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.

Gracious and loving God,

We are a unique collection of your beloved children.

We come from different backgrounds, with amazing skills and individual perspectives. But we are more than that.

Around this room and in places around the world, we are your dedicated servants, united in our desire to make your vision of peace real.

On our best days, we breathe deeply of your Spirit and are knocked to our knees by the unfathomable love that pours from a lowly manger. Other days we are so full of ourselves we can’t squeeze our giant heads through the stable doors.
Thank you for this overwhelming love so freely given and forgive us for the days when we are not at our best.

As we continue traveling through this Advent season and beyond, we trust your Spirit will go before us and travel with us, lighting the way.

Let us be illuminated by your light from the inside out, sharing joy, hope, love, and peace with all we meet.

In the name of the One who’s birth we celebrate this season. Amen. —Jenn Killpack

**Spiritual Practice**

**Take Five**

Materials: paper, pens or pencils

Light the third candle of Advent and say:

Today we light the third candle of Advent. This candle symbolizes joy. May we draw closer to joy in our lives.

Read the following:

Joy, like pain, is cultivated from within each of us. Joy can come from journeying with God to heal our pain and discovering the love and acceptance that has always been within us. The Christ child represents joy. Christ teaches us that we all are children of God, and that all are loved. “But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people…” (Luke 2:10 NRSV).

When we “Take Five” this season to express our gratitude, it brings joy into our hearts.

Pass out papers and pens to the group and say:

Scientific studies show that gratitude journaling can be a huge part of our journey to happiness and joy. Today we will “Take Five” by spending five minutes writing things we are grateful for. When I start the timer, begin writing the things that fill you with gratitude. At the end of our five minutes we will have time for anyone who might like to share reflections.

Set the timer for five minutes. At the end, invite group members to share reflections about what they are grateful for and what feelings emerged as they spent time focused on gratitude.

**Sharing Around the Table**

**Isaiah 35:1–10 NRSV**

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the Lord,  
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
“Be strong, do not fear!  
Here is your God.  
He will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense.  
He will come and save you.”

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;  
the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,[a]  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it,  
but it shall be for God’s people;  
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.  
No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.  
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Those who never have hoped for something that seemed impossible really never have hoped. If things were too easy or too obvious, there would be no need for hope. During Advent, we wait in hopefulness for the birth of Jesus and the coming reign of God.
Scholars suggest this passage seems aligned with the section of Isaiah that speaks a word of hope to the Babylonian exiles…a people who were “prisoners” of war who were beaten, maimed, and sometimes even blinded…a people devoid of hope. Those to whom Isaiah spoke were more than desperate. They had been abandoned…or so they thought.

Today’s text is a promise to them and a reminder to us that the coming of God’s kingdom is accompanied by unimaginable reversals. The priorities of the world are turned on their heads. The weak find strength, and the strong become feeble. Those who are fearful find courage. The blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame “leap like a deer.” And if that’s not enough, waters “break forth in the wilderness…the burning sand [becomes] a pool…the haunt of jackals (literally the desert) [becomes] a swamp.” Nothing in all of creation is exempt from God’s new age.

Just like the Babylonian exiles, we sometimes find ourselves longing for a safe way out of our own “wilderness.” During Advent, as we await the coming of the Lord, we have reason to hope that in times when all seems lost, God offers a transformed way through the wilderness where “no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.”

Questions

1. How have you experienced a wilderness time in your life?
2. How might Advent be a time for you to rekindle hope in a new, life-giving way?

Sending

Generosity Statement

“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.

The 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 400, “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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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 Joy

Materials: small objects from nature (flower, twig, leaf, dandelion) or a few flowers from a market, fruit cut into bite-sized pieces.

Invite the children to walk outside and return with an object that brings joy. It could be a flower, autumn leaf, dandelion, twig, etc. If a walk is not possible, invite the children to pick something from the items you brought from your garden or bought from a supermarket.

Invite the children to sit and hold the flower or object as you ask:

- Where did this object come from?
- How was this object made?
- Who made this object?
- How does this object make you feel?

Explain that God made many wonderful things for us to enjoy. We can have joy by noticing and appreciating the simplicity and beauty of what naturally occurs all around us.

Lead the children through a mindfulness exercise.

Say: Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and focus on the sound of your breath. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Feel the air going in and out of your mouth. Feel your chest expanding and contracting.

Explain: God created our amazing bodies. God also created us with an amazing capacity to experience joy.

Ask: What other amazing things can your body do? Examples: run, jump, hug, sleep, eat, say comforting words, etc.

Explain: God gave our bodies many amazing abilities. We can experience joy and bring others joy with smiles, hugs, and kind words.

Serve some fruit to the children as an example of something God made for us to enjoy. Invite the children to return to their seats.