Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: First Week of Advent

Scripture: Matthew 24:36–44 NRSV

Gathering

Welcome

(For the Advent season it is traditional to have Advent candles (four white candles, one for each week of Advent) or an Advent wreath (an evergreen ring with four candles and one white candle in the center). One candle is lit each week with the center candle lit on Christmas. The lighting of the Advent candle takes place at the beginning of the spiritual practice.)

Advent is a season of waiting in expectation for the coming of light into a darkened world in the form of the infant Jesus. Advent is spent anticipating and spiritually preparing for the arrival of the Christ-child. Scriptures, symbols, and hymns help make Advent a time of expectation for Christ’s birth, rather than a frenzy of holiday tasks.

The Advent season begins four Sundays before Christmas and is observed each Sunday until Christmas. An Advent wreath with four candles and one Christ candle in the center often is used to observe the weeks of Advent. One candle is lit each week until all are burning brightly on Christmas.

Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.

Light the peace candle.

All praise to the divine Power propelling the universe, yet loving and concerned for each of us. Some of us are entering a season set apart to proclaim our joy and our hope in the Prince of Peace. Others give special remembrance to their deity other times of the year, but they, too, yearn for a peaceful existence. Help us to extend these special times to all time.

Each person affects a few others, but even together our impact has not been enough to create relationships worthy of being called peaceful. We get involved in our own personal wants. We try to compete for your favor even when we declare you are God, the light of all people. Help us to be at peace and to bring peace to others. We say the Earth is created for all. You have given it to our care, but we have desecrated it for personal gain. Forgive our selfishness in thought and action.
May we reach beyond ourselves and give praise and thanksgiving for the power and love that created us and gives us purpose each day.

We pray for peace for the Earth and each of us on the planet. We do not want to limit your purposes and stifle your creativity. We want to live in your way and with your peace. Help us to proclaim and to be the message of the Prince of Peace to our part of your world. Amen.

—Virginia Schrunk

**Spiritual Practice**

**Take Five**

Light the first candle of Advent and say:

Today we light the first candle of Advent. This candle symbolizes hope in new life. May we have hope in that new life, which is coming forth in us.

Read the following:

The liturgical year starts with the waiting for the birth of light. Advent is a period to take a time-out and reflect on what is being born within us, just as we wait for the light and Son of God to be born. Take Five is a spiritual practice of taking a time-out for reflection. With the consumerism that surrounds the holidays, this practice can help us focus and connect with God, each other, and the Earth.

Read the following:

Today we are going to do five minutes of centering prayer. Centering prayer is where we choose a word or phrase and repeat it while breathing in and breathing out. It helps us get into a meditative state and clears our minds. Choose a word to focus on and breathe in for eight seconds, breathe out for eight seconds. We will repeat for five minutes.

Set the timer for five minutes. At the end of five minutes say, “Amen.” Invite group members to share how this practice helped them feel hope.

**Sharing Around the Table**

**Matthew 24:36–44 NRSV**

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have
stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

During Advent season (from Latin, “to come”), we celebrate the coming of Jesus in many ways: through prophecies, birth, baptism, and the future reign of God. At first glance, today’s text may seem a little “dark” in contrast to the spirit of joyful anticipation and expectation associated with the days and weeks leading to the birth of Jesus. Activities like the hanging of the greens, live Nativities, Christmas caroling, and searching for just the right gift seem more fitting than warnings about being left behind and analogies between the Son of Man and a thief in the night.

It’s important for us to remember that—like us—the first-century hearers of these words were busy with the tasks of daily living. So much so, that they may have failed to see and understand how God was present among them and working in their midst to bring God’s reign.

We need not be concerned that we don’t know “the day and hour” of Christ’s coming. What matters more is that we live each day with our eyes and our hearts wide open, so we won’t miss the times when God comes near. We must not allow ourselves to be so enmeshed in the everyday that the Son of Man is able to come and go without our noticing.

Ushering in the reign of God requires intentional living that visibly shows what the coming of the Son of Man will be like. Jesus’ message was, and remains, focused on living in this world in a watchful and wakeful way.

Questions

1. How do you allow yourself to get “swept up” in the mundane or be “left behind” in the chaos of life…so that you miss the times when God comes near?
2. How do you engage in “intentional living” for the coming reign of God?
3. What do you anticipate or expect to come in this season of Advent?

Sending

Generosity Statement

NOTE: If you are using “Thoughts for Children,” make time here for them to share with the group their colored pictures of Christ.

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.

This offering prayer for Advent is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God who is faithful, Be present with us as we plan our spending. May we use our resources to build healthy, happy relationships with you, others, and the Earth. May we remember the teachings of Jesus that challenge us to make lifestyle choices that are counter to our culture of accumulation and excess. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting
Closing Hymn

CCS 392, “All Earth Is Hopeful”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group
- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*
*Light the peace candle.*

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Communion Statement

We come together in this time of waiting to share in the Lord’s Supper “as a visible witness of loving Christian fellowship and shared remembrance of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:4a).

All committed followers of Christ are invited to partake, but no one should feel pressured to receive the emblems.

This Advent season, our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing from Community of Christ Sings 519, “In the Singing.”
Thoughts for Children
Wait in Hope

Materials: five black-and-white coloring-page-style pictures of Christ (Google coloring page Jesus Christ), pen or marker, tape, crayons.
Preparation: Print the pictures of Christ. Write a separate Mission Initiative on the back of each page. Print extra copies of each style to share with the children to color.

- Invite People to Christ
- Abolish Poverty, End Suffering
- Pursue Peace on Earth
- Develop Disciples to Serve
- Experience Congregations in Mission

Before the group arrives, place each of the five Mission Initiative pictures in a different spot around the room.
Tell the children: This is a very special time of year, when we look for Jesus everywhere. Look around and see if you can find Jesus in this room.
Have the children bring each picture back to the group. Have each child read what is on the back of his or her picture.
Explain: We can see Jesus all around us by seeing his mission and purpose all around us.
Ask the following questions and encourage children to share their thoughts:

- How can you invite people to know Jesus?
- How can you help those who are poor or hungry?
- How can you share peace with others?
- How might you learn more about following Jesus?
- What kinds of things could this group do to join in the mission of Jesus?

Lead the children in prayer: We pray this season everyone can feel the light of Jesus in their lives. Amen.
Pass out color pages and crayons and invite the children to return to their seats and color the pictures of Christ to be shared later in the gathering.
Make time during A Disciple's Generous Response for the children to share their colored pictures.