Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year C

Third Sunday of Advent: Joy

Scripture: Luke 3:7–18 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.

Creator God,

Scripture tells us that of faith, hope, and love, love is the greatest. But many of us have not been shown love, so we struggle to give away something we don’t have. Your love is constant, forgiving, and patient. Help us in our unbelieving. Take away the hurt, disappointment, jealousy, and distrust and fill us with understanding, grace, forgiveness, and compassion. We pray your spirit of peace will permeate the hard shell surrounding our hearts and soften it to believe again in love. Help us to demonstrate the love your Son, Jesus, showed to everyone he met. May we remember throughout this season of peace that you gave the ultimate gift of love, Jesus Christ.

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. **Note: Light the first and second candles of Advent before the welcome.**

Light the third candle of Advent and say:

Today we light the third candle of Advent. This candle symbolizes joy. May we share the joy in our lives with others.

Read the following:

Just as birth is painful and joyous at the same time, life is a paradox full of joy and pain that live side-by-side. Joy is cultivated from within each of us, as is our pain. Joy can come from journeying with God in ways that bring healing from pain. As we companion with God we experience anew the love and acceptance that has always been with us. The Christ child represents joy in our lives and in the world. Christ teaches us that we are all 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).

Pass out papers and pens and ask: When do you feel in touch with the joy inside you? Share a story of when you have felt that joy.

Give the group five minutes to journal and then invite members to share their thoughts, feelings, and stories.

**Sharing Around the Table**

**Luke 3:7–18 NRSV**

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not...
worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Today we celebrate the third Sunday in Advent. John the Baptist’s preaching attracted crowds wanting to be baptized. In last Sunday’s reading, John the Baptist quoted the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, who talked about God’s peaceable kingdom as a time when people no longer will experience extreme obstacles and hardships, and when systems that once were broken will be fixed. In today’s reading, John gave practical suggestions about how to bring about God’s peaceable kingdom in his advice to tax collectors and soldiers, who were treating people poorly.

John the Baptist explained complex ideas about God’s reign, using the language and symbols of everyday life. He talked about God’s reign using the symbolism of fire and processing raw materials into food. John the Baptist used these symbols to tell his listeners that God’s peaceable kingdom would bring about creation and destruction, echoing some ideas from last week’s reading.

Advent’s themes of arrival and waiting are present in the expectation of the people, who wanted John the Baptist to share his wisdom and knowledge of God. They hoped he would reveal a grand, divine mission that would offer them liberation from their Roman occupiers. John the Baptist made it clear that he was not this person.

Questions

1. After John the Baptist talked about God’s peaceable kingdom, the people asked him, “What then should we do?” and he gave them simple, straightforward answers. How do you think John the Baptist would answer this question today?
2. In today’s reading, the crowds expressed hope for a powerful individual who could liberate, a Messiah. What are you hoping for at the moment? What kinds of liberation are you hoping for?

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 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 404, “Canticle of the Turning”

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: a beautifully wrapped present. To make it more interesting, wrap something noisy when shook but not easily guessed.

Say: During the Christmas season, we often think about presents. Whether the gift is something precious like gold or simple and made by hand, it is very exciting to think of the perfect gift to give to someone we love. Today we are going to talk about people who gave a special gift to God.

In our scripture text today we read about many people who heard John’s call to repent and be baptized to prepare for the coming Messiah. As they came to him, John told them that if they were doing bad things, and not living God’s way, God already knew about it. This frightened the people, who asked John, “What should we do?” John said they should learn to share.

“If you have two coats, give one to someone who has no coat. If you have food, be generous and share with someone who is hungry.”

He gave examples to all the people of ways they could share generously with others and be satisfied with what they had. John taught the people about God’s love, and they wanted to become better people and think of others.

Christmas is very near. Are you thinking of others and their needs?

As we wait for the light of Christ to come into the world this Advent season, we can think of others around us instead of thinking only of ourselves.

How can we do that?

Discuss possible ways we can think of others and take action, such as adopting an angel tree, visiting the lonely at a nursing home or other location, bringing cookies and cards of thanks to police, fire, and EMS workers who often miss family celebrations to be at work, keeping us safe.

As Christmas draws near, remember that sharing with others is the true spirit of Christmas, and a perfect gift to God!