

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.

Second Sunday of Advent

6th December 2020



Today we celebrate the second Sunday of our Advent journey 2020. Today we are introduced to one of the truly great personalities of the Gospels – the first cousin of Jesus – John the Baptist. A man of simple tastes, serious prayer and penance, he was the one who prepared the people of his day to hear the message of Jesus and to experience the presence of God among them. Even today, he calls us to prepare our minds and our hearts to recognise and respond to the loving presence of God in our lives.

A Prayer Ritual at Home

Gather around the Advent Wreath that you have prepared in your prayer space. Light the purple candle you lit last week.

If assembling your crib – set up the empty stable frame and keep some straw aside. 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)

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with Joy, so that we may share his wisdom and become one with him when he comes in glory for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen

Let us listen to God's Word ...

Mark 1: 1-8

The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the prophet Isaiah: Look, I am going to send my messenger in front of you to prepare your way before you. A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. John the Baptist was in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

Let us reflect ...

John "was an important man: the people sought him and followed him", because his words "were strong" like "a sharp sword", according to the expression of Isaiah (49:2). The Baptist "reached the hearts" of the people. And if "perhaps he felt tempted to believe he was important, he never gave in to it", as demonstrated by his response to the experts who asked him if he were the Messiah: "I am a voice, only a voice", he said, "of one crying in the wilderness. I am only a voice, but I come to prepare the way to the Lord". His first job, thus, was "to prepare the hearts of the people for an encounter with the Lord". But who is the Lord? The answer to this question lies in "John's second vocation: to discern who the Lord was among so many good people". And "the Spirit revealed this to him". Therefore, "he had the courage to say of Jesus: "This is the one. This is the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world".

“It’s beautiful to think of the Christian vocation like this”. In fact, “a Christian doesn’t proclaim himself, he proclaims another, he prepares the path to another: to the Lord”. In addition, “he must know how to discern, he must understand how to discern the truth from what may resemble the truth but is not: he must be a person of discernment”. Finally, “he must be a person who knows how to humble himself so the Lord may increase in the hearts and souls of others”. (*Pope Francis, Morning Meditations, 2014*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Ritual Action

If assembling your crib – add some straw. Now light the second purple candle on the Advent Wreath. As the candle is being lit all pray together:

Father, all powerful Lord of Light, may our Advent be a time of preparation. Help us reflect on the power of light to dispel darkness in our world and in our lives. Touch our hearts with the warmth of your love. May the increasing light of these candles brighten our minds and hearts to be steadfast in faith, joyful in hope and untiring in love, so that we are ready again to receive in true peace, Jesus, the Light of the World, our Lord and Saviour. Amen

Intercessions

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

We pray for peace –peace in our world, peace in our homes, peace in our hearts. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are sick or distressed in any way, mind, body or spirit. We remember all who are in need through poverty, hunger or homelessness. May we be generous and supportive in our response to need. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for our sisters and brothers who have died, especially those who have died this year. May all our faithful departed enjoy eternal peace and rest. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us to help us open our hearts to your presence all about us. You speak to us through the beauty of nature and the kindness of others. Through and in Jesus you came even closer to us and addressed us as your friends. John the Baptist with an open heart was aware of your life-giving presence – help us in these Advent days to sense it too. We make this our prayer 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

Share with someone something of your faith. Spend some extra time in prayer. Give to someone who is poor.



Online Celebration of the Sunday Eucharist



Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if this is possible.
- Light the second purple candle 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.
- The **Readings** focus on preparing for the intervention of God in our lives and in our world. In the **First Reading**, the Prophet Isaiah speaks of God himself coming to console the people of Israel. He comes like a shepherd gently and lovingly caring for his flock. The **Psalm** cries out to God for his saving help. In the **Second Reading**, from the Letter to Peter we hear of how God patiently waits for us to change our hearts and bend our ways towards his. In the **Gospel** – the great figure of John the Baptist is introduced as that voice crying in the wilderness – pointing the people of his day to Jesus – the Messiah – God who had come among them.
- 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. Ask him this Advent to help you prepare a greater space in your heart for his divine presence.

Take away...

Maybe today is a day to check how is my Advent going? With the hustle and bustle of Christmas in the air how can I avoid being distracted from the deeper spiritual side of the season? How can I continue the work of preparing a place in my heart for God in the week to come?



Prepared by the Dioceses of Clonfert and Elphin
© Liturgical Texts, Jerusalem Bible