

A bright star shining over the Earth with rays of light.

Follow the Star

Resources for

Advent - Christmas - Epiphany

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An Overview for Liturgy Groups

Liam Tracey

Introduction: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany are a time of grace when the Church community celebrates the mystery of God's immense love made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, Word made flesh and light to the nations. Each season or movement has its own characteristic and particular flavour, moving with ease from one moment to the next. This time of the liturgical year, is a particularly attractive one for many people. The liturgical seasons follow the movement of the seasons of the year (at least in the northern hemisphere) with the long nights and short days, and yet we are reassured that our true light is Christ who always shines in the darkness. It is worth spending some time preparing for each of these seasons and celebrating them well in our parish communities. Often, once we get to Christmas, it is all over and what the movement of the liturgical year teaches us that it is only beginning.

Advent begins on the First Sunday of Advent, which is the first day of the Church's New Year and it is made up of four Sundays. Advent can be divided into two unequal parts. The first movement of Advent lasts till the 16th of December and its focus is on waiting for the glorious coming of Jesus at the end of time. At that time, Jesus will be revealed as Lord to all of humanity. The early part of Advent has a strong sense of judgement.

From the 17th till Christmas Eve the focus of the season changes to a more immediate preparation for the coming of Jesus in human flesh at Christmas time. These are the days of the famous 'O' antiphons which are used at the celebration of Evening Prayer. They invoke the coming Lord as Wisdom, as Leader, as Flower of Jesse, as Key of David, as Radiant Dawn, as King of all nations, and finally as Emmanuel, our God with us. Words associated with this season are waiting, joy, judgement, expectancy. The people of Advent are Isaiah, the one who announces the coming of the Messiah, John the Baptist, the forerunner who indicates that Jesus is the promised one, Elizabeth, who believes that the promise of God will be fulfilled, Mary, and Joseph, who wait for the coming of the Messiah. A real problem for parishes today is trying to maintain a sense of Advent with its joyful waiting, especially when Christmas starts just after Halloween, at least in the local shopping malls and town centres.

Added to the two comings, that at the end of time and the coming of Jesus at Bethlehem, which are prepared for in the season of Advent is a third one, that Christ comes at every moment for those who wait for him and are attentive to the signs of his presence amongst us. A privileged place for meeting Jesus in this way is in the celebration of the Liturgy. Advent is above all a season for the parish community to celebrate its liturgy well, with as much beauty and dignity as possible. Use incense, candles, have a gospel procession on some of the Sundays of Advent. Focus on the first readings with their message of hope for a people in exile, lost and feeling abandoned by their God. Sing the psalm, you might want to use the same one for the four Sundays. For your penance service you might want to focus on some of the Advent words or people suggested above, remember despite the purple vestments, this is not a penitential season.

Christmas begins with celebration of the midnight Eucharist and lasts for eight days, or a liturgical week of feasts. As well as remembering the events and people of Bethlehem, the feast of Christmas is a proclamation of faith in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, our Emmanuel. Christmas is a celebration of one of the central Christian truths, that God is made manifest in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, hence we kneel at these words in the proclamation of the Creed. It has close

links with the feast of Easter and goes beyond the mere remembering of the events of Bethlehem, it is truly a celebration of our redemption. The days following Christmas are celebrations of various saints who were called in the Middle Ages as the *Comites Christi*, the companions of Christ. They were seen as a cortege of honour accompanying the Christ-child. Christ who is the first martyr is glorified and accompanied by other martyrs.

The predominant sense of this season is faith, birth, the gift of God to humanity in the mystery of the Incarnation, darkness giving way to light. Some of the people of Christmas are Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, Herod, the companions of Christ, the angels and of course Jesus himself.

Remember to give special attention to the Gloria which has not been sung since the start of Advent. It comes back at the Midnight Mass especially as the song of the angels. The second Eucharist of Christmas is the Mass at Dawn which is often skipped over, its focus is the meeting of the shepherds with the child. But light is also a strong focus of the prayers of this mass formulary. The third Eucharist of Christmas, the Mass during the Day, like all strong moments in the Roman Rite uses the gospel of John, the great hymn to the Logos, the Word of God.

Just as it is hard to maintain an advent spirit in the weeks before Christmas, it is hard to maintain a Christmas spirit after the 25th of December. Whereas the liturgy is only beginning its celebration of Christmas, the world around is putting it back into the attic for another year.

Epiphany begins with the celebration of the Epiphany on the 6th of January and it too last for eight days concluding with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. The word comes from the Greek: *epiphaneia* meaning appearance or manifestation of God. The focus of this celebration is the manifestation of Jesus to all the nations. Whereas Christmas focuses on the incarnation of Jesus amongst poor human persons, the Epiphany feast is an attention to the divine nature of Jesus which is manifested to the world. It is a feast of the Lord. The epiphany people are the Kings or wise ones and remember scripture says nothing about them being three, Herod, and of course Jesus, the light of the world. Epiphany words are light, universal nature of God's love for all peoples, manifestation, baptismal preparation and appearance.

In many Christian traditions the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and his first miracle at Cana are also celebrated in the liturgy today. Indeed they were also part of the feast of the Epiphany at one time in the Roman Rite. Both of these events are also manifestations. Because of these associations,

Epiphany has often been a popular time for the celebration of baptism in many liturgical traditions. It was also the time for the proclamation of the date of Easter for the coming year and other important dates in the liturgical year, e.g. the date of the start of Lent. There are several simple musical settings of this proclamation that add to the solemnity and dignity of this day. In the current calendar, the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on the Sunday after the Epiphany. This feast brings the Christmas cycle to a close.



Many liturgists point out that this is the real feast of the kingship of Christ. There are lots of popular traditions associated with the Epiphany in different cultures, why not ask some members of the parish community who come from other parts of the world if they have an Epiphany tradition. Overleaf is one from the German speaking tradition of the blessing of the houses at Epiphany.

Family Epiphany Celebration

Chalking the Door

On the Epiphany of Our Lord, January 6, family and friends (C for “community”) gather at the main entrances to homes or apartments (nursing home quarters, extended care facility, hospital rooms!), and ask God’s blessing on their dwellings and on all who live or visit there.

Leadership may be shared with a change of voice at each Leader’s part (L).

L Peace be to this house and to all who enter here.

L A reading from Proverbs: “By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.”

L Let us pray: Gracious God, as a shining star once guided the magi to the birthplace of the infant Jesus, so enable those who dwell here to be your light in the world; through Jesus Christ we pray.

C Amen.

Using chalk (hence, “Chalking the Door”), people are invited to inscribe the lintel of the home (the horizontal frame above the door) with the inscription shown below. The letters C M B come from the traditional (9th century) names for the “three kings” — Caspar, Melchior & Balthazar. Some also suggest “Christus Mansionem Benedicat” which means “May Christ bless this dwelling!”

Each person is afforded a turn to make one or more of the marks:

20 + C + M + B + 06

L A reading from Isaiah: “The effect of righteousness is peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and quiet places.”

People may join hands or extend their hands outward and upward (orans) for the prayers.

L Let us pray: Sovereign God, we pray that you will bless this home and all who live here with your gracious presence, that your love may be our inspiration, your wisdom our guide, your truth our light, and your peace our benediction; through Jesus Christ we pray.

C Amen.

L Lord, remember your children and teach us to pray:

C Our Father...

People may make the sign of the cross in remembrance of their baptism.

L May the Lord watch + over our going out and our coming in, from this time forth and forevermore.

C Amen.



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This liturgy makes an excellent December/January newsletter item or back-page for a Christmas Season guide-to-worship. Holy water and incense can also be used.+ + +

Communal Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Ciara Walsh

Overview

the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not about a guilt-trip. Rather, it is about unburdening. The Lord invites us to receive from him 'rest for our souls' (Mt 11:29) so that he may set us free (Lk 4:18) that we may continue to seek to live 'life to the full' (Jn 10:10).

The aim of this service is to draw out this sense of unburdening. It does this through the use of symbol, word, gesture, scent, and music. Primarily, it does this through the encounter with Jesus through and in the sacrament. The ritual is designed to be practical, simple and adaptable (depending on parochial circumstances).

Advance preparation

The theme of the ritual is the laying down of our burden of sin before the Lord who takes it from us. Accordingly the central symbolic focus of the ritual is located around the Paschal Candle, representing the presence of the Risen Christ among us.

The Paschal Candle should be placed at a central location – perhaps at the foot of the sanctuary. Symbols outlining our burden of sin might then be incorporated into a presentation around that. This can be done even in simple poster form with such words as Hurt, Anger, Gossip, Omission, Selfishness, etc.

If possible the use of subdued lighting might be considered (as much as insurably possible!). A display of night lights and candles can sharpen the focus on the Paschal Candle.

The Church building could be incensed an hour or so before the liturgy begins. If we enter a Church after a funeral has taken place the scent of incense is very evident. It contributes to the sense of sacredness. The familiar scent of the incense reminds us that we are in a sacred space where we encounter God.

The points of confession should be seen to be welcoming and inviting. Again the use of candlelight can help in that regard. Perhaps the priests could be in their place when the celebrations begin. At each confession point a container holding stones or pebbles (such as a bucket or a box) will be needed.

A leaflet depicting the sense of unburdening could be prepared. Obviously, it should include the words for the hymns and psalm that are to be sung, as well as the words of the Act of Contrition. In addition a copy of the scripture readings could be included. Or any reflection that will be used.

Gathering Rite

Gathering Hymn: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel or Wait For the Lord (Taizé)

The entrance procession takes place during the singing of the gathering hymn. The procession enters (through the congregation) in this order:

1. The lector carrying the Lectionary aloft
2. One to four people carrying bricks aloft (numbers depend on circumstances).
3. The Celebrant

The procession moves at a pace which allows the symbol (of the bricks) to speak. When the procession reaches the foot of the sanctuary the lector proceeds to the lectern. Those carrying the bricks continue to hold them aloft.

The Reader then proclaims from the lectern:

Jesus said, 'Come to me all you who are burdened and I will give you rest'.

The bricks are then laid beside the paschal candle.

The celebrant goes to the presiding chair for the introduction.

Liturgy of the Word

Reading Jeremiah (29:11-13)

I know what plans I have for you, Yahweh declares. Plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. When you call to me and come and pray to me, I shall listen to you. When you search for me, you will find me; when you search wholeheartedly for me, I shall let you find me.

Song: *Be Not Afraid (Bob Dufford) or Psalm: Shepherd Me , O God (Marty Haugen)*

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia (Fintan O'Carroll) or Pilgrim Alleluia (Liam Lawton)

Gospel (Mt 11:28)

Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest'.

Homily

This could draw out the theme of unburdening. Reflecting on Advent as a time when we seek to set ourselves free in order that we may receive the very gift of Christmas.

Examination of Conscience

This could be a period of silence or directed reflection

Act of Contrition

O my God, I thank you for loving me. I am sorry for all my sins, for not loving others and not loving you. Help me to live like Jesus and not sin again.

Individual Confession and Absolution

Following individual reconciliation each penitent takes a stone (or pebble) from the collection of stones and proceeds to the paschal candle. There they leave the stone and, in that way, symbolically acknowledge that through the grace of the sacrament they have been unburdened of their sin.

Concluding Rite

Closing Prayer

Lord,

We acknowledge and give thanks that we have walked in the very depths of your promise.

We acknowledge and give thanks that we have had the courage to trust in your promise.

We acknowledge and give thanks that you have kept your promise, that you have freed us of our burden of sin.

Help us to remain free so that we may truly celebrate the gift of Christmas, the gift of Emmanuel, our God is with us.



Recessional Hymn: Holy God We Praise Thy Name or How Great Thou Art

Hearing the Word of God

John Columba McCann

While this presentation was made to members of baptism teams, it is relevant to other ministries as well. What follows is not so much the text of a talk but a series of pointers.

The Story of a Rich Young Man

A rich young man once inherited the family farm after the death of his parents. Good Christian that he was, he was considering whether or not to sell some of his property and give the proceeds to the poor. He went to Mass and listened to the gospel. In it he heard the story of the rich young man who approached Jesus for advice. Jesus' advice was to sell his possession, give the money to the poor and follow him. Standing in Church, our young listener was struck to the heart and heard it as a message addressed to himself. He sold most of his land, gave away his money, just keeping a small amount for himself and his sister.

Later, he began to think about the small amount he had kept. 'If I really trusted in God's providence,' he thought, 'then maybe I would not even need to keep the small amount I still have. God would provide.' Going to Mass, he listened to the words of the gospel. This time he heard Jesus speaking about trust in providence: 'Do not worry about tomorrow, each day has enough worries of its own... think of the birds of the air...' He took these words to heart and, having made provision for his sister, sold everything he had, and began to live a life of extreme simplicity.

The young man in question was St Anthony of Egypt, who was hugely influential in the first developments of monasticism in the Church. Most people are not called to be monks; nor do we always hear God's word in such a dramatic fashion. Yet there are moments, flashes, when we recognise the Lord's voice.

An interesting group exercise would be for people to share moments when they were struck by something they heard in the proclamation of God's word.

The Steady Work of God's Word

Aside from those dramatic moments when we are struck forcibly by God's word, there is the almost imperceptible work that is achieved in our hearts when we return to the scriptures day after day, week after week. By exposing ourselves to God's word continually, we are shaped by it. Water is gentle and rocks are hard, but the constant movement of the sea sculpts and rounds them into beautiful shapes. The gentleness of God's word can shape our hearts, hard though they may be.



Vatican II:

'In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and the power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for here children, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life.'

In these words there is a real challenge to how we view the life of the Church. At a time in Ireland when the Church is experiencing profound changes and pressures, this text from Vatican II is a wake-up call inviting us back to our true source of support, life and nourishment.

The Road to Emmaus

This gospel passage has much to teach us about hearing the scriptures. An interesting group exercise is to try to piece together the story without the relevant text from Luke 24. Then reference can be made to the text to fill in the gaps.

The following points may be helpful:

- Jesus is not recognised when he draws near. This may be something of a consolation to us; we often have difficulty in recognising him.
- Jesus questions the disciples about their lives. The scriptures ask questions about our lives.
- Contrary to what the disciples think, Jesus is the only one who really knows what happened.
- He draws on the Old Testament scriptures to teach them the significance of what has happened. In group work it can be helpful for people to try to remember Old Testament passages or stories that may point in some way towards the death and resurrection of Christ.
- Jesus does not change the facts of their story, but helps them to understand that the 'bad news' which they tell is actually good news. What about the 'bad news' in our own lives? What interpretation might Jesus have for us, based on the Old Testament scriptures and his own death and resurrection?
- Jesus is welcome as a stranger and offered hospitality, and it is in this context that the breaking of bread happens.
- The breaking of bread is the moment of recognition and confirms everything that they had heard along the road. The word and the sacramental sign interpret one another. Their hearts had burned as they heard the words of Jesus along the road. We see a similar pattern in Acts 2:14-41: here Peter speaks the word to the crowds, they are *cut to the heart*. In this second instance the sacramental sign that follows is baptism, not the breaking of bread. The dynamic of word leading to sacrament underpins all our sacramental celebrations. It is when the word has touched our hearts that we are ready to celebrate sacramentally.

The Voice of Christ

- Vatican II: 'Christ is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church'
- This reflects an intuition familiar to the early Irish Church: not only do we have precious eucharistic vessels such as the Ardagh chalice or the Derrynaflan chalice; we also have priceless manuscripts such as the Book of Kells, which point to a reverence for the word of God. Some of our more ornate high crosses are decorated by scenes from the bible; they are sculpted 'bibles in stone'. St Patrick's spiritual autobiography, his Confession, is so steeped in the language of the scriptures, it reads like a web of biblical references. Patrick, though not a man of great learning, obviously knew his scriptures to the extent that his mind and his manner of writing were shaped by them.



A Problem: the Bible is Not always Easy to Understand

- It is very inconvenient that God should choose to speak to us through texts that are centuries old – from another time and another culture, and not always easy to understand
- Some Old Testament texts in particular are difficult. The understanding of God's ways in the OT was at times primitive. God had to teach his ways to his people slowly over the centuries. It was a long course of training, and some of the earlier lessons seem strange to us. Perhaps the best way of looking at this problem is to remember that image of Christ walking along the road, explaining the Old Testament passages that were pointing to him. Although there are all sorts of things going on in the Old Testament stories and poems, some of them rather unsavoury, Christ himself can help us to see if there is a lesson for our own lives and our own times.

Personal Reading of Scripture: Some Ideas and Quotations

- Sometimes called 'lectio divina' – literally, 'divine reading'
- St Jerome: 'To be ignorant of the scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ'
To read the scriptures is 'to enter his shrine and to look into the mind of the creator'
'Read assiduously and learn as much as you can. Let sleep find you holding your Bible and when your head nods let it be resting on the sacred page'
'Read the divine scriptures constantly; never, indeed, let the sacred volume be out of your hands'
'All that we read in the divine books, while glistening and shining without, is yet far sweeter within. Whoever desires to eat the kernel must first break the nut'
- As well as being spiritual and uplifting, the bible contains plenty that is ugly and violent. Listen to what St Gregory the Great has to say: 'Scripture is a mirror which shows us our interior appearance. There we see our beauty or ugliness. There we see our progress, there the distance to travel.'
- Blessed Columba Marmion: 'The principal source of prayer is to be found in Holy Scripture, read with devotion and reverence and laid up in the heart.'
- Praying a bible story: Where am I in this story? Does this story resemble anything that has ever happened in my own life?
- A great way to get into a bible passage is to write it out in your own handwriting. This forces you to slow down and to take time with it, piece by piece.
- Praying a psalm: look at it the way someone would look at a menu: pick out something really good and chew on it. Maybe even learn it off by heart.



Advent and the Family Mass Group

Monica Carr

Background

Advent is a time of new beginnings. It is the beginning of the Church's liturgical year and it is often the time when new groups are starting. The more established groups, having gathered the troops after the summer holidays, are settling down with new personnel, new children and maybe a new member of the parish team.

General Questions for the family Mass group:

Are there enough adults on our team? Do we need to recruit new people? How do we do that? Is there someone in our group who has liturgy experience? How do we work? Do we work together as a group or separately? Who leads the way? Who sets the pace? Have we a choir? Have we music? Have we books to guide us? Are we familiar with the Directory for Masses with children? Do we have a copy?

Directory for Masses with children

The Directory was published in 1973 as an official supplement to the Roman Missal. It was prepared following consultation with national liturgical commissions and was the fruit of many years of discussion, enquiry and experiment. It deals with children's liturgical formation and offers guidelines to those preparing Masses with them.

Two articles in the Directory worth noting :

- Each Eucharistic celebration with children should be carefully prepared beforehand, especially with regard to the prayer, songs, readings and intentions of the general intercession. This should be done in discussion with the adults and with the children who have a special ministry in these Masses. If possible, some children should take part in preparing and ornamenting the place of celebration and preparing the cup with plate with the cruets".
- The principles of full, active and conscious participation are in a sense even more significant for Masses celebrated with children. For this reason, as many children as possible should have special parts in the celebration; for example, preparing the place and the altar, singing in the choir, playing musical instruments, proclaiming the readings, reciting the intentions of the general intercessions, bringing gifts to the altar and performing similar activities in accord with the usage of various peoples.

Goals for Advent

1. Open the message of the Gospel to our children.
2. Deepen our children's appreciation of Christmas so that they will have a greater understanding of the time of waiting which is the Advent Season.

Preparing for Advent

1. Read and reflect on the Gospels before the first planning meeting when initial ideas are shared.
2. Make an overall PLAN for the four Sundays with an individual plan for each Sunday.
3. Let our priest/s know what is being planned and if they can involve them in the planning work.
4. Remember that our role is not to tell people what the season means but to let the season be celebrated in all its strength.

Journey to Bethlehem

Monica Carr

Some years ago as Advent approached our Family Mass Group in Ballygall Parish with our curate Fr. Eoin Cooke R.I.P. discussed how we could make Advent more meaningful for our children, parents and ourselves. Though Advent comes each year we find ourselves in different situations, sometimes with new challenges and fresh opportunities. We felt that it was within these experiences as ordinary people that God is inviting us to make a space – a birthing space for Jesus to be born again in our hearts and homes.

- We thought of Mary and Joseph – two ordinary people who found themselves in a challenging if not frightening situation long ago.
- Was it possible that they could take us on their journey with them to Bethlehem.
- Could our story and theirs be one?
- We reflected on how long the journey would have taken and the terrain they would have travelled.
- We prepared a large scale map which was on view in a space in the church where our crib would eventually be placed.
- We explored the feelings of Mary and Joseph – they were weary, worried and frightened and yet kept going with a simple trust, deep faith and great love for God and one another.

Preparing for this journey challenged us as a group – more than that, it offered us the opportunity to remind ourselves that with faith, trust, prayer and love we too, will come to our own Bethlehem- in our hearts, in our homes or wherever God is asking us to bring his Son to birth. This is our Advent journey.

And so with a dialogue written by a very talented scriptwriter also a member of our group, in everyday language, the children acted out the tired and often frightened Mary and Joseph. A simply written prayer and the sung verse of “Come, Lord Jesus”, united our worries and fears with those of Mary and Joseph.

Our hearts were opened, a space was created and we were ready.

The inner journey of waiting had begun.



1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Advent means coming.

During Advent we prepare for the coming of Jesus.

Although we celebrate Advent each year Jesus comes to us anew if our hearts are open and ready to meet him wherever we are on our life journey.

We invite you now to journey a little with Mary and Joseph as they may have journeyed to Bethlehem.

We hope and pray that this journey will touch and open our hearts so that Jesus may be born anew for each one of us this Christmas.

NARRATOR Long, long ago, in a little town called Nazareth people were getting ready to travel to Bethlehem near Jerusalem to sign the census.

Among those preparing for the journey were Mary and Joseph.

Mary was expecting a baby and her time was coming near.

SCENE: Table, Cloth, Bag, Window, Nazareth Sign, Census Sign.

JOSEPH Are we nearly ready, Mary?

MARY Yes, Joseph!
Just put the bread in your bag.
Did you put in the water?
Oh, Please don't forget the baby clothes

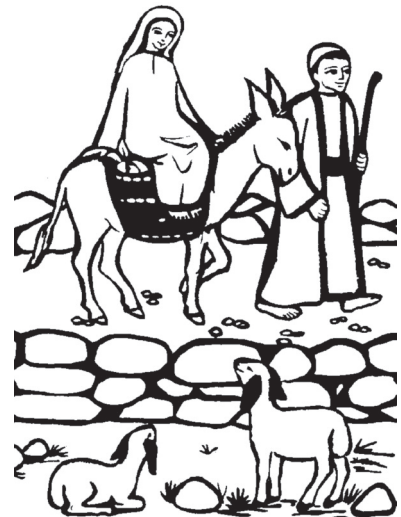
JOSEPH Yes, Mary. It's all done.
Everything is packed now.
Mary will you be alright?
This journey is long and hard.
120 miles.
How will you manage?
Your time is so near.

MARY I know, Joseph.
I really don't want to do this journey.
I'm scared.
What if the baby is born on the way?
Oh, Joseph, I'm so worried about the baby.

JOSEPH It just isn't fair, Mary.
I'm so angry.
The Romans don't care about poor people like us.
All they want is their census
Oh, My Lord!
What if the baby is born on the way?
Mary, what if something happens to you!

MARY Joseph, I think we are forgetting something!

JOSEPH I thought we checked everything!



MARY No, Joseph! We've been so worried and anxious
 We've forgotten that we are not alone!

 God has given us this child.
 His son.
 He will protect us.
 He will walk with us.
 He will give us what we need to walk this journey
 Let us trust him.....
 Let us pray before we begin our journey
 (Background music to accompany)

NARRATOR Our life is a journey.
 Sometimes the road is long and hard.
 Sometimes we seem lost and don't know where we are going.
 Sometimes we don't want to make the journey.
 Sometimes, like Mary and Joseph, we are afraid.

ALL SING ONE VERSE - COME, LORD JESUS, COME.

NARRATOR Sometimes, like Mary and Joseph we worry.
 We worry about money, work, school and exams.
 We worry about our family and friends.
 We worry about the future and having nice things.
 We worry about loneliness and being alone.

ALL SING COME, LORD JESUS, COME

NARRATOR Mary and Joseph were poor.
 They had no expensive clothes or toys to offer Jesus.
 But their hearts were ready to receive him.
 They were READY for his "coming"
 They LOVED each other.
 They had TRUST in God.
 They knew to PRAY
 They knew they were not ALONE.
 GOD WOULD WALK WITH THEM.

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME.

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CHILD Let us listen awhile now, to Mary and Joseph
 as they continue their journey to Bethlehem.

NARRATOR It is the 2nd day and they have reached the outskirts of Jericho.

SCENE SUN, CLOUDS, TREES, SHEPHERDS IN THE BACKGROUND.

MARY Joseph, let us rest awhile. I'm so tired.
 (Mary stops Joseph with her hand)

JOSEPH Here's a nice spot in the shade (pointing)
 Would you like a drink? (Joseph takes out a drink)

MARY Please, Joseph (*Joseph hands drink to Mary and she takes a drink*)
Hmm, that's better.
I'm sorry I have been so cross.
I don't mean to be.
I'm just so weary.

JOSEPH I understand Mary. I know it's hard for you.

MARY (*Mary nods her head in agreement*)
Yes, it's hard, but we have met so many nice people,
(*hands out*)
All poor like us. (*hands in*)
Yet, we all share what we have
(*mime, giving from the heart*)

JOSEPH Yes, it makes the journey easier when we help each other.
I enjoy the evening time most, when people share their stories.
It's fun and it's nice to make new friends.

MARY Those shepherds we met earlier today were very nice, so kind.
They were poor, like us and work so hard.
But they are happy people.

JOSEPH (*nodding in agreement*)
Yes, Mary, I think happiness comes from helping each other-
Sharing what you have – not just food, but your friendship as well.

MARY I agree, this journey would be a lot harder if we had not met
these people.
Before we sleep, let us thank God for the good things and kindness
we met today.



REFLECTION – Background music

NARRATOR Although the journey was hard,
Mary and Joseph found gifts and blessings on the way.
Food shared and friendship given
friendly words, kindness and sharing made a hard journey easier.

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME.

CHILD Mary said she was sorry when she was cross.
Joseph forgave her, understanding her weariness (*very slowly*)
Is there someone we need to make friends with?

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME.

As we light our Advent Candle (*wait for candle to be lit*)
Let us thank God for the gifts in our lives –
the love and friendship we meet daily.

Help us to share that love and friendship generously
so that we might make the journey a little easier for others.

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Today is Joy Sunday. Just as the coming of Jesus on the first Christmas night brought joy to the people long ago, we, too, wait with joy for the birthday of Jesus.

SCENE – Clouds, hills *(brown sheet with children underneath)* **SAMARIA SIGN, JERUSALEM SIGN. Children could dress as soldiers and march in the background near Jerusalem sign. Child could dress as King Herod.**

We now continue our story of Mary and Joseph. Having reached the city of Jerusalem they had come through the most hilly part of the journey known as Samaria.

MARY That was the hardest part of the journey so far.
I'm exhausted.

JOSEPH I know. There were so many hills and valleys.
It's supposed to be a dangerous place *(points to the hills)*

MARY I was terrified we'd get lost, it's such a lonely place.
No one would ever find us. *(Mary shudders at the thought)*

JOSEPH I was afraid myself. Many people do get lost or attacked.
But God protected us and here we are at last at Jerusalem.
Look, Mary, can you see the temple? *(Pointing)*

MARY Yes, Joseph. Isn't it beautiful. *(Hands over eyes)*
We will bring our son here when he is old enough.

JOSEPH Look at all the soldiers.

MARY They make me nervous, Joseph.

JOSEPH Don't worry, Mary. They're not interested in poor people like us.
I wonder where King Herod is?
They say he is a bully.

MARY I don't know why, Joseph, but suddenly I'm afraid for our child.
There are so many mean people and it can be dangerous if you are different.

JOSEPH Hush, Mary *(comforting her)*
We will protect our child.

NARRATOR *(Background music to accompany the narration)*
The hardest part of the journey is completed.
Mary and Joseph kept going when it was most difficult.
There are times when our journey is like climbing hills, all the time.

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME.

NARRATOR The Roman soldiers in the background awakened fear in Mary for her child.
She knows he is coming to show the world a better way.
She believes God is with them.
Her faith has made her strong.

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME.

NARRATOR As we light our 3rd Advent Candle – Pink for Joy –
may we, like Mary and Joseph believe in God.
When the road is difficult.
May we allow God to work within us that our faith may make us strong.

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME.



4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Today is the 4th Sunday of Advent.

Mary and Joseph have at last reached the town of Bethlehem.

**SCENE – DOORS WITH – CLOSED – FULL – MANY PEOPLE.
DOOR WITH – NO ROOM – ELIZABETH IN THE
BACKGROUND WITH BABY IN HER ARMS-**

MARY Here we are at last.
My! It's very crowded (*looking around*)
I hope we will find somewhere to stay.

JOSEPH I'm sure we will, Mary.
Let's sit and talk awhile, before we start searching.
(*Mary and Joseph sit down*)

MARY Oh, that's better. (*waving hand like a fan*)
I'm glad we managed to visit Elizabeth on the way.

JOSEPH Yes. It's been a while. When did you see her last?
(*Hand questioning*)

MARY After I got the message from the Angel that I was to carry God's
Son I ran over to share this great happening

JOSEPH How did Elizabeth react? (*Hand questioning*)

MARY She told me I was "Blessed amongst women and blessed is
the child I would bear" (*Blessing herself*)

JOSEPH That was beautiful thing to say (*Both hands out*)

MARY It was, and do you know Joseph ,
I do feel blessed (*Blessing herself*)
But I ask myself- WHY ME? (*nodding and pointing to herself*)
AN ORDINARY WOMAN, TO BEAR HIS SON?

JOSEPH I've asked myself that, too ,since the angel came to me
In my dream.
Maybe it's because we have so much love to give (*Hands to heart*)

MARY Yes, Maybe.
Baby John was a miracle too.
Elizabeth was old too, and look at baby John –
a lovely, strong, healthy baby.

JOSEPH He certainly is (*Nodding*)
Perhaps, God wants them to work together for Him.

MARY That would be wonderful – the two of them
working together for God.
I think God has a special purpose for everyone.

JOSEPH I think so, Mary.
(*Mary rests her head on Joseph's shoulder*)

REFLECTION – BACKGROUND MUSIC

NARRATOR Jesus will be born very soon.
Mary and Joseph have no place to stay.
Mary asks – Why God chose her,
an ordinary woman to bear his Son.

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME

NARRATOR God has chosen each one of us.
We each have a purpose in this life.
God has work for all of us to do.
We are God's creation
with something unique to give,
at home, at work, at school , in the playground.

ALL SING COME LORD JESUS, COME.

NARRATOR As we light our Advent Candle
JOYFUL – that the coming of Jesus is near
JOYFUL - that we have all been chosen by God
may our hearts be filled with the same love
that Mary and Joseph had for Jesus.
May WE bring JESUS ALIVE
This Christmas wherever we might be.



Blessing of Advent Wreath

We ask you, God, our creator, to bless
this Advent wreath.
May it remind us that Jesus is in our midst
and that we are surrounded by his love and care.
Bless these candles on our wreath.
May they remind us that Jesus is the
Light of the World.
Bless these evergreens on our wreath.
May they remind us that Jesus' love for us
is everlasting and that nothing we do will
ever take it away.
May this wreath remind us to prepare well
for Christmas, each and every day of the
Advent season.
We ask these things in Jesus' name.



Lighting of Advent Candle

On each of the four Sundays a child or a member of the congregation could be invited to light the candle for that Sunday. A child could read as the candle is being lit.

As we light our First Advent Candle this week
may we open our hearts to the light of Christ.
May His light increase in brightness,
through our love and efforts this Advent.

As the candle is being lit CHRIST IS MY LIGHT (from the Alive 0 School Programme) could be sung

Jesse Tree

The Jesse tree is based on the family tree and its biblical roots are in Isaiah 11 verse 7 'A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse and from his roots a bud shall blossom'

The Jesse Tree is another seasonal tradition which recalls the family tree of Christ. We fill our Jesse Tree with symbols of those people who looked forward to the coming of the Saviour. The tree can be limb of a tree, one from an apple tree would be good. Children could be involved in bringing up the symbols to the tree while a commentary is being read. Symbols could be brought in as part of the Entrance Procession and put on without any commentary as the Entrance Hymn is being sung. Symbols could be woven in to the Prayer of the Faithful. A child would read as the symbols are brought forward.

Example

We bring symbols of the Sun, Moon, Animals
and Plants to our Jesse Tree – symbols of creation.

Let us pray that we may see God in all creation, the beauty of nature,
The changing seasons and miracle of each day and night.
May we cherish his gift of life to us.

Let us pray to the Lord

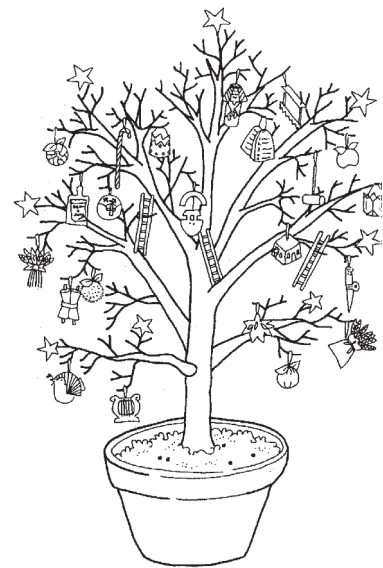
Lord hear our prayer

The symbol of the horn reminds us of John the Baptist
who called on people to prepare for the coming of the Saviour.
May this call help bring countries at war closer to peace.

Let us pray to the Lord

Lord, hear our prayer.

We now place the symbol of the SAW on our Jesse Tree
to remind us of Joseph, the foster father of Jesus.
May Joseph's example inspire all fathers to care for
and love their children.



PRAYER OF BLESSING FOR THE JESSE TREE

Creator God,
bless this tree
that tells the story of your care for us
and fill us with joyful hope
as we wait for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

God of all ages,
you have promised to be with your Church
until the end of time.
May we experience the joy of your presence in our midst
for you live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

All are Children on Christmas Day

Orla Rutledge

Important to sing the Christmas songs in a key that will suit all voices – even self-acknowledged crows want to sing along with Christmas Carols.

Ideas for the Entrance Procession

A Star,

Children in costume to form a Christmas tableau in front of the altar.

Will the children have gifts for baby Jesus to place in the crib?

The Word

1. On Christmas morning it seems strange not to tell children the story of how Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem on the first Christmas Day, and this is one way of doing this.

THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO LUKE

Celebrant to narrate:

The emperor Caesar Augustus made a law that a list be made of all the people in the empire. People had to go to their family towns to be entered on the list. Joseph went from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the City of David, because he belonged to the family of David. Mary, who was engaged to him, went with him. She was expecting a baby, and when they arrived in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born. All the Inns were full, so she gave birth to her baby boy in a stable, she wrapped him in warm clothes and put him in a manger to sleep.

All sing: *Away in a Manger (one verse).*

There were shepherds looking after their sheep in the fields nearby. Suddenly an angel appeared to them and the night was filled with light. They were terrified. The angel said “don’t be afraid, because I have joyful news for you and for all people. A saviour has been born in the town of Bethlehem. You will find him lying in a manger”. Then a whole choir of angels appeared in the Sky, praising God.

All sing: *Angels we have Heard on High.*

The angels left, and the shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem to see what the angles had told them. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. The shepherds told them what the angels had said, and all were amazed. But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart and thought about them over and over again.

All sing: *Silent Night.*

Characters for Mime

Emperor, Joseph, Mary, Angels, Shepherds.

Possible Props

Signs – Rome, Nazareth, Bethlehem.

Scroll and pretending to proclaim the census

A doll for the infant Jesus

Angels in First Communion Dresses and Tinsel

Shepherds with cuddly lambs, sheep.



The Christmas Story

Read by an adult

1: The Ox and the Ass

"You must be tired, Donkey", said the ox, as the two animals stood together at the back of the stable. "That was a tough journey for you". "Well, I am a bit weary", answered the donkey, "but the worst part was the worry about arriving in time to find somewhere to stay before the baby was born". "I thought that humans had more sense than to set out on a journey at a time like that", remarked the ox. "Could they not have waited until after the baby had come?" "No", explained the donkey, "there was some government rule about having to be in a certain place on a certain day so that a census could be taken, and that's why they had to come to Bethlehem. The man was most upset. He was worried about getting somewhere to stay and finding a nurse and making sure they had enough nappies and baby clothes. The woman was very calm and kept reassuring him that everything would work out well, and she was right. This is a really nice place you've got here". "It's not bad", agreed the ox. "It's dry and warm, even if it's a bit crowded now with all those sheep over there. By the way, is the baby a boy or a girl?" "It's a boy", replied the donkey, "and they're going to call him Jesus". "That's a nice name" said the ox. "Do you think the woman would mind if we peeped at him?" "Not at all", answered the donkey, and the two animals leaned forward and looked with gentle eyes at the Son of God.

2: Mary

The little boy and his mother were walking home after visiting a neighbour and her new baby.

"Was I as small as that baby once?" asked the little boy.

"Yes, you were", said his mother. "When you were a new baby you were just as small".

"Did Granny and the neighbours come to see me when I was a new baby?" he wondered. "Well", his mother explained, "not when you were very new, because your father and I had to go to a different town just before you were born".

"So I wasn't born in our house?" he asked.

"No" she told him. "The town was called Bethlehem and when we got there we looked for somewhere really safe and comfortable where you could be born. The Inns were all full but a kind man let us shelter in a lovely warm stable, and that's where you were born".

"Did anyone come to see me?" was the next question.

"Of course", his mother reassured him. "The very night you were born some shepherds heard about you and came to see you. Other people came later and brought beautiful gifts".

"Was I a nice baby?" he wondered.

"All babies are lovely" his mother told him. "Each mother thinks her baby is the most special one in the world. But you were extra special".

"Tell me about the other people who came to see me" he begged.

"Well" she began, "there were", and chatting quietly, Jesus and Mary arrived home.

3: A Shepherd

The old man was looking after his grandchildren, “Tell us a story, Granddad”, they said. “Tell us about the baby in the stable”. The old man began; “I was just thirteen and I was up in the hills over there with my father and my uncle, keeping an eye on the sheep. It was a cold clear night and we were sitting around the fire, telling stories” – “just like now Granddad”, interrupted one of the children, “when suddenly the dogs began to whimper. We looked around to see what had upset them. That’s when we spotted a white glow in the sky and we heard lovely singing. We were terrified when all at once an angel appeared in front of us”. “How did you know it was an angel?” asked the middle child. “Well” said the grandfather, “we knew in our hearts that it was a messenger from God, and he didn’t look like a Moses or a holy man. He was more like a white glowing presence...”, “like a candle flame” suggested the eldest girl, “and suddenly we weren’t afraid any more. He told us to go along to the stable behind the inn and we would find that the King we had been hoping for had been born there. I wanted to see if a baby king looked any different from a baby shepherd, so I ran off quickly and got there before the others”. “Did the baby King have a crown?” asked the youngest child. “No” answered the grandfather thoughtfully. “He looked just like any other baby. We stayed for a while and told his mother about the angel, and then went back to the sheep. But I’ve never forgotten that baby – and I often wondered what happened to him”.

4: An Angel

A historian in Heaven decided to do some research on the first Christmas. He discussed the project with his Guardian Angel who put him in touch with the angel who had been the messenger to the shepherds that night. This angel looked up his diaries and gave the historian this account of the night Jesus was born.

“it was my first mission as a messenger from Heaven and I was determined to do my best. It was a lovely clear night, with a slight breeze. The Angel Singers had been rehearsing their special song for some time and they sang beautifully – so beautifully, in fact, that it seemed as though the world held its breath; the breeze dropped and even the stars seemed to stop twinkling. The Angel Gabriel had advised me that people are frightened whenever we appear, which I find strange as we generally bring them good news. So first of all I told the shepherds not to be afraid. When they had recovered sufficiently to understand my message about the King who had just been born in Bethlehem they hurried off to see him.

We angels went along as well to pay homage, but the shepherds could not see us, as we were now invisible to them. You know, even though we were all looking at the same things, the shepherds did not see what we saw. The shepherds saw a stable, we saw Heaven; they saw a manger, we saw a throne; they saw a joyful family, we saw joy filled humanity. But, we all saw love”.



5: The Innkeepers Wife

Shalom everyone; My name is Hannah, and my husband Simon owns the biggest inn in Bethlehem. We are booked out these days because of the census and have had to turn several people away. Yesterday a young couple arrived. We had no room for them, but I was sorry for them because I could see that she was due to have a baby any day, so I sent them down to the lower stable – its clean and dry and quiet there. Just after sunset the man came looking for me; the baby was coming, and he asked if I would go down to help. I sent him to the kitchen to get some boiling water, and I went down to the stable. The baby arrived before long – a fine healthy boy, the image of his mother. The man got the baby clothes and they wrapped him up snugly and sat there looking at him as though he was the most wonderful baby ever. Suddenly some of that rough Ben Judah gang of shepherds arrived from the hills over there. They had a strange story of lights in the sky and a messenger from God. Mind you, it is a bit odd that they heard about the baby in the stable so quickly. I had to get back to the inn, but before I left I asked what they were going to call the baby. They looked at each other and smiled, and then the man said “His name is Jesus”. And just for a moment, I could have sworn that the baby smiled too! You know I’m still puzzled about those shepherds. I mean, you’d think that God would send messages only to important people, wouldn’t you?

6: Joseph

Joseph was tidying up the workshop, and Jesus was helping him. They were chatting while they worked. “Tell me about when I was born”, said Jesus. Joseph thought for a moment. “You know,” he began, “We were so pleased that you were going to be born, but the timing could have been better! The problem was that we had to go to Bethlehem to register for the Census just at the time you were due. I’ll never forget that journey! I was afraid that you might decide to be born at the side of the road, I was wondering where we might be able to help your mother. Of course, she wasn’t one bit worried. She sat on the donkey – the one we had with us in Egypt, and smiled and told me to relax, that everything would work out fine. It was getting late when we arrived in Bethlehem, and the first places we inquired at were all full. But a kind man was sorry for us and sent us down to a stable he had out the back. It was warm and dry, and that’s where you were born. His wife came down to be with your mother, and you were only a few hours old when a crowd of shepherds came to see you, so you got quite a welcome into the world! Of course, having a baby is something to celebrate, but it’s even better when the baby gets old enough to help in the workshop!” They smiled at each other and then, having finished for the day they went home for supper.

Suggested Songs:

Important to sing the Christmas songs in a key that will suit all voices – even self-acknowledged crows want to sing along with Christmas Carols.

Entrance:	Adeste Fideles (one verse at least in Latin, maybe one in English)
Responsorial Psalm:	Today is Born A Saviour (Paul Inwood)
Preparation of Gifts:	The Drummer Boy (with percussion)
Communion:	Silent Night, Little Donkey, Mary will you take this Baby Boy, Céad Míle Fáilte Romhat, A Íosa.
Recessional:	Angels we have Heard on High

Resources for the Family Mass

The Columba Lectionary for Masses With Children	The Columba Press
Lectionary for Masses with Children Study Edition	A Pueblo Book
The Complete Children's Liturgy Book	Katie Thompson
Welcome the Word	Joan Brown SND
Gather the Children	Mary Catherine Berglund
The Liturgy of the Word	Katie Thompson
Step by Step Liturgy of the Word Children 3-6	Katie Thompson
Footprints in Faith Children 7-12	Katie Thompson
50 Masses with children	Sr. Francesca Kelly
Preaching and Teaching the Gospels to young children	Sean McEntee
The Liturgy of the Word with Children	Katie Thompson
Seasons of Celebrations	Patricia Mathson
Classroom Prayer Services for the days of Advent and Lent	Gwen Costello
Developing Children's Liturgy A Step by Step Guide	Gail Fabbro
A handbook for Children's Liturgy	Barbara Mary Hopper
Advent begins at home	David Polek CSSR & Rita
Anderhub	
Teachers' Manual Alive 0 3, Alive 0 4, Alive 0 7 School Programme	

Advent Music for the Family Mass

Songs from the School Programme

Alive O 1	Christ is my Light	P 52
Alive O 3	Following a Star	P 149
	This is the moment	P 160
	Away in a Manger	P 161
	Carol of the Journey	P 162
	Mary, will you take this baby boy	
Alive O 4	A Star Shines	P 150
	Following a Star	P 152



Follow the Star with Music

Pat O'Donoghue

Advent Music – The Orphan Season

We are spoiled for choice when it comes to Christmas music. We can list off our favourites from year to year. Even though we hear carols on the radio and especially in the shops for weeks before Christmas it is good to remember that Advent is a season of restraint. We hold back our Christmas songs until Christmas Eve and enjoy the richness of the music of Advent. In recent years the music resources available for this season have been expanded greatly and can be divided into three main themes – Waiting – Coming – Mary.

Waiting

The Gathering or Entrance Song can set the right tone for the season and you might consider the Taizé refrain – *Wait for the Lord*. This piece can be played or chanted for some time before the entrance procession. This piece says all we need to about the season – Wait for the Lord – His day is near – Wait for the Lord – Be strong take heart. The words can be put on banners at either side of the sanctuary to reinforce the message and so that members of the congregation have the text.

My Soul in Stillness Waits from the Dameans is another appropriate gathering song with the refrain – For you, O Lord, my soul in stillness waits, truly my hope is in you. The verses which can be sung by the Cantor or the Music Group are the O Antiphons from the Prayer of the Church for the days close to Christmas. It is good to have one opening chant for the four Sundays to ensure maximum participation of the assembly.

Coming

The invitation to the Lord to come among us is strongly represented in the traditional Advent Carol – *O Come Emmanuel* which is very popular with communities throughout the world as *Veni Emmanuel*.

You might like to try Lori True's Gathering Song – *Warm the Time of Winter* which integrates the Entrance Procession, Lighting of the Advent Candles and the Penitential Rite by way of a simple refrain - Holy Light, Warm our night, Warm the time of winter. Once again this gentle piece illustrates restraint and invitation which are the hallmarks of the season.

Hurry the Lord is Near by Owen Alstott is very suitable for Family Mass Groups and has great energy and is fun to sing.

Mary

Mary is one of the central characters of the Advent Season and her song of praise - the Magnificat - is sung as the Responsorial Psalm for the Third Sunday. This year you could introduce Bernadette Farrell's setting *My Soul Rejoices* which is strong in its presentation. Many communities are familiar with the traditional setting of Behold A Virgin Bearing Him. Ronan McDonagh's version with keyboard accompaniment and flute part is another stunning contribution to this genre. This piece is best used at the Preparation of the Gifts on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and on the Third and Fourth Sundays of Advent.

Christmas Music

Many services coming up to Christmas have a strong emphasis musically on Christmas Carols. You can help preserve the atmosphere of waiting by including Advent Songs and Readings in your programme.

On Christmas Eve the singing of the Gloria is restored after the Advent absence and it is great to hear a congregation joyfully sing the refrain Glory to God in the highest ...Donal Hurley has a most singable setting in four parts with easy refrain for the congregation that I would recommend.

The Christmas Psalm is most important and two settings come to mind: *Today is Born Our Saviour* by Paul Inwood is a lively version with optional brass parts while *A Saviour Has Been Born* to us is a gentle piece by Ronan McDonagh in his distinctive Irish style.

Epiphany Music

The celebration of the epiphany can suffer as a result of limited holiday resources. Why not put a good deal of energy into the vigil celebration and leave a cantor to carry the morning liturgies? Look at the texts of the carols to be used and in that regard I suggest the following hymns - The First Noel, What Child Is This, and We Three Kings. The music Group could offer some other choices such as - Tháinig Na Saoithe (Máire Ní Dhuibhir), Carol of the Drum or Star Carol (John Rutter).

Sing Choirs of Angels

It is good to remember that our liturgical songs belong to everyone even if they only reclaim them with gusto at Christmas. The invitation to join in needs to be stated again and again. The first golden rule in choosing music for a liturgy is to ensure that the Opening Song is accessible to everyone in keeping with the Irish motto of Tús maith, leath na hoibre.



Advent - Christmas - Epiphany

Suggestions for Personal or Group Daily Prayer

Des Hayden and Bríd Liston

Preparation:

Set a definite time aside, choose a place, a reading, a reflection and perhaps a lighted candle or a symbol that speaks of the season (Advent, Christmas-time or Epiphany). Music or a hymn helps to quieten the body, focus the mind and open the spirit - to be, to listen and to love.

Creating Atmosphere

It helps to create a special place set aside for prayer. The use of candles to create soft light, of cloth to create colour, of symbolic items all add to the sense that this is a special time. You might consider placing photographs of loved ones in this space to keep them with you during your prayer.

An appropriate symbol for the Advent journey is a variation on the usual Advent wreath - instead of a circle, however, the four candles radiate in a spiral towards the central Christ-light, symbolising our gradual journey towards the centre. The very act of lighting a new candle each week is a symbol of the gradual unfolding of our journey.

The imaginative use of symbols such as incense for the feast of the Epiphany will enrich the meaning and impact of the prayer.

It is appropriate also that the Word of God be given a place of significance, with perhaps an open Bible placed with care within the sacred space.

General suggestions on the use of Scripture:

The words of Scripture are not only inspired – they continue to be inspired each time they are read in the sense that the Spirit, sometimes in a very intimate and powerful way, can reveal through them God's unique word here and now to each of us.

Although we have heard them before, it is important to listen to the words with fresh ears. There is always something new to be discovered.

What is discovered will not be something we work out for ourselves or think ourselves into – it will be the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is important not to try to force any new insights etc... If you simply stay with the word, it will reveal itself to you. This calls for time and patience. Read the passage slowly. Read it again more slowly. If you are drawn to one particular phrase, for whatever reason, stay with that phrase, repeat it to yourself slowly, not trying to work out its meaning, but letting it truly sink in. If these are the words the Spirit is drawing you to, the phrase will gradually unfold before you, becoming somehow richer and richer. It may be clear to you the significance of this particular passage or you may not be sure why it seems to draw you or be important to you. It does not matter. Stay with that phrase and keep it with you throughout the day – it will have its effect:

“Yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.” (*Isaiah 55*)

Some Suggestions for Prayer Groups

- Each person commits to making the journey and to spending a little time in prayer each day throughout the season.
- That there is a general agreement in terms of confidentiality with regard to what is shared in the group.
- That there is an atmosphere of respect and listening with regard to what is shared by members in the group. A prayer group is not the place for discussion or disagreement.
- It is important also that sharing respects the prayerful nature of the meeting - such sharing should be a brief prayerful reflection whose aim is to enrich the prayer and insight of the group.
- It is a good idea to offer refreshments after each meeting to give people a chance to get to know each other. This may be assigned to a group of people.
- Atmosphere is an important element in a prayer meeting. Care taken in creating an imaginative and evocative space is well worth the effort. This may be assigned to a particular person or group of people.
- It is important that each week one person has overall responsibility for leading the prayer group. This may vary each week. This responsibility includes preparing the opening and concluding prayer.

Prayer

Focusing Time:

Take time to quieten down and just 'let your soul catch up with your body'. Become aware of yourself in God's presence. This time might include a mention of the Grace you are praying for...

Invitation:

Come Lord Jesus
Come into my soul, mind and heart my home and family,
my relationships, the good ones and not so good ones,
my work and leisure,
the unfinished areas of my life.

Stay with me
As I try to be with you in quietness and peace,
As I listen to your Word and your voice
Give me the courage and confidence to trust in you,
So that I may live each day knowing you are
the Way, the Light and the Peace in my life. Amen

Scripture Reading:

One reading from Sunday or another Day (chosen beforehand with copies available for group members)

Reflection:

Choose a sentence that speaks to you or some situation in your life just now and stay with it. Talk to God, to Jesus and to the Spirit as one speaks to a friend. Share your heart's desire.

Intercessions or some Personal Petitions:

Praying whatever is deepest in your heart at the time of prayer.

Closing Prayer:

What ever suits the season – perhaps from the Mass leaflet, some other collection of prayers, or the following prayer which is for the end of the year.

Prayer at the End of the Year

In the twilight of this year that is about to end, O Lord, God,
hear my voice and my prayers.

My heart tries to express my gratitude for all the benefits I received.

I am grateful, Lord, for every moment of my life,
Your kindness and support,

For the light and happiness, the dark and painful moments in our homes,
and for the strength and energy which you have given to me.

This year I had difficult and lonely hours, but you have cheered me in my sadness.

Many tears ran down my face, but you taught me
to understand the designs of life.

With great humility, I turn my face to you, my Lord.

Give me strength to serve you with all my heart in the year ahead;

Make me more prudent, more kind, more steadfast in faith.

Help me to find the wisdom that will guide me through life.

You are the source of richness, of life and light.

Bless me, all your human family, and all of creation

Grant to those who call on you Lord,

Freedom, justice and peace. Amen.



Scripture Reading For Daily Prayer

Des Hayden

ADVENT WEEK ONE

Sunday

Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand

(Micah 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8)

Stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming; if he comes unexpectedly he must not find you asleep (Mark 13:33-37)

Monday

Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths *(Isaiah 2:1-5)*

Tuesday

I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do.

(Luke 10:21-24)

Wednesday

He will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples, and the shroud enwrapping all nations, he will destroy death for ever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every cheek; he will take away his people's shame everywhere on earth. *(Isaiah 25:6-10)*

Thursday

Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall; it was founded on rock. *(Matt 7:21. 24-27)*

Friday

In a short time, a very short time, shall not Lebanon become fertile land and fertile land turn into forest? The deaf, that day, will hear the words of a book and, after shadow and darkness, the eyes of the blind will see. *(Isaiah 29:17-24)*

Saturday

And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest." *(Matt 9:25-10:1. 6-8)*

ADVENT WEEK TWO

Sunday

"Console my people, console them" says your God. "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her that her time of service is ended." A voice cries, "prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord. Make a straight highway for our God." *(Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11)*

"Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals." *(Mark 1:1-8)*

Monday

Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, "Courage! Do not be afraid. Look, your God is coming." *(Is 35:1-10)*

Tuesday

"Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? It is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost." *(Matt 18:12-14)*

Wednesday

Jesus exclaimed, "Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light." *(Matt 11:28-30)*

Thursday

I, the Lord, your God, I am holding you by the right hand; I tell you, "Do not be afraid, I will help you." I will make rivers well up on barren heights and fountains in the midst of valleys. *(Is 41:13-20)*

Friday

I, the Lord, your God, teach you what is good for you, I lead you in the way you must go. *(Is 48:17-19)*

Saturday

God of hosts, bring us back; let your face shine on us and we shall be saved. *(Ps 79 v.4)*

ADVENT WEEK THREE

Sunday

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me; for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison. *(Is 61:1-2, 10-11)*

John replied, "I baptise with water, but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap." *(John 1:6-8, 19-28)*

Monday

Lord, make me know your ways. Lord, teach me your paths. Make me walk in your truth, and teach me; for you are God my saviour. *(Ps 24)*

Tuesday

The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; those whose spirit is crushed he will save. *(Ps 33)*

Wednesday

Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard; the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the Good News is proclaimed to the poor, and happy is the one who does not lose faith in me *(Luke 7:19-23)*

Thursday

The mountains may depart, the hills be shaken, but my love for you will never leave you and my covenant of peace with you will never be shaken. *(Is 54:1-10)*

Friday

Thus says the Lord: Have a care for justice, act with integrity, for soon my salvation will come and my integrity be manifest. *(Is 56:1-3, 6-8)*

Saturday 17 December

May the mountains bring forth peace for the people and the hills, justice. May he defend the poor of the people and save the children of the needy. *(Ps 71)*



ADVENT WEEK FOUR

Sunday 18 December

Glory be to him who is able to give you the strength to live according to the Good News. God alone is wisdom; give glory therefore to him through Jesus Christ for ever and ever. Amen. *(Rom 16:25-27)*

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,” the angel said. Mary answered: “Let what you have said be done to me.” *(Luke 1:26-38)*

Monday 19 December

The angel said to Zechariah: “Zechariah, do not be afraid, your prayer has been heard.” *(Luke 1:5-25)*

Tuesday 20 December

“Know this too; your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.” *(Luke 1:26-38)*

Wednesday 21 December

My Beloved lifts up his voice, he says to me, “Come then, my love. For see, winter is past, the rains are gone and over. The flowers appear on the earth, the season of glad songs has come.”

(Song of Songs 2:8-14)

Thursday 22 December

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit exults in God my saviour. The almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name. *(Luke 1:46-56)*

Friday 23 December

The Lord God says this: “Look, I am going to send my messenger to prepare a way before me. And the Lord you are seeking will suddenly enter his temple; and the angel of the covenant whom you are longing for, yes, he is coming,” says the Lord of hosts. *(Mal 3:1-4, 23-24)*

Saturday 24 December

The tender mercy of our God will bring from on high the rising Sun to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

(Luke 1:67-79)

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST - 25 December

No longer shall you be named 'Forsaken', nor your land 'Abandoned', but you shall be called 'My Delight' and your land 'The Wedded'; for the Lord takes delight in you. *(Is 62:1-5)*

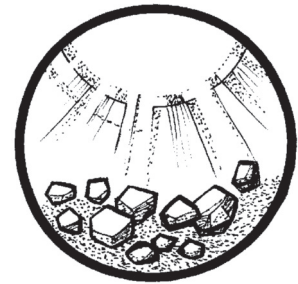
The angel said: "Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." *(Lk 2:1-14)*

As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. *(Luke 2:15-20)*

A light shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower... The Word was the true light that enlightens all people, and to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God. *(Jn 1:1-18)*

St Stephen's Day – 26 December

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Do not hold this sin against them"; and with these words he fell asleep. *(Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59)*

**St John, the Apostle – 27 December**

Something that has existed since the beginning, that we have heard and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands; the Word, who is life – this is our subject.

(1 John 1:1-4)

The Holy Innocents – 28 December

If we acknowledge our sins, then God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and purify us from everything that is wrong. *(1 John 1:5-2:2)*

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God – 1 January

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace. *(Numbers 6:22-27)*

The Epiphany of the Lord 6 January

Arise, shine out Jerusalem, for your light has come. Above you the Lord now rises and above you his glory appears. At this sight you will grow radiant, your heart throbbing and full. *(Is 60:1-6)*

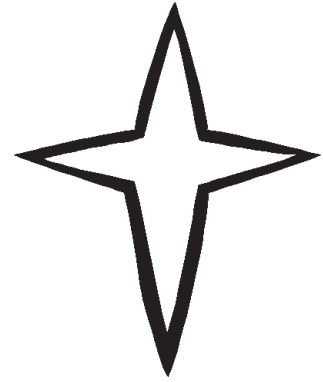
And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

(Matt 2:1-12)



Follow the Star

Some Reflections and Prayers



ADVENT: JOURNEY'S BEGINNING

Des Hayden

Starting our Journey

Advent is a journey, a pilgrimage through time. As in every journey we can only start from where we are. This is the invitation God gives us - to come as we are, not as we would like to be. It is important, therefore, before you set out, to first come home to yourself. Be honest about your hopes, your expectations, your disappointments, your concerns, your fears. Simply acknowledge that they are there.

Be aware that setting out on a journey implies movement and change, not knowing what will happen on the way, not knowing the final destination, but knowing that our journey will change us, that we will end up in a place different from where we started. This is where we are asked to trust, to take the step forward into the unknown believing that God will guide us; trusting, in the words of Cardinal Newman, that even though we cannot see the distant scene, "one step is enough for me."

Reflection

*Take a moment to let yourself feel where you are at this time in your life:
are you hopeful or anxious, excited or tired,
happy or sad, at peace or in turmoil.*

Accept yourself as you are now – it is ok.

Take this self that you are and entrust it into God's hands.

Place yourself in his hands at the beginning of this journey.

*Commit yourself to walking with him in trust and openness, **First candle is lit***



Prayer:

Lord, I place myself in your hands.

I come as I am, placing my trust in you.

I invite you to be with me during this time,

and I open myself to your action in my life. Come Lord Jesus.

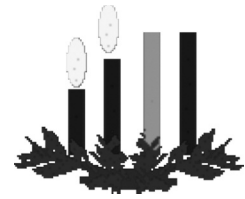
Prepare a Way for the Lord

How do we walk on this journey, what are we asked to do? Two Advent figures - the prophet Isaiah and John the Baptist – call out the answer to us: prepare a way, clear a space, make a highway for God, because he is coming. This is the prerequisite for the journey, the commitment we are asked to make - to clear a space in our lives, however small, for God to come to us.

Because this is a journey, because God's work unfolds only over time, we must be faithful each day to making that space. While this journey may not demand that we spend great lengths of time in prayer, it does demand what someone once called "constancy of immersion," that we remain faithful to giving that time each day, however small, so that God's work in us can bear fruit.

Reflection:

*I invite you to become aware of all there is inside of you,
of how full your mind is with thoughts and plans and memories.
Don't try to sort them out:
just be aware of the richness of all that you are.
Be aware that God will not do violence to you,
that the depths within you need and deserve time and attention,
Commit yourself to giving time for God's work to unfold.* **Second candle is lit**

**Prayer**

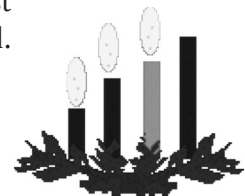
Lord, as I set out on this journey
I commit myself to making it a deepening journey of discovery
by being faithful to giving you time to reveal yourself to me
and to allow your work to unfold gradually within me. Come Lord Jesus.

Waiting

The spiritual journey is fundamentally about waiting – waiting for the Lord to come to us in whatever way he chooses. Therefore patience is an essential value, the patience that lets things unfold over time in their own time. Our journey is one which will take place over weeks. Even the symbolism of the Advent wreath, of lighting a new candle only every week, reminds us that the journey is one that unfolds gradually before us. Like time itself we cannot force it – we must have the patience to let it unfold in its own way. Just as Mary, and every woman who has brought life into the world, must wait patiently while that life gradually grows to maturity within, so we too must wait patiently. Like the farmer Jesus spoke of, who sows the seed and then can only water it and care for it, waiting patiently for it to grow, how he does not know. There are seeds deep within us, unknown, waiting patiently to grow, needing time to slowly come to life.

Following the star

Advent is a time for us to nourish those seeds, to trust the stirring deep within us. It is a time for reawakening and honouring our ideals, our hunger, our longing, remembering that their fulfilment has been promised, for God is coming. We are asked to honour that hunger within us, for it has been planted there by God to lead us to him, to impel us forward on our journey. Someone once said that ideals are like the stars - we chart our course by them. During Advent we allow our star, our ideals, our hunger, our dreams, to lead us. In this context Advent places the figure of Joseph before us, the one who trusted the voice of his dream telling him to take Mary for his wife because she has conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are reminded to trust our own dreams, uncertain as they may seem, for in them is the voice of an angel.

**Reflection**

*I invite you to listen to your own heart:
listen to the dreams, the hopes, the hungers that are there,
deep within, waiting for nourishment.
Open yourself to them and sit patiently with them.
Place them with trust into Christ's hands,
asking him to bring them to life in whatever way he sees fit.* **Third candle is lit**

Prayer

Lord, I give you my hope, my dreams,
the seeds you have planted deep within me.
I ask you to nourish them, to slowly bring them to life,
and I commit myself to waiting with patience and trust. Come Lord Jesus

Come Lord Jesus

The prayer of the early church was captured in one single word *maranatha*. This word can be just as easily translated as either “Come Lord Jesus” or “The Lord Jesus has Come.” This ambiguity expresses a real truth – we are inviting a Lord who is already there, who is already close to us, already waiting within us. We are simply opening ourselves and allowing him to work. The journey is ours, not his. Meister Eckhart once said: “Your opening and his entry are but one moment.” We simply open ourselves and gently invite: “Come Lord Jesus.” In calling Jesus “Lord” we are expressing faith in a God who is beyond us, who created us, who knows us better than we know ourselves, and who knows what we need more than we do.

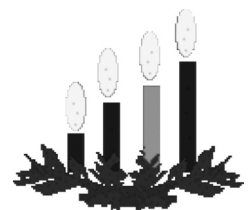
Surrender: Let your will be done

On this journey we are asked to let go – to let go of our own agenda, our own expectation of what we think should happen, of what we think needs to change, of how we think God should reveal himself to us. Many of our difficulties in prayer stem from a sense of disappointment because of frustrated expectations. But perhaps it is our expectations that frustrate God, not allowing him to work in the ways he wants to. Prayer is ultimately about surrender – surrender to the hidden work of God. In this Mary is presented as our inspiration, for her simple words express perfectly the attitude we need to have - “Let it be done to me as you have said.” That is all we need to do – the rest is up to God. In this we have his promise that he will not disappoint us.

Reflection

I invite you to become *quiet*,
to let go of your expectations, your plans,
your fears of what might or might not happen.
The Lord created you, and knows you through and through,
He already knows what you need.
Simply be – present, open, quiet.
Then invite... surrender ...
“Let it be done to me as you will”

Fourth candle is lit



Prayer

Lord, it was your hands that made me and shaped me.
Continue to shape me as I place myself in your hands.
I invite you into my life and surrender myself to your hidden work,
“Let it be done to me as you will.” Come Lord Jesus

Christmas - Our Journey's Goal

Bríd Liston

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. But in the fullness of time, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The prophets proclaimed a wonder person to come! A Counsellor, an Everlasting Person, the Bringer for Peace! Today – Christmas Day – God sends the eternal Word to earth; to us a child is born, today the Almighty God shares our humanity. Jesus does not arrive on our earth in glory or in splendour but as a baby, born in a cave, the newest member of a homeless family. The Angels say “I bring you good news of great joy; to you is born this day - Christ the saviour.”



Reflection:

As we light the Christmas Candle – the Light of the World – perhaps we could reflect on the birth or re-birth of Jesus in my life. Birth is a time of celebration and joy – new life – light and brightness. What do I want to celebrate as I open my heart to the Light of the World this Christmas? What are the gifts that I wish to share because the Word has been born anew in my heart?

Prayer

Response: **Today is the day of Salvation**
We thank you, we praise you, we rejoice in you.

On this day new joy entered the world;
 - may we try by our lives to share joy with others each day. **R.**

On this day fresh hope entered our world;
 - may we bring hope to those who are heavily burdened. **R.**

On this day love was visible in a child;
 - may we show our love for others in concrete ways of friendship and service. **R.**

On this day the promise of peace was proclaimed;
 - may we be lovers of peace and justice in our daily lives. **R.**

The Twelve Days of Christmas

The Darkness of Martyrdom for Jesus

Just as the Light of Christ is beaming out to the world, the Darkness of Martyrdom in the death of Stephen and the Innocent Children is a stark reminder that life will always be a struggle between the forces of good and evil. We are all sinners in a sinful world and in a sinful Church. Life, no matter how difficult is sweet. It is hard to die. Yet, as disciples of Jesus we need to learn both the joy and the cost of discipleship. By their death and not by words, the infants proclaim their witness to the Gospel. Grace and violence, blessing and bloodshed intermingling in life.



Reflection

*In this time of quiet, we place a grey stone filled with white marble
beside the light of Christ, as we remember the martyrs.*

We also remember the people who have died for their beliefs and their faith in God.

*We think of people who suffer at the hands of others,
in war, in the trafficking of human beings, in the voiceless, in children.*

We remember people we know in our own lives who are experiencing great suffering at this time.

Prayer

Loving God,

Stephen, the holy Innocents and all martyrs are witnesses to your life.

May we, in our lives, bear witness to our love for you,
showing by our deeds what we profess with our lips.

Give courage to women and men who strive by non-violent action
to influence others for the good of those suffering and deprived.

We ask this through Jesus, Our Way, our Truth, and our Life. Amen.

Celebration of the Family and Mary, the Mother of God

To day, the family is no longer a neat defined group. Perhaps it never was! Even with Mary, Joseph, and the extended family of relatives, friends and neighbours, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem as he struggled to find his identity. We are called to life through relationships. Perhaps rather than looking at the ideal family we need help in knowing ourselves and understanding our families, so we can be more compassionate with each other. We may need forgiveness for the many times we have failed to forgive those nearest and dearest to us. Family life is about time together, it is about giving and receiving and saying thanks.

Mary was invited to be the mother of God. "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by God would be fulfilled." God's love for us is so great that God was born of Mary to share in our humanity. God gathers us together in the womb of our earth.

May we always reverence our own life and the lives of others that have been given in Jesus.

Reflection *(As a sculpture showing the web of relationships is placed in the sacred place.)*

The feast of Mary, the Mother of God, on the first of January, turns the year for us.

As we let go of the year gone past and look to the future

we celebrate her role in the birth of Jesus and in our own lives.

Maybe we could sit with her for a few moments...

Talk to Mary as a family member, a mother, a sister, an aunt or perhaps a friend.

*As much as anybody, Mary understands the struggles of relationships,
the difficulties of rearing children, of seeing them come and go and leave home.*

Mary knows birth, life and death.

Be with her now, share with her, listen to her in the quiet of your heart.

Prayer

God of Life, a new dawn gives us joy as we celebrate Mary, Mother of God,
our mother, our friend and our intercessor.

Look with compassion on all families.

Where love and understanding have been absent bring trust.

Be with families where there is kindness, peace and care.

May each of us be generative and fruitful bearers of your life-giving Spirit. Amen



Epiphany: Journey's End, Journey's Beginning

An opportunity to reflect on where our journey has taken us.

Des Hayden

Epiphany (manifestation) is in a sense the conclusion of our journey. We have come a long way. Now it is time to look around to see where that journey has taken us, to give thanks for what we have learned and experienced, to express our gratitude that our journey has brought each of us in our own way before Jesus.

“We saw his star as it rose”

Like the wise men we too have set out on a journey, a quest, not knowing where that journey would lead us. Like them we have placed our trust in that star, that hope to guide us. It would be helpful to take some time at this point to look back, to reflect on that journey, to discover what lessons it has to teach us. What have you learned along the road? What did you discover about yourself? What did you discover about God? What did you discover about prayer? What were the moments of grace?

“The star halted over the place where the child was”

That journey led the wise men to the feet of Jesus, falling to their knees, recognising the Saviour of the World. Take a moment to reflect on how your journey has brought you closer to Christ. Think particularly of moments when Christ revealed himself to you? Remembering Mary who “treasured these things in her heart,” take time to allow what you have experienced to sink in, to become part of you. Give thanks for the gifts you have received.

“They offered him gifts”

St John said “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Christian love is first of all a response of love to love. How are you called to respond to what you have been given?

“They saw the child.”

What they are seeing is a beginning, a tiny fragile infant who will need care and nourishment to grow over the years to the fullness of maturity. We too must respect the fragility of the sense we have discovered of ourselves and of Christ. What will we do to nourish that growing life within us?

“They went home by a different way”

Even if they had chosen the same route it would still have been different because they were changed by what they experienced – they looked out at the world with different eyes and life had taken on a new significance. We too have been changed by the journey we have made and by what we have discovered along the way. For them and for us there is a real sense in which the journey is not over, it's only just begun.

Reflection

Take a moment to look back with gratitude for the moments of grace, with understanding for the moments of weakness. The journey is not over – it is only beginning. Allow yourself to be patient with what remains unsolved within and grateful for what you have received. It is enough. Entrust yourself to Christ, asking him to help you continue to grow.

Prayer

Lord, I thank you for all that you have revealed and given to me.
My journey is not yet complete, and there remains much to be discovered
May your light continue to guide me and inspire me
and may you continue to nourish and sustain me in your love.
My prayer remains: Come Lord Jesus.



Liturgical Movement

Bernadette Purcell

Liturgical movement has been a part of the Christian community for centuries.

The story of dance in the Christian Tradition illustrates the shifts and movements that dance has undergone through time. The words 'liturgical movement' and 'sacred dance' have been used interchangeably over time while the question of what exactly constitutes sacred dance continues to be debated. Sacred dance takes various forms: some see it as liturgical dance done in a Christian setting, others see it as any time that dance is done in celebration of, or in petition to, the divine, no matter what faith tradition or what setting. When the entire ceremony is constituted by dance, it is regarded as ritualistic e.g. tribal dance. When dance is part of a larger structure or ceremony it is considered as liturgical and serves as a means to focus the awareness on the community. Liturgical dance attempts to unite body and soul in the expression of the faith.

To illustrate the place of sacred dance in our Christian story the Hebraic tradition (Old Testament) and the New Testament has many examples.

OLD TESTAMENT

A round dance (circle dance) was performed about the altar in Ps. 48:8 "Walk around Zion, count her towers". The festival procession of the Feast of Tabernacles was the autumn feast, and the most important feast in Israel. It was originally a Canaanite custom of harvest thanksgiving. The verb *pasach* (procession) is specifically used in Ps. 118:27. "Yahweh is God, he smiles on us, with branches in you hands draw up in procession as far as the horns of the altar." The focus on Temple dance was an important feature of the Hebraic tradition.

David's uninhibited dance to God was the best-known biblical justification for sacred dance (2 Samuel 6:14-16). "David whirled round dancing with all his heart before Yahweh, wearing a lined ephod".

Dancing likewise celebrates Judith's victory, (*choreauo*), Judith 15: 12f. "...all the women of Israel, hurrying to see her, formed choirs of dancers in her honour..." The use of the circular or ring dance, the processional dance, and the whirling movement, which were associated with joy, represent the three types of dance most commonly used in Israelite society.

NEW TESTAMENT

In Luke 6:23, Jesus is quoted as saying, "Rejoice and dance for joy." This notion of joy is in line with the traditional Hebraic understanding of dance.

EMBODIED PRAYER

As seen in the above, liturgical dance or sacred dance has had the power to express the pains and joys of human life and that has been for some the avenue of the divine.

The body has an innate language that gives expression to a range of human emotions. When individuals connect this language of movement with their experience of God it is truly a revelation. Our



bodies are, as we are told, sacred vessels, images of God. Our bodies are our way of being in this world and our way of responding to God's love. Through dance- whose intention is to give praise, reverence and service to God- the person affirms his or her body as a gift from God.

SOME CRITICISMS

There is a notion floating around that liturgical dance/movement is forbidden by Rome or in a particular diocese, while others say it belongs only in the theatre, not in the sanctuary. The documents on Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council speak of "full conscious and active participation" and encourage animation of the whole assembly. Dance is one dimension of this active participation in worship where it animates the minds/hearts and bodies of the whole people of God.

VARIOUS USES OF LITURGICAL DANCE/ MOVEMENT

Liturgical movement can be used in the liturgy to bring life and spirit to worship. For example the entrance rite at Mass might use a processional form of dance to solemnize the beginning of worship as a community. Other uses of dance include: the Gospel procession; an interpretation of the psalm refrain; an offertory procession; a post-communion reflection as well as a closing ritual which uses the procession format.

Special times of the year give great scope and possibilities to using dance and liturgical movement in a creative way. For example one could use the beginning or end of the school term as a place wherein to explore dance in a specific way. The Church's Seasons offer endless possibilities e.g. Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter.



Advent, Christmas and Epiphany – Art and Environment

Amanda Dillon

“Prepare the way of the Lord!” is the call that marks the beginning of our liturgical year. This applies to the art and environment of the season of advent too. This is the time to clear out the clutter (think of your entrance and gathering area) and let the environment of the worship space signal a new beginning in the life of the community. Advent is a time of anticipation and preparation and this sense of expectancy should be visible in the church. “Prepare a way for the Lord” through all the notice boards, notices, magazine racks, bulletin trays and other miscellaneous items that clutter the entrances. It should be immediately noticeable to anyone entering the church that Advent has begun, that we have now entered this period of preparation for Christmas.

It is important to use materials that are worthy of the task. Where possible locally grown natural elements or products better reflect the life of the community that worships in this place. It is not necessary to spend lots of money to achieve a beautiful end result – but it is important to include creative, artistic and ‘crafty’ people who can use their talents to bring about the desired effects from the materials available.

The most prominent visual clues are the colour purple and the Advent wreath. There are many shades of purple – and it is a dramatic colour, it is a purple that moves towards the blue tones that is more appropriate for this time. It is essential that the purple vestments used in Advent are not the same as those of Lent. The third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday uses a rose colour or a purple that moves towards a rose or pinky colour. This lighter joyful colour is intended to lighten the mood and capture the joyous atmosphere of this Sunday. Some liturgists suggest the use of autumnal earthy colours in the environment at this time - reflecting not only the natural season and this sense of reflective preparing – but also the humble, rustic nature of the stable.

The expectation of Advent is also about mystery and purple lends itself to this beautifully. It is the colour of the night skies and perhaps a subtle splattering of sequins on swathes of purple fabric might hint at stars – especially the star that shall inspire the magi. But before we get to that prominent star - Isaiah calls on God to “rend the heavens and come down”. “Light” is key word and concept to keep in mind throughout Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. Different types of light, day and night, the stars and the sun appear in our readings. The images and symbols arise out of the scriptures and there are many images of the cosmos, heaven, stars and angels in the Advent scriptures - how might it be possible to introduce this idea of the heavens into your environment in a tasteful way? It is important that the liturgical space be dignified and worthy of the people who gather and the worship that takes place there.



The Advent wreath is intended to be made of fresh evergreens symbolising Christian belief in everlasting life. There are 4 candles representing each week of Advent. These may be 3 purple and one rose – to compliment the colour scheme mentioned above or they may be 4 purple candles or 4 white candles. The size of the wreath is important – it should be substantial enough for the church space and clearly visible. It may be located on a stand or suspended from the ceiling, it can be in the gathering area or in the nave or in the sanctuary. Wherever it is placed it should not obscure the ambo or altar. The liturgical environment should enhance the actions of the liturgy not impede them and as such the sanctuary is not the place for all the symbols we introduce at this time – like the wreath, for example, or the nativity scene.

Most churches have images, be they statues, stained glass windows or icons or the ‘heralds of Christ’ Mary, John the Baptist, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. This is a time when more attention may be drawn to these through the use of candles, flowers or use of the Advent purple in some way. However, it is suggested that flowers be used in moderation throughout the church building prior to Christmas. Pinecones, berries and seedpods are more in keeping with the tone. It is important to resist the urge to ‘decorate’ the church for Christmas in a way similar to the decorating of shopping malls and homes. Advent has a different feel completely and is an increasingly necessary antidote to the over-the-top commercial decorations.

Christmas begins at the midnight mass of Christmas Eve and the colours change dramatically to gold and white to mark this. Gold is about radiant light and the scriptures speak of the ‘Sun of Justice’ (Malachi 4:2) and the Light of the World (John 8:12). Increase the light in the church especially through the use of candles, real burning candles in attractive patterns and colours. You may wish now to introduce lights to the outside of the church, the church gardens and pathways. Some churches light the pathway with luminaries, paper bags weighted with sand holding a candle – or strings of fairy lights through the trees.

The Nativity scene is a devotional display that is important for many worshippers, especially children. It is vital to have this looking clean and fresh and not musty and dirty – as if it has been packed up in a dusty corner for a year. Take it out early and spruce it up as necessary. The nativity really does not belong in the sanctuary and indeed is better served in another area of the church where it may have its own space. Some churches may set up the nativity a few days prior to Christmas, with the magi approaching from a distance and the infant yet to be placed in the manger (on Christmas eve). Perhaps this year, a particularly special star may be crafted, in your parish – to hang above this scene. The nativity is a popular fusing of the many different elements of the different narratives of Jesus birth, the shepherds appear only in Luke, the magi only in Matthew, the ox and the ass belong to Isaiah – nonetheless they live well together in our imaginations. A key aspect of enhancing the liturgical environment is about appealing to all of the senses. The nativity with its many stable textures and smells offers many opportunities to appeal to the senses in different ways. How about introducing straw bales into the gathering area and so drawing people immediately into the smells, sights and sounds of the Christmas narrative? How does your parish nativity scene reflect the realities of family life in your area? What might an Irish nativity in 2005 look like? How might we remember the families made homeless, in terrible natural disasters; the tsunami, Hurricane Katrina and the Pakistani earthquakes, since last Christmas?

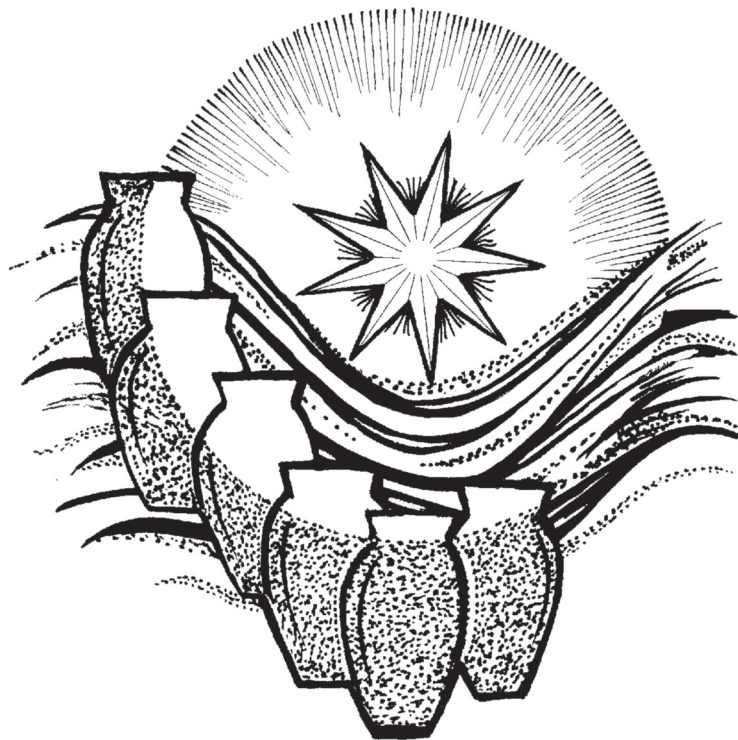


Again the Christmas tree, an evergreen, is preferable near the nativity rather than in the sanctuary and is best not over decorated. In some cultures, spring flowers are placed around the manger signifying new life in Jesus.

The symbols of the Epiphany are water, the waters of baptism most especially and the water and wine of the marriage feast at Cana. It is also the time when we remember the magi in a special way. In essence, Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the world. Again light is a key symbol to be enhanced and brought forth to the full. Christ is the “light of the nations”. There are so many different types of light, torches, lanterns, star-shaped lanterns, long-stem candles, and so many creative ways to use these lights. Electric votive candles are a very poor imitation and rid the symbol of its vitality and integrity. The gifts of the magi lend themselves to interpretation, might you replace the gold with a collection for a specific charity that cares for the homeless, the frankincense with letters to ministers on behalf of the poor in the developing world, or to prisoners of conscience, in place of myrrh gifts for the housebound and dying in your parish? How might people bring their own gifts before God?

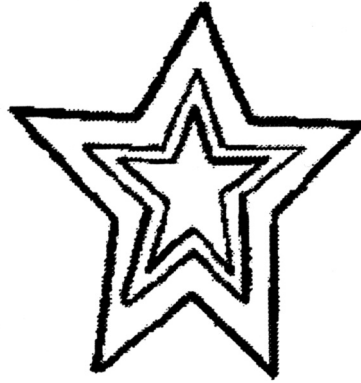
You may wish to draw attention to the baptism font. A dove may hover over the font and candles be placed around it with spring flowers or shells, for example. Attention to detail is essential and simplicity is often very effective. Symbols do not need to be explained – they speak a language of their own. Enjoy enhancing the environment for your fellow worshippers this Christmas. Michael Paul Gallagher, an Irish theologian, suggests that, “Imagination is the key to hope. The poetry of God is calling for new expressions. Because God does not speak in boring prose, moralistic messages, routine rituals, but in soaring imaginative love, in events of liberating surprise from exodus to resurrection. To renew the freshness we need to dive deeper.”*

* Michael Paul Gallagher, *Dive Deeper, The Human Poetry of Faith*. (2003)



Follow the Star

Seamus O'Connell



Reflecting on the Epiphany as Good News

Five Keys from Matthew for Celebrating the Epiphany as Good News

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."'

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. (Matt 2:1-12)

Reading in the Liturgy: Reading beyond the Episodic ~ Isolation Saps Gospel Life

"Whatever you do repeatedly has the power to shape you, has the power to make you over into a different person – even if you're not totally 'engaged' in every minute." Paul Bosch

Key 1: The Gospel is good news not good advice! (N.T. Wright)

Life-giving Question:

For whom is this Gospel good news?

Key 2: The Story of the Magi, like all Gospel stories, is a story of surprise.

Life-giving Question:

What did you not expect in this story?

“What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go.

Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.”
(21:28–32)

Key 3: The Story of the Magi, like all Gospel stories, is the whole Gospel!

Life-giving Question:

What other stories from Matthew does this bring to mind?

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”
(Matthew 13:44)

Key 4: The Story of the Magi, like all Gospel stories, is a portrait of the Church.
(*Every Gospel story is a portrait of our parish.*)

Life-giving Question:

What dimensions of our parish can we see in this story?

Key 5: The Story of the Magi, like all Gospel stories, is a story of darkness and light.
(*Every Gospel story is a story of the crucified and risen Lord*)

Life-giving Question:

How is our HOPE woven through the shadows, threats and crosses of life in this story?

“This is the meaning of Christ’s presence among us: he is God-with us; God who has always been with us in our story, in the suffering and pain of history. In this [Christmas] night God is in our midst, present in Jesus, to assure us that God’s love does not abandon the world...”

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, Midnight Mass Homily, Milan, 24.12.1988.

RESPONSE Lumen Christi, Alleluia! Amen!

Concepts and Presentation © Séamus O’Connell, Maynooth College, Oct. 2005

Epiphany Blessing for Our Homes

Des Hayden

Background

In some parts of Europe on the eve of Epiphany there was the custom of blessing of homes. Doorways would be sprinkled with holy water and the head of the household would write with chalk C + M + B (Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar protect us this year).

Introduction

On this day when we remember the Magi who followed the star as it came to rest on the birthplace of Jesus. There they found Joseph and Mary gathered around their newborn son. As they brought their gifts and did him homage on that holy day they themselves received a blessing. Today we ask Christ to send his blessing upon our home and our family.

We listen to the Gospel according to St. John:

Gospel Reading

In the beginning was the Word:
The Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning,
not one thing had its being but through him.
The Word was made flesh,
he lived among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father,
full of grace and truth.
(John 1:1-3, 14)



Alternative reading: Matthew 2:7-12 The Magi arriving in Bethlehem

Members of the family may wish to pray for particular needs or blessings at this time.

Sprinkling of house with blessed water

Prayer:

Lord God, you guided the Magi to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.
May your blessing come upon us and may it rest upon our home.
May your light guide us, your strength uphold us, and your love protect us,
so that we too may grow in wonder at the glory of God.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sample Advent Service

Entrance Song

My Soul In Stillness Waits (*Marty Haugen*)

All sing: For you, O Lord, my soul in stillness waits,
Truly my hope is in you.

Opening Prayer (*p.28*)

Reading

Micah 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8

Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter,
we are all the work of your hand .

Prayer (*bottom p.36*)

Advent Candle Procession

Warm The Time of Winter (*Lori True*)

All sing: Holy light, warm our night, warm the time of winter
Holy light, warm our night, warm the time of winter

Blessing of Advent Wreath (*p. 18*)

Psalm 25

To You, O Lord (*Marty Haugen*)

All sing: To you, O Lord, I lift my soul
To you, I lift my soul

Gospel Acclamation

Pilgrim Alleluia (*Liam Lawton*)

Gospel

Mark 13:33-37 Stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming;
if he comes unexpectedly he must not find you asleep.

Blessing of Jesse Tree (*p.19*)

Magnificat

My Soul Rejoices (*Bernadette Farrell*)

All sing: My soul rejoices in God my Saviour.
My spirit finds its joy in God the living God.

Intercessions

Response: Lord Hear Our Prayer

Procession with Christmas Fare:

Ullmhaígi Bóthar an Tiarna (*Máire Ní Dhuibhir*)

All sing: Ullmhaígi Bóthar an Tiarna, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Advent Blessing

(Roman Missal)

Recessional

O Come, O Come Emmanuel (*Medieval French*)

All sing: Rejoice, Rejoice, O Israel, to you shall come Emmanuel

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