



... THROUGH THE PROPHETS

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT LEADERS' NOTES



This liturgical year has been designated as a 'Year of the Word' by the Bishops of England and Wales. Between the First Sunday of Advent 2019 and the Feast of Christ the King 2020, there will be many opportunities to deepen our appreciation of Scripture as the Word of God. The Year has the title: 'The God who speaks' which is taken from a document called *Verbum Domini* (the Word of the Lord) which was published 10 years ago (part of the reason for the special Year). It reminds us that God has spoken to human beings for thousands of years. Humans have not always been attentive to what God is saying – or understood it when they have heard it – but God speaks and this Year gives us a chance to learn better how to listen.

Advent is a time when we look back – and forward – and think about how both affect the present. This Advent, we will focus on the First Readings of the Sundays. These are taken from the writings of the Prophet Isaiah who had to listen to hear the Voice of God amidst the trials of exile and loss and despair. Although we do not face the difficulties of his time, we do have situations in our own lives and in the life of the world that cause us to wonder where God is. The Voice of God speaking through the words of Isaiah can bring us hope and joy as we live this Season and look forward to the celebration of the Word of God becoming flesh amongst us.

Suggested Outline for an Afternoon/ Evening of Reflection (1½ hours)

The timings are based on a 7pm start – adjust to your own group's needs.

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| 7pm | Welcome and Opening Prayer |
| 7.15 | Introduction (You may like to use the information and ideas above and/ or the PowerPoint) |
| 7.30 | Listening to the God who speaks |
| 7.50 | Listening with the Heart |
| 8.15 | Closing Prayer |
| 8.30 | Departures |

OPENING RESPONSES

Reader We gather in the name of the Father:
**All Whose Creative Word was spoken,
and all Creation came into being.**

Reader We gather in the name of the Son:
**All The Word of God made flesh,
who made his home among humans
to help humans discover the divinity with them.**

Reader We gather in the name of the Holy Spirit
**All Who opens our ears to hear the Word of God;
our minds to know and begin to understand it –
and our hearts to feel the love of our God
spoken to us by the God who speaks.**

Using the PowerPoint (optional)

The PowerPoint gives you some information about Isaiah and the times he lived in which some of your participants might find interesting as a background to your meeting(s). There is a “Notes file” that you can use to help you to talk through it. It should take around 5 minutes.

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

Have someone read the First Reading- ensuring that they are someone who will read it well – have had chance to read it – and pray with it – first!

Use these or your own words:

We are going to listen to the God who speaks of the eternal peace of God’s Kingdom. It is a beautiful reading so you might like to listen with your eyes closed and allow the Spirit to lead you through it.

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come

the mountain of the Lord’s house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say,
‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.’

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.
O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!

Isaiah 2: 1-5

Allow time for people to read it through again for themselves – inviting them to notice any words or phrases – or ideas – that seem to strike them particularly as they listened or read it.

Then use these or your own words.

Isaiah was writing at a time when his people were in exile. Isaiah saw their suffering and heard their questions: Where is God? Why has God forgotten us? Has God forsaken us? Some probably got angry and turned from God. Many more simply drifted away as God did not seem to care. But Isaiah kept listening and in amongst the fear and despair, heard God speak of his dream for humanity and a world in which his reign of peace would be established. We are not there yet! Not remotely! But in the midst of all the suffering we see in our families – our neighbourhoods – our workplaces – our world – in the middle of all that, we are invited, just like Isaiah, to listen for the God who speaks of peace... and who may be asking us to share in his work of building it.

- Invite people to ponder any words or phrases that really spoke to them and then to share them with the group. If the group feels too large for that, suggest that people form smaller ones of three or four. Ask them to reflect together on things like:
 - What images did the Reading conjure up for us?
 - What would the world look like if people did come ‘to the mountain of the Lord’ and follow God’s ways?
 - Why do people make weapons rather than tools for agriculture or otherwise ensuring the people of our world are fed and cared for?
- Point out that there is no right or wrong answer in these conversations – the important thing is to listen to the God who speaks – through his Word and through his Spirit at work in themselves and in each other.

LISTENING WITH THE HEART...

You might use the following ideas in a quiet time in a meeting room or head into church for Adoration.

- Collect pictures illustrating situations of war and conflict around the world. Also look out for images of people working to make a difference. Invite people to choose one that particularly strikes them and to pray with it. Suggest that they imagine the life-stories of people in the picture – their hopes – dreams – fears and longings. Then, in whatever way seems to work for them, to hold the person/ people or situation before God.
- Place a large map of the world on the ground and invite people to light a tee light and put it on a country or region in need of peace. This can be very effective before the Blessed Sacrament – Christ present in the Sacrament seeing the suffering of the world and choosing to come and make his home in the midst of it all.
- Set Prayer Stations around the room or the church for people to sit quietly next to and use their senses or other ways of praying.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use these or your own words – much will depend on what you included in the session. Take it slowly and gently – allowing people time to reflect and ponder their own answers to the questions.

Reader As we close our meeting, let's call to mind some of the ways in which we have heard the God who speaks...

Something from his Word perhaps...
a word or phrase that seemed particularly significant...
Something that reassured us...
something that challenged us...

Was there something someone said that opened up something new for you?
Or something in the silence?

Did a Prayer Station – or something you did – help you to understand the Reading a little more – with your heart as well as with your head?

How did God speak to you today?

Reader God speaks his Word –
from the dawn of Creation
to our present day.

**All May our ears and hearts be open
to hear the Voice of the God who speaks.**

Reader God speaks words of guidance –
of ways of living that lead us to life.

**All May we hear God's Word
and use it to form the pattern of our lives.**

Reader God speaks of the world as he desires it to be:
a world in which the tools of life
are more valued than weapons of war.

**All May we play our part in the building of this Kingdom of peace –
in our homes – our workplaces –
in our churches and our communities.**

Reader And may God bless us this night and all nights (*or* today and all days)

All The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Reader And until we meet again, may God hold us in the promise of his eternal peace.

All Amen.