



Prayers and  
Readings  
for Lighting your

# Advent Wreath

## **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)*

ALMIGHTY GOD, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. 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 text speaks of the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ and that we all must be ready though we cannot be exactly sure when the Lord is coming.

**How do you prepare for a visitor in your home?**

**What actions do you take to make them feel welcome?**

**How do these actions translate into your spiritual life in this season of Advent as we are preparing for the coming of Christ?**

During this season of Advent 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 also serves as an invitation to us to consider and remember all of the families that have been forced to leave their homes and make their own difficult journeys.

**What might it feel like to be reliant upon the kindness of others for survival?**

**What is one thing you can do to show kindness to others this Advent?**

## **Closing Prayer**

God of Abraham and Sarah, God of all the patriarchs and matriarchs of old, God who was and is and is to come: make our hearts ready for Christ to make his home among us. May we be obedient to your call and be ready and watchful to receive him here, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for you are our light and our salvation. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into the world. Amen.

## Second Week of Advent

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

MERCIFUL GOD, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. 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**

John proclaimed to all that would listen that the Messiah was coming and that they needed to prepare. In this text, he warns the people coming to be baptized that they need to change their lives and to not assume they know the way to salvation already. It is clear that for John the preparation needed is physical, emotional, and spiritual.

**How do you plan to change your life this Advent?**

**What assumptions do you need to rid yourself of in order to be ready for Christ's coming?**

**What physical, emotional, and spiritual work do you need to do as you prepare?**

### **Closing Prayer**

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, just and true: to you be praise and glory for ever. Of old you spoke by the mouth of your prophets, but in our days you speak through your Son, whom you have appointed the heir of all things. Grant us, your people, to walk in his light, that we may be found ready and watching when he comes again in glory and judgment and that we might share with those around us the good news of your power and love; for you are our light and our salvation. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into the world. Amen.

## Third Week of Advent

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

STIR UP YOUR STRENGTH, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. 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 Conversation**

John the Baptist wants to make sure that Jesus is the one that he has been waiting for, and he sends some of his disciples to check in. Jesus' answer is that he is the one who has come to heal the sick and to bring good news to the poor, which should be evidence enough for John to come to his own conclusions about who Jesus truly is.

**How might you bring healing to those who suffer from all manner of sicknesses (physical, mental, spiritual)?**

**How do you plan to proclaim good news to people who are in desperate need?**

Today we light the 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 as a community rejoice in that together?**

### **Closing Prayer**

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, just and true: to you be praise and glory for ever. Your prophet John the Baptist was witness to the truth as a burning and shining light. Help us, who have been baptized into Christ, to be ready to welcome him into our hearts, and to grow strong in faith by the power of the Spirit. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into the world. Amen.

# Fourth Week of Advent

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

PURIFY OUR CONSCIENCE, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. 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 all will be well and that the child that Mary will bear is the son of God...probably not at all what Joseph had expected when he became engaged to Mary. Often God is at work in situations or even in people that we don't expect.

**What may have been going through Joseph's head when he woke up from this dream?**

**Is there something you're wrestling with God about in your life?**

**How might that questioning/wrestling be a faithful response?**

**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**

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, merciful and gentle: to you be praise and glory for ever. Your light has shone in our darkened world through the child-bearing of blessed Mary and the faithful fathering of holy Joseph; grant that we who have seen your glory may daily be renewed in your image and prepared like them for the coming of your Son. Though they were afraid, they responded to your call with joy. Help us, whom you call to serve you, to share with them in your great work of bringing love and healing to our world. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into 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)