Sacred Space: a Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Fourth Week of Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 7:10–16 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.

God of glory and greatness, help us to gather in spirit and understanding. The richness of your goodness leads us to worship.

We are thankful for the gift of your Son this Advent season. He touched and blessed every aspect of our lives while on Earth. He is the Prince of Peace. Thank you for his great love and the beauty of his sharing. Make us responsive to the Holy Spirit he welcomed through prayer. We seek it in our sharing of human problems and relationships. We would lift Jesus’ ensign of peace to our troubled world. Challenge us again during this preparation of Advent to become a creative part of the world’s redemption with him, for we ask it in his worthy name. Amen.

—Miriam Mann
**Spiritual Practice**

**Take Five**

Light the fourth candle of Advent and say:

Today we light the fourth candle of Advent. This candle represents love. May the lighting of this candle remind us to share our light and love with the world.

Read the following:

Throughout this Advent season we have been contemplating how “taking five” helps us slow down, connect with the Divine, and discover hope, peace, and joy in the new light being birthed this season. Jesus taught us about a love that extends far beyond what we might consider as being safe and bordered. Through his actions Jesus taught us not only to love those who look, act, or think like us, but to open our arms wide to all. Jesus models a love that is unrestricted, unbounded, and unrelenting. This is the hope of Advent: the hope of new birth, the hope of God’s mercy and love.

Read the following:

Love is the greatest power in the world. It is stronger than hate. When we are filled with love and treat others with love we bring peace, hope, and joy to the world. Today we will “Take Five” by doing a mantra meditation. As we breathe in, our mantra is, “As I have loved you.” As we breathe out, our mantra is, “Love one another.” Continue this practice for five minutes.

Set the timer for five minutes. At the end, say “Amen.” Invite the group to reflect on this practice.

**Sharing Around the Table**

**Isaiah 7:10–16 NRSV**

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

“Heart then, O house of David…the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” This familiar passage often is read during this time of year to speak of the coming of Jesus. Although a traditional Advent reading, this passage actually is Isaiah, speaking to King Ahaz of Judah during a time of impending invasion by Aram (Syria) and Ephraim (Israel). These words are part of a prophecy assuring King Ahaz that the invaders will not prevail.
The angel who appears to Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew repeats part of Isaiah’s message regarding the birth of Jesus. It is easy to be distracted by the debate of whether or not Isaiah’s words actually were pointing to the birth of Jesus, or whether they referred to a more immediate sign at the time they were spoken. Giving way to this distraction could cause us to miss something important in the passage.

Ahaz is told to ask for a sign from God, and Ahaz refuses. His response of “I will not put the Lord to the test,” may seem appropriate, but we must remember it was God that initiated this conversation. Why did Ahaz refuse? Was his faith already faltering? Did he lack trust in the living God?

Despite Ahaz’s refusal, God responds with steadfast faithfulness and grace. How many times in our own lives do we—in the midst of trouble, doubt, and impending doom—question the very presence of God? Even in dark times God responds in compassion and mercy. God sends Immanuel, “God with us.”

Questions

1. What excuses do you use to keep God at a distance in times of trouble?
2. How do you find hope in the promise of “God with us” in this Advent season and beyond?

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 395, “People, Look East”

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.*

God of glory and greatness, help us to gather in spirit and understanding. The richness of your goodness leads us to worship.

We are thankful for the gift of your Son this Advent season. He touched and blessed every aspect of our lives while on Earth. He is the Prince of Peace. Thank you for his great love and the beauty of his sharing. Make us responsive to the Holy Spirit he welcomed through prayer. We seek it in our sharing of human problems and relationships. We would lift Jesus’ ensign of peace to our troubled world. Challenge us again during this preparation of Advent to become a creative part of the world’s redemption with him, for we ask it in his worthy name. Amen.

—Miriam Mann
Spiritual Practice
Take Five

Light the fourth candle of Advent and say:

Today we light the fourth candle of Advent. This candle represents love. May the lighting of this candle remind us to share our light and love with the world.

Read the following:

Throughout this Advent season we have been contemplating how “taking five” helps us slow down, connect with the Divine, and discover hope, peace, and joy in the new light being birthed this season. Jesus taught us about a love that extends far beyond what we might consider as being safe and bordered. Through his actions Jesus taught us not only to love those who look, act, or think like us, but to open our arms wide to all. Jesus models a love that is unrestricted, unbounded, and unrelenting. This is the hope of Advent: the hope of new birth, the hope of God’s mercy and love.

Read the following:

Love is the greatest power in the world. It is stronger than hate. When we are filled with love and treat others with love we bring peace, hope, and joy to the world. Today we will “Take Five” by doing a mantra meditation. As we breathe in, our mantra is, “As I have loved you.” As we breathe out, our mantra is, “Love one another.” Continue this practice for five minutes.

Set the timer for five minutes. At the end, say “Amen.” Invite the group to reflect on this practice.
Sharing Around the Table
Isaiah 7:10–16 NRSV

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

“Hear then, O house of David…the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Êmmanuel.” This familiar passage often is read during this time of year to speak of the coming of Jesus. Although a traditional Advent reading, this passage actually is Isaiah, speaking to King Ahaz of Judah during a time of impending invasion by Aram (Syria) and Ephraim (Israel). These words are part of a prophecy assuring King Ahaz that the invaders will not prevail.

The angel who appears to Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew repeats part of Isaiah’s message regarding the birth of Jesus. It is easy to be distracted by the debate of whether or not Isaiah’s words actually were pointing to the birth of Jesus, or whether they referred to a more immediate sign at the time they were spoken. Giving way to this distraction could cause us to miss something important in the passage.

Ahaz is told to ask for a sign from God, and Ahaz refuses. His response of “I will not put the Lord to the test,” may seem appropriate, but we must remember it was God that initiated this conversation. Why did Ahaz refuse? Was his faith already faltering? Did he lack trust in the living God?

Despite Ahaz’s refusal, God responds with steadfast faithfulness and grace. How many times in our own lives do we—in the midst of trouble, doubt, and impending doom—question the very presence of God? Even in dark times God responds in compassion and mercy. God sends Immanuel, “God with us.”

Questions

1. What excuses do you use to keep God at a distance in times of trouble?
2. How do you find hope in the promise of “God with us” in this Advent season and beyond?
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.
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

Materials: paper and pencils

Ask: What are some loving things people say to us or we say to others?

Have each child fold a sheet of paper vertically in half. Invite the kids to write or draw on the left side of the paper some things people have said to them, or they have said to others, that did NOT feel loving. After they have drawn or written a few examples, instruct them to write or draw examples of loving things on the right side of the paper.

Invite children to share one thing they wrote on the right side of their page.

Explain: We can practice love by saying kind things and having compassion for ourselves and others, even when we feel weak or make mistakes. Jesus loves us all the time, and we can choose to show love all the time, too.

Tell the children: Thank you for coming today to show your love for all of us and for Jesus as you learn more about him. You can share your love for Jesus by being loving to yourself, your family, your friends, and others.

Lead the children in prayer: We pray that all God’s children can feel God’s love. We pray for their safety. We pray for their health. We pray they may feel joy. Help us to be God’s hands this Advent season as we wait in love.