

# **Waiting in Watchful Hope.**



**CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BUNBURY  
ADVENT PROGRAM  
2018**

# GROUP LEADER'S SHEET

The leader's role is to coordinate the smooth running of the Advent group. Two hours is a good length of time to allow and below are suggested times for each part of the program. If you or the group think more time is needed on a section, then please feel free to adjust the session to suit. Although two hours are allocated, this is only a guideline and your group is free to decide how much or how little time should be spent. You may find that the amount of time spent in discussion changes from week to week.

## **1. Gathering together**

Welcome everyone, ask them to make themselves comfortable, and then suggest they pause in silence before the Lord's presence. You may like to select and listen to a meditative piece of music or to an appropriate hymn for Advent. Then, pray together the opening prayer for the week. (In the first week, allow a little extra time for group members to read the introduction to the program.)

(suggested time: 5 minutes)

## **2. Reading the Gospel:**

The Gospel reading can be read directly from this program, or from a Missal if preferred. Allow some silent time at the end of the reading for group members to reflect on what they have heard.

(suggested time: 10 minutes)

## **3. Understanding the Gospel reading:**

After reading the Gospel passage and the *Opening the Scriptures* section; group members should be encouraged to share their thoughts and reactions to the questions with everyone out loud. Participants should be encouraged to listen to each other without responding at this stage. (The family or individual can do the same.)

(suggested time: 20 minutes)

## **4. Reflecting on the Advent Theme:**

After reading *The Spirit of Advent* reflection, a group discussion can be structured around the questions included in the *For Reflection and Sharing* section. It is important to make sure that everyone who wishes to participate in the discussion is given the opportunity.

(suggested time: 30 minutes)

## **5. Pray the Intercessions together.**

## **6. Conclude with the closing prayer.**

(suggested time: 5 minutes)

## **7. After the prayer, organise anything that needs to be done for the next Advent Group gathering, e.g. Readers, perhaps tea/coffee break etc.**

(suggested time: 5 minutes)

# **WELCOME TO ADVENT 2018**

## ***Waiting in Watchful Hope.***

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We welcome you to the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle in our Church year, and most especially to this Advent reflection program.

Our fervent hope and prayer is that you will find nourishment and inspiration for your Advent journey in this program.

The theme of this year's program is "Waiting in Watchful Hope", and it provides opportunities for reflection on the Sunday Gospels of Advent, as well as some meditations on the central themes of Advent.

In addition, this year, the program contains some thoughts from Pope Francis on "Caring for our Common Home" (*Laudato Si*) and practical suggestions for a Christmas that 'cares for our common home'.

May your Advent journey immerse you more deeply into God's life and love, and inspire you to bring hope to others. May your contemplation of Mary, the first one to "Kiss the face of God", draw you closer to Christ this Christmas. May these reflections on the Advent Sunday Gospels nourish you on the journey to Christmas.

With the prayerful best wishes of the Pastoral Office Team,

Fr Tony Chiera  
Mrs Rebecca Ward

### **JACARANDA**

*Verna Holyhead SGS  
(1933 – 2011)*

*Advent bursts violet and beautiful  
like the Jacaranda tree  
on the very brink  
of an Australian summer.  
It is a tree of contradictions.*

*Like this southern season of the Church's year:  
Green – leafed in winter,  
Autumn gold in Spring,  
blossoming from bare trunk  
to welcome in November.  
A myriad trumpets cluster  
for short fanfares  
before it lays a purple carpet  
to greet its King  
who is not yet – but coming.*

# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## *Opening Prayer*

God, you show your saving hand  
in the midst of collapse,  
and in the ending of all things  
you reveal the advent of your reign.

Sharpen the senses of our spirit,  
that speaking as your prophets  
to interpret the signs of the times,  
we may encourage others to lay aside fear  
and await with us the coming of your kingdom.

We make this prayer through Jesus Christ,  
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,  
now and forever  
Amen

## *Gospel Reading*

Luke 21: 25-28. 34-36

*Your redemption is near at hand*

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.’

‘Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.’

The Gospel of the Lord.



### ***Opening the Scriptures:***

The Gospel this Sunday uses strange and disturbing imagery to describe the ‘end times’. This is a style of writing popular at the time (apocalyptic literature) describing terrible, cosmic and worldwide events associated with the intervention of God at the culmination of history. It is in the midst of this cosmic upheaval that the Son of Man will come on the clouds, a Biblical symbol of God’s presence.

The early Christians, filled with the life changing Spirit of Easter and Pentecost, expected Christ to return in glory at any moment. However, as time passed, and they prayed and reflected, they came to realise they were living in an ‘in between time’. Christ had not returned in glory, but they had to get on with life in the meantime. How were they going to do that?

So, what are Christians to do as they await the glorious return of Christ at the end? They are to stay ‘awake and vigilant’, praying constantly and living with hope and confidence in the future!

There will be a ‘day of the Lord’, when the mercy of God will be finally and completely victorious, when history and all creation will be gathered into God, and we will stand face to face with our Risen Lord and totally surrender to him.

The Gospel summons us to prepare for ‘that day’ today!

### ***Question for Personal Reflection:***

If tomorrow were to be the last day of your life, what might you do or change today?

### ***Questions for Group Reflection:***

What are some of the fears that shake and disturb people’s lives and faith today?

Where do you find strength as a Christian to face these fears? What promises of God sustain you in the trials and challenges of life?

What are some ways you and your parish can ‘stay awake’ to the presence of God this Advent?

### ***The Spirit of Advent:***

#### **WAITING**

Advent celebrates waiting. But waiting is not always a welcome or easy task. Just waiting in a long checkout line can be enough to disturb the peace of an otherwise good day! Waiting at roadworks can challenge a tight schedule and raise blood pressure! Yet so much of life is shaped by profound waiting. Our mothers waited to give birth to us, and then waited longer for our first smile and our first word. Hospitals are full of people waiting to heal and regain strength, as well as people waiting by hospital beds for loved ones to surrender to eternity.

The spirit of Advent waiting is captured in the Advent mantra: “Come, Lord Jesus”. In fact the second last verse of the entire Bible cries out “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20) This Advent waiting is a mark of the Christian life, not only in the weeks leading up to Christmas, but in every season. To cry out “Come, Lord Jesus” is to live out of a “deliberate emptiness” according to Fr Richard Rohr. It means keeping life wide open, open to grace and to a future created by God rather than by ourselves. While we experience Christ in the present moment, we know as Christians that there is a fullness still to come. We know that God comes to us from the future to draw us into the fullness of life and love; and so we wait with an open heart and a deep trust in God.

But waiting, and living with incompleteness, can be an anxious and distressing experience. At times we can try and anaesthetise our pain, make demands of life and people, and even turn away from God for not changing reality to suit us. Advent waiting is the patient and trustful willingness, to live peacefully with incompleteness, knowing the Source of our life and future is in God.

This profound spirituality of “waiting” is captured in these words of Fr Henri Nouwen:

“To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our imaginings. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God moulds us according to God’s love and not according to our fear. The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy, or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.”

### ***For Reflection and Sharing:***

The advertisements tell us that people are preparing for “the perfect Christmas”. But so much in our life is “unfinished”, “empty” and far from “perfect”! So much in our relationships, families and communities is “incomplete”. How can we pray from these “empty places”? Where do we find the strength to wait on God for what we cannot change or control?

Our waiting is a prayer. What does this mean for your life? For your parish?

### ***Intercessions***

***Response: Come, Lord Jesus***

Leader: Let us lift our voices in prayer and raise our heads in hope to the Lord who is our Saviour.

1. For the Church, that in the face of distress and anxiety, it may steadfastly proclaim the sure and certain hope of God’s promised redemption.

***Response***

2. For the world, that among nations made desolate by conflict and violence, justice and righteousness may flower anew. ***Response***
3. For those who are apprehensive about the cares of life, that the disciples of Jesus may bring them words of hope and deeds of love. ***Response***
4. For all upon whom advanced age or failing health brings fear that they may be given the care necessary to live in safety and security. ***Response***
5. For all who work for social justice, that they may know that their work brings God's promises to fulfilment. ***Response***
6. For our parish community, that the Lord may grant us abounding love for one another and so prepare us to stand before Christ who will come in glory. ***Response***

*Pause for participants to offer personal intentions out loud.*

Leader: We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.  
All: Amen

### ***Closing Prayer***

All:

In this time of waiting in watchful hope,  
draw us together in unity,  
that our praise and worship  
might echo in these walls  
and also through our lives.

In this time of waiting in watchful hope  
draw us together in mission,  
that the hope within  
might be the song we sing,  
and the melody of our lives.

In this time of waiting in watchful hope  
draw us together in service,  
that the path we follow  
might lead us from a stable  
to a glimpse of eternity.

Amen

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### *Opening Prayer*

Eternal God, source of all insight,  
we pray to you.

Open our eyes  
and let us see the vision of peace  
which you place before the sight of humankind.  
Set our footsteps on your path of justice  
and guide us in your way of truth  
so that the work you have begun  
may be completed,  
and all the world behold your salvation.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,  
now and for ever.

Amen.

### *Gospel Reading*

Luke 3: 1-6

*All people shall see the salvation of God.*

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrach of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrach of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrach of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries in the wilderness;  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.  
Every valley will be filled in,  
every mountain laid low,  
winding ways will be straightened  
and rough roads made smooth.  
And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.



The Gospel of the Lord

## ***Opening the Scriptures:***

The Gospel this Sunday has St Luke going to great lengths to situate the ministry of John (the Baptist) in the real world of the geography and politics of the time. He names the roles and people who hold power at the time, beginning with the Roman Emperor, right down to the Jewish religious leaders of an occupied Palestine. Why all this detail?

God works his saving plan and merciful love precisely in and through the shape of world history and human events.

It is in this complex, and even sinful, interweaving of politics, religion and geography that the ‘Word of God’ comes to John in the wilderness. St Luke never calls John the ‘baptiser’. He does not wish to highlight the baptisms performed by John, rather the ‘Word of God’ that John announces precisely as a prophet.

A prophet does not predict the future; rather the Prophet brings God’s Word about the present.

John calls people to repentance in the here and now; a change of mind and heart; a turning of one’s whole life to God who is coming to heal and liberate his people.

### ***Question for Personal Reflection:***

What valleys and hills need to be made straight in my life in order for me to receive God during this Advent?

### ***Questions for Group Reflection:***

Where do you see God present and active in the very real history and events of your life, parish and church at this time?

Think of times when your life (or the life of your parish/church) was a ‘desert place’. What did you discover about God and faith during that time?

What are you doing to prepare yourself and your family for Christ’s coming this Christmas?

## ***The Spirit of Advent:***

### **WATCHFUL**

Advent celebrates watchfulness. But being watchful and attentive is difficult at the best of times. For one thing we are creatures of habit. Doing the same things over and over again; seeing the same faces and places can truly make us “switch off” and no longer “see” the newness and originality of each concrete reality. On the other hand we are people who “hurry” so much, responding to so many demands and calls that we find it extremely difficult to be attentive and present to the full realities before us in any given moment. Advent sounds a profound call – “stay awake” and “be watchful”, for the God you await is in your midst!

While looking back and celebrating the birth of Jesus, Advent also seeks to sharpen our focus on the present and the future. We are always moving in sacred space and sacred time. As St.

Paul says “God is not far from any of us, since it is in him that we live, and move, and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) And in the words of the Catholic Catechism, “With creation, God does not abandon his creatures to themselves. He not only gives them being and existence, but also and at every moment, upholds and sustains them in being, enables them to act and brings them to their final end” (C.C.C. #301). Advent summons us to “wake up” to the God who fills all reality; to the presence of Christ in the smallest of creatures and in the vastness of the universe. Advent alerts us to the God who touches us each day in the depths of our humanity, in the love of others, at the hour of our death and in the consummation of all history.

We do well during Advent to heed the beautiful insights of Fr Jean-Pierre De Caussade (1675 – 1751). Fr John-Pierre was a French Jesuit priest who travelled widely teaching about the life of faith and prayer. His letters of spiritual direction addressed to a community of nuns were widely published in 1741 under the title “Self-Abandoned to Divine Providence”. This work was later translated under the title “The Sacrament of the Present Moment”.

“The present moment holds infinite riches beyond our wildest dreams but you will only enjoy them to the extent of your faith and love. The more a soul loves, the more it longs, the more it hopes, the more it finds. The will of God is manifest in each moment, an immense ocean which only the heart fathoms insofar as it overflows with faith, trust and love.”

Advent calls us to be watchful, attentive and present to this very moment. This moment is a vast ocean drawing us into God. In this moment of tears or joy, this moment of emptiness or fullness, this moment of life or death, God is alive “for us”; God is drawing us into our blessed future in Christ. We must energetically work at being watchful and awake.

### ***For Reflection and Sharing:***

Advent is one of the busiest times of the year as the calendar winds down and Christmas approaches. We live in a hard-driving culture.

Is there a park or a chapel where I can pause, breathe and place myself in the silence of God?

Can I park the car, switch off the radio for a few minutes and consider the things that really matter?

Can I look at the purple Jacaranda tree or the Australian golden “Christmas tree” in nature and hold the beauty of God?

Can I do one thing each day with attention and presence and still my rushing life?

## ***Intercessions***

**Response:**    ***Come, Lord Jesus***

**Leader:**    Praying with constant joy and filled with the compassion of Christ Jesus, let us offer intercession on behalf of all.

1. That the church may be a voice crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. **Response**
2. That those who govern nations may plant seeds of peace for a harvest of righteousness. **Response**
3. That worldly pride may be brought low and the earth's afflicted lifted up on the pathway of God's justice. **Response**
4. That those exiled from their homes by violence and terror may soon exchange the garments of sorrow for robes of rejoicing. **Response**
5. That our prayer and our presence here in this group may encourage the sick and homebound of our parish community. **Response**
6. That the One who began the good work of the gospel in us will carry it through to completion up to the day of Christ Jesus. **Response**

***Pause for participants to offer personal intentions out loud.***

**Leader:**    We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.

**All:**            Amen

## ***Closing Prayer***

**All:**

God of hope, who brought love into this world,  
    be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world,  
    be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world,  
    be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon,  
    be the centre, the focus of our lives always,  
        and particularly during this time of Advent.

Amen

# THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## *Opening Prayer*

Holy God,  
whose presence is unending joy,  
deliver us from the cares  
that oppress our minds and spirits.

Set your people free  
to receive your rule and joyfully pursue  
the things that lead to your peace.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,  
now and for ever.

Amen.

## *Gospel Reading*

Luke 3: 10-18

*What, then, must we do?*

When all the people asked John, ‘What else must we do?’ he answered, ‘If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same. There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, ‘Master, what must we do?’ He said to them, ‘Exact no more than your rate.’ Some soldiers asked him in their turn, ‘What about us?’ What must we do?’ He said to them, ‘No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!’

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, ‘I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.’ As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

The Gospel of the Lord.



## ***Opening the Scriptures:***

This is the longest passage in any of the four Gospels describing what John the Baptist actually taught. It gets to the heart of John's message.

As people approached John for baptism, they asked him ‘what should we do in our lives, to respond to this unique moment?’ John simply says ‘continue living your life doing what you have always done, but carry out your responsibilities with real concern for others and with honesty and integrity’.

For John, if we are to draw closer to God then we must live and act in right relationship with others. So this would mean for instance, sharing food and clothing with the poor and vulnerable, and never exploiting people. The ‘tax collectors and soldiers’ who worked for the Roman occupiers were despised precisely for taking advantage of their fellow Jewish people. Exploiting others for personal gain had to stop in the name of justice, and to enable a deeper relationship with God.

The coming of Jesus will fill humanity with a new Spirit, enabling a new world of relationships. We must prepare for that gift by renouncing all forms of manipulation or exploitation of others.

### ***Question for Personal Reflection:***

If you asked John the Baptist ‘What am I to do to prepare for Christ’s coming to me?’ What might he say to you?

### ***Questions for Group Reflection:***

John challenges the ways people live, work and relate with others. What can we do to live more justly with each other in our communities and world today?

Who are the vulnerable and poor in our midst today? Look at your own parish and local community. How can we share the joy of Christmas with them?

Where do you see the Holy Spirit alive and at work in your life, family and parish? Do you sense that the Holy Spirit is asking something from us as Christians today?

## ***The Spirit of Advent:***

### **HOPE**

Advent celebrates hope. But many say we are now living in a “post-optimistic world”. The realities that confront us daily as a global community, have taken us beyond the confidence and optimism we once had. International terrorism and natural disasters feature regularly in our news. Major human displacement and corruption at the highest levels continue to shock and disturb us. For these and many other reasons, people are not at ease or confident about the future.

Advent seeks to awaken true Christian hope in our hearts, precisely in the midst of the painful challenges we are confronting. It is important to recall that Christian hope is not just

“wishful thinking”. We can wish for many things, but there is no reality for those wishes to draw upon (I wish I could kick the winning goal in the AFL Grand Final!). On the other hand Christian hope is not the same as “natural optimism”, which is largely based on a person’s temperament and declares “everything is okay and if not it soon will be!”

Christian hope is a “trusting and confident movement toward the future” based on what we are experiencing in the present. In the words of Fr. Anthony Kelly, “we already carry the future in our heart”, and that is why we can move with some trust and confidence toward that future. That is not to say that it is an easy path to the promised future. Whatever we face, we hold this profound conviction emerging from the experience of the love of God in the present; “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us”. (Romans 5:5) This conviction, born of Christ’s life within us now, carries us forward to the fulfilment of God’s plan in the future.

So, hope is an energy formed in the core of our being, where Christ already lives. Advent awakens this sense of hope and longing, as we await the fullness of God’s life and love.

This hope does not remove us from the sufferings and challenges of the present. It does not give us permission to “sit back” and “do nothing” because God will “fix it all”. It is often said, that our life as Christians is lived as “grace under pressure”. We are called to faithful perseverance as we await God’s fulfilment. We are called to grow in character as we face life’s hurdles. Most importantly we are, as people of hope, to join with God in shaping his kingdom of love, justice and peace here and now...today!

### ***For Reflection and Sharing:***

The hope and joy of Advent-Christmas goes far deeper than the tinsel and shopping of the season. It is a willingness and strength to make each day “Christmas”; to see each day and each moment filled with the life of Christ, and to reveal that presence of Christ to others by our love.

Where do you see Christ revealed in these days of Advent? How can you give hope and encouragement to others this Advent?

### ***Intercessions***

***Response:***    ***Come, Lord Jesus***

**Leader:**    With thanksgiving, let us make our prayers known to God who is always near.

1. For all those baptised in water and anointed with the Holy Spirit: May we serve the world by proclaiming the good news of the One who is coming.

***Response***

2. For all those nations at war with one another: May they turn from conflict toward mutual and lasting respect. ***Response***

3. For all in need of food or clothing, for those deprived of adequate housing and suitable employment: May these blessings soon be theirs. ***Response***

4. For all those who are victims of greed, fraud and the abuse of power: May the judgement which the Messiah brings separate the wheat of integrity from the chaff of injustice. **Response**
  5. For those in our community who will find the coming Christmas season a time of anxiety: May we support them with our prayers and assist them with our resources. **Response**
  6. For this group gathered together to pray: May our gentleness and love be known to everyone. **Response**

*Pause for participants to offer personal intentions out loud.*

**Leader:** We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.  
**All:** Amen

## *Closing Prayer*

All:

For your word which endures,  
we give you thanks.

For your promises to which we hold,  
we give you thanks.

For such intimacy with you,  
we give you thanks.

For the love which from our birth,  
over and around us lies,  
we give you thanks.

For those gathered here today,  
we give you thanks.

For family, friend and stranger,  
we give you thanks.

For those who minister your grace,  
we give you thanks.

For the hope that lives each Advent,  
of a love that has no end,  
we give you thanks.

Amen.

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## *Opening Prayer*

God of blessings,  
you ask nothing of us  
except to trust in your promise.

Turn us wholly to yourself,  
and bestow on us the strength of will  
to pledge ourselves freely to your purposes,  
that your name may be glorified  
to the ends of the earth.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,  
now and for ever.

Amen.

## *Gospel Reading*

Luke 1:39-44

*Why should it happen that I am honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?*

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

The Gospel of the Lord.



## ***Opening the Scriptures:***

St Luke presents us with the joyful meeting of two pregnant women.

After the Angel of the Annunciation left, Mary set out as quickly as she could, on an extraordinary journey of some 80 kilometres from Nazareth in the north to Judah in the south. A journey that would have taken four days of walking!

When Mary greets Elizabeth, the child in her womb gives a kick and leaps for joy. Mary brings Jesus to Elizabeth even before Jesus is born. Elizabeth for her part, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaims her faith in the child Mary is carrying in her womb, using the Easter title ‘Lord’ to refer to the child.

The story concludes with Elizabeth extolling the profound faith and trust of Mary. Mary believes the promise made by the angel. She believes she will conceive and bear a Son, and that the ‘Lord is with her’ in all that is happening.

Mary entrusts her life and body to the loving will of God, and our Saviour takes on human flesh!

### ***Question for Personal Reflection:***

Where do you sense the nearness of God in these days before Christmas? What brings you joy?

### ***Questions for Group Reflection:***

Which promises of God do you believe and hold on to in your heart? What difference do these promises make to how you live your life and face your challenges?

Share a recent experience that left you filled with joy before God.

Luke’s Gospel gives a lot of attention to the role of women in the story of God’s saving love in this world. What is the role of women in that same story in today’s world?

## ***The Spirit of Advent:***

### **MARY**

Advent turns our hearts to Mary as a beautiful model of “waiting and watching in hope”, and so becoming a blessing to others.

Biblical hope is trusting in God to fulfil his promises in the future. The basis for this hope in God for the future is that God has been faithful in the past and is active in the present.

Mary is the woman “watchful” in the present. She knows what God has done in the past for her people and is prayerfully attentive to the movement of God in her life. She is so attentive in fact, so watchful, that she can hear “the whisper of an angel” announcing God’s incredible promise. The promise is to give the world Emmanuel (God is with us); to give the world a child who will unite earth and heaven, God and humanity. The angel announces a future for humanity, and God’s promise of a child to be born of Mary.

The wonder of Mary is that she believes God's promise of a child, and a future for humanity. She believes the promise, knowing God has always been faithful to His people from the very beginning. She believes the God who took her people out of slavery in Egypt can touch an empty womb and fashion a child for the life of the world.

Not only does Mary believe in God's promise, not only does she trust in God's power to fulfil his promise, but she is prepared to take God's promise and hope for the future and become pregnant with it – to give flesh and blood to God's hope and promise for the future. She who “pondered all these things in her heart”, the contemplative woman, was also the one who was willing to suffer the pains of childbirth in order to bring God's future into the world. She, who waited on the Holy Spirit, was also the one who nursed a fragile new life into an adult who would save this world for God.

Mary is truly the woman who waits on God, watches for his voice and presence and trusts in the future God is creating. But above all she is the Advent woman who is prepared to give “flesh and blood” to God's promise and God's future. She is prepared to “birth” Christ, and be part of the future she awaits.

Advent calls us to not only honour Mary and love her, but most especially to imitate her. God's future for the world is sealed already. He creates this world in love and fills it each moment with his life. He sends Christ Jesus to show us the way into God's glorious future; and Christ fills us with his Spirit now as the pledge of that future. With Mary we give ourselves to that future in hope, and commit our own “flesh and blood” to the shaping of God's future.

### ***For Reflection and Sharing:***

What inspires you the most about Mary?

What is Mary calling us to become?

### ***Intercessions***

**Response:**      ***Come, Lord Jesus***

**Leader:**      Placing our trust in the Lord who provides for the needs of his flock, let us pray.

1. That the church, renouncing any desire for worldly power, may seek only to serve in the name of the Lord. **Response**
2. That all the nations of the earth, forsaking violence and vengeance, may greet one another as brothers and sisters. **Response**
3. That Christians may hasten to the aid of those who are in anguish of body, mind or spirit. **Response**

4. That those who await the birth of a child may delight in the mystery and miracle of childbirth. **Response**
5. That those who are travelling at this time of year may reach their destination safely and find refreshment and joy in the hospitality they receive. **Response**
6. That we who pray together may translate our prayers into a living witness of striving to do God's will. **Response**

*Pause for participants to offer personal intentions out loud.*

**Leader:** We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.  
**All:** Amen

### ***Closing Prayer***

**All:**

Mary, Mother of Jesus,  
 help me turn to God with hope and faith.  
 Help me feel the growing joy in my heart which you felt in yours.  
 But at the same time,  
 help me live with “the burden” of knowing  
 that bringing Christ into the world today  
 is my task and calling,  
 just as it was yours.

Thank you for saying yes, Mary,  
 and for being our example of this.  
 When times are tough for us,  
 your yes reminds us  
 that God is our hope.

Help me prepare to enter  
 into ever deeper intimacy with Christ.  
 Open my heart to receive your gift into my life.

Thank you for walking with us  
 during this Advent journey of love.  
 As we enter the Feast of Christmas,  
 we do so with you,  
 and we place our lives in God's hands.  
 Amen.

## *Final Prayer*



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!"  
Amen.

Henri J.M. Nouwen

# Caring for Our Common Home this Christmas

*Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.*

*Laudato Si #91*

Australians spend over \$10 billion at Christmas; much of which is spent on food that is wasted and unwanted gifts that are thrown away. Rubbish volume rises by approximately 30% at Christmas time and 35% of food purchased will be thrown away. In keeping with the message of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* here are some ideas for caring for our common home this Christmas with your family.

## ⦿ Gifts:

- Give homemade gifts such as jams or baking; or for those crafty people – create something that can be used and treasured for years.
- Purchase a “Global Gift” through Caritas (<https://globalgifts.raisely.com/>) or a “Life-giving Gift” through Catholic Mission (<https://www.catholicmission.org.au/gift-catalogue>) and let people know that you made a donation in their name.
- Instead of giving out material gifts why not give an “experience” – a gift card, a voucher for an experience that you know someone would enjoy, movie or concert tickets, or a membership.
- Purchase gifts that support small local businesses in third world communities. E.g. Oxfam or World Vision
- It is ok to re-gift! If you have received something that you cannot use gift it to someone who can!

## ⦿ Food:

- Make your own Christmas cake, puddings, mince pies etc. and avoid all the plastic packaging that is used on the purchased varieties.
- Buy only what you need and can reasonably consume. Ask guests to bring along a container and share out any leftovers to avoid wasting any food.
- Shop locally for your fresh produce – support local business, and reduce the carbon emissions associated with transporting food long distances.
- Purchase organic and free-range meat and eggs.
- If you enjoy seafood at Christmas, try to avoid buying overfished and threatened seafood species.
- Find recipes for using up all the leftover ham, chicken and turkey or freeze it for another day.

## ⦿ Wrapping:

- Get creative and use fabric, scarves, tea towels, fabric bags or old newspapers and magazines to wrap gifts rather than purchase glossy wrapping paper or plastic coated gift bags that cannot be recycled.
- Avoid sticky tape and fasten gift wrapping with fabric ribbon or string.
- Re-use glass jars and bottles, baskets, cardboard boxes and tins.

### **Decorations:**

- Make your own decorations using natural materials.
- Use fresh flowers and beeswax candles for table centrepieces.
- Use energy efficient LED or solar powered lights set on a timer to minimise electricity usage

### **Responsible Shopping:**

- Look for Fairtrade, sustainably produced and ethically produced items for gifts. Stay away from plastic toys, products tested on animals and over packaged items.
- Avoid purchasing battery-operated toys.
- Ask family members for a list of suggested gifts so that your gift will be something truly needed and valued.
- Purchase locally to avoid excess packaging items that cannot be recycled such as polystyrene foam packing beans.

### **Avoid disposables:**

- Use linen and china rather than disposable plates, napkins and tablecloths.
- Use glasses rather than plastic cups
- Avoid plastic cutlery and plastic straws.
- Make your own crackers from cardboard paper- towel rolls and fill with non-plastic gifts or small homemade chocolates.
- Purchase soft drink in cans that can be recycled rather than in plastic bottles.

*We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much waste which, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet. In practice, we continue to tolerate that some consider themselves more human than others, as if they had been born with greater rights.*

*Pope Francis  
Laudato Si #90*

# PRAYING WITH THE ADVENT WREATH AT HOME



## WEEK 1: Light the first purple candle

**Child:** God, we ask you to bless our family Advent wreath. It has evergreen leaves, reminding us that you will always be with us...and it is shaped like a circle, with no beginning and no end, just like your love for us.

**Adult:** Jesus, we look forward to celebrating your birth at Christmas. Open our hearts to love all the people we meet each day.

**All the family:** Come, Lord Jesus into our hearts and into our home.



## WEEK 2: Light the second purple candle

**Child:** Jesus, our brother, we ask you to bless our family during this Advent time. We light these candles to remind us that you bring light into our lives and into the world. We thank you for showing us how to show love and be kind and help those who need help.

**Adult:** God, your story of love for people all through time reminds us that you are with us, offering us light and hope. Help us to trust in you this week.

**All the family:** Come, Lord Jesus into our hearts and into our home.



## WEEK 3: Light the pink candle

**Child:** God, we light the pink candle today. This reminds us that you want joy for us...you want us to trust you and believe that you are there for us, even when things are hard.

**Adult:** Jesus, our friend, we thank you for the joy you give us as a family...for all the love and fun we enjoy together. Help us to share our joy with others.

**All the family:** Come, Lord Jesus into our hearts and into our home.



## WEEK 4: Light the third purple candle

**Child:** Jesus our friend and brother, we ask you to bless all the people who are waiting to celebrate your birthday. Help us to spend these days of waiting by showing love and kindness to everyone.

**Adult:** God, your love for us meant that you would give us your own Son. Help us to realise that you love us so much. We look forward to showing your love by being with you on Christmas Day.

**All the family:** Come, Lord Jesus into our hearts and into our home.

