Family of Four Parishes

Old St. Mary, Our Lady of Divine Providence, SS Peter & Paul, and Three Holy Women



Dear Friends,

I love Advent! A time to prepare my heart for our Lord, O come O come, Emmanuel. The word Emmanuel means, "God-with-us" That is truly good news! Our God is with us every step of the way. I have reflected on those words many times before, but this Advent, God-with-us gives me more comfort in an uncertain times in our history. Ten months ago, I would have never imagined we would face a worldwide pandemic that would change our lives so dramatically. But here we are, even as our daily lives have been disturbed, one thing has not changed: the love of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just like you, I am home a lot more than usual and I'm limited to where I go. Just like you, I'm unable to gather with my family, and I am filled with worry. I'm convinced of the need to spend time in prayer, more time designated for my God.

In my personal prayer space, I have an image of the Holy Family and have been reflecting on the special love between Joseph and Mary, the perfect models of discipleship. I ponder what was in their hearts and minds as they awaited the birth of Jesus. They show us how to live with hearts completely available to God, and when we are completely available to God, we are completely received by him. The Holy Family remained faithful, and God provided. Let's remain faithful.

You're invited to attend an at-home retreat! The following pages are filled with scripture, prayer, meditation, and activities.

Father, I humbly ask you to make this Advent my best ever. Help me to find you deep within. Teach me how to love with the freedom with which Mary and Joseph loved.

Advent Blessings,

At Home Retreat

When getting ready to have an at-home retreat, one still must act as if they are on a retreat. It's helpful to prepare yourself and your surroundings if you are able.

Prepare your Advent wreath. Place it on a table where you can see it during your quiet time of prayer. If you do not have a wreath, use what is ever available in your home. Be creative!

Bring other symbols of Advent/Christmas into your sacred space. (Christmas tree, lights, angels and a manger) Keep it simple.



Have a warm blanket available, in your favorite chair. And, a warm beverage.

Here are a few suggestions:

- 1) **Begin all prayers by asking for God's assistance.** The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans" (Rom 8:26-27).
- 2) **Silence external noises.** We need to silence the external noises, find a quiet place with little to no distractions, preferably a place of solitude where one can be alone with God. The best time to pray is early in the morning when our mind has just woken up and is not preoccupied with the business of the world like work, family life, etc. or in the evening before sleep.
- 3) Silence internal noises. I recommends reading a short passage from Scripture. Enclosed in this booklet are Advent prayers. Each day begin by focusing on your Advent wreath, read the prayer for that week (found on page 3). Taking part in repetitive vocal prayers, Be Still and know that I am God or Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved or saying the rosary. These prayers can be accompanied by deep breathing exercises to take "our concentration from the world and reorient our mind to be sensitive to our being and living in the present moment.
- 4) **Silence our heart and soul.** Using Scripture as a tool to listen with the ears of our hearts is one of the most powerful tools available. We are not silent for the sake of silence, but it is a means by which we can encounter and experience a real, personal and all loving God.
- 5) **Encounter God.** In the end, it is not the destiny of the process or the fruits of prayer or whether it was a productive time that matters. It is the fact that we spent time with God, it is about the encounter.

We need to pray with our whole being — the body, intellect, memory, imagination, emotions, heart and soul -— not just with

A Guide for praying Lectio Divina

Praying with scripture can help you to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit by stirring inside your heart and inviting you to hear God, who speaks through the words of the Bible.

For this, there is an ancient practice called "lectio divina". This means "divine reading". It is a method of reading and praying on scripture. It has had many forms in the Church's history. God will knock and wait. With "lectio" we open the door, and give God space in our hearts.

Preparing for the holy reading

Place. Find a quiet time and place to pray. You can pray alone, or have a group "lectio". Here is how you can pray alone.

Posture. Be relaxed and comfortable.

Select a passage. Normally you would select a theme and a passage from scripture related to it.

But since we are in the season on Advent, I would invite you to use the scripture provided in this booklet.

Begin: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

- Faith in God's presence: Lord, we truly believe that you are present among us, and we want to ask You to help us open our minds and hearts, to understand and to welcome your word into our lives.

—Body of prayer. Reading from the Bible

"Reading" is the first movement after the beginning acts of the "lectio". One begins by the slow and mindful reading of the passage from Scripture. Try to concentrate on the message. What is God telling me in this passage? As you read, be alert to any word or phrase that seems to "come forward" for you and highlight them.

- Moment of silence

This is the moment for personal meditation. After trying to understand the Bible's message, you think about how the reading applies to your own life. We pause to have time to reflect and ask, "God, what do you want to tell me in this?"

Behold, the Lord comes to save his people; blessed are those prepared to meet him.

Advent Family Prayer

God of Love.

Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us.

He is a sign of your love.

Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent,

As we wait and prepare for his coming.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior.

An Advent Prayer

Lord God, we adore you because you have come to us in the past. You have spoken to us in the Law of Israel.

You have challenged us in the words of the prophets.

You have shown us in Jesus what you are really like.

Lord God, we adore you because you still come to us now. You come to us through other people and their love and concern for us.

You come to us through men and women who need our help. You come to us as we worship you with your people.

Lord God, we adore you because you will come to us at the end. You will be with us at the hour of death.

You will still reign supreme when all human institutions fail. You will still be God when our history has run its course.

We welcome you, the God who comes.

Come to us now in the power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayers for Lighting the Advent Wreath Candles

First Week HOPE

All-powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

Second Week LOVE

God of power and mercy open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy so that we may share his wisdom and become one with him when he comes in glory, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

Third Week JOY

Lord God, may we, your people, who look forward to the birthday of Christ experience the joy of salvation and celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Fourth Week PEACE

All-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces his glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for his



SYMBOLS of the Advent wreath

• A ring/circle: God is eternal

Evergreen leaves: God is life

 Four candles: One for each of the Sundays in advent

• Purple candles: Sign of penance

Pink candle: Sign of joy

Journal:	

1ST WEEK OF ADVENT HOPE

Sunday, November 29th —Gospel Marks 13: 33-37

Show us, Lord, your love; And grant us your salvation.

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

Reflection

Be on Guard! Be alert! Every time I reflect on this gospel, I'm reminded of a dear boy named Tommy: a boy I met on an ordinary day who taught me a great lesson of hope.

It was during my chaplaincy internship and we were learning about theological reflection: the process by which we find meaning in our experience by connecting it to God.

I was getting off the elevator at a local hospital, rounding the corner, there in a small waiting room, a beautifully lit Christmas tree and two little legs sticking out from underneath. I stopped! The next thing I heard was a soft voice singing, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

Tommy noticed that I stopped, and quickly poked his heard out and said, "Aren't these lights cool." I bent down, and acknowledged him with a joyful—yes! The closer I got to Tommy, the more I noticed he had no hair and was very pale. We shared more pleasantries and then before I knew it I had joined him under the tree. This little boy was infectious, he loved life and more important he loved Jesus.

After awhile we both became still and just looked up at the tree. The limbs, the lights, the ornaments,

After awhile I asked Tommy what he wanted for Christmas. With great confidence he said, "a cure for cancer." Tommy shared that lying underneath this Christmas tree looking up at all the lights brought him closer to Christ and it helped him to cope with his treatment. Sharing his sacred story with me, and he hoped one day he would be cancer free.

Tommy's mom and nurse heard us talking, and before I knew it, we were all underneath the Christmas tree. This young boy inspired three grown adults to stop, lie down under a tree and reflect on the real meaning of Christmas. The real meaning of preparing our hearts for Christ the Savior. We joined hands and prayed together.

Emmanuel means, God is within us. Tommy understood that message very well, and he shared that lesson with everyone who listened. God inspires us daily to understand why he sent His only Son Jesus Christ to teach us the way—free us from sin. It always amazes me, how it took a babe to stop the world and listen. It took a babe to teach us about mercy and forgiveness. It took a babe to teach us about hope and love.

In the midst of any ordinary day, God brought a special boy into my life who invited me to look up at the Christmas tree lights, to hold hands in prayer, to see

What words stood out to you as you prayed?
What did you find stirring in your heart?

2ND WEEK OF ADVENT LOVE

Sunday, December 6th — Gospel Mark: 1:1-8

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths."

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will



BEAUTIFUL...Mary with JESUS in her womb ...and Elizabeth with John in her womb!

Reflection

This image of Elizabeth and Mary is full of great love—God's unconditional love.

God had great plans for Elizabeth, and He wove her life story into the fabric of our salvation. Elizabeth brought the Messiah's forerunner into the world. Elizabeth comforted and encouraged Christ's own mother, and confirmed the prophetic words of the angel Gabriel had spoken to Mary, announcing the Savior's impending birth.

Like Elizabeth, all of us have experienced disappointment. We have struggled at times with worry and perhaps we lay awake at night, wondering or questioning our purpose in life or how we have lost our way.

John the Baptist, knew that sin kept people far away from God. During Advent we too are preparing for the coming of the Messiah, and part of that preparation also involves repentance.

How does this happen? Repentance requires us to take a spiritual inventory of what needs to change in our lives. If we ask, the Holy Spirit will help us search our hearts and will gently reveal our sins to us. Repentance is powerful. God will use it not only to cleanse you but to soften your heart and draw you closer to himself.

For over fifty years God was preparing Elizabeth for a key role, she would play in the history of God's love poured out

"Jesus, give me the grace to recognize my sin and repent."			

3ND WEEK OF ADVENT

JOY

Sunday, December 13h — Gospel John 1: 6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said,

'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord'

as the prophet Isaiah said." Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor

Reflection:

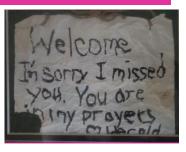
One of the greatest joys in ministry is visiting the sick. Many years ago, I had the honor of meeting a faithful man named Herald. He lived a simple life. And, no matter what time of day I would visit Herald in the nursing home, he would always be sitting near the main entrance greeting everyone with a warm, "hello." One day I asked Herald, "Do you ever take a break?" With great enthusiasm, he said, "yes! When I do, I post this sign: Welcome! I'm sorry I missed you. You are in my prayers. Love, Herald."

My friend Herald, had serious health problems but lived fully. Herald had a purpose in life and freely shared his joy.

During our visits Herald would share his faith with me and how he was prepared to see Christ. When we prayed together, and shared in the Eucharist, the presence of Christ's love nourished us both.

A week prior to Christmas, I went to visit Herald, I noticed he was not at the door, and learned he went

The nurse at the front desk approached me with the sad news, and she handed me Herald's sign. I was honored by his gift of love. His life, his faith brought great joy to everyone, and I still treasure his gift forever.



In the words of Henry Nouwen:

Lord Jesus.

Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.

We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day,

We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete **joy** of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.

To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!' Amen.

How can you share JOY?

4TH WEEK OF ADVENT PEACE

Sunday, December 20 —Gospel Luke 1:26-38

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.

He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me ac-



God of Peace, do not let me forget
that you are the most essential part of my life.
Keep reorienting me to your presence
as I move through this time of year.

Peace is more that the absence of conflict. It is an attitude about life. The prophet Isaiah writes that those who trust God are the ones who have peace. We can't keep all the hustle sand bustle out of our lives. We can't avoid some daily conflicts and difficulties but we can give ourselves in trust to God. How? Each time we feel distress, act unlovingly, surrender to anxious worrying or get caught

Blessed are you who have believed, that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled. -Luke 1:45

PLACING OURSELVES IN THE NATIVITY SCENE

One of my cherished Christmas memories as a child, was setting up our family nativity set. My grandmother helped me when I was real little, but as I grew up it became a memorable activity, and one I still enjoy.

And each year I am confronted with two questions: Do I put the baby Jesus out before Christmas? And, do I put the three wise men out before the Epiphany? Recently, I have placed them all in their rightful place from the start, but I know some people who keep an empty crib until Christmas Eve and others who slowly inch the wise men closer and closer to the stable.

Setting up a nativity scene and making choices about just where to put the shepherds and the sheep and how and when to display the wise men can help us in our spiritual lives. It can allow us to enter more deeply into the mystery of the nativity – to put ourselves in the scene.

It can be a very powerful meditation — one that many of the saints liked to do. St. Ignatius of Loyola encourages us to meditate on the nativity in this way: to imagine the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem; considering how long, how wide, whether it is level or through valleys or over hills; how the stable looks, how large, how small, how low, how high. And then to look at Jesus, and Mary, and Joseph and imagine ourselves there with them and to imagine what they are doing and what are they saying. How are they feeling? Joyous, exhausted, or scared?

During this Christmas season, we can put ourselves into the nativity scene and we can ask ourselves some important questions:

The wise men followed the star, they didn't know exactly where they were going, but they took a risk. Are we willing to take a risk for God? Maybe the risk it to discern a vocation to the priesthood; or to have another child; or consider a leadership role in your parish.

The wise men also brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What gifts do we bring? Are there other gifts we need to develop? Are there gifts that we need to give to others? Maybe as of late we have been slow to share the gift of faith with our families, our co-workers and friends. Or maybe we have been selfish with our time and need to spend some quality time with a spouse, a child, a grandparent.

During this holy season we have a wonderful opportunity to place ourselves into the nativity scene right there with Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the three kings. And if we consider what they might be doing, saying, and feeling God might reveal a



O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice; come and shine on those who dwelling darkness and in the shadow of death.