



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 4 – Aisha Huertas, Director of Mission, Outreach and Diversity

### Theme: Promise

Scripture: *The Magnificat Luke 1:46-55*

*He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy. – From the Magnificat*

### Reflect:

Everything we have done and reflected on these past weeks of advent has been based on God's promise of a savior.

Promises fill us with hope and expectation. They allow us to live in faith that beautiful things will come when we wait in God.

Yet, our human nature often gets in the way of waiting peacefully for the promise to be realized. Living in anxiety and focusing only on the ultimate promise, takes away from the discipline of waiting. It is in this discipline that we work on our trust and faith in God. It is in this discipline that we learn to be servants and agents of the Creator, as we live to see his promises fulfilled in our lives and the lives of others.

Have we waited peacefully in His promise the past few weeks or have we allowed anxiety and humanity to rob us of the opportunity to be in relationship with God?

Take this last week of Advent to refocus and be truly ready to receive His promise.

### Households with Adults and Children:

► **RESPOND:** We have many names for God. If you go to a church that has a history of singing Handel's Messiah Chorus during Christmas (it was written for Easter...don't get us started), then you will hear many of the ways we refer to God and Jesus. Creator, redeemer, sustainer; Lord; God is Love; the true vine; the Good Shepherd; Wonderful; Counselor; Almighty King...the list goes on.

Today, your task is simple. What are the names you like for God (other than God, of course)? What are the names you find problematic? What metaphors or imagery do you love? Which ones do you wish to never hear again? Why? Write down your favorite and think about why you have descriptors for God that you don't like. Remember, God is beyond description, God is beyond gender, God is beyond and yet is still near to you.

### Households with Adults and Youth (or older children):

► **RESPOND:** If someone we love and trust makes us a promise are we able to relax and believe or do we feel anxious? Why is that? Go outside and pick up a fall leaf in your favorite color (or, if you are unable to go outside, talk about what your favorite fall leaf would look like and draw one). Did you have any doubt that fall would arrive, leaves would turn color, and drop? Why not? Exchange the leaf with another family member as a reminder that God is true to his promises.

Share your response with the other person(s) in your household.

### Households with Adults

► **RESPOND:** When have you seen God's promises come to realization in your life? Did you peacefully or anxiously wait for that promise? Why? Write down one or many of your realized promises from God. Place these in a box somewhere prominent in your household as a reminder that God is faithful. Share your response with the other person(s) in your household.



### Advent Wreath Practice:

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

Dear God, thank you for your promise of a risen savior and eternal love. Let us live in peace and not anxiousness and draw us nearer to you, as we wait for all of your promises to be fulfilled in our lives and in the lives of others.

### Way of Love Connection

REST: Receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – John 14:27*

*Blessed are you, O Lord ... giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent.  
– Book of Common Prayer, 113*

From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness - within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

In the next 24 hours, see if you can find a way to retreat and rest – even for 15 minutes – from all the hubbub. Ask God to give you a vision of the restoration and wholeness that is waiting for you in the love of Christ. Next, ask for guidance to be revealed in the New Year on how to remove those things that are blocking your restoration, and ask for courage to address them. Close your time of rest with a breath prayer of gratitude and hope.

### Concluding Reflection:

You have been on a great journey. Last year, Advent 4 was Christmas Eve, and there was little for us to do except beg that you not jump into Christmas without pausing and at least giving Advent one more look, one more prayer. This year, you have one whole day. So, please, we know that you have much to do. Maybe you are traveling. Maybe you have a shopping list a mile long. Maybe your home is filled with friends and relatives. Our hope is that in taking your time this Advent you have come into Christmas ready to great Jesus into your life. Our hope is that you come into Christmas with peace, joy, and happiness.

Once again, remember how it felt to pause, breathe in God, and live in God's time. Carry these practices forward. Praying always works. God is always answering. Jesus is always coming to you.

Merry Christmas, carry your Christmas spirit all the way into Epiphany!

