



2018 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL FROM THE
DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA AND FORMA



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA



THE NETWORK FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION

In 2017, Forma and The Diocese of Virginia began a partnership to provide support and resources to the wider church. Our goal is to bring together the creative talents of the Diocese of Virginia and the expertise of Forma's network of Christian Formation professionals through offerings like this Advent devotional.

In this second year of our Advent devotional for families and individuals, we are thrilled to have Aimee Bostwick, Forma Board President and Roger Hutchison, Forma Board member join with Paris Ball and Aisha Huertas from the staff of the Diocese of Virginia to write these reflections. Once again, you will find a brief overview of the scriptural themes for each week, ideas to try in your home to deepen your experience of Advent, and some short prayers and rituals to make your Advent experience complete.

This is merely a guide. Please do embrace the Advent season as a moment to pause, reflect, and push aside the secularization of Christmas. Advent was historically a penitential season. We certainly don't think that many people are going to return to a second Lent like season, but we are hopeful that you will find a few moments in each day to think about the coming of Jesus into your life. What does it mean to be waiting with anticipation for our Lord to come? What is holding you back from being with Christ as he is born? Now is the time to ask those questions.

We are weaving into the Advent Faith-at-Home resource some practices from The Way of Love: Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life. You can find the 2018 Advent Way of Love resources here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/journeying-way-love>. Journeying the Way of Love is a great resource for groups and individuals. We hope that you will utilize The Way of Love as much as possible as you use your Advent Faith at Home resource.

Please also consider purchasing, or creating, your own advent wreath for your home ritual. Ask your priest or lay minister in charge of Christian Formation for more information about what an Advent wreath is and where you can get one. There is nothing here that is complicated or unruly. This Advent devotional is designed for anyone to use at home, with friends, spouse, children, or anyone you want to deepen your faith with.

We invite you into a Holy Advent – Let's BEGIN!!



NOTE – How the Church Tells Time

Most of the world thinks of time as a line. We have what once was, we have now, and we have what will be. The Church does not think of time in this way. Advent is the beginning of the Church liturgical year, but in practice, we have no beginning or end. We have seasons: Advent (4 Sundays), Christmas (12 days) ending on Epiphany, Lent (6 Sundays), Easter (7 Sundays) ending on Pentecost, and the Sundays after Pentecost (also called Ordinary Time). The cycle repeats over and over again living through the life cycle of Christ and the Church, calling us into memorial and remembrance of what was, is, and will be.

About these devotions – The Advent offerings are formatted similarly to the weekly Faith-at-Home offerings sent out to Forma Members each week. Here, each week you will find a scripture to read, a thought to reflect on, and then several ways to respond according to the ages gathered. We encourage you to read the scripture with every age group, and the reflection with older children through adults before jumping into the response.

WE INVITE YOU INTO A HOLY ADVENT – LET'S BEGIN!!

Advent, Week 1 – Aimee Bostwick, Forma Board President

Theme: Waiting in Hope

Read: *Psalm 25*

*“Show me your ways O Lord
And teach me your paths.*

*Lead me in your truth and teach me for you are the God of my salvation,
In you I have trusted all the day long.*

Reflect:

One of my favorite hobbies is hiking. It gets me outdoors, disconnected from technology and more connected to my family and friends. There is something about hiking a new trail. There is the relief of being outdoors, but there is a bit of anxiety about where the trail will take me. What’s around the bend? How steep is it going to get? Will I be able to finish the trail if it gets really hard? Who will I encounter along the way? What if the trail isn’t well marked? Who will be my guide should I get lost?

Maybe you have experienced a “faith walk”. Everyone has a partner. One person is blindfolded and the other is designated as the guide. The person who is blindfolded is led along a path and relies on the guide to help them understand the way and to keep them safe. The guide is to make every effort to communicate with their partner to help them “see” where they are going and to be prepared for what they may encounter as they step blindly forward. As the blindfolded partner reaches out to take the guides hand, the first few steps will be crucial as trust between the two partners is built. With each step forward, trust is nurtured, and progress is made.

Such is our faith walk with God as we begin this season of Advent. As we put on our blindfolds and take our guide’s hand, the first few steps will be crucial. May we open ourselves to what it is we are to learn along this Advent path. May our faith increase, and God’s ways become clear. May we be led to unexpected places of peace and joy that leave us filled with hope.

Households with Adults and Children:

➤ **RESPOND:** There is much symbolism between walking and our relationship with God. Being in relationship with God is similar to the relationship we have with our children. Parents serve as guides for their children, especially when first steps are being taken. Ask: What are some of our favorite “walks” as a family? What made those walks so memorable? Parents, share with your children the memories of their first steps and reflect on how that is similar to a faith walk. Perhaps bring out family pictures of those moments. And/ Or Do a simple faith walk in your backyard or somewhere safe in your home. Process the experience afterwards.

Households with Adults and Youth (or older children):

➤ **RESPOND:** What have been some of the “first step” experiences that we have shared together as a family? (moving, starting a new school or job, traveling together) How did we help guide one another through those experiences?

Re-read Psalm 25 together and reflect on how that Psalm ties into your walking/ hiking memories. Plan a family hike to get out of the craziness of the season. Read Psalm 25 together before you begin. Once you have reached the “top” or have finished your hike, reflect on the experience in the perspective of being led by God.

Facilitate a “faith walk” between family members and process the experience afterwards.

you like to do to prepare? How do you stay patient when you are waiting for something to happen?

ound in other places.) Take a piece of paper with a magnifying glass drawn on it (see next page for an example) and



Households with Adults:

➤ **RESPOND:** Discuss the symbolism in experiencing life as a path with God as your guide and you as the one who is blindfolded. Reflect on times when you have distinctly known that you were being led by God. Have there been times when you didn't feel God's hand holding onto yours quite so strongly? How did you navigate your way back to the path and continue walking?

ADVENT WREATH PRACTICE: Light a small candle, LED candle, or the first candle of your Advent wreath. Gather with your loved ones as you are able and offer this simple prayer:

God, help us as we begin walking this path of Advent with one another. May we not forget that you are our companion along the way when things seem uncertain or we become afraid. Show us your path and teach us your ways so that we may prepare ourselves for the arrival of Christ into our lives.

Amen.

Way of Love Connection:

Go: Cross boundaries, listen deeply and live like Jesus

Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." – John 20:21

Send them into the world in witness to your love. – Book of Common Prayer, 306

As Jesus went to the highways and byways, he sends us beyond our circles and comfort, to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God with our lips and with our lives. We go to listen with humility and to join God in healing a hurting world. We go to become Beloved Community, a people reconciled in love with God and one another.

How can you practice Going this week, walking the path of hope to places that need to hear or feel the Good News of Christ' coming?



Advent, Week 2 – Paris Ball, Director of Christian Formation and Camps, The Diocese of Virginia

Theme: Messages and Messengers

Scripture: Malachi 3:1-4, Philippians 1:3-11, Luke 3:1-6, Canticle 16

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord!”

Reflect:

As we continue on our Advent journey, we encounter a number of people God sends to tell others of God’s hope for this world and God’s people. Many of these messengers are unlikely characters: springing up out of nowhere, it seems, to tell important things to those around them. Many of these holy messengers were not listened to completely or not believed: but they continued to tell their stories as long as they were able.

God’s people of wisdom and hope have been around since the beginning, sending holy messages to those who would listen and hear. This week, we will explore together where those messengers may be today and how we can share this news with others.

Households with Adults and Children:

► **RESPOND:** This week, we are talking and thinking about all the people who have had messages to share about God’s love. Sometimes, those messages are ignored or misunderstood.

Have you ever tried to tell someone something and they didn’t understand you? Or maybe was there a time when you wanted someone’s attention but they didn’t give it to you? How did that feel? Sometimes we all need a reminder to pay attention to the messengers in this world. Take an index card (or other small paper) and decorate a sign together that will help you pay attention. Maybe the card will say “SHHH, Listen!” or “Pay Attention!” or “God Loves The World!” – maybe the card will simply be an image. Find a place in your house where you will see it, maybe by the front door, and hang it together. Throughout the last weeks in Advent – you can have fun pointing to the sign you made together and reminding each other to listen to the messages of God’s love in this world!

Households with Adults and Youth

► **RESPOND:** In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he says that he “thanks God every time [he] remembers” them, because they care for him and are working to share the gospel so well in this world.

Who are the people in your life that you remember with joy every time you think of them? What things have they taught you about God, or about God’s love? (Note – both the adult and the youth should share the important people in their lives, mentors and messengers are for all of us!) Spend a few minutes remembering the important people who serve as messengers in your life with each other, and then offer a prayer of thanksgiving for those people in your lives.

Households with Adults

► **RESPOND:** John the Baptist plays an important role in the lives of many, including Jesus. He risked ridicule worse by spending much time in the wilderness, preaching and proclaiming about a messiah to come. While his words were heard by many, not all took him as seriously as he did. His message was one of contradiction and challenge, which was not easy for people to accept – then, or now.

John talked about every valley being filled, and the mountains being made low. He said that what is crooked will be made straight, and what is rough will be made smooth. He is preaching about a future where what we understand will be tipped upside down. Have you ever heard someone preach a message like this? Have you ever experienced a moment where it seemed like things were tipped upside down? Talk with each other about this. There were many things happening during the time that John was preaching and baptizing, but many did not notice the signs because they were preoccupied with their own lives. Do you allow space in your life to see and hear what may be happening in your own lives? Come up with a plan to set aside time for reflection and sharing that you can do throughout the rest of Advent.

ADVENT WREATH PRACTICE:

Light a small candle, LED Candle, or the Second Advent candle in your wreath. Gather with your loved ones as you are able and offer this simple prayer:

God, you send messengers to teach us about your dreams for our world. Please help us hear those messages, and give us courage to be a messenger for others.

Way of Love Connection:

BLESS: Share faith and unselfishly give and serve

“Freely you have received; freely give.” – Matthew 10:8

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People: We will, with God’s help. – Book of Common Prayer, 305

Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in his name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite others to the Way of Love.

How can you, like John and the other messengers, be a messenger of blessing this week? What selfless action could you take during what is potentially a very busy week in order to show the love of Christ to others?



Advent, Week 3 – Roger Hutchison, Forma Board Member

Theme: Do Not Worry

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Reflect:

We live in a season of worry. We worry about our health. We worry about our finances. We worry about our children. We worry about our parents. We worry about politics. We worry about violence of all kinds. We worry about the environment. We worry about our future.

We are a people of worry. For many, these worries aren't "what ifs", they are "when."

As we move into the third week of Advent, we are reminded that "the Lord is near." We are told to give thanks for everything – and do not worry about anything.

This does not mean that we are going to live a worry-free life. Nor does it mean that additional support will not be required. However, it does show that addressing challenges in our lives should be awash with prayer.

The Lord is near. Do not worry. Pray. Give thanks.

And the peace of God – the peace of the One who gives us breath – will guard our hearts and our minds. This God. Love incarnate. Is coming.

This involves trust, faith, and a willingness to give our all. How are you going to respond?



Households with Adults and Children:

➤ **RESPOND:** Worry is a natural human reaction to trouble and turmoil. Paul reminds us in the text above that just because the circumstances surrounding you are worrisome, do not lose hope because the "Lord is near."

What is something that you are worried about? How does worrying make you feel? Does worrying ever make you feel better? Create a family altar – a simple coffee table or stool will suffice. Make sure your children can reach it. Have children participate in the creating of this holy space by letting them choose the location and by encouraging them to place symbols of faith, love, and safety on or around the altar. It might include something they've built out of Legos or a lump of clay. It might be their baptismal candle or a shell that they found on the beach. Place a bowl in the center of the altar, and next to it, stack small slips of paper. Set a time each day or once a week to encourage each other to write or draw their worries and place it in the bowl – a symbol of giving your worries to God.

PRAYER: *Loving God, we know that you are near. Thank you for surrounding us with your presence, peace, and love. Thank you for replacing our worry with your peace. We rejoice and give thanks for all of the blessings in our lives. AMEN*



Households with Adults and Youth (or older children):

► **RESPOND:** Worry is a natural human reaction to trouble and turmoil. Paul reminds us in the text above that just because the circumstances surrounding you are worrisome, do not lose hope because the “Lord is near.” It is very easy to get stuck in our own heads. The same worry plays over and over and we often find ourselves hopeless with no way out. One way to “get out” of our heads is to reach out beyond ourselves in kindness and service to someone else. Encourage your teenager to help come up with some sort of outreach or mission project. One idea might be to collect blankets for a homeless shelter or if your teen responds to animals, animal hospitals and shelters are always looking for clean towels and blankets. Young people enjoy being with friends, so allow them to do this project, not just with their families, but with their friends.

*Breath Prayer:

Breathe in: “*Creator God*”

Breathe out: “*Your peace heals my heart.*”

*Choose your own words to pray silently in your heart – then pray it over and over – no matter the setting. This is a simple way to ease a worried mind. Focus on the words and focus on your breath.

IMPORTANT: Everyone worries. That is how we are wired. That being said, if your worry and anxiety is affecting your joy, passion, and day-to-day life, or if you are feeling hopelessness, you may need additional support. Please ask for help. This is nothing to be ashamed of. Talk to your priest, a therapist, or psychiatrist – there is help available.

Advent Wreath Practice:

Light a small candle, LED candle, or the third candle of your Advent wreath. Gather with your loved ones as you are able and offer this simple prayer:

God, we know that you are near. Thank you for surrounding us with your presence, peace, and love. Thank you for replacing our worry with your peace. We rejoice and give thanks for all of the blessings in our lives. AMEN

Way of Love Connection

TURN: Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus

As Jesus was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. – Mark 2:14

“Do you turn to Jesus Christ ...?” – Book of Common Prayer, 302

Like the disciples, we are called by Jesus to follow the Way of Love. With God’s help, we can turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice, and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom. In turning, we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ, falling in love again, again, and again.

This week, trying to practice turning to Christ each and every time you begin to be filled with fear or worry. Practice the breathe prayers in this weeks response, or find a quiet place to sit and meditate on these words: “When I am afraid I will trust in you.”



Advent, Week 4 – Aisha Huertas, Director of Mission, Outreach and Diversity

Theme: Promise

Scripture: *The Magnificat Luke 1:46-55*

He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy. – From the Magnificat

Reflect:

Everything we have done and reflected on these past weeks of advent has been based on God's promise of a savior.

Promises fill us with hope and expectation. They allow us to live in faith that beautiful things will come when we wait in God.

Yet, our human nature often gets in the way of waiting peacefully for the promise to be realized. Living in anxiety and focusing only on the ultimate promise, takes away from the discipline of waiting. It is in this discipline that we work on our trust and faith in God. It is in this discipline that we learn to be servants and agents of the Creator, as we live to see his promises fulfilled in our lives and the lives of others.

Have we waited peacefully in His promise the past few weeks or have we allowed anxiety and humanity to rob us of the opportunity to be in relationship with God?

Take this last week of Advent to refocus and be truly ready to receive His promise.

Households with Adults and Children:

► **RESPOND:** We have many names for God. If you go to a church that has a history of singing Handel's Messiah Chorus during Christmas (it was written for Easter...don't get us started), then you will hear many of the ways we refer to God and Jesus. Creator, redeemer, sustainer; Lord; God is Love; the true vine; the Good Shepherd; Wonderful; Counselor; Almighty King...the list goes on.

Today, your task is simple. What are the names you like for God (other than God, of course)? What are the names you find problematic? What metaphors or imagery do you love? Which ones do you wish to never hear again? Why? Write down your favorite and think about why you have descriptors for God that you don't like. Remember, God is beyond description, God is beyond gender, God is beyond and yet is still near to you.

Households with Adults and Youth (or older children):

► **RESPOND:** If someone we love and trust makes us a promise are we able to relax and believe or do we feel anxious? Why is that? Go outside and pick up a fall leaf in your favorite color (or, if you are unable to go outside, talk about what your favorite fall leaf would look like and draw one). Did you have any doubt that fall would arrive, leaves would turn color, and drop? Why not? Exchange the leaf with another family member as a reminder that God is true to his promises.

Share your response with the other person(s) in your household.

Households with Adults

► **RESPOND:** When have you seen God's promises come to realization in your life? Did you peacefully or anxiously wait for that promise? Why? Write down one or many of your realized promises from God. Place these in a box somewhere prominent in your household as a reminder that God is faithful. Share your response with the other person(s) in your household.



Advent Wreath Practice:

Light a small candle, LED candle, or the fourth candle of your Advent wreath. Gather with your loved ones as you are able and offer this simple prayer:

Dear God, thank you for your promise of a risen savior and eternal love. Let us live in peace and not anxiousness and draw us nearer to you, as we wait for all of your promises to be fulfilled in our lives and in the lives of others.

Way of Love Connection

REST: Receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – John 14:27

*Blessed are you, O Lord ... giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent.
– Book of Common Prayer, 113*

From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness - within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

In the next 24 hours, see if you can find a way to retreat and rest – even for 15 minutes – from all the hubbub. Ask God to give you a vision of the restoration and wholeness that is waiting for you in the love of Christ. Next, ask for guidance to be revealed in the New Year on how to remove those things that are blocking your restoration, and ask for courage to address them. Close your time of rest with a breath prayer of gratitude and hope.

Concluding Reflection:

You have been on a great journey. Last year, Advent 4 was Christmas Eve, and there was little for us to do except beg that you not jump into Christmas without pausing and at least giving Advent one more look, one more prayer. This year, you have one whole day. So, please, we know that you have much to do. Maybe you are traveling. Maybe you have a shopping list a mile long. Maybe your home is filled with friends and relatives. Our hope is that in taking your time this Advent you have come into Christmas ready to great Jesus into your life. Our hope is that you come into Christmas with peace, joy, and happiness.

Once again, remember how it felt to pause, breathe in God, and live in God's time. Carry these practices forward. Praying always works. God is always answering. Jesus is always coming to you.

Merry Christmas, carry your Christmas spirit all the way into Epiphany!

