preparation for Christmas, Lent is a period of preparation for Easter, the highest festival of the Church Year.

ASH WEDNESDAY

The six weeks of LENT commemorate the forty days of fasting and of prayer, which our Lord spent alone in the wilderness in preparation for his three year ministry. The word comes from the Saxon, 'lecten' meaning "Spring". ASH WEDNESDAY, the first day of Lent, forty weekdays before Palm Sunday is specially commemorated by the blessing of ashes before the Communion.

The people come forward while the pastor, dipping his thumb in the ashes, makes the sign of the cross upon their foreheads. The ashes signifying that humankind being mortal, must ever approach the Throne of God with deep humility, are obtained by burning palms used in the last year's Palm Sunday procession.

MAUNDY THURSDAY (PASSEVER/LOVE FEAST)

The Passover is the First of three great religious festivals in Israel's liturgical calendar, commemorating the deliverance from Egypt. It is observed in the Spring near Good Friday and Easter. The Love Feast is the Christian adaption of the Passover with emphasis on the love of God toward us and the love that God bids us to show toward one another. It commemorates our deliverance from sin and death through the passion of Jesus Christ.

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On Thursday before Easter, we celebrate this feast in our church. Christ himself is our Passover and unconditional love is our mandate. We call this day "Maundy Thursday". That term is derived from the Latin word Mandatum, which means "Mandate" or commandment from God. The commandment found in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give you, that you also love one another.

By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another". They shall know we are Christians by our love. LOVE is the nature of God. LOVE is the chief characteristic of a Child of God. LOVE is the identification mark of a Christian. LOVE is the greatest thing in the world.

THE PASSOVER (AGAPE) MEAL

The Paschal Lamb represents the sacrificial offering, Jesus Christ.

Matzah: Unleavened bread represents the haste and urgency of the exodus, the liberation agenda is urgent today. There is no time for frivolity or foolishness.

Lettuce represents the bitter herbs, the bitterness and pain of slavery, second class citizenship. Racism is bitter. It still hurts.

Passover Wine represents the hope and joy that awaits Canaan, Land of Freedom.

Rice represents the faithfulness of the harvest.

Olives represent healing and light.

Figs represent peace and unity.

Dates represent sweetness and grace.

Oranges represent the faithfulness and abundance of the earth and of the people who are liberated of God.

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GOOD FRIDAY

The remembrance of the three hours that Jesus suffered and died on the cross, with prayers, sermons and music.

EASTER

Easter is the oldest and most significant festival of the Church Year. It has been referred to as the keystone in the arch of Christianity because without it everything else falls. Easter season begins with prayers on the eve of Easter and ends fifty days later on the eve of Pentecost.

PENTECOST

Pentecost is Greek for fiftieth. It is the festival fifty days after Easter (the seventh Sunday) at which Christians commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples in the form of eleven tongues like fire (Acts 2:3). Christians consider this event the founding of the Christian church. The basic symbols for this day are those of the Holy Spirit, especially the flames and the descending dove.

TRINITY

The Sunday following Pentecost is Trinity Sunday. This begins a long season of Sundays "after Trinity" lasting twenty-seven Sundays depending on the date of Easter. Worshipers are to think of the seasons preceeding Trinity as periods in which they consider what God has done for them in Christ. During the Trinity season the emphasis is on Christians responding to God's grace. God's revelation is applied to life so that Christian growth is nurtured.

And then the Church Calendar starts again with Advent.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE HARTFORD CALENDAR

JANUARY:

First Sunday of the New Year - Tabernacle Baptist Church
In House Revival

FEBRUARY:

Men's Day
Pastor's Appreciation

March:

Lenten Cell Meetings

APRIL:

Pastor's Anniversary

MAY:

Spring Revival - Ebenezer Baptist Church of Atlanta
Hartford at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Ga.

JUNE:

Baccalaureate Sunday

July:

Hartford at Trinity United Church in Chicago, Il.

AUGUST:

Annual Church Picnic

SEPTEMBER:

Women's Day

OCTOBER:

Fall Revival: Trinity United Church of Christ of Chicago
Deacon's Day/Ordination

NOVEMBER:

Thanksgiving Day Service - 9:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.

DECEMBER:

Church Christmas Dinner and Pastor's Birthday Celebration

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PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

PRAYER: An address to God in word or thought; with adoration, confession, thanksgiving and petition (or supplication). Prayer is communion with God. It is the way God has ordained for us to communicate with him, and he with us.

WHY PRAY? THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER:

Above all, the purpose of prayer is to glorify God. Enjoy the presence of God. Go into his presence and linger awhile. In God's presence, we find comfort and peace, direction and guidance, and joy. Prayer is not just a means of getting us out of trouble, or something to make life easier for us. The purpose of prayer is to glorify God. Prayer that moves God, is prayer that "...seeks first the kingdom of god and his righteousness..."

Our Relationship to God in Prayer:

"It's important to realize, as we pray, that prayer is a spiritual activity, an activity which must be motivated and carried out by the Holy Spirit. When we come into God's presence in prayer, we should recognize our ignorance of what we should pray for and how we should pray for it, and in the consciousness of our utter inability to pray right, we should look up to the Holy Spirit, casting ourselves utterly upon Him to direct our prayer, to lead out our desires and to guide our utterance of them."

R.A. Torey, How to Pray

Prayer satisfies the deepest longings of the human heart, the longing of a heart for God. This Psalm of David, written when he was hiding in the wilderness of Judea, describes that longing for God.

"O God, My God! How I search for you! How I thirst for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. How I long to find you! How I wish I could go into your sanctuary to see your strength and glory, for your love and kindness are better to me than life itself. How I praise you! I will bless you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. At last I shall be fully satisfied; I will praise you with great joy."

Psalms 63:1-5 Living Bible

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It is a privilege to be able to pray to our Father in heaven. God has given us access to himself, through prayer. Of all the privileges we have in life, a personal audience with our Father is one of the greatest.

PARTS OF PRAYER:

Generally speaking, there are four parts of prayer, adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. These four parts can be categorized into two phases. 1) Giving to God; adoration, confession and thanksgiving. 2) Receiving from God; supplication

ADORATION (PRAISE) - Giving honor to God. Regarding him with fervent devotion. Enjoying God for God's sake. Think about what you like about God. I.e. his mercy, his magnificence, his love, his salvation, etc.

CONFESSION - Humble yourself. Confess your faults. Confess your ignorance, that you don't know what's best. Confession should be real and earnest. But, beware of torturous self-examination or unhealthy extremes of introspection. (Don't beat up on yourself) Great men of the Old Testament, like David and Moses, were not perfect. But, when they sinned, they had the ability to confess and be restored to fellowship, and go on once more with God.

THANKSGIVING - Render Thanks. Express gratitude. Thank God for specific things, i.e. right mind, activity of limbs, shelter, salvation, his love, etc. Give thanks in all things, even adversities. For God is with us in the midst of our storms.

SUPPLICATION - Ask the things you desire

- First, for others (Intercessory prayer); family, world, church, city, government, homeless, poor, sick, bereaved...
- Lastly, for yourself; desires of your heart

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UNANSWERED PRAYER: We believe that God can answer prayer, but we sometimes question whether he will.

By way of understanding God's willingness to answer prayer, Jesus uses this parent/child analogy described in Luke 11:11-13: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." No parent would refuse his child an honest request. No parent would deliberately hurt his child. The loving parent always seeks to do what is best for the child, even though the child may not understand it, or perceive it that way.

Having the faith and confidence in our heavenly Father, that he will always answer our prayer in the best way, we must be willing to patiently wait upon his answer, but accept his answer, even if

Considerations for seemingly unanswered prayer:

- Ask expectantly: If we but call on God. He will answer and show us "great and mighty" things.

We are often hindered by earthly circumstances that we lose sight of God's vision, and turn to our own devices. We should continue to expect to hear from him. William Carey, the great evangelist, said, "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."
- Ask according to God's will: We know the mind and will of God, through study and prayer. "Seek ye first, the kingdom...." Our petitions should always glorify God.
- Ask believing: "Without faith it is impossible to please him." This can be a stumbling block for most of us, because we are tempted to doubt God's love and willingness to make provision for us. More things are wrought by prayer than this world could imagine.
- Wait for an answer: Be patient. God's ways are not our ways. He is not governed by our calendar or perception of time. If we pray expectantly, in faith, and according to his will, we will wait patiently for the manifestation of his answer. Even if the answer is no.

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PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT: Praying in the name of Jesus and in the character of God. Surrendering to God's will. Not necessarily praying in "Tongues."

Again, prayer is a spiritual activity, an activity which must be motivated and carried out by the Holy Spirit. "True prayer is prayer in the Spirit; that is, the prayer the Spirit inspires and directs." John 4:24 tells us that "God is a Spirit...." We must worship and pray in that spirit. The Spirit comes to be our life companion. By faith, we have the assurance that the Spirit will keep us in a prayerful attitude and make us realize God's presence so that our prayer will be the continual exercise of fellowship with God and his great love."

WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY:

We ought to always pray. Prayer should be an integral part of our daily life. Every Christian should set aside time to pray, to communicate with God. To fellowship with God. We continually need guidance as we walk the path of this Christian life. God does not promise to show us the whole future at once, but he does promise to guide us day by day. Our prayer life is a means of "abiding in, and with God."

Some begin their day with prayer, rising early in the morning to spend time talking with and listening to God. C. Austin Miles, describes his prayer time in the hymn, "In the Garden."

I come to the garden alone, While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear falling on my ear, The Son of God discloses
And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am
His own, And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has
ever known. I'd stay in the garden with Him, Tho the night
around me be falling; But he bids me go - thru the voice of
woe, His voice to me is calling....

Whether in the morning or at night, we can proclaim our greatest happiness, our unparalleled joy, our peace that surpasseth understanding; express our deepest hurts, confess our worse sins, and entrust our most ardent desires to our heavenly Father, through pray.

These are the greatest needs of life. These are things which God alone can satisfy.

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PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. What is prayer?
2. State the purpose of prayer.
3. Describe our relationship to God in prayer.
4. Name and define the four parts of prayer.
5. What is intercessory prayer, and what is it's order in prayer.
6. Describe our attitude about confession in prayer.
7. What are some of the considerations for unanswered prayer.
8. What is "praying in the spirit?"
9. When should we pray?