

SHARING GOD'S WORD

— THROUGH THE YEAR —

November 29, 2026 • 1st Sunday of Advent

GATHERING

During the four weeks of Advent, place an Advent wreath on a table in the center of the group. Begin by lighting the first candle.

If there are new members of the group, begin by having all the participants introduce themselves and share their reasons for joining the group.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: We gather in the light of this candle, remembering that Christ, our light, is coming to dispel the darkness and set us free.

All: Come, O Lord, and set us free.

Leader: You are the long-promised Messiah.

All: Come, O Lord, and set us free.

Leader: You are strength and protection for your people.

All: Come, O Lord, and set us free.

Leader: You are the source of our confidence and hope.

All: Come, O Lord, and set us free.

Focus

Advent begins with the challenge to be prepared. One day, we will meet Christ and have to give an account of our lives. Our case for one another will be an important part of that accounting.

THIS WEEK'S GOSPEL

Mark 13:33-37

HISTORICAL CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Note the series of such words: “be constantly on the watch,” “stay awake,” “look around you,” “be on guard.” One could be cynical and say that this is exactly what one must do in order to survive in our increasingly violent, destructive world.

Jesus’ frightening predictions of his death, the fall of Jerusalem, or the trials his followers would endure are tempered by the encouraging message of Jesus’ resurrection and return in glory. Keep in mind, however, that traditional Mediterranean culture is as intensely focused on the present as Westerners are hopelessly rooted in the future. Mark’s audience viewed Jesus’ return as imminent, just around the corner, as it were.

The Mediterranean cultural focus on the present needed a nudge to the future. We who are so future-oriented (just consider our endless varieties of insurance-car, house, health, etc., to cover eventualities that may never happen) need to concentrate more on the present. In Jesus’ culture, men tended to focus on the present, while women were expected to focus on the future. Jesus frequently proposes that men in his cultural world consider the alternative, women’s values, and adopt them when preferable.

Jesus’ command to “watch” may be the keyword today. Watch and care about how the earth’s resources are used today; there may be no resources for tomorrow. Watch and care about how races, governments, and nations treat each other; watch and care about the quality of life for every person. The parable cautions listeners against being unprepared, caught short, surprised by an event which was certain to occur (the master’s return) but whose delay prompted lessened vigilance.

The attitudes we are to have are patience, endurance, steadfastness, confidence, faith, and hope. Then, when the call comes, we can truly say that we have indeed been the alert caretakers and

missionaries of the Gospel as was entrusted to our hands until the Son of Man returns in glory.

AN ILLUSTRATION

When John slipped into the pew at church one Sunday morning in early December, his mind was filled with thoughts of the letters he needed to write, the challenges of the week ahead, and the upcoming football game that afternoon. But only a glance at the church bulletin and an announcement from the priest lifted him from his self-absorption: food was needed to restock supplies for a local charity serving low-income families and the homeless during the holidays.

When he returned home after Mass, John placed the bulletin on his kitchen table as a reminder. The next weekend, he roamed the aisles of the supermarket near his apartment and chose the healthiest types of canned tuna fish, mixed vegetables, and fruit chat he could find. As he made his selections and dropped them into his shopping basket, he imagined dozens of other parishioners fanning out across other grocery stores in town.

The thought that hundreds of foodstuffs would soon flow into the charity's cupboards cheered him. Just a small investment of parishioners' time and thought, combined with the foresight and care of the church staff, meant the food bank would be well prepared to ease the hunger of many people and brighten their holidays.

FAITH SHARING

1. In what ways are you attentive to the needs of others and prepared to help those in need?
2. How prepared are you to give an accounting to Christ of how you have lived the challenge to be his disciple?
3. "Be on guard!" What does that expression mean in your life?
4. How will you observe this Advent season?

RESPONSE IN ACTION SUGGESTIONS

1. Make a list of the things that you need to do to be spiritually prepared for Christmas.
2. Go shopping for non-perishable food to donate to the parish food drive or a local pantry.
3. Volunteer some time to work at your local soup kitchen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close by singing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" or another Advent song about Christ's coming.

SHARING GOD'S WORD

— THROUGH THE YEAR —

December 6, 2026 • 2nd Sunday of Advent

GATHERING

Once again, place an Advent wreath on a table in the center of the group. This week, light two candles.

Begin by taking a few minutes to review the last week and share any actions your members were able to take. Then invite members to share the ways that they are already preparing spiritually for Christmas.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: We are called to reform our lives.

All: Repent, for God's reign is at hand.

Leader: Prepare a way for the Lord.

All: Repent, for God's reign is at hand.

Leader: Clear a straight path for the Lord.

All: Repent, for God's reign is at hand.

Leader: Gentle God, our lives are cluttered with many things. Help us to focus today on what is really important. Bless our sharing and make us truly sorry for our failings. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

Focus

John the Baptist preached repentance, and we still need to hear that call today. We have so many opportunities to experience God's mercy and forgiveness, including the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

THIS WEEK'S GOSPEL

Mark 1:1-8

HISTORICAL CULTURAL BACKGROUND

John the Baptist is a central figure in the Scripture for Advent. True to form, each Evangelist depicts him in a distinct way. For Mark, John is the first official herald or messenger of the public ministry of "Jesus the Messiah, Son of God."

Mark presents no genealogy for Jesus but goes immediately to the heart of the matter. He cites Isaiah to present Jesus' identity, the ground of his authority. John the Baptist strengthens that authority when he describes a stronger one who will follow him, someone who will usher in the new age. Mark tells us that many were baptized by John, thereby committing to transformation into this new age.

John the Baptist has only one function in the Gospel of Mark: he points to Jesus as the Messiah. Yet he is very much a man of the Mediterranean world, where his claim to unworthiness is typical of the honor-shame society of which he was a part. While John recognizes Jesus as more powerful, he is not seeking honor for himself by challenging Jesus' honor. He shows he knows how to defend his own honor but will not trespass on another's. This is what it means to be humble in the first-century Mediterranean world.

The figure of John is drawn to reflect the prophet Elijah, an earlier messenger, come back to life. Like Elijah, John is a man of the desert and wears a camel's-hair garment with a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8). John's nourishment is locusts and wild honey.

The desert is rich in symbolic meaning for our biblical ancestors. After its rescue from Egyptian bondage, Israel was molded into a nation sealed with a covenant in the desert. It was also in the desert that the people were tried, purified, and brought together in a stronger commitment.

The desert/wilderness was also viewed as outside the control of structure. When John and his followers go into the desert, they symbolically withdraw from the established social system. Mark mentions that people came out to hear John from both Jerusalem

and the country of Judea, thus pointing to social groupings as well as to geographical locations. Those from the country of Judea would have been rural peasants, while those from Jerusalem would probably have been artisans and other non-elite of the city.

The “drawing” factor was John’s preaching of repentance. Remember that in the Mediterranean world, personal and social repentance were always linked together. The term “baptism” literally meant “dipping” and was used to symbolize incorporation into the transformed community.

AN ILLUSTRATION

Lisa had been away from the Church for a long time. There was no particular reason for her absence. She wasn’t angry with the Church or some priest. She wasn’t rebelling against her parents. She did not have major disagreements on doctrinal issues, though she did have some questions about certain matters. She had just started “drifting away” in adulthood. She no longer attended Mass or paid much attention to her faith. It was a kind of benign neglect.

She moved to a new city and was looking for new friends. John, a new friend at work, invited her to a retreat at his parish. It seemed like a great opportunity to meet more people, so she decided to go.

She enjoyed the retreat very much. Not only did she meet interesting people who shared her values, but she also felt challenged to reconnect with her faith. On Saturday morning, one of the retreat leaders announced that there would be an opportunity for Reconciliation that evening. She shuddered at the thought: she had not been to confession since her Confirmation. She agonized over it the rest of that morning and finally asked to talk to the priest after lunch. He reassured her and helped her find the strength to receive this sacrament again. She knew she wanted to and found the courage to face her fear.

That evening, she confessed her sins. They weren’t monumental or extraordinary, but she felt like a burden had been lifted and that Christ had welcomed her back. She was overjoyed. She thanked John for being the herald who led her back to her faith.

FAITH SHARING

1. What does the Sacrament of Reconciliation mean to you?
2. When has this sacrament had meaning for you?
3. Has there been a time in your life when you have gone for a long time without going to confession?
4. Do you have questions about the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

RESPONSE IN ACTION SUGGESTIONS

1. Make time for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
2. Arrange to take some time away for quiet reflection and Christmas preparations.
3. If there is a person with whom you need to be reconciled, pray about how to begin the process.

CLOSING PRAYER

Play a song about the need for forgiveness (e.g., “Hosea” by Gregory Norbet) and take a few moments to recall your own faults and failings. Ask for forgiveness in your heart.

Conclude by praying the “I confess...” (Confiteor) from the Penitential Rite of the Mass:

I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done
and in what I have failed to do,
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.