



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. One legend has it that Saint Boniface first gave the wreath its Christian meaning in the eighth century. Other origin stories trace the Advent Wreath to 16th Century German Lutherans.

The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God. The evergreens that create the circle 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. In some traditions, a pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, which is a 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. The Advent Wreath is a way of marking time in this Season of Advent as 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 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

Jesus said, "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 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."

Luke 21.25-36

Reflection and Conversation

In this story, Jesus is telling his followers to pay attention and watch for signs that he is returning. He wants all of us to know what God's kingdom looks and feels like here on earth. That's why in the Lord's prayer he teaches us to pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Getting ready for Jesus coming at Christmas is very important...and so is making our hearts, our minds, our bodies ready to experience heaven on earth.

- **What do you think heaven (the Kingdom of God) looks like? Feels like? Sounds like? Smells like? Tastes like?**
- **I wonder what it would be like for us to experience heaven here on earth...**
- **How do we get our house ready for Christmas?**
- **What are some things we could do to get ourselves - our hearts, minds and bodies- ready to experience Jesus' coming again?**

Closing Prayer

Loving God,

Your Son was the greatest gift for the world.

Help us to prepare our lives for him coming to be with us. Remind us of his presence in everyone we meet as well as in ourselves. Amen.

Second Week of Advent

Opening Prayer *(as you light two 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 the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Luke 3.1-6

• Reflection and Conversation

This Gospel story introduces a new character named John the Baptist. John is baptizing people in the Jordan River as a way that they might prepare their lives for the coming of Jesus, so that they might all experience heaven on earth. This story reuses another story from the Old Testament, from the prophet Isaiah who is also trying to get his community to change their lives so that they would be ready for God. So, in a way, John the Baptist is also a prophet. A prophet speaks for God to the people, like a messenger or an interpreter. Both Isaiah and John are talking about God doing something new in the people's lives - something that is very good, but also changes a lot of things. They are both trying to remind the people how much God loves them and how much God wants them to live like they are his beloved children in whom God is well pleased.

- **What messages do you think God might be trying to communicate with you?**
- **Who are the people in your school, your job, your church, your neighborhood that might be messengers of God? Why do you think that?**
- **Can you think of someone you know who might need to be reminded of how much they are loved by God and by you? What might you do to remind them?**
- **Do you believe that God loves you no matter what? God does!**

Closing Prayer

Loving God,

Thank you for sending people into our lives who love us well and who remind us that we are your children. Help us, like John and Isaiah, to proclaim the good news that you love everybody and that even though we sometimes get scared, you are always with us. Amen.

Third Week of Advent

Opening Prayer *(as you light three candles)*

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

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..."

Luke 3.7-18

Reflection and Discussion

Today we heard another story about John the Baptist. John warns the people coming to be baptized that they need to change their lives for the better - to repent, saying "I'm sorry" for things we've done and said that hurt ourselves or hurt others. He tells people who have food and clothes to share what they have with people who don't have food or clothes. He tells people to use the jobs they do and their everyday lives to protect the people who they serve. All of these things will help them to be ready for Jesus and will help the world around them look and feel more like heaven.

- **When was a time that you needed to say "I'm sorry" to someone?**
- **Are there things today for which you need to say you're sorry?**
- **What are some things that you and your family have that you might share to help someone in need?**
- **What kinds of jobs can you do around the house this week to help your family so that your home feels more like heaven?**

Closing Prayer

Forgiving God,

Your Son taught us that you love us no matter what and that you always want what's best for us. Help us to follow Jesus' example of forgiving others so that we might always be ready to recognize Christ in ourselves and in the other. Amen.

Fourth Week of Advent

Opening Prayer (as you light all four candles)

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

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Luke 1.39-55

Reflection and Conversation

This text is called *The Magnificat* and it is Mary's song of praise to God for what God is doing in her life. She has made a risky journey to visit and stay with Elizabeth and Zechariah, and even the child in Elizabeth's womb knows that something holy is about to happen. Because she said "yes" to God's invitation, Mary is the God-bearer and soon she will have a baby who is the incarnation of God.

- **What are 10 things you want to give God thanks for?**
- **Do you know any other songs of praise to God? Can you sing them with your family?**
- **How does it feel to sing to God?**
- **I wonder what Mary felt like to be the mother of Jesus, the God-bearer...**

Closing Prayer

Loving God,

Your desire to be in relationship with us gives us great hope. Give us the courage to say "Yes" to your invitation to be God-bearers ourselves so that we might partner with you in this adventure of life. Be with us as we celebrate Christmas tomorrow and open our hearts to your love for us and for all of creation. Amen.

A Final Word

The wait is almost over...Christmas Eve is tomorrow!

There are lots of last minute things to prepare, presents to wrap and stockings to hang up.

Even though this is a very busy and exciting time, 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 with your family. Give of your time to help out, slow down enough to be present to these special moments with your loved ones 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	Dec. 2	Advent wreath-making with teaching
Advent II	Dec. 9	St. Nicholas (Bishop of Myra) Celebration
Advent III	Dec. 16	Christmas Pageant and Living Nativity
Advent IV	Dec. 23	Las Posadas

Other Advent Offerings

Dec. 9	5.00pm	Advent Lessons & Carols with St. Mark's Choirs
Dec. 12	6.30pm	Advent Quiet Evening in Bethlehem Chapel
Dec. 15	10.00am	Christmas Pageant Rehearsal on 3rd Floor
Dec. 15	3.00pm	Texas Children's Choir Christmas Concert

Christmas Eve

Monday, December 24

3.45pm Prelude, 4.00pm Holy Eucharist with Children, Treble & Youth Choirs
6.45pm Prelude, 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

Tuesday, December 25

10.00am Holy Eucharist

First Sunday After Christmas

December 30

Holy Eucharist at 10.00am (no 7.45am liturgy)
Congregational Christmas Lessons & Carols