



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER  
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH  
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

**SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

*December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

**Introduction to the Word:**



Advent is here and regardless of which church cycle we are in, the underlying theme is “*Prepare*.” Two ways: we *prepare* as this Advent season unfolds and we rely on **HOPE**. Hope is not this “looking at the world through rose-colored glasses” thing. Hope is tough stuff. It is not what our human nature typically defaults to when things are going wrong and the world seems to be crumbling around us. Hope requires an inner strength, a reliance on God, knowing His love for us will always get us through. This is why Hope is not a thing but a person.

During our first week of Advent we entered into “Call and Response” seek to look for the moments to Praise the Lord, pause and Hmm and even respond to His amazing grace with “Amen”. Now, this second week we tackle the question – do we want to resemble Jesus?

**Warm-Up:**

John the Baptist whom we meet in the Gospel was a man with an important mission. As a warm-up activity, the group members are invited to spend a few minutes completing the following lead statements as they relate to their experience of “warnings” and/or responsibilities:

- i. *A personal responsibility that I find most challenging is...*
- ii. *A hope or mission that I feel called to bring to fruition in my lifetime is...*

**CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)**

*Leader:* We wait in joyful hope for the *coming again* of Jesus Christ. He has promised to return in all His glory in order to lead us to share in the fullness of His own life so that we, in turn, may bring this life and light to our communities and our world.

**Lord Jesus**, you came to reveal to us the fullness of God’s love,      **Lord, have mercy.**  
**Christ Jesus**, our Emmanuel, God-with-us, God-for-us,      **Christ, have mercy.**  
**Lord Jesus**, our most certain way to the Father/Mother,      **Lord, have mercy.**

**Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:**

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,*



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*and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart  
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit  
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.  
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of  
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

### **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME** (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

#### **FIRST READING** (Isaiah 11:1–10)

On that day: A shoot shall come out from the stump 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. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### **SECOND READING** (Romans 15:4–9)

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name." The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### **GOSPEL** (Matthew 3:1–12)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he



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said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’ Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, John said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)*

### COMMENTARY:

#### [You may also as a group wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord’s Day Message](#)

Last week we finished the first Sunday of Advent by asking “So this Advent – will you Celebrate Differently? Will you look for the moments to Praise the Lord, will you seek the times to pause and “Hmm”, will you decide on the moments to say Amen?” It was an invitation to Call and Response. This Lord’s Day the invitation becomes and invocation to resemble Jesus!

Today’s first reading from Isaiah is considered by some to be one of the most moving and impressive texts of the Bible. Writing between 801 and 780 B.C.E., Isaiah uses both wisdom and poetry to express a deep sense of God’s passionate caring for God’s people, and in fact, for the whole universe. Isaiah announces that from the line of David will come a new king. Filled with the gifts of the Spirit, he will rule in faithfulness to the living God, and in his reign there will be justice in the land as the poor and the powerless will be freed from oppression.

Today our world has people desperately searching for reasons for hope. Ours is a world torn with wars and political upheavals. In these times one cannot help but ask, “*Is Jesus still present and ‘available’? Is his Spirit still the empowering force it once was?*” To these anxious questions, old and new, Isaiah’s ancient prophecy rings with an unmistakable YES.

Paul’s words to the Romans, our 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, are intended to reaffirm Isaiah’s prophecy. Paul encourages us to trust the Scriptures—the readings we hear every Sunday – God’s Word. We will



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find them to be a true source of real hope – because Hope is not a thing – it is a Person – Jesus the Christ.

Jesus is the one whom John the Baptist in the Gospel invites us to proclaim the way of the Lord for. He is the one whom we strive to resemble as we seek “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” When we show these and when we seek these, then we see Him and we resemble Jesus. There are of course times we fail and so the Sacrament of **Reconciliation**.

Psychiatry, psychology, counselling loom very large today; and it is a good thing. But no psychiatrist would ever conclude with the words: “Go in peace; your sins are forgiven”. Yet therein lies the promise of Jesus; there is our hope; there is our peace. We are aware of things *we have done* and of things *we have failed to do* as we prepare to celebrate the Eucharist. Maybe what we are really waiting for is some kind of place along the journey to stop, refuel, and refresh before we start up again. Will you strive to resemble Jesus and celebrate differently this Advent? Maybe our reflection as we seek to celebrate differently might be something like this?

Help me to seek the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding – Come Lord Jesus  
Help me to embrace the Spirit of counsel and might, – Come Lord Jesus  
Help me to desire the spirit of knowledge and the Reverence of the Lord – Come Lord Jesus

If we do – for sure we will celebrate differently and most of all begin more and more to resemble Jesus!

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion:** (15-20 minutes)

(Romans) “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you.”

**Hospitality** in early Jewish times was a highly valued custom and practice. The original meaning of the word *hospitality* required the host of the household to treat every guest with the same respect and courtesy as if he/she were a member of the family, and the first welcoming gesture was to wash the person’s feet and invite him/her to a family meal.

- a. How would you describe the hospitality of your typical Sunday morning Mass? Does the Sacrament of Reconciliation partake of this hospitality? Explain.  
What might be done to make our parish a more welcoming place?  
What could your small group do to help bring about some of these changes?
- b. Talk about how the concept of *hospitality* has changed from the time of your childhood? What are some of the reasons for this change?

### Intercessions:

**Leader:** Our response: Lord Hear us



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For the Church, gathered in prayer during the holy season of Advent: may gratefulness and kindness be the guide posts of our journey of faith. We pray to the Lord.

For areas of the world in strife and seeking peace - recalling our mission work in Haiti, Kenya, Jerusalem: that one nation will not raise the sword against another, and that we in our actions and deeds, may be instruments of peace in our homes and in our heart. We pray to the Lord.

For each of us: that we may Celebrate Differently as a people of faith and be vigilant in waiting upon Christ who comes to bring us light, health and strength. We pray to the Lord.

In Thanksgiving for the Lord's continued blessing upon our parish community. As a Family of Faith, may we remain a place with something for everyone, with the Eucharist as the centre of our parish life. We pray to the Lord.

For our parish family: as we undertake a focus on kindness, may our hearts change in deed and action as we seek to help others through our Red Stocking appeal and Kindness Counts Campaign. We pray to the Lord.

For all who have died and await the kingdom, and for the intentions recorded in the Parish Book of Prayer. We pray to the Lord.

Leader: **Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray: [Hail Mary](#)**

### **Closing Activity and Prayer (15-20 minutes)**

*(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and "outreach" to the larger community.)*

### **GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:**

#### **GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT**

Please consider offering a **Holy Hour in our Adoration Chapel** – either as a group or individually – for the intentions of the parish common good and for the objectives of our pastoral priorities. Remember also our Pastor, our Pastoral Team.

#### **GROUP ACTION:**

- The Red Stocking Campaign and Kindness Counts Campaign are underway – how will your group be involved?
- Our Day of Mercy (all day confessions) is on December 15<sup>th</sup> from 8:30am-8:30pm. Twelve Hours, Twelve Confessors. Consider setting aside time to join us for this evening.



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**Let us pray** (together)

God of Love,

Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us.

He is a sign of your love. Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent,

As we wait and prepare for his coming.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

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