



Advent

Waiting to celebrate

Aim

To discover the importance of the Advent season for helping us prepare for the coming of Jesus at Christmas.

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*

Readings – *to hand out to individuals*

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*
- *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 believe 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 and share something about the occasion.*
- The Church gives many opportunities for us to deepen our appreciation of the faith and grow in relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, today we explore one.
- 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 with us:

- 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.
- 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 little out of synch with (ahead of) the usual annual calendar, January - December

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 when Easter falls. The date of Easter varies because of the moon. Easter is celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon the follows the Spring Equinox, which in the Church Lunar Calendar is 21st March.

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, and lasts 6 weeks (Purple). The last Sunday of Lent Palm, or Passion Sunday, (Red) begins Holy Week, the most important week of the Church year, which ends on Easter Sunday, beginning a six week period leading to the Ascension (White) following which we return to Ordinary Time, (Green) through to the end of the Liturgical Year.



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

- Have coloured pencils, crayons or felts available on the tables. Hand out worksheet to each person with the following headings: Symbol, word, colour, action, theme.

- Invite the young people try to depict something that relates to each heading to show their understanding of Advent.
- 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/S02KOIw7dIA> 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 needed.
- Leaders share a couple of the ways they / their families mark Advent.



Explain that Advent is not a race to Dec 25, a time for rushing around shopping and partying, nor does it have the repentance focus of Lent. Advent is a joyful time of expectant waiting, hopeful anticipation and cheerful preparation. During the weeks of Advent we are preparing to welcome Jesus into our lives anew. It is a cozy time – we clean and decorate our home to welcome family members and friends, and most of all the special guest, Jesus.

Prayerful Reflection

To believe that God became human is just too difficult for some people to accept. So many refuse to believe the Christmas story.



Ahead of Christmas, Advent provides us with time to reflect on God's love. The themes related to the Advent Wreath can help us to remember people and events that are important in our understanding of the Jesus story. The Advent Wreath, a circle of evergreen leaves representing the eternity of God, has four candles, three purple and one pink. On Christmas day a white one, Christ our light, is placed in the centre.



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 What is it we are hoping for 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.

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 What can we do to promote peace? 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 that comes from knowing Jesus.

- 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, but that didn't last very long.

- Isaiah is not happy about this and 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 lived in the desert denying his own comforts. John spoke to the people bravely taught 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 When, recently, have I felt truly loved? We take a moment to reflect. (all then 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 Jesus brought to the world.

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 What brings true joy to our lives? 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 visited her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah, the parents of John. 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 his disciples too. The Church honours Mary because she is such an important part of the Jesus story. We do not worship her – as some seem to think. That accolade is reserved for God alone.

Going Deeper

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



Activity - The Annunciation: *Image of Mary on the screen - 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 the event.
- Ask how Mary seems in this image, what might she be thinking?
- What happened next?



Explain how 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. Mary understands herself enough to be able to give herself away – totally, selflessly to the God, for whom nothing is impossible. All we are told is that Mary left to visit 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.



Activity – The Annunciation of Joseph:
Part 1

- Ask the young people how they think Joseph reacted when Mary told him her news?

- Why might it be a good idea for Mary to go and visit Elizabeth?

Part 2

- *Image on the screen of sleeping Joseph and the hands of Mary: Seiger Koder*
- Again, ask the group to look at the image for about 30 seconds, then to respond.
- Take feedback and comment as necessary.



Explain that 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, with the cousin whom she loved.

Everyone has time to adjust to the news before Mary returns, three months or so later.

This is when 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 Birth in Bethlehem:

Activity 1 - Ask the young people to ponder the two questions below – using their journals to jot down responses:

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

Take feedback and clarify as necessary – see notes below to assist



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

It was quite a trek, especially as Mary was so near the time to give birth.

With so many visitors in Bethlehem, they could not find accommodation.

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 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.

Activity 2 - Place the *Seiger Koder*, image of the Nativity, on the screen

- Once more ask the group to look at the image for 30 seconds, allowing it to speak to them
- Invite comment on what they see. Clarify as necessary.



Point out that this modern depiction is a colourful and joy filled scene.

The angels who 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.

Reflection and Prayer

✠ **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 shine from them and be seen by everyone.

In one of his writings Pope Francis 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.”

So often when we see images of Pope Francis on TV he is spreading 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 be able to look and listen to the Christmas story with new eyes. In doing so you will discover new insights not just in the story, but into God’s love for you and for all people.

This can happen not only in church, but whenever you see a crib scene in a shop, a window on TV and also when you look at Christmas cards that come into your home, especially those with a Christian image or message.

† **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.