

Advent Prayers for Sundays at Home

Finding ways to worship together as a household each week is challenging...

How do we invite each other into prayer and into scripture when we are just a small household and not a “church” with programs and classes?

How do you create something that involves grade-school kids in worship but is not mindless for grown-ups?

During 2020, our family has turned to the Anglican morning prayer service for a basic structure for our worship together, and then I modified it. On the following pages, you will find the outline for what we are doing this Advent.

We read through this script, with our 10-year-old taking the part of the “first reader” and our 7-year-old the “second reader.” This keeps them involved and helps them learn the words of ancient prayers and the creed. (And works on their reading skills, too!)

When we get to the Advent Wreath, we light the candles one at a time, pausing to pray each prayer in turn and sing each verse of *O Come, O Come Immanuel*, so the singing builds verse by verse, week by week. The Wreath has been a part of our family practice for years. And we light our candles through the week when we share a family meal for the entire season. When traveling we say the prayers at bedtime, letting the kids fall asleep to the candle light. (And then blowing them out before we go to bed.)

For the “sermon,” we have found our children love reading through the bible and talking about it as we go. We use the NRSV or the NIV, and I don’t edit the text...but I do read it aloud as I would a novel, with voices and inflection. As the kids notice things that seem funny or strange, have questions or see connections between other passages, they interrupt and we talk about what they’ve seen. They notice the problems, the hard parts, the parts that don’t fit nicely in our stories and theologies...and it is thrilling and wonderful to see their imaginations being shaped by the wild story of the reckless, demanding, and sometimes snarky love between God and the people. This year, for Advent, we will read through the prophet Micah, doing about 2 chapters each week.

After the “sermon,” we read through the creed and the prayers. We use a picture book of the Lord’s Prayer, and after the final prayer we usually sing the doxology. But during Advent we will sing something else...probably some sort of Christmas carol (but not Jingle Bells because that leads to Batman smells...they are kids, after all!).

And we finish each week, after the closing song, with a meal! French toast, pancakes, cinnamon rolls, coffee cake, donuts, whipped cream, fruit, coffee...something rich and sweet and wonderful. Because God’s word is sweet. Praying together is sweet. And I want my kids to know that reality in their mouths and tummies and all the way down to their toes.

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OPENING WORDS

ALL: Blessed are you O Lord, our God, King of the universe.

First Reader: O that you would rend the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence, as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil. Make known your name to your adversaries, O Lord, so that the nations might tremble at your presence.¹

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

Week One:

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come,
that by your protection we may be rescued
from the dangers that beset us through our sins;
and be a Redeemer to deliver us

(light candle)

O Emmanuel, Jesus Christ,
desire of every nation,
Savior of all peoples,
come and dwell among us.

Sing Together:

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Week Two:

Stir up our hearts, O Lord,
to prepare the paths of your Only-begotten Son:
that we may worthily serve you
with hearts purified by His coming:

(light candle)

O King of all nations, Jesus Christ,
only joy of every heart,
come and save your people.

Sing Together:

O come, Desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Week Three:

We beseech you to listen to our prayers, O Lord,
and by the grace of your coming enlighten our
darkened minds.

(light candle)

O Key of David, Jesus Christ,
the gates of heaven open at your command,
come and show us the way to salvation.

Sing Together:

O come, our Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things by thy might;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Week Four:

Pour forth your power, O Lord, and come:
Assist us by that mighty power,
so that by your grace and merciful kindness
we may swiftly receive the salvation that our sins
impede.

(light candle)

O Wisdom, holy Word of God, Jesus Christ,
all things are in your hands,
come and show us the way to salvation.

Sing Together:

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

¹ Is 64:1-2

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READING AND SERMON/DISCUSSION

CREED

ALL: We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

CONFESSION AND PRAYERS

First Reader: During this time of increasing darkness and waiting, we pray for our suffering and broken world...

Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Your people are scattered, and we war among ourselves.² And so we cry out,

ALL: Come Lord Jesus

People walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices, sitting inside tombs, and spending the night in secret places.³ And so we pray,

ALL: Come Lord Jesus

The land is filled with silver and gold, with no end to its treasures. The land filled with horses, with no end to its chariots.

The land filled with idols: people bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made.⁴ And so we cry out,

ALL: Come Lord Jesus

The righteous are sold for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. People trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and push the afflicted out of the way.⁵ And so we pray,

ALL: Come Lord Jesus

² Is 64:10

³ Is 64:2b, 4a

⁴ Is 2:7-8

⁵ Am 2:6

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Father and mother are treated with with contempt; the foreigner is oppressed, the orphan and the widow mistreated.⁶ And so we cry out,

ALL: Come Lord Jesus

The earth is plagued by floods and fire, smoke and darkness.⁷ The mountains fall into the heart of the sea, the waters roar and foam, and the mountains quake with their surging.⁸ And so we pray,

ALL: Come Lord Jesus

The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the olive oil fails. Farmers despair, vine growers wail, grieving for the wheat and barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed.⁹ And so we cry out,

ALL: Come Lord Jesus

People eat their food in anxiety and drink their water in despair, fearing the land will be stripped of everything in it because of the violence of all who live there.¹⁰ And so we pray,

ALL: Come Lord Jesus

People's souls are full of troubles, and their life draws near to Sheol. They are counted among those who go down to the Pit, like those who have no help, like those forsaken among the dead.¹¹ And so we cry out,

ALL: How long, O Lord, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?¹² How long, O LORD, must we call for help but You do not hear, or cry out, "Violence!" but You do not save?¹³

Come and judge between the nations. Settle disputes for many peoples. Then we might beat our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks; Then nation will not lift up sword against nation, then we will not learn war any more.¹⁴

Second Reader: And now, as our Savior taught us we are bold to say:

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.

⁶ Ez 22:7

⁷ Ez 38:22

⁸ Ps 46:2

⁹ Jl 1:10-11

¹⁰ Ez 12:19

¹¹ Ps 88:5

¹² Re 6:10

¹³ Hb 1:2

¹⁴ Is 2:4

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Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

CLOSING WORDS

First or Second Reader

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her

that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.¹⁵

All: Amen

¹⁵ Is 40:1-5