# Opening Prayer Service

## Gather

Blessed are you Lord God of our Salvation.

We thank you for sending us your son, Jesus,

Born to Mary and Joseph of humble means.

We thank you for the role models of prayer you have given us

In the prophets and the saints

And in particular, Mary.

Through her humble trust in you, she shows us

How to say yes to your initiative in our lives.

Like Mary, help each one of us to become aware

Of your work in the world that hinges on our humble consent.

Blessed are you Lord God of our Salvation.

Amen.

## Listen

Luke 1: 26-38

## Respond

Presider:

As we prepare for the birth of the Christ Child in our midst, let us pray as Mary prayed when she received news that she would become the mother of Jesus, our savior. Our response is “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.”

Reader 1:

My soul magnifies the Lord,   
   and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,   
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
   Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

Assembly: Here am I, the servant of the Lord.

Reader 2:

For the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
   and holy is his name.   
His mercy is for those who fear him  
   from generation to generation.

Assembly: Here am I, the servant of the Lord.

Reader 3:

He has shown strength with his arm;  
   he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.   
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
   and lifted up the lowly;

Assembly: Here am I, the servant of the Lord.

Reader 4:

He has filled the hungry with good things,  
   and sent the rich away empty.   
He has helped his servant Israel,  
   in remembrance of his mercy,   
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
   to Abraham and to his descendants forever.’

Assembly: Here am I, the servant of the Lord.

## Go Forth

Presider:

God, help us learn to pray as Mary prayed. Help us to respond to your initiative in our lives first with prayer, and then with care and concern for others. As we journey through Advent toward Christmas, and as our anticipation builds, we pray that so too will our appreciation build for the ultimate gift of salvation through your son Jesus Christ. Amen.

# Handout #1.

# Interview With the Angel Gabriel

Interviewer:

It’s a great honor to have you here, Angel Gabriel. Thank you for taking the time.

Gabriel:

No problem. You can call me Gabriel, or Gabe.

Interviewer:

You played a prominent role in the events that led up to Jesus’ birth. What was that like? It must have been fascinating.

Gabriel:

Indeed, it was fascinating and also humbling. Whenever God reveals himself, it is both fascinating and humbling. It was not I who played a prominent role. Rather it was God. I was simply God’s voice to both Zechariah and Mary.

Interviewer:

That’s right! I had forgotten that you visited Zechariah before appearing to Mary. Zechariah was the father of John the Baptist, wasn’t he?

Gabriel:

That’s correct. His is a great story. So human. When I appeared to him and told him that he and Elizabeth would have a child, and even though this news was an answer to *his own prayers*, he scoffed in doubt, for he and Elizabeth were supposedly too old to have a child.

Interviewer:

What did you do when Zechariah expressed his doubt?

Gabriel:

I reminded him that I was sent by God to bring *good news*, but since he doubted God, I rendered him speechless until all that I announced came true.

Interviewer:

And then what happened?

Gabriel:

Some months later I appeared to Mary, but let me finish up Zechariah’s story first. I don’t want people to think he was a bad or weak person, for he truly was very holy and dedicated to God. I’ve noticed that all humans have doubts now and then.

Interviewer:

Can you blame him for his skepticism? After all, he and Elizabeth were old! It seems human nature to be doubtful when something extraordinary happens.

Gabriel:

Yes, that’s true, and no I don’t blame him. But since he did not have his own voice for several months, I think he was better able to hear the voice of God and realize that nothing is impossible for God.

Interviewer:

And then the baby came, and they named him John. Afterwards Zechariah could speak again.

Gabriel:

Yes, and do you know what his first words were after all these months? They were words of prayer and praise to God! Zechariah simply could not wait to express his thanksgiving for his son John, who would prepare the way for the Lord, and would later be known as the greatest of all the prophets!

Interviewer:

You also appeared to Mary with some extraordinary news!

Gabriel:

Yes, I think most people know that I told Mary she would be the mother of Jesus. And like Zechariah, she was confused about how this would work. But unlike Zechariah, she harbored no doubt about God’s power, and she immediately gave her humble consent. Mary is the perfect model for how to respond when God intervenes.

Interviewer:

You also told Mary that Elizabeth was going to have a child.

Gabriel:

Yes, and Mary immediately went to assist her cousin Elizabeth. Humans can learn a lot from Mary. She was chosen for a most important role in God’s saving plan, and she gave humble consent right away, and then turned her attention to help someone else when nobody would have blamed her for focusing only on herself.

Interviewer:

I am beginning to realize how right you are. I am beginning to see that the lives of Zechariah and Mary and all of the events leading up to Jesus’ birth teach us to respond to God’s activity in our lives first with prayer of praise and thanksgiving, and second by turning our attention to those in need.

Gabriel:

That’s just what all Christians should strive for during Advent and the Christmas season.

Interviewer:

Gabriel, thank you very much for joining us today.

Gabriel:

My pleasure.

# Handout #2.

# O Antiphons

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of the Messiah who would come as Savior for the world. Isaiah had seven titles for the Messiah, and each title indicated a particular good that the Messiah would bring to the world. We celebrate these titles through the O Antiphons, which cover the period of Advent preparation known as the Octave before Christmas, December 17-23. Each day of the final week of Advent, we celebrate a different O Antiphon. Let’s discover what they are.

**O Antiphon #1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

“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.”

**“O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation.”**

Draw a symbol or write a few words reflecting on the meaning and importance of wisdom in your life right now. Parents and children can work together.

**O Antiphon #2 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

“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.”

**“O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.”**

Draw a symbol or write a few words reflecting on the meaning and importance of Jesus as Lord in your life right now. Parents and children can work together.

**O Antiphon #3 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

“A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,  
   and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

“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.”

Essentially this refers to Jesus’ family tree. Jesse was the father of King David, and it was prophesied that the Messiah would be of the house and lineage of David and be born in David’s city, Bethlehem (Micah 5:1).

**“O Flower of Jesse’s stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.”**

Draw a symbol or write a few words reflecting on the meaning and importance of your family tree—parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on. Parents and children can work together.

**O Antiphon #4 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

“I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open.”

“His authority shall grow continually,  
   and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
   He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
   from this time onwards and for evermore.”

**“O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel controlling at your will the gate of Heaven: Come, break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people to freedom.”**

Draw a symbol or write a few words reflecting on your vision of heaven and everlasting peace. Parents and children can work together.

**O Antiphon #5 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

“The people who walked in darkness  
   have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
   on them light has shined.”

**“O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”**

Draw a symbol or write a few words reflecting on the importance of justice and fairness in the world. Parents and children can work together.

**O Antiphon #6 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

“For a child has been born for us,  
   a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
   and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
   Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

“He shall judge between the nations,  
   and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
   and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
   neither shall they learn war any more.”

**“O King of all the Nations, the only joy of every human heart; O Keystone of the mighty arch of man, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.”**

Draw a symbol or write a few words reflecting on your vision of Jesus as Wonderful Counselor or Mighty God or Everlasting Father or Prince of Peace. Parents and children can work together.

**O Antiphon #7 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.”

**“O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God.”**

Let us conclude our session by singing one verse of “O Come Emmanuel.”

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

# Handout #3.

# Handout #4

Christmas Dinner Table Prayer

Advent Week #1 Table Prayer - Humility

Advent Week #2 Table Prayer for Our Neighbor

Advent Week #3

Table Prayer in Thanksgiving

Advent Week #4

Table Prayer of Obedience

Come, Lord Jesus! Open our minds and hearts and souls as we wait for you to be born anew in our lives and in our family. Like Mary, help us give our humble consent to your will in our lives.

*Family members each share one way they have given humble consent to the Lord Jesus in their home today.*

Come, Lord Jesus! Bring peace and healing in our family and our world. May we hear again your own prayer “that we may be one.” May we prepare the way for you by being generous and forgiving.

*Family members share how they have experienced generosity and forgiveness today.*

Come, Lord Jesus! Come and stay with our family and friends—and all who are dear to us. We are truly grateful for their love and care, just as we are grateful for your light that shines brightly in those who love us. Help us to spread your light and joy by giving freely and happily to all we meet.

*Family members share one specific way in which they how they are thankful for the light of the Lord Jesus today.*

Come, Lord Jesus! We hunger, we thirst, we wait for you! We pledge our obedience to you just as did Mary and Simeon. Come, Lord Jesus and do not delay!

*Family members share a time when they have responded obediently to the Lord Jesus present in the home or community*.

***Leader***

O God of gentleness, in love you gather us at this table. We celebrate your great gift to us, Jesus Christ, your son.

Lord Jesus, hold us close to each other. In the peace of this Christmas season may the hungry be filled and homeless sheltered, and may the unremembered be united especially through your love and peace at work in each of us. We remember especially those who have loved us in a special way today—those people who have brought Jesus’ love to us.

(*Names may be said aloud or in silence.*)

***All***

Lord, bless our food, our family, our friends. Help us to share our love. Amen.

# Advent – Christmas Placemat Template

Christmas Dinner Table Prayer

Advent Week #1 Table Prayer - Humility

Advent Week #2 Table Prayer

for Our Neighbor

Advent Week #3 Table Prayer in Thanksgiving

Advent Week #4 Table Prayer of Obedience

# Handout #5

# Advent Information Cards

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. The Church’s liturgical year begins with the First Sunday of Advent. | 1. The Advent wreath is a tradition of the season. It is a symbol of our hope in Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the world. |
| 1. Advent begins on the Sunday nearest November 30th, which is the feast of St. Andrew, and lasts until December 24th. | 1. The circle and evergreens on the Advent wreath remind us of God’s everlasting love which has no beginning and no end. |
| 1. The word Advent comes from the word adventus which means “coming.” | 1. It is customary to use three purple and one pink candle on the Advent wreath. The purple reminds us of the need for sorrow for our sins. The pink candle reminds us of the joy and hope we share in Jesus, the Light of the World, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. |
| 1. Advent is a season in the Church year when we remember how the Word of God became human in the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, which we celebrate on Christmas. During Advent we also reflect on and celebrate how Jesus comes into our lives and is present with us every day. | 1. Advent begins with the lighting of one purple candle on the first Sunday of Advent. The pink candle is lit the third week when the Advent focus shifts to the special joy of the Christmas event. The increasing light of each week reminds us that Christmas is closer, and Christ’s presence continues to grow and brighten our lives. It also reminds us that by being Christ’s light today, we can brighten the “darkness” we find in our lives and in the world around us. |
| 1. Advent is a time of hoping and working for a change of heart. We focus on being more open to the love of God in our lives, and the salvation offered through Jesus. |  |

# Handout #6.

# Advent Readings and Sample Prayers

This chart shows the Scripture readings for each Sunday of Advent. Each time you light the candles of your Advent Wreath, choose an appropriate reading.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Cycle A | Cycle B | Cycle C |
| Week One of Advent | Isaiah 2:1-5  Matthew 24:37-44 | Isaiah 63:16-17,19; 64:2-7  Mark 13:33-37 | Jeremiah 33:14-16  Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 |
| Week Two of Advent | Isaiah 11:1-10  Matthew 3:1-12 | Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11  Mark 1:1-8 | Baruch 5:1-9  Luke 3:1-6 |
| Week Three of Advent | Isaiah 35:1-6, 10  Matthew 11:2-11 | Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11  John 1:6-8, 19-28 | Zephaniah 3:14-18  Luke 3:10-18 |
| Week Four of Advent | Isaiah 7:10-14  Matthew 1:18-24 | 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16  Luke 1:26-38 | Micah 5:1-4  Luke 1:39-45 |

Here is a sample prayer for each Week of Advent. Use these prayers as a guide to compose your own. Each time you light candles on your Advent Wreath, choose the appropriate prayer.

## Sample Prayer for the First Week of Advent

*Come, Lord Jesus! Open our minds and hearts and souls as we wait for you to be born anew in our lives and in our family. Help us to experience your love in our family throughout Advent.*

Compose your own prayer for the First Week of Advent.

## Sample Prayer for the Second Week of Advent

*Come, Lord Jesus! Bring peace and healing into our family and our world. May we hear again your own prayer—”that we may be one.” May we prepare the way for you by being generous and forgiving.*

Compose your own prayer for the Second Week of Advent:

## Sample Prayer for the Third Week of Advent

*Come, Lord Jesus! Come and stay with our family and friends—and all who are dear to us. May your light shine brightly so we can see you everywhere. Help us to spread your light and joy by giving freely and happily to all we meet.*

Compose your own prayer for the Third Week of Advent:

## Sample Prayer for the Fourth Week of Advent

*Come, Lord Jesus! We hunger, we thirst, we wait for you! Come, Lord Jesus and do not delay!*

Compose your own prayer for the Fourth Week of Advent:

# Handout #7.

# Response to Significant Events

## Mary and Elizabeth

Reflect on this passage from Scripture:

“In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.’

And Mary said,  
‘My soul magnifies the Lord,   
   and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,   
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
   Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;   
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
   and holy is his name.   
His mercy is for those who fear him  
   from generation to generation.   
He has shown strength with his arm;  
   he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.   
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
   and lifted up the lowly;   
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
   and sent the rich away empty.   
He has helped his servant Israel,  
   in remembrance of his mercy,   
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
   to Abraham and to his descendants for ever’” (Luke 1:39-55).

**What is the significant event that occurred in this passage?**

**How did the person(s) respond?**

**What does their response teach us about responding to significant events in our lives?**

## Zechariah

Reflect on this passage from Scripture:

“Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, ‘No; he is to be called John.’ They said to her, ‘None of your relatives has this name.’ Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, ‘His name is John.’ And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, ‘What then will this child become?’ For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:   
‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
   for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.   
He has raised up a mighty savior for us  
   in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:57-68).

**What is the significant event that occurred in this passage?**

**How did the person(s) respond?**

**What does their response teach us about responding to significant events in our lives?**

## Simeon

Reflect on this passage from Scripture:

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,   
‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
   according to your word;   
for my eyes have seen your salvation,   
   which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,   
a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
   and for glory to your people Israel.’

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too’” (Luke 2: 25-35).

**What is the significant event that occurred in this passage?**

**How did the person(s) respond?**

**What does their response teach us about responding to significant events in our lives?**

# Prayer Service

## Gather

The ritual of the *Angelus* commemorates Mary’s humble consent to be the mother of Jesus. It is a simple ritual. Let us pray it now to conclude our session.

## Listen

Luke 1:46-50

## Respond

Leader: The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary

Community Response: **And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.**

Leader: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Community Response: **Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.**

Leader: Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.

Community Response: **Be it done unto me according to thy word.**

Leader: Hail Mary ...

Community Response: **Holy Mary ...**

Leader: And the Word was made flesh

Community Response: **And dwelt among us.**

Leader: Hail Mary …

Community Response: **Holy Mary …**

Leader: Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,

Community Response: **That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.**

Leader: Let us pray.

## Go Forth

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, your Son, was made known by the message of an Angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Christ, our Lord, Amen.