

THE RULE OF LIFE



CULTIVATING PRAYER
Advent & Christmas 2019



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Name: _____

ADVENT REMINDS US THAT “MISERY, SORROW, POVERTY, LONELINESS, HELPLESSNESS, AND GUILT MEAN SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT IN THE EYES OF GOD THAN ACCORDING TO HUMAN JUDGMENT; THAT GOD TURNS TOWARD THE VERY PLACES FROM WHICH HUMANS TURN AWAY; THAT CHRIST WAS BORN IN A STABLE BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR HIM IN THE INN—A PRISONER GRASPS THIS BETTER THAN OTHERS. AND FOR THEM, THIS IS TRULY GOOD NEWS.”

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

THE RULE OF LIFE & THE LITURGICAL CALENDAR.

At Grace Pasadena, we are committed to forming habits and practices— a Rule of Life — that root us in the love of God in Jesus Christ. As part of our common Rule, we follow the liturgical, or Church calendar. As we live into the different seasons of the church, the Holy Spirit invites us to live our lives with God and one another with a different rhythm and intention than our usual busy and frantic pace. So, what is the liturgical or church calendar?

As another calendar year draws to a close, a new church year is just beginning. The church year was developed over centuries as a tool to help the people of God remember and celebrate the full mystery of the good news of Jesus Christ. The church year is divided into the following seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost/Ordinary Time.

Each season calls us to focus on different aspects of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, as well as his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and his promised return. The church calendar also provides space for us to consider our identity as the body of Christ, the new life Jesus gives to us by the Holy Spirit, and our witness in word and deed until Jesus returns. To that end, each season has its own feast days, colors, prayers, rituals and moods to aid in our remembrance and celebration.

By marking the passage of time redemptively, the liturgical year reminds us that God holds all time in his hands and has acted and continues to act in history in order to redeem for himself his people. Taken altogether, we see that the liturgical year acts in concert with Scripture, prayer, worship, Sabbath keeping, silence, and other aspects of our Rule of Life to amplify the invitation to lose ourselves in the Good News of Jesus so that we might truly find ourselves and bless the world with the life of Jesus.

THE ADVENT SEASON.

The approximately four-week season of Advent starts the new church year, preparing the people of God for the celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany. It officially begins the Sunday after the feast of Christ the King, which means the length of Advent varies year-to-year; it doesn’t always start on December 1!

The word *advent* means “coming.” So, during this time, the church remembers Jesus’ first coming and the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises. We also *anticipate* his coming again. Jesus’ resurrection inaugurated a new era in which sin and death are defeated. But until he returns as he promised at the ascension, this world continues to be marred by sin. Advent teaches us to look forward and yearn for the day Jesus returns to complete his work of redemption and make all things new.

It follows that the mood of the season is of longing, expectation and waiting. The color purple is used because of its association with repentance, preparation and sacrifice.

The cry and prayer of Advent is, thus, taken from Revelation 22:20: "Come, Lord Jesus, come!" It is the cry from those who have experienced the tyranny of injustice in a world under the curse of sin. It is the cry from those who still have hope of deliverance because they believe in a God who hears the cries of the oppressed and delivers them. It is the cry that sums our deepest desires.

Of course, Scripture teaches us that we need redemption from our broken world because we broke it! Advent calls us to wait and prepare for Jesus' return by repenting. We are to turn away from the false hopes and desires that twist our hearts and break our relationships and world. We are to turn toward Jesus, who frees us so that we may serve one another in grace and truth. Just as John the Baptist was born to prepare the way for Jesus' first coming, we are given to each other in the church to encourage each other and challenge the world around us to prepare for his coming again.

So, what do we exactly do during Advent? We wait and prepare by re-committing ourselves to the Christian practices, especially prayer. We learn to pray "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20) and offer our desires, hopes, fears and laments. We enter this time to cultivate patience and new hope.

This makes Advent is a wonderful time to cultivate prayer, and so this month's Rule of Life focus is on prayer. We hope this guide and the tools offered within it move us into deeper and more intimate prayer. At the same time, we hope keeping Advent together through prayer forms us more and more into a patient people: a people who wait on the living King to satisfy rather than a people who seek self-satisfaction with lesser things and their false promises.

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON.

In the rhythms of the Church year, we learn the value of waiting and preparing for celebration. This rhythm reminds us that God always answers his people and fulfills his promise in his mysterious timing. We are a society that embraces instant satisfaction. Advent forces us to wait, to slow down, and to prepare. And the good news is that our waiting is not in vain:

"CHRISTMAS HAS DEVoured ADVENT, GOBBLED IT UP WITH THE TURKEY GIBLETS AND THE GOBLETS OF SEASONAL ALE.... [THE] DISAPPEARANCE OF ADVENT SEEMS ESPECIALLY DISTURBING FOR IT'S INJURED EVEN THE SECULAR CHRISTMAS SEASON: OPENING A HOLE, FROM THANKSGIVING ON, THAT CAN BE FILLED ONLY WITH FIERCER, MADDER, AND WILDER ATTEMPTS TO ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS. MORE CHRISTMAS TREES. MORE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS. MORE TINSEL, MORE TASSELS, MORE GLITTER.... FOR MUCH OF AMERICA, CHRISTMAS ITSELF ARRIVES NEARLY AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT: NOT THE FULFILLMENT, BUT ONLY THE END, OF THE LONG YULE SEASON THAT HAS BURNED WITHOUT STOP SINCE THE STORES BEGAN THEIR CHRISTMAS SALES.

—JOSEPH BOTTUM

*"THE FUNCTION OF PRAYER IS NOT TO INFLUENCE GOD,
BUT RATHER TO CHANGE THE NATURE OF THE ONE WHO PRAYS."*

—SOREN KIERKAGAARD

Advent always ends with the second biggest celebration of the Christian year, and that is Christmas! (Let us not forget that Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is *the* feast of feasts.) Without Advent, our Christmas celebrations become too weak.

At Christmas, we remember the birth of Jesus, and celebrate past fulfillment and future fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus Christ. The mood is that of joy. The colors white and gold are used because of its association with the glory, royalty, joy, holiness and light of God. With all of our past, present and future waiting answered in Jesus, we continue the song sung by the chorus of angels present at Jesus' birth: "Glory to God in the highest!" (Luke 2:14).

And this not a one-day affair. Christmas is actually a twelve-day celebration beginning on Christmas Day. Yes, the twelve days of Christmas refers to the entire season of Christmas that ends with the Epiphany on January 6, which commemorates the visitation of the Magi. All of our Advent waiting leads to a long celebration. How could Christmas not be a multi-day, extravagant and joyous feast when the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, Creator and Redeemer has come to make the world and us new and is coming again?

So what do we do during the Christmas season? We rejoice, celebrate and give gifts. In some traditions, gift giving occurs on each of the twelve days of Christmas. Regardless of your gift giving practice, it is one that emulates and points to God's great sacrificial generosity

towards us. Thus, celebrating Christmas is an exercise in humility and care of others. As Paul says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit...In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2).

While we celebrate, we also look for ways to be united with Jesus in his humiliation so that others in our lives can know the joy of the Incarnation, God with us. In other words, we continue to cultivate the Christian practices to be shaped into the people of God.

THE ADVENT WREATH.

Many celebrations of Advent include the use of an Advent wreath. The Advent wreath as we know it today is a relatively new tradition, but one now embraced by Christians across many denominations. The wreath consists of evergreen boughs encircling five candles. Generally, four purple candles represent each week of Advent and a fifth white/gold one represents Christmas. (Often times, the third candle is pink to mark the middle of Advent.) One purple candle is lit on the first Sunday of Advent. Two are lit on the second Sunday, and so on. All four candles and the remaining fifth candle are lit on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Many continue to light all five candles through the Christmas season.

*“PRAYER IS NOT ASKING. PRAYER IS PUTTING ONESELF IN THE HANDS OF GOD, AT HIS DISPOSITION,
AND LISTENING TO HIS VOICE IN THE DEPTH OF OUR HEARTS.”*

—MOTHER TERESA OF KOLKATA

We recommend using the wreath because it offers a visual way to mark our Advent waiting and the fulfillment of our expectations in Jesus Christ. Lighting the candles also offers a moment in our busy days, whether we are alone or with others, to pause and to reflect on our longings and to offer them to the one who created us, knows us and comes to us.

(Advent wreaths can be bought pre-made, or consider making one. Craft stores often sell Advent wreath forms and they can be decorated with real or artificial evergreen clippings. Many people simply use 5 candles without the wreath.)

THE PRAYER GUIDE & INVITATION TO PRAYER.

This guide offers prayers, hymns and readings for Advent through the first week of the Christmas season. A few notes on the different elements of the guide.

- As mentioned previously, we are taking Advent as an opportunity to cultivate a deeper life of prayer. To that end, different ways of praying will be introduced throughout Advent. Each way of praying is deeply rooted in Scripture and tradition. Each way invites us to listen to, respond to and experience God. Many of us struggle to find the right words when we pray. Rooting ourselves in Scripture and the wisdom of others will only expand our vocabulary.
- Each way of praying is tied to the practices of silence, solitude, listening and sabbath

keeping we’ve explored so far, as well as the practices we will look at in the months ahead—they all work together. If you haven’t started keeping the Rule of Life with us, it’s never too late. Jump in where you are! Previous month guides with notes about each of the practices are available online if you would to review.

- Each week, the guide will invite you to pray both morning and evening. This practice is often referred to as the Daily Office. Morning and evening prayer is an ancient rhythm rooted in Scripture and it is a pattern the church has kept for centuries. Praying in this way frames our days with God’s word of love and reminds us that God is indeed the King of all our days. The liturgies and content for morning and evening prayer have been simplified a bit to help us develop this rhythm.
- Most of the morning Scripture readings continue in Matthew and then change at Advent 4. The schedule for Matthew is taken from a daily lectionary followed by Christians all around the world. Most of the evening Scripture readings are based on the tradition of the Jesse Tree. This tradition walks us through the genealogy of Jesus Christ starting in Genesis all the way through his birth. The evening readings follow the children’s Jesse Tree guide. We hope this helps families keep Advent together and provides a way for families to

*“ADVENT...IS A SERIES OF EVENTS DESIGNED NOT TO DELAY THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS, BUT TO ENHANCE IT. IT’S A KIND OF DELAYED GRATIFICATION THAT CULMINATES IN ...
A SATISFACTION THAT IS ALL THE RICHER FOR THE WAITING.*

— JOAN CHITTISTER

dwell on the same scriptures.

- Like in previous guides, prayers of confession are included. The morning prayer changes weekly, while the evening one remains the same throughout Advent. Confessing daily and regularly helps us grow into our identity as sons and daughters of God. Confession also helps us confront our desires. Are our desires ruled by the love of Jesus Christ, our King, or are they ruled by other things? Advent is a season of desire and longing for our true King, and confession helps orient our hearts to Jesus.
- The weekly suggested hymns are sung throughout the year, but especially during Advent because they all share the central theme of waiting. It follows that the hymns switch to traditional Christmas carols on Christmas Day. A link to these Advent hymns and many other Christmas ones may be found at www.gracepasadena.org.
- The guide takes us through Christmas Day and the first week of the Christmas Season. A prayer guide for the second week of Christmas and the rest of January will be available online and at our worship service by January 1.

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENTS

We believe this guide, along with the wreath, will help you as individuals, roommates, groups, and families to enter into the redemptive story of God’s love in Jesus Christ in new and deeper

ways. Our goal is not to load you down with more tasks in an already busy life, but rather to provide you with tools to help you experience God’s goodness more fully this season and beyond.

With that said, please remember that keeping Advent and the Rule of Life is not about perfection. The truth is, we will never keep either perfectly. The good news is that our God is perfectly faithful and is the one leading us into deeper communion with him. So, let’s keep Advent and our Rule of Life imperfectly but with hope, peace, joy and love.

It is a great joy to be in community with you and to wait on Jesus together. We are so thankful that God has brought us together and we are honored to be able to worship and serve our Lord together with you. May Christ grant us all a blessed Advent and Christmas!

With great love for you all,

The Pastors and Staff of Grace Pasadena

The Rule of Life -- Looking Ahead

January – Habits of the Body

February – Spiritual Friendship

March – Fasting & Hospitality

April – Stability of Heart & Place

May – Work & Creating

June – Balance: Putting it All Together

1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER: PSALM 18:8

“For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness.”

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we have not kept watch for you. We have occupied ourselves with our own concerns. We have not waited to find your will for us. We have not noticed the needs of our neighbor. We have not acknowledged the love you have given to us. Forgive us for our lack of watchfulness and renew us this day. *Amen.*

MORNING READINGS

Sunday	12/1	Psalm 111
Monday	12/2	Matt. 21:1-11
Tuesday	12/3	Matt. 21:12-22
Wednesday	12/4	Matt. 21:23-32
Thursday	12/5	Matt. 21:33-46
Friday	12/6	Matt. 22:1-14
Saturday	12/7	Matt. 22:15-22

FOR REFLECTION:

- In silence, ask: “What do I hear about Jesus and myself? How might I respond?”
- Consider the practices on the next page.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” Also, offer prayers for the day ahead and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord’s Prayer and/or following prayer:

“Come, Lord Jesus, come. Renew our hope for this day as we wait for you. Amen.”

EVENING PRAYER

LIGHT THE 1ST ADVENT CANDLE

and say: “Prepare the way of the Lord. Our hope is in our coming Savior, Jesus.”

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we look back on our day.
(silence for reflection)

We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbor. Have mercy and forgive us. Renew us with your love. *Amen.*

EVENING “JESSE TREE” READINGS

Sunday	12/1	Gen. 1:1; 2:5-8
Monday	12/2	Gen. 3:1-10, 23
Tuesday	12/3	Gen. 6:5-8, 7:1-5, 9:16
Wednesday	12/4	Gen. 12:1-7
Thursday	12/5	Gen. 22:1-13
Friday	12/6	Gen. 28:10-17
Saturday	12/7	Gen. 37:3-36, 50:18-21

FOR REFLECTION:

- How does the passage point you to the hope we have in Jesus Christ?
- Consider the practices on the next page.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” Also, offer the day behind you to God and pray for the day ahead. Pray for the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord’s Prayer and/or following prayer:

“Come, Lord Jesus, come. Renew our hope for the day ahead and let us find rest in your promises. Amen.”

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- **Sunday.** As Advent starts, spend a few moments looking back and looking ahead. Begin by closing your eyes and taking a few deep breaths. As your heart, mind and body relaxes, dwell on the opening morning or evening verse/phrase and acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit. Continue to take a few deep breaths. When you're ready:
 - Look back by bringing to mind ways God has been faithful to you over the Thanksgiving holiday and the last few months. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where God has met you, especially in ordinary places and moments. Give thanks.
 - Look ahead to Advent and the Christmas season. What are you looking forward to? Where do you hope to find joy? What makes you anxious? What hopes and hurts are you bringing into the season? Take note of these and offer all these things to God, remembering that Jesus is the light of the world.

- **Monday.** Continue looking back and looking ahead. What aspects of the Rule of Life have been meaningful? Which practices are resonating with you? What shifts have you noticed in your heart, mind, body? What shifts have you noticed in your life with family, friends, etc.?
 - As we press on with the Rule of Life and consider the spiritual practices, remember that the Rule of Life is comprehensive, but at the same time simple. Part of this simplicity comes from the way all the practices are tied together. For example, as you spend time in silence, you are praying. As you keep the Sabbath, you are fasting. As you pray, you are listening to God's Word. In what ways have you experienced this?

- **Tuesday and following.** In Psalms 4 and 5, we see a pattern of evening and morning prayer. In other parts of Scripture, we see regular prescribed hours of prayer. From its earliest days, the Church has followed this pattern. This practice is often referred to as the Daily Office. There are many variations of the Daily Office, and many traditions prescribe a simple one of evening and morning prayer. This is what we recommend.

There's much wisdom in this pattern. This pattern frames our day with God's Word and reminds us God has all time in his hands. This pattern helps us live into the body of Christ by connecting us to millions of other Christians who keep the Daily Office. This pattern also opens the door to praying at all times with all kinds of prayers. (Eph 6:8).

 - If you are not in the habit already, start keeping the Daily Office. Find a few minutes each morning and evening to pray by listening to God's Word and responding. If you have more than a few minutes, wonderful! If not, start where you are and build on it.
 - Consider inviting your roommates, children, spouse and/or neighbors to keep the Daily Office with you. Share this guide, adapt it as needed, and pray together.

2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER: PSALM 43:3

"Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me..."

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Jesus Christ, we confess we do not know how to prepare for your Advent. We have turned our hearts away from you; we have ignored the promise of your kingdom; we have been consumed by the busyness of this season. Forgive us and make us ready for your coming. *Amen.*

MORNING READINGS

Sunday	12/8	Psalm 114, 115
Monday	12/9	Matt. 22:23-33
Tuesday	12/10	Matt. 22:34-46
Wednesday	12/11	Matt. 23:1-12
Thursday	12/12	Matt. 23:13-26
Friday	12/13	Matt. 23:27-39
Saturday	12/14	Matt. 24:1-14

FOR REFLECTION:

- In silence, ask: "What do I hear about Jesus and his world? How might I respond?"
- Consider the practices on the next page.

SONG AND CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus." Also, offer prayers for the day ahead and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord's Prayer and/or following prayer:

"Come, Lord Jesus, come. Renew our love as we wait for you. Lead us in love to our neighbor. Amen."

EVENING PRAYER

LIGHT 2 ADVENT CANDLES

and say: "We wait for our Lord, the Prince of Peace who has come and is coming again."

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we look back on our day.
(silence for reflection)

We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbor. Have mercy and forgive us. Renew us with your love. *Amen.*

EVENING "JESSE TREE" READINGS

Sunday	12/8	Exodus 20:1-20
Monday	12/9	Num. 13:1-2,17-27
Tuesday	12/10	Ruth 1:1-10, 4:13-17
Wednesday	12/11	Isaiah 11:1-5
Thursday	12/12	1 Chron. 17:7-15
Friday	12/13	Jonah 1:1-6; 11-17
Saturday	12/14	Isaiah 11:6-10

FOR REFLECTION:

- How might the reading encourage you to cultivate peace in and around you?
- Consider the practices on the next page.

SONG AND CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus." Also, offer the day behind you to God and pray for the day ahead. Pray for the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord's Prayer and/or following prayer:

"Come, Lord Jesus, come. Cover us with your peace as we sleep. We rest knowing you are coming soon. Amen."

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- **Sunday.** Like last week think back on the last week. Before you do, take a few deep breaths. As you quiet your heart, mind and body, dwell on the morning Psalm or the opening evening phrase. Take a few more deep breaths and acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit. Think back to last week and the times you were able to pray both morning and evening. What was exciting? What was difficult? What else did you experience?

- **Monday.** In preparation for the rest of the week, take time to consider your physical posture when you pray. Do you sit most of the time? Do you ever kneel? Lay down? Stand up? Open your hands? How might your posture cultivate deeper prayer or detract from it?

- **Tuesday and following.** God takes our bodies seriously and calls them good. The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is affirmation of this truth. Our bodies matter to God and we are to use our bodies in prayer and worship. In the Gospels, Jesus reiterates Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and says the greatest commandment is to love God with all of our hearts, soul, mind and strength. (Luke 10:27, see also Matthew 22:38; Mark 12:30-31). The Greek word for *strength* implies the totality of our being and ability, which includes our bodies. The Hebrew word for *soul* implies the whole self and a unity of the flesh and will. And when we look at Abraham (Genesis 17), Moses (Exodus 9), David (Psalm 4), Solomon (1 Kings 8), and many others including Jesus, we see many different postures of prayer. Our bodies matter and we're invited to use our bodies in prayer and worship.
 - This week, consider taking up the following simple practice: once a day, either in the morning or evening, spend a few moments kneeling in prayer. Take a few moments to kneel in silence, or kneel while saying the final prayer, or kneel while reading the scripture, or kneel while asking God for help, or kneel while confessing.
 - If you are unable to kneel or want to try other prayer postures, try: laying prostrate, standing, lifting your hands, or looking up towards the sky.
 - Take note of your experience. Does your perception of God and yourself change? Does your listening change? Does your sense of expectation and receiving change?

3RD WEEK OF ADVENT

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER: PSALM 112:4

"Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous."

MORNING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Jesus Christ, instead of preparing for your coming, we have been busy eating and drinking too much and buying too much. Instead of finding satisfaction in you, we have used the emotions and bodies of others for our own pleasure. Forgive and overwhelm us with your grace. Renew us with your joy. *Amen.*

MORNING READINGS

Sunday	12/15	Psalm 103
Monday	12/16	Matt. 24:15-31
Tuesday	12/17	Matt. 24:32-44
Wednesday	12/18	Matt. 24:45-51
Thursday	12/19	Matt. 25:1-13
Friday	12/20	Matt. 25:14-30
Saturday	12/21	Matt. 25:31-46

FOR REFLECTION:

- In silence, ask: "What good news do I hear? How might I respond?"
- Consider the practices on the next page.

SONG AND CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing "Savior of the Nations, Come." Also, offer prayers for the day ahead and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord's Prayer and/or following prayer:

"Come, Lord Jesus, come. Renew our joy as we wait for you. Bring your joy to our city, country and world. Amen."

EVENING PRAYER

LIGHT 3 ADVENT CANDLES

and say: "We wait for our Lord, our light and giver of all joy."

EVENING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we look back on our day.

(silence for reflection)

We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbor. Have mercy and forgive us. Renew us with your joy. *Amen.*

EVENING "JESSE TREE" READINGS

Sunday	12/15	Isa. 40:9-11, Ps. 23
Monday	12/16	Isa. 53:1-6
Tuesday	12/17	Micah 5:2; Lk. 2:1-7
Wednesday	12/18	Lk 1:5-25; Isa. 54:1-3
Thursday	12/19	Lk 1:26-38; Isa. 7:14
Friday	12/20	Matthew 1:18-25
Saturday	12/21	Luke 2:1-14

FOR REFLECTION:

- How does the reading root you in the joy of the Lord and his promises?
- Consider the practices on the next page.

SONG AND CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing "Savior of the Nations, Come." Also, offer the day just completed to God and pray for the day ahead. Pray for the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord's Prayer and/or following prayer:

"Come, Lord Jesus, come. Give us joyful dreams of your kingdom and let us rest in your faithful kindness. Amen."

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- **Sunday.** Spend time looking back at the last two weeks.
 - What are you learning and experiencing by keeping the Daily Office? In what ways is evening and morning prayer making room for God and others?
 - How has it been using your body in prayer?
 - This week, consider making a concerted effort to kneel or lowering yourself while confessing. What do you notice?

- **Praying the Lord's Prayer.** When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, Jesus gave them a prayer that has become known as *the Lord's Prayer* or *the Our Father*. We often treat *the Lord's Prayer* as a beginner's prayer or a child's prayer. This is far from the case. *The Lord's Prayer* is the prayer of prayers. It brings together all of our hopes and desires and roots them in the faithfulness and goodness of God. It is a prayer to pray at all times, but especially during Advent, the season of remembering God's promises to fulfill all our desires.

This week, practice praying the Lord's Prayer by making each clause the main prayer of the day. Pray and repeat each clause slowly; take deep breaths and let the Holy Spirit help you respond to each clause. Take note of your desires, fears, joys and hopes as you pray.

 - **Monday.** Pray slowly: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."

 - **Tuesday.** Pray slowly: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

 - **Wednesday.** Pray slowly: "Give us this our daily bread."

 - **Thursday.** Pray slowly: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

 - **Friday.** Pray slowly: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

 - **Saturday.** Pray slowly: "For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever."

"SOMETIMES WHEN I AM IN SUCH A STATE OF SPIRITUAL DRYNESS THAT NOT A SINGLE GOOD THOUGHT OCCURS TO ME, I SAY VERY SLOWLY THE 'OUR FATHER' TO TAKE ME OUT OF MYSELF, AND WONDERFULLY REFRESH ME." — **St. THERESE OF LISIEUX**

4TH WEEK OF ADVENT + CHRISTMAS EVE

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER: ISAIAH 9:2

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."

MORNING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

While we have been busy preparing for Christmas, we confess we have done little to prepare our hearts for your coming. Forgive us Lord, for not bending the knee, for not reading your Word, for not searching our hearts, for not facing our sins. Forgive us according to your tender mercies, O God! Grant that when Christmas morning breaks for us this year, we may have a fresh sense of your presence and grace. *Amen.*

MORNING READINGS

Sunday 12/22 John 3:16-21
Monday 12/23 Luke 1:1-25
Christmas Eve 12/24 Matthew 1:18-25

FOR REFLECTION:

- In silence, ask: "What do I hear about Jesus and myself? How might I respond?"
- Consider the practices on the next page.

SONG AND CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." Also, offer prayers for the day ahead and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord's Prayer and/or following prayer:

"Come, Lord Jesus, come. Renew all things with the light of your love. Make our way straight and lead us to you. Amen"

EVENING PRAYER

LIGHT 4 ADVENT CANDLES

and say: "We wait for the Lord, the light of the world and lover of our souls."

EVENING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we look back on our day.

(silence for reflection)

We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbor. Have mercy and forgive us. Renew us with your joy. *Amen.*

EVENING "JESSE TREE" READINGS

Sunday 12/22 Luke 2:15-21
Monday 12/23 Matt. 2:1-2; Jn. 8:12
Christmas Eve 12/24 Re-read Mt. 1:18-25

FOR REFLECTION:

- How does the reading point you to the love of Jesus Christ?
- Consider the practices on the next page.

SONG AND CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." Also, offer the day just completed to God and pray for the day ahead. Pray for the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord's Prayer and/or following prayer:

"Come, Lord Jesus, come. Satisfy us with your love and may we rest with the sweetness of your Word on our lips. Amen."

THE "O" ANTIPHONS

- There are no new practices for these final days of Advent. Continue pressing into the practices of prayer. Dwell on the Good News of Jesus coming and give thanks. To do so, dwell on the words of the "O Antiphons," from which the song "Come, O Come Emmanuel is based." It is full of rich theology and reminders of God's promises and ability to fulfill them. Let the words wash over you. For whom and what are you waiting?

O Wisdom of our God Most High,
guiding creation with power and love:
come to teach us the path of knowledge!

O Leader of the House of Israel,
giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:
come to rescue us with your mighty power!

O Root of Jesse's stem,
sign of God's love for all his people:
come to save us without delay!

O Key of David,
opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom:
come and free the prisoners of darkness!

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

O King of all nations and keystone of the Church:
come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:
come to save us, Lord our God!

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER: ISAIAH 60:1

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”

MORNING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy God, we confess that we have not followed the light of your Word. We have failed to praise your Son’s coming and refused his peace on earth. Forgive our faithlessness and renew in us all fine desires, that we may watch and wait and once more hear the glad story of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord.
Amen.

MORNING READINGS

Christmas Day 12/25 John 3:31-36
Christmas 2 12/26 Psalm 28
Christmas 3 12/27 Psalm 97
Christmas 4 12/28 Psalm 118: 25-29
Christmas 5 12/29 1 John 5:1-12
Christmas 6 12/30 Psalm 23
Christmas 7 12/31 Ephesians 2:4-9

FOR REFLECTION:

- Re-read the passage and give thanks to God for coming to us in Jesus Christ. How are you encouraged by the passage?

SONG AND CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing any Christmas hymn with abandon! Also, offer prayers for the day ahead and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord’s Prayer and/or following prayer:

“With all of heaven and earth we declare: Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests! Amen.”

EVENING PRAYER

LIGHT ALL THE CANDLES

and say: Joy to the world, the Lord is come and is coming again. Let us rejoice and be glad!

EVENING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we look back on our day.
(silence for reflection)

We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbor. Have mercy and forgive us. Renew us with your joy. *Amen.*

EVENING “JESSE TREE” READINGS

Christmas Day 12/25 Psalm 2
Christmas 2 12/26 Psalm 119
Christmas 3 12/27 Mark 10:13-16
Christmas 4 12/28 Colossians 1:1-15
Christmas 5 12/29 Hebrews 13:8
Christmas 6 12/30 Romans 5:1-5
Christmas 7 12/31 Revelation 19:6-9

FOR REFLECTION:

- What regrets do you have for 2019? What hopes do you have for 2020? How does the passage speak to both?

SONG AND CLOSING PRAYERS

Sing any Christmas hymn with abandon! Also, offer the day to God and pray for the day ahead. Pray for the world and its needs, the Church and her life. End with the Lord’s Prayer and/or following prayer:

“Joy to the world! Our King rules the world in grace and truth. We give ourselves to our King and rest in his faithful love. Amen.”

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

Introducing the Examen. As the Christmas season begins, the calendar year is ending. Many of us take advantage of this time to reflect on the past, and so this is a good time to introduce the Examen. The Examen was developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola to help people develop a reflective habit that attunes the heart and mind to Christ's presence, as well as nurture a joyful response to the Holy Spirit's leading.

In a nutshell, the Examen is a way of reviewing one's day and the emotions and desires that arise in them. We often look for God in the extraordinary, and the Examen gently reminds us that God is always found in the ordinary and cares about our experiences. As Jim Manney writes, "*Nothing in our lives is so insignificant that it doesn't deserve God's attention. In fact, the mundane and the humdrum parts of our lives give depth and texture to our relationship with God.*"

Praying the Examen. The Examen is most frequently used to examine one's day. As you become familiar with the Examen, it can also be used to review a week, month or year. Here are the basic steps of the daily Examen as adapted from Jim Manney's *A Simple Life Changing Prayer*:

- *Ask the Holy Spirit for light: I want to look at my day with God's eyes, not merely my own.* We need the Holy Spirit to help us see rightly (John 16:13): God's perspective is different from our own. We often have too high an estimation of our experiences and emotions or too low of one. We need God's grace to see how he sees. We need the Holy Spirit to illumine our desires and to bring to surface any of our sins.
- *Give thanks. The day I have just lived is a gift from God.* Be grateful for both the good and bad experiences. God is a generous giver of gifts (James 1:17).
- *Review the day. I carefully look back on the day completed.* Search your hearts (Ps. 4:4) and review the day by going hour-by-hour. Take note of any consolations and desolations, and pay attention to any feelings that surface in those experiences. Good questions to ask: When did I feel a sense of love, peace, and joy? When did I feel exhausted, dead, drained, angry, mean? Which interactions were meaningful or frustrating? What desires did I feel? What things feel out of place or uninteresting? Where did I fall short? Strong emotions will arise, and when they do, offer them to God and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what might be beneath them.
- *Face your shortcomings, your sins. I face up to what is wrong-in my life and in me.* This is more than just our outwardly actions. It involves the root cause of our actions in our hearts (Mt. 15:8). In facing our sins, we are asking for forgiveness. We are asking to experience God's love afresh and to be transformed by God's love.
- *Look toward the day to come. I ask where I need God in the day to come.* Ask: What do you want me to do? Where do you want me to be hopeful? Who do you want me to find? The answers are usually small things, but the small things are often the most difficult.

MONTH IN REVIEW / LOOKING FORWARD

Think back on the month. What practices of prayer have been most meaningful? What shape is your Rule of Life taking? Where can you go deeper? What can you simplify to make it sustainable?

What was your experience of Advent this year?

As you look ahead, which practices are you eager to explore, and why?

The Rule of Life -- Looking Ahead

January – Habits of the Body

February – Spiritual Friendship

March – Fasting & Hospitality

April – Stability of Heart & Place

May – Work & Creating

June – Balance: Putting it All Together

NOTES & OTHER RESOURCES

To further explore Prayer:

- *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* by Timothy Keller
- *The Lord and his Prayer* by NT Wright
- *Loved: The Lord's Prayer*, a retelling of the Lord's Prayer for little ones by Sally Lloyd-Jones
- *A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer: Discovering the Examen* by Jim Manney

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