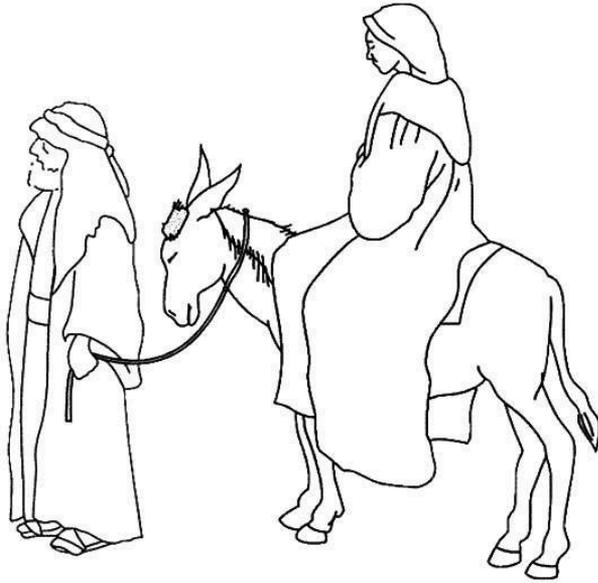


Advent



**Expecting God
to Move in our Darkness**

Zeteo Press



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Session 1: Sitting in Darkness Longing for Light

- Experiencing Advent in a meaningful way is not automatic.
- We cannot force ourselves to have hope, joy, peace, or the like.
- Celebrating Advent can easily become superficial if we feel like we have heard it all before.
- Celebrating Advent can cause a lot of tension if we do not know how to handle our thoughts and feelings that conflict with the spirit of the season.
- These obstacles are a form of personal darkness that we encounter in our lives and Advent is a time to face darkness.
- Some of the darkness in this world has become so normal to us that we hardly notice it as a grievous evil that God longs to correct.
- Some of the darkness is so beyond our power to help that we become numb to it.
- Seeing the darkness in its full awfulness and refusing to make this broken world our true home empowers our hearts to cry out, "Come, Lord, Jesus!"

Reflection Questions

What types of darkness are you faced with at this time in your life?

In what ways does your heart cry out for the Lord's coming and in what ways has it grown accustomed to this world?

What are some of the joys and frustrations you have experienced while attempting to celebrate Advent?

Litany of Maranatha

Because of suffering, injury, sickness, pain, and death,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of sorrow, fear, anxiety, depression, & loneliness,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of trials, and temptations,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of our enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of sin and ignorance,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of pride, envy, greed, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of injustice and corruption,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of slavery and exploitation,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of hatred and strife,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of violence and war,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because of broken homes, broken relationships, and broken lives,

Come, Lord Jesus!

Because creation longs to share in the freedom of the sons of God,

Come, Lord Jesus!



Session 2: Stale versus Living Truth

- To some people the phrase “God loves you” is a truism.
- To others the same phrase is dynamic, living, and fresh.
- To many, it is sometimes one and sometimes the other.
- The phrase “God loves you” can be received with great joy, solemn approval, neutral apathy, or even real frustration.
 - **Negatively with frustration** when experienced as a reminder of God’s failure to help as he ought.
 - **Neutrally with apathy** when experienced as disconnected from the actual problems of life.
 - **Positively with approval** when experienced as important but without immediate power to help.
 - **Profoundly with awe** when experienced in its full reality and power.
- Like food, truth must be received in a fresh way on an ongoing basis or it will become stale and unable to speak to us in a deep and life-giving way.
- It is beyond human ability to keep truth fresh within us, only by God’s continual action is it possible to perpetually experience truth in a meaningful way.

Reflection Questions

How does your heart respond to the phrase “God loves you” at this point in your life?

Describe a time when you experienced truth as living and a time when you experienced truth as stale.

Session 3: *Lectio Divina* and Advent

- *Lectio divina* is a way to pray with the Scriptures.
 - There are four steps:
 - Step 1: *lectio* (read)
 - Step 2: *meditatio* (meditate)
 - Step 3: *oratio* (pray)
 - Step 4: *contemplatio* (contemplate)
 - *Lectio divina* is about encountering God not interpreting the Scriptures.
 - Contemplation is when your heart is moved spontaneously to praise God.
 - This is always a direct grace from God.
 - Reaching contemplation can take 15 minutes, 4 days, or a lifetime, because you are not in control.
 - The movements of your soul can be subtle or intense and it is up to you to decide when to move on.

- The process of *lectio divina* gives us profound insight into the season of Advent.
- In both *lectio divina* and Advent we first sit in darkness longing for light, and then we wait for heaven's gift in hopeful expectation and patience.
- What our enemies intend for our destruction, God intends for our good.
- We can meditate on the darkness in our lives, as if it were Scripture, waiting for God to reveal himself to us in it.
- We will be able to wait in darkness with more hope and expectation the more God proves himself to us by meeting us again when we seek him.
- Learning to wait upon God in this way is necessary to mature in the spiritual life.

A Guide for *Lectio Divina*

The Goal:

- The goal of *lectio divina* is to encounter God.
- The Holy Scripture is God's revelation of himself to us.
- Our ultimate question should be: "*God what are you showing me about yourself?*"
- ***You have accomplished the goal of lectio divina when your heart is lifted up with a fresh desire to praise God.***
- *Lectio divina* is not about interpreting the Bible. It is about sitting with Scripture patiently until its truths come alive.
- *Lectio divina* requires patience, honesty, humility, and desire.

Step One: *Lectio (Read)*

Read a passage of Scripture carefully several times.

Try to notice all that you can: What is happening? Who is there? Where is this taking place? etc.

Step Two: *Meditatio (Meditate)*

Think about what God might be trying to communicate through this passage. Feel free to use any resources that will help you think more about the passage. The sky is the limit for how you might meditate. Anything is fair game as long it remains nothing more than a tool for the real goal which is allowing God to stir your heart.

Here are some ideas for how to meditate on the passage: try to apply the passage to your personal life; ask yourself what this passage says about God; try to imagine yourself in the passage; look the passage up in the original languages; read a commentary on the passage; or try to connect it to other parts of the Scripture.

Be honest with God about your thoughts and feelings toward the passage whether or not they seem holy or faith filled.

Step Three: *Oratio (Pray)*

As you continue to read and think about the passage, talk to God about it.

(Now, patiently sit with the passage, reading, meditating, and praying about it. Remember, your goal is not interpretation. Even if you know what the passage reveals about God, look to see if there is more to learn or just sit with it until God allows the truth to penetrate your heart and to fill you with a desire to praise him for it.)

Step Four: *Contemplatio (Contemplate)*

Eventually, God will speak to your heart.

Remember, you cannot come to God unless you are first drawn by the Father. You cannot spontaneously lift your heart in praise on command. It only happens if God gives you a special grace to do so.

If you are feeling the desire to praise God, *he has come to meet you in your prayer!* He has responded to your humble patience.

At this point, just sit in the sweet fruits of contemplation that he has allowed you to enter.

These movements of the heart are sometimes very small, sometimes very intense, and they can be anywhere in between. It is up to you to decide when you are satisfied with how much God has met you through any given passage.

Sometimes God moves your heart within minutes and sometimes it takes several days (or longer) of meditating on the same passage.

I highly recommend using a pen and paper to record what seems important!

Lectio Divina Passage

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, grace-filled-one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

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

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband:" And the angel said to her,

"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, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible" And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

-Luke 1:26-38

Lectio Divina Notes

Conclusion: Advent Trains the Heart

- Advent is the perfect liturgical season to train our hearts to wait for God and to invite him to move within the many types of darkness we face.
- This is fundamental to the spiritual life, because without this disposition to wait upon the LORD, everything we do will be done in vain.
- First, identify the many places of darkness in your life where you need the Lord to come.
- Second, cry out for him to illuminate the darkness.
- Then, sit with it, meditate on it, wait for him to reveal himself through it.
- Finally, rejoice as his living word refreshes your soul.
- In time you will transform your pains, trials, confusion, and suffering into a chance to enter into another Advent.
- Expectation and hope will become natural as a new Christmas shines in your heart in each situation.

Advent Prayer

O my God, Word of the Father, Word made flesh. For the love of us, You assumed a mortal body in order to suffer and be immolated for us. I wish to prepare for Your coming with the burning desires of the prophets and the just who in the Old Testament sighed after You, the one Savior and Redeemer... O Lord, send Him whom You are going to send... As you have promised, come and deliver us! I want to keep Advent in my soul, that is, a continual longing and waiting for this great Mystery wherein You, O Word, become flesh to show me the abyss of Your redeeming, sanctifying mercy.

O sweetest Jesus, You come to me with Your infinite love and the abundance of Your grace; You desire to engulf my soul in torrents of mercy and charity in order to draw it to You. Come, O Lord, come! I, too, wish to run to You with love, but alas! my love is so limited, weak, and imperfect! Make it strong and generous; enable me to overcome myself, so that I can give myself entirely to You.

-St. Teresa of Avila

Advent Poem

Sit in darkness, don't befriend a
World where evil does not end.

Expect the coming of the Word, for
In the darkness He is heard.

Rejoice in light, it makes all new,
Living, active, joyful, true.

Advent is a way to wait, that
Humbly opens heaven's gate.

Commentary on the Poem:

Whatever lacks the life-giving presence of God in this world is a type of darkness. We must never settle for what this world can offer, but instead remain pilgrims on Earth. When we acknowledge the brokenness of the world, it stirs our hearts with longing for the coming of Christ.

Every difficult thing we encounter God intends for our good. God will reveal himself to us through our pains, trials, and anguish if we humbly wait for him to meet us. The darkness will actually become a place of encounter with God's living Word.

Whatever truths God speaks into our heart during these moments of grace will be fresh, life-giving, and active. They will bring joy, courage, and conviction to us. Through God's faithfulness to these encounters, the darkness will gradually become a place of hope and expectation.

The season of Advent focuses on the dynamic of waiting with hopeful expectation for God to come to us as we sit in darkness. We must learn to make this humble, expectant waiting a regular part of our relationship with God. It is foundational for letting God take the initiative in our lives.

Jesus came and Jesus comes,
he'll come at last when all is done,
First the Advent of the Child
Holy, humble, peaceful, mild
Next the Advent of the Bread
Giving life to raise the dead
Last the Advent of the King
Glory, honor, power, sing!

Countdown 'til He's born as man
The Jesse Tree shows God's great plan
Wreath of life and death's defeat
Candle light, the dark retreats
Purple penance, sin destroyed
Gaudete Sunday, rosy joy
Hope, expect, be penitent
Watch, prepare, be vigilant

Wait with Zechariah mute
With Elizabeth seclude
Leap with John, feel Christ is near
Guard with Joseph, do not fear
Give with Mary your, "Fiat"
Sing with her, "Magnificat!"
Make a manger in your soul
Love will make it soft and full

The Word has come and comes again,
The Word will come until the end
Creating Word who made all things
Prophetic Word from whom hope springs
Incarnate Word whom God did give
Communing Word who makes us live
Word of glory and of power
Word that comes at unknown hour
Like a thief is God the Son
His Bride and Spirit cry out, "Come!"

Sit in darkness, don't befriend
A world where evil does not end.
Expect the coming of the Word, for
In the darkness He is heard.
Rejoice in light, it makes all new,
Living, active, joyful, true.
Advent is a way to wait, that
Humbly opens heaven's gate.