



Prayers and
Readings
for Lighting your

Advent Wreath

with children

The Story of the Advent Wreath

Advent wreaths were originally part of folk traditions of Northern Europe. Wreaths of evergreens were decorated with candles to symbolize life and light during the dark months of winter. Legend has it that Saint Boniface first gave the wreath its Christian meaning in the eighth century, and we have been using these wreaths as part of our Advent preparation ever since.

The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God. The evergreens signify continuous life. Each of the four candles represents one of the Sundays of Advent. The blue (or purple) candles represent the prayer, penance, preparation, and good works we are called to do during Advent. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, which is the Sunday of rejoicing.

The light of the candles reminds us that Jesus comes into the darkness of our lives to bring newness, life, and hope. We gradually add more light each Sunday until Christ, our Light, comes at Christmas.

First Week of Advent

Opening Prayer *(as you light the first blue candle)*

Jesus, as we wait for your coming, help us not to be afraid and to trust in you. As we light this candle, we remember that you bring the light of hope into our lives. May your Word be always in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. Amen.

Reading

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.

Matthew 24:37-44

Reflection and Conversation

The gospel story is telling us that we must be ready when Jesus comes again, but that we cannot be exactly sure when that will be, so we must try to be ready all the time. It can be lots of fun when we have visitors – either someone new that we have not met before or family or friends that we have not seen for a while.

Imagine a visitor is coming to see us.

How would we get ready for the visit?

How would we make them feel welcome?

At this time of year, we remember Mary and Joseph's long journey to Bethlehem and how they relied upon the kindness of strangers to provide them with shelter. This Advent, we think about all the families that have been forced to leave their homes and make their own difficult journeys.

How can we show kindness to others this Advent?

How can we get ready for Jesus to be with us in a new way?

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
Your Son was the greatest gift for the world.
Help us to remember all that he taught us
about loving our sisters and brothers,
wherever they live in the world.
Amen.

Second Week of Advent

Opening Prayer *(as you light two blue candles)*

Jesus, John the Baptist told the people, “If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn’t have any. If you have food, share it with someone else.” As we light this candle, we remember that you bring the light of service into our lives. May your Word be always in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. Amen.

Reading

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.” ’

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume 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 axe 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.

‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’ *Matthew 3.1-12*

Reflection and Conversation

Today we heard a story about John the Baptist. John told everybody that Jesus was coming and that they needed to get ready. John warns the people coming to be baptized that they need to change their lives for the better. This will help them to be ready for Jesus.

If we change our lives for the better and try to do the right things, we can help to make the world a happier place for other people too.

How might we change our lives for the better this Advent?

What could we do for others so that we are ready when Jesus comes?

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
Your Son was the greatest gift for the world.
Help us to remember all that he taught us
about loving our sisters and brothers,
wherever they live in the world.
Amen.

Third Week of Advent

Opening Prayer (as you light two blue candles and the pink candle)

Jesus, we gather here as a family to dedicate our lives to you, as John the Baptist did. Help us to know, love, and serve you. As we light this candle, we remember that you bring the light of joy into our lives. May your Word be always in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. Amen.

Reading

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.'

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matthew 11.2-11

Reflection and Discussion

John the Baptist, who we heard about last week, wants to make sure that Jesus is really the special person that he has been waiting for, so he sends some friends to check. Jesus answers them by telling them that he is the one who has come to heal the sick and to bring good news to the poor. This answer tells John that Jesus really is the person for whom he has been waiting.

How can we try to be like Jesus, helping others and bringing good news to people who are poor?

Today we light our pink candle as a sign of our rejoicing in what God is already doing AND in what God is about to do in the world around us.

**Where do you see God in your life and how can we rejoice together?
How might we be like John and help our friends and neighbors prepare for the rejoicing that comes with Jesus' birth?**

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
Your Son was the greatest gift for the world.
Help us to remember all that he taught us
about loving our sisters and brothers,
wherever they live in the world. Amen.

Fourth Week of Advent

Opening Prayer (as you light all four candles, the final blue one last)

Jesus, your mother, Mary, is “blessed among women.” We are happy that she said “Yes!” to being your mother. As we light this candle, we remember that you bring the light of love into our lives. May your Word be always in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. Amen.

Reading

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel’,

which means, ‘God is with us.’

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife...

Matthew 1.18-25

Reflection and Conversation

In this story an angel comes to tell Joseph that everything will be all right and that Jesus is not just an ordinary baby, but is very special. He is the son of God...probably not at all what Joseph had expected when he became engaged to Mary. Sometimes God is at work in situations or even in people that we don’t expect.

Can you imagine what might have been going through Joseph’s head when he woke up from his dream?

How might wondering about or even asking questions of God be a faithful response to God’s work in our lives?

What does it mean to you that one of Jesus’ titles (or job descriptions) is the word “Emmanuel” which means “God with us?”

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
Your Son was the greatest gift for the world.
Help us to remember all that he taught us
about loving our sisters and brothers,
wherever they live in the world. Amen.

A Final Word

The wait is almost over...Christmas is just one week away!
There are lots of last minute things to prepare, presents to wrap and stockings to hang up. Even though these next seven days will be very busy and exciting, remember to stop and think about the true meaning of Christmas. Make time to read the Christmas story (Luke 2.1-20) with a friend or someone in your family. Give of your time to help out, share some special moments with your family and friends and together give thanks.

**As you use your Advent Wreath
to mark time this season,
please also mark your calendars
for these incredible offerings
from St. Mark's:**

Sundays in Advent

Worship services will be held at 7.45am & 10.00am every Sunday in Advent.
Intergenerational Formation and Fellowship begins at 9.00am.
Breakfast will be provided each week.

Advent I	Nov. 27	Intergenerational wreath-making with teaching
Advent II	Dec. 4	Las Posadas
Advent III	Dec. 11	Christmas Pageant and Living Nativity
Advent IV	Dec. 18	Britten's Ceremony of Carols

Advent Quiet Day

“Enlarging Our Hearts to Embrace the Love of God”

Saturday, December 3

9.00am-2.00pm

St. Benedict's Workshop

Led by The Rev. Carol Morehead

Christmas Eve

December 24

3.45pm Prelude, 4.00pm Holy Eucharist

7.00pm Holy Eucharist with St. Mark's Choir

10.00pm Prelude, 10.30pm Holy Eucharist with St. Mark's Choir (with incense)

Christmas Day

December 25

One Combined Holy Eucharist at 10.00am

(No 7.45am Service)

First Sunday After Christmas

January 1

One Combined Holy Eucharist at 10.00am

(No 7.45am service)