

Liturgy of the Word with Children

Advent, Year A

General Information

Catechist Background

With schools preparing Christmas concerts and Nativity plays, retailers counting down the number of shopping days until Christmas, and families preparing for Christmas celebrations, it is easy to remember one of the purposes of Advent: preparing to remember Christ's Incarnation in history. It is much trickier to remember the focus for the first three weeks of Advent, preparation for Christ to come again. There is a slight penitential flavour to Advent, as we remind ourselves that we need Jesus in our lives, and a tension as we must both prepare and wait for Jesus' return.

Advent means 'coming' or 'waiting' in English, but we should encourage our children and ourselves to focus on the ways Christ came and does still come into the world, which are hinted at in every Mass in the Memorial Acclamation. Jesus came to Bethlehem 2000 years ago; He comes into our hearts now through sacramental grace; and He will come in fulfilment of the end of time.

Changes to the Lectionary

Since Advent 2024 the Catholic Church in this country has been using a new Lectionary. This means that the readings and Gospel in Mass may sound a little different from your memory of the last time we were in Year A (in 2022). The readings and Gospels are from the same passages as before, but they now come from the *English Standard Version – Catholic Edition* of the Bible.

Setting the Scene

Purple is the colour for Advent, and if your Children's Liturgy space allows, you may choose to incorporate that colour into a centrepiece (and/or rose – a lighter form of purple - for the Third Week). You may choose to have a small Advent Wreath to use for the children as well, although please use caution with lighting candles near small children, especially if you are in a cosy space.

Purple is the liturgical colour which is associated with kingship and divinity, as it was the most expensive (and thus the rarest) dye to create in the ancient and medieval worlds and so it was only worn by those who ruled in some way. For the ancient Romans, their rulers (if they were wise) only wore at most a strip of purple on their clothes: to wear more was to invite trouble as it was "hubristic", meaning that you thought you had more power than you actually did.

The 'Gloria' is not sung during Advent even though it is a joyful season. This is so that the angels' song of Gloria at Christmas (and ours on the feast day) has greater poignancy.

We Say Sorry

In some parishes, Children's Liturgy of the Word begins before the Introductory Rite has finished. If you have been in the main body of the church for the Penitential Rite, there is no need to repeat it in Children's Liturgy.

We Pray (1)

The Collect expresses the theme of the readings for the day. As above, if you have been in the main body of the church for the Collect, there is no need to repeat it in Children's Liturgy.

Gospel Acclamation

'Alleluia' is the normal Gospel Acclamation sung during Advent. For the Gospel Acclamation you might like to have a look at:

- *Music for Children's Liturgy of the Word* by Christopher Walker (Oregon Catholic Press)
- 'Halle, Halle, Halle' by John Bell (Wild Goose Publications), also in *Laudate*, no. 178
- Some of the Gospel Acclamations used at your parish mass if suitable
- Try writing your own words using tunes familiar to children (see suggestions in *The Complete Children's Liturgy* by Katie Thompson (Kevin Mayhew publishers))

Gospel

Advent marks the beginning of a new year in the Church's calendar. This year is year 'A,' and most of the Gospel readings for Sunday Mass will come from the Gospel of Matthew. Textual clues lead scripture scholars to believe that Matthew's Gospel was originally aimed at Jewish Christians. He is particularly intent on proving Jesus' messianic credentials through the fulfilment of prophetic writings, and affirming Jesus' link to Israel's glorious past.

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

Response

We Believe

We Pray (2)

'All liturgy is prayer and it is right that a liturgy of the word with children should end with a time of intercession. The prayer may arise from the children's reflection but it is always concerned with the needs of the whole Church and the world. It is important to remember that the petitions are invitations to pray not the prayers themselves, so a short phrase that invites the children to pray is better than a long or detailed list of concerns. This model of intercession is easily learned by children.' (*Liturgy of the Word with Children – Guidelines –Commentary ¶17*)

