

Not Meant to Frighten

Scripture Background

This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background for the leader. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.

Now that we have celebrated Thanksgiving, it may feel like the holiday season is upon us. Our society certainly tells us so—heck, advertising for Christmas gifts has been going on since well before we digested the Thanksgiving turkey. Fortunately, as Catholics, we have an antidote to the crazy-making of this time of year. It is called Advent. Rather than a period in which we have to speed up to keep pace with the rest of the culture, the biblical readings for the next four weeks invite us to slow down and focus on how God has come to us in times of darkness and despair in the past, and how we are called to stay alert and keep watching for how God will come into our lives now.

Opening Prayer

Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God of Light and God of Darkness,
thank you for this chance to slow down
and listen to your Word for us.

Open our eyes, ears, minds, and our hearts
so that we experience how you are alive and active
in our lives today.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 24:37-44

Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.

Ask: What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

Reflections on the Reading

Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:

This reading can be unsettling. A reminder of how so many died in the catastrophe of the flood in Noah's time, the image

November 30, 2025 • Year A

1st Sunday of Advent

- ▶ Isaiah 2:1-5 • Swords into plowshares.
- ▶ Romans 13:11-14 • Awake from sleep
- ▶ Matthew 24:37-44 • The need for watchfulness



of some people being snatched away from their work while others are “left behind,” the description of a thief coming in the night—all are disturbing images. The final words of the passage, “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” can feel frightening in this regard.

In Jesus’ time, when his Jewish people were oppressed under Roman rule, they envisioned God’s arrival in terms as we have just heard. Rather than being frightened at the prospect, they looked forward in hope to God’s arrival in the world to pronounce final judgment. When Jesus used the term the “coming” of the Son of Man, he used the Greek word “parousia.” At that time, it referred to the arrival of a ruler, god, or deity who would visit a particular city or his people and bring salvation to them. Jesus was reminding them to hang onto that hope as they waited for what must have seemed like forever.

Today our attention is more likely caught up on the daily matters at hand rather than longing for God to put an end to a miserable world. If that is the case, Jesus challenges us to stay awake, be more alert, and be *present* to what we are doing because we don’t know when things might change in an instant. If we knew we or a loved one only had a year to live, or a month, or a day, what would we want to be doing up until the end? Posting on social media? Working overtime? Eating or drinking until we feel sick? Probably not.

This passage is an invitation to reevaluate how we spend our time—and to not take tomorrow for granted. How would Jesus want us to spend our time if we were to die tomorrow? Let’s awaken to that—and start today.

Questions for Discussion

Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.

- ① What is your first reaction to this Gospel passage? Do you find it unsettling? Frightening? Consoling? Something else? Please share.
- ② Thinking about people and peoples today and throughout history who have been oppressed and mistreated, can you see how they might find hope in such a passage?
- ③ What might you be invited to let go of so that you can be more alert to the gifts present in your life right now? How is Jesus inviting you to spend your limited time and energy this week?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following aloud together:

Lord, may what we have heard and reflected on today inspire us to go out from here to be better disciples in our daily lives.

May we be a blessing to all those we encounter this coming week.

Amen.

John Was on Fire

Scripture Background

This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background for the leader. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.

The first reading from Isaiah is one of his more famous passages. It gives us the image of a peaceable kingdom where the lion and the lamb can live together in safety and harmony. The peace of the natural world will be a reflection of the peace in human society when a righteous king will rule with wisdom and understanding, counsel, strength, justice, and faithfulness to God. The passage speaks to Jewish and Christian hope for a time when the world will be as God created it to be. Written in the context of turmoil and danger, Isaiah hoped to inspire his Jewish listeners to hold fast to their hope for a better future. During this Advent time of darkness and waiting, Christians, too, can look to this in hope.

Opening Prayer

Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God of Light and God of Darkness,
thank you for this chance to slow down
and listen to your Word for us.

Open our eyes, ears, minds, and our hearts
so that we experience how you are alive
and active in our lives today.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:1-12

Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.

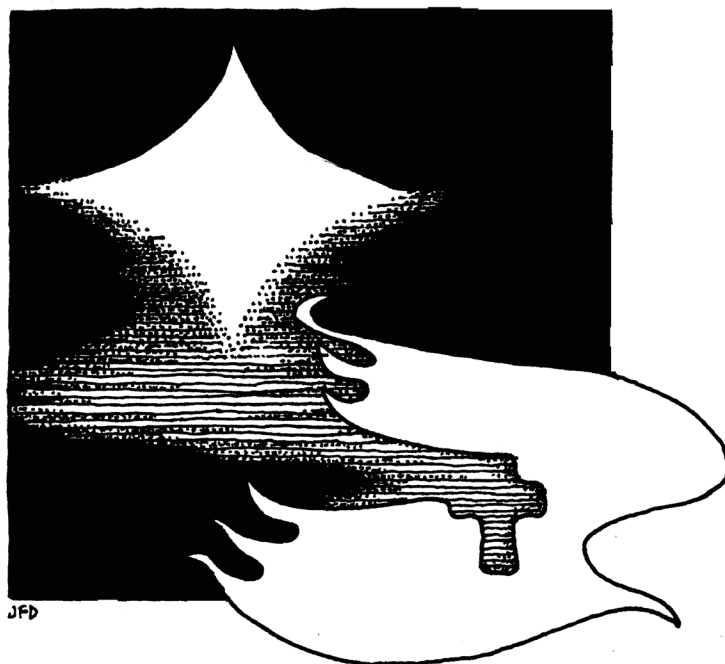
Ask: What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

December 7, 2025 • Year A

2nd Sunday of Advent

- ▶ Isaiah 11:1-10 • The lion and the lamb
- ▶ Romans 15:4-9 • Prayer of encouragement
- ▶ Matthew 3:1-12 • John the Baptist



Reflections on the Reading

Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:

After hearing the beautiful images of the lion and the lamb, the cow and the bear, and the child and the snake living together in peace in the first reading today, the Gospel passage about John the Baptist may seem jarring, or even off-putting. Then again, the words and actions of John the Baptist, whenever he shows up in the Gospels, are always strong, direct, and challenging. Sometimes people don't want to hear his directness or his challenges.

John was *on fire* with the urgency that we turn our lives around. He was asking folks to repent of whatever in their lives was keeping them from living in God's way of justice and peace. He gladly baptized those who acknowledged their sins, but he had little patience for false repentance, especially coming from religious leaders like the Pharisees and Sadducees. It didn't matter to him who someone was, what family they came from, or what their religious background was—he wanted to see the fruits of their repentance. John was a New Testament version of the Old Testament prophets: fiery, passionate characters who unsettled the rich and powerful but offered hope and consolation to those willing to be honest about their shortcomings.

As we prepare ourselves for Christmas, John is a valuable guide. His urgency to evaluate how we live in this world and how we need to change is hard to ignore. We have work to do before Christmas that doesn't involve planning the perfect party or finding the perfect gift. Our work now is to acknowledge what we need to change, ask forgiveness, and get back to doing God's work.

Questions for Discussion

Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.

- ① Who in your life is on fire for justice and repentance? What can you learn from them?
- ② Give an example of what strikes you as false repentance. On the other hand, what proves to you that someone is genuinely repentant?
- ③ What can you do this coming week to “prepare the way of the Lord”?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following aloud together:

Lord, may what we have heard and reflected on today inspire us to go out from here to be better disciples in our daily lives.

May we be a blessing to all those we encounter this coming week.

Amen.