



2017 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL FROM THE DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA AND FORMA



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA



THE NETWORK FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION

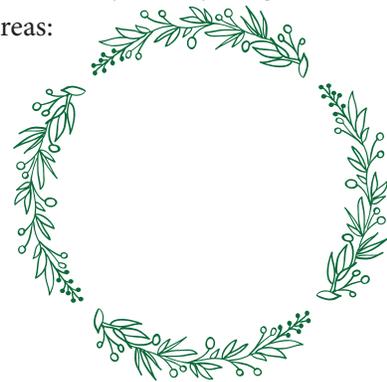
The Diocese of Virginia and Forma are thrilled to partner together to offer this simple Advent devotional to families. Please use this to deepen your faith and your understanding of this important, but often overlooked season in the Church year.

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 3

Theme: Messages and Messengers of Joy

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28; Canticle 15

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the Lord.’”

Introduction:

As we move into the third week of Advent, our journey of inward preparation and outward observation draws us closer each day to Christmas. This week, the readings show a variety of ways that people have been and continue to be messengers of God’s love and hope for this world.

God speaks to the people of this world in many different ways. One of the ways that we know about God’s dreams for humankind is through words spoken by prophets and other messengers. Isaiah speaks boldly about God’s desire to turn the world as we know it upside down: those who mourn will be comforted and will rejoice, ruins will be rebuilt and captives will be freed. Mary, in her song of praise to the Lord, depicts a similar situation: those who are “low” will be lifted up and those who are hungry will be filled.

God’s messengers have been present throughout all generations, and they are around today. The message of hope and joy is present throughout this week’s scripture readings. Where is it present in your life?

Households with Adults and Children:

➤ **DISCUSSION STARTER AND ACTIVITY:** This week, we think about the people who have shared the message of God’s love and hope for our world. Isaiah, Mary and John the Baptist all told stories about God, but sometimes those messages were misunderstood by the people around them.

○ **Ask:** Have you ever tried to tell someone something, and they didn’t understand? How did that make you feel?

○ **Do:** If there are multiple people in your household, play a game of Telephone to explore how messages can change over time. Start with a goofy phrase, like “Mr. Smith enjoys eggs and grapes on Wednesday morning” – what happens after the phrase moves through several messengers? Talk about how, sometimes, it is hard to be a messenger – and you need to SHOUT your message rather than whisper it so people will hear and understand.



Households with Adults and Youth (or older children):

➤ **DISCUSSION STARTER AND ACTIVITY:** Mary’s life was flipped upside down: pregnant, unmarried, and without any real money to speak of. She had every reason to be scared and focused only on herself and her own problems. However, she was open to God’s presence in her life and chose to live with courage rather than let fear guide her. Because of her courage, she was able to hear God’s message when she went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. When she saw Elizabeth and discovered that she, too, was unexpectedly pregnant, Mary’s words about God’s love and mercy seem to just fall out of her mouth. Without meaning to, she becomes a messenger of God’s love and intentions.

○ **Ask:** Have you ever been so moved by something that you couldn’t help but cry out? What was that like? What did you say or do?

○ **Do:** Read Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55 or Canticle 15) together, splitting the reading so that each member of the household can read a portion. Talk about what stands out to everyone in this reading: what surprises you? What message does Mary give us about God’s hope for this world? What things does she think God would like to change in our world? What makes you feel excited? Is there anything in her song of praise that concerns you or that you don’t like?

Households with Adults:

➤ **DISCUSSION STARTER AND ACTIVITY:** John the Baptist plays an important role in Jesus' life and ministry, but the story is not about him. He, like Isaiah, comes in advance of Jesus to clear a way and help people prepare for the messages Jesus will be bringing to the world.

○ **Ask:** Consider that the role of John may be played by many people in our lives today. Who "pointed to the light" in your life? Who are the people who helped you learn more about faith or showed God's love to you through their lives? Did you ever talk to these people about the impact they have made on your life and your faith?

○ **Do:** Spend some time creating a response to God's message you have received from other people in this world. Do what works for you: consider writing a letter (to send or not) thanking someone for teaching you about God – create an art piece or collage to represent what you learned from someone else – write a poem as a response – etc. Share your response with the other person(s) in your household.

For Everyone – Rituals and Prayer:

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

*God, you send messengers to teach us about your dreams for our world.
Please help us hear those messages, and give us courage to be a messenger for others.
What do you think is God's message for us today?
(How) has that message changed since Jesus' time on Earth?*

