

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

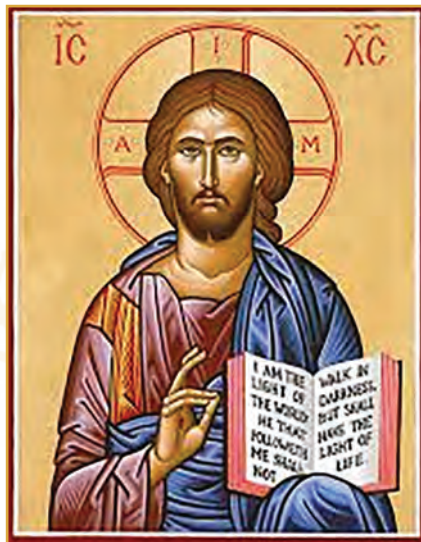
Blessing

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?



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