

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.

First Sunday of Advent

29th November 2020



Today we celebrate the first of the four Sundays of Advent and with it a new Liturgical Year. As the commercial world about us readies itself for the Christmas season we are invited to take a step back and view the bigger picture: the key Christian belief that life is a sacred journey towards eternity and that someday “at an hour we do not expect”, Jesus will return again to bring finality to the transforming work he began that first Christmas many years ago.

A Prayer Ritual at Home

Gather around the Advent Wreath that you have prepared in your prayer space. Take a moment to reflect on the ever-green leaves shaped in a circle without beginning or end. Become aware of the infinite presence of God. Now look at the candles. The infinite power of God comes to us in Jesus as a light in the darkness – a beacon and a guide for our journey through life. Place some Holy Water in a bowl for the blessing of the Wreath.

As we begin ...

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

A blessing for our Advent Wreath

God without beginning or end, our Creator and our Father, we ask you to bless this Advent Wreath. Bless these evergreens. May they remind us that your love for us is everlasting and that nothing we do will ever take it away. Bless these candles on our Wreath. May they remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World. May they also remind us that the Spirit is in our midst and that we are surrounded by your love and care. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Holy water may be sprinkled over the Wreath in blessing.

Let us pray (pause)

All-powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen

Let us listen to God's Word ...

Mark 13:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from his home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own work to do; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow or dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I am saying to you I say to all: Stay awake!"

Let us reflect ...

Today, on the First Sunday of Advent, we begin a new Liturgical Year; that is, a new journey of the People of God with Jesus Christ, our Shepherd, who guides us through history toward the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, this day has a special charm; it makes us experience deeply the meaning of history. We rediscover the beauty of all being on a journey: the Church, with her vocation and mission, and all humanity, peoples, civilisations, cultures, all on a journey across the paths of time.[...] This journey never comes to an end. Just as in each of our lives, we always need to begin again, to get up again, to rediscover the meaning of the goal of our lives, so also for the great human family it is always necessary to rediscover the common horizon toward which we are journeying. The horizon of hope! This is the horizon that makes for a good journey. The season of Advent,

which we begin again today, restores this horizon of hope, a hope which does not disappoint for it is founded on God's Word. A hope which does not disappoint, simply because the Lord never disappoints! He is faithful! He does not disappoint! Let us think about and feel this beauty. *(Pope Francis, Angelus, 2013)*

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Ritual Action

We now light the first purple candle on the Advent Wreath. Traditionally this is done by the youngest in the household. As the candle is being lit all pray together:

As we light our first Advent Candle, may we open our hearts to the light of Christ. May his light increase in brightness, through his love and our efforts this Advent. Amen

Intercessions

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

As we begin our Advent journey we pray for a greater awareness that Jesus comes to us in unexpected ways. May Advent be a time of grace and new beginnings. *(pause)*

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for our world, a world waiting for God, that the light of Christ may break through darkness. We remember the people through whom Christ comes to us each day, especially our family, our friends and our parish. *(pause)*

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for a spirit of solidarity and courage as we continue to face together the dangers of Covid-19. We remember all who suffer or are anxious in this dangerous time. *(pause)*

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

O God of all ages, rouse us from sleep, deliver us from our heedless ways and form us into a watchful people, that, at the coming of your Son, he may find us doing what is right, mindful of all you command. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen

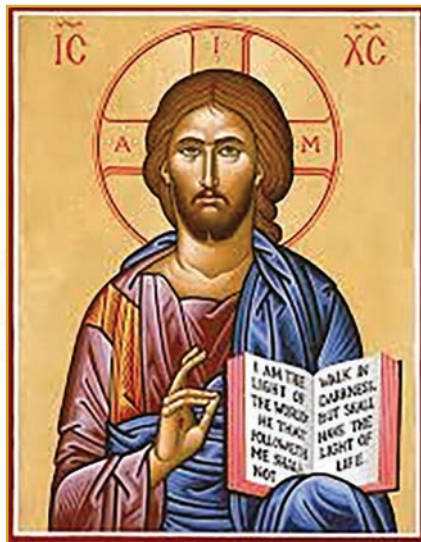
Blessing

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

Take some time this week to notice the shortened days and the winter landscape all around you. Make a list of people you should make contact with over the next few weeks. Engage in some form of charity work. Take a picture of your Advent Wreath and post it on your social media platforms.



Online Celebration of the Sunday Eucharist



Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if this is possible.
- If your Advent Wreath has not been blessed pray the prayer of blessing over it (see page 5).
- Light the first 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 the return of Jesus at the end of time. Isaiah in the **First Reading** draws on the image of clay in the potter's hands to remind us that God is our Creator and that we are all the work of his hands. The **Psalm** prays for the Lord of Hosts to bring us back, to let his face shine on us and we shall be saved. The **Second Reading** states the belief that we are all waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ to be definitively revealed at the end of the world. In the **Gospel**, Jesus exhorts his listeners to "Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come".
- 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...

Ask yourself what nugget of Christian wisdom will I take away from today's Mass?
What will I do during the week inspired by what I have heard?

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.





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?

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary 8th December 2020



Many people believe that today's feast celebrates the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb. It does not. It is the feast of Mary's own conception in her mother Anne's womb. As such it marks the beginning of Mary's unique and special life that because of Jesus was kept free from original sin from the moment of her conception. In a sense she is, as we pray, truly full of God's grace.

A Prayer Ritual at Home

Gather around the Advent Wreath that you have prepared in your prayer space. Light the two purple candles for the first and second Sundays of Advent. Have ready a picture or statue of Our Lady. 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)

Father, you prepared the Virgin Mary to be the worthy mother of your Son. Filled with faith and love she became the perfect example of a disciple of Jesus. May we welcome your presence into our lives as she did. Open our minds to your wisdom. Strengthen our faith. Forgive us our failings. Increase our love. Help us to serve you and one another. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen

Let us listen to God's Word ...

Luke 1: 26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Let us reflect ...

And today we look at the beauty of Our Lady, born and lived without sin, ever docile and transparent to God. This does not mean that life was easy for her, no. Being with God does not magically resolve problems. The conclusion of today's Gospel passage recalls it: "the angel departed from her" (v. 38). He departed: it is a strong verb. The Angel left the Virgin alone in a difficult situation. She knew the special way in which she would become the Mother of God — the Angel had said so — but the Angel had not explained it to others, only to her. And problems began immediately: let us imagine the irregular situation according to law, to Saint Joseph's torment, the life plan tossed aside, what the people would have said.... But faced with problems, Mary places her trust in God. She is left by the Angel, but believes that God remains with her, in her. And she trusts. She trusts in God.

She is certain that with the Lord, even if in an unexpected way, everything will be fine. This is the wise approach: not to live depending on problems — when one ends, another appears! — but by trusting God and entrusting every day to him: here I am! “Here I am” is the phrase. “Here I am” is the prayer. Let us ask the Immaculate for the grace to live this way. (*Pope Francis, Angelus, 8th December 2018*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Ritual Action

Place a picture or statue of Our Lady near the Advent Wreath – while doing so you might say: “Hail Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with You”.

Prayer of Pope Francis ...

O Mary, our Immaculate Mother, on your feast day I come to you, and I come not alone: I bring with me all those whom your Son entrusted to me, in my life and in the entire world, that you may bless them and preserve them from harm. I bring to you, Mother, children, especially those who are alone, abandoned, and for this reason are tricked and exploited. I bring to you, Mother, families, who carry forward life and society with their daily and hidden efforts; in a special way the families who struggle the most for their many internal and external problems. I bring to you, Mother, all workers, both men and women, and I entrust to you especially those who, out of need, are forced to work in an unworthy profession and those who have lost work or are unable to find it.

We are in need of your immaculate gaze, to rediscover the ability to look upon persons and things with respect and awareness, without egotistical or hypocritical interests. We are in need of your immaculate heart, to love freely, without secondary aims but seeking the good of the other, with simplicity and sincerity, renouncing masks and tricks. We are in need of your immaculate hands, to caress with tenderness, to touch the flesh of Jesus in our poor, sick, or despised brethren, to raise up those who have fallen and support those who waver. We are in need of your immaculate feet, to go toward those who know not how to make the first step, to walk on the paths of those who are lost, to find those who feel alone. We thank you, O Mother, because in showing yourself to us you free us of all stain of sin; you remind us that what comes first is the grace of God, the love of Jesus Christ who gave his life for us, the strength of the Holy Spirit which renews all things.” Let us not give in to discouragement, but, trusting in your constant help, let us engage ourselves fully in renewal of self, of our communities and of the entire world. Pray for us, Holy Mother of God!

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

Loving God, We thank you for the example of Mary, whom you chose to be the mother of your only Son, Jesus. She lived her life with love for you and for others. Help us to do the same. We make this 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

Think of your parents, living or dead, who brought you into the world. Why not rediscover the prayer of the Rosary? If your grandparents are living make contact with them, if dead pray for them. Try to explain to someone what the Immaculate Conception really means!



Online Celebration of the Eucharist



Before the broadcast begins:

- Light the first and second purple candle on your Advent Wreath.
- Place a statue or a picture of Our Lady in your sacred space

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- Note the priest will wear the festive colours of white or gold for today's celebration often with blue motifs a colour associated with Mary.
- The **First Reading** from the Book of Genesis-tells the story of Adam and Eve and their rebellion against God which brought sin into the world. The Psalm turns to the hope of salvation and praises God for the wonders he has worked. In the **Second Reading**, from St Paul to the Ephesians, we are told of God's desire from all time that we become his adopted sons and daughters. The **Gospel** tells the story of the Annunciation – the visit by the angel Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth with that news that she was to bear a Child and that he will be called Son of the Most High.
- At communion time make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Like Mary opened up her life to the Spirit of God – let us spend some time opening our own lives to the presence of Jesus. In the silence and the stillness let us bid him welcome and savour his life-giving and life-changing presence.

Take away...

What thought or idea will stay with me after today's celebration? What am I going to do in the week to come as a result?

Third Sunday of Advent

13th December 2020



Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent which is called “Gaudete Sunday” in Latin or “Rejoicing Sunday” in English. Traditionally Priests wear pink/rose coloured vestments instead of purple to symbolise the foretaste of the joy of the approaching feast. Joy is the central theme. Not a shallow or frivolous joy but a joy of deep contentment in the hope that the Lord is near – he is near indeed.

A Prayer Ritual at Home

Gather around the Advent Wreath that you have prepared in your prayer space. Light the two purple candles for the first and second Sundays of Advent.

If building your crib have the figures of the ox and donkey 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 God, may we, your people, who look forward to the birthday of Christ experience the joy of salvation, and celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving. We make this prayer through Christ, Our Lord. Amen

Let us listen to God's Word...

John 1:19-28

"Now those who had been sent were Pharisees, and they put this question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the Prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptise with water; but standing among you -- unknown to you- is the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising."

Let us reflect ...

The human heart desires joy. We all desire joy, every family, every people aspires to happiness. But what is the joy that the Christian is called to live out and bear witness to? It is the joy that comes from the closeness of God, from his presence in our life. From the moment Jesus entered into history, with his birth in Bethlehem, humanity received the seed of the Kingdom of God, like the soil receives the seed, the promise of a future harvest. There is no need to look further! Jesus has come to bring joy to all people for all time. It is not just a hopeful joy or a joy postponed until paradise: as if here on earth we are sad but in paradise we will be filled with joy. No! It is not that, but a joy already real and tangible now, because Jesus himself is our joy, and with Jesus joy finds its home, as your sign there says: joy is at home in Jesus. All of us, let us say it: "Joy is at home in Jesus". Once more: "Joy is at home in Jesus". And without Jesus is there joy? No! Well done! He is living, He is the Risen One, and He works in us and among us especially with the Word and the Sacraments.

We who are baptized, children of the Church, we are called to accept ever anew the presence of God among us and to help others to discover Him, or to rediscover what they have forgotten. It is a most beautiful mission, like that of John the Baptist: to direct the people to Christ — not to ourselves! — for He is the destination to which the human heart tends when it seeks joy and happiness. (*Pope Francis, Angelus, 2014*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Ritual Action

Place the ox and donkey in your crib. We now light the pink/rose coloured candle on the Advent Wreath. As the candle is being lit all pray together:

Lord God, may we, your people, who look forward to the feast of Christmas experience the joy of salvation and celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving. 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 the joy of being truly content in life. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for those who lack joy in life. May they find consolation in their troubles and worries. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for a renewed sense of joy in our Church. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

Loving Father, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Help us to realise that true joy and happiness are found not in the things of this world but in a life of love with you and with our brothers and sisters. Help us to experience that true joy in our hearts this Christmas. 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

Write a list of “Spiritual Gifts” you would like to receive this Christmas. Why not visit your local church for quiet prayer before Jesus present there? Spread a bit of Joy about the place! Smile!



Online Celebration of the Sunday Eucharist



Before the broadcast begins:

- Light two purple candles and the pink/rose coloured candle on your Advent Wreath.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- Today is one of only two days in the year when pink/rose coloured vestments are worn.
- The Readings focus on the building excitement at the prospect that God is going to do something amazing for humanity. In the **First Reading**, the Prophet Isaiah speaks in excited tones about the “Spirit of God” having been given to him to “bring good news to the poor” and to “bind up hearts that are broken.” The Psalm using the words of Mary rejoices at this prospect. St Paul in the Second Reading encourages the early followers of Jesus at Thessalonica to “be happy at all times; to pray constantly; and for all things to give thanks to God”. In the **Gospel** the figure of John the Baptist returns as a witness to the coming of the one – whom he is “unfit to undo his sandal-strap” – Jesus the Messiah.
- At communion time make an Act of Spiritual Communion. Invite Jesus to visit your heart, take some time to truly welcome his presence. Let the closeness of Jesus fill you with a happiness that the world cannot give. Hold on to him and whisper to him.

Take away...

What brings you Joy in life? Does religion give you joy?

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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