The image features five lit candles of varying heights and colors against a black background. From left to right, the candles are: a short white candle, a medium-height purple candle, a tall white candle, a medium-height purple candle, and a medium-height purple candle. All candles are lit, with bright yellow and orange flames and blue bases. The lighting is soft, creating a warm and contemplative atmosphere.

# Toward Christmas

An Advent Reflection

# What is Advent, and what does it have to do with Christmas?

Some may be surprised that the Christmas season doesn't begin when the advertising starts calling to our wallets. Traditionally, Christmas actually begins on Christmas Day and lasts for 12 days until Epiphany, which marks the visit of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus.

Advent, then, is the period that begins four Sundays before Christmas Eve.

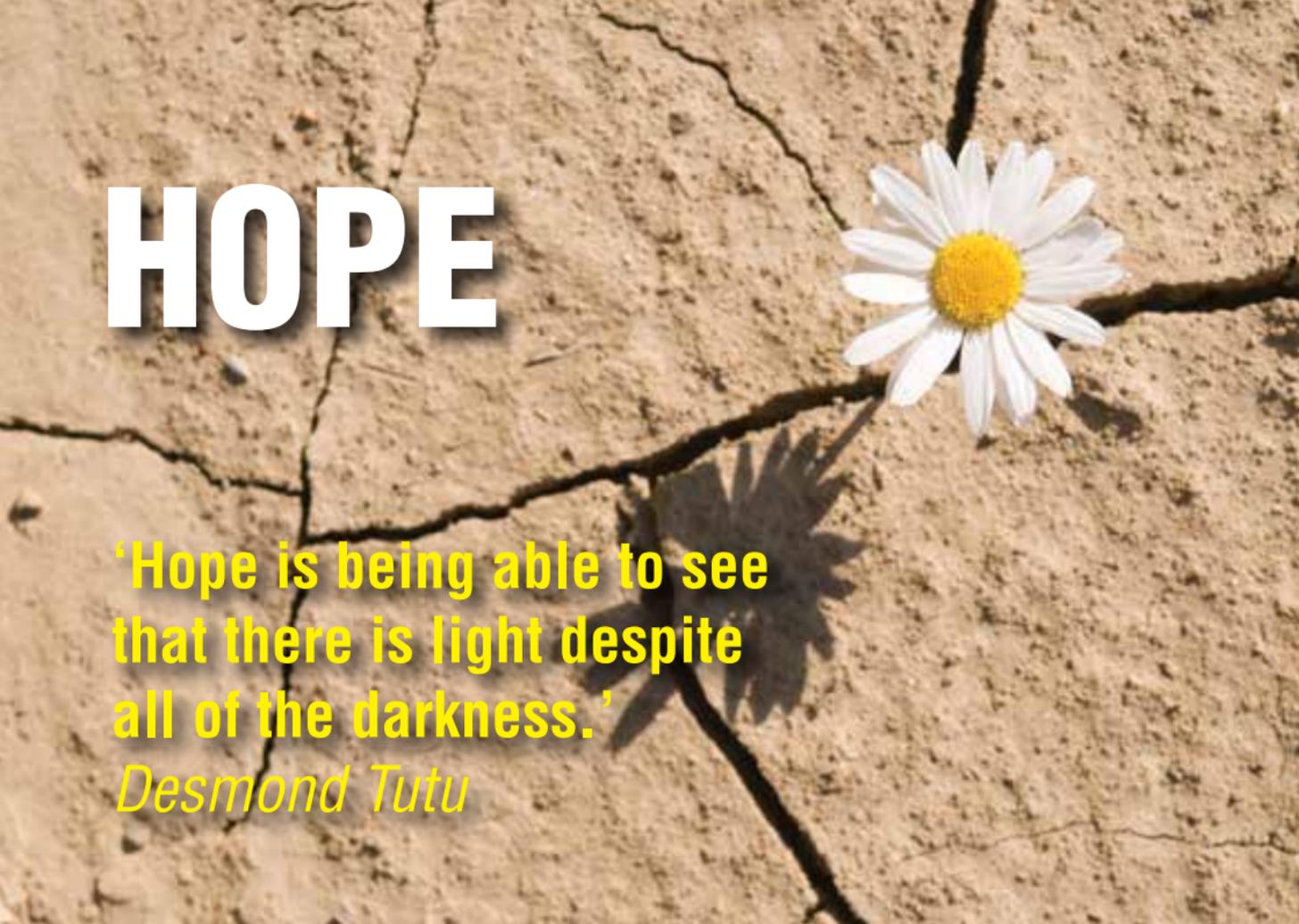
The word Advent comes from the Latin word 'Adventus', which means 'coming'. This itself comes from the Greek word 'parousia', which was often used to refer to the Second Coming of Jesus. As such, the season of

Advent is a time of reflection in anticipation of both the birth of Jesus and his eventual return, as well as being a time for welcoming God into our lives every day.

Each of the four weeks of Advent focus on the themes of hope, love, joy and peace, which are often marked with the lighting of a candle. Then on Christmas Eve a white candle, representing Christ, is lit.

In the midst of the stress and busyness leading up to Christmas, this Advent booklet is an invitation for you to enter into a more reflective space and to welcome the themes of Advent into your life.

# HOPE

A close-up photograph of a single white daisy flower with a bright yellow center, growing out of a deep crack in parched, cracked brown soil. The flower is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the frame. The background is the textured, cracked earth, with several other cracks visible. The lighting is bright, casting a distinct shadow of the flower onto the ground to its left.

**'Hope is being able to see  
that there is light despite  
all of the darkness.'**

*Desmond Tutu*

# What is Hope?

The theme for the first week of Advent, hope, is connected to the experience of the ancient Israelites, who were frequently under the rule of foreign empires. Their prophets promised that one day a Saviour would come to set them free, and this hope for the future helped them to persevere in difficult circumstances.

Hope is often linked with optimism about the future. Like joy, it can be an anchor during adversity. What if hope was based on a fact, if it was unshakeable, based on something that sustains you despite the trials and tribulations that life often throws at us?

## Questions for reflection

1. Where do you find hope in your life? Or if you feel hopeless, why is that so, and what choices could you make to find a sense of hope?
2. Reflect on the past year. How have your experiences shaped your hopes for the future?
3. Where do you see hope in the lead-up to Christmas?

# LOVE

**'Spread love everywhere  
you go. Let no one ever  
come to you without  
leaving happier.'**

*Mother Teresa*



# What is Love?

The theme for the second week of Advent is love, reflecting the Christian understanding that God is love, and loved the world so much that He came in the person of Jesus to share our experience of being human.

Love can mean many different things in our culture. We say we love our spouse, but we also say we love our favourite television show. Love is generally seen as an affection for someone or something. But what if love is more than that? What if love is about sacrificial giving without expecting anything in return? It is sometimes said that love is a verb (a doing word or action), not a noun.

## Questions for reflection

1. Think of some times when you have given sacrificially to someone, or they have done the same to you?
2. What could you do to offer love to somebody else?
3. How is love part of Christmas for you?

**‘Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.’**

*Karl Barth*



# What is Joy?

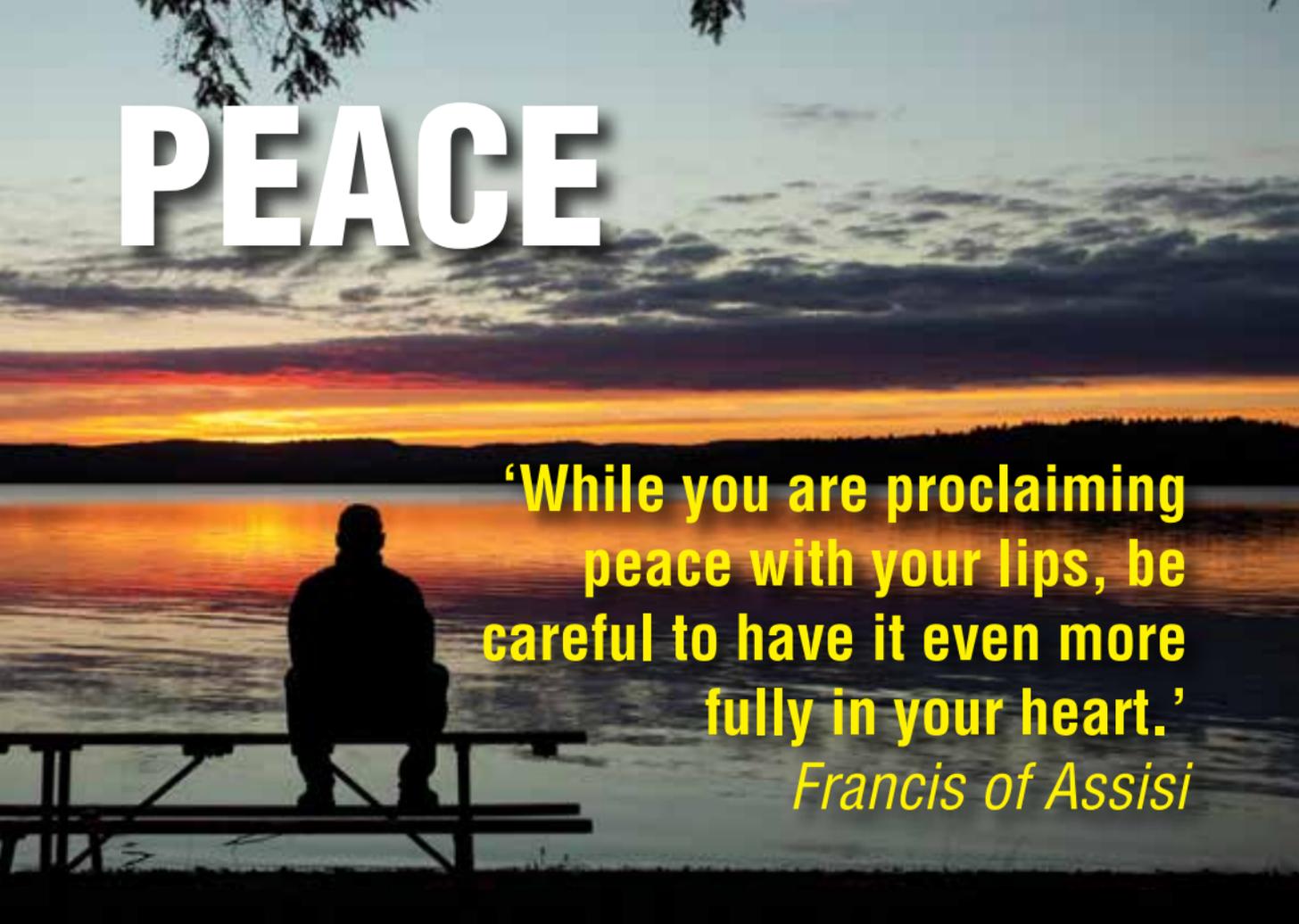
The theme for the third week of Advent is joy, often connected to the joy of Mary at realising she has been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, but also a reminder that we can be joyful that the birth of Christ is near.

Most people see joy and happiness as the same thing. Happiness, however, is generally assumed to be a feeling connected to circumstances going our way. Joy, on the other hand, comes from within and is not dependent on circumstances. It can be based in knowing that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. It gives us resilience to cope with life.

## Questions for reflection

1. Are joy and happiness the same thing? How are they different for you?
2. Is it possible to experience joy during difficult times? When has this happened for you?
3. Do you experience joy at Christmas? Why/why not?

# PEACE

A person is silhouetted while sitting on a wooden dock or pier that extends into a calm body of water. The scene is set at sunset, with the sky transitioning from a deep orange near the horizon to a pale blue at the top. The sun's reflection is visible on the water's surface. The word "PEACE" is written in large, bold, white capital letters in the upper left corner of the image.

**‘While you are proclaiming  
peace with your lips, be  
careful to have it even more  
fully in your heart.’**

*Francis of Assisi*

# What is Peace?

The theme for the final week of Advent is peace. Here we can reflect on the fact that the baby Jesus who is soon to be born in a stable is called 'the Prince of Peace' by the prophet Isaiah, and as an adult, he chooses to respond to violence with love.

The ancient Israelites saw peace as something that encompassed the whole of life. They called it shalom. It wasn't just about the absence of conflict, but it was also about an inner contentment linked to joy. It is the sense that everything is okay despite what we may see around us.

## Questions for reflection

1. Do you think peace is more than the absence of conflict? If so, what more would peace entail for you?
2. Do you experience peace? Or a lack of it? What choices could you make to experience more peace in your life, especially during the pressure of preparation for Christmas?
3. Reflecting on your own relationships, how could you bring more peace into them?

## The Christ Candle

**The Christ Candle is lit on Christmas Eve to celebrate the imminent birth of Christ. It is where hope, love, joy, and peace converge. Our waiting and anticipation is over; the salvation of the world has begun.**

**Take time to reflect and act on the themes of hope, love, joy and peace and how they relate to the birth of Jesus.**

**For example, perform a random act of kindness for someone, spend some time delighting in nature, or take time to simply be still and sit in silence.**



Advent is a time of anticipation, expectant waiting and preparation for the coming of Christ into the world. It is a time to reflect on the themes of hope, love, joy and peace.

We have produced this Advent booklet in the hope that it will provide a sense of understanding about this time of year, and how we can prepare ourselves by setting some time aside to be still amidst the busyness of this season.

Our focus on Advent is also linked to our Christmas gift catalogue, where you can purchase gift cards linked to the four themes of hope, love, joy, and peace, and in the process support projects that bring the spirit of Advent and Christmas to people in poor communities around the world.

We hope this booklet has helped you reflect on what Advent means, and has given you the space to be still and know some of the hope, love, joy and peace that Advent and Christmas bring into the world.