

The Word Anew Amongst Us

2022 - 2023

*Advent to Christmas Reflection Booklet
(Year A)*



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ADVENT TO CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

2022 - 2023

Dear sisters and brothers,

Once again, we are presented with an opportunity to gather with family and friends preparing to receive the wonderful "Gift" of our Father. The "Gift" goes on revealing as much as we are open to receiving the Lord with a curious heart ever willing to discover the depth of this love the Father has for us.

The bible is our Father revealing Himself to us the mystery of His existence and love. Therefore, we take His Word as the basis of our journey during this season to know the truth about this love our Father has for us.

Christmas will never be the same if our journey during the season of Advent is never new. The newness of the "Gift" depends on our response to His invitation to enter into a deeper relationship with Him who is giving us the "Gift". There is nothing that has been held back from us to have a truly meaningful relationship with our Father. On our part, we ought to hold back nothing from our Father.

In the letter to the Hebrews we are told, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Heb 4:12). For the newness of the celebration to happen, we need to be bold to take our Father's Word into our daily lives to enlighten it with wisdom. The awakening to the Word is necessary as it is to repent from the kind of life we are living in order to realise the fullness of the love of our Father through His "Gift".

During this time of Advent for Christmas, we go back to the Word of God, for the Word is for all of us a light to our darkened path.

I wish you an insightful time of preparation for Christmas.

Rev. Fr. Terence Pereira

Episcopal Vicar for the New Evangelisation

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET

This resource is intended for families, RCIA groups, parish organisations, ministries, small Christian communities and neighbourhood Christian communities. It may also be used for individual reflection.

- To promote the Christian community in the neighbourhood as a place where we can hear the word of God and put it into practice.
- To give participants an experience of community and a sense of their mission by reaching out to neighbours and those in need.
- To gather parish organisations / ministries to pray together as one and put Christ back in the centre.
- To increase communication between family members. Love should be the main message in all communication, so the sessions are aimed at families sharing stories, doing meaningful activities together, sharing faith and being reconciled with one another.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

These reflections may be used either (1) before participating in Sunday's liturgy, as a way of preparation to receive God's Word at Mass, or (2) after participating in the liturgy as a continuation of 'breaking open the Word of God' in our lives.

In the spirit of generosity, group members volunteer beforehand to read Scriptures and other parts of the text.

A different group facilitator can take the responsibility in each session to foster good interaction and to keep time.

Someone should record the discussion in general terms and then email it to the members who are absent.

The duration of each session is about two hours.

The time and place for the next meeting should be announced at the end of each session.

SESSION FORMAT

Opening Prayer

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

Readings

The three readings and their accompanying commentaries will be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.

Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

Reflections

Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).

Sharing Questions

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond.

Take Home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

Doing your bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

Closing Prayer

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

Appendix: Activities

The appendix section contains activities that further enrich our spiritual journey with our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ.

FACILITATING GROUP REFLECTION

For where two or three meet in my name, I am there with them

- Matthew 18:20

Be mindful of Christ's presence. Adopt a humble and reverent manner when speaking or acting within the group. Read the text meditatively and give your best attention to the words of the Scripture readings.

May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you

- John 17:21

Help everyone to feel at home and take special care to welcome newcomers. Treat each person as a beloved member of the community and invite one another to participate in the session by taking turns to read the text. Use a language that everyone can understand so that no one feels left out.

...and their great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen

- Mark 10:42-43

Avoid being authoritative or domineering by acting aggressively, flaunting knowledge or telling others what to do. If there is advice to be given, do so after the reflection is done. Choose words that are easily understood by all when speaking. Avoid giving lengthy and verbose sharing that consume other people's opportunities to offer their sharing.

If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me

- Luke 9:23

At the core of these reflections is the Word of God, the teachings of the Church and the invitation for our conversion towards Christ. If the group wanders away from this during the session, gently invite one another to re-focus.

Because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say

- Luke 12:12

There is no need to prepare sharing in advance or to appoint people to share. Wait patiently for God's Spirit to inspire generosity and remember to give thanks after someone volunteers to contribute their own faith experience.

...your light must shine in people's sight, so that, on seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven

- Matthew 5:16

These reflections challenge us to do the will of God - to reflect the love of Christ to others we meet. Spend some time at the start of the next group session sharing with one another how each one has tried to do this over the past week.



CATHOLICSG RADIO

brings you the audio version of 2022 – 2023 Advent to Christmas Reflection Booklet.

Join our presenters as they take you through the reflection via the CatholicSG Radio app. Broadcast times will be on every Wednesday at 8:00am starting from 23 November 2022.

Besides listening via a web browser: <https://radio.catholic.sg/>, the CatholicSG Radio app is available for downloading via the following app stores:

Download the CatholicSG Radio app



Apple App Store



Google Play Store



Huawei App Gallery

Podcast Versions

The same reflections will be available as podcasts on the app itself.

*Advent Reflection
(Year A)*

The Word Anew Amongst Us



SUNDAYS OF ADVENT (YEAR A)

The Word Anew Amongst Us

<i>Week</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Theme</i>
1st Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44	Stay awake to the Mystery of the Word
2nd Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12	Repent to listen to the Word
3rd Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 35:1-6,10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11	Aware of the Word
4th Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 7:10-14; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24	Obedient to the Word



1st Sunday of Advent

Stay awake to the Mystery of the Word

OPENING PRAYER

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

Lord, in this season of praying and waiting, enable us to stay awake to the moments when you reveal Your mysteries in our midst in the daily unfolding of our lives. As we respond to Your invitation to what it means to 'put on Christ' daily in our preparation, renew our hearts and minds so that we may grow to be better ready to receive you in our lives. Amen.

READINGS: *The three readings and their accompanying commentaries will be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

1st Reading:

Isaiah 2:1-5

This hopeful promise came after we are told of the corruption, injustice and rebellion of the 'holy city' in chapter one. In the midst of what looks like a hopeless and impossible task, the prophet gave hope that the holy mountain of the Lord, Mount Zion which is really a low hill in the area will become the towering mountain of the Lord. The incredible sign of nations streaming up the mountain to learn the ways of the Lord is another sign for hope. These sure signs help us to know that God our Father's promise of salvation and restoration will be fulfilled. That is when God's peace will reign and the swords are hammered into ploughshares, spears into sickles; a testament to harmony. So while things may look bleak, the Lord has not given up on us.

2nd Reading:

Romans 13:11-14

St. Paul is reminding his audience and us, to be vigilant and know what hour it is. Christ, who obtained salvation for us will surely come again. Hence, we

cannot drop our guard and allow the sins of the flesh to take root strangulating the growth of our spiritual life. St. Paul reminded us that as Christ enters our life, all darkness will be dispelled. So as we recall that at our baptism we put on Christ, it is now time to be suited in the 'armour of light' and fully embrace our identity as children of light and live in right relationship with the Lord.

Gospel:

Matthew 24:37-44

The message of staying awake and being vigilant is clear. The second coming of Christ or *Parousia* is certain but there is no telling when exactly it will happen. The Gospel writer wished to convey to the audience the importance of staying vigilant always living the Christian way as we do not know the exact hour of His coming. It is to not go about looking for signs for the coming of the Lord, but to focus on living out kingdom values, in the hope that when the signs appear, the Lord will notice. The call to stay awake is a way of life, a response toward our good God's continuous reaching out to us.

REFLECTIONS: *Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

We have always begun Advent with this message of staying awake and being vigilant. How does it look like in Christian living? A watchfulness in the way we act, worship, and go about our daily lives. It would mean that we examine and check our consciousness of being Christ to one another daily, in the family, at work, in school or during recreation. In this manner, when the Lord comes, He will find us ready to enjoy the eternal heaven.

The season of Advent certainly acts as a reminder of the posture of wakefulness to the unfolding mystery of God and the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is certainly good to take this season to practise the discipline of staying awake, but imagine how much more the Lord can do for each of us if we continue to stay tuned daily to the Word? Daily, there are many

things vying for our attention, the demands from bosses and colleagues to complete projects and tasks at work, the different attention needed for family members especially the children and the elderly, the social and economic issues that we are facing, the war that has impacted the global economy, and the list goes on. This list seems endless. In the midst of these, 'God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men' (Dei Verbum #6) through Jesus Christ, the Word of God. It really requires us to stay awake to the Word in the midst of all that is drawing our attention. When we can be vigilant, our lives can be transformed and made anew. Let this not be a practice during the season of Advent, but an ongoing life-changing movement towards God our Father.

SHARING QUESTIONS:

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond.

Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.

What struck you from the passages of scripture?

What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.

- Recall a time when you were attentive to the Word of God in your life. What was the lesson for you?
- What spiritual discipline do you need to cultivate to stay attentive to the Word?

Group Contextual Sharing Questions

You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.

For Small Christian Communities

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- In the life of our community, how have we been vigilant to the Word of God?
- How can this posture of awareness become part of our community?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- What part does the Word of God have in directing our service in the parish and/or wider community?
- How can we form the habit of staying alert to the direction from the Word of God?

For Family

Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- What does our family need to be aware of as we make this journey during Advent in order to arrive at a new experience of Christmas?
- What can be done to keep the Word of God alive in the family? Decide on an action and do it together as a family.

Take home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

I stay awake to the Word of God so as to grow close to God our Father.

Doing your bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

Think of five persons that you want the Lord to touch during this season of Advent and pray for them. Write their names on a sheet of paper.

1st Sunday of Advent

Stay awake to the Mystery of the Word

CLOSING PRAYER

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

*Lord Jesus, we thank You for this time of grace.
We ask for Your continuous inspiration to help us to
stay open and obedient to Your Spirit's promptings to
be always be ready for your coming.
Amen.*

2nd Sunday of Advent

Repent to listen to the Word

OPENING PRAYER

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

Lord Jesus, we praise and thank You for this time to come before You again. Open our hearts and minds to You. Make us attentive to the Spirit moving in and around us so that we may be aware of Your loving presence among us and learn to listen to Your soft prompting to abide in Your word. Amen.

READINGS: *The three readings and their accompanying commentaries will be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

1st Reading: *Isaiah 11:1-10*

This post-exilic, messianic poem on a saviour king from David's lineage is filled with hope and possibilities. The saviour king, in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, is able to bring about peace in the world marked by taming of the wild animals. The image of peaceful existence is a stark contrast between wild and tame animals and having a child in the midst of wild animals. It is one of assurance and amazement in the time where the people were fearing for the safety of their children and livestock. It is also incredulous to our modern imagination today that such peace is attainable especially in the volatile climate of war and the pandemic. Yet, the promise in Isaiah's message is anticipatory and hopeful: 'for the land will be full of knowledge of the Lord' (v.9) and creation will be fully transformed and renewed.

2nd Reading: *Romans 15:4-9*

The church in Rome during St. Paul's time was known for its faith. However, there was also tension between the Jews and the Gentiles there. In this significant letter to the Romans to enlist help for his ministry, St. Paul exhorts the two groups to work together for unity as all worship the same Lord, Jesus Christ. He reminds all that Christianity

builds on the faith in God the Father's promises to Abraham. The scripture written was so that all may live in hope through perseverance and be encouraged by what was written. St. Paul affirms that indeed the Lord wishes to have all to be drawn to glorify God the Father through the 'circumcised' with an image of worship and praise from all peoples.

Gospel: *Matthew 3:1-12*

John the Baptist's appearance in Matthew's gospel is astounding and not short on attention grabbing. Dressed in camel's hair and crying out for people to repent, the Baptist wants his audience to sit up and listen: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. The word 'kingdom' in English does not quite describe the message by the Baptist: it is that the divine authoritative power is present and reigns over all, such that what is deemed unimagined can indeed become real. Hence, the urging to repent from sinful ways and come into the fullness of God the Father is what John offers to the people in his message. Our act of repentance must truly reflect our intent and not be like the Pharisees and Sadducees, whose hearts are not set on embracing the fullness of the kingdom.

REFLECTIONS: *Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

In this week's readings, we are brought to an image of what true peace could look like. This true peace that the Lord offers is what all humans long for and yet it always seems so fleeting beyond our grasp. At the time of this writing, the world looks chaotic - nations waging war, senseless killing, an image of a young child smiling one moment and gone in the next. Can true peace really happen? When we think of 'peace' we often think of people getting along fine, no fights and no war. Yet, true peace is not without tension. What do we do in that tension? This is what we read in the reading: the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the calf, the Jews and Gentiles, we can already sense discomfort hearing these pairings. There is definitely tension, but 'to have hope through perseverance and through the encouragement of the scriptures' (Rom 15:4), but for that, we need to repent of our old ways.

The etymology of the word 'repent' comes from Old French 'repentir' which is a deep regret for one's conduct that caused a change in posture to develop new mental and spiritual habits. This realisation that God's plan cannot take place now because we are still struggling to be in right relationship with ourselves and with others, cannot be ignored. Our own unforgiving

postures or apathetic attitudes have allowed tension and disorder to continue in the world.

When we look at the happenings in the world, it is not enough to just offer prayer and sympathy. There is a need to look at what we have done and what we have not done. God our Father has every right to smite this generation for perpetuating the violence and disorder in our lives. Jesus Christ came to put right the relationship and commanded us to love God and neighbour. Yet, we have often failed to heed the command to listen and obey the Word. Hence, there is the need to repent, to change our conduct to form new habits such that we will be more forgiving and more concerned about people and situations. There is a need to be involved in transforming the lives of others because we care for them. We do this so that the world may 'be full of the knowledge of the Lord' (Isa 11:9), and then will we see true peace.

During this Advent, let us be mindful of what we have done and what we have failed to do for God's true peace. May we change and form new habits to grow our relationship with the Word so as to be guided and directed by the Word and the Spirit.

SHARING QUESTIONS:

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond.

Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.

What struck you from the passages of scripture?

What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.

- Are you aware of the times when your attitude or behaviour contributed to the disorder and violence in certain situations?
- If your response has been a 'yes', what can you do to change your response during difficult times? If 'no', what helped you to become more aware?

Group Contextual Sharing Questions

You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.

For Small Christian Communities

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- Is the Word of God at the heart of our community? How are we being directed by the Word?
- Is it a habit in our community to allow the Word of God to lead us to repentance and renewal? What can we do better?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- What change do you think needs to happen within the ministry?
- What can we do in order to be more attentive to the Word?

For Family

Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- Share with each other in the family a scripture text that has helped you to change and renew your relationship with God.
- Write down the scripture texts shared by each family member in a 'scripture album'. Continue to collect scripture texts that are significant to the family. Use this album to remind each other to grow in faith.

Take home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

My conduct can cause disorder and a breakaway from God's true peace. I can resolve to make the adjustments to realign. This is how new spiritual habits can be formed, and it begins with listening to the Word of God.

Doing your bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

Write down a list of challenges that you face in being Christ-centred and a list of qualities that a disciple of the Lord should have.

2nd Sunday of Advent

Repent to listen to the Word

CLOSING PRAYER

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

Loving Father, we want to come before You, to be still and to acknowledge that You are God over all the earth. You promised to be with us until we can all share in eternal joy with You and the whole of creation. Inspire us to hold on to Your promise in order to renew ourselves so as to come into the fullness of Your peace and joy. Amen.

3rd Sunday of Advent

Aware of the Word

OPENING PRAYER

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You for the gift of Jesus Christ, our life and our salvation. As we move deeper into the season of Advent, help us to become ever more aware of Your life-giving Word in Scripture pointing to the coming of Your Son in human history. Help us to see in Your Word today, Your exhortation to be joy-filled and patient in all that we are confronted with today. Enable us to recognise the signs of the presence of the Messiah through these events in our lives. Amen.

READINGS: *The three readings and their accompanying commentaries will be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

1st Reading:

Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

The Third Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudete* (Latin for “rejoice”) Sunday, and today’s readings are filled with joy, hope and encouragement. In the 1st reading, Isaiah delivers a glorious message to the Israelites exiled in Assyria (722 BC) and makes them aware of a time when God our Father will return them to their homeland. This is conveyed in the description of barren lands blooming with “abundant flowers” and of physical infirmities being healed. God’s deliverance is so powerful that the lame will not only walk, but they will also “leap like a stag”; not only will the mute talk, they will sing. Isaiah’s prophecy culminates in the joyful image of the released Israelites entering their homeland singing with gladness.

2nd Reading:

James 5:7-10

Just like the 1st reading, the 2nd reading conveys a message of encouragement – this time to the early Christian community which was facing persecutions and longing for the Parousia (the second coming of Christ). The writer employs a powerful image

here to help the early Christians be aware of the need for patience – just as a farmer must wait patiently for the rains to make his produce grow, so too the early Christians need to wait for the coming of the Lord which is “at hand”. In addition, James draws their attention to the fact that the prophets before them also had to exercise patience when facing hardships.

Gospel:

Matthew 11:2-11

The Gospel shows Jesus helping people become more aware of the Word of God and how it is now being fulfilled. To John the Baptist’s question of whether Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus refers to the signs of how God our Father would save His people in Isaiah’s prophecies in the 1st reading, indicating that these now refer to Him as He performs His ministry. The signs include the blind regaining their sight, the lame walking and the deaf being able to hear. Speaking to the crowds about John, Jesus refers to Mal 3:1 and tells them that John is indeed the one that the verse refers to, the “messenger” who prepares the way for the Messiah.

REFLECTIONS: *Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

God our Father's promise to redeem the human race is a thread running throughout the three readings. The passages help us become aware of how God's promise of redemption evolves from the Old to the New Testament and is ultimately revealed in the person of Christ.

In the 1st reading, Isaiah gives a hopeful vision to the Israelites languishing in exile, telling them of how God our Father will deliver them from captivity. It will be such a momentous, miraculous event that the natural landscape itself would "rejoice and bloom", the sick will recover and God's people will re-enter their homeland in "everlasting joy".

In the Gospel, Jesus expands Isaiah's prophecy of being physically delivered from captivity to being spiritually saved in God's salvific plan. His reply to John the Baptist, who wanted to know if He was the promised Messiah, is telling. By performing the very signs that Isaiah spoke of – making the blind see, the lame walk and the deaf hear, Jesus, thus

indicates that His miracles are evidence of the further fulfilment of God's plan of salvation for the human race, which was already prophesied in the Old Testament.

The 2nd reading develops this understanding even further. The early Christians, who had accepted Christ and who were facing persecution, were now hoping to experience the Second Coming so they could enjoy their heavenly reward. For them, this would be the ultimate fulfilment of God our Father's salvific plan.

The three readings thus help the reader gain an increasing awareness of God our Father's Word and promise of salvation from the Old to the New Testament. The readings show that God's salvific plan hinted at in the Old Testament is accomplished by Jesus in His work on earth. This salvation will be ultimately fulfilled in the Second Coming of Christ when those who are saved are taken to live with Him forever.

SHARING QUESTIONS:

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond.

Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.

What struck you from the passages of scripture?

What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.

- How aware are you of the Word of God? How has this awareness led you to walk closer with the Lord?
- How is God's salvific plan working in your life?

Group Contextual Sharing Questions

You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.

For Small Christian Communities

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- The second reading advises Christians to avoid complaining about one another in community. How can we exercise greater patience with one another in our group?
- How can we resolve our differences through the Word of God?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- As ministers to others, how often do we offer them the Word of God?
- How can we deepen our spirituality as a ministry in order to bring hope to others?

For Family

Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- Which verses of scripture is most alive in your family as you relate with one another?
- As a family, how are you preparing for Christmas during this season of Advent?

Take home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

We can help to bring about the reign of God here and now by being loving and kind, and giving hope to those around us.

Doing your bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

Go through scripture and find the Words of God that would address the challenges that you had listed out last week. Go through the Gospel of Luke to find qualities of a disciple.

3rd Sunday of Advent

Aware of the Word

CLOSING PRAYER

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word that is anew among us. Help us to realise that even though salvation is already present to us this day, it is yet to be completely fulfilled. We hear Your call in today's readings to reflect Christian joy, hope, love and encouragement. Help us to do our part to prepare for the coming of Your kingdom by our words and deeds. Keep us close to You this Advent season as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Your Son. We make this prayer through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

4th Sunday of Advent

Obedient to the Word

OPENING PRAYER

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

God our Father, we give You thanks for this gathering and time of prayer, as we await in joy for the promised birth of Your Son. As we hear Your words in Scripture may we be open to follow your inspirations. Stir our souls that we may be moved towards faith and obey Your dictates. Just as Christ was conceived in Mary's womb through her obedience, let Him be present in our hearts through obedience. Amen.

READINGS: *The three readings and their accompanying commentaries will be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

1st Reading:

Isaiah 7:10-14

As the king of Jerusalem, Ahaz was in a bind. His enemies allied against him, and defeat seemed certain. God our Father did not abandon him and sent Isaiah to assure him. However, when Isaiah gave him the opportunity to ask God for a sign, Ahaz pretended to be modest. Despite saying he would not test the Lord; he did not have the confidence that God could save Jerusalem. The word of God was not to be frustrated by a human king. Isaiah went ahead to prophesy the birth of a boy named "Immanuel", which means "God is with us", as a sign of God's presence for His people.

2nd Reading:

Romans 1:1-7

St. Paul began his letter to the church in Rome by introducing himself. He identified himself as someone who dedicated his life to the good news, which was not something completely unknown, but promised by the prophets long ago. By announcing his calling to bring about faith in Jesus, he effectively invited his listeners to believe in Jesus and follow him. St. Paul also reminded the Romans about the connection

between Jesus and the House of David, to which Ahaz belonged. As seen earlier, Ahaz lacked faith in God our Father. In contrast, Jesus, has complete confidence in God our Father. By surrendering to His Father's will, Jesus was resurrected and declared as the Son of God to all.

Gospel:

Matthew 1:18-24

Joseph must have been disappointed to discover that the woman engaged to him was pregnant. He could have demanded an explanation. In fact, Deuteronomy 22:20-21 says that an engaged woman found not to be a virgin could be stoned to death. However, Joseph chose to divorce Mary quietly. This would not do for God our Father's plan if Mary and her baby had no male protector in a society where one needs a male adult to have any status at all. Therefore, an angel instructed Joseph in his dream to take Mary as his wife. This encounter must have been frightening for Joseph. However unlike Ahaz, he had faith, and he did exactly as he was told. Till this day we remember him as the earthly father of our Lord.

REFLECTIONS: *Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

The readings invite us to compare three different persons and how they responded to God. In the 1st reading, we are told that Jerusalem was in trouble. Moreover, Ahaz, the king, lacked faith in God the Father's power. Nevertheless, God did not abandon His people and gave a sign through Isaiah. In the Gospel, we hear how Joseph was put in a difficult situation as Mary whom he was engaged to, was pregnant with someone else's child. In the ancient world, one was obliged to hand down his property to all his sons, except those disowned. There was no DNA test to prove to the community who was a biological son, and therefore, deserving of a greater share. Thus, there were real consequences to take Mary as his wife. Yet, he obeyed the angel's command given to him when he was not even awake. He could have dismissed it as a mere dream. Finally, in the 2nd reading, we see St. Paul having a rocky path in following Jesus (Gal 1:11-24). However,

in the end, he chose to completely devote his life to the gospel.

As we reflect on these individuals, we can reflect on how we have responded to God. Have we chosen to have faith in Jesus and follow Him? Furthermore, each reading gives us different circumstances to think about. The 1st reading is about faith amidst danger. The Gospel is about faith and obedience in very uncertain times. The 2nd reading invites us to think about how our faith and identity might be connected.

The readings also encourage us to have faith and dispel our doubts in following Jesus. God our Father progressively revealed His plan to us, and the history of our salvation still continues even till today. The work of Jesus in obedience to God the Father has not ceased. Today, it continues in us, His body, the church.

SHARING QUESTIONS:

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond.

Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.

What struck you from the passages of scripture?

What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.

- How did I respond the last time I was put in a challenging situation? Did I use the Word of God in that situation?
- The readings invite me to always have faith in God. What are the obstacles I face in reading and memorizing scripture so that the Word of God can direct my life?

Group Contextual Sharing Questions

You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.

For Small Christian Communities

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- What are some challenges we are facing together as a community? Have we used the Word of God to resolve issues and challenges in our community?
- How are we devoted to Jesus if we do not know the Word of God?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- What are some challenges we are facing in being obedient to the Word in our ministry? Do the readings and their themes throw some light on these challenges?
- How can we bring about a deeper faith in others through the Word of God in this ministry?

For Family

Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- What are some challenges that we are facing together in this family? How do the readings and their themes speak about these challenges?
- How can we support one another to live the Word of God?

Take home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

God our Father's plan is revealed to us in stages, and we might not be able to know everything at any given moment.

Doing your bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

Write the challenges and corresponding scripture verses side by side as a list on a decent piece of card and decorate it if you can. Make five copies of this. Write the name of each person you had been praying for on each card.

4th Sunday of Advent

Obedient to the Word

CLOSING PRAYER

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

God our Father, we thank You for giving us Your Son, the Scriptures, and the presence of each one of us here and now. You are generous with Your gifts but we often forget Your gifts when we are going through difficult times. May we keep in our hearts and ponder the words spoken today when challenges come our way. May our faith be continually renewed when we recall Your love and the saving work of Your son. Make us ready for the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Christmas Reflection
(Year A)*

The Word Anew Amongst Us



CHRISTMAS REFLECTION (YEAR A)

The Word Anew Amongst Us

<i>Week</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Theme</i>
Christmas Nativity of the Lord	Isaiah 52:7-10 Hebrews 1:1-6 John 1:1-18	The Word was made flesh for us
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God	Numbers 6:22-27 Galatians 4:4-7 Luke 2:16-21	Living the Word
Epiphany of the Lord	Isaiah 60:1-6 Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6 Matthew 2:1-12	The Word for all



Christmas – Nativity of the Lord

The Word was made flesh for us

OPENING PRAYER

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

Oh God, You wonderfully created all people and yet more wonderfully restored the dignity of human nature through the incarnation of Your Son.

Grant that we may share as a community, the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

READINGS: *The three readings and their accompanying commentaries will be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

1st Reading:

Isaiah 52:7-10

What an exuberant euphony of joyful sounds in these verses! We hear three voices echoing after one another. First, the voice of the messenger bringing the much awaited good news that God our Father's peace and salvation shall reign. Israel's captivity will come to an end as our Father restores her freedom. Second, we hear the voices of the watchmen breaking out in song as they see God returning to Zion. No longer abandoned, God's children can now dwell in safety with Him. Finally, we hear the voice of Jerusalem, rejoicing even in her ruins as she experiences God's comfort and promised redemption.

2nd Reading:

Hebrews 1:1-6

The first four verses, also known as the exordium, is a thoughtfully crafted introduction to orientate readers to the rest of the arguments presented in Hebrews. In Greek, these four verses are actually a singular sentence littered with literary techniques of assonance and

alliterations. At the heart of this exordium is a celebratory confession of the superiority of Jesus Christ. He is God our Father's eternal Son, the heir of all life. He bears the perfect imprint of God. He has made perfect atonement for our sins. Thus, as God's Son, He stands far above prophets and angels.

Gospel:

John 1:1-18

This prologue can be divided in four parts. The first speaks of the Word before incarnation (vv 1-5). Jesus Christ is situated in the expanse of the cosmic sphere as light overcoming darkness. The second is a preview of John's testimony to the Word as he situates himself secondary to this light (vv 6-9, 15). The third bears the response of humanity to this Word (vv 10-13). To those who believe, Jesus Christ gives them the power to become God's children. The final part speaks of the Word becoming flesh (vv 14-18). Jesus Christ has come to live among us, so that through Him, we may truly know the heart of the Father.

REFLECTIONS: *Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

Today we get many different answers to the question: "Who is Jesus Christ?" Different people, religious groups and even the non-religious have their own explanations of who Jesus is, or who He is not.

For instance, some people see Jesus as an influential moral teacher or an enlightened guru. Some religions consider Jesus as one of the most respected prophets sent by God. Others believe Jesus as a son of God, is simply one of many avatars of a deity.

Most of these will not accept that Christ died for their sins and even less, that He rose from the dead. In the face of so many conflicting views, what is the truth? Where do we lean on for our beliefs about Christ? As Catholics, our faith rests upon the truth as revealed in the Word of God illuminated by the Church.

The readings of this week give us a composite picture of who Jesus is and why He came. In the first reading, we hear the voices of the messenger, the watchmen and Jerusalem speak in joyful anticipation about God Himself returning to comfort and save His people.

The second reading speaks about Jesus as

more than a prophet sent by God the Father. As the second person of the Trinity, Jesus is God and also the Son of God. He was there with the Father from the very beginning creating everything there is. Jesus, because He was never created, is infinitely superior to the created angels who themselves worship Him.

In the Gospel, the evangelist John speaks of Jesus as the pre-existing Eternal Word who 'was made Flesh and dwelt among us'. We call this mystery 'Incarnation' which means that God became a human being like us in all things except sin. God did this to free us from sin, to open the way for us to Heaven and have everlasting life with Him. In Jesus, God reached out to save us in a costly, humble, and incarnational way. This fulfils all the great hopes expressed in the very first reading and is the reason for our joy during Christmas!

Who is Jesus Christ to you? What do you believe? The question calls for a response. What you believe about Jesus Christ will determine not just the life you now live, but also the life that is to come. The more we keep this truth in mind, the more we will be able to honour Christmas as it is truly.

SHARING QUESTIONS:

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond.

Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.

What struck you from the passages of scripture?

What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.

- What are you doing to celebrate Christmas?
- Have you put aside time to be with Jesus on Christmas day?

Group Contextual Sharing Questions

You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.

For Small Christian Communities

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- In what ways can we incarnate Christ in our relationships with one another in our Small Christian Community?
- Just as the three voices proclaim in joy of the Lord, how do we as a Small Christian Community proclaim the joy of His birth to others who have yet to receive it?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- In our service to others, do we do so in the humility of John the Baptist?
- Through Jesus, we can see how much God loves us. How do we as a ministry bring forth the love of Jesus this Christmas so that others may know God loves them?

For Family

Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- How meaningful was the celebration of Christmas today?
- Jesus came to show us how much God loves us. How can we as a family help someone who doesn't know Christmas to realise the wonder of this celebration?

Take home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

How convicted you are about Jesus Christ will determine the life you now live, and the life that is to come.

Doing your bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

Visit each one of the five or make an appointment to meet individually these five persons and give them the card. Invite them to see that the Lord does not leave them alone in life.

Christmas – Nativity of the Lord

The Word was made flesh for us

CLOSING PRAYER

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

Father, thank You for Your Word which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path and thank You Father, for our Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word made flesh, who has life in Himself and is the light of the world in whom is no darkness at all. You have called us to be lights in the world, reflecting the glory and light of Christ. May we be all that You would want us to be in Jesus' name, Amen.

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Living the Word

OPENING PRAYER

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

Eternal Father, with gratitude we commemorate this solemnity of the Virgin Mary and become deeply aware of Your desire to draw us to Yourself. Assist us to remember the awesome role she played in the mystery of salvation. May we imitate the way she said "yes" to Your divine plan, and how she lived Your Word and pondered on it in her heart. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

READINGS: *The three readings and their accompanying commentaries will be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

1st Reading: *Numbers 6:22-27*

The Book of Numbers tells parts of the story of the Hebrews' journey from Egypt to the Promised Land in the 13th century BC. However, this biblical book was written much later, after these people's descendants were taken as captives to Babylon in the 6th century BC. When they finally returned to their homeland, their priests wanted to restore a sense of the nation's glorious history. The recounting of the blessing entrusted by God our Father through Moses to Aaron and his sons (the priests of Israel) was one way.

A key phrase in the blessing, "May the Lord let His face shine upon you," appears to indicate a change in the Israelites' understanding of God our Father. Ancient Israel had believed that it was possible to see the face of God our Father, but that it was dangerous to do so. However, here God our Father tells the people to expect His face to "shine upon" them and to look "kindly" upon them. This appears to signal a gradually evolving belief in a God of love, a belief that would be fleshed out further in today's readings.

2nd Reading: *Galatians 4:4-7*

St. Paul's aim in this letter was to free the Christians in Galatia from their self-imposed obligation to keep the old laws of Moses, such as circumcision. Some felt they needed to do this in order to be saved. St. Paul argues that there should be no such requirement because Jesus, who was Himself "born under the law" had

"ransomed" all of them from slavery under the old laws.

St. Paul asserts that because the Son of God was "born of a woman" and entered the world as a fellow human being, all Christians now also share in this divine sonship, able to call God intimately as "Abba" (equivalent to "Daddy"). And if Christians share in this sonship, then they also are heirs of God's heavenly kingdom. Implicit in this reading is the significant role that Mary played in the Incarnation of Christ, of how He took His human flesh from a human being – Mary, whose solemnity we celebrate today.

Gospel: *Luke 2:16-21*

The Gospel reading provides us with two contrasting responses to divine revelation. The shepherds excitedly act upon the message they received from the angel, to go find Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem, and then "made known" to others what they had learnt about the child. They are thus the very first evangelists to tell the world about Christ.

On the other hand, Mary quietly "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart". Mary is thus seen as a person who meditates upon and lives the Word of God deeply. This probably enabled her to accept all the extraordinary circumstances surrounding her Son's birth to eventually becoming His disciple and helping to form the Church. By her faithfulness to God's plan and her intimate connection with Jesus' divine mission, she models for us the path of discipleship.

REFLECTIONS: *Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

What better way to start the year than with a blessing? In this case, the blessing given by God our Father to Aaron and the priests of Israel of how God will be gracious to them and grant them peace. This theme of God our Father blessing His people is one of two that runs through the three readings. The 1st reading shows God's great love for the Israelites who had suffered much in the course of their history. Aaron and his fellow priests are to invoke this blessing upon the Israelites and God will definitely "bless them".

This love is further developed in the Gospel where God our Father gives His Son to the world to save people from their sins. The 2nd reading expands our understanding of God's love further: we are His beloved children. The basic message goes like this: since Christ was born of a woman, and under human law, just like us, He is then our Brother. If Christ then calls God His Father, so can we, and if we are all children of the Father, then we are also coheirs of the Kingdom of God together with Christ.

The other theme running through the readings is the role of Mary in the history of salvation. Pope Francis, in his 2014 message for this solemnity, referred to the blessing in the 1st reading as pointing towards Mary's role.

"There is no more meaningful time than the beginning of a new year to hear these words of blessing," said Pope Francis. "The message of hope contained in this blessing was fully realised in a woman, Mary, who was destined to become the Mother of God, and it was fulfilled in her before all creatures."

Mary's obedience brought about the most wonderful miracle the world has ever known – God's incarnate love, Jesus, the Prince of Peace. The Church thus puts the feast of this solemnity on the first day of the New Year to emphasise the importance of Mary's role in God our Father's salvific plan. The Church also celebrates World Day of Peace on this day, acknowledging Mary's powerful role in interceding for peace in the world.

SHARING QUESTIONS:

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond.

Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.

What struck you from the passages of scripture?

What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.

- What does living the Word of God mean for you?
- How much difficulty would you have in obeying the Word of God?

Group Contextual Sharing Questions

You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.

For Small Christian Communities

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- How have we as a community lived the Word of God?
- How can our reflections and actions be based more in the Word of God?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- Just as the shepherds eagerly shared with others the message of the angel, how can we share joyfully the Word of God with the people we serve?

- What are the concrete steps we can take to achieve this?

For Family

Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- Just as Mary reflected deeply on the events in her life, how can we as a family also reflect deeply on the Word of God in our prayer and Bible sessions?
- Is there room for the Word of God in our family discussions and decision processes?

Take home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

We can help others realise how our Father sees them by treating them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Doing your bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

Invite a few non-believers to a meal at home or elsewhere this coming Sunday. Prepare to speak to them about the birth of Jesus Christ and that the Good News is meant for everyone. If you are unsure of yourself, invite some others who might be able to help you.

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Living the Word

CLOSING PRAYER

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. We pray that just as Mary pondered on Your Word in her life, may we also reflect deeply on Your Word anew amongst ours. Open our eyes to the numerous blessings You shower on us daily, especially the blessing of being Your children. Just like Mary, help us to say “yes” to Your plans for us. We thank You and bless You. Amen.

Epiphany of the Lord

The Word for all

OPENING PRAYER

Everyone will pray the opening prayer and sing an opening hymn to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to God's Word and one another.

Heavenly Father, with great joy we celebrate this season of Christmas. As Your Son, the Word-made-flesh, is revealed to discerning hearts, mould our hearts to experience Your abiding presence, especially in persons and places we least expect. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

READINGS: *The three readings and their accompanying commentaries will be read out loud, allowing some time for a silent reflection.*

Then the readings are explained by the leader or group facilitator using the given commentaries. Preparation is recommended for the leader or group facilitator to read and understand prior to the meeting.

1st Reading:

Isaiah 60:1-6

Does light choose its recipients?

Light rays shine in all directions on all things in their path. The light of Jerusalem, God's city, shines out in the darkness, which means that darkness is touched by the light and the darkness will be no more. Not only shining on Jerusalem, on God's chosen people, but on *all* God's children *everywhere*. God's light of love and God's heart is throbbing and full, flowing out to all in abundance. Only those who are living in the fear of scarcity and deprivation will want to restrict this light of love but not our God.

2nd Reading:

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

The mystery of grace entrusted to St. Paul, is also ours. To be entrusted with it we have to truly receive it. For grace to be grace, it is unmerited (not earned) and gratuitous (totally free). Some simply call 'grace' as God's friendship,

and we know we cannot force or earn a real friendship: it is a mystery and a total gift. St. Paul proclaims this bold statement that God's grace is for all God's children, and it includes pagans (non-Jews) as well. There will be no more distinction between God's chosen people and others because no one is *not chosen* by God to belong to Him.

Gospel:

Luke 2:16-21

So near and yet so far. The infant king of the Jews is so near King Herod, but he does not recognise His presence. In fact, he wants to destroy the child, out of fear and insecurity. The Magi instead who are far away, come to pay homage, present gifts and bow low before this child that is destined by God our Father to shepherd Israel. The Word-made-flesh is manifested to these pagans with discerning hearts. His destiny is revealed through these gifts: gold (kingship), frankincense (Godhead) and myrrh (martyrdom).

REFLECTIONS: *Someone reads this section, which is meant to deepen our reflection(s) on the readings of the week. Allow adequate time for reflection(s).*

We often express ourselves through words. God our Father expresses Himself through His Word (Logos), and His Word is made flesh in the person of Jesus, and today's great celebration is the Epiphany (manifestation of) who this Jesus is, at His birth to all the world.

God tries to reveal Himself to me, so to reveal who I am and how I am to live the fullest life possible. If I believe that God loves everyone but me, then I am undeserving, unworthy of God's love only because I make myself to be that

way. God's grace is unmerited and gratuitous. When I truly open my eyes and heart to embrace God's grace as it is, I will be wrapped by His all-embracing presence.

In a meritocratic society, it is hard to accept an unearned gift, but this is the reality of who our God is! God our Father is showing us through Jesus' birth and Epiphany, that He welcomes the lowly shepherds and the pagan Magi, and that everyone has a place in God's reign of love, God's new creation.

SHARING QUESTIONS:

This section is divided into Personal and Group Contextual sharings. The latter is meant to prompt sharings based on the specific context i.e., Small Christian Communities, Ministry or Family. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond.

Personal Reflection & Sharing Questions

Take time to reflect on the following, then share if you are in a group.

What struck you from the passages of scripture?

What stirs your heart? Remain with it for a while.

- What is currently the desire of your heart? Is it a spiritual desire?
- Can you truly experience and accept God's grace shining upon you and through you for others?

Group Contextual Sharing Questions

You may wish to reflect on one of the following questions according to your context.

For Small Christian Communities

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- Like the community of the Magi, how are we searching for God as a community?
- How is God expanding our community's hospitality to be as big as His light of love?

For Ministry

We talk about what struck us in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- What is the desire of my heart as I serve in this ministry?

- How do I live the Word of God with people who are different from me and who think different from me?

For Family

Let us as a family share about what stood out in the passages of scripture.

Let us share a bit about the scripture that we have just heard.

- God manifests/reveals His plans for us and also our charisms (God-given gifts), how do I accept them? And do I recognize those of my family members as well (especially in my children)?
- How can we increase our desire of God together as a family, growing in intimate relationship with our Lord and with one another day by day?

Take home

Discern how the Word of God is inviting us collectively or individually to respond through concrete action(s).

God's light of love is a free gift for all of God's children, and God's plan and gifts are revealed to us within this love.

Doing your bit

Your action to reach out or evangelise to another person to share the Good News of Jesus.

To those who have been invited to a meal, tell them about what you have prepared to say. After the time together, invite them to another social event so that the relationship you have with them may be deepened.

Epiphany of the Lord

The Word for all

CLOSING PRAYER

The session ends with a prayer being prayed by everyone in the group. Everyone will pray for each participant and then for the community.

Lord, we thank You for coming anew amongst us and for showing us afresh the purpose of Your coming, which is love.

Help us daily to embrace the beautiful mystery of Your grace and with it, shine Your light of love to all. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

APPENDIX

Advent / Christmas Activities

During Advent, Jesus' coming is emphasised:

- 1) His coming in the past - at Bethlehem, the first Christmas;
- 2) His coming in the present – in the Mass and Sacraments; and in grace as we go about our prayers and work during the day. He comes to us in our neighbours, who are the instruments of His will for us and He comes to our neighbours through us, when we live God our Father's life and make Christ present to those we meet; and
- 3) His coming in the future - the Parousia.

As a family, community or ministry, think of how you can prepare to receive Jesus - the wonderful "Gift" of our Father. To receive this gift and to discover the depth of this love the Father has for us, we need to live the Father's Word in our daily lives and to share it with others.

Here are some suggestions that you can do as a family, community or ministry:

- Choose a day when you can come together for a Day of Recollection (this can be done online also). Put aside all the frenzied activities of shopping and cooking for a day of praying, reflecting and sharing. You may want to go to the following websites for resources.
 - <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/advent>
 - <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Advent/>
- Decide together to do an 'Advent fast'. You can choose to 'fast' from talking by listening more. First of all, we can learn to listen to God our Father more during our prayer time and during our reading of the daily Scripture. Then, we listen to each other in the families, in the community, at the workplace and also in the neighbourhood around you. Discover the needs of others and bring them to prayer and ask God our Father to guide our actions to serve the needs of others.
- Decide together how you are to be 'gift' to others. You may want to do an outreach to the poor in your area. You can also consider doing home visits to the sick and homebound neighbours, the elderly who are staying on their own or the foreign workers. You can do this together with other NCCs around you or work with the ministries from your parish. Joy is greatly experienced when it is shared and given to others. Use the period of Advent to prepare for your outreach or visits. Do not forget to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and be His witnesses with your outreach activities.

PRAYING WITH THE ADVENT WREATH

The symbolism of the Advent wreath lies in the tension between light and darkness, waiting for the coming of the Messiah, the light of the world. The progressive lighting of the candles each week symbolises the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of His second coming to judge the living and the dead. As the candle is lit each week, light increases and darkness decreases as we are reminded that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world and has overcome darkness.

(4 weeks of Advent wreath prayers are adapted from Catholic Household Blessings and Prayer (NCCB, 1988))

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:

Leader: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Response: Who made heaven and earth.

Scripture is read

Isaiah 9:1-2

'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest, as they exult when dividing the spoils.'

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

After a time of silence, all join in prayers of intercessions and in the Lord's Prayer.

Then the leader invites:

Leader: Let us now pray for God's blessing upon us and this wreath.

All place their palms face-down over the Advent Wreath and the leader prays:

Leader: Lord our God, we praise You for Your Son, Jesus Christ: He is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, He is the wisdom that teaches and guides us, He is the Saviour of every nation.

Leader: Lord God, let Your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath. May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation. May He come quickly and not delay.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Response: Amen.

The first purple candle is then lighted.

Leader: Let us bless the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

The blessing may conclude with a verse from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel":

All: O come, desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of humankind;
bid every sad division cease and be thyself our Prince of peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

First and Second purple candles are lighted as the leaders says:

Leader: Blessed are You Lord God of all creation: in the darkness and in the light
Blessed are You as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour,
Jesus Christ.

Response: For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours now and forever.

Leader: Come, Lord Jesus!

Response: Come quickly!

Leader: Let us live soberly, justly, and devoutly in this world as we wait in joyful
hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Response: For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours now and forever.

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

First and Second purple candles and the pink candle are lighted as the leaders says:

Leader: Blessed are You Lord God of all creation: in the darkness and in the light
Blessed are You as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour,
Jesus Christ.

Response: For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.

Leader: Come, Lord Jesus!

Response: Come quickly!

Leader: Let us live soberly, justly, and devoutly in this world as we wait in joyful
hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Response: For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours now and forever.

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

First, Second and the Third purple candles and the pink candle are lighted as the leaders says:

Leader: Blessed are You Lord God of all creation: in the darkness and in the light
Blessed are You as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour,
Jesus Christ.

Response: For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours now and forever.

Leader: Come, Lord Jesus!

Response: Come quickly!

Leader: Let us live soberly, justly, and devoutly in this world as we wait in joyful
hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Response: For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours now and forever.

CHRISTMAS EVE OR CHRISTMAS DAY

Leader: We have come to the eve of our Christmas celebration, Jesus' birthday. (Or: Today, we celebrate Jesus' birthday.) We have spent a long time preparing for His coming. Let us listen to the words of the prophets who foretold His coming.

Reader 1: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined.

Reader 2: For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon His shoulders; and He is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Reader 3: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel.

Leader: Today, we celebrate the great fulfilment of all these promises. Scripture proclaims that "to You is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord." And so, we light all the candles of the Advent Wreath.

First, we light the candle for HOPE because Jesus is our hope.

(1st purple candle lighted)

Second, we light the candle for PEACE because Jesus is our hope and peace. *(2nd purple candle lighted)*

Third, we light the candle for JOY because Jesus brings joy.

(Pink candle lighted)

Fourth, we light the candle for LOVE because Jesus is love.

(3rd purple candle lighted)

Finally, we light the centre candle. This is the CHRIST candle. We light this candle to celebrate that Jesus is born. He has come into our lives forever. *(White candle lighted)*

Leader: Loving Father, we thank You for Your great gift of Jesus Christ, Your Son. God of love, Father of all, the darkness that covered the earth has given way to the bright dawn of Your Word made flesh. Make us a people of this light. Make us faithful to Your Word that we may bring your life to the waiting world. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Response: Amen.

The “O Antiphons” of Advent

The “O Antiphons” refer to the seven antiphons which are prayers that come from the Breviary’s Vespers during the Octave before Christmas Eve. They are magnificent theology that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming Christ as fulfilment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well. Their repeated use of the imperative ‘Come!’ signify the anticipation of the long awaited Divine Messiah.

Each Antiphon begins with “O” and addresses Jesus with a unique title, which comes from the prophecies of Isaiah:

- **December 17:** O Sapientia
(*O Wisdom*) Isaiah 11:2-3
- **December 18:** O Adonai
(*O Lord*) Isaiah 11:4-5
- **December 19:** O Radix Jesse
(*O Root Of Jesse*) Isaiah 11:1
- **December 20:** O Clavis David
(*O Key of David*) Isaiah 22:22
- **December 21:** O Oriens
(*O Dayspring*) Isaiah 9:2
- **December 22:** O Rex Gentium
(*O King of the nations*) Isaiah 9:7
- **December 23:** O Emmanuel
(*O With Us is God*) Isaiah 7:14

To pray the O Antiphons as they are prayed in the Divine Office, begin with the Antiphon, then pray the Magnificat, and then repeat the Antiphon.

December 17

O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love:
Come to teach us the path of knowledge!

December 18

O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:
Come to rescue us with Your mighty power!

December 19

O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all His people:
Come to save us without delay!

December 20

O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom:
Come and free the prisoners of darkness!

December 21

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:
Come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 22

O King of all nations and keystone of the Church:
Come and save man, whom You formed from the dust!

December 23

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:
Come to save us, Lord our God!

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what could we have done better?

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