



## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Year A

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

### Gathering

*(A Bible open to this week's gospel, seasonal greens arranged around four Advent candles and a googled Christ icon are laid out on a table covered with a purple or deep blue cloth.)*

Once again, the Advent season gives us the opportunity to reflect on the longing and hope for the coming of Christ. The longed for peace and harmony expressed in the Isaian oracle remain very relevant in our war torn 21st century world. As intentional believers, we can each reflect God's love in our daily interactions if we stay alert and vigilant.

### Prayer

*(Members pause in silent attention to the Lord who comes. After a time of quiet, the prayer continues as follows.)*

## Blessing Prayer for the Advent Wreath

Leader: Lord, Source of All Energy and Light,  
the ancients saw the sun  
as a great fire wheel rolling across the sky.  
May our Advent wreath, this small wheel of green,  
be for us a symbol of the sun  
and of the Son of God.

All: May, its ever-greenness  
be a sign of life and of light  
in the midst of the darkness of winter.  
May the candles that burn brightly upon it  
remind us of your Son, Jesus,  
who is the light of the world.

Leader: Grant, Lord, that this Advent wreath  
may be for us and for all who visit our home  
a sign of faith in a world grown cold with disbelief,  
a symbol of hope in a time of gloom and despair  
and a flaming image of love  
in a winter of mistrust and hate.

All: May all who look upon this symbol of Advent  
be encouraged to prepare their hearts  
for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.  
May this green wreath with its bright candles  
help us to prepare for the real Christmas  
which happens within our hearts.

Leader: May, then, Your blessing - Father of Light,  
Son of Glory and Spirit of Love -  
be upon this Advent wreath and upon our home.

All: Amen.

*(One candle of the Advent wreath is lit.)*

## HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

*(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)*

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

### Reflection

The lunacy of Black Friday/Cyber Monday is upon us, having ushered in the relentless flow of catalogs, sale leaflets and non-stop advertising that will remind us incessantly for the next four weeks what the ideal *commercial holiday* season should look like. What is it that we are *waiting* for, preparing for? A *holiday season* filled with busyness, complexity and stress that will require a *recovery period* into mid-January? Not that there is anything wrong with tradition, family gatherings and showing our love for one another.

But this week's scripture sends a decidedly different message about what this season of *waiting* and anticipation should be for Christian believers.

We are reminded that, as people of faith, we are to remain expectant, hopeful and alert. The readings convey a call to alertness, a call to a heightened state of awareness and *mindfulness*. Paul tells us “it is the hour for you to awake from sleep” and the gospel admonishes us to “Stay awake”.

This can be the year we become ever more *aware* of the true meaning of Christmas, the fulfillment of a promise made by a loving God with the gift of his son. How deeply do we believe? Deeply enough to make Advent a real time of preparation?

A short period of quiet, centering prayer each day is a meaningful way to prepare. We can begin that prayer by being aware of the thoughts, anxieties and distractions flooding through our mind. Notice these things, but then, for a time, treat them as *junk* flowing down a river. Just stand on the bank and watch them flow away and out of sight. Stand empty, praying for awareness, the awareness that allows you to see opportunities to build the kingdom during the Advent season. Pray simply, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done”. In such a time of prayer, opportunities will come to consciousness, along with encouragement to perform small courtesies while sitting in traffic or shopping, perhaps a call to cook for a soup kitchen or visit someone who is home bound.

Be *mindful* this Advent. Wait with attention for Jesus who comes, he who is the true gift of Christmas.

### Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What is your typical preparation for Christmas? What would you like your time of preparation to be like this year?
- ◆ How good a listener are you during prayer time?
- ◆ Share some ways that you might block out the *consumer static* that bombards us during the weeks leading up to Christmas.
- ◆ What are you waiting for these days?

### HEARING THE GOSPEL’S LORD

*(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)*

### Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Create a simple, quiet environment at home one night each week of Advent. Unplug the television; play some relaxing instrumental music while you go about your necessary tasks and activities.

- ◆ Be generous in support of your parish outreach efforts to those in need at Christmas time.
- ◆ Obtain and use the “Two Feet of Love in Action” guide to consider how you can strengthen both charitable works and social justice at home and as part of your faith community. Visit [www.usccb.org/twofeet](http://www.usccb.org/twofeet) for more information.
- ◆ Complete your Christmas shopping early so you don’t end up racing around mindlessly at the last minute.

## Prayer

*(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.*

*Following this sharing, seasonal instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, the community gathers around the Advent wreath. The leader and a member lead the community in prayer as follows.*

**Leader:** As the days continue to grow short, guide us, O God, as Advent messengers. Help us to see with enlightened clarity the needs of others and to respond as Jesus did. Help us to slow our pace. Help us to be more reflective and in touch with your will.

**Member:** Let us rejoice as we journey to the house of the Lord, a place of tranquility and hope.

**All:** Lord, illuminate my soul to reflect your goodness.

**Member:** Let us rejoice in the presence of the Lord, a presence that

satisfies our deepest yearnings.

All: Lord, illuminate my soul to reflect your goodness.

Member: Lord, open our hearts to seeing you in the least of our brothers and sisters.

All: Lord, illuminate my soul to reflect your goodness.

Member: Lord, help us to walk through each day with gratitude and thankfulness. Open our hearts to share with those in need.

All: Lord, illuminate my soul to reflect your goodness.

*(Members join hands to pray the Lord's Prayer. Members exchange a sign of peace.)*

