

...THROUGH THE PROPHETS

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT LEADERS' NOTES



There are some trees that, if you cut down the main trunk, will grow a new stem from the stump. Olive trees are particularly good at this! Isaiah uses this image to give hope to the Jewish people – and turn their minds to the promise of someone who will come into the misery of their current lives and bring about a new reign. The passage for Week 2 this Advent is sometimes called “The Peaceful Kingdom”. When we listen to it, it is easy to see why.

Jesse comes into it because he was the father of David – one of the greatest kings the Jewish people ever had. His line was ended – rather like the tree being cut down. As the Jewish people endured so much suffering, they looked back to the golden days of David’s reign and lamented the loss of the just king – the wise and strong king – they once had. Isaiah hears the Voice of God speak of the promise of a new David. The stump of Jesse will give life to a new shoot – someone upon whom the Spirit of God will rest – someone who will be strong and righteous and wise. Isaiah still saw this person as human – but the kingdom he sees being established is definitely not of the world as it is at the moment. In this kingdom, prey and predator will live in complete harmony... We may be enchanted by the images of lions and lambs – but it also applies to the lions and lambs that are human beings living in harmony – which is, perhaps, even more miraculous!

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.

- 7pm Welcome and Opening Prayer
- 7.15 Introduction – You may like to use the information and ideas above and/ or the PowerPoint if not used previously. *NOTE – if this is your only session, consider also using the notes about the Year of the Word from Week 1)*
- 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.**

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 promise of someone who will come into the world – upon whom God’s Spirit will rest powerfully – and who will establish a reign of peace and justice. You might like to listen with your eyes closed and allow the Spirit to lead you through it.

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.

They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.
On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him,
and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Isaiah 11: 1-10

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.

Then use these or your own words.

Isaiah was writing at a time when his people were in exile and looking back – as many of us do – to the “good old days”. In this case, they are looking back to King David who was a great leader – and who was the son of Jesse. The line was broken – like a tree being cut down. But Isaiah sees that the root is not dead – it has life in it yet and, one day, a new shoot will come from it. He catches a glimpse of what this new King’s reign will be like but even he does not realise that this shoot from the stock of Jesse will not only be a descendant of David’s House but will be the Son of God himself.

- 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?
 - How do the spiritual gifts or qualities that Isaiah lists make for a good ruler?
 - Thinking of the images at the end of the passage – of lions and lambs – and children playing near snakes’ nests – how might these be symbols of the world as it is and what it could be? (Suggest things like – who are the human lions and lambs? Where are the lives of children “stung” or “poisoned” or put in danger by others?)
- 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 your meeting room or head into church for Adoration.

- Encourage people to pray again with the Word of God. Remind them that the Spirit might speak through the words – or the images that come into their minds – or just a sense in their heart – as they ponder God’s Word. All are valid in this kind of prayer.
- Use a Jesse tree to tell some of the story of salvation. If time does not permit the whole thing, ensure that you include Jesse, David and Solomon. (You can find more information and ideas in the *Jesse tree* folder).
- Have a candle for each of the qualities of the Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. Read that part of the Reading – lighting the candle for each one. If appropriate, the lights could be alongside the Blessed Sacrament – reminding us of some of the things we find in the Presence of Christ. Continue the Reading and let it settle into the silence. Use it again to bring people from the quiet to the conclusion of your meeting.
- 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 – allow 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...

Perhaps there was a word or phrase in the Reading that seemed particularly significant...
Why might it have struck you today?
What does it invite you to take away?

Was there something someone said that seemed to come from God through them?
Was there something you received in the silence?

Was there a spiritual gift that seemed to resonate with you –
as something you need to pray for – or use better?

Were there 'lambs' and 'lions' you felt drawn to pray for? Or children?

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 that offer hope.

**All May we hear God's Word
and be formed in the wisdom and understanding of the Holy Spirit
to receive it deeply into our hearts.**

Reader God speaks of the world as he desires it to be:
a world in which knowledge, wisdom and understanding are honoured –
and all of Creation finds peace in the reign of God.

**All May we too yearn for such a world –
and use the gifts we have received in working with God to build it –
a place of peace, of healing, of wholeness.**

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 hope in his promises.

All Amen.