



2018 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL FROM THE  
DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA AND FORMA



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA



THE NETWORK FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION

In 2017, Forma and The Diocese of Virginia began a partnership to provide support and resources to the wider church. Our goal is to bring together the creative talents of the Diocese of Virginia and the expertise of Forma's network of Christian Formation professionals through offerings like this Advent devotional.

In this second year of our Advent devotional for families and individuals, we are thrilled to have Aimee Bostwick, Forma Board President and Roger Hutchison, Forma Board member join with Paris Ball and Aisha Huertas from the staff of the Diocese of Virginia to write these reflections. Once again, you will find a brief overview of the scriptural themes for each week, ideas to try in your home to deepen your experience of Advent, and some short prayers and rituals to make your Advent experience complete.

This is merely a guide. Please do embrace the Advent season as a moment to pause, reflect, and push aside the secularization of Christmas. Advent was historically a penitential season. We certainly don't think that many people are going to return to a second Lent like season, but we are hopeful that you will find a few moments in each day to think about the coming of Jesus into your life. What does it mean to be waiting with anticipation for our Lord to come? What is holding you back from being with Christ as he is born? Now is the time to ask those questions.

We are weaving into the Advent Faith-at-Home resource some practices from The Way of Love: Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life. You can find the 2018 Advent Way of Love resources here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/journeying-way-love>. Journeying the Way of Love is a great resource for groups and individuals. We hope that you will utilize The Way of Love as much as possible as you use your Advent Faith at Home resource.

Please also consider purchasing, or creating, your own advent wreath for your home ritual. Ask your priest or lay minister in charge of Christian Formation for more information about what an Advent wreath is and where you can get one. There is nothing here that is complicated or unruly. This Advent devotional is designed for anyone to use at home, with friends, spouse, children, or anyone you want to deepen your faith with.

We invite you into a Holy Advent – Let's BEGIN!!



#### **NOTE – How the Church Tells Time**

Most of the world thinks of time as a line. We have what once was, we have now, and we have what will be. The Church does not think of time in this way. Advent is the beginning of the Church liturgical year, but in practice, we have no beginning or end. We have seasons: Advent (4 Sundays), Christmas (12 days) ending on Epiphany, Lent (6 Sundays), Easter (7 Sundays) ending on Pentecost, and the Sundays after Pentecost (also called Ordinary Time). The cycle repeats over and over again living through the life cycle of Christ and the Church, calling us into memorial and remembrance of what was, is, and will be.

About these devotions – The Advent offerings are formatted similarly to the weekly Faith-at-Home offerings sent out to Forma Members each week. Here, each week you will find a scripture to read, a thought to reflect on, and then several ways to respond according to the ages gathered. We encourage you to read the scripture with every age group, and the reflection with older children through adults before jumping into the response.

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## Advent, Week 2 – Paris Ball, Director of Christian Formation and Camps, The Diocese of Virginia

### Theme: Messages and Messengers

Scripture: Malachi 3:1-4, Philippians 1:3-11, Luke 3:1-6, Canticle 16

*“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord!”*

#### Reflect:

As we continue on our Advent journey, we encounter a number of people God sends to tell others of God’s hope for this world and God’s people. Many of these messengers are unlikely characters: springing up out of nowhere, it seems, to tell important things to those around them. Many of these holy messengers were not listened to completely or not believed: but they continued to tell their stories as long as they were able.

God’s people of wisdom and hope have been around since the beginning, sending holy messages to those who would listen and hear. This week, we will explore together where those messengers may be today and how we can share this news with others.

#### Households with Adults and Children:

➤ **RESPOND:** This week, we are talking and thinking about all the people who have had messages to share about God’s love. Sometimes, those messages are ignored or misunderstood.

Have you ever tried to tell someone something and they didn’t understand you? Or maybe was there a time when you wanted someone’s attention but they didn’t give it to you? How did that feel? Sometimes we all need a reminder to pay attention to the messengers in this world. Take an index card (or other small paper) and decorate a sign together that will help you pay attention. Maybe the card will say “SHHH, Listen!” or “Pay Attention!” or “God Loves The World!” – maybe the card will simply be an image. Find a place in your house where you will see it, maybe by the front door, and hang it together. Throughout the last weeks in Advent – you can have fun pointing to the sign you made together and reminding each other to listen to the messages of God’s love in this world!

#### Households with Adults and Youth

➤ **RESPOND:** In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he says that he “thanks God every time [he] remembers” them, because they care for him and are working to share the gospel so well in this world.

Who are the people in your life that you remember with joy every time you think of them? What things have they taught you about God, or about God’s love? (Note – both the adult and the youth should share the important people in their lives, mentors and messengers are for all of us!) Spend a few minutes remembering the important people who serve as messengers in your life with each other, and then offer a prayer of thanksgiving for those people in your lives.

#### Households with Adults

➤ **RESPOND:** John the Baptist plays an important role in the lives of many, including Jesus. He risked ridicule worse by spending much time in the wilderness, preaching and proclaiming about a messiah to come. While his words were heard by many, not all took him as seriously as he did. His message was one of contradiction and challenge, which was not easy for people to accept – then, or now.

John talked about every valley being filled, and the mountains being made low. He said that what is crooked will be made straight, and what is rough will be made smooth. He is preaching about a future where what we understand will be tipped upside down. Have you ever heard someone preach a message like this? Have you ever experienced a moment where it seemed like things were tipped upside down? Talk with each other about this. There were many things happening during the time that John was preaching and baptizing, but many did not notice the signs because they were preoccupied with their own lives. Do you allow space in your life to see and hear what may be happening in your own lives? Come up with a plan to set aside time for reflection and sharing that you can do throughout the rest of Advent.

## ADVENT WREATH PRACTICE:

Light a small candle, LED Candle, or the Second Advent candle in your wreath. Gather with your loved ones as you are able and offer this simple prayer:

God, you send messengers to teach us about your dreams for our world. Please help us hear those messages, and give us courage to be a messenger for others.

### Way of Love Connection:

**BLESS:** Share faith and unselfishly give and serve

“Freely you have received; freely give.” – Matthew 10:8

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People: We will, with God’s help. – Book of Common Prayer, 305

Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in his name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite others to the Way of Love.

How can you, like John and the other messengers, be a messenger of blessing this week? What selfless action could you take during what is potentially a very busy week in order to show the love of Christ to others?

