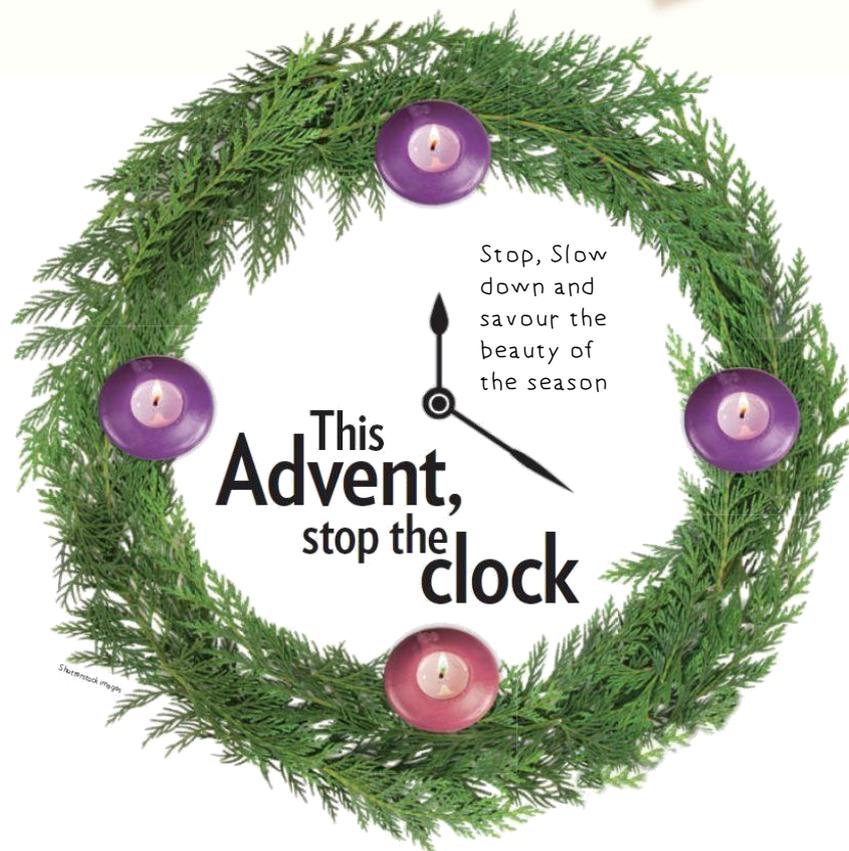




Something Different for Advent 2018

MY ADVENT RETREAT
*Person's
Busy Retreat*



A collection of short prayers, reflections and exercises for **BUSY PEOPLE** to help aid you on your Journey through Advent

May God's blessings this season. light your way!

My Advent in Prayer

The season of Advent seems to shorten every year – Halloween is over and the very next day the Christmas ads are on television and Santa is on his way to the local supermarket.

The pressure is put on as predictably as drawing up a shopping list, stressing over presents and finances, decorating the tree and planning the Christmas Dinner. We need to gift ourselves a few minutes out from our hectic world each day and to give ourselves a little space and time. Let these 5-10 mins each day be your gift to yourself as you prepare for Christmas. In the Gospels we are told that Jesus frequently goes away to a quiet place to pray, to escape the crowds, to spend time with God. With the pull of work, family, preparations, even with the best intentions, this can be hard to find – even an envied luxury!! So this is a collection of short prayers, reflections and exercises to hopefully help aid you on your Journey through Advent to Christmas

I believe in God, but do I believe in God-in-me? I believe in God in heaven, but do I believe in God-on-earth? I believe in God out there, but do I believe in God-with-us? Lord, be born in my heart. Come alive in me this Christmas Season! Amen

You are invited to create a simple sacred space in your home. This could be in the corner of your bedroom or sitting room. It should be somewhere that you can go for some quiet time each day. You may use some symbols in your space –such as a cross, candles, a bible or some significant symbol for you. The colour for Advent is **Purple**, a symbol of hope, so you may like to use that colour in your sacred space. **Evergreens** speak of the hope that we have in God, the hope of newness, of renewal. **Candles** symbolize the light of God coming into the world, the light still burning in our world & hearts today. Maybe make your own Advent wreath? *Be creative, yet keep it simple.*



The Advent story of hope and mystery, anticipation, preparation, a kingdom of this world and the next, and a king appearing when we least expect. Heaven touching earth, the footsteps of the divine walking dusty roads as once they did in Eden, and a people, searching for a Saviour, and walking past the stable. Open eyes and hearts, that this might be an Advent of hope to the world.

Practice the Art of Waiting - We live in a world of instant gratification. We hate to wait in line; wait for the fever to break for a sick child; wait while our computers & tablets "buffer;" for the Wi-Fi to connect; We also spend a fair amount of time teaching our children how to wait (*"No, you can't have sweets just before dinner"*). So, we already know that there are benefits to waiting. So, what if we changed our thinking about waiting - Waiting then becomes an activity, and a pretty helpful one at that. By actively waiting, we are able to reflect more carefully on what really matters during Advent. By actively waiting, we are preparing our hearts for Christ to be born anew in them.

The God who loves you deeply is waiting with open arms for you to open the doors of your heart.

Prayer in the Days before Advent

My brother, Jesus. It happens every year. I think that this will be the year that I have a reflective and active Advent.

I look forward to Sunday and this new season, Jesus. But all around me are the signs rushing me to Christmas and some kind of celebration that equates spending with love.

I need your help. I want to slow my world down. This year, more than ever, I need Advent, these weeks of reflection and longing for hope in the darkness. Jesus, this year, help me to have that longing. Help me to feel it in my heart and be aware of the hunger and thirst in my own soul. Deep down, I know there is something missing in my life, but I can't quite reach for it. I can't get what is missing.

I know it is about you, Jesus. You are not missing from my life, but I might be missing the awareness of all of the places you are present there.

Be with me, my dear friend. Guide me in these weeks to what you want to show me this Advent. Help me to be vulnerable enough to ask you to lead me to the place of my own weakness, the very place where I will find you the most deeply embedded in my heart, loving me without limits.

Watching the Sunrise during Dark, Mornings of Advent

Thank you. What a gift this morning from you as I watched the blazing sunrise through a cloudy winter sky. It is hard getting up these dark mornings, Lord, and yet you gift me with a sight that I miss at other times of year, when the weather is warmer and the sun rises before I get up. I stared out the window at the red and purple light, gloriously framed by the gold of the rising sun. "Be still, and know that I am God" was the only thing that came to me. I watched in silence, filled with a sense of your presence in my life.



I am filled with gratitude this day for such a treasure and could feel it and see it as a gift from you. Thank you for your love. Today, let me carry a sense of how much you love me to send me such a gift. Let that awareness of your love change the way I treat others today. Let me be more reverent in the irritations of the day. I ask your help to move through my errands and holiday preparations today with peace and a sense of your sunrise in my heart. Your glory fills my spirit and I want only to give thanks with my life this day.



Preparing for Visitors to My Home

They are coming! Oh, dear Lord, like the Wise-men wandering toward the stable, visitors are heading to my house. I am so excited about this visit. But I can get so side-tracked about how my house looks, or the food that I serve. I can only keep this prayerful with your help.



Help me to stay humble this Advent and Christmas season. You invite us into the humility of the stable where you were born. Help me to remember that humble-ness and the simple joy of your birth. Let me stay focused on my guests, not on myself and my worries about my house. Guide me in rejoicing in who these people are and in loving them freely.

When you come to prayer:
Focus on your breathing take three deep slow breaths, then focus on your normal breathing.
This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift.
Repeat the following slowly:
Come, Lord Jesus, Come
&
Be aware of God who is with you and loves you always.

Praying for my Children When our children are little, Lord, we have a thousand joys and a thousand worries. As our children get older, and leave the envelope of our care more and more, our concerns grow. And when our children go through phases of rebellion and rejection of our love and what we ask of them, we feel the pain of love. If our children become adults and adopt values and a life style that is different from our hopes and dreams for them, we can tend to blame ourselves or we can be tempted to judge or even badger them. If their relationships don't go well, or they struggle financially, medically in any way, these are our struggles, as parents, too. Lord, please be with my children. I place them in your care. Please relieve any anxieties or fears they may have. Give them deeper faith in you. Let them feel your loving presence in the midst of the clamour of this season. Open their hearts and their lives to see in the growing of their faith a way to you and a way to be generously giving their lives to others. Let us truly feel and share the joy of this season as a family. Protect my grandchildren and help them to know your love. I ask all of this, with great longing, in faith, in trust, in Advent Hope.



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY



Create a paper chain - one link for each day of the Advent season, but before linking it together, write an Advent Scripture quote or a good deed to do or the write name of a family member or friend, on each link. On each day of the Advent season, take off one link and reflect on the quote or do the good deed or as a family, pray for the person or whose name is on that strip of paper.

Praying Over My To-Do List

I sit here with my list, Lord, and I know I need help finding a balance. I am so looking forward to Christmas Day, with the family here, the company, the wonderful celebration. But, Lord, there is SO much to do! When will it all get done? How will I maintain any semblance of inner peace in this "peaceful" season?



I think, Lord, that I need some balance in my life. I feel so torn between wanting to cook and fill my house with wonderful welcoming smells, and wanting to finish decorating the house. I have shopping to do, the house to clean and cards to write and mail. When? How?

Help me, guide me, Lord. Help me to set priorities around doing those things that will bring me closer to you. Maybe my house really is clean enough, or maybe I can ask my family for help. Am I missing the season in my rush to prepare for it? Can my house decorations be simpler? Is there more than a little ego involved when I want so desperately to have my house "magazine perfect" for the holidays? Help me rediscover the joy of simplicity, Lord. Help me to remember what I am celebrating. Help me to find it in my heart to call out, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Take 10 minutes at the end of each day to see the signs of Hope all around you. In prayer ask God to bring to mind experiences that day, whether large or small, through which you have sensed genuine love, genuine care, and genuine compassion. People might come into your memory, or places where you felt welcomed and restored, or particular events. Write down a word or sentence in a notepad that captures that time, without going into details; as the next memory comes, write something down about that and so on, so that you end up with a long list of moments or memories. Most of these points of connection will be ordinary, everyday things. When you've finished spend some time looking at your completed list. Reflect with God about the shape love takes: how love practically expresses itself and brings Hope. **Be open to be surprised!**



Make a Family Blessing jar

Place an empty jar on your dining table. Each day during Advent, state one blessing for which you are thankful. Write it onto a slip of paper and put it in the jar. On Christmas Day, pour out the blessings. Read together and give thanks to God for the blessings you have enjoyed during Advent.



Working in the Kitchen during Advent

What joy this brings me, Lord. Thank you for guiding me into the kitchen for some time of silence with you. The room fills with wonderful smells and I share tastes and samples with my family as they make extra trips through the kitchen on days like this. Thank you for each and every one of these special people in my family. They are like the ingredients of my own life, adding spice and heat and wonderful flavour, melting together into a unique dish designed to glorify you.



You know, God, cooking is quite a bit like my life. It's messy, I get careless and sometimes things don't turn out as I had planned. But in the mess of my life, that's where I can turn to you. Help me when I have to deal with being so imperfect. Bless me with humility when I grapple with my own poverty. Let me feel how deeply you love me, even when all I have to offer is scorched and humble.

Be with me Lord, in this kitchen today. Help me to take the time in this intimate silence with you, to pray for each person who will eat this food. Allow me to remember all of those around the world who have so little food, and bless those who share what little they have.

God of hope
be with us in our Advent journey
to the stable and beyond,
be with us in our meeting
and in our travelling together,
be with us in our worship
and our praying together,
be with us in our Advent journey
to the stable and beyond,
our God of hope.

Dress For Advent

It's common for people to wear secular Christmas colours (red and green) throughout the month of December, so why not Advent colours? Purple and pink. Real men do, too, wear pink these days!!



Wrapping gifts

Dear Lord, I am tired. I sit here surrounded by ribbons and paper, gifts and tags and I struggle to feel the spirit of giving. I can barely remember which gift is for whom and at moments it all seems so far from your birth. Help me to take this moment to think of the many gifts you have given to me, the many ways your grace has blessed my life. Help me to remember that each gift is a tiny mirror of the generosity I see so clearly in your life and of the many ways you shower me with such lavish and undeserved love. Let me sit here for just a moment and feel that joy in my heart. Thank you. Thank you.



Praying Through Exhaustion

Oh Lord, I am so tired. It seems like the lists of to-do's get longer each day, the frenzy in my home each night gets wilder. It seems like the holidays have barely started and already I am behind.

Help me, dear Jesus. Let me feel your loving arms wrap me tightly in the warm embrace of your endless love.

Teach me to make choices about my time, to remember what is important this season and to say "NO" whenever my Yes would take me away from your peace. Fill me with patience, love and a sense of humour. Remind me of your deep love for me and let the fire of that love be something I can share with everyone around me.

I'm So Tired



Try during the week to take at least one *30 minute* walk through an area you know well. In ordinary walking, we usually have some place to get to. In mindful walking, there is no goal, no place to get to.... set aside a time you decide that would be best to be fully present with whatever is inside of you and all around you. Choose where you will walk and let it be somewhere where you won't be disturbed. It could be your estate, by a river, your area, a park ... *But* walk it as if you are walking it for the first time. Notice colours, plants, faces, smells, signs, voices, sounds ... that you may not have noticed before. On this walk look around and see / feel how wondrous life is, inside yourself and all around you. The lights in the vast expansive sky overhead, birdsong, the caress of a breeze on your face, the smell of cut grass, the taste of the air. Enjoy each nourishing, healing step and with each footprint imprint your gratitude upon this beloved earth.

Allow God to surprise you!

God cares for our hearts.

Nothing is impossible to Him.

And He loves to surprise us

when we're least expecting it ...

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT - FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY



Create the manger but leave it empty of straw. The idea is that when a family member does an act of service, sacrifice, or kindness for someone, they receive a piece of straw to put into the manger. Then, on Christmas morning, Baby Jesus is placed in the manger (which hopefully is now full of straw with all the good deeds done). Encourage your family members to make Jesus bed as comfortable as possible through their good deeds. In the process, explain that we are the ones who bring God's love into the world and that our gifts and talents are God's gifts to us, what we do with them are our gift to God!!

Halfway through Advent - have I missed it?

Dear Jesus,

It's halfway through Advent and I'm not sure what happened. I really wanted to make this a reflective and calm season, preparing for your birth and pondering how you came into this world in such a stunningly humble way. But it's so busy and I'm distracted and sometimes even short-tempered with those I love the most. Where are you in THAT?



I am discouraged and wish I could start over. But as I sit here in the rare moment of silence, I contemplate your birth. In a bed of straw, with the smell of manure everywhere. It's a mess in that stable ... and come to think of it, my life is a little messy, too. I suddenly see that it is not just into the mess of the stable but into my mess that you enter the world. You came into a humble place and that humility is often where I live my life - feeling guilty or distracted and wishing I were a better person. But if I stop thinking of myself and focus on you, I realize that there you are, waiting to love me, even though I have so many unfulfilled good intentions about prayer, so many desires of how to change this fleeting Advent season.

I can begin Advent today and make this season deeper by making room in my heart for you. I can take just a moment before I get out of bed in the morning and feel the empty place in my life I so often fill with my busy-ness. It is there I need you the most. Come, Lord Jesus. Come into that dark and lonely spot in my heart. You know what my needs are more than I do. Let me feel your love. If I only carry that thought with me each day, it will prepare me for Christmas. Thank you, Jesus. It's not too late. You are waiting to enter my life today, wherever I let you in. Help me to open my heart in these remaining days.

At the end of each day, before you close your eyes, give a few minutes of loving attention, making yourself present to the Lord as someone who was blessed by Him during the day.

Thank God for everything that was good for you, for your family and for your community.

Invoke the power of the Holy Spirit, asking for light to discern how to make the right choices, how to decide wisely.

Be Aware of the situations, circumstances, and events of your day in which you allowed God to act, to be present in your life. Review your actions that were signs of God's presence and love for others.

Ask for forgiveness for wrong choices made, opportunities missed and for chances lost.

Entrust yourself, the day gone and the coming day to the Lord and experience the joy and hope that comes from putting all these matters into God's hands.

Shopping during Advent

Dear God, as I look through my gift shopping list, I hold up to you each person listed on it. Slowly, one by one, I ask that the fire of your abundant love burn within each of them. I pray that the gift I find for each person will bring joy into that life.



Help me to keep a balance this season, Lord. Let me keep my buying in perspective, not to spend more than I need to or can afford. Let me not give in to the pressures of this world and not equate love with money spent. Let me always remember the many, many people who have so much less in material things. Help me to buy wisely, so that my choices will not burden those in other countries who are so deeply affected by this country's economy.

And finally, loving God, help me to find time in the frantic moments of each day to become centred on you. Walking through a store, riding on the bus, hurrying down a street: let each of these times be moments when I can remember your incredible love for me and rejoice in it.

Try to do this at least once a day. **Be still.** To start take three deep breaths... inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four (*all through your nose, which adds a natural resistance to the breath*). Then, close your eyes and focus on your normal breathing. On the in-breath be aware that it is life-giving, nurturing; a gift from God. On the out-breath be aware that you are feeding the plants and trees around you; you are blessing the world around you. Stay with that for a while: The in-breath as a gift from God; the out-breath as your gift to the world. Repeat the following: *"In you, oh Lord, I rest my soul"*, for as long as you are comfortable and be aware of God who is with you always.

Have a Family movie night Gather your family and watch films that help you understand the season of Advent, like The Nativity Story, The classic "Peanuts" special "A Charlie Brown Christmas", It's a Wonderful Life, A Muppet Christmas Carol, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, ... There's many more... How do they inspire you to live this Advent season?





THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT - FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY
Bless the Tree – As you put up the family Christmas tree, give thanks to God for the gift of evergreens in the winter, the gift of lights to remind us of Jesus coming into the world, and special ornaments that remind us of family, friends and holidays past.

Blessing of the Christmas tree at home

Lord God, Let your blessing come upon us as we decorate and illuminate our Christmas tree.

May the light and cheer it gives us be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts.

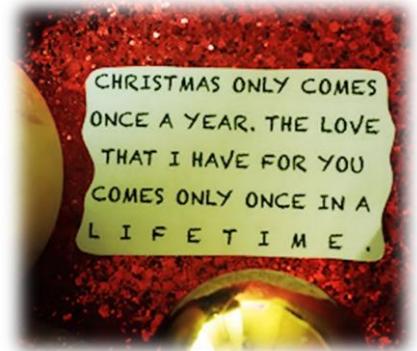
May all who delight in this tree spread that joy to others and may we be a witness of the light of your love for all. Keep that light burning bright in our family. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Praying with special loved one on a December morning.

In the cold, dark early mornings of December, it can be difficult to leave the warmth of our beds. This might be a good time to "risk" a new tradition - leaning over toward special loved one with a loving embrace and beginning our day with a prayer.

Dear Lord, thank you so much for the gift of this person in my life. You know how much I rely on *him/her*, and need *him/her*. Every Advent season, it is so easy to get caught up in the frantic pace of holiday life. Help me to love this special person you given me to share my journey with more unselfishly and to give without wondering what I get back. May this relationship you have called us into, be a way to glorify you in our lives, in every moment of this day. Bless our family and friends. Keep them all safe today. I ask this humbly and gratefully.



Advent as I Consider My World

God of comfort, these times seem so uncertain, so scary. The world seems darker than it has in the past and I am less sure of myself. Maybe that's a good thing; maybe now I am turning to you with a realization that I need you so much more and that my life is not in my own control. Let me not forget all of those around the world who are frightened at this moment. Help those who are victims of terrorism and war. Be with those who have lost so much in the past year. Hold us all in your loving arms and let us be comforted by the strength and peace you want so much to offer us through the birth of your son, Jesus. Thank you for the many gifts you offer us.



A little something to think about...

Sometimes life just hurts. I wish there were a more delicate way to say that. I wish there were a clever way to explain this fact away – maybe some whimsical cliché that we can all have a chuckle over? But I've got nothing. The truth is there are days when the burdens of life can weigh on us so heavy that we're not sure how we'll lift it, much less carry it around. Around the middle of December it can be easy to be swept up in the holly, jolly tide of Christmas cheer. If life has dealt you a good hand, it's a quite enjoyable time of the year. But if life has dealt you a bad hand, if you have lost a love one during the year then that tide of Christmas joy can feel like it's drowning you. What do we do with this? For starters, we can call to mind that Advent is a season for people who are in darkness waiting for the sort of light that will save them. You can't commercialize or turn a profit on this sort of thing. Living in darkness and waiting for a great light isn't very easy to market either. Maybe that's why it's so easy to forget (or avoid) this reality when we're rushing through the season's numerous to-do lists. Author Taylor Caldwell writes, "I am not alone at all, I thought. I was never alone at all. And that, of course, is the message of Christmas. We are never alone. Not when the night is darkest, the wind coldest, the world seemingly most indifferent. For this is still the time God chooses." This season is still the time God chooses to bring the world's greatest hope into the very darkness of life that can seemingly weigh us down every day. There is, indeed, hope for those who live in darkness. May we stand in solidarity with those for whom darkness is an all too familiar reality this season. May we experience and share this light together. And maybe, just maybe if we look through the chaos, the pain and the struggle we see our true hope, the child in a manger.



(Adapted from Hope in the Darkness: An Advent Reflection for Those Struggling With the Holiday Season. By B Gosden)



Hope is an action more than a feeling. We remember the works of God in the past and so anticipate the work of God in the future, leading us to act purposefully in the present. Ask God to show you an action you can take as an expression of hope, whether this in relation to your own circumstances, or someone you care for or the community or the church you are part of. Make a conscious effort to do at least one act of random kindness each day!

We draw strength and **hope** from our community of faith! Every parish has Advent and Christmas liturgies (like the daily Mass liturgies and the Advent Reconciliation services), and they also have other seasonal activities. Engaging in them as a family (if possible) will help you keep Christ in the centre, and it will also help you to help others to keep Christ in the centre. Never underestimate the support you give to others. You are building up your parish by participating in these liturgies and activities!! Even if you haven't been there for a while, the door is always open and there's a warm welcome to be had. Why not see how you can get more involved? Find out if there is a group or ministry you could bring your gifts to. Take the risk!



PLUG IN!
to God to Community to Mission

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT - FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY

Spend time at the Crib – Encourage each member of your family to spend some quiet time in prayer near the Nativity scene at home or in your parish. What does the manger teach us? How could God allow his Son to be born in a stable? Give thanks for the gift of Christ and the joy of the Christmas season to come.



Blessing of the Crib at home

God of every nation and people, from the very beginning of creation you have shown us your love: When our need for a Saviour was great you sent your Son for us. To our lives he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy, and love. Lord, Bless all who look upon this manger, may it remind us of Jesus' humble birth and may it remind us to show to others the love he has shown us. **Amen**

Prayer for those travelling home this Christmas

Loving God protect and watch over all our loved ones who are travelling home to be with us this Christmas. May they arrive safely to share this season of joy with us. We ask this in your care.

Amen



A busy week ahead...

This is usually one of the busiest weeks of the year but make a conscious decision (as a family) to do one simple thing for someone else each day for these days to Christmas. Maybe do something special for your prayer companion. Suggestions could be Light a candle and say a prayer for a loved one far away; to take a special treat to a neighbour; Make a card for a loved one and send it in the mail; Recycle some toys to share with others; Read a Christmas book to your child; Make a small stocking and drop it off on someone's door as a surprise; Write a Thank You letter to someone; Take food to a local food bank; Write a list of 10 things you are thankful for this year and share it with a loved one... If you find it easier make a list of things that you would like to do, put it in your prayer space and tick them off and say a prayer as you do them. Bring that joy to others. Be creative!

Listen with your heart Visit a sick friend
Clean a neighbor's walk Offer a hug
Give an unexpected gift Make a new friend
Pick up litter Say "hello" Open a door
Plant a tree Help carry a load Share a snack
Cheer up a friend Thank a teacher or mentor
Read to a young child Lend a hand Do a kind act daily
Leave a thank you note Offer your seat
Cycle courteously BE TOLERANT Let another go first
Bake cookies to share Give a compliment
Help a student make friends Donate your gently used items
Give a balloon away Lend a pencil Respect others

Christmas after the loss of a Loved One

Such a loss! Such a keen and tearing pain. Even when I am in a crowded room, there is a loneliness I never knew existed. Comforting God, I have turned to you so many times for solace, and I come again. While the world is bright and sparkling, my heart feels leaden and has an emptiness that cannot be filled.

Lord, how can I enter into this season of joy? In my head I celebrate your birth into this world, but in my everyday life, I am filled with a grief that runs so very deep. You

blessed me with a loving relationship and now it is gone from my life. How can I be faithful to that love and the memory of that love and my sorrow in this season of "Rejoice!"??

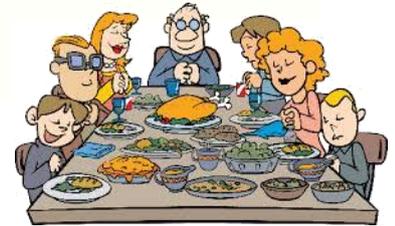
Tears are so close to the surface all the time and helpful friends who want to "keep me busy" don't seem to really understand that I need to embrace my grief. I am afraid of letting go of the sadness and losing the deep love connection I had. Instead of entering into the Rejoice of Christmas, I long for the sorrow of Lent. I beg you Lord, show me how the two are connected. I ponder the name '**Emmanuel**' and know that it means "God with us." With us. With me in this world, in this sorrow. If I look beyond my pain, I know that you, too, suffered so much in this world. I never understood so clearly before that *Emmanuel* is what your nativity is really about. You are in my world, in my pain.



Thank you, Lord, for the loved one you blessed my life with. Grant me now in my grief, a peace. Give me a comfort that might not make the tears go away, but that lets me feel your presence as you take up a place deep in my heart, *with me*.

A Family Prayer before the Christmas Meal

Loving God, on this Christmas day we give thanks that Jesus, your Son, has come into our world bringing us gifts of peace and joy. Bless us as we sit down together at this table for our Christmas meal. Bless the food we share and help us to remember those who are hungry. Be with our neighbours and our friends, those who are lonely, sick or away from home. We pray that our departed loved ones may now sit at your table in heaven. May the joy of this feast give us strength and light, now and in the days ahead. We ask this prayer through Christ, Our Lord. Amen



And Finally ... *May you know Jesus more this season. May the way you live your life this Christmas be an act of worship and prayer, displaying God's love to all people. May you care for others in new ways. May you spend less, give more, love all and worship fully! And may you know our God in Jesus who wraps you in his loving and compassionate arms*

The preparations are in place, the excitement mounts, and for those who are journeying to families arrangements are finalised, clothes sorted, gifts wrapped and labelled.

There is a new song in the air!

Lord, this Christmas,
Let my heart be touched by your gift
of love

✧

My life be your witness.

With joy and confidence I pray, 'Come Lord Jesus Come.'
Amen



Merry Christmas



Hopefully you have found this simple booklet of Advent prayers helpful, enjoyable and useful. After the busyness of Christmas is over Gift yourself a New Year's resolution to continue or carry on at least one aspect of this into your future ... be always sure and aware of your God who is with you and loves you always!

