

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.

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?



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