



Advent

Waiting to celebrate

Aim

To discover the purpose and importance of the Advent season and scriptures in helping us prepare for the coming of the infant Jesus.

Resources needed

Leaders

- *Advent notes*
- *Laptop and projector or TV*
- *Prayer focus items*
- *Sheets of paper and coloured pencils crayons or felt tips*
- *Passages for group members to read*
- *Sieger Koda images (from resources)*

Young People

- *Journal*

Prayer Focus

Cloth - *White and purple*

Bible - *Open at Luke 1*

Candle - *Holy Spirit Candle*

Advent Wreath - *initially out of sight*

Manger - *plus strips of fabric, out of sight*

Liturgical Link

- Liturgical year and colours
- Advent Wreath
- Preparation rather than penance
- Christ the gift of peace, to be shared

Overview

- The Spirit is with us
- The Liturgical Calendar
- Advent - what is it
- The story unfolds
- Christmas through different eyes

Preparation by Catechists

- *Familiarity with content and resources*
- *Be ready to share re positive Advent memories or traditions*
- *Place the prayer table in front of the screen so both are in view*
- *Prepare a manger – box with a plain cloth, plus additional strips of cloth*
- *Pray for the young people and leaders*

Scripture Passages

- Genesis 12:1-3 Abraham blessed
- Isaiah 9:6-7 Prince of Peace
- Luke 1:5-15 His name will be John
- Luke 1:26-38 Annunciation

Tenets of Faith (Faith Formation)

- Advent a time of joyful preparation
- Isaiah spoke of the coming of the Messiah
- Blessed are those who trust in God's love

Gathering

Welcome and Overview - Create a welcoming environment and have everything in place before the young people arrive.

- Thank the young people for coming back for gathering – *which may be after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation – if so, congratulate the young people and invite them to recall the occasion, and to consider what reception of the sacrament has brought to their lives. Encourage each person to share something with the group.*
- The Church year provides many different opportunities for us to deepen our appreciation of our faith and grow in relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit today will explore one of the important liturgical seasons.
- Provide the aim, an overview and link these to the current stage of the journey.

† Opening Prayer - Breath Prayer

Refer to the Holy Spirit Candle on the Prayer Table and invite the group to begin by acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit here amongst us:

- **Option 1:** Slowly and gently, we will pray together the words Come Holy Spirit, while breathing in and out: as breathe in – Come, slight pause, then breathe out – Holy Spirit. Repeat the words a few times then invite the group to sit quietly and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit with us.
- **Option 2:** Sit comfortably and listen to the Taize Veni Sancte Spiritus, encourage the young people to close their eyes and allow themselves to be caught up in the chant. <https://youtu.be/WmxXwAgkhWQ> or virtual choir <https://youtu.be/us-v4sIsUX4>

Conclude by praying together the Glory Be, or Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and inspire in us the fire of your love, send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, any you will renew the face of the earth.

- Following the prayer, check if all are feeling calm, and are happy to be here.

Exploring

➔ Introductory Activity - Liturgical Calendar

- Ask group members which Liturgical Season we are currently in and if they know when it has recently, or will soon, change
- Drawing information from the young people do a general recap on the Liturgical seasons and their respective colours.



Explain how the Liturgical calendar is a month ahead of the lunar calendar, with Advent begins the Church year, usually the last weekend in November (Purple and Pink) Following this we have the Christmas Season, (White) then Ordinary time (Green) – anything from 2-7 weeks, depending on the date of Easter.

The date of Easter varies because of the moon. Easter is celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon that follows the Spring Equinox, which in the Church Lunar Calendar is

21st March.

The seasons of Lent beginning on Ash Wednesday, (Purple) leads us towards Easter. The 6th Sunday of Lent is Palm, or Passion Sunday, (Red) begins Holy Week, the most important week of the Church year, which ends with the Triduum, the three days in which we recall the passion and death of Jesus, then on the eve of Easter Sunday, his glorious resurrection.

The Easter season continues through to the feast of the Ascension, (White), following which we return to Ordinary Time, (Green) until the end of the Liturgical Year.



Activity - Advent - the season of Advent leads us towards Christmas

- Hand out A4 paper to each person and have coloured pencils, crayons or felts available. Using words, images and symbols ask the young people to express their understanding of Advent. Allow a minute or two.
- If necessary give a couple of clues, or have an image on the screen to help.



Activity – Advent in 2 minutes

- While watching the video clip invite the young people to look for items that match those on their sheet, and also anything else of significance to add.
<https://youtu.be/S02KOlw7dIA> A fast moving *Busted Halo* production
- Take some general feedback on how many items group members had noted, and anything they saw or heard on the video clip that was new to them.
- Clarify as necessary then invite the young people share any traditions they, or other family members, engage in during Advent.
- Leaders share a couple of the ways they / their families mark Advent.



Explain that Advent is not a race to Dec 25, rushing around shopping and partying.

Though a reverent time Advent does not have the repentance focus of Lent.

Advent is a joyful time of expectant waiting, hopeful anticipation and cheerful preparation.

The Church encourages us to use Advent well to prepare our hearts for the coming of our saviour, in particular to recognise the joy in waiting. This we do through reflecting on the scriptures to see how people of the past have waited, as we do in the present, looking to the rewards we will have in the future.

During the weeks of Advent we are preparing for God to break into our lives anew.

Advent is a cozy time, especially for those in the northern hemisphere experiencing the cold dark winter months. We clean and decorate our home to welcome family members and friends, and most of all the special guest, Jesus.



Advent - For Christians, Advent is a time to reflect on the wonder of God's love.

- The Sunday scripture readings help to bring us closer to Christ. These, like the Christmas stories are full of symbols that help us to a deeper understanding of the truth.
- The Advent Wreath is one such symbol. The evergreen leaf represents the eternity of God. On the first Sunday of Advent one of the purple candles (Advent colour) is lit, then along with the others the following weeks. The pink candle, is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday, a word which means rejoice.

- On Christmas Day the white candle is lit and placed in the centre of the wreath to acknowledge the arrival of Jesus the light of the world. It reminds us that Jesus wishes us to have him at the centre of our lives too.
- The meanings and traditions associated with Advent may vary, but their themes and messages are consistent: hope, peace, love and joy.

Prayerful Reflection

The prospect of God becoming human is too difficult for some to accept. Therefore, many in our world refuse to believe. Advent gives us the opportunity to reflect on the wonder of God's love, as we take stock of what has happened in the past year. The Advent wreath can help us to recall some important people and events that are important aspects of the Jesus story.

Though the meanings and traditions associated with the Advent may vary, their messages are consistent.

† Advent Wreath Prayer

- Bring the Advent Wreath into a prominent place and gather the group around it.
- Four, previously nominated, group members assist with readings.
- Invite the group to, prayerfully, listen and respond as the candles on the wreath are lit:

Leader - On the First Sunday of Advent, we recall the hope we have in Christ.

Reader 1

Because Abraham had trusted and put his hope in God, God promised Abraham that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3) The Old Testament tells of the coming of Christ, of how a Saviour would be born, a king in the line of David. A king who would rule the world wisely and bless all the nations. We too believe in God's promise to send Jesus again to this world to establish his kingdom upon the earth.

(The Candle of hope is lit)

Leader For what am I hoping this Advent?

We take a moment to reflect. (all then respond)

All Hope is like a light shining in a dark place.

As we look at the light of this candle let us rejoice in the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Leader On the Second Sunday of Advent the Candle of Peace is lit.

Reader 2

We remember the prophets who spoke of the coming of Christ, a Saviour born a king in the line of David. The prophet Isaiah called Christ "the Prince of Peace". (Isaiah 9:6-7) The one who would rule the world wisely and bless all the nations.

Throughout his ministry Jesus taught people the importance of being peacemakers. He said that those who make peace shall be called the children of God.

(The Candle of Peace is lit)

Leader When do I feel most at peace with the world. How can I help bring peace into the lives of others?

We take a moment to reflect. (all then respond)

All Peace is like a light shining in a dark place.

As we look at this candle let us feel the peace we find in Jesus Christ.

- Check if the young people know which famous prophet speaks to us during Advent, he is the one who spoke the most about the coming of the Christ, the Messiah? Isaiah.
- Who might they consider a prophet speaking similar messages today? Pope Francis?



Explain that the Isaiah readings for Year B were written when the people of Israel has been released from exile and allowed to return to Jerusalem – at first they were grateful, hope filled and peaceable.

All too quickly they forgot about God's goodness and the commandments.

They fell into religious apathy, much like we see around us today, focusing only on their own happiness.

In his writings Isaiah demands that God's people treat one another, and the gentiles, in a just and peaceful manner.

Leader On the Third Sunday of Advent we light the Candle of Love.

Reader 3

In their old age Zechariah and Elizabeth were blessed by God, and given a son who was named John. (Luke 1:5-15) John often lived in the desert denying his own comforts. John spoke to the people bravely, teaching that we should share what we have with others, treat each other kindly and show God's love. He wanted people to repent and find God's forgiveness.

(The Candle of Love is lit)

Leader Recently, when and by whom have I felt truly loved?

Take a moment to reflect. (all respond)

All Love is like a candle shining in a dark place.

As we look at the light of this candle let us acknowledge the love we have in Christ.

Leader On the Fourth Sunday of Advent we light the Candle of Joy.

Reader 4

When the angel Gabriel told Mary that a special child would be born to her she was rather taken aback. Later, filled with joy, she sang a song that began with the words: "My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." (Luke 1:26-38) Just as the birth of Jesus gave great

joy to his mother, so his presence in the world gave joy to those who had none before. Jesus healed people, bringing hope and peace to those who believed in him.

From hope, peace, and love comes joy. We light the Candle of Joy to remind us that when Jesus is born in us, we have joy in our hearts, and that through him we will find everlasting joy.

(The Candle of Joy is lit)

Leader Do I know people who seem to lack joy in their lives? If so, what might I do to help bring them joy?

We take a moment to reflect. (all then respond)

All Joy is like a light shining in a dark place.
As we look at this candle let us give thanks for the joy we find in Jesus Christ.



Remind the young people that John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus.

It was following the Annunciation – the visit by the angel, that Mary made the journey to the hills to see her cousin Elizabeth and husband Zechariah, the parents of John.

As the women greeted one another John leapt in his mothers' womb – a sign of recognition of God's presence in their midst.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is known as the first disciple, in saying yes to God, she was the first to say yes to being a follower of Jesus.

Mary supported Jesus throughout his life, and afterwards the disciples who continued his work.

We do not worship Mary – that accolade is reserved for God, but we do honour her as the mother of Jesus our Saviour, and of the Church he founded.

Going Deeper

Let us look a little deeper into the events leading to the birth of Jesus.

➔ **Activity - The Annunciation:** *Image on the screen of Mary - Seiger Koder*

This modern depiction is one you may not have seen before.

- Ask the group to simply look at the picture for about 30 seconds, then invite initial responses. Take note of anything interesting, or in need of unravelling.
- The Angel is missing – most unusual for an Annunciation image.
- Work with the group to briefly recount what happened at the Annunciation.
- Ask how Mary seems in this image, what might she be thinking?
- What happened next?



Explain that at first Mary is afraid, she wonders, then questions, she trusts and accepts only after all this processing does she consent to the request

Mary can say yes to God because she has sufficient faith to believe that God is capable of doing all that the angel had told her.

She also understands herself enough to be able to give herself away – totally, selflessly to the God, for whom nothing is impossible.

All the Gospel tells us is that Mary left to visit her cousin Elizabeth – no doubt she visited Joseph and her parents before doing so. It is likely she would have had a male escort to accompany her on the journey.



Prayerful reflection

- Invite everyone to sit comfortably and gazing at the image to allow the wonder of these events to touch their hearts, and in a quiet moment to thank Mary for her 'yes' to God.
- While the group continue to gaze, gently read the reflection below:

*Lady, so still, lost in the moment of your listening,
is it the soft wind or the Spirit gently singing?
Do you see the messenger who comes to call your name,
or is it just a movement in the air, above the candle flame?*

*Lady, so still, lost in the moment when your heart is full of praise,
show us in the coming days, the message that you hear:
in your silence God is very near.*

Tom McGuinness SJ, taken from Christ our Morning Star by Sieger Koder



The Annunciation of Joseph

Activity 1 – Working in 2's or 3's ask the young people to consider the questions below and jot down some notes ready to share with the group

- How Joseph might have reacted when Mary told him her news?
- Why might it be good that Mary was so keen to go and visit Elizabeth?

Take feedback and respond as necessary to clarify, see notes below to assist.



Mary was betrothed, legally given to Joseph in marriage, but not yet living with him, because of her age.

Joseph loved and respected Mary enough to decide to divorce her informally, to save embarrassment.

By going to visit Elizabeth, Mary removed herself from the gossip and accusations and was in a place of welcome and safety amongst family whom she loved.

Zechariah, who also had a vision from an angel brining the news that he and his wife would have a son, John, was struck dumb after questioning how this could be. His speech would not return until the child was born. Mary and Elizabeth would have endless hours to chat together, uninterrupted!

Back in Nazareth, everyone has time to adjust to the news of Mary's pregnancy before she returns, three months or so later.

Activity 2 – reflection

- Have on the screen the image of the hands of Mary above Joseph sleeping - *by Sieger Koder*

- Again invite the group to look at the image for about 30 seconds, then share how the picture speaks to them.



As Mary was due to return to Nazareth the Angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph in a dream. Joseph is a good and a holy man, his relationship with God allows him to hear God assuring him it is OK to take Mary as his wife.

The image shows Mary pleading with open hands for Joseph to accept her and provide a home and safety for the baby.

The full depiction of the Ascension has the hands of the Holy Spirit holding the Christ child, and both annunciation events together.

Like his Hebrew namesake from the book of Genesis, (37:50) Joseph shows us the power of dreams and gives witness to the dreams of God's people being fulfilled.



Prayerful response

- Provide everyone with a copy of the prayer
- Invite people to once again gaze at the image allowing it, and the conversations that have taken place to touch their hearts. Allow 30-60 seconds, as seems appropriate.
- All then offer the prayer together:

*Lord, when we don't know who to turn to,
call us back from the brink and bring us to consciousness
of your presence in our lives.
Help us to trust you as did Mary and Joseph,
so that we can continue on our faith journey. Amen.*



The Birth in Bethlehem

Activity 1 - Ask the young people to ponder the two questions below, allow 30 seconds or so

- Why Jesus was born in Bethlehem when Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth?
- What happened when the family arrived in Bethlehem?

Invite a volunteer to begin telling the story – 1 sentence only. Continue around the group each person adding a sentence to help complete the story.



Explain that Joseph needed to go to the place of his birth to register in the census.

It was quite a trek, around 80 miles, and they were required to walk. With Mary so near the time to give birth it would have been a long slow process – she would only be able to ride on a donkey for very short spells, if at all.

With so many visitors in Bethlehem, they could not find accommodation, and there would have been long ques to wait in for the registration process.

An Innkeeper offered the stable where his animals were sleeping.

Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, was born to a young peasant girl, in a smelly shed amongst animals, and was visited by shepherds, the lowest of the low in the society.

From the very start of his human existence Jesus challenged the conventional norms, his life and teachings during his three years of ministry did just the same.

Reflection and Prayer

† **Preparing for Jesus**

- Place Image of the Nativity, by *Seiger Koder*, on the screen
- Gather around the prayer table if there is room, add the manger; otherwise place on the floor, small table or stool in front of it.
- Hand out strips of cloth to all members of the group.

This modern depiction is a colourful and joy filled nativity scene.

- Allow a few moments for all to look at the image on the screen and let it to speak to them.

The angels who alerted the shepherds to the birth, and then hovered over the manger, came to bring joy. As Luke writes, “Do not be afraid: for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy.” It is not so much that the Angels were joyful, but that they brought joyful news to the world.

- In thanks and praise to God for the joyful news that God has gifted his Son to us, in turn, we will gently move forward to lay our piece of cloth on the manger.
- This prayerful action symbolizes our desire to prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior this Christmas. (demonstrate if needed)
- Before and after this gesture all are invited to again look at the image and ponder the great mystery it holds.
- Gentle music will be playing during this time, possibly an instrumental version of *Away in a Manger*.
- Together all then offer the prayer:

Prayer - *Here is a place for you, Lord Jesus.*

*Just as our hands have made it ready,
so make our hearts ready to love and to welcome you.*

Be born again, not in a manger, but in us.

*Make us your Bethlehem,
where God is personal, and where all thing and all people are made new.*

Amen

✠ **Seeing Christmas through different eyes**

Pope Francis regularly speaks of the need for Catholics to be joyful, to live secure in the knowledge of God’s love and let this joy radiate to everyone we meet. He tells us: “The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded. That is what the angels proclaimed to the shepherds in Bethlehem.”

We, like Pope Francis can spread joy with a smile, a hug or a warm word. It is this gift of joy that we are called to share with every person we meet, especially during Advent.

Thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit, received in the Sacrament of Confirmation this year you will also be able to approach Christmas differently, seeing the story with new eyes. In doing so you will discover new insights, not just in the story, but of God’s love for you and for all peoples.

This discovery can take place anywhere, whenever you take the time to ponder. This may be at home, when you look at the Christmas cards arriving, especially those with a Christian image or message. Seeing crib scenes in a shop, a window, or on TV, can also be prompts to pause and reflect.

This year we urge you to make a concerted effort to see Christmas with fresh eyes and experience in a new way the wonder of God's love, in sending his Son into the world, especially in such a vulnerable way.

† *Prayer to end*

All Loving Father, help us to be aware of the small joys we experience every day of our lives, and in these to recognise the joyful song of all creation: that your Son has become one of us, sharing our earthly joys and sorrows, so that we too may one day share in his glory.

Glory to you O God, and peace to all peoples of the earth.

Closing Remarks and Next Step

- Invite response to the gathering and the content of this gathering
- Identify the next step for the group
- Encourage daily prayer / reflection during Advent, attending Sunday Mass and inviting a friend or family member (who would not normally attend Mass) to come along with them to Mass on Christmas, and New Year's Day too.