

First Sunday of Advent

Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength...to stand before the Son of Man.

—Luke 21:36 NRSV

Explore

Advent—The Call to Adventure

newsprint, markers

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Spread a large sheet of paper on the table. Give the teens markers. Have them list or draw everything they know about Advent in the next few minutes.

Bibles, Book of Mormon

Advent is celebrated during the Christmas season as a time of anticipation and preparation for the coming of Christ's birth. The word "Advent" comes from a latin word that means "coming." It also is part of the word "adventure." Maybe, as a child, the teens had an Advent calendar and waited anxiously to open a new door each day. Ask the teens to describe an adventure. Ask them what they hope to gain from their adventure.

Scripture Search

Christ's coming promised hope to those who would follow. Read the scripture from Jeremiah 33:14–16. Here Jeremiah proclaimed a future of hope. Discuss the following questions:

- Who is speaking in the scripture?
- What is promised?
- When will it happen?
- Where will the prophecy take place?
- Why will this happen?
- How will humankind recognize the fulfilling of the promise?

Read II Nephi 8:18–21. Identify the elements of hope found in this scripture. Have the teens think about their definition of adventure. Compare their definitions with the adventure that begins with Christ's birth.

Extract

Announcement, Announcement, Announcement!

Bible,
Book of Mormon

paper, pens

Jeremiah 33:14–16
Luke 21:25–36
1 Thessalonians
3:9–13

Helaman 5:55–60
III Nephi 1:1–24
Alma 16:151

Today's scriptures announce Christ's coming. During Advent season on the Christian calendar, we look forward to Christ's coming, God's purpose being fulfilled. We celebrate the first coming—Jesus' birth—and consider the Second Coming. Ancient prophets looked at the conditions of their world and saw little possibility for change or reform. They saw great differences between how the people worshiped and how they lived their faith. Prophets looked forward to Christ's coming and preached that all should prepare and be ready for that day. In this Advent season, we are called to turn away from destructive habits and prepare ourselves through mighty, powerful prayer.

Read Jeremiah 33:14–16, Luke 21:25–36, and 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13. Note the ideas all three scripture passages share. (*They all discuss the end of one life and the beginning of a new one.*) Luke was written ten to twenty years after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies. It told the early Christians that their turbulent world was not the end, but a time to hope and a time of preparation for a new future.

A similar story comes from the Book of Mormon. If ever a people needed hope and not material objects, it was the Nephites in the ninety-second year of their judges. The people were prosperous, but they feared for their lives. Faced with certain death, they looked intently for the signs prophesied by Samuel the Lamanite. Their motto literally was "Be Alert! Christ Comes!" even though some were very skeptical that this miracle would actually happen.

Five years earlier Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, spoke to the Nephites in Zarahemla, compelling them to repent and giving them hope that their savior would be born. Read aloud Helaman 5:55–60. Not all Nephites received this message well. Nephite missionaries had converted scores of Lamanites to faith in Jesus in preceding years. There was peace among these nations for a time while both peoples had a common allegiance to God and a common hope in the birth of God’s son. When the Nephites became prosperous, a portion of the people forgot about God’s promises. They saw no reason to follow Samuel’s urgings to repent, because he was a Lamanite, and, therefore, not to be trusted. They didn’t believe they were doing anything wrong.

paper, pens or pencils

Even when people believe and cling to the hope that there is a God, doubts still creep in. People question their faith and become fearful that they may believe the wrong thing. Nephi (in III Nephi 1:11) brought his fears to God in mighty prayer. He was afraid for his people, and he probably wondered about his own beliefs, but his basic faith in God helped him not give up hope that God’s promises would be kept. Ask, “How have you questioned your faith? How have you questioned whether God is there?” It’s always good to “experiment upon my words” (Alma 16:151) and examine what you hope is true.

Experience

Casting the Movie

Play the movie director. Tell your crew—the class—that you have a movie script waiting for casting. You’re looking for actors to play the roles of Jeremiah, Luke, Paul, and Samuel the Lamanite as they’ve been introduced in today’s lesson. What current actors would they call for a screen test for each role and why? Discuss the selections the class provides. Choose the best for each role, keeping in mind actors who could persuade them to be alert for Christ and mighty in prayer.

flip chart, markers

Mighty Prayer

How do you experience “mighty prayer”? Experiment with different prayer positions: kneeling, standing with hands raised, laying on your stomach flat on the floor, sitting or standing with your head down, or sitting with your head up. In any position, keep your eyes open or keep your eyes closed. Step out of your comfort level. Which positions make you feel more humble or vulnerable? Which open you to a willingness to approach God more easily?

flip chart, markers,
paper, pens

Write a Prayer

Experiment with different symbols. What does each symbol say about God? How might this idea change the way we pray? Have students write a prayer of hope using one of these symbols as a focal point. Ask for volunteers to read their prayer, and explain why they selected a certain symbol. Then pray the prayers together as a class before moving on. If some prayers are favorites of the class, post them in the classroom and use them to begin or end future classes.

Symbols:
wooden cross, water,
coins, bread, watch
or clock, map or
compass, mirror,
rope, a seed, a lighted
candle, music on a
CD or other device,
evergreen or holly
branch

Expand

Lifting Our Hopes in Prayer

Using the paper provided, ask the students to respond to “What hopes do I need to bring to God in prayer?” Use one of the student prayers written today to close class.

Lectionary scriptures—Jeremiah 33:14–16; Psalm 25:1–10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13; Luke 21:25–36