

# The Gift of Light

*An Advent Service by Marilyn Houser Hamm  
From Women Together: Ideas for Groups, vol. 1  
Mennonite Women*

## Advance Preparation

You will need a scripture reader, actor, soloist, at least one instrumentalist (piano, recorder, flute, violin would work well for this music), and a small group of singers. The singers will take the part of the “family,” improvising lines in designated parts of the program; assign roles of three children of different ages. If you wish, perform the program as a pantomime, with one person reading the actor’s lines as another mimes the role of the mother.

Props include an apron, kitchen utensils for a specific activity (cooking pot for soup-making, rolling pin for baking biscuits, etc.), votive candle, matchbook, chairs, and table at center stage. After the first scene, remove the kitchen utensils and place an Advent wreath on the table, including a middle Christ candle. As a gift to all participants, prepare a basket of white candles tied with gold ribbon and a tag with the Isaiah 60 passage.

## Program

Instrumentalist plays in the background (possibly “O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion” from Handel’s “Messiah”) as the reader and actor (and narrator, if the actor only mimes her part) enter. The singers stand to the side or behind the congregation. The actor wears a professional outfit covered with an apron; during the scripture reading, she freezes in place.

**Reader:** The people who walk in darkness  
will see a great light;  
those who live in a dark land,  
the light will shine on them. (Isaiah 9:2)

Singers sing verse one of HWB 176 “Comfort, comfort, O my people” as the actor feverishly cooks. Voices (from singers) emerge with calls such as: “Mom, did you lose my socks in the laundry again?” “Do I *have* to practice piano?” “Mommmy! Hockey practice in half an hour!” “Aw—soup again?!” The actor ad-libs responses.

**Actor:** The day had been a hectic hurdling of work, fixing lunches, tracking five separate schedules in our busy household, bucking traffic, and now, it was time to make supper. I love cooking at the end of a work day—not!

In the midst of my frenzy, my eyes caught sight of the small votive candle which I had placed on the kitchen counter the day before—the beginning of Advent. Almost instinctively, I stopped. I reached for the matchbook, watched the momentary flicker of the wick, and was greeted by the sudden surprise of . . . serenity. My whole being began to change as the warmth of the candle’s glow flickered into my determination with a reality check. (*Sighs deeply*) Ah well, you have ’em and you love ’em. (*Looks at candle, smiles, shakes her head, and begins to resume her task, humming.*)

Instrumentalist plays another stanza of “Comfort, comfort” while the actor completes the kitchen task with satisfaction, glances at the votive candle, smiles, and exits, calling, “Your socks are in your dresser drawer!” etc. She removes the apron. Instrumentalist again plays the music used to begin the previous scene. During the reading, the actor enters at a casual pace, stops at left. She looks around, shakes her head in disbelief at the quiet, smiles, and plops down in front of an imaginary fireplace, warming her hands.

**Reader:** Arise, shine: for your light has come;  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
For behold, darkness will cover the earth,  
and deep darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will rise upon you,  
and his glory will appear upon you.  
Lift up your eyes round about, and see. . . .  
You will see and be radiant,  
and your heart will thrill and rejoice. (Isaiah 60:1-2;4a &5a)

**Actor:** It never happens at our house; I mean, never! Our house turned quiet in the evening. Not just a dull roar, absolutely quiet! All three kids suddenly were out—Amanda to girl’s club, Kristen to volleyball practice, Rob to a friend’s. It was sooo quiet. Jim and I hardly knew what to do with ourselves.

We put in the fireplace years ago, partly for an alternate heat source, partly for the hope of enjoyment. But rarely had the second half of our plan taken place. In a moment of enlightenment, Jim dug out the kindling. Moments later, the crackling sound of the flames and light of a different kind filled the room. Jim sat down beside me and promptly fell asleep!

As I watched the dancing flames, basking in the glow of the fire, light and warmth and healing filled my whole being, and my spirit found that “settled rest” of which the poet speaks in the hymn I love so well.

Instrumentalist plays and soloist sings HWB 589 “My Shepherd will supply my need,” verse one. Instrumentalist continues to play during the next reading.

**Reader:** (*Slowly*) Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I have come to bring you light.

Singers lead whole group in verse three of HWB 589. At the end, the actor urges, “Jim! Wake up!” She stands and moves to the center.

**Actor:** Every evening in Advent, just before bedtime, we gather together at the dining room table around the Advent wreath. (*An immediate burst of voices is heard as the family brings the table and Advent wreath to front right and sit around it. Ad lib family banter—typical sibling back-and-forth. The family acts out events describes by the actor.*)

The children wait in eager expectation for their turns to light the candle. Who will be brave enough to strike the match? And, ah—the satisfaction of a task completed when the tall red candles glow with the slim flame reaching up to God. We sing, talk about the day, and give thanks to God in the serenity of that sacred space.

Actor sits with family for an improvised scene. They choose and sing a carol; a young child requests “Jingle Bells.” Parents initiate sharing about the day, gather prayer requests from children. Family noticeably quiets as time progresses. One child speaks a prayer. Parents remind children it is bedtime. Family exits amidst much activity—“ ’Night, Mom . . . Are you coming?” “Be sure to brush your teeth.” “I’ll be there in a minute.” The actor lingers, gazing into the flame. Room lights are dimmed as the instrumentalist begins to play HWB 211 “Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming”; music continues throughout the reading.

**Reader:** ( *Holding a lit candle*) 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 by him; and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being. In him was life; and the life was the light of the world. The light shines in the darkness; and the darkness has never overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

The singers invite all to join in singing HWB 182 “Oh, how shall I receive thee” or Hymnal Subscription Service 980 “O joyous light of glory.” Distribute the decorated candles to all participants. Invite those sitting at ends of rows to light their candles from the Christ candle of the Advent wreath, and then begin passing the flame from person to person, lighting all the candles.

**Actor:** What is the light, but a beckoning—  
a calling to my inner spirit to come close,  
to shut all of the other doors of my life,  
and to enter into the fullness of that silence.

In the warmth of the glow of that light,  
I am called to listen, to listen through the silence.

My world seems so full of crises and emergencies,  
a place where I pray only when there is nothing “urgent” to do.  
Even when I do good things,  
it’s often with impatience and my own complaining.  
Into this world of mine, come, O light.

Help me to come to the light which you offer,  
to stand in your presence with open hands and heart,  
vulnerable as the child in the manger.

Out of the silence, may my living proclaim  
that there is nothing which I can do  
without the One who gives me light and strength,  
hope, courage, and peace,  
through the Savior born in Bethlehem.

*(Based on writings of Henry Nouwen)*

Led by the singing group, everyone sings HWB 191 “O little town of Bethlehem.” Reader invites worshippers to take home the candles and to stand for the benediction.

**Reader:** Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
Lift up your eyes round about and see;  
enter into the light, and hear God’s voice.  
You will see, and be radiant,  
your heart will thrill and rejoice. Amen.