



LITURGICAL PREPARATION SESSION ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2021

PRAYER

"Lord, you give me this Advent season,
As a road to prepare.

This road is in my innermost heart,
The place where I am completely known
To only You, my God and Creator.

Help me to level this road for You,
To bridge over the ravines of my fears,
Of my shortcomings and failures.

Give me the simplicity of the heart of a child,
To reduce to their true measure
All the things that seem to be impossible mountains."

MESSAGE OF WELCOME

On behalf of Liturgy Services and of myself personally, let me extend a very warm welcome to you and offer our thanks for your positive response to this annual liturgical event.

REVEALING SELECTED THEMES

Note: Selection and reasoning

"If the diocesan liturgical council had been installed, it would have deliberated on the selection of the theme(s), with priority given to listening to the people in the field."

Liturgy Services were inspired by the proposals that *Vie liturgique* presented:

- In Jesus, Greater Hope - for Advent
- In Jesus, Light today - for the Mystery of Christmas.

-Reactions: "Why did you choose these themes? Were there not other very interesting ones as well?"

- The selection process was carried out with thorough examination of the current context

"Since March 2020, our lives have been turned completely upside down. We can no longer easily do so many things that were normal for us. We cannot shake one another's hands!

The medical world is overwhelmed by a foe that continues to impose restrictions on our lives as though we were dwelling in foreign territory. We cannot share the suffering of loved ones or see our departed to their final resting places. And we must participate in Communion virtually instead of taking part in person."

-So what should we do?

Remember that we are encouraged to hope against hope, looking differently at the current situation and trusting that God has not yet spoken his final word. This is the attitude we refer to with the word "Hope."

Charles Péguy: "*Hope cannot be taken for granted, it doesn't occur spontaneously. To hope one must be happy. One must have received a great grace.*" *The grace of believing that hope is a Person. It is God giving us what He is.*"

-For us as Christians, hope has a name: Jesus.

"On the road to salvation, on the carnal road, on the uneven road to salvation, on the endless road, on the road between her two sisters, little Hope forges ahead." But other questions arise. Are the dark days of 2020 really behind us? Are the memories of the painful moments that we have lived through with such difficulty now dispelled, or do they haunt us still?

"Despite our great feats of science and technology, which must always be acknowledged, our lives are not the same any more. We are now living in fear and uncertainty. And yet, one firm conviction remains, one unshakeable belief: the Sun of our lives always returns. He will bring light into our days, as He already has. Some signs are already perceptible, even though we are still obliged to wear our masks. The vaccination has restored our hope."

SOME STRATEGIES IN APPROACHING THE THEMES

"How do we go about approaching the theme and by doing so help our communities benefit from it? This, if I am right, is the twofold question you are considering this evening."

- Using the songs (see suggestions in the slides)
- The symbolism of reconstruction: Build the Christmas crècheⁱ in stages over each Sunday in Advent, and invite members of the community to participate.
- Rely on straightforward visualsⁱⁱ





"A panel with a golden star on a navy blue background. Several smaller stars may be used instead. The blue background represents the night, the darkness that surrounds us.

Fortunately, the North Star of freedom for humanity is there, in the middle of the panel:

In Jesus, Greater Hope

At the bottom of the panel, from left: Mary, Joseph and Jesus. This image refers to a much more difficult life situation, inviting us to keep our eyes fixed on the Star and ourselves become stars that shine and spread light for others, giving them hope.

If possible, we may also indicate for each Sunday between now and Christmas an action inspired by the liturgical texts for each point of the star.

"

- Offer a commentary supported by the readings

"The readings at each liturgy usher us into an Advent frame of mind. They instil in us an attitude of active expectation, making us open to following the example of Him who is coming."

THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ADVENT

Before presenting a commentary that attempts to illustrate the selected theme, let's first ascertain that we share the same concept when we are talking about Advent.

- **The Meaning?**

Derived from the Latin "*Adventus*," meaning "*the Coming or the Appearance*," Advent is the season during which the faithful carry out their spiritual preparation in order to celebrate the Mystery of the Incarnation, that singular and decisive event for humanity. Through that action, God became one of us, partaking in the human condition in every sense except that of sin, so that He could make us divine.

- **The Significance?**

-The celebration of a threefold event: The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (Incarnation of the Word of God / the historical dimension), his coming into the hearts of people of all times (Present/ the missionary dimension) and his return at the end of time (Parousia / the eschatological dimension).

-The Portal: "The beginning of Advent marks the entry into a new liturgical year.

Beginning each year with this season of preparation for Christmas, the liturgical year concludes one year later with the feast of Christ King of the Universe. Advent is the portal to the liturgical year.

"During the liturgical year, the Church rereads and relives the great events of the story of salvation, with particular emphasis on the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. Christ's birth, death and resurrection. But the Advent liturgy focuses on those times in the Bible during which the Messiah was expected. It is an invitation to observe and to make ready our hearts for the coming of Christ. It is thus a time of expectation and of preparation.

During this liturgical season, we Christians live in the present with our eyes focused on the glorious return of our Lord and Saviour. "

- **How can we prepare for Advent?**

- Striving towards conversion: Remaining vigilant, transforming life.

"The Word of God calls each one of the faithful to conversion, to prepare their hearts. The other readings in the Mass have no other message than this: is none other than a continuous call to turn around, to engage in a true process of metanoia."

- Always doing better and doing more.

SELECTED TEXTS AND COMMENTARY

The metaphor of the journey.

"The liturgy of Advent invites us to set out on a journey that culminates in the Celebration of the event whereby the Lord became human in order to make the human divine. In this journey, every step taken is important, is worth its weight in gold. True as this is of every human experience, it is as much or even more so for the demanding journey of Advent.

And so, in the course of this presentation, I will take the time to examine every step and every gesture to be made. I will demonstrate by using a certain verb, and illustrate with a commentary on a text chosen from among the liturgical texts recommended for our meditation for each Sunday of Advent and Christmas."

"As mentioned earlier, Advent marks a fresh start, the beginning of a new liturgical year. Although nothing has yet happened, all cameras are already fixed on Christ. This reveals how central for the destiny of the human race is the event that is Jesus Christ. Since becoming one of us by his birth, He has inaugurated a new era."

- **Sunday 1: Hope and Watch**

"The texts that the liturgy proposes for our meditation during Advent invite us to nurture hope. This takes form in everyday life, allowing us to live in the free and confident expectation required by the newness of God."

Jeremiah 33:14-16

"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah." This is not the voice of the prophet Jeremiah. It is likely that of his disciple, his spiritual son.

While his contemporaries are tempted to despair, he reminds them of the words of other prophets from several centuries earlier. He tells them to

remember what the Lord had said through those prophets: Do not be afraid. Keep your faith. The promise will come true.

But what did one of them, Jeremiah, actually say? I quote: "I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David." What a beautiful promise of hope and life. For informed listeners trained in things biblical, this meant that a King, of the line of David, would be born to reign over Jerusalem. In Jeremiah's day, it was already difficult to believe in such a promise. Nothing had changed by his disciple's time.

In Jeremiah's day, King David was already dead, along with his dynasty. The "tree of Jesse" was almost entirely extinct. King Nebuchadnezzar had taken over the country. He had deposed the king of Israel, razed the city and stricken Samaria from the map. The inhabitants of Israel were expelled and driven by force to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's troops. Those who arrived in Babylon still alive after the long and harrowing forced march asked: What happened to the wonderful promises of Yahweh? Had God forgotten his people?

It was at this moment, counter to every expectation that Jeremiah's disciple appeared.

He proclaimed that the promise would be fulfilled. That promise was addressed to the houses of Israel and Judah: that is, the two kingdoms of Israel as if they were united, although already in Jeremiah's day, they had been divided into two distinct and hostile kingdoms.

In saying, "I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David," the disciple of Jeremiah gives us an understanding of what hope is: this capacity to dare announce the light even when all about is dark and gloomy. Pope Francis subscribes to this same point of view; he considers that hope is a light that overcomes darkness. It "makes us step into the darkness of an uncertain future in order to walk in the light. The virtue of hope is beautiful, it gives us great strength to go through life." And at this very uncertain moment in our history, with the word contagion on everyone's mind, and with the fear and anxiety that it provokes, Pope Francis says: "every human heart awaits this Good News. It is the contagion of hope." This God who comes, this God of

hope, is the Lord of justice. Righteousness comes from him. If we rely on ourselves to transform the world, our efforts may never succeed.

Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

The Lord who comes shows sinners the way. The word "way" as used in this psalm allows us to understand the context in which this was sung. We are in a penitential celebration. Sin is a wrong path. To sin is to take the wrong road. The penitents recognize that they have gone astray and beg the Lord to help them to go back to the right path. And what is the right path? It is the law of God. Keeping watch during Advent means to cling to the law of our Lord, the true path to happiness for believers.

- **Sundays 2-3: Journeying**

Advent presents the faithful with an itinerary of faith. Reading the liturgical texts for Advent, the believer is swept up into an existential journey:

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Lk 3:4). Such exhortations recur constantly in the texts of this liturgical season. These same texts direct our attention to "the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord" (Sacrosanctum Concilium 102), when one "will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory." (Lk 21, 27).

Luke 3, 1-18

In this attitude of expectation, a question arises from the depths of our hearts: "What should we do?" Advent is always a time for each of the faithful to answer the call and take a stand in all honesty before their own conscience and ask themselves without evasion: "What am I to become in my life?" In his study of the human being in his or her becoming,

Paul Ricoeur said that they can be considered as a potential for action that develops gradually throughout the stages of life. One becomes oneself through action. In doing, one realizes oneself and thus advances in the understanding of one's own life, working out what one 'wants,' examining what one is able to do and coming to terms with what opposes one (what is imposed on one). It is through this process that one humanizes oneself.

Beginning with the new pastoral year in September, we have been on the move, reaching out, called out towards the peripheries. Advent extends the

same invitation, by recounting when Jesus first reached out, even before his birth. Throughout his entire life, Jesus was on the move, constantly heading towards the frontiers. Preparing for Advent is accepting to be always on the move, passing through one beginning to the next.

The joy of the Good News is contagious. It is meant to be shared. Mary's Good News is no exception. Indeed, aware of the treasure that was within her, Mary made haste to share her joy with Elizabeth. However, the wondrous encounter is that of Jesus with his cousin John in Elizabeth's womb. Advent is the season when we are constantly encouraged to venture outside our structures, our rituals and our comfort zones in order to go share the treasure that is within us.

- **Sunday 4: Waiting**

During Advent, our inner gaze is on the celebration of the Nativity of the Lord and his return at the end of time. This expectation is the foundation of every Christian's life. It is in no way a question of passively waiting. Daily commitment in following Christ is the most tangible sign that the Kingdom is at hand, and the liturgy invites us to be vigilant and remain active.

Micah 5:1-4a

A reminder about the language used by Micah. The prophets regularly employ two types of language. On one hand, they give warnings, censuring those who go astray and forget the covenant and its commandments. These ones the prophets consider as the authors of their own misfortune. On the other hand, the prophets speak a language one would say of encouragement.

They support those who are at risk of becoming discouraged and encourage them to remain faithful. Everyday life teaches us that people do not take kindly easy to being rebuked, nor do they easily accept encouragement, especially when everything looks miserable. This Sunday's text from Micah is one of encouragement. It was likely written at a deeply troubled time, when the people had lost all hope, many believing God had delivered up his people to their enemies, concluding that the long-awaited perfect king would not appear.

Micah disagrees with this perception. He suggests that all will indeed come to pass. But when? The answer is enigmatic: "(...) when she who is in labour has brought forth"! The

Messiah will be born. This will occur, not by necessity, but by the certainty that God himself has promised it. The present time is but a moment in the long march of human history. We must learn and dare to wait.

- **Solemnity of the Nativity: Rejoicing**

As we deal with society's customary frenzy of consumption, the liturgy of Advent makes subtle and respectful appeals to our freedom. It encourages us to experience a time of joy: a joy that is sometimes sober and austere. "As you see, Lord, your people are preparing to celebrate the birth of your Son; fix our joy on the joy of such a great Mystery". This joy will become more intense at the Solemnity of the Nativity.

Isaiah 52:7-10

The prophet Isaiah exhorts us to do so with an excellent formula: "Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem." In order to understand his full meaning, let us situate this text in history. Jerusalem was devastated by Nebuchadnezzar's troops in 587 BC. After plundering and wreaking destruction and desecration on everything, they occupied the land. Farmers were held in place for the heavy task of feeding the occupying forces. Able-bodied men and women were banished to Babylon, where they remained for 50 years. This was a long time of tribulation and, in their despair, they were convinced they would never see their country again.

But here comes the prophet announcing their return. His first words are: "Comfort, O comfort my people." And, in this Sunday's passage, he again uses the same term. He says, "The Lord has comforted his people." For Isaiah, the Lord is already in action. The return to normal, to ideal circumstances, is at hand. To drive his point home, the prophet sees watchmen on the hills or the city ramparts, shouting for joy and heralding the return of the exiles. The city will be rebuilt. The ruins of Jerusalem have reason to rejoice and to sing in jubilation.

From atop the ramparts and the hills, the watchmen see the exiles returning. The Lord goes before them. He has redeemed them. He has set his people free and bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations who, along with the ends of the earth, have seen the salvation of the God of Israel.

Our task is to show God's love to all of humankind.

- **Feast of the Holy Family: Rejoicing**

1 Samuel 20-22; 24-28.

It is during the era known as the period of the judges, spanning the entry into the Promised Land, ca. 1200 BC, to the eve of the reign of King Saul, ca. 1040 BC. Jerusalem and its temple did not yet exist.

The Ark of the Covenant, having accompanied the people during the Exodus, was kept in a sanctuary at Shiloh, in the heart of the land of Israel, some 30 km north of present-day Jerusalem.

The sanctuary was guarded by a priest called Eli (not to be confused with the prophet of the same name from the 9th century BC), and had become the destination of a yearly pilgrimage. Nearby there lived a man, Elkanah, who had two wives. Hannah was his favourite, but she was barren; the other wife, Peninnah, was blessed with many children. She mocked her rival, suggesting that her barrenness was a curse.

The most trying time for Hannah was the annual pilgrimage; she was sad, while Peninnah was happy and fulfilled. Hannah murmured something that could not be heard. Only by watching the movement of her lips could it be understood: "Lord, give me a child. »

God heard Hannah's plea and answered her prayer. A few months later, Hannah had a son and called him Samuel: God has heard.

In her despair, Hannah had made a vow to her God. This Sunday's text deals with the fulfilment of that vow. As soon as the child was weaned, Hannah took him to Eli the priest. And here Samuel grew up.

Why has the liturgy chosen this text as we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family? What is the connection between the two children (Samuel and Jesus), the two mothers (Hannah and Mary) and the two fathers (Elkanah and Joseph)?

From her experience, Hannah learned that God hears. She had the same experience as people of faith, who know that God always hears them and hears their prayers. Hannah's hymn is uncannily similar to Mary's.

We are considering two miraculous births: one birth against expectation for Hannah and Mary's astonishing virgin birth. Both remind us that every child is a miracle, a heavenly gift. Life is given by God, but we pass it on. Let us learn from Mary and Hannah to offer up our bodies and all that we are to the Lord, so that we may contribute to his purpose of love.

- **Epiphany: Illuminating**

"Advent is a revelatory experience. The fact becomes clear when we think of the symbolic importance of light during this season. The Advent wreath candles are lit in order, each light recalling a separate stage in the history of salvation preceding the birth of Christ. These lights symbolize the prophecies that throughout history illuminated the people of God during their long night of awaiting the appearance of the Sun of Justice."

Isaiah 60:1-6

This passage contains many expressions of light: "shine... the glory of the Lord has risen... his glory will appear... your light... the brightness of your dawn... shall see and be radiant... But why are there so many expressions denoting light in this one short text? They are an indication that the atmosphere was sombre at the moment of writing. Conscious of this climate of gloom, Isaiah intercedes to revive the people's hopes.

It is now the period of 525-520 BC, 15 to 20 years after the return from Babylon. The captives have returned to the land of Israel. They had expected happiness to be awaiting them. The return, so long hoped for, was not equal to their expectations. Coming back home, they had assumed they would take up their former positions in the running of the country and reclaim their property. But, when we think about it, their exile had lasted 50 years, meaning that some of the captives had perished in Babylon. Those who returned to Jerusalem had to be either their children or their grandchildren. The homecoming was difficult and painful! How could they recover their property? Others had already taken possession of them.

As for those who had not been taken away, they had suffered the horrors of the occupation. But there were also foreigners who had settled in the country following the catastrophe caused by Nebuchadnezzar and his troops, and they had introduced heathen customs and foreign religions.

The major problem was the reconstruction of the Temple. In fact, with King Cyrus's authorization, those returning had restored the altar in Jerusalem and were resolved to rebuild the Temple. But now heretics (both foreigners and Jews) were wanting to become involved. The returning community had declined this proffered hand, so menacing for the faith, believing that the Temple of God could not be rebuilt by heretics who would then want to carry on other forms of worship. This refusal was not well received. Those who were returned from captivity blocked reconstruction. The hopes and dreams of rebuilding the Temple vanished.

To revive the spirits of those who were in despair, Isaiah foretold the future. He reminded them of their vocation as the chosen people, recalling that God counts on his people, Israel, to make his glory known to the whole world. As the new Israel, we are the sign He has chosen to proclaim his presence. To illuminate the world, this is our mission, our commitment to live in such a way that the light may transform the world within and all around us.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the following passage is from a hymn heard often during Advent:

Light for the world today,
You come to Earth, for here
A poor man hopes in You.
Reach even to the blindness in me:
Touch my eyes so they may see
With what love You looked for me.
How can I see whence springs the dawn
When I see not that night has fallen.

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

Websites to consult:

<https://www.cccb.ca/fr/evangelisation-catechese-et-education/ressources-video/cheminer-ensemble-durant-lavent/>

<https://liturgie.catholique.fr/annee-liturgique/de-lavent-au-temps-de-noel/lavent/4620-comment-fleurir-pendant-l-avent/>

[http://www.diocese-trois-rivieres.org/images/2021-presentation du theme - avent 2021 comp.pdf](http://www.diocese-trois-rivieres.org/images/2021-presentation_du_theme_-_avent_2021_comp.pdf)

Articles and books to read:

Raymond E. Brown, Lire l'Évangile au temps de l'Avent et de Noël, Cerf
Klemens Stock, SJ, La liturgie de la Parole de l'Année C (Luc) –

L'Avent (Rome, 2012)

Jean-Marc Moschetta, Le Dieu de l'espérance Réflexions théologiques pour
le temps de l'Avent.

<https://www.revue-christus.com/article/parler-de-l-espérance-aujourd-hui-670>

ⁱ Vie liturgique, numéro 452 du 7 novembre au 26 décembre 2021, Novalis, (Montréal) p.19

ⁱⁱ [http://www.diocese-trois-rivieres.org/images/2021-presentation du theme - avent 2021 comp.pdf](http://www.diocese-trois-rivieres.org/images/2021-presentation_du_theme_-_avent_2021_comp.pdf)