

**Scripture**

Mark 13:24-37

# Watchfulness

**We wait for the coming of God's kingdom.**

- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples to be on watch for the unexpected time when he'll return to us.
- ◆ At this time, adults and children alike may be experiencing the pressures of the season, feeling overwhelmed but also anticipating the coming holiday.
- ◆ Today's session, marking the beginning of Advent, invites members to acknowledge God's presence in the gifts Jesus brings to them.

**Core Session**

- ◆ Getting Started
- ◆ Gospel Story: When Will You Come?
- ◆ Advent Art (*colored chalk, bowls of sugar water*)
- ◆ Praying Together (*Advent wreath, 4 candles*)

**Enrichment**

- ◆ Music
- ◆ Sketchbook Journal (*optional: copies of journal covers, stapler, rubber bands, hole punch, yarn*)
- ◆ Ice-Breaker
- ◆ Scripture Choral Reading
- ◆ Advent Wreath (*heavy and light weight florist's wire, 4 candleholders, 4 candles, evergreens; optional: florist's or modeling clay, ribbon, sprays of berries, pine cones*)
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

**Helps for Leaders**

- ◆ More About Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ Liturgy Link: The Message of Advent
- ◆ Faith Formation and the Arts, Part 1
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Grace and Peace

## ✓ Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Members discuss Advent, the first season of the Church year.

Draw a vertical line dividing the board or newsprint in half. On the left side, write the title *Winter*. Ask participants to fill this section with words and pictures that tell what winter means to them. For example, they might write “snow” or draw a Christmas tree. Challenge them to fill this section within 3 minutes. Discuss:

- ◆ What happens in winter?
- ◆ What do we do during winter?
- ◆ How do we feel during winter?

On the right side of the board or newsprint, write the title *Advent*. Ask participants to fill this section with words and pictures that tell what Advent means to them. For example, they might write “getting ready for Christmas” or draw a picture of a wreath. Challenge them to fill this section within 3 minutes. Discuss what happens in Advent: What do we do and how do we feel during Advent? As necessary, explain:

- ◆ Advent is the first season of the Church year, beginning four Sundays before Christmas and ending on Christmas Eve. During Advent, we prepare for the important Feast of Christmas.
- ◆ The word advent means the coming or arrival of something important. During Advent, we remember how Jesus came as a baby and how he’ll come again at the end of time.

## ✓ Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Begin by asking:

- ◆ How does your family get ready for Christmas?

Allow time for sharing stories. Explain that in today’s story, we’re told to get ready for someone important. Invite them to listen and find out who. Read aloud the story below. For a more comprehensive version, read **Mark 13:24-37** as members follow along.

### When Will You Come?

Jesus’ friends knew that one day soon, he’d leave them. They asked, “When will you come back? And how will people know you’re coming?”

“I’ll come again,” said Jesus. “But even I don’t know when. Only God knows:

“Maybe in evening,  
Or in darkest night,  
Before the dawn,  
Or at break of light.”

“What should we do ‘til you return?” they asked.

“Keep watching, so whenever I come, you’ll be ready to meet me. I promise, I will come again.”

## ✓ Advent Art (10-20 minutes)

Members use water-dipped chalk to “paint” pictures of Jesus’ coming.

Read again the above rhyme (“Maybe in evening...”) from today’s gospel story, encouraging members to recite with you.

Show participants how to dip colored chalk into bowls of sugar water, and then hold the chalk on its side to “paint” in broad sweeps of color. Encourage them to draw Jesus coming at evening, midnight, before dawn or when the sun comes up.

Allow volunteers to show their work, which you may wish to display.

## ✓ Praying Together (10 minutes)

*Activity Soundtrack:* Play “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” (Open your *Winter-B Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.)

In a hymnal, turn to “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” Explain that this ancient hymn is a prayer to Jesus (Emmanuel). Ask volunteers to take turns reading aloud the stanzas. Respond to each stanza by reading the refrain in unison. Discuss:

- ◆ What could we add to this list of things we’d like Jesus to come and do this Advent season?
- ◆ For example, what would we like Jesus to do in our personal lives? home? school? workplace? world?

If available, close by gathering around an Advent wreath and four pillar candles in Advent colors. As you light one candle, say:

- ◆ Our Advent wreath and candles remind us that we’re waiting for Christmas and for Jesus.
- ◆ What would you like to say to Jesus today?

Close by praying aloud:

- ◆ We’re ready and waiting. Come, Lord Jesus. *Amen.*

## ☐ Music (5-10 minutes)

From *Singing the Good News*, sing together:

- ◆ “Light Your Lamp” (songbook p. 14)
- ◆ “Prepare the Way” (songbook p. 16, also available as an MP3)

**Note:** To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Winter-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Singing the Good News*.

You might also teach an Advent hymn, such as “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” attached to this document.

## ☐ Sketchbook Journal (10-20 minutes)

Participants create simple booklets that may be used as both a sketchbook and journal, depending on the focus, in this and subsequent sessions. Each person will need seven pieces of 8½" x 11" printer or light-colored construction paper, folded in half.

**Note:** You'll find a cover for the *Sketchbook Journal* attached to this document. There's a color version of the cover to use as is, or a black-and-white version participants can decorate. Participants may also create covers from scratch.

Be sure everyone has a pen, pencil or marker. Younger children may need help with this task. Distribute the folded paper and give these instructions:

- ◆ Take seven pieces of folded paper and tuck them inside each other to make a small booklet. On the front cover, write your name. (*Adults can help nonwriters with this task.*)
- ◆ Decorate your cover how you wish. (*If not using covers provided, suggest a winter drawing, favorite quotation or members' choice.*)

Options for binding:

- ◆ Hold booklets together with large paper clips.
- ◆ Use a long-arm stapler to staple along the fold.
- ◆ Use a single-hole punch to make holes near the top and bottom of the fold, and then thread bright-colored yarn (or string) through the holes, tying in a knot and leaving about 2" of loose yarn. Though more time-consuming, this last option gives the booklets an attractive handmade look.

If time permits, invite members to reflect on today's story and discussion about getting ready for Jesus. Invite them to draw a picture and/or write about what they might do to get ready for Jesus' return.

In this and subsequent sessions, volunteers may share their Sketchbook Journal drawings and reflections. Collect the booklets to use in future sessions.

## ☐ Ice-Breaker (10-15 minutes)

### Name Game

So that members can get to know each other in this first session, consider beginning with the following ice-breaker. (If you have a large group—12 or more—you may wish to split into smaller groups for this activity.) First, seat the group in a circle. Beginning with yourself, state your name, perhaps a favorite color and a favorite movie or TV show, for example: I'm Linda; I like the color blue; I enjoy the TV show *Dancing with the Stars*.

The next person in the circle repeats the information you shared, and then states his or her own name, favorite color and movie or TV show.

Continue in this fashion around the circle, each participant repeating everything shared previously, and then adding his or her own information. Participants may drop hints if some have trouble remembering.

Play until everyone has had a turn. Conclude the game with either you or one or more volunteers trying to repeat all the information shared.

## ☐ Scripture Choral Reading

(5-10 minutes)

Invite group members to read **Mark 13:32-37** as a choral reading, with one volunteer reading verses 32 and 34-37. The other members read in unison verse 33, *Be on watch, be alert, for you do not know when the time will come*, as a refrain after each of the other verses. Discuss:

- ◆ In this passage, Jesus speaks of his second coming. Summarize Jesus' advice to his listeners.
- ◆ To what does Jesus compare his coming?
- ◆ What contemporary comparisons could we make for Jesus' second coming? (*For example, it will be like the first bill of a roller coaster that you ride at night—you can't see the big drop, but you know it's coming.*)

- ◆ What differences would it make in our lives if we knew that Jesus was coming in 20 years? one year? tomorrow?
- ◆ What difference would it make to our friends? family? nation? world?

## □ Advent Wreath (10-15 minutes)

Participants work together to make an Advent wreath. You can use this wreath in today's prayer and throughout the season. For this activity, you'll need florist's wire in both heavy and light weights, four candleholders, four candles and assorted evergreens. You might also want to use florist's clay to help secure decorations, colorful ribbon, pine cones and sprays of berries to trim the wreath.

The Advent wreath includes four candles, one for each of the weeks of Advent. Match the colors of your candles to your church's Advent traditions. Some churches use four purple candles, some use four blue candles and some replace one candle with the color rose. These colors represent the major themes of Advent: kingship and repentance (*purple*) and joy (*blue and rose*). A fifth (*white*) candle, to represent Christ, may be added to the center of the circle and lit during the twelve days of Christmas.

Explain that one way many families prepare for Christmas is by using an Advent wreath. Our group will make an Advent wreath and use it each week as we prepare for Christmas. Ask:

- ◆ Who can describe an Advent wreath?

### Directions:

Bend the heavy wire into a circle.

- ◆ Make a second smaller circle and place it inside the first circle.
- ◆ Use short lengths of wires to bind the two circles together.
- ◆ Use lightweight wire to bind evergreens to the circular frame.
- ◆ Place four candleholders at equal distance around the circle.
- ◆ If necessary, use bits of clay to hold the candles securely in the holders.
- ◆ You can decorate the wreath with ribbon, berry sprays and pine cones.

Gather members around the wreath and discuss:

- ◆ What do each of the four candles of the Advent wreath represent?
- ◆ What might the circle of the wreath represent?
- ◆ What might evergreens represent?
- ◆ What might the lighting of each additional candle as we approach Christmas represent?

For information you can share with group members, see the article *Using an Advent Wreath* attached to this document. An article titled *Making an Advent Wreath* is also attached.

Save the finished wreath to use in today's closing prayer, if desired, as well as throughout the season.

## INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
  - Two reproducible cover options for the Sketchbook Journal: *Sketchbook Journal Color* and *Sketchbook Journal BW*.
  - An optional music enrichment activity, which includes lyrics to *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*.
  - An optional enrichment activity titled *Advent Purple*, which explores the liturgical use of the color during the season.
  - An optional enrichment activity titled *O Antiphons*, which examines traditional Advent songs.
  - An optional enrichment activity titled *Wooden Crèche Figures*.
- ◆ Open your Winter-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Winter-B's *Models of the Faith*.
  - An article for leaders, families and/or group members further exploring *The Gospel of Mark*.
  - An article for leaders, families and/or group members titled *Advent Overview*.
  - An article for leaders, families and/or group members titled *Prophets and Prophecy*.
  - Two articles for leaders, families and/or group members by Roger Hutchison titled *Tapping into the Power of Art* and *Faith Formation and the Arts*.
  - Articles for leaders, families and/or group members titled *Making an Advent Wreath* and *Using an Advent Wreath*.

## More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings call us to watchfulness. Isaiah assures us that God works for those who wait in faithfulness, especially through challenging times. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul affirms his readers for their spiritual gifts, which will equip them for the return of the Lord Jesus. In today's gospel, Jesus directs us to "keep awake" (v. 37).

### Isaiah 64:1-9

Today's reading is included in a psalm of lamentations and intercession (63:7–64:11). When the exiles returned to their land, they found Israel still desolate and the temple still in ruins (64:10-12).

"A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent."

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Their conviction that God desired Israel's salvation wavered in the face of the immense task of restoration and their own continuing sense of sinfulness and alienation.

The prophet cries out for God's glory to

be manifested as in the past. Sinfulness now bars the people from God's presence, just as ritual uncleanness barred one from corporate worship. The prophet recognizes the need for a Redeemer, God alone, who would return their hearts to "doing right."

In the space of a few verses, the prophet three times reminds God that "you are our father" (63:16; 64:8). The prophet recalls the fatherhood of God in order to stress God's role as Israel's begetter, the One that gives life and identity to Israel. The prophet's use of the title *Father* also reminds his audience of the permanence of their relationship with God. In that relationship rests all their hope.

### 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Paul adapts the customary introduction of ancient letters and combines the usual greetings, "grace" (Greek) and "peace" (Hebrew). These are more than good wishes. They describe the state of salvation as "grace," God's gift, and as "peace," the harmony of the kingdom of God. Paul also freely applies to Jesus terms used of God in the Old Testament, for example, those who "call on the name of our Lord" (Joel 2:32) and "the day of our Lord" (Isaiah 13:6-9; Amos 5:18).

In the thanksgiving, Paul sets forth the themes of the letter. He gives thanks for the same spiritual gifts, speech and knowledge, that were causing so much division in the Corinthian community. Later in the letter he will deal with the misunderstanding and misuse of these gifts (chaps. 12 and 14). They are undoubtedly God-given and confirm "the testimony of Christ" (v. 6), Paul's preaching of the gospel. Here Paul carefully places the Corinthians' present individualistic use of the gifts into a context of future revelation and shared responsibility in the community.

### Mark 13:24-37

Chapter 13 of Mark is known as the "little Apocalypse." The Greek word *apokalypsis* means revelation, disclosure or uncovering. Such writing usually comes out of tribulation, which is interpreted through signs and symbols to disclose the unseen reality of God's presence and purpose beneath the appearance of disaster.

Jesus' terse parable about the deputized servants who await the master's return urges us to live in that balance between keen anticipation and faithful obedience. The former without the latter may lead to idleness and a neglect of service. An unwavering commitment to responsibilities without an eager hope may result in feelings of drudgery and despair or spiritual and moral lassitude. The final word to all is: "Keep awake!"

## Reflection

When Jesus warns us to be constantly alert, we might take that ominously, as though some distant, punitive deity is waiting eagerly to pounce on our slightest mistake. But we can think of this gospel more positively.

Our news reports are filled with pictures of families awaiting the return of spouses, offspring, siblings and parents from war in Iraq or Afghanistan. When the buses roll in, sometimes at odd hours of the night, gyms are packed with welcome banners and fluttering flags. As each beloved soldier emerges, families and friends explode with joy. The same phenomenon occurs at airports. Observe the faces scanning each arriving passenger, then see them light up as a familiar, beloved figure emerges into the waiting area.

Do we await Christ's coming with the same happy anticipation? Would we rush delightedly into his arms if he appeared suddenly at our doors? "I've waited so long for you!" we might cry. "And I'm so glad to see you." If we don't think of a reunion with Jesus that

way, why not? Are we happier lugging around our own doubtful baggage of guilt, resentment or depression? What welcome banner might you prepare for him?

## Liturgy Link

### The Message of Advent

The word *advent* means coming. During this season of the Church year, we remember the coming of Jesus as a babe in Bethlehem long ago, we celebrate the coming of Jesus to us here and now in word and sacrament and we prepare for his coming in great glory at the end of all time.

Jesus' coming in human form fulfills both the words of Israel's prophets and the events in Israel's history that speak of God's saving grace. Thus, the Church has

"Faith is required of you, and a sincere life, not loftiness of intellect, not deepness in the mysteries of God."

—Thomas À Kempis

appointed scriptures for Advent that tell of God's promises to the people of Israel, especially the promise of the coming of the Messiah.

Every covenant and prophecy—from the exodus to the foretelling of the nation's return to Jerusalem—recalls the promise of union with God. In Jesus, the promise is fulfilled.

During Advent, we remember and honor those who prepared the way for Jesus: John the Baptist, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph and others. We hear the stories of preparation, and we sing carols of expectation.

So now we watch and wait. We watch and wait as the days of Advent run into Christmas. We watch and wait as the Church prepares place and song and heart for the infant Savior. We watch and wait for his Bread to feed us, in scripture and Eucharist. We watch and wait for the One who comes to fill all things, to make the whole creation new.

## Faith Formation and the Arts, Part 1

by Roger W. Hutchison

We all have a story to tell. I choose to share my piece of the greater story by painting pictures and writing words on paper. This began for me as a child and continues even now. I am forever grateful to those who encouraged me along the way.

Faith formation and the arts share an intimate dance. The space where these two experiences intersect is rich and full. There are colors and shapes, fragrances and textures, taste and touch. The space where this dance takes place is holy ground. It is life-giving. Our communities of faith must provide this space for all who enter our doors. We must welcome all to the dance. My reflection is about this creative dance: using the visual arts within the realm of Christian Formation. To fully be able to do this, in the next few weeks I'll share some of my creative journey with you.

### The World of the Bible

#### Grace and Peace

The basic sense of the word *grace* (Greek, *charis*, Latin, *gratia*) described a free gift that is bestowed not out of merit (then it would be owed rather than a true gift) but because the giver has found some reason to single out or favor the recipient. The choice of one recipient (a favorite) from many possible ones for the gift led to the common connection of grace and honor. Thus our salvation or right relationship with God is a grace or gift freely bestowed by God, our great benefactor.

Peace (Hebrew, *shalom*) describes the experience of fullness or completeness—lacking nothing that one needs for a full and happy life. Peace is a gift that comes with God's presence. Thus it is also the goal for the life of the covenant community. The way to peace is justice—establishing and maintaining rightly ordered relationships for the covenant community according to God's guidelines. As a greeting, peace is a wish for the fullness of life, for union with God and harmony with others leading to happiness for all.