



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.

WE INVITE YOU INTO A HOLY ADVENT – LET'S BEGIN!!

Advent, Week 3 – Roger Hutchison, Forma Board Member

Theme: Do Not Worry

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Reflect:

We live in a season of worry. We worry about our health. We worry about our finances. We worry about our children. We worry about our parents. We worry about politics. We worry about violence of all kinds. We worry about the environment. We worry about our future.

We are a people of worry. For many, these worries aren't "what ifs", they are "when."

As we move into the third week of Advent, we are reminded that "the Lord is near." We are told to give thanks for everything – and do not worry about anything.

This does not mean that we are going to live a worry-free life. Nor does it mean that additional support will not be required. However, it does show that addressing challenges in our lives should be awash with prayer.

The Lord is near. Do not worry. Pray. Give thanks.

And the peace of God – the peace of the One who gives us breath – will guard our hearts and our minds. This God. Love incarnate. Is coming.

This involves trust, faith, and a willingness to give our all. How are you going to respond?



Households with Adults and Children:

➤ **RESPOND:** Worry is a natural human reaction to trouble and turmoil. Paul reminds us in the text above that just because the circumstances surrounding you are worrisome, do not lose hope because the "Lord is near."

What is something that you are worried about? How does worrying make you feel? Does worrying ever make you feel better? Create a family altar – a simple coffee table or stool will suffice. Make sure your children can reach it. Have children participate in the creating of this holy space by letting them choose the location and by encouraging them to place symbols of faith, love, and safety on or around the altar. It might include something they've built out of Legos or a lump of clay. It might be their baptismal candle or a shell that they found on the beach. Place a bowl in the center of the altar, and next to it, stack small slips of paper. Set a time each day or once a week to encourage each other to write or draw their worries and place it in the bowl – a symbol of giving your worries to God.

PRAYER: *Loving God, we know that you are near. Thank you for surrounding us with your presence, peace, and love. Thank you for replacing our worry with your peace. We rejoice and give thanks for all of the blessings in our lives. AMEN*



Households with Adults and Youth (or older children):

► **RESPOND:** Worry is a natural human reaction to trouble and turmoil. Paul reminds us in the text above that just because the circumstances surrounding you are worrisome, do not lose hope because the “Lord is near.” It is very easy to get stuck in our own heads. The same worry plays over and over and we often find ourselves hopeless with no way out. One way to “get out” of our heads is to reach out beyond ourselves in kindness and service to someone else. Encourage your teenager to help come up with some sort of outreach or mission project. One idea might be to collect blankets for a homeless shelter or if your teen responds to animals, animal hospitals and shelters are always looking for clean towels and blankets. Young people enjoy being with friends, so allow them to do this project, not just with their families, but with their friends.

*Breath Prayer:

Breathe in: “*Creator God*”

Breathe out: “*Your peace heals my heart.*”

*Choose your own words to pray silently in your heart – then pray it over and over – no matter the setting. This is a simple way to ease a worried mind. Focus on the words and focus on your breath.

IMPORTANT: Everyone worries. That is how we are wired. That being said, if your worry and anxiety is affecting your joy, passion, and day-to-day life, or if you are feeling hopelessness, you may need additional support. Please ask for help. This is nothing to be ashamed of. Talk to your priest, a therapist, or psychiatrist – there is help available.

Advent Wreath Practice:

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

God, we know that you are near. Thank you for surrounding us with your presence, peace, and love. Thank you for replacing our worry with your peace. We rejoice and give thanks for all of the blessings in our lives. AMEN

Way of Love Connection

TURN: Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus

As Jesus was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. – Mark 2:14

“Do you turn to Jesus Christ ...?” – Book of Common Prayer, 302

Like the disciples, we are called by Jesus to follow the Way of Love. With God’s help, we can turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice, and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom. In turning, we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ, falling in love again, again, and again.

This week, trying to practice turning to Christ each and every time you begin to be filled with fear or worry. Practice the breathe prayers in this weeks response, or find a quiet place to sit and meditate on these words: “When I am afraid I will trust in you.”

