

In Hopeful Expectation

PRAYERS AT HOME
FOR ADVENT
IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC



2020

What is Advent?

Each passing year presents us with a new opportunity to recall the Christian story by celebrating the different feasts and seasons of what we call the Liturgical Year. As we do so – our lives are opened up to the saving presence of God and we are drawn deeper into that great mystery of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Liturgical Year begins with the season of Advent, which consists of the four weeks before Christmas. Central to Advent is the Christian belief that God comes close to and visits humanity. “The first visit — we all know — occurred with the Incarnation, Jesus’ birth in the cave of Bethlehem; the second takes place in the present: the Lord visits us constantly, each day, walking alongside us and being a consoling presence; in the end, there will be the third, the last visit, which we proclaim each time that we recite the Creed: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead”. (Pope Francis, Angelus, 2016)

A Spiritual Opportunity

If approached in a spirit of openness, Advent can be an opportunity to deepen our sense of God who walks alongside us on the journey of life. It is somewhat like a mini Lent before Christmas. We are invited to set aside some extra time and space for prayer, reflection and good works. The restrictions in place because of the Coronavirus mean that we may not be in a position to gather as usual for our religious services. This situation challenges us to find new ways of reflecting on our faith and praying in our homes. It is hoped that this guide will assist you in doing just that.

The Advent Wreath

Catholicism has a long tradition of using images and symbols to help us to pray. Setting aside a place in your home for an Advent Wreath can help in this regard. For this you will need some ever-green leaves and five candles (it is preferable if there are three purple, one pink and one white). Arrange the leaves in a circle. Without beginning or end, the circle, along with the green leaves, symbolises the eternity of God who sustains life in all things. Put the purple and pink candles in the circle – and place the white one in the centre. As we progress through the Sundays of Advent, the different candles are lit, with the white one being lit on Christmas Eve. With the lighting of each candle we are reminded of how God draws ever-near and brings with him his saving light to dispel the darkness of our lives and our world. You might also consider placing a Bible – the Word of God – near the Advent Wreath.

Assembling the Christmas Crib

Another symbol that is used to help us connect with the meaning of Christmas is the traditional nativity scene or crib. During Advent, the gradual assembly of the crib may accompany our spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christmas. Source materials to build a stable along with crib figures (Mary, Joseph, the Ox, the Donkey, Shepherds, the Baby, the three Wise Kings). On the Second Sunday of Advent assemble the stable and leave it there empty with no visitors. On the third Sunday add some straw along with the Ox and the Donkey. On the fourth Sunday add Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds.

Broadcast Masses

While nothing can substitute for gathering in person, we are blessed to live in a time that the celebration of the Eucharist can be broadcast on radio or television or by means of the internet. This guide is also designed to help deepen your participation in those broadcasts and to assist you in getting the most out of them spiritually.



Call to Action

During each of our days of prayer there will be a call to action. To do something different or significant that puts the message of that particular day into practice.

Safety

This guide is designed for use by a single household. All health and safety advice should be adhered to. When using candles, please do so safely.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

20th December 2020



On the fourth Sunday of Advent the gaze of the Liturgy turns more and more towards that first coming of Jesus. Mary becomes our focus. We begin to journey with her as she conceives and brings to birth a Son. We contemplate the wonder of God becoming one of us and prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus that night those many years ago in Bethlehem. If we open our hearts – our lives WILL be changed.

A Prayer Ritual at Home

Gather around the Advent Wreath that you have prepared in your prayer space. Light two purple candles and the pink/rose one.

If building your crib – have the figures of Mary, Joseph, Jesus and the Shepherds at hand.

Pause for a moment of silent reflection to become aware of God's presence.

As we begin ...

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Let us pray (pause)

Lord, fill our hearts with your love, and as you revealed to us by an angel, the coming of your Son as man, so lead us through his suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection, for he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen

Let us listen to God's Word...

John 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her."

Let us reflect ...

"Nothing is impossible for God" (Lk 1:37): this is how the Angel's response to Mary ends. When we believe that everything depends exclusively on us we remain prisoners of our abilities, our strengths, our short-sighted horizons. On the other hand, when we are ready to let ourselves be helped, to allow ourselves to be advised, when we open ourselves to grace, it seems that the impossible begins to become reality. As in the times gone by, God continues to look for partners, he continues to look for men and women capable of believing, capable of remembering, of feeling part of his people in order to cooperate with the creativity of the Spirit. God continues to walk our neighbourhoods and our streets, he goes everywhere in search of hearts capable of listening to his invitation and of making him become flesh here and now. Paraphrasing Saint Ambrose in his commentary on this passage we can say: God continues to seek hearts like Mary's, willing to believe even in completely extraordinary conditions (cf. Exposition of the Gospel sec. Luke II, 17: PL 15, 1559). May the Lord increase this faith and this hope in us. (*Pope Francis, Visit to Milan, 2017*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Ritual Action

Place the figures of Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds in the Crib. Take the figure of the Baby Jesus and wrap it as a Christmas present and place it somewhere safe under the Christmas tree to be opened on Christmas Eve and placed in the crib. Jesus was the original Christmas gift.

We now light the last purple candle on the Advent Wreath. The circle of light is complete. As the candle is being lit all pray together:

Father, all-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the announcing of his glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for this coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Intercessions

We take a moment to bring before God our needs and the needs of the world at this time:

We pray for our world in this time of Pandemic; we pray for those who are sick because of Covid-19, those who have died and their families. We entrust our worries and our fears to you confident in the words of the angel “Nothing is impossible to God”. (pause)

Lord in your mercy. Hear our Prayer.

We pray for our medical staff, our priests, our political leaders and our scientists. (pause)

Lord in your mercy. Hear our Prayer.

We pray all those who are expecting a baby at this time and for all mothers and fathers. (pause)

Lord in your mercy. Hear our Prayer.

Add your own intercessions here. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

Loving Father! As the great festival of the Birthday of Christ, our Lord and Saviour, approaches renew our faith and strengthen our love. Create in our hearts and in our lives a fitting place for the Christ-child. Transform our way of life so that we might reach out in love to those around us especially those who are most in need. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

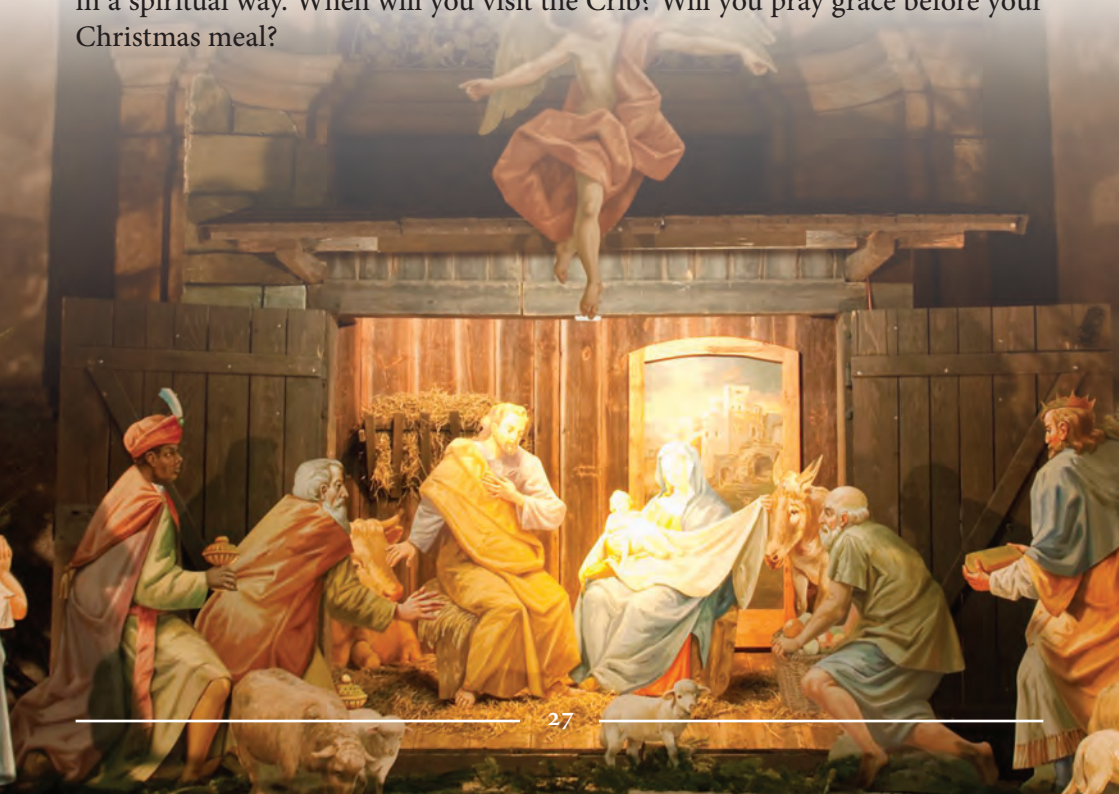
Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; The Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us; The Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever. Amen

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Call to Action

Prepare something for someone less well off – a hamper or a donation to a charitable organisation. Play some Christmas carols – don't forget to listen to the words. Begin to plan what you and your family will do to celebrate this Christmas in a spiritual way. When will you visit the Crib? Will you pray grace before your Christmas meal?



Online Celebration of the Sunday Eucharist



Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if you can.
- Light all the purple and pink candles on your Advent Wreath.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- The priest will wear **purple vestments** today- a symbol of the spiritual preparation and penance that is part of the Advent Season.
- In the **First Reading** the figure King David emerges from the Second Book of Samuel – he and his family were particularly blessed by God. The Psalm returns to this blessing and proclaims that God has chosen David and that his throne will last forever. The **Second Reading** from the Letter to the Romans speaks of Jesus Christ as “the Revelation of a mystery kept secret for endless ages”. The **Gospel** recounts the very moment when Jesus was conceived – “Listen you are to conceive and bear a son and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.”
- The Eucharist will be celebrated as normal. At communion time make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Invite Jesus to visit your heart, take some time to truly welcome his presence.

Take away...

Am I really open to God's presence as a guiding force in my life? Could I welcome God as Mary did? Would I be prepared to change my life as a consequence?



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