

# Advent Scripture Sharing

## Pilgrims of Hope 2024



Kildare and Leighlin  
Faith Development Services





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## METHOD

Thanks to all those who decide to use our Advent Booklets this year. They come to you this year mindful of the Jubilee of Hope we are about to enter. Christ is our hope and Advent is very much directed towards preparing ourselves to welcome Hope, to welcome Christ into our lives - the One who was, who is and who is to come.

We know that there are many well-established groups both in Kildare and Leighlin and outside who may wish to use these booklets... thank you for your faithfulness!!

We hope that this booklet may also be of use to people who wish to reflect on the Advent readings, but for different reasons cannot join a group.

Here are some guidelines to help those who are reflecting in groups:

- Wherever you gather, some focus might be very useful, such as a lighted candle or an icon. This can be very simple but serves to remind people that we gather in the presence of the God who wants to speak to us through his Word.
- Before you begin, it might be an idea to use a small Taize chant or a well-known hymn, just to set the atmosphere.
- It would be good to pray the opening prayer together as a group.
- Take time at the reading of the Gospel passage. This is the most important part of the gathering. Allow for some minutes of silence afterwards.

- Arrange with someone beforehand to read the Homily Reflection. Again, after the reflection, please allow for some time of silence. This can be followed by a time of sharing, but no-one should be put under pressure to say anything!
- The prayers given can be supplemented with prayers for the parish or community, or other needs as present themselves.
- The "Final Thought" is meant to give a small idea for people to take away with them. It can be read out loud, or people can read it in their own time.

Thank you once again for your faithfulness to spending time in reflection on the Gospels. We hope it brings you the hope, peace, joy and love that comes to those who "hear God's Word and keep it"!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to thank the family of the late Fr John Cummins, for giving us permission to adapt for use the Advent homily reflections from 'My life in Your Hands. Years B & C'. This is part of a two-volume collection of homilies by Fr John. We are delighted to be able to continue to be inspired by a much missed and loved priest of Kildare and Leighlin.



## 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Lord, bless us as we begin the Advent journey of waiting and watching, as pilgrims of hope. We pray for a listening heart so we can hear your word in Scripture and an attentive ear to recognise your voice in our daily lives. May we see your call in our work and your face in our companions who make our pilgrim journey with us.

**With Mary we pray**

Hail Mary ...

### READING

People can take it in turns to read the Gospel, or else if someone is praying on his/her own, then s/he can read the Gospel a number of times.

**First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16**  
**Second Reading: 1Thess. 3:12-4:2**

### Read the Text

Take it in turns to read the Gospel, or if someone is praying on his/her own, read the Gospel a number of times. This should be followed by a time of reflective silence.

**A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 21:25-28, 34-36**

Jesus said to his disciples: *'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces*

*the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.'*

*'Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'*

### WORDS/PHRASES

After a pause, suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (*with no comment from anyone else*).

### REFLECTION

Fear has been a part of human experience since time immemorial. Our time is no exception. Today people live in fear for their lives in the Middle East, [in Ukraine] in many African countries; even in Ireland there are families where fear of violence, abuse, or neglect is part of daily life. Fear is ratcheted up in the face of war. But we might even be afraid of the weather and its power to damage our homes or cause injury and distress. We fear what lies beyond our control. It seems at times that our world is an ugly place, where people are burdened in such a way that they miss out on the beauty of life. While the particulars may differ from generation to generation, since time

immemorial, this has been part of our human condition. Jesus speaks to his disciples of the fear that they are likely to experience, the movements of the heavens, the burden of the cares of the world, the things that lie beyond their control and he says "Watch, stand with confidence, trust in the Christ, the One who is to come. Life brings its share of disasters, trouble, and uncertainty, but Christ is with us." [Preparing to enter the Jubilee Year of Hope, this Advent see in Christ our hope.] That promise of a brighter future is part of the Christian vision; we see it in the first reading, a vision of a people dwelling in confidence, not in fear, living in a city called "The Lord-our-integrity." St. Paul, writing to the people of Thessalonica in the second reading, also urges the people to live in readiness for the coming of Christ, to watch for him, to wait for him, to live as if he were coming at any moment. Advent is all about this watching for Christ's presence, looking for him to come again. But it points to an attitude of attentiveness to the presence of Christ among us now.

Do not let the fears and terrors of this life blind you to Jesus who is present among us. Do not let the suffering and pain, the disasters, and devastations of today deafen you to the voice of the one who brings good news, the one who calls us

beyond the pain of this world to a new life, a life with no end, a life of joy and happiness with him. Paul outlines how we are to live in this time of waiting and watchfulness; he prays the Lord may be generous in increasing our love, that he may confirm our hearts in holiness, that we might make more and more progress in the kind of life we are meant to live: the life that God wants. [Am I prepared this Advent to wait and watch, and to see Christ, our hope, who already is coming to us.]

*Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence*

#### **PRAYER**

**Response: Come Lord Jesus.**

Lord, you come to bring us hope and courage; help us to be a support to those who feel a stranger in our midst or feel rejected and hopeless in their present struggles.

**Come Lord Jesus.**

Lord, you come to show God's great love and care for us and our world; help us to show our care for one another, our environment and all our endangered species.

**Come Lord Jesus.**

Lord, you come to show the generosity of God; may we share our gifts freely and willingly in a way that gives dignity to those who receive them.

**Come Lord Jesus.**

Lord, come and be with your Church as we walk together as pilgrims of hope on a synodal pathway. May the Holy Spirit be our guide and inspiration.

May we journey together  
with openness and respect  
for all.

**Come Lord Jesus.**

Glory be to the Father....

**FINAL THOUGHT**

‘It is the beautiful task of  
Advent to awaken in all of us  
memories of goodness and  
thus to open the door to  
hope.’

Pope Benedict  
XVI





## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### PRAYER

Our readings today focus us on the presence of God in our world, showing splendour in every aspect of Creation, and the love of Christ for us through all our human interactions and care for each other. We pray that we may listen with the ear of our heart today.

**With Mary we pray**

Hail Mary ...

### READING

People can take it in turns to read the Gospel, or else if someone is praying on his/her own, then s/he can read the Gospel a number of times. This should be followed by a time of reflective silence.

**First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9**

**Second Reading: Philippians 1:3-**

**6, 8-11 Read the Text**

**A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance

for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

*A voice cries in the wilderness;  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.*

*Every valley will be filled  
in, every mountain and hill  
be laid low,*

*winding ways will be  
straightened and rough  
roads made smooth.*

*And all mankind shall  
see the salvation of God.*

### WORDS/PHRASES

Suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (*with no comment from anyone else*)

### REFLECTION

Jesus doesn't appear in the Gospel today; nor does he appear next week or the week after. Where is he? We sometimes ask that question in times of illness or loss, times of financial hardship, times when we face unimaginable calamity. We can be disillusioned with our faith, asking ourselves "Where is God"? And why do things happen? It's easy to be discouraged in our world; we know so much of sadness and suffering, of disasters and tragedies. We see danger everywhere and are afraid that it will intrude into our own home, into our own lives. The world, the Ireland, in which we prepare for Christmas in [2024] seems to have forgotten what this season is about - the welcoming of the Saviour, the renewal of faith and hope, the advent of salvation and the



coming of the Light into a world in darkness. Where is he? Why doesn't he bring the long-promised deliverance?

Today we stand with John the Baptist, the voice crying in the wilderness, a barren place where no one is listening, no one taking heed, we should still continue to be that voice. Even if, like John the Baptist, we struggle to understand God's purpose and will and what exactly he is doing, when there is no sign of conversion, we are asked, like him, to continue to be that voice. For some reason, for some purpose God wants us to be where we are at this time, in this place. God does not ask us to be successful; he asks us to be faithful.

And sometimes, when we don't understand what's going on, when we feel the weight of life on top of us, even if our world has collapsed, that is all we have to give him. Our Gospel describes that lonely voice of John calling for a radical conversion to prepare for the coming of the Saviour. We are [each] constantly being called to that same radical conversion to make his paths straight, fill in the valleys, lay low the mountains. In other words, remove the barriers to Christ in your life whatever they may be. Get rid of whatever prevents us from coming to him and prevents him from coming to us. Make his paths smooth. The Lord is

coming; he is near.

The message of Advent is real and it's personal. It's not about being dazzled by sparkles and frills. It's about the coming of our Hope, the Light, the Saviour to you and me. How are you getting ready to welcome Christ again?

*Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence*

## **PRAYER**

As we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ, we present our prayers.

### **Response: Lord, hear our Prayer**

For Pope Francis, who has called us each to be pilgrims of hope. May he continue to find strength and courage in his preaching and teaching.

### **Lord, hear our Prayer**

For our political and Church leaders across the globe that they may be directed and supported in their search for justice and peace.

### **Lord, hear our Prayer**

For nurses and doctors, carers and life givers, and for parents and guardians who go the extra mile in their daily work and care. May God's spirit be upon them and guide them in safety.

### **Lord, hear our Prayer**

For all who feel under pressure and may be inclined to lose hope, that they may be renewed in confidence and courage during these days. May they find strength in the example of St Joseph, who put his trust in God and was enabled to overcome many difficulties.

### **Lord, hear our Prayer**

For our family members and friends who have departed this life and for all who have died, that they may find peace and fulfilment in the presence of their Lord and Maker.

**Lord, hear our Prayer**

**Glory be to the Father...**

**FINAL THOUGHT**

May the call of John the Baptist, help us today to focus on the conversion we need to make in our own lives in order to ready the path for the Lord. May each of us recognize where winding ways need to be straightened, and rough roads made smooth. As an Advent pilgrim people, may we turn to the Lord and see in him the one who is our Hope and Saviour.





### 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

#### **PRAYER**

As we journey through Advent, let us welcome some quiet time to reflect on the Gospel for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday. Following from last Sunday John the Baptist is the key figure. Today's Preface reminds us: we pray, 'so that (at his coming) he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise'.

#### **With Mary we pray**

Hail Mary ...

#### **READING**

Again, ask a few people to read the Gospel text. Keep it slow! Take your time; remember that God wants to speak to you in these words.

Allow for a few minutes of silence.

**First Reading: Zephaniah  
3:14-18 Second Reading:  
Philippians 4:4-7**

#### **Read the Text**

**A reading from the Holy  
Gospel according to Luke  
3:10-18**

When all the people asked John, 'What must we do?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics, he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No

intimidation!

No extortion! Be content with your pay!' A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

#### **WORDS/PHRASES**

Suggest that each person says a word or a phrase which stayed with them from the reading (with no comment from anyone else)

#### **REFLECTION**

"I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord." So said our second reading today. It might be news to some people that God wants us to be happy. Pope Francis is constantly asking Christians to be joyful. The call to every Christian is to be that Joy, to be that Gospel, that Good News of Joy for the world. The question for every Christian [and every Christian family] today is "Do we experience that joy? Do we live that joy? Do we share that joy with others? Are we ambassadors of the joy of the Lord for a world that's crying out for Good News, deeply

in need of the Joy of Jesus Christ?" Those same questions apply to our parish family - are we the family of God? In the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, are we ambassadors of Joy?

The joy of expectation is something that we all know, that sense of savouring the moment yet to come, enjoying the time of expectation; think of the joy of the engaged couple, of expectant parents, and grandparents. Today our readings burst out with joy. In the Gospel, John the Baptist urges people to share what they have, to build peace and to act justly as they wait in joyful expectation.

St. Paul encourages us to be happy, to trust and not to worry, to pray with thanksgiving in our hearts. In the first reading we have this marvellous image of God exulting with joy over his people, renewing us by his love, the God who will dance for joy as on a day of festival. Is this your image of God? When you pray to God, is he dancing with joy, exulting over you, renewing you by his love?

Do you know the joy of the Lord? Have you encountered him? Is there space for him in your life, or are you too busy, is there room at the inn?

In these last days before Christmas, try and stop and rest awhile in the presence of God. Imagine him

looking at you. What does he see?

*Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence*

## **PRAYER**

**Response: Lord, hear our Prayer**

We pray for Pope Francis that he may have good health, wisdom and courage to continue being a beacon for the world today.

**Lord, hear our Prayer**

We pray for all those who have died as refugees and migrants on their dangerous route to find a better future.

**Lord, hear our Prayer**

Lord, our world needs your strength and healing, enable us to live honestly by following guidelines for our safety.

**Lord, hear our Prayer**

Lord, lead us to be generous this Advent season in our support of the Vincent de Paul Christmas appeal and any other deserving charity.

**Lord, hear our Prayer**

## **Our Father**

**Glory be to the Father...**

## **FINAL THOUGHT**

God our Father help us to seek joy and happiness not in personal contentment nor in things but in people and in you, in human kindness and in sharing, and in doing all things well. Make our everyday new and worth living through the presence among us of Jesus Christ, our Lord



## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

### PRAYER

Loving God, we come together to reflect and to pray. We ask you to open our minds and hearts to listen to you as you speak to us through Scripture, through each other, through the reality of our everyday lives and through all of creation. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to respond to the promptings of your Holy Spirit.

### With Mary we pray

Hail Mary ...

### READING

Once again, ask a number of people to read the Gospel Passage. Remember that God wants to speak to you through these words, so spend a little time in silence to grasp these words and hold them.

**First Reading: Micah 5:1-4**

**Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10**

### Read the Text

**A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 1:39-44**

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, *'Of all*

*women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled'*

### REFLECTION

We're almost at Christmas Day, the focus of our Advent watching and waiting. We witness the joy and expectancy of Elizabeth and Mary, two women filled with the Holy Spirit, as they joyfully anticipate the birth of their children. I don't know if there's any other account of two pregnant mothers meeting in the bible.

Here we have a whole-scale conversation. I can just imagine them as they chat, not just about the strange events that have led to this moment, angels visiting and so on, but also the normal exchange that two women would have as they each expect their first child. Perhaps they're worried about the delivery; maybe they share their hopes and dreams, as well as their fears, for the future. In the three months that Mary stayed with Elizabeth, I'm sure that their conversations were wide-ranging.

The word that jumps out at me in the Gospel is the word "blessed." These women are conscious of having been blessed by God. They are enveloped in the mystery of God's plan unfolding around them and within them, and that they are participants called to cooperate in a divine plan much greater than they can perceive

or understand. They each have a sense of being privileged, a sense too of the privilege that the other woman has, and they rejoice. They are filled with joy, with trust and confidence, and perhaps there is some fear too, trepidation. What does this mean, and where is it leading? For the moment, it is enough to be in the moment, to savour this present time, this sacred time and to give thanks and praise to God. The mystery of life is continued in every human person; mothers are especially aware of that mystery in the life that grows within them and comes into the world as a new and beautiful little baby. But we are all held within the mystery of God, who has a plan for each one of us, all part of the mystery and plan that was revealed 2000 years ago in Palestine. Each of us is surrounded by the mysterious presence of the divine; each of us is loved by God, special to him, unique to him. In these hectic days of Advent and Christmas it might be a bit of a challenge to remember the mystery of God as it enfolded 2000 years ago and continues to unfold in us. But try to stop for a little bit, and to let the story of Mary and Elizabeth and their children be present to you. It's the story of our salvation, where God enters into human history and transforms what it is to be human - life, death, suffering and evil, - all changed forever. So let the mystery of God enfold you, hold you and enter into your soul, and welcome it with the simple joy and acceptance

of Mary and Elizabeth, who recognized the divine presence as it was revealed in their lives. *'My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior'*.

***Allow for a period of five to ten minutes' silence***

## **PRAYER**

**Response: O Lord, give us your love.**

The Visitation story highlights the importance of hospitality and being other-centered. We pray that we will be people who are generous in reaching out in love and care, especially to those who need a comforting word or gesture of kindness.

**O Lord, give us your love**

The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth speaks of joy and gratitude. May we be people who count our blessings and are life givers in our world.

**O Lord, give us your love**

The Magnificat reminds us that God raises up the lowly. We pray that we will be open to the presence of God in all of creation, remembering that all bear the image and likeness of the creator.

**O Lord, give us your love**

We pray that the calls and challenges of the Visitation story will inspire us to listen and respond to the invitation of Deuteronomy to 'Choose Life' and the words of the prophet Micah reminding us of what a life centered on God involves, *'This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God'*.

**O Lord, give us your love**

## Glory be to the Father...

### FINAL THOUGHT

It was Mary, the mother of Jesus, who gave flesh to the Eternal Word.

It was Mary whose co-operation with God enabled Jesus to live among us. It was Mary filled with God's grace who allowed us to glimpse God's glory in Jesus Christ. Mary carried Jesus in her womb and gave birth to the child who was her son and the Son of God. Mary nurtured Jesus, giving him the human graces that nurturing gives. Mary was mother, nurturer, handmaid of the Lord. We are called to be like her. Mary is strength and gentleness. As she is, so we can be.



## **CEREMONY OF HOPE**

### *From Darkness into Light*

Wrapped in December darkness we welcome the birth of the Son of God, the light of lights, the Prince of Peace.

### **SUGGESTED SETTING**

Group in a circle. Cloth in the centre with an unlit large candle, and a small tea light for each member of the group.

### **LEADER**

Let us take a few moments to be aware of our breathing, to be quiet and focus on the unlit large candle. *(Background music if possible)*

December 21<sup>st</sup> has the longest hours of darkness for those of us in the Northern Hemisphere. If you were in Newgrange, Co. Meath on that morning at 9am you would experience the rising sun and the sunlight peeping through the passage grave.

In pre-Christian times our ancestors were fearful that darkness and death would rule over the earth, so they circled sacred fires built on hilltops and in holy places to petition the gods and the goddesses to bring back the sun.

The Christian feast, December 25<sup>th</sup>, Christmas day, celebrates the word made flesh who came as a light in the darkness. Jesus the Light of our world has overcome darkness. This darkness comes in many forms and patterns. It can be a brief visitor or a long-term resident. The darkness holds a variety of emotions, some of which may not feel good *(Background music)*

Let us reflect on the dark times in our lives during the past year *(pause)*. *(The large, unlit candle is passed around as each person takes time to reflect on the darkness in their own lives. Each person is then invited to share their dark times with one other person, or with the group if they so wish)*

### **VOICE 1**

If we listen carefully in the darkness we will hear a tiny voice whisper.

### **VOICE 2**

I will go before you and level the mountains. I will give you treasures out of the darkness and riches that have been hidden away.

### **VOICE 3**

In the dark days I do not wait until light dawns for I know not when it shall come. I go instead stumbling into the darkness, searching for a road, straining to see a way – darkness, it is a place of growth. Tonight we are celebrating and marking the emergence of light out of darkness, of hope out of despair. *(one person is invited by the leader to light the large candle. All present stretch out their hand towards the candle as the blessing is read)*

### **BLESSING**

As we light this candle, we ask that God who is the fullness of light will protect each of us, our families and friends, from that which we fear most.



**Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:1**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. On those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone.  
*(Silent Reflection)*

**PRAYER**

May we all be encircled by the warmth of the light and love of God and the flame of our friendship with one another. May we who are gathered here be protected from all harm and disease, all evil and wickedness, all fear and darkness. Let us celebrate the light breaking through the darkness with song.  
*‘The Light of Christ has come into the World’ or ‘City of God’ or any suitable hymn.*

**LEADER**

*Invites each one to light a tea light from the large candle.*  
We focus on each person as s/he lights a candle, and we remember her/his family and friends. We are aware also of our connectedness with each other, with the world and the whole of creation.  
*Invites each one to share their hopes for this Christmas and for 2025.*

**PRAYER**

May we find hope in the lights we have kindled, hope in one another and in all who form the web work of peace and justice that spans the world. May we call forth from one another the light and the love that is hidden in every heart.

**HYMN**

The Lord is my Light  
My Light and Salvation  
In Him I trust

*Or any hymn of choice*

**FINAL BLESSING**

Light of God to give us hope  
Power of God to protect us  
Light of God to give us joy  
Peace of God to calm us  
Light of God to give us faith  
Grace of God to save us, this night and ever more.  
Amen



