

***ctkAlive!* Scripture Study**

First Sunday of Advent

2020—B Cycle



Advent Candle
courtesy of [Kyle](#) on [unsplash.com](#)

Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.

Exception: In the course of these reflections, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Prayer at Lighting Our 1st Advent Wreath Candle

Come, Lord Jesus.

Excite in me a *wonder* at the wisdom and power of Your Father . . . and mine.

Excite in me a *hunger* for peace: in the world, in our nation . . . and within myself.

Excite in me a *desire* to serve you and others with gladness and love.

Excite in me the kind of *joy, love, and peace* I hope to bring to the manger at Christmas.

I pray this in your name, Jesus Christ, whose advent I welcome.

Amen.

Adapted from: [Catholic Forum](#)

Introduction to the First Sunday of Advent

A *pregnancy theme* dominates the season of Advent. Mary's accepting, carrying, and nurturing Jesus energizes the spirit of these four weeks. How can we—both men and women—relate to the Advent mystery of inner silence and unseen growth? Our own poetic expressions give us a clue: "pregnant with anticipation," "expecting the approaching unknown," etc. To make sense of Advent, we must tap into that part of our daily lives where we "wait," "anticipate," "expect," "hope."

There was a first Christmas only because of Mary's patient but active pregnancy, her personal Advent season of waiting. There can be no *meaningful* Christmas for us without a conscious, reflective Advent preparation.

Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, states this spiritual truth quite bluntly in her *Bible Diary 2010*

reflection: "If we are too busy [*preoccupied, even in these covid times*] to make space for prayerful reflection every day, we are too busy to be *human*, too busy to be *good*, too busy to *grow*, too busy to be *peaceful*."

Our Catholic tradition invites to spend the next four weeks in conscious, reflective preparation for the coming of Christ, again.

— *What motivation / inspiration can I draw from Sr. Joan's "too busy" wakeup call?*

— *What can I do in the weeks ahead to avoid coming out of this Advent/Christmas season in worse spiritual shape than I am now (i.e., less peaceful, less human, less pleasant for others to be around)?*

Readings

Book of Isaiah 63: 16-17, 19; 64: 2-7 "Why have you let our heart become hard, so that we do not fear you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance."

Psalms 80: 2-3, 15-16, 18-19 "Turn again, O Yahweh of hosts, look down from heaven and see; care for this vine and protect the stock your hand has planted."

II Corinthians 1: 3-9 "You have been fully enriched in him, with words, as well as with knowledge."

Mark 13: 33-37 "Stay awake, for you don't know when the Lord of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, when the cock crows or before dawn."

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah (63: 16-17, 19; 64: 2-7)

"For you are our Father, whereas Abraham does not know us nor has Israel any knowledge of us. But you, O Yahweh, are our Father, from the beginning, you are our *redeemer*: this is your name! Why have you made us stray from your ways? Why have you let our heart become hard, so that we do not fear you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance. For too long we have become like those you do not rule, like those who do not bear your name.

"I have stretched out my hands all day to a rebellious people who chose the evil way, following their own wishes. These people provoked me to my face, continually, sacrificing in gardens, burning incense on bricks, living in tombs, and spending nights in dark places; a people who eat the flesh of swine and broth of abominable meat.

"They cry out, 'Stay away, do not come near, for I am too sacred to be touched.'

"Yahweh says, such people and their acts arouse my anger like fire that burns all day. Look, all this is written in my book, I will not keep silent till I have settled my account with them for their crimes and the crimes of their fathers, as well. Because

they burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed against me on the hills, I will pay them back in full.”

Personal Reflection

This passage is taken from the last of three distinct sections of The Book of Isaiah. It dates from the time just before the Babylonian exile and captivity (ca. 780 BC/BCE). The unknown author paints a bleak picture of the corrupted state of Israel but maintains faith that Yahweh will have the last word.

— *How does the prophet's portrayal of Yahweh compare with my own image of God? (Keep in mind the historical context of this passage.)*

— *How confident am I that our God is still in charge of me and the world? And that God will be with those who “keep the faith,” as the author declares?*

— *In our badly divided world and my own homeland, where do I find strength and hope to persevere as a Catholic Christian committed to living and modeling the Christ-life in my attitudes and behavior?*

Antiphon: Psalm 80 (2-3, 15-16, 18-19)

A plea for the return of God's favor

*Lord, make us turn to you;
let us see your face, and we shall be saved.*

Listen, O shepherd of Israel,
you, who lead Joseph like a flock;
you, who sit enthroned between the cherubim.
Shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might and come to save us.
*Lord, make us turn to you;
let us see your face, and we shall be saved.*

Turn again, O Yahweh of hosts,
look down from heaven and see;
care for this vine and protect
the stock your hand has planted.
*Lord, make us turn to you;
let us see your face, and we shall be saved.*

Lay your hand on your instrument,
on the son of man, whom you make strong for yourself.
Then, we will never turn away from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
*Lord, make us turn to you;
let us see your face, and we shall be saved.*

Personal Reflection

(If you have access to “Alexa” or “Hey, Google,” say “Play Psalm 80 by Sons of Korah.”)

“... care for this vine and protect the stock your hand has planted.”

— *How firm is my conviction that “Yahweh of hosts” has time and interest to nurture and care for me personally?*

“Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face, and we shall be saved.”

— *Who in my life reflects the “face” of our loving God, especially during my hard times?*

How does this person help me “stay positive” and persevere on the paths of faith and hope?

From the Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (1: 3-9)

“Receive grace, and peace from God, our Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

I give thanks constantly, to my God, for you, and for the grace of God given to you, in Christ Jesus. For you have been fully enriched in him, with words as well as knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you. You do not lack any spiritual gift and only await the glorious coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord. He will keep you steadfast to the end, and you will be without reproach on the day of the coming of our Lord Jesus. The faithful God will not fail you, after calling you to this fellowship with his Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord.”

Personal Reflection

“I give thanks, constantly to my God, for you, and for the grace of God given to you, in Christ Jesus.”

— *What occurred within me or around me during this Thanksgiving Week that inspired me to “give thanks to my God”?*

— *When in my life did I almost forget that God loves me and takes care of me? Did it occur in a time of great joy and success? Or, in a hard time, perhaps a personal illness/injury or family tragedy?*

Most Catholics are uncomfortable using the word, “fellowship.” We associate it with our Protestant brothers and sisters. In this passage, Paul uses that word, saying “... after calling you to this fellowship with his Son. . . .”

— *What did “fellowship” mean to St. Paul?*

— *What meaning does it have for me now?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Mark (13: 33-37)

“Be alert and watch, for you don’t know when the time will come. When a man goes abroad and leaves his home, he puts his servants in charge, giving to each one some

responsibility; and he orders the doorkeeper to stay awake. So, stay awake! For you don't know when the Lord of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, when the cock crows, or before dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him catch you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all: 'Stay awake!'"

Personal Reflection

Media outlets warn us daily to be on our guard—to live in a constant state of high alert. We watch out for deadly viruses, thugs, cyber-terrorists, threats from hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, and other potential dangers.

— *Is this week's gospel just one more "red alert" for me to ignore, especially if nothing bad has happened to me?*

— *What message might Jesus' "Watch!" advice carry that I need to listen to—today?*

— *Before looking out for potential external "disasters," how might I be unaware of (asleep to) internal, unhealed "disasters" within my own heart and home? How is Jesus calling me to "wake up," face these realities, and move forward in a positive direction?*

Shelter-in-Place

Americans and all peoples of the world find themselves in a holding pattern awaiting final approval and distribution of a corona virus vaccine. We congratulate and pray for the scientists, medical personnel, and government leaders who are making this happen.

On the downside, vaccine developers and processors warn us to expect a *gradual* distribution process based on certain criteria of need. This means some of us can expect a long, tough winter and continued sheltering orders as government agencies and the medical profession sort this out. Sadly, the effect on service businesses, jobs, and housing can only get worse, before it gets better.

— *Will I choose to be vaccinated or will I decline this opportunity? Why will I or won't I? "What would Jesus want me to do?"*

— *If I have not personally suffered financial setbacks during this time, what am I doing—or am willing to do—to help those hardest hit by inability to earn a living, pay rent, feed their families, etc. This applies especially to those of us fortunate ones among us, who watch our bank accounts grow as our living expenses shrink.*

To see what some Americans are doing to "make a difference," Watch a 15 min, video segment that aired Sunday, Nov. 22, 2020, on [CBS Sunday Morning](#).

Write about your feelings and lived experience of these issues during your journaling time (below).

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on this weekend's liturgical readings?

Suggested prompt:

— *After reflecting on this weekend's scriptures, what impresses me the most?*

We mustn't simply be grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We also need to "give back."

— *How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love, and "give back" during the week ahead?*

For Inspirational Viewing / Reading

Video:

Bishop Robert Barron on [The Advent Revolution](#) (11 min.)

Book:

[The Reed of God](#) by [Caryll Houselander](#)

First published over half a century ago, *The Reed of God* is an acclaimed spiritual classic awaiting rediscovery by a new generation of readers. Houselander's profound meditation depicts Mary's intimately human side as she ponders then accepts her role as a hollow (holy) reed waiting for God's music to play through her. The author shares her insightful understanding of Mary (1) on earth, (2) among us, and (3) as a confused but trusting teenager, whose holiness flowers with her eternal "Yes!"

(One of my personal all-time favorites—AJG)

Music:

[O Come, O Come, Emmanuel](#) (Vocal and Instrumental) from [La Sierra University](#), Riverside, CA

Preview of Next Session

2nd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 "Prepare the way of the Lord!"

Psalms 85: 9-14 "The Lord himself will give his benefits"

2 Peter 3: 8-14 "In the Lord's eyes, one day is as a thousand years."

Mark 1: 1-8 "One more powerful than I is to come after me."

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

As I Consider the World Situation

God of Comfort,
these times seem so uncertain, so scary.
The world seems darker today than in the past.
And I am less sure of myself,
But that may be a good thing.

Now, I turn to you with realization
that my life is not entirely in my control.
Let me remember those around the world
who are frightened at this moment.

Help the victims of covid-19, terrorism, and war.
Be with those who have lost nearly everything in the past year,
through natural or human-caused disasters.

Hold us all in your loving arms and let us be comforted
by the strength and peace you want so much to offer us
through the birth of your Son, Jesus.
I thank you, Lord, for all your many gifts.
Amen.

Source: [Creighton University](#)

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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