



REFLECTIONS FOR ADVENT

Every year, Christmas disrupts our routines as we get ready to celebrate the holidays and find ourselves busy with events and gatherings. We're on the Christmas countdown clock.

Our Advent message seeks to pause and reflect on a different way to prepare for the Christmas we all desire in our hearts.

"Messages of Hope for Advent and Christmas 2019" [Michael White and Tom Cocoran] sum up many of our feelings for the season. We have many hopes for Christmas. We want to feel Christmas. It's that warmth of belonging. It's the joy of giving. We grow more aware of our longing for that spirit of joy - among friends, family, coworkers. We long for goodwill and peace and wish others the same.

That unity, that Christmas feeling, comes from acceptance. We are drawn to the places where we are accepted – despite our faults and failures. Home. We long to be known and loved for who we are. Jesus drew so many followers because he offered love and acceptance, no matter their past sins. He made room for them in a world that did not.

Advent is a season full of expectation as we await the birth of the Christ Child. Advent gives us the time to deepen our relationship with Jesus so that His presence in us shines through. It is a season to open our minds and prepare our hearts so that we can both receive and share His love. As disciples, we are called to prepare the way of the Lord, in prayer and deed, loving as Christ loves and serving as Christ serves. We are asked to Make Room for Jesus, and to Make Room for others who need him, too.

PRAYER FOR THE LIGHT OF ADVENT

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness,
send Your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.

We who have so much to do
seek quiet spaces to hear Your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things
look forward to Your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways
long for the complete joy of Your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy
seek the joy of Your presence.

We are Your people, walking in darkness,
yet seeking the light.
To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!"

Advent Prayer by Henri J.M. Nouwen

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 1, 2019

Gospel Mt 24:37-44

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark.

They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left.

Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into.

So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Four weeks of Advent prepare us for the First Coming of Jesus in Bethlehem. But they also urge us to be ready for his Second Coming and for His presence in our daily lives.

1st Reading:	Isaiah 2:1-5
2 nd Reading:	Romans 13:11-14
Gospel:	Matthew 24:37-44

1. The First Reading, Isaiah, Chapter 2, includes:

"For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another..."

- **If there is conflict in your life, how can you prepare for the coming of Christ by turning your "sword into plow- share"?**

2. The Second Reading, Romans Chapter 13, includes:

"For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

- **What is the armor of light? How can you use it to throw off "darkness"?**

3. Matthew's Gospel for the first week of Advent closes saying:

"So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

- **If Jesus were to come again right now, would you be ready? How would you prepare?**
- **Reflect upon the parish Advent theme of "Making Room"**, the difference between taking time vs. making time; having room vs. making room – fitting things into a schedule amid the busy-ness or secular Christmas vs. making our spiritual journey a priority.

4. Advent Challenge: Consider making a different kind of Christmas "list": Who are you preparing to Make Room for this Advent? Who is on your Christmas invitation list to share the love of the Messiah – family, friends, neighbors, the lonely, the alone, the poor, the sick, the lost? Write it down – and pray all season long for your Advent journey to Christ and pray for those on your list.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 8, 2019

Gospel Mt 3:1-12

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:

A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.

John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist.

His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Review the first and second readings hopes for harmony.

Contrast that vision with the Gospel, where words of John the Baptist

to the Pharisees and Sadducees echo even today: "Repent, for the kingdom

of heaven is at hand!" As we begin to celebrate peace and joy of Christmas, we are asked to consider our sinfulness – and we are invited to reconciliation, a source of grace.

1st Reading:	Isaiah 11:1-10
2 nd Reading:	Romans 15:4-9
Gospel:	MATTHEW 3:1-12

1. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you."

- **At what point in your life did you need a "welcome" – and received it?** Did that surprise you, change you? Who can you welcome, in faith? What is stopping you from doing so?

2. Before we can make room for others, we ready our hearts to receive them.

- **John – and Jesus – preached repentance in a new way to the times.** The "repentance" John calls for does not focus on the laws of religion [norms and behaviors], but a change of mind and heart which would manifest itself in "good fruits". Discuss the relationship – and results – that a change of heart can have on a change of behavior.

3. The Sacrament of Reconciliation gives us the opportunity to restore our relationship with God.

- **Is there an area of your life that you haven't given to the Lord?** Why? Are you afraid that He won't take care of it? What gift do you particularly need right now? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to see what needs changing in your life. If there is a relationship that needs to be restored to peace, pray how to make this happen. *The parish Advent Penance services are Tuesday, Dec. 10 and there are both regular weekly Reconciliation hours and additional ones for Advent (check Bulletin).*

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 15, 2019

Gospel Mt 11:2-11

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John,

"What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?

Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing?

Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why 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:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.

Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The third Sunday in Advent is called *Gaudete Sunday*.

"*Gaudete*" is the Latin word for "let us rejoice". The liturgical mood is one of *joyful anticipation* that the feast of Christmas coming is getting closer.

1st Reading:	Isaiah 35:1-6a
2 nd Reading:	Jas 5:7-10
Gospel:	MATTHEW 11:2-11

The Readings tell us to fear not, we are not alone, God is with us, that the prophecy is to be fulfilled (Jesus is near), there is hope for all Christians in the first coming of Christ and the second one we await. The Gospel gives us the opportunity to focus on being attentive. John the Baptist to Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

1. **God constantly works in our waiting.** Although some promises take longer than others to fulfill, hope allows us to realize how present God is in our lives today and how much more awaits us in eternity. As we read earlier in Advent – *For we know not the hour...*"

- **Our waiting is a time of expectation – what are we EXPECTING in the coming of Christ?**

2. Our first two weeks of Advent focused on dimensions of preparing ourselves for the Christ Child. This week, as Christmas draws near, we ask: if Christ came today, are we attentive enough to see Him?

- **"Are you the one"? What kind of Messiah was John expecting?** He could hold onto the image he had of the Messiah or adjust his thinking. How does Jesus answer him?
- **This week, we examine WHO we are asked to Make Room for this Christmas.** Discuss, are you attentive to: the oppressed, the hungry, the captive, the blind, those bowed down, the stranger, the lonely, the fatherless and widow? (list taken from pg 9 Responsorial Psalm, *Living Liturgy 2020*)? **Are there people close to us who are in those same circumstances? Do we SEE them?**

3. **ADVENT INVITATION:** Go back to your Christmas list, your Advent prayer list. Reach out this week and invite them to Christmas in some way – to church, to prayer, to take a walk together this holiday, perhaps even to your home. Look for or any way you can make room for them.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 22, 2019

Gospel Mt 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.

When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.

Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.

She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,*

which means "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

On the eve of Christmas, Joseph and Mary are great witnesses to what it means to Make Room, for Jesus, for each other.

Joseph witnessed his faith through his actions. Joseph **makes room**.

He is a silent man with a unique role in the salvation story.

1st Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14
2nd Reading Romans 1:1-7
Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24

1. **The Angel appeared to Joseph in his sleep and helps him to understand.** Angel means messenger. He brings a message and a help to perceive God's action in life. What do you think of the role of angels in guiding our lives?
2. **In Joseph – and in Mary – we see that this is not just a season of hope, but one of trust.** Through Joseph's trust in his faith, God built a bridge to heaven. How does the figure of Joseph challenge you or encourage you to consider your trust in Jesus?
3. **Mary and Joseph said yes. How does God want to use your "yes".?** What Holy purpose all we all called to as disciples? The times Mary and Joseph lived in presented their own challenges to pursuing a Holy life. What challenges us today, especially in Holy seasons such as Advent when the secular calls us in different ways? What helps us to keep going – or trying?
1. God calls on each of to respond, according to His plan, using the gifts He has given us. **Discuss the many ways we are called to Make Room for others** (accept, accompany, invite, serve, comfort, forgive - all those things that Joseph and Mary did to make room in their home and in their hearts for Jesus).

