

When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads, because your salvation is near."

"Be careful not to let yourselves become occupied with too much feasting and drinking and with the worries of this life, or that Day may suddenly catch you like a trap. For it will come upon all people everywhere on earth. Be on watch and pray always that you will have the strength to go safely through all those things that will happen and to stand before the Son of Man."

The Gospel readings of Advent invites us to meditate on the mystery of waiting. Jesus speaks of his return: "the Son of Man is coming," and we who wait must be fully prepared. He will use terrible signs; yet we should not panic, when the moment comes those who are ready can stand erect, because this is a time of grace and liberation. A time to stand with confidence before the Son of Man. So be prepared.

Extra Reading: Daniel 7: 13-14. Thessalonians 5: 3-8.

REFLECTION

- ◆ Jesus asks us to be prepared to stand before him, what does this mean for you?
- ◆ What actions do you see yourself doing to help others to a deeper relationship with God?

PRAYER

Thank you God for the hope you give us.

We ask that as we patiently wait for all your promises

to come true in our lives, we may always hear your word and live it out.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who was born for us in Bethlehem.

Amen

ACTION FOR THE WEEK

Take time in prayer to thank God for the many times he has supported you and your family in times of need.

Advent Week One

Year C

When we look into the face of Jesus we see the **Hope** that his coming promised.

Please ensure each participant has a copy of the Readings and Psalm

PRAYER CENTRE

- ◆ First lit candle - Purple
- ◆ Open bible
- ◆ Fabrics - colours of the season and or the Year of Grace [Yellow, Orange, Red]
- ◆ The word 'waiting'
- ◆ Flower buds - representing the expectation of blooming

INTRODUCTION

It is not sure as to when Advent was first introduced by the Church. It is possible that it was linked to St Martin of Tours, feast day, November 11th in the fifth century. The Advent period was often known as "the 40 days of St Martin". The early period of Advent was marked by a six week period of fast in preparation for Christmas. In the sixth century the season was reduced to four weeks and the fasting dropped. The term Advent comes from the Latin adventus, meaning "coming" or "arrival". Advent is about Jesus Christ who has come both as a baby/man and Christ who will come again.

PRAYER

Lord, let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Look upon your church and see the vine which you have planted by word and action.

May we grow in grace and faith as we develop a deeper relationship with you.

Amen.



From the beginning of time the people of God have been waiting, waiting for the coming of the Messiah heralded by the prophets and now waiting for the return of Christ as spoken of in today's Gospel. In life we wait for many things: we look forward to the joyful occasions and we dread the coming of unhappy events. If used properly, waiting can be a time for personal development and growth in maturity of our faith. The one constant Christians can call on is the loving care of God who is always with us.

FIRST READING

Jeremiah 33: 14-16

King David's family had ruled Israel for over 500 years. Then God sent the Babylonians to take the people into exile. It appeared David's family was finished. Not so, God gave the picture of the future to his prophet Jeremiah that the roots or stock of David's family were still there to fulfil the promise of God and in time new strong growth would occur. God's plan was to bring salvation to us through his everlasting plan for Israel, the Saviour Jesus Christ.

Extra Reading: Jeremiah 23: 5-6. Isaiah 4: 2-3.

REFLECTION

The Israelites needed time to learn the lessons about grace, mercy and forgiveness.

- ◆ What life lesson can we personally learn from the experience of waiting?
- ◆ How does this time of waiting link with our spiritual life?

PSALM *[read or sing together]*

24:4-5,8-9,10,14

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

This psalm is credited to David and is a prayer for guidance and protection. David is asking for the "way" that is God's way not his. Humility (9) does not mean weakness, it takes a lot of courage to humbly accept what is given to us in life.

In verse 10 God's friendship is special because of his unconditional love and his willingness to make a covenant with each of us.

SECOND READING

1 Thessalonians 3: 12 - 4: 2

Paul is called to preach to the Gentiles...those who are not Jews. Thessalonica was a Roman Colony with many differing religious cults within it. Paul had spent some time preaching among the people. After he had to leave Philippi and was unable to revisit the area again he sent Timothy. Timothy reported that he was impressed with the Christians in Thessalonica, so Paul wrote to them with gratitude and encouraged them to continue to set an example for other Christian communities.

REFLECTION

Paul and the people of his time believed that Jesus, return was imminent. It was important that they live the kind of life that God wanted so they would not be found wanting.

- ◆ If you were Paul writing to the early church how would you suggest the Christian community live out the promise of Christ?
- ◆ Do you think that your suggestions are relevant to today's Church and why?

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION *[may be sung]*

Alleluia, alleluia,

Lord, show us your mercy and love and grant us your salvation.

Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Luke 21:25-28. 34-36

"There will be strange things happening to the sun, the moon, and the stars. On earth whole countries will be in despair, afraid of the roar of the sea and the raging tides. People will faint from fear as they wait for what is coming over the whole earth, for the powers in space will be driven from their courses. Then the Son of Man will appear, coming in a cloud with great power and glory.

The date of its writing is not certain, probably between 75 and 85 AD. His writing reflects his relationship with Mark, whom he knew well, meaning that a great deal of the source is from Mark. The writing clearly shows that the Gospel is constructed by a learned man who is orderly in compiling the narrative. He writes from knowledge of the history of his day and uses names to back up his information. We see this in the first part of this week's gospel where we are given dates and names.

When John the Baptist is introduced by Luke, he gives us both time and place. John is seen as both an itinerant preacher and the one who foretells the coming of Jesus. In Matthew 17 and the Gospel of John 1 he is likened to the prophet Elijah, a defender of God and a forerunner of Jesus.

Baptism was not unknown to the people of Jesus' day as the Jewish faith had a purification rite that included washing, so suggesting that sins are forgiven by washing them away was not such a foreign concept.

The Gospel links with the first reading. Baruch speaks of the salvation of a people saved by God and brought safely home. Luke tells how John fulfils the prophecies made by Isaiah, and bring the people home to the God of salvation by baptism.

REFLECTION

John is encouraging us to make ready, be prepared. Christmas sees a lot of us running around preparing food and gifts for the big day whereas Advent invites us to prepare our hearts and minds for the gift of love that is the coming of Christ.

- ◆ What are some of the things you let go of so you can better know the peace of God ?

This is a good time to go to reconciliation in preparation for Christmas.
Extra Reading: Mark 1:2-8. Matthew 3: 1-12.

PRAYER

Come Lord Jesus and bring us peace,
Grant that this peace being embedded in our hearts free us from sin and worry. May the peace granted to us be given by our lives and actions to others. Amen.

REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK

During this week take time to let go and let God take charge of something in your life.

Advent Week Two

Year C

When we look into the face of Jesus we see the **PROMISE** of **PEACE**.

Please ensure each participant has a copy of the Readings and Psalm

PRAYER CENTRE

- ◆ Second lit candle - Purple
- ◆ Open bible
- ◆ Fabrics - colours of the season and or the Year of Grace [Yellow, Orange, Red]
- ◆ In the centre an olive branch symbolizing 'Peace' or picture of a dove.

INTRODUCTION

We are introduced in this week's readings to the concept of turning towards Jesus to see the salvation he offers to us, salvation that brings us harmony and peace. To appreciate the Advent of Jesus we must look within ourselves taking time to be quiet and hopeful, reviewing our lives and allow space to listen to what God is saying to us.

He will lead us home.

PRAYER

O Lord, strengthen our hearts that we who received the gift of Grace at our baptism, may prepare worthily for your Son.

Stir up our longing for peace and reconciliation so that we can bring the gift of charity to those all those we meet.

Amen



Baruch-ben-Neriah is said to have been the scribe of Jeremiah and one of the Minor Prophets. He was from the tribe of Judah. Baruch was very attached to his mentor, Jeremiah, and was even imprisoned with him for a period of time. He is said to have died in Babylon with the exiled Israelites. The book of Baruch is only six chapters long and is one of the deuterocanonical books which relate to a lesser regarded or disputed part of Scripture. It was written for the Jews in exile and is part poem and part prose and is often attributed to Jeremiah because in Jer. 36 it is said that Baruch is supposed to have "written down all that Jeremiah told him". Some of the events in Baruch do not fit into the time of Jeremiah but come from a later source.

FIRST READING

Baruch 5: 1-9

There is strong imagery in this reading, creating a rich tapestry in which is woven the promise of God to the people of Israel that he "remembers them" and will return them to their home land after their exile in Babylon. Baruch makes them aware of all that God has done and will do for them in the future but they need to be people of integrity and devoted to God.

REFLECTION

"Wrap the cloak of (truthfulness, honesty, reliability) integrity of God around you."

- ◆ How do you feel this statement is lived out in today's society, and how can you live out the truthfulness God requires of each of us?

PSALM *[read or sing together]*

125. R. v. 3

**The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.**

A Psalm of deliverance: the people who on returning to their home land are grateful but now face the problem of feeding the population.

Verses 3 and 4: Often when people were starving they would eat the seeds set aside for sowing. It took great confidence for hungry people to trust that God would supply the "streams in dry land" and that the seeds that could alleviate their hunger would grow and bring home a great harvest.

SECOND READING

Philippians 1: 3-6, 8-11

Philippi in the north of Greece was in Paul's day an important town and a Roman colony. During Paul's second missionary journey he established the first of the Christian churches in Europe there, in 50AD. At the time of writing this letter Paul is under house arrest. The letter starts with praise and thanks. He is grateful for all the members of this community have done and encourages them to live deeper the love that Christ has shown each of them.

REFLECTION

Paul encouraged the community in Philippi to improve their knowledge and deepen their perception of what is best, the Good News. This is also what each Christian should be aiming for.

- ◆ When you think of the knowledge and perception of Christ what do you consider these to be?
- ◆ Do you think you would like to improve these concepts in your life, if so where do you would go to find the information needed?

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION *[may be sung]*

Alleluia, alleluia,

**Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
all people shall see the salvation of God.**

Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Luke 3: 1-6

It was the fifteenth year of the rule of Emperor Tiberius; Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip was ruler of the territory of Iturea and Trachonitis; Lysanias was ruler of Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests. At that time the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

So John went throughout the whole territory of the Jordan River, preaching, "Turn away from your sins and be baptized, and God will forgive your sins."

As it is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Someone is shouting in the desert: 'Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel! Every valley must be filled up, every hill and mountain levelled off. The winding roads must be made straight, and the rough paths made smooth. The whole race will see God's salvation!'"

Luke's Gospel

We find the fullest story of the life and actions of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. It has a sequel in the Acts of the Apostles and contains the history of the beginning of Christianity.

The Gospel reading continues from last week when we hear from chapter 3:1-6. (You may like to read both readings together.)

It is like there are two parts to this reading. "What must we do?" (verses 10-14) and the question (verses 15-18) about who was the Messiah. John's answer to the first question is that life and deeds are what count before God. He is just as clear on who the Messiah is, making sure that they are aware that it is not him but one very worthy of the title.

Advent is about the coming of Jesus and John heralded this coming but also made his listeners aware that they need to be active in their faith. Baptism is only the beginning. We need to take the given gifts and use them to spread the Good News. Joy happens when we respond to what God asks of us.

Extra Reading: John 1: 19-20. Acts 13: 24-25

REFLECTION

John's words would have caused concern with the hearers, some would repent and others resent what he said.

- ◆ Why do you think John's words worried some people?
- ◆ Has someone in your life made a legitimate request for you to change? Have you made a suggestion for someone to change their ways? What has been the response from you and others?

PRAYER

Your grace, O Lord, is more fruitful in our lives and in the world than anything can ever imagine.

May we find the joy that comes from letting you lead and direct us, So that daily we may be examples of your love.

Amen

ACTION FOR THE WEEK

Take time this week to find the points of joy in your life and to thank God for them.

Advent Week Three

Year C

When we look into the face of Jesus we see the **PROMISE** of **JOY**.

Please ensure each participant has a copy of the Readings and Psalm

PRAYER CENTRE

- ◆ Third lit candle - Pink
- ◆ Open bible
- ◆ Fabrics - colours of the season and or the Year of Grace [Yellow, Orange, Red]
- ◆ In the centre use pink material or flowers, streamers or balloons to emphasise the joy of the Sunday.

INTRODUCTION

The third week of Advent is traditionally called Gaudete (rejoice) Sunday when we look to the imminent joy that is to come at the incarnation, God becoming man.

We are reminded in the Gospel that God is coming to us not as Santa Claus "who knows if we have been bad or good" but as Jesus, the God who is with us, the one who asks us to turn around and follow him.

The good news of Advent is that God came not to destroy but to perfect us, to help us to become what we should be. Is this not reason to be joyful?

PRAYER

God of love, we praise and thank you for all that you have done for us.

May we always be grateful and live a life worthy of the gifts you have brought to our lives.

Amen.



FIRST READING

Zephaniah 3: 14-18

Zephaniah may have been of royal blood related to the king of Isaiah's times, King Hezekiah. The prophecies of Zephaniah are dated to the reign of Josiah in the 7th century BC. Most of his prophecies were denouncements of those who were involved in corrupt religious practices.

In this reading those who live a worthy life will survive the expected Day of Judgment that Zephaniah has seen happen to neighbouring nations through war, drought and disease. God will restore the faithful few, he will rejoice over them.

REFLECTION

"The Lord your God is in your midst."

- ◆ When you look around you who or what tells you that God is in your midst?

PSALM *[read or sing together]*

Isa 12: 2-6. R. v. 6

**Cry out with joy and gladness:
for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.**

This week's psalm is not from the Book of Psalms but is taken from the prophet Isaiah. It is from the part of the writings called "the hymn of thanksgiving."

In the first part of Isaiah (chapter 1-39) he mostly looks at Jerusalem and the monarchy. It appears that he would have liked to bring good news of salvation to everyone but they rejected his message. In writing down the message he hopes that when people read it later they will understand that it was from God, not from him.

In the very short chapter 12 those who return to God will find a God they can trust, one who they will exult above all others for he is their salvation.

SECOND READING

Philippians 4: 4-7

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Paul is under arrest, unsure of his fate. He has suffered abuse from the mob. Yet he is full of joy. He has learnt to let God take care of the future, to pray and let go. In this way his heart is full of peace and he is joyful.

REFLECTION

One of the hardest things for us to do is to let go and let God. We all need to be in control, yet Paul finds happiness and contentment, the very thing we long for, by letting Jesus take the helm.

- ◆ What are the things you have the most problem of letting go of and letting Jesus take charge of?

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION *[may be sung]*

Alleluia, alleluia,

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;
he sent me to bring Good News to the poor.
Alleluia.**

GOSPEL

Luke 3: 10-18

The people asked him, "What are we to do, then?" He answered, "Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it." Some tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what are we to do?" "Don't collect more than is legal," he told them. Some soldiers also asked him, "What about us? What are we to do?" He said to them, "Don't take money from anyone by force or accuse anyone falsely. Be content with your pay." People's hopes began to rise, and they began to wonder whether John perhaps might be the Messiah. So John said to all of them, "I baptize you with water, but someone is coming who is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He has his winnowing shovel with him, to thresh out all the grain and gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out." In many different ways John preached the Good News to the people and urged them to change their ways.

Advent Week Four

Year C

When we look into the face of Jesus we see the **PROMISE** of His **LOVE**.

Please ensure each participant has a copy of the Readings and Psalm

PRAYER CENTRE

- ◆ Fourth lit candle - Purple
- ◆ Open bible
- ◆ Fabrics - colours of the season and or the Year of Grace [Yellow, Orange, Red]
- ◆ In the centre add a baby's shawl and/or booties or something that speaks of the imminent birth of a child.

INTRODUCTION

Christmas is about promise. The promise of a child who would grow to save us, of one who would fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament and offer us the assurance of a future with him through the forgiveness of sin and the gift of everlasting life. Blessed are those who by faith believe in the promise made to them by the Lord and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Almighty and loving God, soon we will be celebrating the birth of your Son, Jesus.

As we celebrate we find great comfort in his promise to come again.

May our preparation for this wonderful event increase in us the desire to always see the face of Jesus in all those we meet, as we say "Come Lord Jesus, we are ready."

Amen

Mary arrives at Zachariah's unannounced and we hear that the traditional greeting was exchanged. The greeting may have been one of congratulation for the coming joy of birth *Mazel tov*, good luck, or the more traditional *Shahlohm alukhem*, peace be upon you, the same as what the angel said to Mary at the annunciation. Whatever the greeting was, it has a powerful effect. The child leaps in Elizabeth's womb and she is filled with the Holy Spirit and becomes aware of Mary as the Mother of the Lord.

"Blessed is she who believed in the promise made by God." Mary's first sign of faith is when she is willing to let God use her and so become for others blessed (holy, hallowed, set apart). Her trust in God leads us to be confident that we can turn our lives over to God, doing what he asks of us, rejoicing in the birth of Jesus.

Extra Reading: Mary in the Year of Grace,

Rev. T Costelloe, Archbishop of Perth.

REFLECTION

- ◆ Elizabeth was honoured by the visit of Mary. What is your first thought and action when a friend or relative who you are happy to see comes to visit unannounced?
- ◆ How do you react to those people who you do not want turning up on your doorstep?
- ◆ For you what is the promise of Christ?

PRAYER (You may like to say a decade of the Joyful Rosary)

Let us pray together,

O God, who has led us lovingly through Advent,

pour your blessings upon us as we welcome your Son at Christmas.

Especially bless those who will find it hard to be full of joy this season because of sadness, loneliness or poverty.

We ask this through your Son Jesus Christ

Amen.

ACTION FOR THE WEEK

Take time to look at those things that you have been blessed with by God and to thank him for them.



FIRST READING

Micah 5: 1-4

Micah was minor prophet, who was born in the 8th century BC in Judah. His prophecy is directed to the denouncement of the sins of the people and their rulers. The book is divided into three sections each introduced by the word "Hear". Or "Now"

In chapter five, the Israelites are facing great danger from the Assyrians but Micah speaks of the one who will come from the house of David, a new king, to deliver Israel. He will change everything. Micah makes mention that the one to come is "from ancient time" He will not be born as we are he existed before time bringing the power of God.

Extra Reading: John 1 1-3.

REFLECTION

- ◆ Read Colossians 1:15-20 and discuss what is the same as and what is different from the first reading.

PSALM *[read or sing together]*

Ps 79: 2-3, 15-16, 18-19. R.v.4

**Lord make us turn to you;
let us see your face and we shall be saved.**

This psalm is attributed to Asaph who lead the Temple choir and is thought to speak to the people after their return from exile in Babylon. Asaph starts by using a familiar image of God as a shepherd, one who protects the people, those who need rescuing and are desperately crying out to God.

In verse 16 the image of a vine planted by God is mentioned. This is seen as the tribe of Israel spread out over the land.

Verse 18 is often considered to be a reference to Jesus as the man chosen and given God's strength.

SECOND READING

Hebrews 10: 5-10

The origins of the Hebrews is a mystery, no one knows who the author was. Though it is often attributed to Paul, this is very unlikely. The letter could have been a sermon. It is written by a capable teacher, to what seems to be a well-established Christian group who were under persecution at the time.

Possibly written between 60-70 AD as a reminder to Jewish converts not to return to the old ways because Christ is far better he is the perfection they are looking for.

The writer of Hebrews continually looks back to the Old Testament and points out that there is a new priesthood: a reality attained by Jesus for them by his death and resurrection, the new covenant.

In Luke 10:5-10 the old form of sacrifice only reminds people of their sins, it does not remove them. The sacrifice Jesus did on their behalf replaces the old form, doing what the law could not do; sins are not only forgiven but forgotten.

REFLECTION

When you read "Here I am Lord I come to do your will":

- ◆ What is your reaction?
- ◆ Has Advent helped you to find out what God's will for you is?

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION *[may be sung]*

**Alleluia, alleluia,
I am the servant of the lord;
may his will for me be done.
Alleluia.**

GOSPEL

Luke 1: 39-44

Soon afterward Mary got ready and hurried off to a town in the hill country of Judea. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby moved within her. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said in a loud voice, "You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear! Why should this great thing happen to me, that my Lord's mother comes to visit me? For as soon as I heard your greeting, the baby within me jumped with gladness.

Having heard (Luke 1:36) that Elizabeth is pregnant, Mary makes the trip to visit her cousin. We are told that she travelled to a town in the foothills of Judea. Traditionally, this was Aim Karin, about 80-100 miles from Jerusalem, at least a 3 or 4 day walk.

Why did Mary visit her cousin the older Elizabeth at this time? We can only speculate. She was a teenager and what had happened and was happening to her was overwhelming. So maybe her visit was partly for support and guidance and partly because she was eager to congratulate Elizabeth.