

The Common Rule

— habits of light for a world of darkness —

www.thecommonrule.org



CELEBRATE!

The incarnation is unfathomably magical. That God became man in order to redeem all things deserves a party, a big one. Team up with others doing The Common Rule and pull out all the stops. Celebrate late into the night. Eat and drink with all the joy of the kingdom. Here are some steps that might help:

1 TEAM UP WITH FRIENDS

Often there is way too much going on during Advent. If adding a party to the list is going to crowd things, don't do it. If you can team up with friends who also want to celebrate the incarnation - maybe friends, small group, church community, neighbors - then do it together.

2 PLAN SIMPLY

Big celebration doesn't have to mean crippling preparation. There is enough of that at the holidays. The point is here is to round up some people and celebrate. Plan one big batch drink (see below for a cider & cocktail recipe) and ask everyone else to bring an appetizer to share. Or maybe you plan a big appetizer and ask everyone else to bring a drink to share. Whichever it is don't feel like you need to impress - feel like you need to celebrate!

2 FOCUS ON SPACE, NOT DECORATION

We need each other more than we need snow frosted fake pine cones. Don't worry about decoration as much as a space where people will be together. Maybe this is a bonfire out back, maybe it's a clever grouping of chairs to steer people into conversation, maybe it's rearranging your main room so it's people - not TV - centric. Whatever it is, use the opportunity to get people engaging and celebrating in a common space.

4 CELEBRATE INTENTIONALLY

See if you can't gather people in the middle of the party for a time of toasting, signing or saying what you mean. You will know your neighborhood or community well enough to know what's appropriate. If you need ideas, draw on the Carols & Cocktails template.

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Carols & Cocktails

An Advent Guide to a Liturgical Party by The Common Rule

Instructions:

Throw a great Christmas party with lots of food and drink. Sometime in the middle of the party, gather people for 20 minutes to go through the songs and readings in this guide. Ideally, you should have three readers picked out ahead of time and also have someone tapped who can kick off the toasting. This will help the flow feel more easy.

TS Eliot on a lifetime of Christmases:

*"[May the] accumulated memories of annual emotion
. . . be concentrated into a great joy
Which shall be also a great fear, as on the occasion
When fear came upon every soul:
Because the beginning shall remind us of the end
And the first coming of the second coming."*

- T.S Eliot, *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees*

Incarnation

Call and Response:

Reader 1: “Where is he who was born King of the Jews?”

All: We have come to worship him.”

- Matthew 2.2

- *pause for silence* -

Reader 2:

“You can read every fairy tale that was ever written, every mystery thriller, every ghost story and you will never find anything so shocking, so strange, so weird and so spellbinding as the incarnation of the Son of God.”

- John Piper, *Good News of Great Joy*

- *pause for silence* -

Reader 3:

“The Word become flesh. Ultimate Mystery born with a skull you could crush one-handed. Incarnation. It is not tame. It is not touching. It is not beautiful. It is uninhabitable terror. It is unthinkable darkness riven with unbearable light. Agonized laboring led to it, vast upheavals of intergalactic space/time split apart, a wrenching and tearing of the very sinews of reality itself. You can only cover your eyes and shudder before it, before this: ‘God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God . . . who for us and for our salvation,’ as the Nicene Creed puts it, ‘came down from heaven.’”

- Fredrick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark*

- *pause for silence* -

Sung together:

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

*Christ by highest heav'n adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a Virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”*

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”*

All:

- OPEN FLOOR FOR PRAYERS -

Trading Slaves

Reader 1:

Although Jesus existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and was made in the likeness of men.

- Philippians 2.6-7

- *pause for silence* -

Reader 2:

The incarnation was God's locking himself into death row. Christ did not risk death, he embraced it. . . Jesus took our nature in Bethlehem to die our death in Jerusalem. If death is no longer a fear, we are really, *really* free.

- John Piper, Good News of Great Joy

- *pause for silence* -

Reader 3:

I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people... I broke the yoke of slavery from your neck so you can stand upright and walk with your heads held high.

- Leviticus 26:13, *combined translations*

Sung together:

O Holy Night

*Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!*

All:

- OPEN FLOOR FOR PRAYERS -

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

*Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.*

*Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.*

The Way Down is the Way Up

Reader 1:

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?"
Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king."

- John 18:36

- silence -

Reader 2:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth

- Philippians 2:9-11

- silence -

Reader 3:

And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."
- Revelation 21:5

All together:

We have a king. We have a kingdom.

- OPEN FLOOR FOR TOASTS OR WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT -

Sung together:

Joy to the World

*1- Joy to the World , the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.*

*2- Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.*

*3- No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.*

*4- He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

Benediction

Call and Response:

Reader: We have a king. We have a kingdom.

All: "For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Halleluiah! Halleluiah!"

- Revelation 19:6 (and also Handel's *Messiah*)

Closing Prayer

Communal Benediction

Read together:

Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come
In your fearful innocence.

We fumble in the far-spent night
Far from lovers, friends, and home:
Come in your naked, newborn might.
Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come;
My heart withers in your absence.

Come, Lord Jesus, at the end,
Time's end, my end, forever's start.
Come in your flaming, burning power.
Time, like the temple veil, now rend;
Come, shatter every human hour.
Come, Lord Jesus, at the end.
Break, then mend the waiting heart.

- Madeleine L'Engle, *The Irrational Season*.

For Reflection

T.S. Eliot on leaving Christmas:

*We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.*

- T.S. Eliot, *The Journey of the Magi*

Cocktail Recipe:

The Modern Institution

Equal parts of Bourbon, Dry Vermouth & Cynar
Serve with a garnish of citrus peel (poke a clove through it if you feel festive)

Mulled Cider:

"We'll Fill Our Mouths With Cinnamon"

Warm cider on the stove with cinnamon sticks and orange peels.
Serve with a splash of whiskey or rum (blackstrap rum if you can get it)