

# Journey through Advent

## LEADER GUIDE

*Thank you for your willingness to help lead your group(s) and make this a great experience for everyone! Here are some things to keep in mind as you do so.*

## PREPARING THE MATERIALS

The participant materials are provided in separate files for each session. We recommend that you distribute the handouts at each session, rather than giving them out all at once at the beginning. This will help your people remain focused on the current week and keep them from forgetting to bring their handouts each week. We provide the materials in two formats:

**One-fold leaflets.** In this format, the handouts print on two sides of a legal-sized sheet of paper. Each sheet is folded once to create a leaflet. These are generally the most convenient, as each participant will get a single sheet of paper per session and no stapling is necessary. When printing, look for double-sided printing options for “short-edge binding” or to “flip pages on short edge.” Or print on single-sided pages and use those to make double-sided copies on your copier.

**Stapled packets.** This format uses regular letter-sized paper, stapled in packets for each session. These handouts use a slightly larger font.

## PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT

Wherever the groups may be gathering, it can be helpful to set the environment to help people transition into a prayerful, reflecting space. You may want to have quiet music playing in the background as people gather. Consider preparing a table with a purple cloth, an Advent wreath, and a Bible.

## SCHEDULE

The meetings should last from 60 to 90 minutes. Always respect the participants’ time by starting and finishing on schedule. You may want to jot down target times for starting each section so you can gauge progress. For example, it may look like:

- 7:30pm • Opening Prayer & Sharing
- 7:45pm • Listening & Sharing (Old Testament Scripture Reading)
- 8:10pm • Reflection & Sharing (New Testament Scripture Reading)
- 8:40pm • Closing prayer
- 8:45pm • Refreshments
- 9:00pm • End

## FACILITATING THE SESSIONS

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Thank you for being willing to help lead your group and make this a great experience for everyone! Here are some things to keep in mind as you do so:

- 1 Ensure good hospitality. Members of your group may be new to a small group experience or the larger community. Facilitate introductions and be sure everyone feels welcome.
- 2 Go over the ground rules (see below) at the beginning of the series, and quickly review them at the start of each session. Some of the material is challenging, since it explores how the Gospel challenges us to change our lives. Make sure that the below ground rules are followed so everyone feels comfortable in the group.
- 3 Gauge the dynamic of your group. If necessary, you (or another designated facilitator) may need to gently facilitate to keep the group on schedule, remain on-topic, and/or allow all voices a chance to enter the circle. You may feel timid interrupting someone, but this can be a very important role that helps the whole group. Apologize in advance when reviewing the ground rules with the group. However, don't put people on the spot by compelling them to share.
- 4 Facilitate answering reflection questions. Sometimes sharing times can be a little awkward waiting for people to initiate. You can rotate around the circle, but we recommend that you try something called the "popcorn" method. One person starts, and when they are done sharing they choose the next person (who is always allowed to pass and pick another person). We have found that in practice this works very well, sometimes adding a little levity.
- 5 Listen to the feedback from the group along the way. Pace the time for the different sections based on the total time available and what works for your group.
- 6 We recommend that the content in the handouts be read aloud rather than silently. An excellent way to get everyone's voices heard early on is to simply go around the circle having each participant read one paragraph.

# Journey through Advent

November 30, 2025 • First Sunday of Advent • Year A

*Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. —Matthew 24:42*

## OPENING PRAYER

Reader: We gather to reflect on this season of Advent,  
looking for the light in the darkness of our world.

All: **Lord, help us to see where your light is shining.**

Reader: We gather to reflect on how you have been a light for us in the past,  
always leading us forward despite any darkness we have encountered.

All: **Lord, help us to know how you have been with us  
up until this day,  
even if we did not recognize it at the time.**

Reader: We gather so that we may go out from here,  
inspired to be points of light in the world.

All: **Lord, help us to shine more brightly  
so that we may be a light to others who are  
in darkness. Amen.**



## SHARING

Advent comes at the darkest time of the year for people living in the northern hemisphere. It is a time of shortened daylight hours and a time of cold, wetness, and barrenness in the earth. Sometimes our spirits mirror the physical world at this time of year, with a sense of longing, loneliness, discouragement, or depression creeping in as the nights get longer and the days grow colder. It is not a coincidence, then, that many world religions celebrate holidays or seasons of light around this time of year. As Catholics, we have Advent to sustain us in our search for light amidst the darkness. We will light one more candle each week for the next four weeks even though outside the natural light grows weaker until the lights of Christmas blaze soon after the winter solstice.

- 1 How are you feeling as this Advent season begins? Daunted? Frenzied? Discouraged? Excited? Hopeful? How come?
- 2 If you could change something about how you observe Advent and approach Christmas this year, what would it be?
- 3 What are you hoping to get out of this group?

## LISTENING: ISAIAH 2:4-5

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*They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;  
One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.  
House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*

At a time of year when it is naturally more dark outside, the darkness of local and world news may feel especially discouraging. Wars, famine, refugee crises, racial strife, natural disasters, political divisions, and religious intolerances may seem overwhelming. Technology today means we are inundated with bad news from near and far, sometimes incessantly. It doesn't mean that bad news is new in the world.

The people of the Bible lived with terrible wars and crises as well. They experienced times of great uncertainty, fear, and desolation too. That is why Isaiah's prophecy of a time when the instruments of war would become instruments of agriculture and when all would walk in the light of the Lord resonated so deeply in their hearts.

We, like them, need something to hope in, some promise that the terror we humans inflict upon each other will end. We are desperate for little glimpses of light. We need to be reminded that we are called to walk in that light, no matter how much the darkness may seem to surround us. Like Isaiah, we are called to give hope and encouragement to others that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5)

## SHARING

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- 1 What current events do you experience as the most discouraging or troubling at this time?
- 2 Share an example of someone or some group you know or have heard of who is working for peace or justice, metaphorically beating swords into plowshares.
- 3 Despite the apparent hopelessness of world events, what can you concretely do to heed Isaiah's call to "walk in the light of the Lord" this coming week?

## REFLECTION: MATTHEW 24:37-42

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*Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come."*

We have all experienced, or at least heard stories, of how quickly lives can take a terrible turn for the worse. A person goes to work but then their spouse gets a shocking call from the hos-

pital after the heart attack. We receive an unexpected cancer diagnosis. One moment a child is laughing, alive and vibrant, the next moment something goes terribly wrong and she is lifeless, preceding her parents in death. The people in Jesus' day had these experiences too. Like them, we know what it is like to go along in life assuming everything is normal and fine until it is not.

Jesus understood the human propensity to take our lives for granted and that is why he sounded the cry to "stay awake." He isn't asking his followers to forego sleep at night, he is begging us to pay attention, to really savor life. He wants us to be aware that things can change at any moment. Who knows what we may be asked to endure or to live through? Jesus tells us one thing, though: we can't presume things will always be the same. We must cherish what we have now, and be awake and alert to whatever new will come.

## SHARING

- 1 Share an experience of a sudden, life-changing event. How did that change you?
- 2 In what area(s) of your life do you feel you are just "going through the motions" right now, not really savoring or appreciating what you have been given?
- 3 What might you like to "wake up" to more this upcoming week?



## CLOSING PRAYER

Reader: Gracious God, we thank you for this time to reflect on your Word in scripture.

All: **Help us to be more aware of how you are still speaking to us in our lives today.**

Reader: Be with us as we begin our Advent journey  
and help us to be aware of how your light  
shines into the darkness of our world.

All: **Strengthen us in our resolve to "walk in the light of the Lord."**

Reader: Grant that we may be more awake and alert to the ways you come into our world.

All: **Bless us with a sense of gratitude and an ability to savor all of the gifts you have given us while they are on loan to us.**

Reader: We ask this all in Jesus' name.

All: **Amen.**