

how to Advent

A Guide for Personal or
Small-Group Reflection

Episode One

Opening Prayer

For God alone my soul waits in silence;
From him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
My fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.

On God rests my salvation and my glory;
My mighty rock, my refuge is God.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
Pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.

– Psalm 62:1–2, 7–8

Introduction

At some level, we know that the season of Advent is...well, a season. But the shape of our lives often looks a little different: we race from Halloween, around the bend to Thanksgiving, and into the homestretch of the most wonderful (stressful?) time of year—Christmas!

What if we took a moment and considered how we might make space in our lives for Advent this year, so that we might make space in our hearts for Christ's coming? Watch the first episode of *How to Advent* to do just that.

Watch

How to Advent, Ep. 1

Reflect / Discuss

1. What do you remember about Advent as a child? Are there things you have continued as you've gotten older? Are there other things you have intentionally changed, and why? Is there anything you'd like to recapture or reinstitute this year?
2. What is your favorite part of Advent? What emotion or thought most characterizes the season for you?
3. When you think back to last Advent, how great was your awareness of the season? Were there particular moments or practices that reminded you of the season?

Commitment

What specific commitment can I make this week to prepare for Advent? Is there a *prayer*, a *practice* (e.g. a devotion or an action), or a *project* (e.g. something artistic or cultural) that would help me to reclaim the season in all its richness?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
You love us so abundantly that you sent your only into the world
to be with us and to give his life so that we might live.
Send your Holy Spirit upon us,
to help us and to strengthen our resolve,
so that we might prepare our hearts most fruitfully this Advent
for the coming of our Savior and friend, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Episode Two

Opening Prayer

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy.

– Isaiah 9:2–3

Introduction

One of the most familiar Advent sights is the Advent wreath. This simple object has a beautiful richness and depth to it. Not only does it engage our senses—the smell and feel of evergreen branches, the light and sound of candles—but it also symbolizes the coming of Christ, the light of the world.

The Advent wreath is the perfect example of a simple tradition that can make the season richer and more meaningful. How so? Well, the second episode of *How to Advent* is here to help.

Watch

How to Advent, Ep. 2

Reflect / Discuss

1. Have you made use of an Advent wreath in your home before? What did that practice or tradition look like?
2. How could you give the Advent wreath a more prominent place in your life and in your home? Are there prayers or other traditions you could build around it, like talking about the season, the Sunday Mass readings for that day, etc.?
3. This year during Advent, if you have an Advent wreath, what would you like to remember or call to mind when you light each of the candles on your wreath?

Commitment

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Closing Prayer

Good and gracious God,
You created us out of love,
and in mercy you redeemed us.
Thank you for the gift of new life
that your only-begotten Son brought into the world.
So that we might not take that gift for granted,
send your Holy Spirit to guide and to prompt us,
that we might treasure the time of Advent
to prepare our hearts for the Christmas mystery. Amen.

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Episode Three

Opening Prayer

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

– Isaiah 11:1–3

Introduction

The waiting of Advent can be tough, but the story of the Old Testament reminds us that God's chosen people also had to endure a lot of waiting. It's both important and helpful to remind ourselves of that story, and Advent is a great time to do it. It all started way back with Adam and Eve...

Okay, it would take a little too long to read or to tell the whole story. But is there another way of calling it to mind and sharing in the sense of expectation that permeates it? There is indeed, and the third episode of *How to Advent* gives us one of the best ways to remember the story of salvation and to pray our way through it.

Watch

How to Advent, Ep. 3

Reflect / Discuss

1. How do you experience the waiting of Advent? Does it build anticipation? Does it cause frustration or impatience? How was it as a child? How is it now?
2. Can you think of an example of fruitful waiting in your life? Maybe getting ready for marriage, preparing for a new stage in life, or awaiting the birth of your first child. What was it that made this waiting fruitful rather than pointless? Your attitude? The goal? The community around you? Prayer? Things that marked the time and its passing?
3. What lessons can you take from fruitful past experiences of waiting and apply them to this Advent season?

Commitment

What specific commitment can I make this week to prepare for Advent? Is there a *prayer*, a *practice* (e.g. a devotion or an action), or a *project* (e.g. something artistic or cultural) that would help me to reclaim the season in all its richness?

Closing Prayer

Merciful Lord,
You guided the events of salvation history
to show forth your love for us and to save us.
Thank you for this great story of your loving kindness towards us!
Fill our hearts with your Holy Spirit,
so that we might come to treasure anew
the story of salvation that draws us toward the coming of your Son,
our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

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Episode Four

Opening Prayer

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return
to the people of Israel.

And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth.

And he shall be their peace.

– Micah 5:2–5

Introduction

One of the most familiar scenes of Advent and Christmas is the nativity (or manger) scene. Perhaps we even take it for granted: Mary and Joseph looking serene; an angel looking glorious; shepherds looking reverent. Sometimes it can all be very beautiful, but is it meaningful as well?

If we want to understand the meaning and dig into the meaningfulness of the manger scene, then the fourth and final episode of *How to Advent* is the perfect place to go. It will help us to tie together our preparations for Christ's coming so that Christmas will be all the more joyful and fruitful.

Watch

How to Advent, Ep. 4

Reflect / Discuss

1. Do you have a childhood memory related to a nativity (or manger) scene? If so, what do you remember and how was it significant?
2. If you set up a nativity scene in your house, when do you do that? How do you go about it? Are there any moments of prayer associated with it?
3. Imagine the nativity scene and what the first "Advent" would have been like for each figure in the scene. Would it involve lengthy expectation or sudden surprise, a straightforward path or a roundabout one? Can you relate to one figure more than other? Or is there a figure in the scene you'd like to relate to more? Why?

Commitment

What specific commitment can I make this week to prepare for Advent? Is there a *prayer*, a *practice* (e.g. a devotion or an action), or a *project* (e.g. something artistic or cultural) that would help me to reclaim the season in all its richness?

Closing 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 and 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