

A classical painting of the Nativity scene. Mary is seated on the right, holding the infant Jesus. Joseph is on the left, kneeling in prayer. Several angels are visible in the sky and around the manger. The scene is set in a stable with a manger filled with straw.

LISTEN TO THE WORD

Prepare for His Birth



Advent Companion 2023

Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney





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Cover Image:*The Adoration of the Shepherds* by Jean Baptiste Marie Pierre, c. 1745. Photo: www.dia.org/Public Domain

Image at Left: *Christ Is Born as Man's Redeemer (Episode from the Story of the Redemption of Man)*, c. 1500–1520. Credit: Met Musuem/Public Domain

Scripture from *The Jerusalem Bible*, © 1966, 1967 and 1968, Darton, Longman and Todd. Used by permission of the publishers.





Introduction

Advent is a time of anticipation and preparation, in which we await the fulfilment of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

As Christians our life is one of sustained listening and constant attentiveness to God who calls. Our following of Jesus as disciples depends on hearing His voice, on a heart that strains forward to encounter Him who speaks, and on our willingness to put His word into practice (Luke 8:21). Like his mother Mary, we are invited to treasure all that God announces, invites us to, and supplies in our lives; pondering these things in our heart and nurturing the Word within us (Luke 2:19).

Advent is a season that deepens this sense of desire and surrender in our Christian discipleship. In the Scriptures, we hear the call to be ever more receptive to the coming Christ and to be fruitful in Him. As shared by our contributors to this companion, we are at once roused from our sleep by our anticipation of He who is to come, but also called to be living witnesses like John the Baptist in our waiting.

We await Jesus with an expectant hope that calls us to set aside distraction, to fix ourselves whole-heartedly upon what God inaugurates, and prepare a place for Him in our life and in a world which yearns for His redeeming love and presence.

By our prayerful listening and contemplation of God's Word this Advent, may we ready ourselves for the gift of Christ and announce Him by our lives—Jesus who is, as St John of the Cross affirms, the "one Word ever uttered by the Father."

Daniel Ang

Director, Sydney Centre for Evangelisation

The stained-glass window from the church of Ss Philip and James in Oxford, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, looking to Christ in prayer.
Credit: Lawrence OP/Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

“

We await Jesus with an expectant hope that calls us to set aside distraction, to fix ourselves whole-heartedly upon what God inaugurates ...

”

How to use this *Advent Companion*

This is a suggestion for how individuals and small groups could use this Companion. Put aside time in the week leading up to each Sunday or on the day itself. As Christmas Day falls on a Monday this year, you may choose to pray with the Gospel and reflection on Christmas Day, or any day within the Christmas Octave (the eight days of Christmas).

1. **Begin with the Opening Prayer** in which you entrust the time to God and ask for His grace.

2. **Prayerfully read the Gospel passage.** An ancient method of doing this is *lectio divina* (divine reading), which is outlined briefly on this page. You may find it helpful to read the Gospel passage more than once.

3. **Read the Gospel reflection.**

4. **Take some time to pray**, using the questions as a guide to considering more deeply the Gospel passage and the reflection. You may find it helpful to use a journal to write down your thoughts. Groups may choose to discuss the responses to the questions.

5. **Pray the Closing Prayer.**

6. **Conclude by singing or praying** the hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*.

Additional Material (pages 16-21)

Examination of Conscience

Advent is a fitting time to receive God's mercy and grace in the Sacrament of Penance (also called 'Confession' or 'Reconciliation'). In order to prepare well, you may find it helpful to use the Examination of Conscience in this resource.

On the Theophany

An oration of Gregory of Nazianzus about the manifestation of God in the birth of Jesus Christ.

Advent Wreath

A blessing of the Advent Wreath in the home and prayers to accompany the lighting of the candles.

Lectio Divina

Lectio (reading)

Begin by reading the passage slowly and gently either aloud or silently. It is helpful to savour each portion, constantly listening for a word or a phrase which speaks to your heart. It is helpful sometimes to read the passage again, going back to certain words, repeating them, memorising them and allowing them to sink in more deeply.

Meditatio (meditation)

Ponder more deeply on the words or images which speak to you, allowing the words to move from the head to the heart. Continue to sit with these words, ruminating on them, engaging your mind, and reflect on what God might be saying to you through them. Give this to God and allow the light of the Word to shed new levels of meaning on them.

Oratio (prayer)

Speak to God in response to the Word or the thoughts which arose during meditation. This dialogue or prayer can take many forms – thoughts, ideas, writing, images or simply sitting in deep silent awareness of God's presence. The important thing is to speak to God just as we would with someone who knows and loves us.

Contemplatio (contemplation)

In this step, our words and thoughts subside and give way to silent presence where we rest in God's embrace. This experience may last for only a short time, or for a longer period, depending on the individual and the grace of God. Here we allow God to take over and we simply let go and receive.

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Visit www.jamberooabbey.org.au/prayer/lectio-divina-praying-with-the-sacred-scriptures/



First Sunday of Advent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we offer ourselves to you as we listen to your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection. May we recognise that you are the Word of God who took flesh as a newborn at Christmas, to save us from sin and to draw us into eternal life with you.

Gospel of St Mark (13:33-37)

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'



Gospel Reflection

By Christian Stephens

In this parable we are told to “stay awake” three times in four verses. Someone who is asleep and dreaming thinks he possesses things which he really doesn’t. We have fallen asleep when we think and act in the ‘house’ of this world as if it is we who ultimately possess it, and with no divine accountability.

Jesus is teaching that being truly awake begins with letting this fundamental truth sink in: the things of this world are not ultimately yours and they are not permanent—so don’t cling to them or rest in them as if this were not true. Instead, desire, cling to, and rest in the Eternal One who is the “Master of the House,” and then you will be truly liberated to use and love all these temporal things for what they are: His gifts and opportunities. This is why sanctity is sanity—the saint acts in accordance with this reality. In doing so, he appears to the wicked servants to miss out, but in gaining the Master, he gains all other things too. The

*“... desire, cling to,
and rest in the
Eternal One who is
the ‘Master of the
House’ ...”*

lazy servant who disregards the Master only dreams he is gaining something, and he has an appointment with reality sometime in the future.

The Lord teaches that the second aspect of being truly awake consists of knowing we have been given our ‘own task,’ and we will be held responsible for it. God has given each of us a temporary share in His being and power, and He wants us to do well with it so we will be like Him, and so be able to live with Him. He looks forward to returning to His home, and when He

does, His presence will manifest the truth of each of our own conditions. At that time, He will not be manipulated, negotiated with, threatened, bought, sued or protested. We have been told He is on the way, so let us do what we need to do.

If you treat Christmas as His arrival, and spend Advent acting accordingly, you will not regret it—neither now, nor when you hear the knock at the door.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. What do I need to do, to be ready when the Master returns as a newborn at Christmas? Which worldly or temporal things distract me from this?
3. In which relationship or situation is God inviting me to witness to others the urgency of staying awake for the coming of Christ?

The Light of the World by William Holman Hunt, 1904. Credit: St Paul's Cathedral/Public Domain



Closing Prayer

Eternal Father, we give you thanks and praise for speaking to us through the gift of your Word. Help us to be faithful to the individual task that you have given us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we desire, cling to, and rest in the Eternal One who is the Master of the House—whose coming we await this Christmas—and who is your Son, Jesus Christ.



Second Sunday of Advent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we offer ourselves to you as we listen to your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection. May we recognise that you are the Word of God who took flesh as a newborn at Christmas, to save us from sin and to draw us into eternal life with you.

Gospel of St Mark (1:1-8)

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
he will prepare your way.

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

Gospel Reflection

By Milad Khalil

This Gospel passage brings to mind many thoughts and images: the excitement and anticipation we see around the home and workplace in the lead up to Christmas; the preparation that goes into planning gatherings, arranging decorations, deciding on outfits for the different occasions; and the huge numbers of people and communities who come together in churches and homes.

But how can we connect all of this to the incredible moments we read about on this second Sunday of Advent?

Perhaps we can begin by placing ourselves among the people of Jerusalem journeying towards the wilderness and the excitement and anticipation they would have experienced. What would have generated all that excitement and anticipation for them, and what generates it for us?

The baptism of John signified the need for inner purity, a cleansing to become a better

people, a people who are closer to God. While John the Baptist's outfit probably 'wouldn't cut it' as the most fashionable item at Mass on Christmas Day, and locusts and wild honey may not be the family favourite at Christmas lunch, these details recall those of the Old

Testament prophets: their renunciation of worldly things, and their faithfulness to God.

The people of Jerusalem, and John the Baptist, offer us much to ponder as they prepared—and as we prepare—for the coming of the Lord.

What is the motivation for all the preparation that we do? With what disposition do we gather together in churches and homes?

While everything mentioned above is good, which is the highest of these goods? St Mark points us to it at the very beginning of his Gospel: it is the Gospel—the Good News of Jesus Christ.

“What is the motivation for all the preparation that we do? With what disposition do we gather together in churches and homes?”



Closing Prayer

Eternal Father, we give you thanks and praise for speaking to us through the gift of your Word. Grant us the grace of true repentance for our sins. By the power of the Holy Spirit, give us the grace to renounce the worldly things that threaten our faithfulness to your son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. Do I truly repent of my sins? What do I need to do to ensure that I avail myself of the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Advent so that my heart is prepared to receive the infant Jesus at Christmas?
3. How can I help others to recognise that Jesus is the highest of all goods, and so approach His birth with joyful anticipation and excitement?

Christ with the Winnowing Fan icon at St Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Arizona. Credit: Lawrence OP/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 DEED



Third Sunday of Advent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we offer ourselves to you as we listen to your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection. May we recognise that you are the Word of God who took flesh as a newborn at Christmas, to save us from sin and to draw us into eternal life with you.

Gospel of St John (1:6-8,19-28)

A man came, sent by God.
His name was John.
He came as a witness,
as a witness to speak for the light,
so that everyone might believe through him.
He was not the light,
only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ.' 'Well then,' they asked 'are you Elijah?' 'I am not' he said. 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied:

a voice that cries in the wilderness:
Make a straight way for the Lord.'

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

Gospel Reflection

By Sr Anastasia Reeves OP

Today is Gaudete Sunday, meaning Rejoice Sunday. John the Baptist is a unique witness of joy, and one who “Make[s] a straight way for the Lord” (Jn 1:23). A truly humble man, John knows that he is a sign, a “witness to speak for the light.” He does not point to himself, nor preach his own ideas, but points others to Jesus.

This is what an effective sign does. When we are driving on a well-signed road, we don’t usually stop to admire the signs; rather, we are focussed on the destination we seek. So too, John the Baptist was a sign who led many people to the Messiah, the One whom they were seeking.

Andrew the Apostle was so delighted to have found the Messiah that he told his brother, Peter, and took him to meet Jesus. Peter then led other people to Jesus, who led more people to Jesus, and so on, who came to know the joy of being a disciple of Christ. We can see this joy in St Francis,

*“Yes, at times we
carry heavy crosses,
just like Jesus did!
However, in Christ
we have received
an abundance of
good gifts ...”*

St Dominic, St Philip Neri and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, among many others.

Yet we must ask ourselves, “What are the implications for our lives?” Yes, at times we carry heavy crosses, just like Jesus did! However, in Christ we have received an abundance of

good gifts, including a joy and peace that surpass all understanding; a joy which is so much more real and profound than what the world offers—superficial fun and comfort, which are ultimately elusive and disappointing.

We must also ask ourselves, “Do I respond to Christ’s goodness by living as a witness pointing to Him?” If so, there may be times when we feel like “a

voice that cries in the wilderness.” We would then be in good company with John the Baptist, pointing others to that which we all seek, whether we know it or not: a life founded on the source of all good things, God himself, dwelling among us in Jesus.



Closing Prayer

Eternal Father, we give you thanks and praise for speaking to us through the gift of your Word. May we be filled with your joy. By the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to be witnesses to speak for the Light, so that everyone might believe in your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. In which moments of my life can I recognise God speaking to me through one of His witnesses?
3. When have I responded to God’s invitation to witness to Him, as John the Baptist did, by pointing others to Him?

St. John the Baptist Preaching by Luca Giordano, c. 1695. Credit: Los Angeles County Museum of Art/Public Domain



Fourth Sunday of Advent

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we offer ourselves to you as we listen to your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection. May we recognise that you are the Word of God who took flesh as a newborn at Christmas, to save us from sin and to draw us into eternal life with you.

Gospel of St Luke (1:26-38)

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Gospel Reflection

By Rachel Vala

I often find myself repeatedly mumbling this profound truth—in the form of the Hail Mary—and yet, I don't think it is possible to ruminate over it enough: a virgin woman conceived a child and, in case that wasn't news enough, He was the Son of God!

The very unexpected, in an expecting woman.

In reading Luke's Gospel, I cannot help but wonder what Our Lady's plan was? I wonder how she thought her adult life would turn out. I wonder if she expected to give birth in a stable or flee to Egypt.

I wonder if her plan included watching her Son die and then leave this world before she did. Perhaps not.

It is good to plan and discern our path in life, but life rarely goes to plan. It is worth considering how compatible it is to have a

detailed plan for life and to remain open to the Holy Spirit. If nothing is impossible for God, then we need to be ready to adopt His plan over our own. What attitude do I hold when my expectations are not fulfilled? How do I

respond when God is asking more of me? I find, more often than not, the way I respond is a great indication of my internal disposition and of my readiness to welcome the Holy Spirit in my life.

Mother Mary is the perfect example of openness to the Holy

Spirit; so much so, that her openness literally brought new life to her plans. He can do that in our lives too, as nothing is impossible for God. May we all strive to be more like Our Lady this Advent, and prepare room for God in our hearts, in our homes, and in our plans.

“If nothing is impossible for God, then we need to be ready to adopt His plan over our own.”

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. What is one particular example of when God's plan for my life surpassed my own? How can I be more open to the Holy Spirit in my life?
3. How can I encourage others to come closer to Mary this Advent, as we await the birth of Jesus at Christmas?



Closing Prayer

Eternal Father, we give you thanks and praise for speaking to us through the gift of your Word. May we truly listen to your Word, and surrender our lives to you. By the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to prepare room for you in our hearts, our homes and our plans, so that we may be ready to celebrate the birth of your son, Jesus Christ.



Christmas

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, we offer ourselves to you as we listen to your Word in this Gospel passage and reflection. May we recognise that you are the Word of God who took flesh as a newborn at Christmas, to save us from sin and to draw us into eternal life with you.

Gospel of St John (1:1-18)

In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower.

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.

The Word was the true light that enlightens all men; and he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself.

The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John appears as his witness. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me ranks before me because he existed before me.'

Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received – yes, grace in return for grace, since, though the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Gospel Reflection

By Fr Matthew Meagher

It is said that the human story is one of seeking God. But we don't just seek God—we want to hear from God. We want Him to give us answers to the meaning and purpose of all things. Life is mysterious to us: In the good times, we yearn for more and want to know where such goodness and beauty come from. In the bad and difficult times, we want to know the purpose of suffering and hardship. In our challenges, we want guidance.

In the prologue of his Gospel, John tells us that God has always spoken to us—His Word has been in the world since the beginning. It is in every part of the world, including every human heart. Though God has spoken his Word, the world “did not know him.” We can't hear Him clearly.

Despite this, John's prologue is full of hope: He tells us that when God speaks,

*“To hear God speak,
we do not need
complex philosophical
reasoning or
some mystical
enlightenment
program—we
just need Jesus of
Nazareth, the Word
made flesh.”*

He will ultimately make sure we hear Him clearly. John tells us that God's Word “was made flesh and dwelt among us”: God's Word is not an abstract answer, but a person, now living among us. To hear God

speak, we do not need complex philosophical reasoning or some mystical enlightenment program—we just need Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh. God's Word, His answer to all our needs and desires, is the person of Jesus Christ calling us to be His friends.

On the first Christmas night, God spoke His Word to us in a most simple and perfect way: His Word is a person, now lying as a baby in

a manger. As we approach Christmas, we only need to remind ourselves of this: God has spoken to us, and He has spoken clearly in Jesus. Let us go to be with Him. He is the answer. He is everything we can ever need.



Closing Prayer

Eternal Father, we give you thanks and praise for speaking to us through the gift of your Word. Give us the grace to hear you clearly. By the power of the Holy Spirit, let us go to be with your Word, now lying as a baby in a manger. May we find in Him everything we can ever need; He who is your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel or the reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. In which ways could I better listen to the Word of God—and find the answers that I seek—in the person of Jesus?
3. How can I encourage others to take time to listen to God's Word as we celebrate His birth on Christmas Day?

The Adoration of the Shepherds (L'adoration des bergers) by James Tissot, c. 1886-1894. Credit: Brooklyn Museum, 00.159.26_PS1.jpg

AN AID TO YOUR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

BY ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP

I am the Lord your God: you shall not put other gods before me.

Positive value: Reverence for God.

- What are my priorities in life? Do I put God first and love Him with all my heart or do I put something or someone before God?
- Do I pray daily?
- Do I receive the teachings of Christ and His Church with an open heart and profess them openly? Or have I resisted less convenient teachings or denied them so as to get along?
- Do I receive Holy Communion often (at least annually in Eastertide), and prepare well for this? Or have I gone to Communion thoughtlessly, ungratefully or without first confessing grave sins?
- Do I go to Confession whenever I have committed a serious sin and am I honest when I go to Confession?
- Have I engaged in any occult, satanic or superstitious practices?
- Have I avoided activities that I know can be occasions of sin for me?

You shall not take God's name in vain.

Positive value: Respect for the things of God.

- Do I give due honour to God, His holy name, sacred ministers and sacred things?
- Have I used the name of the Lord (God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit...) disrespectfully, or the names of Mary or the saints?
- Have I deliberately harboured hatred or resentment towards God?
- Have I cursed or wished evil on another person?
- Have I lied under oath or violated a vow?

Keep the Lord's Day holy.

Positive value: Worship of God.

- Do I make worship of God a priority in my life?
- Is Sunday my day of rest, prayer and dedication to my family, avoiding unnecessary work and shopping?
- Have I missed Mass on Sunday without a serious reason? Or on a Holy Day of Obligation (in Australia: 25 December and 15 August)?
- Do I try to be there for all of Mass and try to be engaged with God, his Word and the sacred actions while I am there?
- Do I fast and do penance at the proper times (Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, other Fridays)? Do I fast for an hour before receiving Holy Communion?

Honour your father and mother.

Positive value: Reverence for family.

- Do I love, honour and respect my parents, other older people, and those in authority?
- Have I shown appropriate care for my spouse, children, siblings, other family?
- Have I neglected the aged, sick or lonely?
- Have I tried to ensure that my children receive the sacraments, are given good religious instruction and practice their faith?

You shall not kill.

Positive value: Reverence for life.

- Do I uphold the dignity of every person?
- Do I love others appropriately and forgive those who hurt me? Or do I harbour hatred, grudges or prejudices?
- Have I deliberately harmed someone, physically, emotionally, or in reputation?
- Do I care for my own physical, emotional, and spiritual health?
- Have I abused alcohol or drugs or driven 'under the influence'? Do I act recklessly?
- Have I had an abortion or helped someone else to have one?

VI You shall not commit adultery.

Positive value: Reverence for sex and the body.

- Do I reverence my own body and have I been faithful to my state in life (married, vowed, single)?
- Am I a flirt? Have I engaged in immodest or sexually inappropriate behaviour?
- Do I honour my own marriage / family and support others in their family life?
- Have I committed sexual acts outside of marriage?
- Have I used bad language or told impure jokes?
- Have I used or encouraged others to use contraception or sterilisation?
- Have I viewed pornographic magazines, film or websites?

VII You shall not steal.

Positive value: Reverence for earthly goods.

- Do I honour the goods of the earth and of other people and try to contribute to the improvement of this world?
- Do I share with those in need, giving generously to charities and contributing to the material needs of the Church?
- Have I stolen, pirated or damaged other people's property?
- Have I cheated someone or failed to make just restitution?
- Do I gamble excessively or spend wastefully?
- Do I act justly with respect to my employer, employees and in my tax affairs?

VIII You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

Positive value: Reverence for truth.

- Do I always seek to know and speak and live by the truth? Or have I lied, exaggerated or sworn falsely?
- Do I gossip or reveal confidences without good reason?
- Have I damaged someone's good name or failed to defend those unjustly criticised?
- Have I plagiarised or been academically dishonest?

IX You shall not covet your neighbour's wife or people.

Positive value: Reverence for persons.

- Do I reverence other people's bodies and state in life?
- Do I guard my senses, imagination and memory? Or have I wilfully lusted after another person or entertained impure thoughts?
- Am I envious of the abilities, talents, beauty, friendships or success of others?
- Do I ridicule, humiliate or manipulate others?
- Do I encourage others to live good lives? Or have I encouraged them to engage in a sin or wrongly assisted them in doing so?

X You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

Positive value: Reverence for higher things.

- Do I put the higher things first in my life or am I materialistic and part of the consumer culture?
- Am I excessively attached to material goods or envious of what others have?
- Do I show respect for the earth? Or do I unnecessarily damage the ecology?
- Have I desired or planned to steal, destroy or damage the property of another?
- Do I trust God to provide or fail to be grateful when He does?

"Merciful
and gracious
is the Lord,
slow to anger,
abounding in
mercy."
(Ps 103:8)



The Word Was Made Flesh... and We Saw His glory

Advent prepares us for the birth of Jesus—the moment when God took on the flesh of man, and so revealed His glory to us. In this oration, Gregory of Nazianzus marvels at the profound reality of the manifestation of God to us, and cries out with joy for the greatest gift that the world has ever received: the Word becoming flesh.

Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 38: On the Theophany

Christ is born—give praise! Christ comes from heaven—rise up to meet him! Christ is on the earth—be lifted up! “Sing to the Lord, all the earth!” Or, to speak of two places together, “Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad,” because of the heavenly one who now lives on earth! Christ is in the flesh—rejoice with trembling and joy: with trembling, because of sin; with joy, because of hope!...Who does not worship the one who “is from the beginning”? Who does not glorify the one who is “the end”?

Once again darkness is put to flight, once again light comes into being, once again Egypt is punished by darkness, once again Israel is illumined by the pillar [of fire]. Let “the people who sit in the darkness” of ignorance see “the great light” of divine knowledge. “Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” The letter gives way, the Spirit gains ground, the shadows disappear, the truth takes their place.

Melchisedech finds his fulfillment: the one without mother comes into being without father—motherless first, fatherless next! The laws of nature are shattered; the world above is fully realized. Christ is in command—let us not resist him! “All nations, clap your hands,” for “a child has been born for us, and a son given to us, whose rule is upon his shoulder”—for he is lifted up, along with his cross—“and his name is ‘Angel of great counsel’” the counsel of the Father. Let John cry out, “Prepare the way of the Lord!” I shall cry out the meaning of this day: the fleshless one is made flesh, the Word becomes material, the invisible is seen, the intangible is touched, the timeless has a beginning, the Son of God becomes Son of Man—“Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, the same also for all ages!”

Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 38*, in *Gregory of Nazianzus*, ed. Brian Daley (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 117-118.

The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel by Duccio di Buoninsegna, c. 1308-1311. Credit: NGA/Public Domain





ADVENT WREATH

Blessing and Prayers in the Home

The use of the Advent Wreath is a traditional practice which has found its place, not only in the Church, but also in the home. The Advent Wreath is usually constructed of a circle of evergreen branches into which are inserted four candles. The candles represent the four weeks of Advent, and the number of candles lit each week corresponds to the number of the current week of Advent. Ordinarily, three of the candles are violet and one is rose-coloured. The rose candle is lit on the Third Sunday of Advent, which is also known as Gaudete Sunday.

When the Advent Wreath is blessed in the home, the blessing can be carried out by a lay person in the absence of a priest or deacon. The Advent Wreath is blessed on the First Sunday of Advent.

Blessing of Wreath

Begin by making the Sign of the Cross.

Lay minister: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

Reader: *Reading from Isaiah (9:1-2,5-6)*
The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone. You have made their gladness greater, you have made their joy increase; they rejoice in your presence as men rejoice at harvest time, as men are happy when they are dividing the spoils. For there is a child born for us, a son given to us and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him: Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.

Prayer of Blessing. Lay minister says the prayer with hands joined.

Lay minister: Lord our God, we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ: he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us, he is the Saviour of every nation. Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath. May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation. May he come quickly and not delay. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

* Based on the *Order for the Blessing of an Advent Wreath*. International Commission on English in the Liturgy. *Book of Blessings* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1989), 647, 656-657.



Lighting of Candles

Each Sunday, follow these simple steps for lighting the candle. With each Sunday, you will also light the candles of the previous Sundays, so that the number of lit candles increases throughout Advent.

1. Begin by making the Sign of the Cross.
2. Light the candle(s) while the leader recites the Opening Prayer (see below).
3. Read the Sunday Gospel (refer to relevant page in this booklet).
4. All join in singing the Advent hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (see page 23).
5. Conclude by making the Sign of the Cross.



Opening Prayers¹

The prayers below are the Opening Prayers, or Collects, for the Sunday Masses during Advent.

First Sunday of Advent: Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent: Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent: Let us pray. O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent: Let us pray. Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

¹ *The Roman Missal*, 3rd ed. (London: CTS, 2010), 161-181.



*Adoration of the
Shepherds* by Philippe
de Champaigne.
Credit: Lawrence OP/
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O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of Might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law,
In cloud, and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things, far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

A Prayer for Renewal



lessed are you, Father,
who, in your infinite love
sent us your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
that we may have life, and have it in abundance.

By the power of the Holy Spirit,
renew our Eucharistic communities.

May they be places of encounter
with the living Christ,
centres of evangelisation and outreach
to our community in love and mercy.

Grant us the gifts of faith, hope and love
to be faithful disciples of Jesus and
radiant witnesses to the people of Sydney.

Our Lady, Help of Christians. *Pray for us!*

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelisation. *Pray for us!*

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop. *Pray for us!*



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