



# SAY YES TO GOD





Acknowledgments . . . . . iv

Presenting RENEW International . . . . . v

Introduction . . . . . vi

Faith Sharing in a Small Community . . . . . vii

Faith-Sharing Principles and Guidelines . . . . . x

The Structure and Flow of a Session . . . . . xii

SESSIONS

Getting Ready: First Week of Advent . . . . . 1

Make Straight the Way! Second Week of Advent . . . . . 7

“What Should We Do?”: Third Week of Advent . . . . . 14

Accept the Invitation: Fourth Week of Advent . . . . . 20

APPENDICES

Family Devotion: Blessing the Advent Wreath . . . . . 27

Family Devotion: Blessing of the Crèche . . . . . 29

Family Devotion: Blessing the Christmas Tree . . . . . 32

Family Devotion: Sharing the Opłatek . . . . . 35

A Personal Reflection for Christmas Eve: ‘She laid him in a manger’ . . . . . 36

Family Devotion: Epiphany House Blessing . . . . . 39

Song Lyrics . . . . . 42

Music Resources . . . . . 45

Faith-Sharing Resources from RENEW International . . . . . 47

# GETTING READY FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT



## Suggested Environment

*A Bible and an Advent wreath with four candles are placed on a small table. The Bible is open to the Scripture reading for this session. You might also wish to display a calendar open to the month of December with the 25th prominently outlined in red. You might also wish to decorate the table with violet, which is the liturgical color for the season of Advent.*

## Advent Awakenings 1

*The leader invites one member to light the first candle of the Advent wreath while another member reads aloud the aim of the session:*

That we begin the season of Advent with a commitment to prepare for the coming of the Lord by praying more deeply and freeing ourselves from anxiety over day-to-day problems.

## Invitation to Pray

*Leader:* Let's take a few quiet moments to become conscious of the presence of God.

*The group spends time in silence as each member pays attention to his or her breathing and quietly prays for stillness.*

*Leader:* Let us pray.

**All:** **God of our journeys,  
as we begin this season of Advent,  
calm our hearts and minds  
so that we may focus  
on what is truly important.  
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.**

1

Song suggestion: "Come, Lord Jesus," Dan Schutte.

## Gospel Reading for the First Sunday of Advent

*The leader invites a member of the group to proclaim the Gospel:*

**Luke 21:25-28, 34-36**

## Reflecting and Sharing on Scripture

*The leader invites the group to take a moment to reflect on what word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passage touches their hearts or speaks to their lives.*

*The leader invites those who so wish to repeat and share on a key word or phrase in the Scripture that touched them.*

### A Full Life: Prayer and Action

Maria Crocifessa Di Rosa was not easily distracted—not by grief, not by illness, not by rejection, not by war. She was born Paola Di Rosa in 1813 in the city of Brescia in Lombardy. When Paola was 17, she left school to help her widowed father manage his house and servants. She also organized retreats and missions in her parish and established a women’s guild. She felt called to religious life, which troubled her father, who wanted her to marry. Maria, aided by her spiritual director, Msgr. Faustino Pinzoni, convinced her father to let her remain single. She devoted herself to helping young women who worked long, hard hours at her father’s mill. She established a boarding home for those women, who lived catch as catch can while away from their families’ homes six days a week. Maria founded schools for the deaf. She and a close friend, noblewoman Gabriela Bornati, also cared for victims of a cholera epidemic in 1836. In 1840, with the help of Msgr. Pinzoni, Gabriela, and others, she established the “Handmaids of Charity.” Paola took the religious name Maria Crocifessa when she and Gabriela entered the order. In a few years, she was grief stricken by the deaths of Gabriela and Msgr. Pinzoni, and then, in 1848, she found herself in the midst of war as Brescia rebelled against Austrian rule. She and her “handmaids,” shunned at hospitals that preferred secular nurses, went into the battlefields to help the wounded. On one occasion, she and six of her sisters, brandishing a crucifix and two candles, turned back a group of soldiers bent on pillaging a military hospital. Through all of this, Maria, who was physically frail, sustained herself through daily prayer—arising two hours before dawn to engage in mental prayer, attending Mass, and praying intensely for two more hours. Exhausted by her efforts, she died in 1855; she was canonized in 1954. The



community she founded continues to minister to those in need in Europe, South America, and Africa.

## Invitation to Share

- How can the experience of a woman like St. Maria help you evaluate and re-form your own life?

## Reflection

On Sunday we begin a new liturgical year with a new Gospel—the Gospel of Luke—and a new season—the season of Advent. Like the passage from the Gospel according to Mark that we heard at Sunday Mass two weeks ago (Mark 13:24-32), this Sunday’s reading focuses on the Son of Man returning in glory at the end of days. Once again, we are told that there will be signs, but that we cannot predict when the time will be. Despite the language about fear and foreboding, however, Jesus’ words are intended to comfort his people and offer them ways to prepare for his return, and that invitation continues for us today.

During Advent, a season of anticipation, joy, and conversion, we prepare to celebrate the Incarnation—God coming among us in human form. As a couple prepares for the birth of a child, they take steps to prepare themselves and their home for the baby’s arrival. The same goes for us as we examine our hearts to make room for Jesus. It is a process that takes time, much like the time we spend over the course of weeks or months to complete a work project. Rather than becoming drowsy when we wait until the last minute to work on the project, we succeed by taking gradual steps to complete the work. So it is with our Advent preparation. Each week invites us to enter more deeply into reflection on how we can allow ourselves to be more open to God’s presence in our lives. Jesus does not want our hearts to get drowsy with the drone of daily life. If we are not alert, we can begin to lose awareness of where our lives are going and how God is calling us to be more faithful disciples.

Similarly, we are all sometimes plagued by the anxieties of life, whether that means troubles in our relationships, in our studies or work, or in other areas. These concerns drain energy from us if we let them consume us. They can weigh heavily on our hearts. It can be hard to take the time needed to turn to the Lord for help so that these anxieties do not overcome us. This passage from Luke encourages us to “be vigilant,” to be awake and alert, not

with anxiety but with courage and confidence in the promise Jesus makes to us—that he is with us always. Jesus also offers a way to remain vigilant: prayer. He tells his disciples to “pray that you have the strength,” and he speaks these words to us as well. So as we begin this season of waiting and preparation, we are invited to make a commitment to enter more fully into prayer, letting go of our anxieties, and preparing our hearts for Jesus’ return.

## The Holy Family’s Journey

One of the most exuberant Advent traditions in the world is the custom known as *Las Posadas*, which is observed in Mexico, Guatemala, and in individual communities elsewhere, ranging from the southwestern United States to Canada. The Spanish word *posadas* is equivalent to English words such as “lodgings” or “inns,” and the custom is a nine-day reenactment of Mary and Joseph searching for a place to stay in Bethlehem when the birth of Jesus was imminent.

*Las Posadas*, which is said to have originated in Spain, has been observed in Mexico for more than 400 years—some think since 1538. This ritual begins on December 16 and ends on December 24—the nine days symbolizing the nine months from the conception to the birth of Jesus. After sunset on each of those days, a procession that may include costumed angels and shepherds, candles and flowers, and musicians, stops at several houses where a couple representing Mary and Joseph ask for shelter, usually in song. They are turned away again and again before finally being allowed to enter a home where there is prayer; Scripture reading; *villancicos*, or carols; and a celebration that ends when the children break a *piñata* made in the shape of a star. On each of the nine evenings a different house is the *posada*; in some communities, a church is the final destination.

There are variations in the way the observance is conducted. In some cases, figures of Joseph and Mary and the infant Jesus are carried in the procession. In some, the figures of the Holy Family are left at the *posada* overnight. In some, the man portraying Joseph might even lead a live burro bearing Mary on the journey. However it is observed, *Las Posadas* is a dynamic observance of Advent that represents not only the journey to Bethlehem but the spiritual pilgrimage of this season, the pilgrimage that each of us makes to adore our Savior.



## Invitation to Share

- What anxieties of daily life distract you from focusing on your relationship with God? What steps could you take to reduce these anxieties?
- When has your heart become “drowsy”? What are you doing to keep your spiritual life healthy? What more could you do?
- How can you step out of yourself to be more aware of the needs of others during this season of Advent? How will you prepare for the coming of Jesus in glory?

## Invitation to Act

*Jesus emphasized the connection between faith and action, between what we believe and what we do. In that spirit, decide on an individual or group action that flows from what you have shared in this session. If you decide to act on your own, share your decision with the group. If you decide on a group action, determine among you whether individual members will take responsibility for various aspects of the action.*

*You are likely to benefit most from taking an action that arises from your own response to the session. However, you can consider one of the following suggestions or use these ideas to help develop one of your own:*

### Some suggestions

- In this Sunday’s Gospel passage we hear Jesus calling us to pray at all times for strength. During this season, choose a time each day to spend with the Lord in prayer.
- Advent calendars are a popular way of celebrating this season. Buy a calendar and use it as a daily opportunity to reflect on the season’s call to hopeful waiting, joy, and conversion. Perhaps you could also pray each day for a different intention, or find a booklet of Advent reflections to read.
- This time of year can be difficult for families who struggle to make ends meet. Organize or participate in a program which helps support families monetarily or through acts of service.
- Consider spending time each day with Sacred Space, a website provided by the Irish Jesuits ([www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)). Give yourself the gift of a peaceful state in which you can experience and respond to the daily prayers and Scripture readings on the site.

## Invitation to pray

*The group leader invites the participants to pray together:*

**All: Lord of light,  
help us to stay steadfast  
in our faith.**

**Enliven our spirits and hearts so that we become  
ever more open  
to your loving presence.**

**May the joy of this season  
be radiated in our thoughts, words, and actions.**

**We ask this through the eternal light,  
who banishes all darkness.**

**Amen.**

## Looking Ahead

*Prepare for your next gathering by prayerfully reviewing the Scripture passage and the reflection for the next session.*





## FAITH-SHARING RESOURCES FROM RENEW INTERNATIONAL

### ***PRAYER*TIME Cycle A, B, C: Faith-Sharing Reflections on the Sunday Gospels**



This faith-sharing resource responds to the U.S. Bishops' suggestion that "every parish meeting can begin with the reading of the upcoming Sunday's Gospel, followed by a time of reflection and faith sharing."

With each Sunday's Gospel as a focus, *PRAYER*TIME proposes meaningful reflections, focused faith-sharing questions, related questions for consideration, and prayers as a source of spiritual nourishment and inspiration.

Use *PRAYER*TIME any time of year, whenever the small community needs. It is also ideal for beginning meetings of the pastoral council, staff, and other parish groups. The themes can also be read personally as a way to prepare for Sunday Mass.

Also available in Spanish: *OREMOS* Ciclo A, B, C. *Reflexiones sobre los Evangelios Dominicales para Compartir la Fe*

### ***Lenten Longings* Years A, B, C**

Lent invites us to a time of prayer, reflection, and conversion. See inside cover flap for more information.



### ***GLEANINGS: A Personal Prayer Journal***

Many participants in small communities tell us how much they are helped in both their shared discussion and their personal reflection by the technique known as journaling: keeping a notebook for the expression of thoughts and ideas.



*Gleanings* is a valuable tool for both avid and occasional journal writers. Each page spread is decorated with a spiritual quotation or musing that can inspire prayerful reflection on your relationship with God. The format makes it an excellent companion for your personal faith journey, helping tap into the richness of God's wisdom within you. It is also a thoughtful gift for friends or family.