

ADVENT

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS - SESSION 1



PREPARE THE WAY

PARTICIPANT GUIDE



AUGUSTINE
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OPENING PRAYER



"You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour."

—Luke 12:40

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this special season in the Church in which we prepare our hearts for the fulfillment of your plan of salvation. Lord Jesus, we ask for the grace to examine our hearts, repent of our sins, and seek forgiveness from you in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Holy Spirit, help us to enter fully into this Advent season and draw us into deeper, prayerful communion with you and with one another.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.



DISCUSS

» James 4:4 states: "Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." In what ways does secularization make us an enemy of God?

» How does the tradition of the Advent wreath serve to prepare our hearts for Christmas?

- » In “O Holy Night,” the lyrics “long lay the world in sin and error pining” asserts that every one of us has a sin problem and we suffer with longing as a result. Coincidentally, Christmas is the time of year that people experience the highest incidence of depression, according to the National Institute of Health. In what ways might the “sin and error pining” be related to the higher incidence of depression?

- » What do the lyrics “till He appeared and the soul felt its worth” mean to you personally?

- » The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year...the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming” (CCC 524). In what ways will the second coming of Christ be different from the first?

- » One bumper sticker reads: “WARNING: In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned.” Another sticker reads: “In case of rapture...can I have your car?” If you had to choose one, which one would you put on your car?

- » A *presepio* is an elaborate, crowded Nativity scene within a village. Traditionally, they were often modeled after the local Italian villages in which they were constructed. The symbolism is that Jesus was born into the real world and lived among everyday people. A good *presepio* will require some effort to locate Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the scene. Why do you think the King of Kings and Lord of Lords entered human history in such a humble, obscure way?

- » On November 30, 2015, ABC aired the 50th anniversary of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. The President of the United States and the First Lady commemorated the event with a special message to the viewing audience saying that Linus and his friends teach us the true meaning of Christmas. And that true meaning is this: “Tiny trees just need a little love and on this holiday we celebrate peace on earth and good will to all.” But what did Linus actually say Christmas is all about?

- » In what ways is the observation of Advent a remedy to the secularization and commercialization of Christmas—how does it help us to not lose sight of the reason we celebrate?

COMMIT

The challenge this week is to commit to prayerfully reading Scripture every day.

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DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS - SESSION 2



TRUST IN GOD

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OPENING PRAYER

Read Luke 1:26–38. Then pray together the following...

THE ANGELUS

Leader: The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

Response: And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Leader: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Response: Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

L: Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R: Be it done unto me according to thy word.

L: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

R: Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

L: And the Word was made Flesh.

R: And dwelt among us.

L: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

R: Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

L: Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R: That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

L: Let us pray.

All: Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord,

Thy grace into our hearts,

that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ Thy Son

was made known by the message of an angel,

may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection.

Through the same Christ Our Lord.

Amen.



“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

—Luke 1:38



DISCUSS

» When is it hardest for you to trust? What are you missing out on in life because you don't trust?

» In what ways can someone's lack of trust in others impact their relationship with God?

» In the Incarnation, God bridged the gap between God and humanity. How is God saying "You can trust in Me" through the Incarnation?

» How would you answer the sponsor's question, and how do you think the answer to this question helped Jennifer?

- » In 1942, St. Teresa of Calcutta made a private, personal vow to God that changed her whole life. With incredible trust and with the permission of her spiritual director, she vowed to say “yes” every time God asked anything of her and never to refuse to do his will. This vow allowed her to go to the slums of India to serve the poor, sick, and dying with her whole heart, renewing her “yes” in the face of each person that she encountered. With her yes, she changed the world. In light of St. Teresa’s example, why is a yes to God so significant?

- » What stands out to you from this reading? How does this story help us see the big picture of trust and distrust in the history of salvation?

- » French author Jules Renard had a difficult and sad childhood. As an adult, he wrote: “I don’t know if God exists, but it would be better for His reputation if he didn’t.” What do you think he meant by this?

- » Consider this scenario: When being challenged to repent of a sinful habit, one of your friends says, “But this is a private sin! It’s not like murder or lying. I’m not hurting anyone else. It’s my life and as long as I am not bothering other people, it’s not a big deal.” What would you say in response to this?

» What connections do you see to the story of Annunciation?

» What do you think this beam of light symbolizes?

» Since his election to the papacy, Pope Francis has gotten attention for his special devotion to Our Lady, Undoer of Knots. Some non-believers accuse Catholics of relying too much on prayer and on Mary's help to undo the knots in our lives, saying that we should take responsibility for our problems ourselves. How is this a false perception of Mary's help in our lives?

» Imagine that your friend comes to you and says, "I think Mary is really beautiful and her story is wonderful, but I don't feel like I can relate to her life at all. She was sinless, and she raised the Son of God! I don't understand why the Church raises her up as a model disciple, because my life will never be like hers." How would you respond?

» In Luke's account of the Annunciation to Zechariah, why do you think that God silenced Zechariah when he didn't believe the words of the angel?



COMMIT

This week, our challenge is to commit to silence. Like we discussed in the example of Zechariah, we can't respond with a "yes" to God if we aren't listening to hear what He is saying. This week, spend 20 minutes in silent prayer each day. If you're already praying silently each day, add 20 additional minutes. This sounds like a lot of time, especially in the busy days and weeks approaching Christmas, but it is more important than ever to find the time to pray when we're busy. As St. Teresa of Calcutta once said, "If you're too busy to pray...you're too busy."

My plan for incorporating 20 minutes of silent prayer into each day:



CLOSING PRAYER

THANKSGIVING TO MARY

O Blessed Virgin Mary,
 who can worthily give you the just dues of praise and thanksgiving,
 you who by the wondrous assent of your will rescued a fallen world?
 What songs of praise can our weak human nature recite in your honor,
 since it is by your intervention alone that it has found the way to restoration?
 Accept, then, such poor thanks as we have to offer here,
 though they be unequal to your merit; and, receiving our vows,
 obtain by your prayers the remission of our offenses.

Carry our prayers within the sanctuary of the heavenly audience
 and bring forth the gift of our reconciliation.

Take our offering, grant us our requests,
 obtain pardon for what we fear, for you are the sole hope of sinners.

Holy Mary, help the miserable, strengthen the fainthearted,
 comfort the sorrowful, pray for your people, plead for the clergy,
 intercede for all women consecrated to God.

Be ever ready to assist us when we pray
 and bring back to us the answers to our prayers.

Make it your continual care to pray for the people of God,
 you who, blessed by God, merited to bear the Redeemer of the world
 who lives and reigns, world without end.

Amen.

—St. Augustine

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DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS - SESSION 3



WATCH AND PRAY

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CONNECT

LOOKING DEEPER

Manger Scene _____

Santa Claus _____

Presents _____

Crucifixion Scene _____

Star _____

Visiting extended family and in-laws _____

The Eucharist _____

Caves _____

Politics _____

Homelessness _____

“The Gloria” sung at Mass _____

Caesar Augustus _____



OPENING PRAYER



"His mother kept all these things in her heart"

—Luke 2:51

Heavenly Father, open our eyes to see your love in a new way
as we dive deeper into these familiar Christmas stories.
Reveal to us the goodness of the Father
who loves us so much that He sends us his Son,
and make us realize that we, too, are your beloved children.
Lord Jesus, come gently into our hearts
like You came into the heart of Mary, your Mother.
Help us to ponder this Christmas mystery in our hearts,
through her intercession.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill us with wonder and awe, with courage,
with peace and with joy as we ponder this story in a deeper way.
We ask for the intercession of Our Lady
to help us ponder these mysteries in our hearts, as we pray,
Hail Mary...



DISCUSS

- » What words or phrases can you pick out from this passage that connect Caesar Augustus to Jesus? How do you know, from this story, that Jesus is greater than the earthly emperor?

- » Why do you think it's tempting to rely on cultural solutions or political leaders to "fix" the world rather than relying on Christ?

- » Why do you think the virgin birth of Jesus Christ defines history?

- » What is the connection between Micah 5:2 and the infancy narratives in St. Luke's Gospel, and how does it illustrate that God is in control of the world's affairs?

- » Even though the enrollment of the people was intended to oppress them, God used the evil plans of the rulers of the age to bring about good: Christ the King was born in the royal City of David, fulfilling the hopes of the Israelites, because this census forced his parents to go there. Looking at world affairs today, what are some ways that you can see God bringing about good in the middle of an evil situation?

- » It's easy to forget that the Holy Family was likely uncomfortable, needy, and frightened on the night of Jesus's birth. Why do you think God allowed the Holy Family to experience the poverty of the Nativity?

- » How does the voluntary, temporary homelessness of these young Jesuits help them to understand why God allowed the homelessness of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem?

- » Considering all this, why is it fitting that Christ humbly chose the manger and the Cross instead of earthly glory?

- » In what ways is receiving the Eucharist the same as receiving the Infant Jesus into your arms? In what ways is receiving the Eucharist an even greater privilege?

- » Drawing from St. Francis's example on this holy night, how can singing the Gloria help us recall and rejoice in the beauty of the Incarnation during Mass?

- » In the story of the shepherds, we see how God breaks into the everyday lives of the humble and lowly and reveals to them an incredible truth: that God was with them. When was one time in your life where God showed you how He was present in a time of weakness or trial?

- » How did Mary's quiet suffering as she traveled to Bethlehem become a token of love to Jesus, like Mother Teresa talked about? What is one situation in your life where you can choose not to complain or seek attention, but instead, give your suffering to God out of love?



COMMIT

What is one concrete action, based on your take-away from tonight and on our spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S., that you can implement for the remainder of Advent?

Here are some examples of ways that you can commit to watch and pray for the remainder of Advent:

Holy Hour: Add 10 minutes of silent time to your daily prayer to watch and listen for Christ.

Accountability: Get lunch with someone you look up to and share one area where you're struggling in the spiritual life.

Bible: Memorize one verse from Luke's infancy narratives.

Invest: Call your parish and see if there's a way that you and your family can volunteer a little extra during the busy Advent season.

Tell: Tell a family member about one of the new insights you had from our study today on the Christmas story from Luke's Gospel.

Sacraments: Stop by a Catholic Church to visit Jesus in the Eucharist for a few minutes next time you're out running errands.



CLOSING PRAYER

The Magnificat

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”*

—Luke 1:46–55

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DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS - SESSION 4



THE GIFT

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“The liturgy of Advent...helps us to understand the fullness of the value and meaning of the mystery of Christmas. It is not just about commemorating the historical event, which occurred some 2,000 years ago in a little village of Judea. Instead, we must understand that our whole life should be an ‘advent,’ in vigilant expectation of Christ’s final coming. To prepare our hearts to welcome the Lord who, as we say in the Creed, will come one day to judge the living and the dead, we must learn to recognize his presence in the events of daily life. Advent is then a period of intense training that directs us decisively to the One who has already come, who will come and who continuously comes.”

—Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience on December 18, 2002



OPENING PRAYER



“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”

—Matthew 2:10-11

Heavenly Father, we come to you today
 asking for your forgiveness and mercy.
 We are sorry for the times we have not paid attention
 to your movements in our daily lives.
 We ask you, by the workings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts,
 to help us recognize your Presence in every moment and every detail,
 so that this Advent may truly be a time of excitement and preparation
 for the coming of your Son at Christmas.
 We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
 Amen.



DISCUSS

- » Imagine that your friend announces to you that she will not be giving or accepting gifts this Christmas because she feels gift-giving distracts from the true meaning of Christmas. How would you respond?

- » In this segment, Dr. Gray taught us some of the historical and biblical context that enlightened the story of the Magi. How does learning more about the stories of Scripture help us to love God more deeply?

- » What are ways we can remain faithful to our Catholic Faith in the face of opposition?

- » Why did O. Henry call his short story "The Gift of the Magi"?

- » Consider this situation: A college student tells her concerned mother that she believes reading her horoscope every day is simply following the tradition of the Magi. What is problematic with this viewpoint?

- » What does this quote mean, especially in light of Christmas? “Man...cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self” (*Gaudium et Spes 24*).

- » In much of the world, Advent coincides with the beginning of winter. How can the winter help us to understand the Church’s purpose for the liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas?

- » The Church celebrates the arrival of the Magi during the feast of the Epiphany. The word epiphany can be defined as “an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure.” What does the Feast of the Epiphany reveal and illuminate?

- » How does Advent prepare us for the end of our earthly lives?



COMMIT

This week, make commitments based on the ways that Dr. Gray challenged everyone at the end of the session.

- What is the gift our group is going to give?
- What is the gift you are going to give to Christ this season?



TIPS FOR THE WEEK

Here are some suggestions for how you can give yourself as a gift this Advent:

- *Offer prayers and sufferings for a certain charity or for a special intention.*
- *Engage your reason and learn something new this Advent. Choose one learning source, like a passage from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a book or movie on formed.org, or the writings of your favorite saint, and then journal about what you learned.*
- *Make it your goal to reference the name of Jesus at least once in each of your conversations about Christmas.*
- *Think about the ways that your external preparations, even gift-giving, decorations, family gatherings, or meal preparations, reflect the way you're preparing your heart for Christ's coming.*
- *Call your parish and volunteer your time and talents to get the church ready for the Christmas liturgies.*