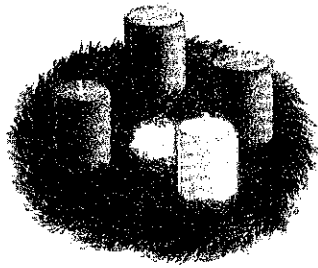


Introduction to Advent



Seasonal Background

Advent means “coming” or “arrival.” The season of Advent is a time of preparation. As a faith community, we spend four weeks preparing to celebrate Jesus’ birth but also his coming at the end of time. Secular celebrations of Christmas often happen throughout the month of December. Yet the season of Advent is not for wrapping gifts and baking cookies, school concerts, and holiday decorations. The great joy we experience in celebrating the Incarnation, God coming into the world, can only increase if we purposefully prepare our hearts with prayer and good works.

Advent is also far more than simply preparing to mark a two-thousand-year-old event. It is a time when we join our present-day longings with the longings of the Chosen People. The words of the Advent hymn, “O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here,” speak of our ancestors. Today, we also long for ransom, to be saved from the restraints that bind us to ways of living that are not the ways of children of light. We long to be saved as a community and a nation from oppression and violence. We long for peace in our homes and in the world.

The prophets, John the Baptist, and Mary are important figures in the season of Advent. Meditating on the ways they prepared for and awaited Jesus can help keep the focus on Advent’s purpose.

At every Mass, we proclaim that we are waiting for Jesus to come again. It is easy for this focus of Advent to be lost. Allow the words of the prophets, proclaimed during Advent, to become part of your Advent preparation to increase its richness.

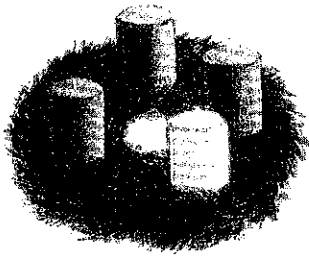
Celebrating the Season

The Church gives expression to the meaning of the Advent season in the liturgical environment. Be mindful of the Advent environment in your parish and refer to the colors, symbols, smells, rituals, and music. Remember that young children are sensitive. They are formed by and respond to sights, sounds, and smells. On the Sundays of Advent in most parishes, the candles of the Advent wreath are lit at the beginning of Mass and the congregation expresses its longing for God’s salvation and presence in prayer and song. The ritual of the lighting of the Advent wreath with the singing of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” forms children to wait, to anticipate, and to long for Emmanuel, “God with us.”

Violet is the color of Advent and was a color originally associated with royalty. Purple was an expensive dye and only a few could afford clothes of this color. Over time, the color violet became associated with penance, preparation, and sacrifice. During Advent, the priest wears violet vestments. Violet drapes and banners are used throughout the church. On the Third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, the priest may wear rose vestments, and the rose candle on the Advent wreath is lit.

Prayer can center on the Advent wreath: light the first candle and add a candle on each additional week. Candle colors are three violet and one rose colored, or four white. You might also consider using the Jesse Tree, which helps children to think about how God prepared for Jesus’ coming.

Children are anxious to sing Christmas songs, which are ubiquitous during December, but look to the Church’s tradition of Advent songs to teach children. They may find some new favorites!



First Sunday of Advent

Advent's Here: Awake!

Focus: To walk in the light of the Lord.

Catechist's Context

In Advent, our readings focus in a special way on preparing for Christ, who assures us that when he returns, it will be surprising. Because we do not know when he will come again, we prepare by performing acts of love for God and others at all times. In this way, we know we will be ready at the right time.

Focus on Church Teaching

We begin our new liturgical year with the season of Advent. This is a time of preparation, prayer, and service. As we look forward to Christmas, we remember the longings of those who waited for the Messiah to come and save them, which were fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. At the same time, we express our own longings, remembering Jesus' promise to return at the end of time (CCC, 524). As we wait, we try to live in the world as Jesus taught us, with the help of the Holy Spirit (CCC, 736).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. What liturgical season begins today? What is the liturgical color for the season? Use the "Introduction to Advent" on page 1 to help guide your discussion, talking about what the season means, how we celebrate it, and how it helps us to prepare our hearts and lives to welcome Christ our Lord.

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Psalm 85:8

Alleluia, alleluia.

Lord, show us your mercy and love,
and grant us your salvation.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 24:37-44

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man appears, things will be just as they were when Noah lived. People were eating, drinking, and getting married right up to the day that the flood came and Noah went into the big boat. They didn't know anything was happening until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man appears.

"Two men will be in the same field, but only one will be taken. The other will be left. Two women will be together grinding grain, but only one will be taken. The other will be left.

"So be on your guard! You don't know when your Lord will come. Homeowners never know when a thief is coming, and they are always on guard to keep one from breaking in. Always be ready! You don't know when the Son of Man will come."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Be Ready Always!

☉ What does it mean to be ready?

We get ready for many things in our lives, don't we? There are things we do to get ready to leave our homes for school or for church.

☉ What do we do when we get ready to leave the house?

We get dressed and comb our hair, put on our socks and shoes. If it is cold out, we might put on a sweater or coat. We gather up everything we will need to take with us to go out.

We get ready for mealtimes.

☉ What do we do to get ready to eat?

We wash our hands. Maybe we help our parents set the table with placemats, plates, cups, and utensils. We might set napkins at each place setting.

We get ready for bed.

☉ What do we do to get ready for bed?

We wash our face or take a bath. We brush our teeth and put on our pajamas. We wish our family good night and say our bedtime prayers.

When we are ready, we know that we have prepared for what comes next. We aren't rushing around because we took the time to get organized or make ourselves ready.

Today is the First Sunday of Advent. We begin our preparations for Christmas Time.

☉ Has anyone noticed a change in the decorations in church? What changes do you see?

☉ What color had the priest been wearing at Mass, and what color is he wearing now at Mass?

This Sunday we begin a new liturgical season, Advent, which means that everything we will be doing from now until Christmas is to prepare for Jesus to come. The color violet that we are using reminds us that we are in preparation for the next four Sundays. Just like we do various things that help us get ready to go out or to eat or to go to bed, we do certain things to prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming. We can prepare by spending time with him, in prayer or by going to Mass with our families. We can listen to the words of Jesus in the Bible. We can quiet our bodies and our voices in order to listen for Jesus in our hearts. We can tell Jesus "I love you" and "thank you" and anything else we want to say to him in prayer.

When we share with those less fortunate than us, we are also preparing our hearts for Jesus. We might not have money to give to those in need, but we can pray for them or do small acts of kindness. It doesn't take much to pay someone a compliment or to do small tasks at home like helping to set the table. When we use our bodies for loving actions like hugging and shaking hands instead of hitting or shoving, we prepare our hearts for Jesus.

Advent Garland Paper Chain

You will need purple and pink construction paper, scissors, and tape or glue sticks to lead this activity. You may opt to cut construction paper into strips in advance using a paper cutter, or to print guidelines on sheets for the children to cut along.

Have enough paper strips available for each child—either precut or ready to cut—that match the number of days during the Advent season. Seven of those strips should be pink to represent the third week of Advent, while the rest will be purple. Show the children how to make a loop and glue or tape it closed. Once you have the first loop, show them how to thread the next strip and close the loop in order to make a chain. The first fourteen loops should be purple, the next seven pink, and the remaining number of days of Advent should be purple. Explain that every day during Advent they should do one thing to prepare for Jesus. When they have done it, they can take off one chain link from their garland. The colors will match the colors they see in church and remind them to get ready to welcome Jesus. Once all the chain links are gone, Christmas will be here!

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Say the name "Emmanuel" to the children and invite them to repeat it back to you. Explain that *Emmanuel* means "God is with us." God promised the people of Israel that a son was coming, and that the son would be "God with us." This promised son is Jesus Christ. We wait and prepare for Jesus together just as the people of Israel waited and prepared. For this reason, we sing together "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel." We rejoice! Teach the children this refrain and sing it together.

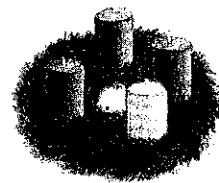
Advent Wreath Sensory Experience

You will need a fresh evergreen Advent wreath, candleholders, a lighter, and Advent candles to lead this activity. If possible, use beeswax candles, which have a pleasant, slightly sweet smell.

Help the children to enter into the sights, textures, and smells of the Advent wreath. Invite them to gather at the prayer table and explain that Advent wreaths are made of evergreen branches. They stay green all year, so they are always alive, always ready for sunlight and growth, even in cold, dark months. Remind them that Jesus is always alive in our hearts. Pass the wreath around for the children to touch and smell it. Ask them how the leaves feel and what the wreath smells like. Show the children the violet and rose Advent candles. Explain that purple and pink are colors we see in the sky just before a sunrise. When we see these colors, we know a new day is coming. The Church also uses these colors to help us remember that we are getting ready for something. Pass the candles around and invite the children to touch and smell them. Set up the Advent wreath and candles on the prayer table. Announce that we wait and get ready for the light of Christ to enter into the world and our hearts in a new way. Light the first Advent candle inside the wreath. Sing an Advent song or an Alleluia setting together.

Living the Liturgy at Home

First Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalms 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

Prayer

Lord God,
you promise to send us joy beyond
all telling.
Let your blessing come upon us as we
wait for your promised Light
to dispel the darkness of our minds
and hearts.
Send your peace into the world,
and may the fire of your love fill
our hearts
and make us one with you and with
each other.
We ask this through the Great Light,
Jesus Christ,
who enlightens and encourages
us always. Amen.

Conversation Questions

☉ The people in the time of Noah were so busy with the day-to-day aspects of their lives that they did not prepare for the coming flood. What in my life keeps me from preparing for Jesus?

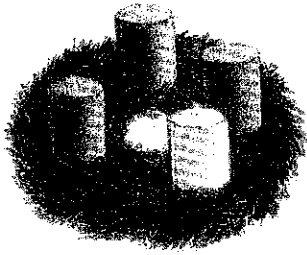
☉ How can we make this time a prayerful period of anticipation? Are there worldly activities that we can avoid to help prepare our hearts better for Christmas?

Faith in Action

We are not meant to wait idly for Jesus to come again. Jesus has told us what we need to do to prepare his way: help others, care for the poor and the sick, praise God, and spread the Good News. This week, help your child to make a calendar showing each day from now until Christmas. Hang the calendar in a prominent place in your home, and tell your child that each time he or she does something to prepare Jesus' way, you will put a sticker on the calendar. Challenge your child to see how many stickers he or she can accumulate between now and Christmas!

?? Did You Know?

... that today begins Year A of our Lectionary? The readings we use for Sunday Mass are organized as a three-year cycle. During Year A, most of our Gospel readings are taken from the Gospel according to Matthew. In Year B, we hear Mark's Gospel, the beginning of Jesus' life, and Luke's in Year C. The Gospel of John are found in all three years.



Second Sunday of Advent

Justice Shall Flourish

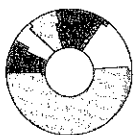
Focus: To produce the fruits of justice.

Catechist's Context

This Sunday's Gospel heralds the coming of God's reign and reminds us that we are not passive observers in the Kingdom. John the Baptist boldly tells us to repent, be baptized, and bear fruit. A sense of urgency drives the reading, proclaiming the immanence of the Messiah. There's a driving urgency in our culture's countdown of shopping days too, and young children feel that excitement. Through this Sunday's Gospel, they can see a glimpse of the real meaning of Christmas: Jesus brings love, peace, and justice to a world that has been longing for him.

Focus on Church Teaching

As followers of Jesus, we are called to create a world of justice for the poor and afflicted, where the strong do not prey on the weak, where harmony among all people will prevail. We are to spread the Gospel to the whole world by proclaiming God's Word, calling people to repentance, and acting on behalf of justice. We are called to serve the poor and all in need and to liberate the world from oppression and injustice (JM, 6; SRS, 42).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read

more about (see pages vi-viii for more information about the saints). How did this saint prepare the way of the Lord as John the Baptist did in today's Gospel? How might we turn back to God and prepare for the Kingdom of heaven?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Luke 3:4, 6

Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:

all people shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 3:1-9, 11

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

John the Baptist started preaching in the desert of Judea. He said, "Turn back to God! The kingdom of heaven will soon be here."

John was the one the prophet Isaiah was talking about, when he said, "In the desert someone is

shouting, 'Get ready for the Lord! Make a straight path for him.'"

John wore clothes made of camel's hair. He had a leather strap around his waist and ate grasshoppers and wild honey. From Jerusalem and all Judea and from the Jordan River Valley crowds of people went to John. They told how sorry they were for their sins, and he baptized them in the river.

Many Pharisees and Sadducees also came to be baptized. But John said to them: "You bunch of snakes! Who warned you to run from the coming judgment? Do something to show that you have really given up your sins. And don't start telling yourselves that you belong to Abraham's family. I tell you that God can turn these stones into children for Abraham.

"I baptize you with water so that you will give up your sins. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

An Announcement and an Invitation

© What is an announcement? Have you ever heard an announcement?

Announcements are important news or information that is said loudly and clearly so that everyone can hear. We might hear an announcement on the radio that school is closed because there is too much snow. You might hear one from the loudspeakers at a park. Sometimes the announcement might be about a special celebration. On the Fourth of July, you might hear an announcement about what time the fireworks will start. At Mass you will hear a reader letting us know any parish-related news.

In today's Gospel passage, John the Baptist was telling people something loudly and clearly.

© What was John the Baptist announcing?

It was something very important. He was telling people that the Kingdom of heaven was coming soon. And not just the Kingdom, but the Lord himself! Because of this upcoming event, John the Baptist was inviting people to be ready by saying sorry for their sins. Then he baptized them in the Jordan River.

© What is an invitation? Have you ever received or given out an invitation?

When we have a celebration, we often send out invitations. We ask others to be a part of our special celebration. We send out these invitations before the party happens so that they can get ready for the special celebration. They can pick out their special party clothes. Our guests can think of a gift they would like to bring. Being invited means your presence at the celebration would mean a lot.

© What was John the Baptist inviting people to do?

John invited people to get ready for the coming of the Kingdom of heaven. He told them that when the Lord arrived, he needed a path to travel on. John invited people to make the path fit for a king. He told them a path for the Lord should be straight and smooth, with nothing in the way. John the Baptist wasn't just making this announcement and inviting the people of his time. He is also inviting us. Remember we are still in Advent, when we are preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord. As part of our preparation, we can make a straight, smooth path for God. We can clear out all the obstacles, get rid of the choices we make that hurt other people, like using our hands for hitting or calling names. We can fill in all the holes in the path with acts of love, like saying loving words or using our hands for sharing. We can get the road of our hearts ready for Jesus.

Make a Straight Path

You will need painter's tape and chairs, pillows, and other child-friendly obstacles to lead this activity.

In an open space, use painter's tape to outline a path for children to travel. Set up obstacles in the path, such as chairs and piles of pillows. Be as creative as you can. Ensure the safety of the children as they attempt to travel the path.

After each has traveled through, ask what challenges they faced in traveling the path. Did they find ways around the obstacles? How did they overcome the blocks on the path?

Next, lay a new line of painter's tape on the floor. This time, make it straight with no obstacles. Invite the children to walk this path. Then compare the two paths together. Was it easier to walk the clear, straight path? Could you get to the end of the path faster? How was walking on this path different from the other one that was full of things that were in the way?

Explain how we prepare the way for God to come to us. When we choose to fight with our friends, disobey our parents, or don't share, those become "blocks" on our paths. This means that it won't be easy for God to come to us, just as it wasn't easy to travel on the path full of obstacles. Ask the children what actions and words will make the path clear.

Signs and Symbols

This week, bring in secular Christmas cards or magazine photos of "holiday" decorations. Discuss ways to look at the decorations around us through eyes of faith, seeing them as signs and symbols of Jesus. Lights that people put on their homes and in their windows welcome guests, and can remind us to welcome Jesus, the Light of the World. Christmas trees point upward to heaven and remind us that Jesus is the Son of God. Round wreaths of evergreen remind us that God's love is never-ending. Gifts remind us of the greatest gift of all—Jesus.

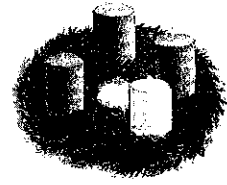
Tour the Church

To lead this activity, you will need to schedule a visit to the church in between Mass times or when the church is empty.

Before you leave for the tour, remind the children that Advent is a time of waiting and getting ready. Jesus asked us to be ready always and we get ready in a special way at Advent. In the church, point out the colors of violet and rose, along with evergreens, which are signs that we are getting ready for Christ to come. Point out different aspects of the church environment and explain how they differ from Ordinary Time or the other liturgical seasons.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Second Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 11:1–10

Psalm 72:1–2, 7–8, 12–13, 17

Romans 15:4–9

Matthew 3:1–12

Prayer

Lord God,
you promise to send us joy beyond
all telling.
Let your blessing come upon us as we
wait for your promised Light
to dispel the darkness of our minds
and hearts.
Send your peace into the world,
and may the fire of your love fill
our hearts
and make us one with you and with
each other.
We ask this through the Great Light,
Jesus Christ,
who enlightens and encourages
us always. Amen.

Conversation Questions

☉ John the Baptist stood out from others in his clothing, his words, and the way he lived. How do our actions reflect our belief in God?

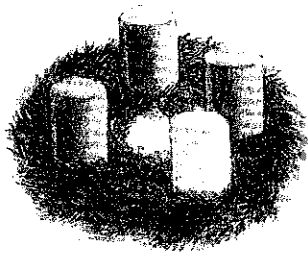
☉ John preached a message of turning back to God. Is the path that we are on headed toward God or something else? How can we reorient ourselves to God?

Faith in Action

John the Baptist helped others prepare for the Kingdom of God. Think of ways that your family can do that too. Find numerous agencies online through whom you can send cards to service men and women overseas. You may know an elderly neighbor who would enjoy having some help with Christmas shopping, wrapping, or decorating. Perhaps you have a neighbor who would appreciate transportation to church. Make sure there's a way for your child to contribute too. Afterward, discuss your experience and help your child understand that what we do for one another, we do for Jesus.

?? Did You Know?

... that the news that Mary receives about her cousin Elizabeth having a baby is part of the story of our salvation? That baby is John the Baptist; he is Jesus' cousin. John is considered a significant bridge between the prophets of the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament. He is considered the last prophet—the one who announces Jesus' coming before Jesus begins his public ministry.



Third Sunday of Advent

The Lord Comes to Save

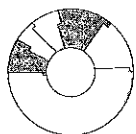
Focus: To see the signs and believe in the Messiah.

Catechist's Context

St. John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the one for whom they were waiting. Rather than reply with a yes or no, Jesus responded by pointing to the signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jesus brings life, goodness, justice, peace, joy, and abundance. We too can be signs of the Kingdom of God when we care for others and prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus when he comes again.

Focus on Church Teaching

The miracles that Jesus performs are not just favors for individuals. They are signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God that he proclaims in his words and teachings. They demonstrate that he is the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the one who has authority over sin and death, which oppress people in many ways. They are invitations to believe in him, to follow him, and to preach the good news to the poor and to act in his name (CCC, 547-49, 2443).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi-viii for more information

about the saints). We can recognize God's saving action in those who choose to be like Christ and continue his mission. How did this saint carry on Jesus' work?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Isaiah 61:1

Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord now upon me has sent me bring good news to the poor.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 11:2-11

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

John was in prison when he heard what Christ was doing. So John sent some of his followers to ask Jesus, "Are you the one we should be looking for? Or must we wait for someone else?"

Jesus answered, "Go and tell John what you have heard and seen. The blind are now able to see,

and the lame can walk. People with leprosy are being healed, and the deaf can hear. The dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing the good news. God will bless everyone who does not reject me because of what I do.”

As John’s followers were going away, Jesus spoke to the crowds about John:

“What sort of person did you go out into the desert to see? Was he like tall grass blown about by the wind?”

“What kind of man did you go out to see? Was he someone dressed in fine clothes? People who dress like that live in the king’s palace.

“What did you really go out to see? Was he a prophet? He certainly was. I tell you that he was more than a prophet. In the Scriptures God says about him, ‘I am sending my messenger ahead of you to get things ready for you.’

“I tell you that no one ever born on this earth is greater than John the Baptist. But whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Signs of the Kingdom

When we go outside, signs are everywhere. Signs tell us what or where something is or what to do.

☉ What kinds of signs have you seen?

We see signs for where and when it is safe to cross the street, where people with disabilities can park, and which direction to walk in. We see other traffic signs—each color tells us if we should stop, go, or slow down. We don’t even need to be able to read many of the signs—they are simple and easy to understand.

Last week we heard John the Baptist making a loud, bold announcement. He was telling everyone to get ready and make a straight path—because the Lord would soon be coming. In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist’s followers approached Jesus and wanted to know for sure whether he was that special person John was talking about: the Messiah. They had been waiting for one whom God would anoint, someone who would bring about the Kingdom of God. They thought Jesus might be the Messiah, but they wanted to be sure, so they asked Jesus, “Are you the one we should be looking for?”

☉ How did Jesus answer them?

Jesus didn’t tell John’s followers yes or no. Instead, Jesus pointed out that his actions speak louder than words. He asked them to pay attention to signs—wondrous signs of blind people who could now see, of those with diseases who were now healed, and of deaf people who could now hear. These are the miracles that he performed.

☉ Why wouldn’t Jesus have just given the followers a simple answer? Why didn’t he just say he was God’s Son?

It would probably have been easier if Jesus just said, “Yes, I am,” when John’s followers asked him if he was the Lord and left it at that. But Jesus wanted them to see this truth for themselves. That’s why Jesus told John’s followers about the amazing and wonderful things that had happened because of him. And, these signs told John’s followers that the Kingdom of God was here!

We can tell others about the Kingdom of God by showing them signs too. For example, when we do good works, like taking care of those who are ill, or when we share with those who are less fortunate, we show people the signs of God’s presence on earth. Our words and our actions will show others that Jesus wants all of us to be a part of the Kingdom of God.

Signs of God's Love

You will need construction paper and drawing materials to lead this activity.

Ask the children if they can remember any of the things that Jesus said were signs of God's presence in the Gospel (the blind can see, the lame can walk, the sick are cured, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised, the poor hear the Good News). See if anyone can remember some stories in which Jesus did some of these things.

Talk about some of the ways in which we are signs of God's loving presence in the world. You might highlight a few examples of ways in which the children have been signs of God's presence throughout the day (for example, when they shared crayons with one another or when they prayed to God).

Help the children make cards that show signs of God's presence. Ahead of time, arrange to take the cards to a hospital or homeless shelter or to send them to soldiers serving abroad. Tell the children where their cards will be going, and explain that they are being sent as signs of God's presence for people who are in need.

Scavenger Hunt

In today's Gospel, Jesus didn't tell John's followers who he was. Instead, he pointed to the signs that proved he could only be God's Son.

Signs give us information. Have the children go on a scavenger hunt for signs. Room numbers, restroom logos, directional arrows, and exit signs are common signs that give us information. If you go outside or have the children look out the window, point out gray skies or clouds, which can be signs of inclement weather. Look for other signs that indicate the

current season in nature. Ask the children to look for signs of Advent in the liturgical environment and colors.

End the activity by explaining that blessings are signs of God's love. When we are blessed, we know that God is good and that God is always active in our world and our lives. Give them a few examples of blessings. Blessings are everywhere, and once we heighten our awareness of them, we heighten our awareness of God himself.

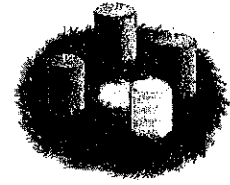
Rejoice!

You will need rhythm instruments to lead this activity.

The Third Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudete Sunday*. *Gaudete* means "rejoice!" We light the rose-colored candle on the Advent wreath, and the mood of the season becomes one of heightened expectation. By now, the children are likely to be familiar with the refrain of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," in which we sing "Rejoice." Use rhythm instruments, if you have them. Teach the children to play them loudly as they sing out the first "Rejoice!" and to play them lightly as they sing softly the second "Rejoice!" Then keep the instruments still as they sing the rest of the refrain. Repeat the refrain this way until everyone understands the rhythmic dynamics. Then, process around the room or through the building, proclaiming musically the hope that characterizes *Gaudete Sunday*.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Third Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

Psalm 146:6–7, 8–9, 9–10

James 5:7–10

Matthew 11:2–11

Prayer

Lord God,
you promise to send us joy beyond
all telling.
Let your blessing come upon us as we
wait for your promised Light
to dispel the darkness of our minds
and hearts.
Send your peace into the world,
and may the fire of your love fill
our hearts
and make us one with you and with
each other.
We ask this through the Great Light,
Jesus Christ,
who enlightens and encourages
us always. Amen.

Conversation Questions

☉ Jesus pointed to signs that John's followers should look for to know when the Kingdom of God would arrive. What blessings do we experience that are signs of the Kingdom of God?

☉ Jesus brought about restoration for the ill, the blind, and the poor. How can we work for restoration in our family? community? world?

Faith in Action

In this Sunday's reading, John sends his disciples to talk to Jesus because he is imprisoned. Jesus proclaims the coming of God's reign to John. This week, investigate what kind of prison ministry your parish or diocese is involved in. Ask someone who is involved to tell you about how the Church continues to proclaim God's reign to those in prison.

?? Did You Know?

. . . that the song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is based on the O Antiphons, which are prayed starting on December 17? Each antiphon, prayed before the Magnificat during evening prayer, uses an ancient biblical image for the Messiah, connecting us to the great tradition of those who await the coming of the Savior. O come, Emmanuel!



Fourth Sunday of Advent

God Is with Us

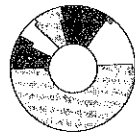
Focus: To trust like Joseph.

Catechist's Context

God promised to be with the people, and he fulfilled this promise through Jesus. God announced this to Joseph, who trusted God's words. Like his wife Mary, he responded by doing what God asked. Joseph took care of Mary and Jesus and helped to raise Jesus in a loving family. We can be like Joseph when we listen and respond to God's Word by caring for others.

Focus on Church Teaching

Mary became the Mother of Jesus because she placed the will of God above all human laws and customs. Joseph too obeyed God, accepting Mary and her child when no one would have expected him to. Mary is the model for all Christians as the first to believe in the Son of God and as a person of perfect faith. She is given the title "Mother of God" to express that Jesus is truly, fully, and inseparably both divine and human (NDC, 74; CCC, 484–86, 494).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). In what ways did this saint trust in God as Joseph did?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Luke 1:23

Alleluia, alleluia.

A virgin will give birth to a son;
his name will be Emmanuel: God is with us.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 1:18–24

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit.

Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to quietly call off the wedding.

While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

So God's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "A virgin will have a baby boy, and he will be called Immanuel," which means "God is with us."

After Joseph woke up, he and Mary were soon married, just as the Lord's angel had told him to do.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Trust in God's Promise

An angel appears again in this Gospel passage with a message.

☉ Do you know the story of how the angel told Mary that she was going to have a son named Jesus? (Briefly recount the story for the children, including how the angel told her not to be afraid and how she responded by trusting in God.)

In today's Gospel reading, the angel shares God's plan with Joseph. Joseph doesn't have the chance to speak or to ask questions, however, because the angel appears to him in a dream. Part of the angel's message is to remind Joseph of the promise God made to the people of Israel a long time ago. God promised that a young woman would have a very special child. Through this child, God would be with the people. Many people trusted that God would make the promise come true and they waited. The angel told Joseph in his dream that God's promise had come true. His fiancée Mary is that young woman who is going to have that special child. So the angel reassures Joseph that it is okay to get married. He even tells Joseph what to name the baby, which is Jesus, a name that means "God saves."

☉ What did Joseph do?

Joseph trusted God. He didn't hesitate to follow the angel's instruction.

☉ Whom do you trust? How do you show these people you trust them? [Answers might include parents, family members, friends, and teachers. We trust them by listening and obeying.]

☉ Do you trust God? How do we show God that we trust him?

We can be like Joseph. We can listen to God's message for us. We can hear the words of the Bible. We can listen to others we trust are bringing us God's message like the angel. Our parents, our catechists and teachers, and our pastors are just a few of the people who know about God's message for us and can help us listen. When we hear the words of God's message for us, we can trust that they are true and do what God asks us to do. We can use loving words to all those around us. We can obey our parents and do our chores when they ask. We can share with our brothers and sisters and our friends. When we do this, we can be like Joseph.

Joseph Was a Gentle Man

Joseph is an example to all of faith-filled, loving, and tender service to God. As a reminder of the powerful witness of this gentle man, teach the children this song, to the tune of "Old MacDonald."

*Joseph was a gentle man.
He said yes to God.
He welcomed God's own little lamb.
He said yes to God.
May we be like this holy man,
serving Jesus when we can.
Joseph was a gentle man.
He said yes to God.*

Thank-You Cards

You will need construction paper and coloring materials to lead this activity.

Jesus' Father was God. Joseph helped take care of Jesus by taking on the role of Jesus' father while he lived here on earth. The people who take care of us might not be our parents, but they still love us. Examples might include grandparents, aunts or uncles, teachers, babysitters, and older siblings. Ask volunteers to share stories about who helps take care of them. Be aware that there could be many different kinds of family units in your class.

Our parents and caretakers love us very much and make sure that we are safe and well cared for. Help the children to make cards or drawings for people in their lives who care for them, like Joseph cared for Jesus.

O Antiphons Window Ornament

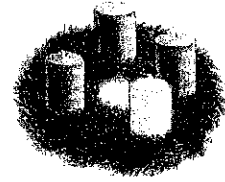
You will need paper plates, colored tissue paper, glue, and scissors to lead this activity.

During the fourth week of Advent, we pray using special names for Jesus in the Liturgy of the Hours. Emmanuel, the name the angel tells Joseph, is one of these special names for Jesus. We call these the O Antiphons because they call out Jesus' many names: O Wisdom, O Lord, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Dayspring, O King of the Nations, O God-with-us. The children might be familiar with these names from the traditional Advent hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

Show the children how to make an O out of the center of a paper plate by folding it in half and cutting out the center. They can decorate the edge of the plate by gluing small pieces of tissue paper. Ask them to hang their ornament in a window at home for light to shine through.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Fourth Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 7:10–14

Psalm 24:1–2, 3–4, 5–6

Romans 1:1–7

Matthew 1:18–24

Prayer

Lord God,
you promise to send us joy beyond
all telling.
Let your blessing come upon us as we
wait for your promised Light
to dispel the darkness of our minds
and hearts.
Send your peace into the world,
and may the fire of your love fill
our hearts
and make us one with you and with
each other.
We ask this through the Great Light,
Jesus Christ,
who enlightens and encourages
us always. Amen.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ God made a promise to Abraham, and Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. How do we trust in God's promises?
- ☉ How is God *Emmanuel*, "God with us," in our own lives? Where do we see God's presence among us?

Faith in Action

This week, in honor of St. Joseph, visit the Blessed Sacrament in church to ask God's special grace for the fathers in your life. If this option is not available to your family, spend time in prayer this week with your family praying for the fathers in your life. Ask Joseph, patron saint of fathers, to walk with these men as they care for their families and encourage them in their work of being examples of faith to their families.

?? Did You Know?

. . . that this story about Joseph is only found in the Gospel according to Matthew? Joseph is named as a son of David. Matthew's account of the Gospel was originally written for the Jewish community, who knew the Messiah would be a descendent of King David. This revealed to listeners that Joseph's dream was about the coming of the Messiah.

