



Advent

Waiting to celebrate

Aim

To deepen appreciation of Advent and the scriptural events associated with the season, and the coming of Christ.

Resources needed

Leaders

- *Advent notes*
- *Prayer focus items*
- *Prayers for group members to read*
- *Incarnation Script*

Young People

- *Journal*

Prayer Focus

Cloth - *White and purple*

Bible - *Open at Luke 1*

Candle - *Holy Spirit Candle*

Cross /Crucifix - *both part of the story*

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 and Advent
- Reflecting on the story as it unfolds
- Seeing 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 The Annunciation
- Luke 1:39-56 The Visitation

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, pondering how the gift of the Holy Spirit, received in the sacrament, is bringing changes 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

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:

- Invite the group to sit comfortably and, preferably with their eyes closed, to listen to the song Veni Sancte Spiritus. This Taize chant is designed to help us get lost in the chant, and place ourselves before God. <https://youtu.be/WmxXwAgkhWQ> or virtual choir <https://youtu.be/us-v4slsUX4>
- Conclude using the prayers of intercession from the Divine Office, Pentecost, Evening Prayer 2.

Leader: We know the Father is with us because of the Spirit he has given us.

With this confidence we turn to you in prayer:

Response: Father send your Spirit into the Church.

Reader 1: Father you wish to unite all people by baptism in the Spirit: draw all believers together in mind and heart. **Response**

Reader 2: You sent the Spirit to fill the earth with your love: help us to build communities of justice and peace. **Response**

Reader 3: Father of all peoples, bring to your scattered children unity of faith: may the power of your Spirit fill the earth. **Response**

Reader 4: Open minds and hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit: and bring healing to the sick, comfort to the afflicted and the promise of salvation to all. **Response**

Reader 5: Through the power of the Holy Spirit your Son came into the world as a baby, and in adulthood raised him from the dead: may we too rise with him on the last day.

Response

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 that the Liturgical calendar is a little out of synch with (ahead of) the lunar calendar

Advent begins the Church year, usually the last weekend in November (Purple and Pink) it ends on Christmas Eve. There are 4 weeks, but the fourth one can vary in length from 1 day to 7 days, depending on the calendar.

The Christmas Season follows, this is not just a day, (White) the Church celebrates the Octave of Christmas, and the Christmas Season then continues until the Saturday after the Epiphany. Ordinary time then begins (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 seasons of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, and continues for 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 with the Triduum, the three days during which we recall the passion and death of Jesus, culminating on the eve of Easter Sunday, with the Easter Vigil – celebrating his glorious resurrection.

The six-week Easter season takes us through 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

- Invite the young people to spend a few minutes to ponder:
 - the meaning and purpose of Advent, what do you understand this to be
 - the symbols and the scriptural characters we encounter
 - the popular world view of the weeks leading to Christmas
 - any Advent traditions celebrated by their family members or
- encourage the use of journals to jot down responses - using words, images and symbols. Allow 2-3 minutes.
- If necessary give a couple of examples to help them get started.
- *Encourage the use of journals to jot down responses - using words, images and symbols. Allow 2-3 minutes – or as appropriate.*
- Invite each person to share and chart up responses on the PPT, whiteboard, or a large sheet of paper. See what there is in common and add to the lists as necessary.
- Comment on the difference between the Christian and societal preparation for Christmas.
- Ask leaders share a couple of the ways they / their families mark the season of Advent.



Explain that Advent is a joyful time of expectant waiting, hopeful anticipation and cheerful preparation, for the coming of our saviour, it is also a reverent time. In society the focus seems to be on frenetic, and often excessive, shopping and partying.

Lots of families and groups use the weeks before Christmas as a time to reconnect with others and remember their combined history.

The Advent scripture readings invite us to do the same.

The Church encourages us to use Advent to quietly and prayerfully wait for the coming of our Saviour into the world. In the birth of Jesus, we find hope of Christ's second coming, and draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain us in our daily lives.

Reflecting on the Advent scriptures can help us to appreciate the role played by people of the past in, both the waiting for and, the revelation of God. We, like them, can then better appreciate the present and look in hope to the future.

During Advent we are preparing for God to break into our lives anew. For the joy of Christ's birth, God uniting with humanity, to delight us.

Yet, the cross is on the table to remind us that the birth, death and resurrection are all components of the same story. Both symbols are reminders of God's love for us.

When we recognize the joy in waiting, we are better able to prepare our hearts for the wondrous event; when God became one of us.

Though sharing the Lenten colour of purple, Advent does not have the repentance focus of Lent. The purple is a gentler, lighter purple rather than the deep Lenten colour.

Advent is a more cozy, homely, 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.

- Both the Advent scripture readings and 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 added to the following weeks. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, known as, Gaudete Sunday, 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 just too mind blowing 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 during the past year. Reflections associated with the Advent wreath can help us to recall people and events that are important aspects of the Jesus story.



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.

- Ask the young people if they remember who is the first 'Father of the Church' the Old Testament person called by God? And which family line the saviour would be born into?
- take responses, clarify as necessary, then invite a group member to read the reflection.

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 How has belief in God brought hope into my life? What am I 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 Christ.

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

- Ask the young people if they remember the names of any prophets who spoke of Christ's coming, and the one, in particular, who referred to him as the Prince of Peace?
- Take responses, clarify as necessary, then invite a group member to read the reflection.

Reader 2

We remember the prophets, who told 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 peace makers. 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 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.



Explain how 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.

- Ask the young people who was the person who led the way for Jesus, in proclaiming God's love for his people? What was his message?
- Take responses, clarify as necessary, then invite a group member to read the reflection.

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 much of the time 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 When recently have I felt truly loved or forgiven? We 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.

- Ask the young people how it was that the word of God became flesh,
- Take responses, clarify as necessary, without going into detail. Then invite a group member to read the reflection.

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 need to experience joy in their lives, if so, what might I do to help bring that 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.

Going Deeper

➔ **Activity – the Incarnation** To deepen our appreciation of the reasons God took such drastic action let us listen to a dialogue about the Incarnation. Access script in 15-18 Advent Resources. Three readers are required, preparation is required.

- Invite the young people to sit comfortably, preferably with eyes closed, to be free of distractions, while listening to the dialogue.
- Encourage them to allow the spirit to speak to their heart as they ponder the words
- Following the reading, allow a few minutes for individuals to make jottings in their journals
- Invite any responses, including how God might be feeling when looking at the world today – has anything changed? Draw together any threads and comment appropriately.

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

➔ **Activity - The Annunciation** Luke 1:26-38 *Seiger Koder Image on the screen of Mary*
This modern depiction is one you may not have seen before.

- Invite the group to look at the picture as they listen to the scripture passage read
- Allow a couple of minutes afterwards for noting in journals any insights or questions form the reading or the picture.
- Encourage each group member to share one thing in response.
- Take note of anything interesting, or in need of unravelling. Use the points below to assist as needed.



Acknowledge that the Angel is missing in this image – most unusual for a depiction of the Annunciation.

At first Mary is afraid, she wonders, then questions, she trusts and accepts only after all this processing does she give her firm consent to the request.

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

Though aware of the vindication that would result from the news of her pregnancy, when supposedly a virgin, and not yet living with Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, legally married, Mary understands herself enough to be able to say Yes.

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

➔ **Activity – Mary Pondering**

- How does Mary seem in this image, what might she be thinking? Invite responses or affirm observations already shared.
- Alone again, Mary would have pondered further the news the angel brought: read the reflection **Mary Pondering**, access in 15-18 Advent Resources
- Allow a few moments of quiet afterwards for further reflection.
- Then ask - what happened next? If there is little knowledge is evident, read Luke 39-56 or gather responses and add to, or help clarify, as necessary.



Explain that all we know from scripture is that Mary left to visit her cousin Elizabeth, whom the angel had told her was in her 6th month. No doubt Mary visited Joseph and

her parents before leaving. It is likely she would have had a male escort, possibly a relative, accompanying her on the journey to the hill country of Judea.

Mary's cousin, Elizabeth and husband Zechariah, had also been favoured by God and promised a son, John the Baptist, who was the cousin of Jesus.

As the women greeted one another John leapt in his mothers' womb – a sign of recognition of God's presence in their midst. Mary is very young, and Elizabeth old – well past childbearing age. They seem to have a close relationship, which is now made stronger by them both being favoured by the God they have faithfully served.

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.

Contrary to popular misbelief, Catholic's do not worship Mary. That is an accolade reserved for God alone. However, we do honour Mary as the mother of Jesus our Saviour, and of the Church he founded.



Accepting the Gift

In the Mary Pondering reflection, the seed planted by God is referred to as a gift, a gift Mary is willing to accept and gently nurture. Elizabeth and Zachariah openly acknowledged their child as great a gift from God. But what about 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 might Joseph have reacted when Mary told him of their gift?
- Why would it be good for everyone 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 to her and her family.

By going to visit Elizabeth, Mary removed herself from the gossip and accusations and was in a place of welcome and safety amongst extended family. There she would be able to give support to Elizabeth and, away from prying eyes, have the chance to prepare herself spiritually and mentally, for all that was to come.

Elizabeth's husband Zechariah, also had a vision from an angel brining the news that he and his wife would have a son, John. In questioning how this could be, and doubting God, Zechariah was struck dumb. 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 also has time to adjust to the news of Mary's pregnancy before she returns, three months or so later.

✠ **Reflection Activity**

- Put on the screen the image of the hands of Mary above the sleeping Joseph *by Seiger Koder*
- Bearing in mind all that has been said, invite the group to look at the image while listening to the song: <https://youtu.be/eVbuwtRuZqQ> *Gift of God O Emmanuel*
- Invite group members to share a word, a thought or a feeling from their reflection.



As Mary was due to return to Nazareth the Angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph in a dream. A righteous - good and a holy man, Joseph's relationship with God allows him to hear God's assurance it is OK to take Mary as his wife and accept the gift of a child. The image shows Mary pleading with open hands for Joseph to welcome her and the baby, providing a home and safety for them as a family.

The full depiction of the Annunciation has the hands of the Holy Spirit holding the Christ child, above Mary and includes 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
- Put on the screen the complete image of *Seiger Koder's* Annunciation depiction.
- Invite everyone to gaze with fresh eyes at the image - allowing it, and the conversations that have taken place to touch their hearts. 30-60 seconds, as seems appropriate.
- All join together offering the prayer:

*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.*

*Each day help us to accept all that we experience as gift,
- so that we may find you, Lord the Giver, in the gift. Amen.*



Activity - Why Bethlehem?

- Ask the group why Jesus was born in Bethlehem when Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth?
- Invite responses, then ask group members if they can recall being involved in a census – they generally happen every 10 years or so.
- Put on the screen the image of the Census form and questions, (or hand put copies) then in 2's & 3's group members share their answers.
- Next invite the group to quickly assemble in a line, according to how far they live from the place of their birth. When in place each in turn calls out the distance.
- Comment on these, how many might be walkable, and if such journeys could easily be taken, or contemplated without accommodation being booked.

Reflection and Prayer

Bethlehem to Nazareth was about 80 miles – a long way on foot for anyone, especially a woman almost ready to give birth.



Activity – Mary's journey

- Invite group members to sit comfortably and listen to the reflection – Mary's Journey
- Then to spend another minute or so pondering all that Mary and Joseph would have gone through.
- Use any of the points below to help fill in any gaps if needed.



Clarify why Joseph needed to go to the place of his birth to register in the census.

It was quite a trek, 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. There would have been long queues to wait in for the registration process, and no doubt at the pop up food stalls and inns that would be struggling to service visitor needs.

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 continued to do just the same.

The spectacle of his messy passion and death brought Jesus to centre stage in a different way. Those who had plotted his demise and rejoiced in his end, were then rocked by his resurrection and ongoing impact on the community.



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.

- Invite everyone to look at the image on the screen for a few moments and allow it to speak to them.

This is a colourful and joy filled scene. 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 look at the image on the screen and allow it to speak to them. Gentle music to be playing during this time, possibly an instrumental version of *Away in a Manger* or https://youtu.be/AnwO_0DrpCk a very nice harmonized version

† 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 things 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 angel 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.

As we prepare for this Christmas, why not make it a different holiday. Instead of thinking I should do this or that, choose some things we actually plan on doing! It's a new season, and we can be too. By taking positive action we will discover new insights, not just in the story, but in God's love for us, and for all people.

The discovery can take place anywhere, through reflection when noticing a crib scene in a shop, a window or on TV, or giving time to look more carefully at the images and messages on Christmas cards that speak of the Gospel message that God's love is so generous, that the Word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us.

This Advent make a real effort to view the coming of Christ in a new light. Allow the wonder of this great mystery to be viewed with fresh eyes and an open heart, so the glory God's love will be reflected to all those you meet.

† **Prayer to end - In hope the universe waits**

From Cloth for the Cradle, Wild Goose Worship Grp, Glasgow, 2002

Leader:	In hope the universe waits:
All:	God's purpose shall be revealed.
Leader:	Limited by mortality, yet destined for liberation, in hope the universe waits
All:	God's purpose shall be revealed.
Leader:	Groaning as if in childbirth, sampling the fruits of God's harvest, in hope the universe waits:
All:	God's purpose shall be revealed.
Leader:	Trusting in what is unseen, believing the best is to come, in hope the universe waits
All:	God's purpose shall be revealed.
Leader:	In the seclusion of a byre where the maker of all will be born, in hope the universe waits
All:	God's purpose shall be revealed.

(Adapted from Romans 8:18-25)

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.