

# ONEWITH

OneWith community, OneWith faith, OneWith Christ.

December 6, 2020

## Reflection Break Outline Grades 9-11 ~ Session #5:



### Session Goals

#### Catholicism Unpacked

*The season of Advent calls the people of God to pause and consider the world around us; to examine our actions and interior spiritual readiness in preparation to welcome “the arrival” of Christ.*

- *Season of Advent focuses on spiritual reflection and preparation (anticipation) for Christmas.*
- *Explore Catholic Advent traditions (wreath/candles; calendar; etc.) and their meaning.*
- *Reflect on the meaning of Advent in the modern world.*

#### Scripture Unpacked

*God’s Word is filled with wisdom and inspiration for daily living.*

- *Articulate the meaning of a Scripture passage from the Sunday readings (or homily).*
- *Reflect on and articulate at least 1 way these lessons could apply to contemporary life.*
- *Ask youth for a commitment to engage in at least one Advent practice prior to Christmas.*

## **Scripture Unpacked** (10-15 minutes)

*God's Word is more than "oddly phrased" words that people read during Mass... The wisdom and Truth of scripture are just as alive today as they were when they were first scribed millennia ago... The following questions are important to help our young disciples to learn the process of identifying, clarifying and focusing on the MEANING of the scripture passage.*

*Be on the lookout for answers that synthesize "gospel" concepts ("True" forgiveness) with "secular"/cultural beliefs (being nice). This is our (your) chance to correct or put a theological fine point on any misconceptions or perceptions that our teens might have. Ask questions like...*

- What did you hear in Scripture readings from Mass?
- What did you hear in the homily (Fr. Mike's teaching)?
- What do you think was Father Mike's main point?

*Close this part of the lesson by highlighting one or more theological themes - see page 6 for more details.*

## **Digging Deeper – Gospel Reflection Questions**

- Why would John have gone out into the wilderness to conduct his ministry?
- What do you think people found attractive about John's baptism of forgiveness?
- Why is the first sentence of the passage significant, given it is the very first sentence of the gospel of Mark?
- How can we continue to prepare the way for the Lord?

## **Scripture Application Questions**

*Disciples Do! The "Discipleship Challenge" asks our youth to take the practical lesson/wisdom that they have discerned from the Scripture readings (aka – the Bible) and/or the homily – and apply that in the context of their own lived experience.*

*Note: We are looking for something specific/concrete for them to commit to. "Being a better person" would be too generic... We also want to stay away from "praying" or "praying for someone" - We certainly want them to pray, but prayer is a separate practice of discipleship. If a youth is having problems coming up with something, start with their learned lesson/wisdom and work from there. The point here is to put faith into action by working up a tangible way for them to become agents of mercy, justice and love in their families, among their friends and in our world.*

## **"Discipleship Challenge"**

- What is one "practical lesson" or bit of wisdom that YOU can take away from the Bible readings and/or homily?
- Make commitment to participate in an *Advent spiritual practice* in the weeks leading up to Christmas. (see next section)

## Unpacking the Mass: Happy New Year!

*Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year (Roman Rite). The season of Advent derives from the Latin phrase "Adventus Domini", meaning arrival of the Lord. The season of Advent is a time of preparation that directs our hearts and minds to the miracle of God's incarnation – Jesus (Christmas). The Church also reflects on the mystery of Christ's second coming at the end of time.*

## Reflection Questions

*Many of our favorite Christmas traditions have deeply religious roots that we may take for granted. Take some time to talk about your favorite Christmas rituals, signs, symbols and traditions, then "connect the dots" to their Christian meaning.*

- *What is your favorite Christmas tradition... and **why** is that so memorable to you?*
- *Do others share your enthusiasm for this particular tradition? Why/Why not.*

*Make a list of the signs and symbols of Christmas (Christmas Trees, Santa, gift-giving, etc.) Choose 5-6 and see if you can "connect the dots" to their Christian meaning. This website might help [www.whychristmas.com/customs/](http://www.whychristmas.com/customs/) (also see Resource Notes pages 4-5)*

- *Which "traditions" on your list have obvious "Christian roots" – what are they?*
- *Which "traditions" do not have obvious "Christian roots" (or no apparent Christian ties) – why are they celebrated during this time of year?*
- *How do these "Christmas traditions" help support your Christian faith?*

*The season of Advent help all of us prepare for Christmas.*

*Advent reminds the people of God to pause and consider the world around us; to examine our actions and interior spiritual readiness in preparation to anticipate and welcome "the arrival" of Christ.*

- *The season of Advent focuses on spiritual reflection and preparation (anticipation) for Christmas – what is the value in this preparation – why not skip it and just celebrate Christmas?*
- *Brainstorm several reasons why we should pay attention to "Advent" in today's world.*
  - *Send me your list, I would like to post a few to our website/facebook page.*
- *Ask the youth to make a commitment to engage in at least one Advent spiritual practice prior to Christmas.*

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## Resources Section

**Sunday Readings:** <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/120620.cfm>

### Optional Advent Video Resources:

“Seek”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tb9YVx26ljg>

“Christmas in a Nutshell”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXgH8ZIZ9jQ>

“Christmas Spirit (The Right Way)” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwBDXbUIJCw>

### Advent Conspiracy:

- <https://vimeo.com/187692524>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsdOHQOoQfQ&t=>
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAKcjHNFhHg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAKcjHNFhHg)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mg4Fmw8tdMg>

### The Bible Project: (<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/the-advent-series/>)

- “Shalom/Peace” - <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/shalom-peace/>
- “Yakhal/Hope” - <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/yakhal-hope/>
- “Chara/Joy” - <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/chara-joy/>
- “Agape/Love” - <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/agape-love/>

### Music Videos...

**Better Than A Hallelujah** - Amy Grant (*Sarah Hart song*):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm5kx3xqmg0&index=10&list=RDular4xtYzdo>

**Breath of Heaven** - Amy Grant:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ular4xtYzdo&start\\_radio=1&list=RDular4xtYzdo&t=](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ular4xtYzdo&start_radio=1&list=RDular4xtYzdo&t=)

**Mary, Did You Know?** – Pentatonix:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifCWN5pJGIE&list=RDular4xtYzdo&index=5>

**O Come, O Come Emmanuel:** Sovereign Grace:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JpvW9FU\\_Rg&list=RDular4xtYzdo&index=20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JpvW9FU_Rg&list=RDular4xtYzdo&index=20)

### Looking for more resources on Advent?

- <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/advent/> (US Bishops site)
- <https://www.catholic.org/advent/advent.php?id=28> (Advent traditions from around the world)

## **Catholic Connection: Advent and Christmas Traditions**

**Advent wreath:** The Advent wreath has German origins and is probably the most recognized Advent custom. The wreath made of evergreen branches which are bound in a circle. It symbolizes the many years from Adam to Christ in which the world awaited its Redeemer; it also represents the years that we have awaited His second and final coming. The wreath holds four equally spaced candles, the three purple ones lit on the penitential Sundays and a pink one for Gaudete, the joyful third Sunday in Advent.

### **The Nativity scene**

The first Nativity Scene is credited to monks in Italy! St. Francis of Assisi and his followers built the life-sized figures in 1223 to tell the story of Jesus' birth.

St. Francis narrated the story himself using wooden figures. After a couple of years, the play had become so popular that real people played the parts of the characters in the story. Songs were sung by the people taking part and they became what we call Christmas carols today!

### **Santa Claus:**

Did you know that St. Nicholas was an actual saint and martyr?

St. Nicholas was a Bishop who lived in the fourth century in Turkey. He was a very rich and very kind man who had a reputation for helping the poor and giving secret gifts to people who needed it.

St. Nicholas died during Roman persecution in 352 AD and his Feast Day is celebrated on December 6th. St. Nicholas is the Patron Saint of children and sailors.

### **Presents:**

Christmas itself is really about a big present that God gave the world about 2000 years ago - Jesus! One of the main reasons we have the custom of giving and receiving presents at Christmas, is to remind us of the presents given to Jesus by the Wise Men: Frankincense, Gold and Myrrh.

Most cultures around the world have a Christmas gift bringer. It is most often St. Nicholas or Santa Claus who brings the gifts, but in Germany they believe that it is the *Christkind* (Christ Child), in Spain it is the *Wise Men* and in Italy they believe it is an old lady - *La Befana* (the "Christmas witch"). These presents are also left in different places/ways. In most of Europe, the presents are left in shoes or boots put out by the children. In Italy and the UK presents are left in stockings. In the US and many other countries, presents for friends and family may be left under the Christmas Tree.

### **Christmas Tree:**

The evergreen fir tree has traditionally been used to celebrate winter festivals (pagan and Christian) for thousands of years. The decorated evergreen tree traces its roots (*pun intended*) back to the "Paradise Tree" in the middle ages.

Paradise Trees were used in "Miracle Plays" that were acted out in front of Churches at Christmas to tell stories from the Bible (before the printing press, most could not read). The Paradise Tree represented the Garden of Eden. It was decorated with ribbons, apples, dried fruits, and treats (and eventually blown-glass ornaments).

## **Gospel Reflection** (by Greg Sunter)

This week's gospel captures beautifully the spirit of preparation and waiting that characterizes the liturgical season of Advent. John the Baptist is portrayed as fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah and others as the one who comes before the Lord preparing the way. He is a messenger, sent by God to "do the groundwork" preparing the people for the coming of the Christ. Although this passage is used during Advent as preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, we know that John was a contemporary (indeed cousin) of Jesus and the time of preparation was immediately prior to Jesus' public ministry.

John appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism for forgiveness of sins. It may seem odd to think of going to the wilderness to try to influence people. Today we might think that the city center or street corner might be the better venue to preach something. What is it about the wilderness? Reference is made to the wilderness several times in scripture. It is used as a place of preparation and encounter with God. The wilderness referred to was a vast expanse of emptiness on the eastern side of the Jordan River. It was not uncommon for wandering preachers like John and Jesus to go out into the wilderness as a way of making a break from their previous life and getting themselves ready in body and spirit to begin their ministry. The wilderness to the east of the Jordan was also the place in which many of the rebels based themselves. There was a sense that challenge and unrest came out of the wilderness. In many ways that is what Jesus—heralded by John—brought out of the wilderness as well.

### **Questions for Teens**

- Why would John have gone out into the wilderness to conduct his ministry?
- What do you think people found attractive about John's baptism of forgiveness?
- Why is the first sentence of the passage significant, given it is the very first sentence of the gospel of Mark?
- How can we continue to prepare the way for the Lord?

### **Questions for Adults**

- Can you recall a time when you have had to consciously prepare yourself for what you were about to do?
- Why is the wilderness an appropriate image for preparation?
- Why does the gospel writer go to such lengths to associate John with the prophecies of history?
- How does this gospel passage relate to the Advent season?