



2017 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL FROM THE
DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA AND FORMA



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA



THE NETWORK FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION

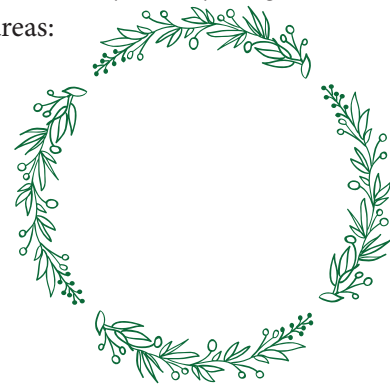
The Diocese of Virginia and Forma are thrilled to partner together to offer this simple Advent devotional to families. Please use this to deepen your faith and your understanding of this important, but often overlooked season in the Church year.

Paris Ball, the Director of Christian Formation and Shrine Mont Camps for the Diocese of Virginia, and Bill Campbell, the Forma Executive Director partnered together to create a few offerings for each week of Advent. You will find a brief overview of the scriptural themes for each week, ideas to try in your home to deepen your experience of Advent, and some short prayers and rituals to make your Advent experience complete.

This is merely a guide. Please do embrace the Advent season as a moment to pause, reflect, and push aside the secularization of Christmas. Advent was historically a penitential season. We certainly don't think that many people are going to return to a second Lent like season, but we are hopeful that everyone will find a few moments in each day to think about the coming of Jesus into your life. What does it mean to be waiting with anticipation for our Lord to come? What is holding you back from being with Christ as he is born? Now is the time to ask those questions.

We encourage you to explore a spiritual practice beyond these suggested activities. One suggested place to start is with the ancient daily practice called The Examen. This sounds daunting and severe – don't worry, it's anything but. All the Examen asks of you is to pause for a few moments at the end of the day and focus in 5 areas:

1. **Become aware of God's presence.**
2. **Review the day with gratitude.**
3. **Pay attention to your emotions.**
4. **Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.**
5. **Look toward tomorrow.**



The Examen has become such a popular tool for spiritual formation that there is now an app on Android and iPhone systems. Go to your app store and search for Reimagining the Examen. You will find this to be a simple, but profound tool for reordering your daily life in God's grace.

While we were purposeful when writing this devotional to make it as "supply free" as possible, we hope you will consider purchasing or creating you own advent wreath for your home ritual. Ask your priest or lay minister in charge of Christian Formation for more information about what an Advent wreath is and where you can get one.

There is nothing here that is complicated or unruly. This Advent devotional is designed for anyone to use this at home alone, with their friends, spouse, children, or anyone you want to deepen your faith with.

WE INVITE YOU INTO A HOLY ADVENT – LET'S BEGIN!!

NOTE – How the Church Tells Time

Most of the world thinks of time as a line. We have what once was, we have now, and we have what will be. The Church does not think of time in this way. Advent is the beginning of the Church liturgical year, but in practice, we have no beginning or end. We have seasons: Advent (4 Sundays), Christmas (12 days) ending on Epiphany, Lent (6 Sundays), Easter (7 Sundays) ending on Pentecost, and the Sundays after Pentecost (also called Ordinary Time). The cycle repeats over and over again living through the life cycle of Christ and the Church, calling us into memorial and remembrance of what was, is, and will be.

Advent, Week 1

Theme: Waiting in Hope

Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-9, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37, Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.”

Introduction:

We have entered the first season of the church year; Advent. Advent means “the arrival” – a time where we prepare our hearts and minds for Christmas, for God incarnate and with us. Interestingly, very few assigned Advent scripture readings actually point to Jesus’ birth. Rather, each year we begin the Advent journey with warnings and preparatory comments surrounding the second coming of Christ.

Jesus speaks about our need to stay alert and aware of signs that point to Christ’s second coming. He asks his disciples, and us, to “stay awake” in this week’s gospel reading so that we will be ready when the time comes. At the same time, Paul comforts the Corinthian church that they are “not lacking in any spiritual gift” as they stand in waiting for the Lord’s arrival.

We are to be on guard, prepared and awake. There will be signs of change that will be revealed to those who are paying attention. But fear not, because all that we need to persevere through this time of waiting we already have.

Households with Adults and Children:

➤ **DISCUSSION STARTER AND ACTIVITY:** Advent is a time of waiting and getting ready. In our household, we are getting ready to celebrate Christmas. One way to get ready is to think about what we love about this time, so we will be watching for those things when they come.

○ **Ask:** What are some of the things that you love about this season?

(Feel free to brainstorm what you love about the WINTER or about Christmas more specifically.)

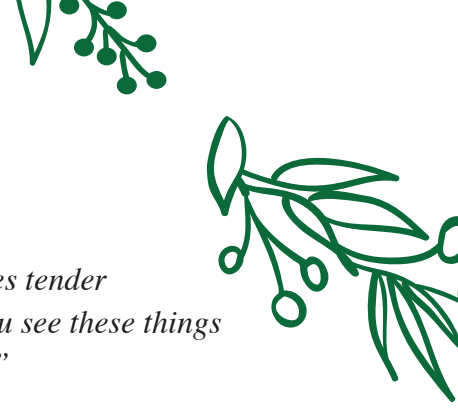
○ **Do:** Make a list together, talking together about why you love the various items on your household’s list. Have children decorate the list as they wish, and then hang somewhere everyone in the household can see it.

Households with Adults and Youth (or older children):

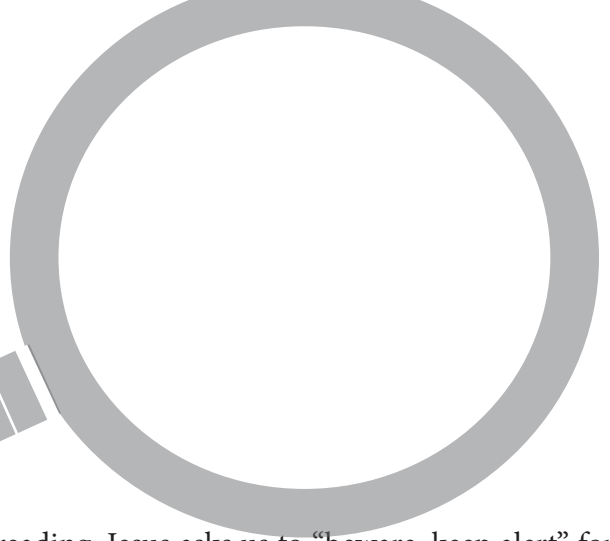
➤ **DISCUSSION STARTER AND ACTIVITY:** Advent is a special time where we prepare and wait for Christmas, when God comes to our world as a little baby. This is a good time for us to practice being patient and paying attention to the world around us. The Bible tells the story of people who waited for a long time for the first Christmas, and they had to be very patient. This is a good opportunity to discuss how to wait with hope for things that are on the way.

○ **Ask:** What kinds of feelings do you have while you are waiting for something special to happen? What do you like to do to prepare? How do you stay patient when you are waiting for something to happen?

○ **Do:** Read this week’s Gospel lesson together (Mark 13:24-37). Jesus is talking with his disciples and gives an example of how we can see that things are changing, if we only pay attention. Nature gives us clues to let us know that things are changing, such as the leaves on trees. When we see the clues, sometimes it makes it easier for us to be patient as we wait for something to happen. What are some of the clues we might see this month as we get ready for Christmas? (NOTE: your clues could be from nature or found in other places.) Take a piece of paper with a magnifying glass drawn on it (see next page for an example) and have youth list some of the “clues” they may see this month as we move toward Christmas.



PAY ATTENTION: LOOK FOR CLUES!



Households with Adults:

➤ **DISCUSSION STARTER AND ACTIVITY:** In Sunday's reading, Jesus asks us to "beware, keep alert" for the coming of the Kingdom of God. He gives his disciples some examples of how, in the springtime, we catch glimpses of trees beginning to bloom. Those changes, as subtle as they are, are indications that summer is already near to us, even if the weather is still chilly.

o **Ask:** Are there areas of your life today, at this time, where you can see subtle glimpses of change to come? How are you making yourself attentive to those glimpses? How do you manage feelings of impatience and anxiety while living in these "in between" moments?

o **Do:** Patience and attentiveness are two major themes of the Advent season. With your household, create a tangible reminder to KEEP ALERT and be patient. Maybe you could draw a symbol that you can hang somewhere visible to remind you to slow down and pay attention, or there is an item (like a smooth stone or a string around your wrist) that you can commit to carrying around. Whenever you see/feel the symbol, you will be reminded to stop what you are doing and pay attention to your surroundings. Each person in the household can make their own decisions about what will work best as a reminder for them, but share your items/symbols with each other.

For Everyone – Rituals and Prayer:

Light a small candle, LED candle, or the first candle of your Advent wreath. Gather with your loved ones as you are able and ask this simple prayer:

*God, we are waiting for something. Please stay with us and help us '
Has anyone seen a sign of change today (or this week)'
How have you been patient today (or this week)?*

