

# Introduction to **ADVENT**



## **The Season**

Of all the seasons of the liturgical year, Advent is the one many Catholics misunderstand. Not only that, but the spirit of Advent is difficult to maintain with all of the references to “the Christmas season” in advertisements, television and radio programming, social gatherings, school assemblies, and family preparations. Yet the season of Advent is necessary if we are to celebrate Christmas well and if we are to live our lives well. Advent’s dual focus is likely the cause of some of the misperception about the season among many in our pews. At the beginning of the season, we focus on the end of all time, and the eventuality of our death and judgment. This is important. It is an annual checkup on our recognition that our actions have bearing on the way we will be judged by Christ, upon our death, and the way humanity will be judged at the end of time. Alongside this focus of repentance, Advent also is a time of joyful expectation. We await the end of time with joyful hope because we trust in God’s promise of eternal life and look forward to the Second Coming of Christ. We also prepare our hearts to joyfully receive Christ in the mystery of the Incarnation, through which God showed the world his immeasurable love and mercy by sending his only Son to us for our salvation.

We must be unapologetic in our insistence on observing the season when we are in our parish settings, and provide as much catechesis as possible through word and witness, color, ritual, and prayer. Send the young people home with the sounds and

sights of Advent in their minds and hearts, so that the season may lead all of us to wait, prepare, and hope in the saving love of Jesus Christ.

## **Celebrating Advent with Teens**

Many teens appreciate the rhythm of the transitions to Advent and then to Christmas, particularly if they mark these seasons at home through special prayer and traditions. Teens may be uncomfortable with the early Advent focus on the end of time, especially if they have recently experienced the death of a loved one. They likely already know that Advent is about waiting, anticipation, and preparation. Invite your teens to keep this brief yet spiritually rich season well and ask them to share their progress as Advent unfolds. Focusing on Advent during Advent allows for a richer appreciation of the mystery of the Incarnation that we will celebrate during Christmas Time.

## **Preparing the Liturgical Environment**

Use Advent violet to help set the tone for your gatherings with the teens during this season. The liturgical environment for Advent will be in stark contrast to the Christmas decorations that can overwhelm us in the weeks leading up to Christmas. A few bare branches or images of Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Mary might be included in your Advent environment, along with an Advent wreath. Leave a Bible open to the Gospel for the current Sunday.



# November 29, 2020

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### LECTIONARY #2B

Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7

Psalms 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Mark 13:33–37

## Prepare for the Word

*The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.*

### Leader's Context

During the season of Advent, we enter a holy time of anticipation and waiting. We remember three particular periods of waiting: the wait the ancient Jewish people had in their anticipation of the promised Messiah, the wait we have to celebrate the Incarnation of the Messiah at Christmas, and the wait for the Second Coming of our Lord. God is with us in our time of waiting, as we are filled with joy and hopeful expectation. Our time of waiting isn't meant to be idle, indeed, our wait is meant to be fruitful. In our wait for Jesus, we prepare our souls and our very lives.

**Q FOCUS:** *Our Lord is coming, and we are called to ready ourselves for his arrival.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

As the season of Advent commences, we begin a new liturgical year in the Church's calendar. It also begins our time of joy-filled anticipation leading up to Christmas. During this time, we anticipate our celebration of the Lord's Incarnation at Christmas. We recall how the Jewish people spent centuries trusting in God's promise as they awaited the coming of the Messiah. We also anticipate the time when Christ will come again at the end of time, and that we must prepare ourselves and our communities for that glorious day.

### Church Teaching Connection

"Being *attentive* and *watchful* are prerequisites so as not to continue to 'err from the Lord's ways', lost in our sins and in our unfaithfulness; being attentive and being watchful are the conditions that allow God to permeate our existence, in order to restore meaning and value to it with his presence full of goodness and tenderness" (Pope Francis, *Angelus* Message, December 3, 2017).

## Hear the Word

*Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.*

### Gospel Acclamation

*Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.*

Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Mark 13:33–37

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

*All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.*

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*Everyone may be seated.*

## Reflect on the Word

*When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:*

Today, we begin Advent, which is a liturgical season of watchfulness, waiting, and preparation.

► **In your own life and activities, what does it mean to be watchful, alert, and ready?**

In our daily lives we are watchful for everyday occurrences, such as spotting stop signs at unfamiliar intersections, checking food labels for allergens, or perhaps searching a locker for missing paper due during afternoon classes. We do these things as a second nature; drivers are aware that traffic patterns at intersections need to be identified; those with food allergies know they must carefully evaluate foods for ingredients which could harm them; students desire to give teachers their work on time in order to maintain grades and not invite academic trouble. When we don't anticipate these aspects of life, we sometimes find ourselves in hot water. Only in hindsight do we realize the importance of being prepared and training ourselves to be alert.

After sin entered the world, God's plan to reconcile his children to himself began to unfold. For many generations, the Israelites were alert and waiting for the promised messiah. The faithful people told one another about God's promises to send a messiah, the one who would save his people. They waited for this holy one, this prince of peace. Alert and watchful, God's people waited, remembering that God always keeps his promises.

► **What were some ways that God kept his promises to the Israelites? (The answers could include stories of God's covenants, like those of Noah, Moses, or Abraham.)**

The prophets reminded the Israelites about the promised Messiah; likewise, the Church uses the season of Advent to remind God's people to anticipate Christ's Second Coming. Through Jesus' words in today's Gospel, we are encouraged to prepare ourselves for his return at the end of time, whenever that may be. We are God's people, made his adopted sons and daughter through our Baptism. Once again, God's people are waiting in anticipation of God's promises. We remember that our Lord has told us that he is returning for his people, and he instructs his followers to remember that his arrival is in our future.

We prepare ourselves for Christ's coming not out of fear, or following a rule of some sort, but we prepare for him out of love for him. Like the servants in the Gospel reading, we have been given tasks and we are to keep up with our work in the faith. Jesus taught his followers to feed the hungry, and care for the poor. We are to seek Jesus in every aspect of our lives and live in service to him.

► **What are some ways you can prepare your hearts for Christ during this season of Advent? Are you ready to meet Christ?**

### Wrapping It Up

*Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 72.*

**God makes promises to his people, and the people trust in God's faithfulness to them; God keeps his promises.**

**Out of love for Christ, we prepare our lives for his coming.**

**We do not know when Christ will arrive, but we want to be ready to greet him in joy.**

# Act on the Word

## Preparing Our Hearts for Christ

To complete this activity, each teen will need a Bible. These can print or accessed electronically.

We are like the servants in the Gospel reading, and Jesus is the master of the house who has left work for us to do. He has entrusted us, his followers, with the continuation of his ministry. During Advent, we often lose this focus because of all the preparations we have to do for Christmas—buying gifts, decorating, making travel plans, finishing any schoolwork before break.

Have the teens break into at least four small groups. Assign each group one of the following passages:

- ✧ Matthew 5:3-12
- ✧ Matthew 25:31-46
- ✧ Luke 6:27-36
- ✧ Luke 10:29-37

These passages help us to recall key aspects of Jesus' teachings and his expectations of discipleship. Have each group discuss the following questions with regard to their assigned passage.

- ✧ What does this passage teach you about discipleship and how you are supposed to act?
- ✧ How is this different from or similar to how society expects people to act?

- ✧ How does this notion of discipleship help you to prepare your hearts for Christ's coming, at Christmas and at the end of time?
- ✧ What are some things you can do this during this season of Advent to put your discipleship into action?

Complete the activity by inviting the groups to share some of the insights they gained and what their action plans are. Choose one or two of these items to do as a group during Advent.

## Closing Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ,  
in this Advent season, teach us the art of waiting,  
of not knowing.  
May we live in joyful hope, free from anxiety  
and distress, and be ready to greet you  
when you come again.  
You live and reign for ever and ever.  
Amen.*

## For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at [www.itp.org/lwgr](http://www.itp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.

# Read



Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b;  
64:2-7

Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16,  
18-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

## LIVING THE WORD

### First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020



#### REFLECTION

In this first week of Advent, we are invited by today's Gospel reading to be alert, prepare ourselves, and to be watchful. The season of Advent encourages all of us to look inward and prepare for the coming of Jesus at Christmas and at the end of time. It may sound strange to talk about the end of the world when we are thinking about Christmas, but think of it like this: if you knew you were going to meet Jesus tomorrow, how would you act today? Most of us would agree we would want to show the very best versions of ourselves. The ancient Israelites prepared themselves for the coming of the Messiah by following God's law and living lives that reflected God's love. Advent is about all of this: preparing our hearts to receive Christ, reflecting on God's word and presence in the world, and reshaping ourselves to become a good disciple of Jesus. Today's Gospel passage is telling us that the time to do this is now; we cannot put it off until tomorrow because Christ could come at any moment!



#### ACTION

This week try to spend ten minutes each day reflecting on your heart, your body, or your spirit. Choose a different aspect to reflect on each night. If you are reflecting on your heart, you can ask yourself questions like, "How can I love my family and friends better?" and then be specific with your response. For your body you might ask yourself, "How am I using my body to help others in this world? Am I treating my body with care to ensure my ability to help others?" Lastly, for your spirit, you might reflect on your emotional well-being or your personal faith. By reflecting on all these things, we prepare ourselves for Christ's coming.

*"The good you do today  
may be forgotten tomorrow.  
Do good anyway."*

—Mother Teresa 



#### QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What are you waiting for during this season of Advent?
- ❖ How do your actions show that you are ready for Christ to come again?

