



St. Therese Parish
Faith Formation Commission
Advent Small Groups 2021

A Journey of Hope to Bethlehem



Christ our Hope is Come!

Calendar/Table of Contents

Preparatory Sessionp. 2

Session 1

November 28 - December 4p. 5

Session 2

December 5 – 11p. 9

Session 3

December 12 – 18p. 14

Christmas Eve Friday, December 24

Christmas Day Saturday, December 25

Appendixp. 20

Guidelines for Leadersp. 22

Guidelines for Small Groups.....p. 24

The Season of Advent is about waiting and anticipation, as we reflect in our prayers the three comings of Jesus: that He has already come in history to proclaim God's reign, He is still to come to bring the fullness of that kingdom, and He comes every day into our hearts and lives. This is a time of promise and hope, a time to open our hearts, deepen our faith, and celebrate the fulfilment of Christ's coming among us.

In our small groups this year, we explore St. Luke's tradition. We will find that his vision takes a different path than that of the past two years, where Matthew and Mark were deeply insistent on the Kingdom's immediacy and urgency, and our need to be prepared and alert. Luke's point of view seems to lead us more to the promise and hope of the season. Jesus announces: "...you will see the Son of Man coming in clouds and great glory... raise your heads, your redemption is at hand!" John the Baptist quotes Isaiah: "...all flesh shall see the salvation of God!" And upon hearing John's message, "the people were filled with expectation". Finally, Mary greets Elizabeth and "the baby leapt in (Elizabeth's) womb for joy".

We will also pray over three passages from Isaiah, filled with the hopefulness and anticipation of the Lord's presence among us. We will appropriately conclude with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

Indeed, it's a time to embrace the promise, and proclaim the hope! Blessed are we who believe that the Lord's words to us will be fulfilled!

Preparation for the Prayer Sessions (before Nov. 28th!)

---Read the two scripture selections below

---Reflect and pray over what you have read and felt

The Core Message of Advent: (Mark 1:15)

“The reign of God is at hand!” Christ our Hope is coming!

Scripture Reading: *Luke 21:25-28, 34-36*

The Gospel Reading from the 1st Sunday of Advent

Jesus said to his disciples:

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Reflection:

Are you shaken by Luke's predictions of what is to come?

What similarities do you see in the world today?

How do you live in the face of such predictions and realities?

What gives you hope and faith both in the past and now?

Scripture Reading: *Isaiah 25:6-10*

On this mountain (Zion) the Lord of Hosts
will provide for all peoples
A feast of rich food and choice wines,
juicy, rich food and pure choice wines.
On this mountain he will destroy
the veil that veils all peoples,
The web that is woven over all nations.
He will destroy death forever!
The Lord God will wipe away
the tears from all faces;
The reproach of his people he will remove
from the whole earth; for the Lord has spoken.
On that day it will be said:
"Indeed, this is our God;
we looked to Him and He saved us!
This is the Lord to whom we looked;
let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"

Reflection:

What is your favorite line in this text? Why?

What do you need to be saved from?

Where do you experience the saving power of God in these times and in your daily life?

Closing Prayer:

God our Savior, you utter a word of promise and hope and hasten the day of justice and freedom, yet we live in a world forgetful of your word, our watchfulness dulled by the cares of life.

Keep us alert, make us attentive to your word, ready to look upon your Son when he comes with power and glory. Make us holy and blameless, ready to stand secure when the day of his coming shakes the world with terror. AMEN!

4
Session
One



Theme: "Make straight your paths!"

Opening Prayer:

God of our salvation,
you straighten the winding ways of our hearts
and smooth the paths made rough by sin.
Make our conduct blameless,
keep our hearts watchful in holiness,
and bring to perfection the good you have begun in us.
We ask this through him whose coming is certain,
whose day draws near: your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, God for ever and ever.
AMEN!

Scripture Reading: Luke 3:1-6

Gospel Reading for the 2nd Sunday of Advent

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of

region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

Reflection

What is the message that is yours to proclaim to your world at this time?

Where do you see signs of God's salvation in your life?

How can you make visible for others the salvation of God?

Song of the Season

"Isaiah Song", written and sung by Chandler Moore

Listen: <https://youtu.be/QTZj5FJMuMI>

(Group note: the YouTube version of this song is very lengthy and a bit repetitive; it's ok to shorten it).

This is the Word of the Lord, your Creator. I am the God who stood before the world was framed. I am the First, the Last, and everything between. I hold your future, who could know these things but Me? So don't fear I will be Your song. Sing, sing, oh barren land. Water is coming to the thirsty. Though you are empty, I am the well. Draw from me, I will provide. This is the Word of the Lord, your Creator. I stand from age to age, the Ancient of Days. I am the Holy One, the Fairest of Ten Thousand. And all who call upon My name shall be saved. So don't fear I will be Your song. Sing, sing, oh barren land. Water is coming to the thirsty. Though you are empty, I am the well. Draw from me, I will provide. I'm a river in

beauty for your ashes. Joy for your sadness and mourning. Heavens open. He's making ways in the wilderness. He's making rivers in the desert. You're making ways in the wilderness. You're making rivers in the desert. You are the way in the wilderness. You are the river in the desert. No more dry ground. No more dry ground. Heaven's open. No more dry ground. Heaven's open. Sing, sing, oh barren land. Water is coming to the thirsty. Though you are empty, I am the well. Draw from me, I will provide.

Scripture Reading *Isaiah 35: 1-4*

The wilderness and the parched land will exult, the
wasteland will rejoice and bloom;
Like the crocus it shall bloom abundantly,
and rejoice with joyful song.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
They will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendor of our God.
Strengthen hands that are feeble,
make firm knees that are weak,
Say to the fearful of heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God,
He comes with vindication;
With divine recompense
He comes to save You."

Sharing

What is your vision of the second coming of Jesus?

What makes you "fearful of heart"?

What strengthens you in the face of your fear?

Invitation to Action

Create an Advent Wreath (see Appendix, page 20). Use it to pray daily in anticipation of the coming reign of God.

Purchase an Advent Calendar, use it each day of Advent to enrich your daily prayer.

Set up your Nativity set/Creche; take time to reflect on one character from that scene. How did their life change?

Read the Mass scriptures for each day this week.

Closing Prayer

The readings we have prayed and shared today speak of the coming of the Lord and our call to perceive and receive the gift of God-with-us.

Think about the ways that you experienced the Lord present in your life now and make a prayer of gratitude OR think of a need that you have and make a plea for particular help:

Lord I give thanks for . . .

OR

Lord, be with me now when I . . .

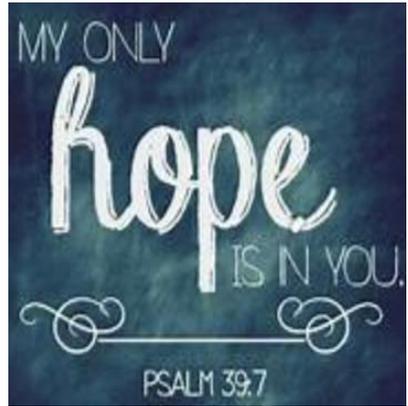
When all who want to share have spoken, pray together:

God of love,
you sent your son among us to prepare our way to you.
We ask you now to open our eyes to his presence with us in
all the moments of our days and nights and to open our
hearts to deeper and more constant love. We make this
prayer through Christ our Lord and Savior,

AMEN!

Christ our Hope is Come!!

Session
Two
3rd Sunday
of Advent



Theme: "Filled with expectation!"

Opening Prayer:

Let us pray (pause):

Almighty God,
you sent your Son into a world
where the wheat must be winnowed from the chaff
and wickedness clings even to what is good.

Let the fire of your Spirit
purge us of greed and deceit,
so that, purified, we may find our peace in you
and you may delight in us.

Grant this through him whose coming is certain,
whose day draws near:

your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, God for ever and ever.

AMEN!

Scripture Reading: Luke 3:10-18

Gospel Reading for the 3rd Sunday of Advent

The crowds asked John the Baptist, "What should we do?" He said to them in reply, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He answered them, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." Soldiers also asked him, "And what is it we should do?" He told them, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

Reflection

How do you think Jesus would respond to you if you asked him what you should do?

What is the good news that you hear from Jesus in your life at this time?

What is the good news that you would like to share with others?

Song of the Season

"For Every Mountain",

by Kurt Carr, sung by Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir

Listen: <https://youtu.be/qO2JPnxPmFg>

I've got so much to thank God for
So many wonderful blessings and so many open doors
A brand new mercy
Along with each new day
That's why I praise You
And for this I give You praise

For waking me up this morning
That's why I praise You
For starting me on my way
That's why I praise You
For letting me see the sunshine of a brand new day
A brand new mercy along with each new day
That's why I praise You

For this I give You praise
You're Jehovah Jireh
That's why I praise You
You've been my provider
That's why I praise You
So many times You met my need,

So many times You rescued me
That's why I praise You
I want to thank You for the blessings
You give to me each day
That's why I praise You
For this I give You praise

For every mountain You brought me over
For every trial you've seen me through
For every blessing
Hallelujah, for this I give You praise! (repeat)

Scripture Reading: *Isaiah 61:1-2, 10*

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
release to the prisoners,
To announce a year of favor from the Lord
and a day of vindication by our God.
I will rejoice heartily in the Lord,
my being exults in my God;
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
and wrapped me in a robe of justice.

Sharing

Have you ever felt the Spirit of God upon you?

What was the message or what were you being asked to do?

Did you do what you felt you were being called/ asked to do? Why or why not?

Invitation to Action

Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Give to St. Vincent de Paul to provide food and rent for those who are struggling.

Study and reflect further on the great social challenges of our day: racism, homelessness, mental illness.

Do what you hear God asking you to do.

Closing Prayer

God of love and peace,

Pour forth your Spirit upon us.

Give us discerning hearts to hear your call.

Fill us with courage to be the bearers of your love to the people around us.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

AMEN!

Christ our Hope is Come!

Session
Three
4th Sunday
of Advent



Theme: "Blest are we who believe!"

Opening Prayer:

Let us pray. (*Pause*)

Who are we, Lord God,
that you should come to us?
Yet you have visited your people
and redeemed us in your son.

As we prepare to celebrate his birth,
make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of your Word,
and move us by your Spirit to bless your wonderful works.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain,
whose day draws near:
your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.
AMEN!

Scripture Reading: *Luke 1:39-45*

Gospel Reading for the 4th Sunday of Advent

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Reflection

Share a time when you "heard" the Lord speak to you?

Did you believe what you "heard"?

How did you react/respond?

Did this experience make a difference in your life?

Have you ever shared this experience with anyone else?

With whom?

If not, why not?

Song of the Season

"Jesus Born on This Day",
written and sung by Mariah Carey

Listen: <https://youtu.be/clNuGfiOqIM>

Today a child is born on Earth
(Today a child is born on Earth)
Today the glory of God
Shines everywhere
For all of the world

Oh, Jesus, born on this day
He is our light and salvation
Oh, Jesus, born on this day
He is the King of all nations

Behold, the Lamb of God has come
(Behold, the Lamb of God has come)
Behold, the Savior is born
Sing of His love to everyone

Oh, Jesus, born on this day
Heavenly child in a manger
Oh, Jesus, born on this day
He is our Lord and Savior

Today our hearts rejoice in him
(Today our hearts rejoice in him)
Today the light of His birth
Fills us with hope
And brings peace on Earth

Oh, Jesus, born on this day
He is our light and salvation
Oh, Jesus, born on this day
He is the King of all nations
Today a child is born on earth
(Today a child is born on earth)

He is light, He is love, He is grace
Born on Christmas day
He is light (He is God), He is love (He is God),
He is grace (He is God)
Born on Christmas day
He is light, He is love, He is grace
Born on Christmas day
He is light (He is God), He is love (He is God),
He is grace (He is God)
Born on Christmas day
He is light, He is love, He is grace
Born on Christmas day

Scripture Reading: *Luke 2:1-7*

In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town.

And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son.

She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Sharing

What is the gift from God that you are hoping to receive this Christmas?

Why this particular gift?

What will do with the gift you receive?

What gift(s) are you hoping to give to others in this Christmas season?

Invitation to Action

Bring a personal dilemma or unresolved relationship issue to prayer.

In prayer, actively ask God for a special gift, a gift for yourself that will heal within you that dilemma or relationship, and then this year regift that to another who needs it.

Closing Prayer

Our celebration of Christmas draws near. We remember the coming of Jesus the Christ into our world two thousand years ago. We also remember that there was no room for him and his family in the inn.

In these final days of Advent, may we make room in our hearts for Jesus.

May we discover anew the gift of God-with-us here and now.

Reflect in silence for a few moments on what gift you want from God in this season for yourself, for others, for the world.

Go around the circle, each one offering a prayer for the gift of God-with-us that you desire in this season.

Then pray together:

God of love,

You desire nothing more than to be with your people.

You sent your Son to us to make clear your deep desire. We give you thanks for the gift of yourself in love to us. Make us now clear signs for others of your great love. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

AMEN!

Christ our Hope is Come!!

Appendix

Advent Wreathes

The Advent Wreath is a Christian tradition that symbolizes the passage of the four weeks of Advent. It is a circular candle holder that typically holds four or (optionally) five candles. During the season of Advent one candle on the wreath is lit each Sunday until all of the candles, including the fifth candle (if used), are lit on Christmas Day. Each candle represents an aspect of the spiritual preparation for the celebration of the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Most Advent wreathes use three colors of candles – purple, pink, and white. However, some may use blue in place of the purple.

1st Candle – (purple) **The Prophecy Candle or Candle of Hope** – We can have hope because God is faithful and will keep the promises made to us.

2nd Candle – (purple) **The Bethlehem Candle or The Candle of Preparation** – God kept his promise of a Savior who would be born in Bethlehem.

3rd Candle – (pink) **The Shepherd Candle or The Candle of Joy** – The angels sang a message of joy (“Gaudete”); we rejoice, our wait is almost over.

4th Candle – (purple) **The Angel Candle or The Candle of Love** – The angels announced the good news of a Savior. His coming is imminent!

5th Candle – (white) **“Christ Candle”** – The white candle reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world! He is born into our lives!

Suggested Prayers for the Lighting of the Advent Wreath

1st Week of Advent

Father in heaven,
our hearts desire the warmth of your love
and our minds are searching for the light of your Word.
Increase our longing for Christ our Savior.
May the dawn of His coming
find us rejoicing in His presence and welcoming His light.
We pray in the name of He who is coming. Amen.

2nd Week of Advent

Father in heaven,
the day draws near when the glory of your Son
will make radiant the night of the waiting world.
Bring us the joy which moves the hearts of those who seek
Him.
Dispel any darkness that would blind us.
Fill us with the wisdom which fills the hearts of those who
find Him.
We pray in the name of He who is near. Amen.

3rd Week of Advent

Father in heaven,
the earth rejoices in hope of the Savior's coming
and looks forward with longing
to His return at the end of time.
Prepare our hearts to receive Him with joy.
Bestow His presence among us.
We pray in the name of He who is almost here. Amen.

4th Week of Advent

Father in heaven,
your eternal Word took flesh on our earth
when the Virgin Mary placed her life in your service.
May we too hear the voice which announces His glory.
Open our hearts to receive Him.
We pray in the name of He who has come among us. Amen

1. This year's prayer sessions will be held either in person or via Zoom. The booklets in paper format and the online files will be available in multiple formats. A few extra printed copies will be provided for those who wish to pray alone and for those without computers and/or internet access.

2. The participant booklets and computer files will be available to you in advance of your first session together. Please be sure all have received them. Please remind all that there is a pre-first meeting session for all (1st Sunday of Advent).

3. Timekeeping. While a great deal of flexibility is encouraged, it is also the intention that the sessions will take about 90 minutes, that all portions of a session will be covered, and that all participants will have ample opportunity to participate.

Thus, this amount of time is suggested for each of the portions:

Opening prayer: 3 minutes

Gospel reading (read aloud): 6 minutes

Reflection: 25 minutes

Song: 8 minutes

2nd Reading (read aloud): 6 minutes

Sharing: 25 minutes

Invitation to Action: 7 minutes

Closing Prayer: 10 minutes

4. Environmental. Each participant should be encouraged to create a prayerful setting in their own homes. Perhaps this could consist of a small table, with a lit Advent wreath and a bible open to the upcoming Sunday's gospel.

5. Scriptures. The focus of the scriptures are the gospel passages, which come from the Sundays of Advent that follow the sessions, and the readings from Isaiah and the Nativity story. Both readings should be read aloud.

6. Music. Songs fitting the Season have been provided, along with the lyrics. The YouTube links for those songs have also been provided. It is recommended that the leader prepares in advance by accessing the YouTube version, and playing it during the Session, while the participants follow along. While those who know the songs may like to sing along, the songs chosen are more for listening and reflecting on the Session themes.

7. Sharing/reflections. Time is given after the readings for sharing and reflecting on personal experiences, allowing the participants to hear the faith stories of those present, and some of the ways in which God is touching their lives. In each case, there are "Stimulus Questions" provided. As the leader, you should make sure no one person dominates these times, so that everyone has an opportunity to speak. Occasionally someone in the group may feel especially challenged by and/or vulnerable from the questions or discussion; it may be necessary to gently cut them off if they are speaking of things that are too personal or inappropriate for such a gathering. Also remind them this is not Confession (the Sacrament of Reconciliation) nor a group counseling session, but rather a prayerful time to look into themselves, seeking a deeper relationship with God. It is ok for folks to "pass" when their turn arrives, or to postpone until a later more comfortable time. Discussion should be minimal, only to clarify or encourage, never to disagree, challenge, or problem solve.

8. Invitation to Action. Suggestions are given for ways in which individuals or the group as a whole could make a response to what they have heard or experienced in the Session. Those present are also encouraged to come up with alternative ideas. The expectation is that this portion of the meeting be kept relatively brief.

9. Final Prayer. Please make this a highlight of the Session. The prayer provided is meant to be both a small summary of the Session and also a challenge to live what has been discovered and shared, and with a moment to vocalize a personalized response.

10. Preparation for the next Session: Encourage everyone to read the scripture passages prior to the next meeting.

Guidelines for Small Group Sharing:

Respect the differing experiences, perspectives, and contributions of each person.

Encourage everyone to participate in the conversation and sharing, but do not force anyone to share.

Share what you are comfortable sharing.

Participate a second time only after all have had an opportunity to speak.

Embrace difference.

Confidentiality is essential.

Take action on what you have discussed and learned through the group sharing.

