



2017 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL FROM THE
DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA AND FORMA



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA



THE NETWORK FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION

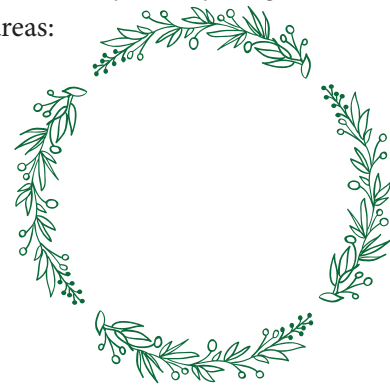
The Diocese of Virginia and Forma are thrilled to partner together to offer this simple Advent devotional to families. Please use this to deepen your faith and your understanding of this important, but often overlooked season in the Church year.

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 4

Theme: Love

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God” – from the Gospel of Luke

Introduction:

So, we aren't delusional. We know that you are thinking that it's not Advent 4 – It's Christmas Eve! Yes, tomorrow is Christmas Day. But, it is NOT Christmas Eve until the sun goes down! We have been working this season to keep Advent and not rush into the Christmas season before its time. We are asking you to just give Advent a few more minutes... It's always strange when Advent 4 and Christmas Eve happen on the same day. In a perfect world, families might go to church in the morning for a service of Advent 4, followed by another church service that evening to mark Christmas Eve. If you can't do that due to travel or family commitments, try to find time for Morning Prayer out of the Book of Common Prayer. This might help you stay grounded in the journey you've been on this month, even as the fullness of "Christmas Eve" grows throughout the day.

There are no week-long projects this time around. We do want you to fully embrace the Christmas Season. We want you to have so much Christmas spirit left that you are ready to celebrate Christmas for its full 12 days! Keep the tree up and hold a few gifts until Epiphany. Celebrate all the way to the end. You have been pacing yourself, so you should be ready!

Activity for today

We have many names for God. If you go to a church that has a history of singing Handel's Messiah Chorus during Christmas (it was written for Easter...don't get us started), then you will hear many of the ways we refer to God and Jesus. Creator, redeemer, sustainer; Lord; God is Love; the true vine; the Good Shepherd; Wonderful; Counselor; Almighty King...the list goes on.

Today, your task is simple. What are the names you like for God (other than God, of course)? What are the names you find problematic? What metaphors or imagery do you love? Which ones do you wish to never hear again? Why? Write down your favorite and think about why you have descriptors for God that you don't like. Remember, God is beyond description, God is beyond gender, God is beyond and yet is still near to you.

Final Advent Prayer:

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

God, help us remember that you are Love, that you are beyond description.

Help us remember that you love us. Help us live out your call to love you and to love others as Jesus loved us, became one of us and died for us.

We hope that you have enjoyed your Advent this year. If any of these activities helped you and your family deepen in your faith, don't give up the practice. Faith is deepened through practice and reading the scriptures. You will have greater faith in your life the more you practice your faith, read the scriptures, and live out your faith in the world. Blessings to you and have a truly Merry Christmas!

