



## Journeys to Christmas

My wondering about the meaning of Advent for me, as a Friend, started with the language "expectant waiting." That phrase is how I often describe meeting for worship -- I wait in stillness and expectation, open to the Spirit. In the same way, the season of Advent is a time of expectant waiting for Christmas and the coming of the Light of the World. My understanding is that historically Quakers didn't celebrate Christmas as a special holiday, because the welcoming of Jesus is meant to be in our hearts always, not just on one day. (I'm reminded of the spacious language in Godly Play stories . . . *All of God is in every place . . . The Light spreads out and is everywhere, in all places and all times . . .*) What do these experiences of continued presence mean for a Quaker pondering Advent? I realized that over the years I was on a journey with this story. And like the journey to Bethlehem, mine had challenges as well as joy.

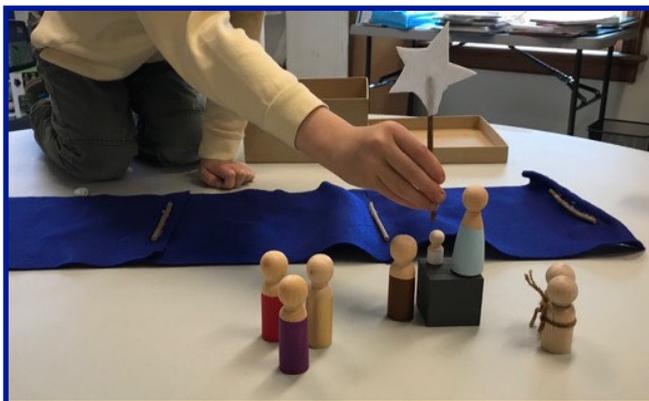
From the time my older children were very little, I've told the Godly Play® Advent story on Sundays after supper in the weeks leading to Christmas. My children would ask me all week when it would be Sunday again. In our household, this holiday tradition had importance both as a story of our shared faith and also as a way to slow down the build-up to Christmas. We could focus on the journey to Bethlehem, the mystery and wonder of that time of year. I loved those story times together -- sitting on the living room floor and bringing out more pieces of our family crèche each week. The Advent wreath and liturgical colors of the season, which had not been part of my Quaker upbringing, are such an inherent visual of the Godly Play story (and part of my spouse's childhood tradition) that if I ever wondered about telling the story without them, I released the concern. I also used this story at our Quaker meeting for many years to begin the Christmas season and get us ready to tell the story of the Nativity in our pageant. I used language like, "If you go into some churches this time of year, it is the time of the color purple." The changing of the light, so that it can spread out and be in all times, all places -- has always resonated with my faith as a Friend.

**More recently, I was led to think about how to adapt with intention and care the language and materials of this story to share it with Friends.** I wondered what we could take out and still have what we need? There were always ways that I adapted the language of the story for the Quaker settings I told it in; how could I keep the language of mystery and broaden the message that this story is in all times, and always with us?

I created materials that don't include liturgical colors or the Advent wreath, but retain the language about being present to the mystery of Christmas, remembering the different journeys to Bethlehem – and the one we're still on, and the light changing. I use a deep blue underlay with the white panel for Christmas, the figures on their way to Bethlehem, and the same color candle for the Light in each panel. I realize that I'm still playing with symbolism and meaning: blue can be the Advent color in some churches, and my wooden figures are made from olive wood from Bethlehem. (Also: see note on last page about "hand of the prophets" in the first panel!) But this felt simpler, and visually closer to the story I prepared to tell. I continue to tell this story in its weekly parts for my family on the Sundays leading to Christmas, and I've also shared all the parts in one telling at meeting.

It's important for the figures you use to be ones children are allowed to touch and work with. Wooden ones are best! When we have Community Worship at our meeting during Christmas time, we will put out a variety of Nativity sets for children and it is a delight to watch them mix together pieces from different sets (some from other parts of the world) as they work/play their way through the story and its journeys.

What is offered on the next page is a sketch of how I started the story (the rest I mostly follow the story in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: Volume 3*, adapted to tell in one sitting – I don't "change the light" until the very end).



**(Holding closed story box)** *A mystery is about to happen. It is a mystery that includes many journeys. This mystery is full of Light.*

*We remember the mystery at this Christmas time of year, but it's for all times and all places. The love and Light in this story can always be with us.*

*At this Christmas time of year, we remember a King who was coming and who is still coming. This is full of mystery. A King is coming, but he is not the kind of King the people were expecting. He had no army, no great house, no riches. This King was a baby who was born in a barn.*

*This is full of mystery, and a mystery can be hard to enter sometimes. **(Take out underlay and set box aside with the lid on like parable box)**. Sometimes people can walk right through a mystery and not even know it is there. This time of year you will see people hurrying and buying things and going to parties, but they might miss the mystery. Maybe they don't know how to get ready, or maybe they just forgot.*

*A long time ago, people in some churches decided that we need a way to get ready to enter or even come close to the mystery of Christmas. This is such a great mystery that it takes weeks to get ready. **(unroll underlay, all but last (white) panel)***

*People call this time Advent, which means "arrival," but before we can arrive anywhere, **(trace finger along panels toward white one still rolled up)** we need to go on a journey. **(roll underlay back up to start )** During this time we are all on our way to Bethlehem. We are all making the journey.*

*[continue with GP script – Volume 3, top of page 31\*]*

*\*One other change, when I'm telling all four weeks at one sitting, I add the language from page 32 about prophets (can be boys or girls, in our circle etc.) after the section on page 31 that begins "Prophets are people [. . .] most important."*

*At the start of each of the next panels, I say, "In the (second) week of Advent, we remember (the Holy Family)," rather than refer to the cards, which my story set does not have.*

*I end the story with:*

*"Anywhere you go, the Light is within you and everyone you meet. And the mystery of Christmas, the baby king born in a barn, who grew to be a teacher, the Prince of Peace, and a Light for the whole World, is with us always."*



The first section of the story should also have a hand pointing the way to Bethlehem.  
*(I've colored the hand brown and added it to my materials, mounted on stiff felt.)*

