

Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year C

First Sunday of Advent: Hope

Scripture: Luke 21:25–36 NRSV

Gathering

Welcome

Advent is a season of waiting 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 Day. 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 Christmas Day.

Prayer for Peace

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

To the One who hears all prayers,

We come in gratitude for the gift of Hope you have given us, your Son, Jesus Christ. As we celebrate Jesus' birth, we are aware that at times we have forgotten hope is an attitude, not something we can buy off the shelf. As we journey through Advent may we see our sense of hope renewed to better serve those who truly are hopeless. As Jesus is our example of hope, may we be a shining light for those who are struggling to see or sense hope in themselves. Something so simple as being kind, giving compliments freely, and accepting your children as they are—just as you do for us—can change how someone looks at the world.

As we leave this place may our souls be filled to overflowing, having had our attitudes changed and opened to see through the eyes of possibilities, wonder, and hope. May we freely pass this as a gift.

Amen.

—Diane Allison

Spiritual Practice

Journaling—Pregnant Waiting

Materials: Advent wreath or ring for four candles and one white candle in the center, paper, and pens or pencils.

Make certain all can see the Advent wreath. You will call attention to the burning candle during today's spiritual practice.

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 coming forth in us.

Read the following:

The liturgical year begins with a pregnant woman waiting for the birth of her child. Was Mary tired? Was she worn out the last few weeks before the birth? Was she just hoping to get it over with? Much waiting must be done before a child is born. In pregnancy and the spiritual life, waiting can be tiring, frustrating, and worrisome. Advent is about the journey to the birth of Jesus. It's a time to pause, to wait, to reflect on what things are being birthed within us.

Pass out papers and pens and ask: What new thing is God doing within you and around you to bring hope to the world?

Give the group five minutes to journal and then invite people to share thoughts and feelings that surfaced during their reflection.

Invite the group to focus on the first Advent candle, which is burning brightly. Say the following:

We will spend a few moments in silence. Focus your attention on becoming quiet inside and out.

Allow a period of silence before continuing.

Think of a person or circumstance in need of hope.

Allow several moments for quiet reflection.

Invite the group to share aloud a person or circumstance in need of hope. Keep a list of the names and circumstances so you can read them aloud.

Invite people into prayer that places these specific people and needs in God's loving, healing care. Read this prayer aloud:

As we focus on the candle's light, imagine each person and circumstance prayed for being surrounded by God's light.

I will read each name and circumstance aloud. I will pause for a moment of silence after each one as we silently pray.

(Read each name or circumstance aloud, pausing briefly after each for silent prayer.)

We trust God to know the needs of each person or circumstance, and we compassionately hold them in the restorative, healing light of God.

Offer a brief prayer of thanks to close your prayer experience.

Sharing Around the Table

Luke 21:25–36 NRSV

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Today we celebrate the first Sunday in Advent, when we anticipate the coming of Christ and remember the birth of Jesus at Christmas. This liturgical year, many gospel readings will come from Luke, who speaks to an affluent audience about themes of poverty and those at the margins of society. Luke’s Gospel is unusual for its inclusion of many stories about women, who would have been among the poor of his community.

Jesus was teaching in the temple. As he taught, Jesus used symbols to describe the coming reign of God. He used natural disasters and apocalyptic symbolism to talk about the disruptive power of Zion to challenge our expectations and fear of change. He also used the symbol of budding leaves in spring to talk about the ways God organically grows the goodness of a peaceable community. In this way, we can see Jesus anticipated God’s reign, or Zion, to be both a wonderful arrival and a disruption to society.

Instead of placing the arrival of God’s Reign—God’s Shalom—in a distant time and place, Jesus called his disciples to watch and wait for these changes in *their* lifetimes. He suggested the disciples should not worry or fear the coming reign of God, but have hope for a better world. Advent calls us to this *season of waiting*.

Questions

1. What do you sense Advent is calling us to wait for or anticipate as a community? Where do you sense waiting or anticipation in your own life?
2. What do you think of when you consider Zion or the reign of God? How might Zion be both joyful and disruptive?

Sending

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: Hope; Scripture: Luke 21:25–36 NRSV

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 in ways that build healthy, happy relationships with you, with others, and with 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 397, “God Almighty, We Are Waiting”

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.

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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

Materials: various signs familiar to children. You may print or bring actual signs, or you may use digital photos displayed on a phone, tablet, or projected on a screen.

Examples: stop sign, do not enter sign, danger sign, school sign, church sign.

Say: Today I want to talk to you about signs. We see them everywhere! Who can tell me what this sign is?

Display a sign, and allow the children to guess and discuss what they know about the sign. Repeat this with all the signs.

Say: Signs are helpful. A sign can tell us in a simple way something important that we need to know. Signs can help us be prepared. They can help us avoid danger! When I am driving and see a “stop” sign, I know I need use my brakes, slow to a stop, and look around before continuing. The sign is there so I will know to slow down and watch for dangers like other cars or even people.

Today begins the season of Advent. This is a time when we wait for the light of Christ to come into a darkened world. Today’s scripture speaks of signs from God that the people would see and which might be scary! Jesus told them to not be afraid when they saw the signs.

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”

—Luke 21:29–31 NRSV

As we begin this season of Advent, think of the signs you see in nature and all around you that point to the coming reality of God’s wholeness, healing, and restoration.