LITURGIES AND DEVOTIONALS



CELEBRATING ADVENT IN COMMUNITY

Operational Team InS

November, 2026

Advent Notebook

2026



EST

InS
Instituto Sustentabilidade
América Latina
e Caribe

Presentation

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we approach the end of 2026, we look back at the path we have traveled. It was a year of challenges and graces, of bright days and crossings that demanded more of us than we imagined we had. In the midst of everything, however, the presence of God remained constant: He was with us in the joys we celebrated and also in the hours when the heart felt tired.

As we contemplate 2027 drawing near, we are invited to carry with us what this year has taught us. What has been engraved on our heart? What signs of hope have we been able to recognize even amid difficulties? And how can we cross the threshold of the new year with more faith, more courage, and more empathy?

The season of Advent helps us precisely in this preparation: to dispose the heart to welcome the Christ who comes, not only at Christmas, but in every circumstance of our existence. It is a time to renew our trust in God, to strengthen the bonds of our faith community, and to rediscover the beauty of faith lived in communion.

We are called to recognize that the Lord comes to restore our life. He comes to bring the justice that defends people who are poor, lifts up those who are cast down, and welcomes those who are despised. And He comes to awaken in us a hope that does not lose heart, that seeks justice, that keeps us vigilant, and that impels us to prepare His way with conversion and commitment.

With this purpose, the Instituto Sustentabilidade América Latina e Caribe has prepared the 2026 Advent Devotional Notebook. More than pages to be gone through, it presents itself as an invitation to a spiritual journey that brings us closer to God and also to one another in our faith community. May each encounter be an occasion for prayer, sharing, and renewal of hope.

May this Advent be, for all of us, a time of light and transformation. May the God who comes to restore our life lead us into a 2027 full of peace, faith, and living hope. May it be so.

InS Operational Team

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Instructions

It is possible to hold the meetings in the church itself or in the homes of members who are willing to open their homes to celebrate the meetings. The family that welcomes the community into their home should have the space prepared before the meeting. If the meeting is held in the church, arrange the chairs in a circle so that everyone can look towards the center where the Advent wreath will be placed.

Advent gatherings include some special rituals, such as lighting the candles of the Advent wreath. The Advent wreath consists of a circle of cypress or green branches with four violet or purple candles, decorated with red ribbons. If the meetings take place in the church, the wreath is placed in a prominent location. If the meetings are held in homes, the Advent wreath should be made inside a plate or tray so that it can be taken to the other homes at each meeting.

The liturgical color of the Advent period is purple, violet or lilac. This color is associated with penance, hope, sadness and nostalgia. It signals that something is coming. It calls for reflection and prayer. In each meeting, one candle should be lit at a time, that is, in the first meeting, one candle is lit, in the

second, two candles are lit and so on. The moment of lighting the candles will be included in the liturgy of each meeting.

To make an Advent wreath you can watch some instructional videos on YouTube. Below we suggest some links to watch the videos.

Materials needed for the Advent wreath:

• Something circular (this could be cardboard, a firm circular frame, like a large ring)

• Green cypress branches

• Four purple or violet candles

• Favorite decoration (can be Christmas tree baubles or red bows)

Some links to instructional videos for making an Advent wreath:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzbLs3ocqMo

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcOuxO7Tuy4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k39q7shhQN0

Suggested materials for the meetings:

• The Advent wreath

• Bible

• Cross

- Natural flowers or leaves
- Violet, purple, or lilac fabric

The devotional liturgy contains several moments that can be divided and read by all participants. Everything written in parentheses ( ) should not be read aloud; they are merely indications and guidelines for specific moments. It is important to have the community's songbook on hand when singing, since this Advent resource does not suggest specific hymns so that each community can sing the songs they know best.

We hope you have a blessed encounter.

1st Advent Devotional

Initial instructions

Set up the Advent wreath in a place where everyone can see it. In the same way, set up a purple or lilac cloth with flowers, a Bible, and a cross in the room. Also have a lighter or matches to light the candle. Keep everything organized so that everyone feels comfortable.

Divide the parts of the devotional among the people present at the meeting, each person can read a part. What is in italics in parentheses should not be read aloud, it is just a momentary instruction. When the time comes to begin, invite people to observe a moment of silence and begin the liturgy.

Greeting and welcome – *(Someone who welcomes, it could be the family that welcomes you into the house or someone who leads the group. Light a candle from the Advent wreath.)*

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, welcome, all of you, to this first gathering of Advent. We begin a journey of faith and vigilance, in which the light of God's promise begins to shine upon us.

This is a sacred time of waiting and preparation, in which faith is strengthened, hope blossoms, and love is renewed in our lives. On this path of preparation for Christmas, let the joy of the psalmist echo in our hearts: "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" (Psalm 122:1)

May this joy also be ours as we begin this Advent journey together, trusting that God comes to meet us in order to restore our life. He comes to bring the justice that defends people who are poor, lifts up those who are cast down, and welcomes those who are despised. And He comes to awaken in us a hope that does not lose heart, that seeks justice, that keeps us vigilant, and that impels us to prepare His way with conversion and commitment.

May we be illumined by the presence of the Lord, who gathers us today as a faith community, a people of hope! In the presence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I invite everyone to sing with joy the following hymn:

♫ Hymn♫

Psalm Reading – Psalm 122

Confession of sins and announcement of grace – God of hope and peace, in this Advent season we come before you with open and sincere hearts to acknowledge our faults. Forgive us, Lord, when routine draws us away from you and when we let weariness extinguish in us the desire to seek you. Forgive us for the times we have been indifferent to the pain of those who walk beside us, for the words that have wounded, for our acts of omission, and for our silence in the face of injustice. Forgive us, O God, when we close the doors of our hearts to the stranger, to the poor, to those we consider different, and when we fail to recognize your image and likeness in every person. Forgive us for so often choosing comfort over compassion, and for letting fear and selfishness separate us from our brothers and sisters. Have mercy on us, Lord, and renew in us the joy of your presence. Grant us watchful and open hearts, that we may welcome your coming with faith, hope, and love. Amen.

Hear the good news of God's word: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7)

In Christ, this welcome becomes grace. God does not reject us because of our sins, but receives us with love and reconciles us to God. In Advent, we are called to live this same welcome: to forgive, to include, to serve, and to love. Therefore, receive and live this truth: in Jesus Christ, we are welcomed, forgiven, and renewed for a life of faith, hope, and love. Amen. Let us sing:

♫Hymn ♫

Gospel Reading – Matthew 24:36-44

Message – There are waits that bring us joy and waits that wear us down. We wait for a reunion, for news, for an opportunity. But we also wait for violence to cease, for justice to reach those whose rights have been denied, and for peace to find a place in our homes and communities. When these periods of waiting grow long, we may lose heart and become accustomed to what wounds life. The season of Advent meets us along this journey and renews a promise: the Lord is coming. His coming confronts injustice and awakens the hope of restoration.

Psalm 122 begins with the joy of someone who receives an invitation to go to the house of the Lord. The journey leads to Jerusalem, a place of gathering, celebration, and belonging. Yet the psalmist's attention also turns to the life of the city: its courts of justice are there, as verse 5 tells us, and peace is sought for it. Prayer brings worship into relationship with the connections that sustain life together. Our encounter with God leads us to desire the well-being of those with whom we share our lives.

In this psalm, peace is a communal aspiration. As we read in verse 8: "For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you.'" The person who prays recognizes that their own well-being is linked to the well-being of others. We can hear in this prayer a call to our congregations and faith communities: may peace reach those who live in fear, those who experience violence, those who find no welcome, and those whose voices are silenced. May it also reach people who face hunger, the deprivation of rights, and the denial of their dignity every day, whose lives and deaths are so often ignored.

A congregation that prays for peace is called to examine its relationships and confront the injustices that occur within its own midst. In verse 9, prayer becomes a

commitment: “I will seek your prosperity.” In the light of the Word and the teachings of Jesus, we are called to build new relationships, to look around us, and truly to see the brothers and sisters who suffer and whose voices so often echo without an answer.

In Matthew 24:36–44, Jesus confronts us with uncertainty: no one knows the day or hour of his coming, as verse 36 states. We are not given a calendar with which to control the future. We are given a call to remain watchful. By recalling the days of Noah and mentioning people working in the field and at the mill, Jesus places this warning in the midst of everyday life. It is precisely there, amid tasks, worries, and commitments, that we need to remain attentive and watchful.

If everyday activities could absorb people’s attention in those days, what can we say about ourselves today, amid so many demands and distractions? As verse 44 tells us, Jesus warns: “So you also must be ready.” His words invite us to ask: Are we prepared? Do our daily concerns allow us to remain watchful? How do we receive the promise of a coming whose timing we do not know?

This passage carries the seriousness of judgment and reminds us that the way we live matters before God.

Watchfulness can therefore be understood as a willingness to let the promise of his coming challenge our choices. What have we failed to notice? What suffering has become so familiar that it no longer moves us? What changes have we postponed in our relationships and congregations? Individualism, indifference, and the trivialization of violence can occupy so much space in our lives that we begin to regard them as an inevitable part of everyday life. Is this normalization consistent with the justice we learn from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior?

Read together, these two texts invite us into a waiting that is attentive and committed. The psalm teaches us to pray for peace and seek the well-being of the congregation; the Gospel calls us to awaken to our responsibility in the present. Hope in the coming of the Lord sustains our journey and gives us the courage to act, even when the results seem small.

In faith-based churches and organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, this hope can take shape through concrete practices: listening to those who are often excluded from decision-making, confronting violence and discrimination, sharing resources transparently, and creating opportunities for participation across generations. Caring for

the continuity of a congregation also means caring for the quality of its relationships, so that its organization serves life and its mission. This requires us to look at others, listen attentively, and recognize needs that may not be our own. It means removing the blindfold of individualism and cultivating relationships shaped by love and empathy, sustained by the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These actions are responses to God's grace, which reaches us and moves us to act. The restoration for which we hope has its source and fulfillment in God. Therefore, we can acknowledge our limitations without giving up the responsibility that is ours. We do not have to carry the future alone, but we are called to care faithfully for the life entrusted to us today.

During this Advent season, lighting a candle can accompany a decision: reaching out to someone who is alone, welcoming a voice that has not yet been heard, reconsidering an unjust practice, or supporting someone who needs protection. These are modest gestures, but they carry deep meaning when they express faith in the God who comes to meet us. In this way, the psalmist's prayer for peace and Jesus' call to watchfulness find expression in the way we live.

The Lord is coming. In light of this promise, we can lift our eyes, renew our bonds, and continue on our way. God's justice challenges whatever destroys life; God's grace lifts us up to take part in paths of reconciliation and care. May the Lord's coming find us watchful and attentive, seeking the well-being of our congregations and sustained by the hope that God himself awakens in us.

Pause for dialogue: *(At this moment, open the group dialogue using the following guiding questions:)*

1) What helps us maintain hope when the wait for justice and peace seems too long?

2) During this season of Advent, what concrete action can we take, individually or as a faith community, to promote justice, reconciliation, and care for life

(Give a few minutes and encourage community dialogue on reflection)

♫ Hymn♫

Closing Prayer – Lord our God, in this first week of Advent, we gather as a community of faith to open our hearts to your presence and renew our hope. Your Word calls us to watch

and to welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed us. Therefore, we pray: make your Church a living sign of hospitality and grace in a world marked by indifference and division. Accompany, Lord, those who govern and lead the nations, that they may seek justice, peace, and the common good of all people. Strengthen each of us as well, so that amid life's worries we may not lose sight of you or close our hearts to those who need welcome. May your Spirit teach us to recognize your presence in simple acts of love, in care for our neighbor, and in the courage to include those who have been left aside. Keep hope alive within us, and teach us to await with joy the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We place all other thanksgivings and petitions in the prayer that Jesus himself taught us, saying: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Blessing and sending – *(The person leading the reading of the blessing and the sending forth extends his or her hands*

forward, palms down. The other people receiving the blessing extend their hands forward, palms up.)

Let us open our hands to receive God's blessing:

"May the God who comes to restore our life bless us and keep us. May He grant us the justice that defends people who are poor and lifts up those who are cast down, and awaken in us the hope that does not lose heart and that prepares the way of the Lord. May faith be strengthened, hope blossom, and love be renewed in our lives. And may the light of Christ accompany us in this Advent and in all our days."

Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Carry to the world the justice that God brings and the hope that He awakens. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. *(Blow out the candle).*

Announcements – *(Inform the location of the next meeting, the time and make the necessary distributions.)*

2nd Advent Devotional

Initial instructions

Set up the Advent wreath in a place where everyone can see it. In the same way, set up a purple or lilac cloth with flowers, a Bible, and a cross in the room. Also have a lighter or matches to light the candle. Keep everything organized so that everyone feels comfortable.

Divide the parts of the devotional among the people present at the meeting, each person can read a part. What is in italics in parentheses should not be read aloud, it is just a momentary instruction. When the time comes to begin, invite people to observe a moment of silence and begin the liturgical moment.

Greeting and welcome – *(Someone who welcomes, it could be the family that welcomes you into the house or someone who leads the group. Light two candles on the Advent wreath.)*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in this second Advent gathering, we receive the invitation to open paths in the wilderness of life, preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord.

With each candle lit, hope grows; with each prayer, faith is strengthened; with each gesture of love, the Kingdom of God is made manifest. May this celebration be a time of light and renewal.

The psalmist reminds us: “In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.” (Psalm 72:7)

That justice which flourishes is a gift of the Kingdom that is drawing near. We do not build it on our own: it is the Lord who opens the way, straightens paths, and makes peace spring up. As we prepare for his coming, we are invited to let that justice take shape in our attitudes, in our faith communities, and in our care for people who are impoverished and suffering. Thus, hope becomes concrete and Advent is transformed into an announcement of new life.

May we be led by the promise of the Christ who comes, bringing peace, justice, and new life. In the presence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with joy, let us sing the first hymn:

♫ Hymn♫

Psalm Reading – Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Confession of sins and announcement of grace – God of life and hope, in this Advent season we are called to prepare the way for your coming. But we recognize that we have often walked along crooked paths. We confess, Lord, our pride and our indifference to the pain of those beside us. Forgive us for the injustice we nourish in silence and for the comfort that keeps us from striving for a more just world. Forgive us when we close our ears to your voice and let discouragement or hurry draw us away from prayer. Forgive us for failing to make straight the paths of reconciliation and peace in our daily relationships. Forgive us, O God, when we ignore the situation of people who are poor, of those in need, and of those who have no voice in our society. Lord, have mercy on us and on all your creatures. Align our lives with your will and open space within us for hope to be born. Lead us in the hope of your salvation, revealed to all humanity in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hear the good news of the Word: “And all people will see God’s salvation.” (Luke 3:6)

This promise is fulfilled in Christ, who came into the world to transform lives and restore paths. On the cross, he removed the weight of guilt; in the resurrection, he opened for us the way of hope. Therefore, receive with joy: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, reconciled, and called to walk in newness of life, welcoming one another, especially people who are poor and those who need it most. Amen. Let us sing:

♫ Hymn♫

Gospel Reading – Matthew 3:1-12

Message – Dear brothers and sisters, the theme of justice runs through all of Scripture. From the Old Testament, we find God's people waiting for a King whose government would be different from human governments: a King who would not govern for his own benefit, but who would defend poor people, listen to needy people, and establish justice. It is exactly this expectation that we find in Psalm 72. The psalmist presents the figure of a king whose government would be marked by justice, peace, and the defense of the most vulnerable people. He is not simply describing a good ruler.

The text points to a much greater hope: the hope that God would establish a true, definitive, and merciful Kingdom.

Centuries later, John the Baptist appears announcing: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3.2). What was once expected now begins to draw near. The Kingdom is coming. The King is coming. And for us, Christian people, this hope has a name: Jesus Christ. The message these texts present to us can be summarized in three affirmations: (1) the King who comes brings justice; (2) the King who comes produces restoration; and (3) the King who comes awakens hope. The Psalm begins with a prayer: “Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.” (Psalm 72.1). The first characteristic of this King is justice. The psalmist continues: “May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.” (v. 2). And again: “May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor.” (v. 4). The justice of this King is not merely a legal or institutional matter. It has a profoundly human dimension: the King looks at that people who suffer.

The text repeatedly mentions afflicted, needy, poor, and helpless people. This reveals something to us about God’s

character: God is not indifferent to injustice. When someone suffers, God sees. When someone is oppressed, God hears. When someone is forgotten, God does not forget. This is a fundamental difference between the Kingdom of God and human kingdoms. The powers of this world often protect strong people and leave vulnerable people on the margins. The King presented in Psalm 72 does the opposite: he turns toward those who need help. And this justice finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

During his ministry, Jesus drew near to those whom society marginalized. He welcomed sinful people, drew near to sick people, gave attention to poor people, and confronted structures of hypocrisy and oppression. Jesus did not come merely to talk about justice. He came to establish the Kingdom of God. Therefore, when we speak of Christian justice, we cannot separate justice from Christ. Our hunger and hope for justice are not simply in human institutions, governments, or society's capacity to transform itself. Our hope is in the one who is the true King.

Psalm 72 presents the effects of this King's government: "In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more." (Psalm 72.7). The

psalmist does not merely desire that evil be contained. He hopes that good will flourish. It is not enough for oppression to be denounced; people must find paths of freedom and dignity. It is not enough to speak of peace while the causes of violence remain untouched; it is necessary to build more just relationships, in which no one has to live under fear, humiliation, or exploitation. The justice of the Kingdom is not merely the absence of injustice. It is the concrete presence of conditions for life to flourish. Justice flourishes when those who are hungry find food and when the community stops treating hunger as if it were someone else's problem. Justice flourishes when the dignity of each person is respected, when violence is confronted, and when those who were silenced find space to speak. Justice flourishes when we recognize that there can be no true peace where human dignity continues to be denied. It is to this reality that Jesus points us. His Kingdom is not an empty promise, nor a beautiful idea meant only to soothe our anxieties. It is God's action that transforms our relationship with him, with other people, and with all creation. In Christ, God reconciles us to himself, defeats the power of sin, and opens, through his death and resurrection, the way of life. The cross shows us that God's love does not flee from

human suffering. The resurrection proclaims that death, violence, and the forces that destroy life will not have the final word.

John the Baptist appears preaching in the desert: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." John is not simply announcing a religious idea. He is announcing that the Kingdom is coming. And the coming of the Kingdom demands a response. That response is repentance. What do we need to repent of? In what situations have we been indifferent? In what have we fed pride? In what situations have we treated people unjustly? The coming of the King not only gives us hope; it also confronts us.

The hope of the Kingdom does not belong to a small group. It reaches all nations (Psalm 72.17). In Christ, God offers a hope that crosses peoples, cultures, eras, and borders. And this hope is necessary because the reality we see often seems to contradict it. It is precisely in those moments that we need to return to the Gospel. Christian hope depends on the one in whom we trust. Our hope is not in the absence of problems. Our hope is in Christ. It is in God's promise. It is a hope that sets us in motion. This may be one of the most important applications of these texts: the Kingdom has already been

inaugurated. Christ died and rose again. He reigns, but we still await the complete consummation of that Kingdom. Therefore, we live between two realities: Christ has already come. Christ will yet come. We have already experienced salvation, but we still await complete restoration. We already know God's justice, but we still await the day when it will be fully established. We already have hope, but we still await the final fulfillment of the promise. This reality changes the way we live. While we wait for the King, we are called to live according to the Kingdom. If we hope for justice, we practice justice. If we hope for mercy, we show mercy. If we hope for restoration, we work for reconciliation. If we hope for a Kingdom of peace, we are people called to promote peace.

The faith community is not called to flee from reality while it waits for Christ to return. It is invited to bear witness, within present reality, to the values of the Kingdom that is to come. Psalm 72 presents to us the hope of a just King. Matthew presents to us the voice of John the Baptist announcing that the Kingdom is near. In Christ, God entered our history. He came to meet sinful people. He announced the Kingdom. He faced sin. He conquered death. And he promised to return. Therefore, our hope is not an empty hope. While we

wait, we do not give up. We continue believing. We continue announcing. We continue practicing justice. We continue caring for people who suffer. We continue pointing to Christ. Because we know that the King came, the King reigns, and the King will return. And this is the hope of the faith community: the one who began the good work will complete it. Until that day, we remain firm, looking to Christ and living by hope in the one who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14.6). Amen.

Pause for dialogue: *(At this moment, open the group dialogue using the following guiding questions:)*

1) What situations of injustice have caught your attention most lately?

2) What changes in us when we stop seeing justice merely as a distant topic and begin to see it as God's call?

(Give a few minutes and encourage community dialogue on reflection)

♫ Hymn♫

Closing Prayer – Lord our God, in this second week of Advent we want to prepare our hearts for your coming, remembering the call of John the Baptist to make straight the paths. We

trust in your mercy that always reaches us first, and we ask that your Church boldly proclaim repentance and forgiveness, blessing those who preach and serve in your name, so that their words and gestures may prepare hearts to welcome Christ. Remember, Lord, those who suffer because of climate change: those who lose their homes because of floods and landslides, those who face prolonged droughts and have no water to drink, those who live from the land and see their crops destroyed. Remember the Indigenous peoples, who care for your creation and are so often expelled from their lands. Remember those who live in extreme poverty, those who go hungry, those who lack decent housing, those who are exploited at work, and those who are victims of human trafficking. Remember also those who flee from war and violence, those who cross borders seeking shelter, those who are separated from their families, and those who find no welcome. May your presence bring comfort and hope where there is pain, and may your Spirit renew in us the commitment to care for your creation, to strive for justice, and to be instruments of your peace. Lead us, Lord, by your Spirit, into a life of sincere repentance and trusting faith. May our words and actions prepare paths for your Kingdom, reveal your love

to those who walk beside us, and care for the common home you have entrusted to us. Teach us to wait with humility and joy for the One who comes to renew all things: Jesus Christ, our Lord. All this, and much more, we place in the prayer that Jesus Christ taught us, saying: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Blessing and sending – *(The person leading the reading of the blessing and the sending forth extends his or her hands forward, palms down. The other people receiving the blessing extend their hands forward, palms up.)*

Let us open our hands to receive God's blessing:

"May the Lord who comes to restore our life grant us the grace to prepare the paths of the heart. May justice flourish in our attitudes and peace abound in our faith communities. May the hope that does not lose heart accompany us today and always."

Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Carry to the world the justice that flourishes and the hope that prepares the way of the Lord. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. *(Blow out the candles)*

Announcements – *(Announce the location of the next meeting, the time and make the necessary distributions.)*

3rd Advent Devotional

Initial instructions

Prepare the space with the Advent wreath in a place where everyone can see it. In the same way, prepare a purple or lilac cloth with flowers, the Bible and the cross in this space. Also have a lighter or matches to light the candle. Leave everything organized so that everyone feels comfortable.

Divide the parts of the devotional among the people present at the meeting, each person can read a part. What is in italics in parentheses should not be read aloud, it is just a momentary instruction. When the time comes to begin, invite people to observe a moment of silence and begin the liturgical moment.

Greeting and welcome – *(Someone who welcomes, it could be the family hosting in their home or someone leading the group. Light three candles on the Advent wreath.)*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in this third Advent gathering we are invited to walk in hope and joy, for the light of the Lord is already dawning on our horizon.

The Scriptures present us with Mary's song, who exults before the promise that is fulfilled: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” (Luke 1:46-47)

Mary teaches us that true joy is born of trust in God, who embraces littleness and does great things. Her song is also a song of justice and hope: the Lord brings down the powerful and lifts up the humble, feeds the hungry and cares for the needy. In this Advent, we are called to echo that same song in our lives, proclaiming with words and actions that the Lord comes to restore his people.

May this celebration strengthen us and renew our hope in the Christ who comes. In the presence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with joy, let us raise our voices in the first hymn:

♫ Hymn♫

Psalm Reading – Psalm 146:5-10

Confession of sins and announcement of grace – Faithful and compassionate God, in this Advent season you remind us of the mission to prepare the way of the Lord, as John the Baptist

did. Before you, we sincerely acknowledge the faults that mark our daily lives. Forgive us, Lord, when we treat with impatience the people we love most: when we respond harshly to those who seek us at home, when we ignore a child's plea for attention, when we have no time to listen to those beside us. Forgive us for what we do and for what we fail to do: for hurtful comments about coworkers, for indifference toward those who ask for help on the street, for silence when someone is humiliated in our presence. Forgive us when we trade presence for screens, an embrace for a quick message, conversation for a "like." Forgive us when we pray in a hurry, when we read your Word without letting it transform our lives, when we go to church but leave faith at the door of our homes. Forgive us when we spend too much and share too little, when we accumulate while others do not have enough, when we ignore where our clothing and our food come from. Forgive us, O God, when we do not defend people who are poor, when we do not welcome those who come from outside, when we do not care for your creation and contribute to the destruction of our common home. Lord, have mercy on us. Renew in us the voice of the messenger who announces your coming, and strengthen in our hearts the

hope that does not fade. Prepare us, O God, to be living signs of your presence among us. Amen.

Hear the good news of the Word: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” (Philippians 4:4-5)

In Christ, this promise is fulfilled. He is the Good News who came to dwell among us, bringing forgiveness, peace, and new life. On the cross, he opened for us the way of reconciliation; in the resurrection, he confirmed the victory of hope. Therefore, receive with faith: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, renewed, and sent as witnesses of his Kingdom, called to welcome one another, especially people who are poor and those who need it most. Amen. Let us sing:

♫ Hymn♫

Gospel Reading – Matthew 11:2-11

Message – Brothers and sisters in Christ, faith does not always come with certainties. Sometimes it is also crossed by questions, insecurities, and doubts. Who here has never doubted? That does not mean we stop believing. Today’s Gospel shows us exactly that: a man of faith who also doubts.

John the Baptist was in prison. He had announced the coming of the Messiah, had baptized Jesus in the Jordan, had seen the heavens open. But now he is alone in a cell, with death approaching, and he sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Mt 11:3).

Notice that John is not asking for a theology lecture. He is asking for confirmation. His faith is faltering. And he asks the question that perhaps many of us are ashamed to ask out loud.

Jesus does not answer with a speech. He does not say, “John, relax, I am the Messiah, everything is under control.” He answers with concrete actions: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” (Mt 11:5). In other words: “Look at what is happening. The promise is being fulfilled before your eyes.”

And here is the point that changes everything. John expected a Messiah of judgment and fire, who would come to bring down the powerful and punish the wicked. But Jesus came as a Messiah who heals, who welcomes, who sits at the table with sinners. He did not come for those who think they

are ready, but for those who recognize their need for salvation.

That is why Jesus ends with a warning: “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me” (Mt 11:6). Because the Messiah of God does not look the way we expected.

Psalm 146 helps us understand this way of God. It sings: “He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow.” (Ps 146:7-9).

Do you see what this psalm is saying? God is not neutral in the face of suffering. God does not sit on the fence. God takes the side of those who are being crushed by life. And that is exactly what Jesus does in the gospels.

In Jesus, God draws near to human pain not with distant speeches, but with hands that touch, with feet that walk to the house of the sick, with eyes that see those no one else wants to see. Not an indifferent God, but a God who gets involved.

Perhaps you are here today with the same question as John. Perhaps life has become too heavy and you are asking yourself, “God, is it really you? Are you in control? Can I trust?”

The good news of Advent is that God is not offended by our doubt. Jesus did not rebuke John. He answered with signs. And today he keeps answering: in the embrace of a community that welcomes, in the Word that consoles, in the shared bread, in the gesture of someone who cares. God does not ask us for a perfect faith. God invites us to trust even when the answers do not come quickly.

And while we wait, we are called to be signs of that hope. As Jesus showed John, the Kingdom is revealed in concrete gestures: when we feed the hungry, when we welcome those who have been left aside, when we visit the person who is alone, when we defend people who are poor and care for creation that groans. Not because we are perfect people, but because we were welcomed first.

John was in prison and did not see the end of the story. But he trusted. And Jesus called him the greatest among those born of women (Mt 11:11).

In this Advent, perhaps you will not see all the answers. Perhaps life will continue to be difficult. But God's invitation is the same: do not take offense at the way God acts. He is coming. And when he comes, all things will be made new.

May we, in this third week of Advent, do as John did: bring our doubts to Jesus, open our hearts to see the signs he is already performing, and wait in faith for the One who comes to renew all things. Amen.

Pause for dialogue: *(At this moment, open the group dialogue using the following guiding questions:)*

1) What has made you doubt or wonder whether God is at work today? Where has your faith faltered?

2) What simple gesture can you and your community take on this week to be a sign of hope for someone?

(Give a few minutes and encourage community dialogue on reflection)

♫ Hymn♫

Closing Prayer – Lord our God, in this third week of Advent we are reminded, by the voice of John the Baptist, that true faith produces fruits of repentance and love. Before your Word, we

acknowledge that we have often lived indifferently, forgetting your will and the need of the one beside us. Even so, we trust in your grace, which calls, forgives, and transforms us. We ask you, Lord, that your Church remain faithful to the Gospel and that, moved by your Spirit, it boldly proclaim justice and compassion that come from you. May we not seek only beautiful words, but a faith that translates into concrete gestures of sharing, solidarity, and care for those who suffer. Remember, Lord, those who wake before the sun and return home after it sets, and still cannot put food on the table. Remember the one who lost a job and feels ashamed to ask for help. Remember those who work in degrading conditions, without rights, without rest. Remember the person who single-handedly sustains a household and has no one with whom to share the weight. Remember families that fall apart because of domestic violence, women who suffer in silence, children who grow up afraid inside their own homes. Remember the person who was driven from their land and has nowhere to return. Remember the person who sleeps on the street and is treated as invisible. Remember those who face anxiety and depression, who smile on the outside but fall apart within. Remember the one struggling with addiction, the one

trying to start over and falling again. Remember the one who lost a loved one this year and faces the first Christmas without that person. Remember those who are hungry, and not only for food, but for affection, for listening, for belonging. Bless those who exercise leadership in our communities and in the world, that they may act with honesty, humility, and commitment to life. May they not be corrupted by power nor distance themselves from those who need them most. Lord, purify our hearts from all arrogance and indifference. May your Holy Spirit renew us, so that we may be living signs of your presence in the world. Teach us to live with joy the good news of salvation and to wait in faith for your Kingdom, which already begins among us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. With humility and faith, we join our voices in the prayer that your Son Jesus Christ taught us, saying: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Blessing and sending – *(The person leading the reading of the blessing and the sending forth extends his or her hands forward, palms down. The other people receiving the blessing extend their hands forward, palms up.)*

Let us open our hands to receive God's blessing:

"May the Lord who comes to restore our life teach us to rejoice like Mary. May our soul proclaim His greatness and our spirit rejoice in God, our Savior. May the justice and hope of His Kingdom take shape in our words and actions."

Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Carry to the world the joy that is born of trust in God, who embraces littleness and does great things. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. *(Blow out the candles)*

Announcements – *(Announce the location of the next meeting, the time and make the necessary distributions. One suggestion for the community is regarding the next and last meeting, the invitation is to be able to have a beautiful banquet or a sharing with meals made by each of the participants. It would be a space where they could bring the food to the meeting place and have a moment of agape. For this, it would be important*

to be able to distribute and organize the people who can and want to bring: food, drinks, napkins, glasses, cutlery, etc.)

4th Advent Devotional

Initial instructions

Prepare the space with the Advent wreath in a place where everyone can see it. In the same way, prepare a purple or lilac cloth with flowers, the Bible and the cross in this space. Also have a lighter or matches to light the candle. Leave everything organized so that everyone feels comfortable.

Divide the parts of the devotional among the people present at the meeting, each person can read a part. What is in italics in parentheses should not be read aloud, it is just a momentary instruction. When the time comes to begin, invite people to observe a moment of silence and begin the liturgical moment. Finally, remember that at the end there will be a moment of sharing, where each person should have brought what was previously assigned.

Greeting and welcome – *(Someone who welcomes, it can be the family welcoming the group into their home or someone who leads the group. Light the four candles of the Advent wreath.)*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in this fourth and final Advent gathering, our waiting draws near its high point, for the light we await is about to shine in fullness.

The psalmist cries out on behalf of the people: “Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.” (Psalm 80:7)

That cry is ours as well. We recognize that, many times, life tires us and our strength seems to fail. But Advent reminds us that God does not abandon us: He comes to restore what was broken, to rekindle what seemed extinguished, and to renew our hope. The justice that flourishes and the peace that abounds are fruits of His mercy. As we draw near to Christmas, let this plea become trust: the Lord comes to meet us to save us.

May this celebration rekindle in our hearts faith and hope, preparing us to welcome the Christ who comes. In the presence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with gratitude and joy, let us sing the first hymn:

♫ Hymn♫

Psalm Reading – Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Confession of sins and announcement of grace – God of love and promise, as we draw near to Christmas we remember the great mystery of the incarnation: you come to dwell among us. But we confess, Lord, that we often fail to recognize your presence in our midst. Forgive us when we rush so much after gifts and decorations that we have no time to pause before the manger, and when our Christmas is reduced to shopping lists, sheer consumerism, and photos to post, while your coming waits in silence in a forgotten manger. Forgive us when we are irritated by the family we have, when we exchange harsh words at the Christmas table, and when we have no patience to listen to the elderly person who only wants company. Forgive us when we look away from those who sleep on the street, when we buy expensive gifts for those who already have everything and do not extend a hand to those who lack the basics. Forgive us, Lord, for the ingratitude that dims the joy of living and for the hardness of heart that keeps us from welcoming our neighbor. Forgive us when we reduce Christmas to empty celebrations and forget the true gift: Jesus, the Emmanuel, God with us. Lord, have mercy on us. Let the certainty of your presence be reborn in our hearts,

and fill our lives with the hope that Emmanuel brings to the world. Amen.

Hear the good news of the Word: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." (Isaiah 9:2)

That light is Christ, the Emmanuel, who came to dwell among us. He did not come for those who think they are righteous, but for those who recognize their need for salvation. Therefore, receive and live this truth: in Jesus Christ, light has overcome darkness, and we are forgiven, renewed, and sent to shine in the world, welcoming one another, especially people who are poor and those who need it most. Amen.

♫ Hymn♫

Gospel Reading – Matthew 1:18-25

Message – Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are coming to the end of Advent. They have been four weeks of waiting, of lit candles, and of preparation for the coming of the Lord. But we know that waiting is not always easy. Perhaps some of us come here today with tired hearts, carrying worries, facing

difficulties, or trying to find answers that have not yet come. And, in the midst of all this, perhaps that ancient question arises, the one that crosses generations of people of faith: “How long, O Lord?”

Psalm 80, read earlier, is the prayer of a people who feel abandoned. They call God the Shepherd of Israel, the one who cares for his people, but, at that moment, it seems the Shepherd is asleep. So they make a bold request: “Awaken your might; come and save us.” (Ps 80:2). And they repeat with vehemence: “Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.” (Ps 80:3).

It is the prayer of those who weep, of those who are tired, and who feel that God seems distant. Perhaps you know that feeling. Perhaps you are living an Advent like that, waiting, but with a heavy heart.

And the most beautiful thing is that the people do not ask for explanations. They ask for God’s presence. Because to see the face of the Lord is to know that he is there, looking with love, not abandoning us.

Now let us turn to the Gospel. If someone asked how God responds to the cry of Psalm 80, what would you answer?

Perhaps thunder, angels coming down from heaven, a great sign on the horizon. But Matthew tells us another story.

God responds with a dream. A dream given to a simple man from a small town, named Joseph. A man who is not the protagonist of the story, who does not speak a single word in the entire text. Joseph discovers that Mary, his fiancée, is pregnant. And he knows it is not his. Imagine the pain, the shame, the silence inside the house. Joseph was a righteous man, and, in his mind, being righteous meant stepping away, resolving everything discreetly, avoiding scandal.

But God appears in a dream and says: "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." (Mt 1:20). God's first word is not a demand. It is "do not be afraid." And then comes the child's name: Emmanuel, which means "God with us."

Do you see what is happening here? The psalm asked: "let your face shine upon us." And God does this in a way no one expected: not from far away, not from above, but from within. God enters the story from below, through a family that could have been the talk of the neighborhood, through a pregnancy out of season, through an unimportant town called

Bethlehem. The face of God will shine on the face of a poor child, in a manger.

This is what Lutheran faith has always insisted on saying: we do not climb up to God; God comes down to us. We do not earn God's presence with our beautiful prayers, with our efforts, with our tidy lives. Joseph did nothing heroic. He simply woke from the dream and did what the angel commanded. Faith, here, is not an achievement. It is a welcome. It is opening the door for God to enter the messiness of our lives.

Today, perhaps you are here with a heart like the one in Psalm 80. Perhaps life has become difficult, and the question is: "God, where are you? Are you seeing what I am going through?"

The good news of Advent is that God does not answer our cry with silence. God answers with a name: Emmanuel. God does not promise us a life without pain, does not promise quick answers, does not promise that problems will disappear. God promises something greater and more concrete: his presence.

And that presence comes in the simplest things. It comes in the night of one who cannot sleep because of

unexpected news. It comes in the home of one who has lost a job and does not know how to pay the month's bills. It comes in the room of one who is sick and waiting for a test result. It comes in the heart of one who will spend the first Christmas without someone they loved. It comes in the life of one who was forced to leave their land and seeks shelter. It comes at the table of one who has no Christmas meal. It comes in the family that rebuilt after a tragedy. It comes in the life of one who feels alone and thinks no one cares.

God is not far from suffering. God enters it. That is what Christmas means. And here is our calling. The psalm asks God to make his face shine. And God did so in Christ. But today, brothers and sisters, that face needs to keep appearing. And it appears when we show it.

When someone welcomes the person everyone else has left aside, the face of God shines. When a family opens its table to someone who would be alone, the face of God shines. When the community organizes to help those who lost their homes in the flood, the face of God shines. When someone has the courage to say to an elderly person, "I have time to listen to you," the face of God shines. When we defend people

who are poor, when we care for creation that groans, when we do not look away, the face of God shines.

And, like Joseph, we will often need courage to do what God asks. Perhaps God will ask us to welcome someone our neighborhood judges, to take a step that seems risky, to change our mind about a person. Joseph thought being righteous meant stepping away. God showed that being righteous meant welcoming. Mercy has always been greater than our idea of justice.

We are almost at Christmas. Perhaps you still do not see all the answers. Perhaps your "how long?" remains unresolved. But Advent teaches us to wait in a different way: not with our eyes on the ground, defeated, but with our faces lifted up, because we know in whom we trust.

The cry of Psalm 80 did not go unanswered. God woke up. God came. And his name is Emmanuel. He is with us today, he will be with us at Christmas, and he will be with us every day of the coming year. Not because we are worthy, but because he is faithful.

May we, in this last week of Advent, do as Joseph did: wake up, trust, and welcome. And may our cry "Restore us,

Lord" turn into praise, because the face of God has already shone upon us. Amen.

Pause for dialogue: *(At this moment, open the group dialogue using the following guiding questions:)*

1) Psalm 80 is the prayer of one who feels abandoned and asks, "How long, O Lord?" Have you ever lived through a moment like that? What has made you feel that God seems distant?

2) The message says the face of God shines when we welcome. Who has been the face of God shining for you in your life? And for whom can you, individually or as a community, be that face this week?

(Give a few minutes and encourage community dialogue on reflection)

♫ Hymn♫

Closing Prayer – Lord our God, in this fourth week of Advent we contemplate the mystery of the incarnation through the story of Joseph, who in the face of the unexpected trusted and obeyed your voice. Like him, we are often surprised by paths we did not plan and by situations that cause us fear. Teach us,

Lord, to trust in your Word even when we do not understand everything, and to respond in faith to your call. We ask you, Lord, that your Church boldly proclaim the Gospel of Emmanuel, God with us, reminding the world that you do not abandon your people and that your love is revealed in the fragility of a poor child, born in a manger. Remember, Lord, those who face difficult decisions and do not know which way to choose. Remember the one who receives unexpected news and cannot find strength to start over. Remember the one who must take a just stand even when the culture around says otherwise. Remember families rebuilding after a tragedy. Remember those without housing who wait for a place to begin again. Remember those who are sick and await a diagnosis or treatment. Remember the one who has lost a job and does not know how to sustain a household. Remember the peoples who live under the threat of war, displaced people who cannot return home, children growing up in shelters and refugee camps. Remember your creation that suffers: forests burning, waters becoming scarce, communities struck by floods and droughts. Lord, give us hearts open to welcome those in need, especially people who are poor and those who most need protection. Make us instruments of your love and

messengers of your joy. May your Kingdom of justice and peace flourish among us. All this and much more that we hold in our hearts, we pray in your name, with the prayer that Christ himself taught us: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Blessing and sending – *(The person leading the reading of the blessing and sending it forth extends his or her hands forward, palms down. The other people receiving the blessing extend their hands forward, palms up.)*

Let us open our hands to receive God's blessing:

"May Emmanuel, God with us, who comes to restore our life, remain by our side in every step. May His justice overcome the darkness, His peace sustain our journey, and His hope prepare us to welcome Christmas with joy."

Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Carry to the world the justice that flourishes and the hope that does not lose

heart. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. *(Blow out the candles)*

Closing – *(In this last moment of the devotional, the sharing moment begins with the meals brought by the members. In the same way, talk about how the experience with the devotionals was, how you felt in preparing for Christmas and thus be able to share experiences and meals in this closing moment.)*



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