**Advent 2023**
**A resource for parishes and small groups**

**Leader’s guidance**Thank you for considering facilitating an Advent reflection group in your parish. This resource invites parish participants to journey through the Advent time of preparation and anticipation, in solidarity with our sisters and brothers around the world.

Each week we will focus on one of four Advent themes – hope, love, joy and peace – and reflect on one of the Sunday readings.

**Getting ready**

Identify a suitable space and time and advertise your gathering. One of the best ways of promoting the Advent reflections will be through personal contact and invitation. You could also advertise on social media, perhaps by setting up an event page, and in Church newsletters.

If possible, ask in advance if you want anyone to read the scripture passages or prayers, so that they can prepare.

**On the day**This is not intended to be a prescriptive list but rather some suggestions. You will know your community best!

* Set up chairs in a circle so that everyone feels equally involved.
* Greet participants as they enter. Tea, coffee and biscuits on arrival are always appreciated and encourage people to chat informally.
* Ask individuals to introduce themselves to the group by saying their name. If people do not know each other well, you might invite them to share a little more as an ‘icebreaker’ such as what has brought them to the group or their favourite Advent/Christmas tradition.
* If you have a large group (more than 12) consider forming small groups to allow individuals more time to speak. If you do form small groups, you may like to gather everyone and let groups report briefly on their conversations.
* Encourage people to participate by acknowledging and valuing all contributions. Invite, but don’t pressure, quieter individuals to share.
* Introduce CAFOD as the international aid and development organisation of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. If possible, you may wish to show a short film explaining our work, such as [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7a0t0XUwkao&t=215s**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7a0t0XUwkao&t=215s)

**Week 1: Hope**

**Opening prayer**

As we light the first candle on our Advent wreath, may we be awake to the signs of God’s coming reign all around us. Lord, fill us with faith and courage, so we may proclaim that your hope is at hand. Amen.

*(Light the first candle in your Advent wreath.)*

**Scripture**

Jesus said to his disciples: “Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad; he has gone from home and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the gatekeeper to stay awake. So, stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all: Stay awake” (Mark 13:33-37)

**Reflection**

Mark writes his gospel for the early community of Christians in Rome at a time when Roman imperial forces have destroyed the Jewish temple and the followers of Jesus face violent persecution. It must have been hard to hold onto hope. Amid this suffering, Jesus assures them the “master of the house” will return. The Son of Man will come in power and glory to set all wrongs right.

Meanwhile, his message to them – and to us – is to not to be found complacent and sleeping but rather to “stay awake.”

The people of Afghanistan have endured years of conflict, political turmoil and poverty. Their situation has been made worse by the Taliban takeover, especially for women and girls. Now two thirds of the population require essential humanitarian assistance including 15.3 million children.

Yet, people still hold on to hope. A CAFOD partner who works with women and girls in Afghanistan, says:

“It has been a difficult and painful year for us all as Afghans. But it has not stopped us from surviving every day and fighting for the spark of light in the darkest days.”

As we enter this season of Advent, may we also “keep awake,” not losing hope in the face of the challenges the world faces, but ready to act together. Treasuring each other and our common home, may we stand ready at the door for the hour of our Master’s return.

**For discussion**

* On difficult days, what gives you hope? What signs of hope, near or far, have lately come to your attention?
* In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes: “Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile” (#55). When have you witnessed ‘bold’ hope?
* How might your hope for the future help you to work for justice now?

**Closing prayer**

We stay awake, watch and wait,
for we do not know the hour
or the day of your arrival.
**Come, Lord, bringer of hope.**

Create in us a desire
for a world transformed
to reflect your glory.
**Come, Lord, bringer of hope.**

Lead us in your ways,
as together we make a change,
to dispel the darkness of poverty.
**Come, Lord, bringer of hope.**

 **Week 2: Love**

**Opening prayer**

As we light the second candle on our Advent wreath, we rejoice in God’s love for us and our love for each other. Lord, help us to share your love.

*(Light the first and second candle on your Advent wreath.)*

**Scripture**

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:
Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;he will prepare your way.A voice cries in the wilderness:“Prepare a way for the Lord,make his paths straight.
and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said,
“Someone is following me, someone more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:1-8)

**Reflection**

The Gospel of Mark does not include a story of Jesus’ birth. Instead, it opens with a very different scene — the arresting figure of John the Baptist in the wilderness, announcing the kingdom and calling people to repentance.

In the wilderness, on the margins of society, John offers faithful witness to the ongoing work of God. He draws attention, not to himself, but to Christ; the one who is to come and whose sandal strap he feels he is unworthy to undo.

As we listen to these words of John, our mind may turn to a scene three years later. An upper room, where Christ kneels on a dusty floor and undoes the straps of his friends’ sandals to wash the dirt from their feet. In this act of gentle service, Jesus reveals to us the heart of God and shows us how to give our own lives in love.

**For discussion**

What makes you feel loved? How do you share love with others?

John the Baptist talks about “repentance”, which describes a change of mind and heart. What change of mind or heart could help you walk more in God’s way of love?

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes: “By its very nature, love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure that makes every periphery converge in a greater sense of mutual belonging. As Jesus told us: “You are all brothers” (Mt 23:8).” #95

What might this mean for us as individuals and as a community?

**Closing prayer**

We repent and are sorry
for the damage we have caused
to our earth and one another.
**Come, Lord, bearer of love.**

Guide us as we seek
to straighten the paths of injustice
and prepare a way for you.
**Come, Lord, bearer of love.**

Lead us in your ways,
as together we make a change
and reach out in love to others.
**Come, Lord, bearer of love.**

 **Week 3: Joy**

**Opening prayer**

As we light the third candle on our Advent wreath, we celebrate the good news of great joy for all people brought by the coming of Christ. Lord, help us share your joy.

*(Light the first, second and third candle on your Advent wreath.)*

**Scripture**

My soul glorifies the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour,
for he has looked on his servant in her nothingness,

henceforth all ages will call me blessed.

The Almighty works marvels for me.

Holy his name!
His mercy is from age to age

on those who fear him.

He fills the starving with good things,
sends the rich away empty.
He protects Israel, his servant,
remembering his mercy.

(Luke 1:46-50. 53-54)

**Reflection**

In this third week of Advent we light the pink candle on our Advent wreath. With Mary, we allow our spirit to rejoice in God our Saviour. Mary sings of a world that has been, is being and will yet be, turned upside down by God’s liberating justice and compassion. In the longest passage spoken by a woman in the New Testament, her great song of social justice is a hymn of hope for the poor, disenfranchised and marginalised.

These words were first spoken in Mary’s own troubled time of occupation and conflict, but they could have been written today. We too live in a world of violence and inequality, where too many people are cold, hungry and oppressed.

Rejoicing is radical. In the face of grief, suffering and loss we lift our voices to sing of God’s love, joy and justice. We proclaim Mary’s transformative vision of a world made new and celebrate that God is at work even now, among and through us, to move those promises from hope to fulfilment.

**For discussion**

* When has joy come to you in unexpected ways? How have you shared joy with others?
* What connections can you make between joy and justice?
* How can we sing Mary’s song of joy, even in difficult times?

**Closing prayer**

In times of despair,
we seek comfort in your presence.
We wait in hope for you.
**Come, Lord, source of joy.**

Move us to be good news in our world
and to stand alongside
our sisters and brothers in need.
**Come, Lord, source of joy.**

Lead us in your ways
as together we make a change
so all people may rejoice and be glad.
**Come, Lord, source of joy.**

**Week 4: Peace**

**There are 2 versions of the week 4 resource. The first is for those groups meeting during Advent and the second for groups who gather in the Christmas season.**

**Week 4: Peace (Advent)**

**Opening prayer**

As we light our candle today, we pray for our troubled world, so full of conflict. Lord, help us to be a people of peace.

*(Light the first, second, third and fourth candle on your Advent wreath.)*

**Scripture**

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, "Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you." She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, "Mary, do not be afraid, you have won God’s favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will have no end.” Mary said to the angel, "But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?" "The Holy Spirit will come upon you” the angel answered “and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy, and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God." “I am the handmaid of the Lord,” said Mary “let what you have said be done to me.” And the angel left her. (Luke 1:26-38)

**Reflection**

“Do not be afraid.” With these beautiful words the angel Gabriel greets Mary

In our war-torn world, awash with conflict and division, many people are afraid. We see the suffering caused by conflict in countries such as Ukraine, Syria, Sudan and Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

But today we can also hope for restoration and healing. Mary’s generous and courageous “yes” allows us to welcome her son Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

As we approach Christmas, let us pray that that we may commit to God’s vision of a just peace and seek to build a world where no one need be afraid of violence, oppression or poverty.

**For discussion**

When you picture peace, what images come to mind?

What steps can we take to make a just peace a reality?

Jesus is born amongst the oppressed and those in poverty. How does that impact our celebration of Christmas?

**Closing prayer**

We listen to your word
as it whispers in our hearts:
“Do not be afraid.”
**Come, Lord, prince of peace.**

Grant us the courage
to build peace in our homes,
our local community and our world.
**Come, Lord, prince of peace.**

Lead us in your ways,
as together we make a change
and share your peace with all.
**Come, Lord, prince of peace.**

**Week 4: Peace (Christmas)**

**Opening prayer**

As we light our candles today, we pray for our troubled world, so full of conflict. Lord, help us to be a people of peace as we celebrate your birth.

**Scripture**

In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified, but the angel said, “Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you good news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing:
    “Glory to God in the highest heaven
        and peace to men who enjoy his favour”

(Luke 2: 8-14)

**Reflection**

“Do not be afraid.” With these beautiful words the angel of the Lord greets the shepherds and the heavenly host sing of peace on earth.

In our war-torn world, awash with conflict and division, many people are afraid. We see the suffering caused by conflict in countries such as Ukraine, Syria, Sudan and Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

But today we can also hope for restoration and healing, for the baby lying in the manger is the Prince of Peace.

This Christmas let us pray that that we will commit to God’s vision of a just peace and seek to build a world where no on need be afraid of violence, oppression or poverty.

**For discussion**

When you picture peace, what images come to mind?

What steps can we take to make a just peace a reality?

Jesus is born amongst the oppressed and those in poverty. How does that impact our celebration of Christmas?

**Closing prayer**

We listen to your word
as it whispers in our hearts:
“Do not be afraid.”
**Welcome Lord, prince of peace.**

Grant us the courage
to build peace in our homes,
our local community and our world.
**Welcome Lord, prince of peace.**

Lead us in your ways,
as together we make a change
and share your peace with all.
**Welcome Lord, prince of peace.**

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