

*The
Advent
Feast*



*A celebration for
families and
friends*

Introduction and Preparation

This Advent Meal is very loosely based on the Jewish Passover Meal, which is a wonderful example of how faith and teachings are kept alive in the family. This has enabled the Jews to hold onto their faith throughout even the most difficult of situations. As Christians we share their great inheritance and the stories of the Scriptures are our own story too. One of the difficulties we have in western culture, is that often we only reflect on our faith when we are in religious settings such as in a Church. It would be helpful for us to return to this tradition of family celebrations which focus on the values and beliefs which are central to our lives.

Drawing on these ideas, here is a format for an Advent Feast. It is first and foremost a family meal *and not* a religious service! It has elements to keep younger children happy but is intended not to be too trite so that adults can also participate. The meal should be relaxed but have a sense of occasion and importance.

The leader reads all the main text and the headings but it is better if the scripture readings are given to others to read. Only short Scripture passages are given and often it might be necessary to remind people of the full story. It is important, therefore, to encourage people to ask questions as you go along and also discuss any issues raised in the text in an informal manner.

The main course should be a proper cooked meal to emphasise the real human celebration involved. The ceremonial drink should ideally be wine, or at least some exotic fruit drink. The symbolism and the prayers give the meal a sense of solemnity, but the more you can make it a natural family meal, the more it will be a celebration of God with us as we really are!

The text talks of Father and Mother etc. but if it is not being celebrated by a family then anyone can take the roles. Using the roles will help keep the family atmosphere of the gathering.

The red text in italics is purely for guidance and is not to be read out.

The Advent Feast is a celebration of the virtue of Hope.

- Hope in the coming of the Kingdom, looking forward to the heavenly banquet when there will be true justice, peace, and an end to oppression.
- Hope which is to be nourished in our hearts to help us participate in bringing about of reign of God.

How to set the room

Near the table where you eat, you may place an advent wreath and also have other candles on the table so that your service of light is impressive. If possible, avoid any electric lighting in the room.

The table should be set as for a normal meal but on the table you will also need;

1. A seven branch candlestick or build up a small platform of steps with a tea light (candle) on each one building up to the highest in the middle. During the story, one is lit for each new promise.
 2. A large main candle for the beginning of the meal. This needs to be passed from reader to reader.
 3. Enough tea lights for everyone to have one candle each.
 4. Small bowls of pistacchios and olives. These are to remind us of the fruits of the desert. Isaiah's theme of the desert blooming and rejoicing is essential to Advent.
 5. Some olive oil in a little dish for the Royal Anointing of King David
 6. A small bowl of vinegar and some pitta bread to remind us of John the Baptist's message of repentance and purification.
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- If it is not suitable to drink wine, choose a non alcoholic drink which is a bit unusual so as to keep the sense of occasion and celebration.
 - During the service of light after the second promise, some suitable hymn/song about light can be sung.
 - Suitable advent hymns/songs can also be sung at the end of the meal.

The Advent Feast

Fill everyone's glasses with wine or an equivalent exotic drink. Then set the scene by turning out the lights so that the room is in darkness. The mother lights a candle and leads with the opening prayer. Make sure the Father is nearby so that he can immediately read the beginning of the story.

Mother: Lord Jesus Christ, Light of the world, come into our hearts this night; dispel the darkness of fear and doubt. Fill us with hope, confidence and strength that we may do your will and let your light shine out through our lives.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Everyone: Amen

Father: Our story starts in the distant past, how God's Spirit hovered over the waters creating order out of chaos, forming mankind out of the earth. Male and Female he created them in His image, and God saw that it was good. The Garden of Eden was a paradise of harmony with all of creation and Adam and Eve lived in the presence of God.

But the voice of evil and chaos spoke to Eve and Adam and he sowed the seed of mistrust in their hearts. They broke faith with God and were cast out of the garden.

At this all relationships were disfigured;

between God and the human race, between man and woman,

between races of peoples, between parents and children,

between humans and animals, between people and creation.

Where there had been harmony there was now injustice.

Where there had been friendship there was now hatred,

where there had been trust there was now fear.

The stars of the morning wept in despair, creation was groaning in travail,

men and women called out to God for help.

And God heard his peoples cry.....

Let us now remember what God has done for us.

This story of God's saving promises in history can be split up and read by different members of the family. It should be done in an informal manner. Pass the candle and the Bible to the first reader and the second reader and so on!

The First Promise

Leader

The First Promise: God promises to renew his Creation.

Despite the terrible mess the human race had made of everything, God decided to choose someone to make a new beginning so he chose Noah to build an ark and to fill it with his family and every kind of animal, two by two. After the terrible flood washed away all evil, Noah and his family settled on dry ground and God made this promise to them.

Reader 1

A reading from the book of Genesis:

(Genesis 9: 12-16)

"And this", God said, "is the sign of the covenant which I now make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come: I now set my bow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I gather the clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I shall recall the covenant between myself and you and every living creature, in a word all living things, and never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all living things. When the bow is in the clouds I shall see it and call to mind the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth, that is, all living things.

The First Cup



Leader

Let us prepare to drink the first cup. We celebrate the first of God's promises: Hope has begun.

Father: Blessed are You Lord God of all creation, from the dawning of time you have called us to live as your sons and daughters bound in a covenant for all time. You have called us to live in harmony with the earth, to care for it and enjoy its fruit. All blessing and honour and glory be Yours.

Everyone: All blessing and honour and glory be Yours.

Drink the first ceremonial cup. (Beware, according to the Book of Genesis, Noah was the first man to plant a Vineyard, he was also the first person to drink too much!)

Light the first candle of the seven branch candlestick.

The Second Promise

Leader

The Second Promise: God chooses us as his family.

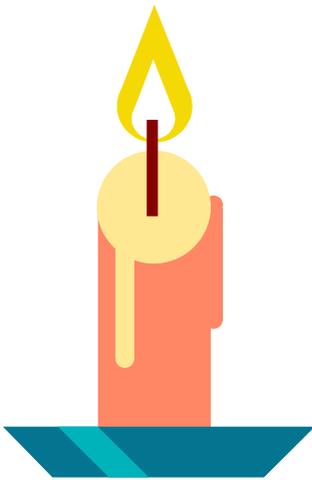
After Noah, unknown numbers of generations passed by. Eventually we come to the dawning of biblical history, to the time of Abraham who, according to the scriptures lived in Iraq between 3500 and 4000 years ago. Against all the odds he put his hope in God and believed God's promises. He is therefore revered as "The Father of Faith" for all Jews, Christians and Moslems. This was one of the many promises given to Abraham.

Reader 2

A reading from book of Genesis:

(Genesis 12:1-3.)

The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country which I shall show you; and I shall make you a great nation, I shall bless you and make your name famous; you are to be a blessing! I shall bless those who bless you, and shall curse those who curse you, and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you."



In baptism God called each of us by name and gave us our vocation. Like Abraham we need to believe God's promises and sometimes have to travel quite far before our vocation is made clear. As a reminder of each person's baptism, pass the main candle round for everyone to light their own candle. As they do this, invite each one to call out his or her baptismal name. If there are other candles in the room, such as an advent wreath, these can also be lit at this moment. A hymn or song about Christ our Light may be sung while this is done. Then the Mother reads out the following prayer.

Mother: Let us fill our lives with the light of Christ!

Everyone: Amen!

Now, invite everyone to pass both their hands six inches over their candle, bringing their hands over their heads as if they were drawing a veil of light over themselves. This symbolises a blessing of the light of Christ over us. (It is an ancient Indian and eastern Christian custom.)

Now light the second candle of the seven branch candlestick.

The Third Promise

Leader

The Third Promise: God gives us a way of life.

During a time of great famine, Abraham's grandson Jacob moved his tribe to Egypt. Joseph his son had become powerful in Pharaoh's eyes and so the tribe was welcomed into the country. After many generations though, the tribe became a slave work-force for the Egyptians. So God called Moses to lead the people out of slavery to a life of freedom. Before they reached the Promised Land, however, God knew that they would only be really free if they changed their own way of life. So God gave them Ten Commandments so that they may live together in peace and harmony.

Reader 3

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy:

(Exodus 20: 1-3, 7-8, 12-17.)

Then God spoke all these words. He said, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you lived as slaves. 'You shall have no other gods to rival me. 'You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not leave unpunished anyone who misuses his name. 'Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. 'Honour your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false evidence against your neighbour. You shall not set your heart on your neighbour's house. You shall not set your heart on your neighbour's spouse, or servant, man or woman, or ox, or donkey, or any of your neighbour's possessions.'

As a sign of re-commitment to live by God's law of freedom, invite everyone to offer the sign of peace to the person next to them.



Now light the third candle.

The Fourth Promise

Leader

The Fourth Promise: God chooses a king to establish Justice and Peace.

The tribe reached the Promised Land and attempted to live by God's laws. At times they succeeded and at other times they didn't. Eventually they decided they would be better off with a King who would protect them and give them peace. Their choice of a king, though, was not a great success, so God called the prophet Samuel to go and reveal God's choice for a new King.

Reader 4

A reading from the first book of Samuel:

(1 Samuel 16:6-13)

When they arrived he looked at Eliab and thought, 'This must be the Lord's anointed now before him,' but the Lord said to Samuel, 'Take no notice of his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him; God does not see as human beings see; they look at appearances but the Lord looks at the heart.' Jesse then called Abinadab and presented him to Samuel, who said, 'The Lord has not chosen this one either.' Jesse then presented Shammah, but Samuel said, 'The Lord has not chosen this one either.' Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, 'The Lord has not chosen these.' He then asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?' Jesse replied, 'There is still one left, the youngest; he is looking after the sheep.' Samuel then said to Jesse, 'Send for him, for we shall not sit down to eat until he arrives.' Jesse had him sent for; he had ruddy cheeks, with fine eyes and an attractive appearance. The Lord said, 'Get up and anoint him: he is the one!' At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him, surrounded by his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord seized on David from that day onwards.

Through our Baptism, we have been made sons and daughters of God, princes and princesses of God's kingdom. As a sign of this, invite everyone to anoint each other on the forehead with a tiny amount of the olive oil saying:

"You are a prince / princess of God the Most High"



Light the fourth candle.

The Fifth Promise

Leader

The Fifth Promise: Despite human failures, God still promises justice and peace and foretells a time when even the desert shall rejoice!

The history of the kingdom was no better than beforehand. David made plenty of mistakes and some of his successors completely ruined everything. The kingdom split in two and eventually both kingdoms became so corrupt, they were easily overrun by invaders. The Northern kingdom fell first and then the Kingdom of Judah. The capital Jerusalem was sacked, God's Temple was destroyed and the people were deported to Babylon. Throughout all these calamities God called forth many prophets, not only to point out the people's mistakes but also to give them hope for a new future. Two examples of such beautiful prophecies about a future of justice and peace are found in the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Reader 5

A reading from the Prophet Isaiah:

(Isaiah 2:4-5 and 35:1-4)

Then he will judge between the nations, and arbitrate between many peoples. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift up sword against nation; no longer will they learn how to make war. House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Let the desert and the dry lands be glad, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom; like the asphodel, let it burst into flower, let it rejoice and sing for joy. The glory of Lebanon is bestowed upon it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; then they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God. Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to the fainthearted, 'Be strong! Do not be afraid. Here is your God, vengeance is coming, divine retribution; he is coming to save you.'

As a reminder of the desert bringing forth fruit, invite everyone to eat some of the pistachios or olives, which are examples of food grown in deserts.



Then light the fifth candle.

The Sixth Promise

Leader

The Sixth Promise: The promises are about to be fulfilled, John the Baptist arrives to prepare the way.

The people had plenty of time to reflect and pray about their mistakes during their time of exile and they began to realise how wonderful God had been towards them despite all their unfaithfulness.

Through God's grace and guidance, they gradually began to collect all the writings that best revealed who God was and how God was acting in their history. This collection of writings is the basis of what we now call the Old Testament. After their exile they were eventually allowed to return to the Promised Land and in response to God's prophets rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. Despite this, they were still not truly free. At first they had to put up with being ruled by the Persians, the Greeks and then the Romans. It was about this time that something very curious happened....

Reader 6

The beginning of the Holy Gospel according to Mark:

(Mark 1:1-8)

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the prophet Isaiah: Look, I am going to send my messenger in front of you to prepare your way before you. A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. John the Baptist was in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.



John the Baptist's message was direct and simple: the people needed a change of heart before they could receive the saviour they had been longing for. They needed to be cleansed and purified.

To remind us of his message of cleansing and purification, invite everyone to dip some of the pitta bread in the vinegar and eat it.

Light the sixth candle and fill the cups with wine.

The Seventh Promise



Leader

The Seventh Promise: The time is here. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary.

God remembered Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and all the men and women who had been faithful throughout the generations. To bring about the fulfilment of his promises God chose Mary who was betrothed to a descendant of King David.

Raise your cups

Reader 7

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

(Luke 1:26-38)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

The Second Cup



Leader

Let us prepare to drink the second cup. We celebrate Mary's "Yes". The hope is fulfilled.

Father: Blessed are You Lord God of all creation, for now in the fullness of time you called Mary to be the mother of Jesus who scatters the powers of darkness and leads us into the Kingdom of heaven. All blessing and honour and glory be Yours.

Everyone: All blessing and honour and glory be Yours.

Drink the second ceremonial cup and light the seventh candle

THE MEAL



The meal is now eaten, the second ceremonial cup was the grace before the meal and the third is the grace after the meal.

The dressing of the Jesse Tree (optional for children)

All through history God has raised up people of hope slowly building up his Kingdom For each character of the story a symbol is put on the tree, this is a chance to ask and answer any questions about these characters.

Apple, Rainbow, Stars, Tablets of stone, Crown, desert flowers, River Jordan, Mary.

Another idea is to trace your family tree using any photographs you have available.

Once the meal is over fill the glasses for the third ceremonial cup.

All raise glasses

The Third Cup



Leader

Let us prepare to drink the third cup. We celebrate our hope in the coming of the kingdom of God.

Father: Blessed are you Lord God of all creation you have invited us to share in your heavenly Banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven. We thank you that even now we have food, friendship and love. We thank you for giving us health and life this night. We thank you that even now we can experience a foretaste of your future blessings. We look forward to the coming of your Kingdom. All blessing and honour and glory be Yours.

Everyone: All blessing and honour and glory be Yours

Drink the third cup

Conclusion



Leader

Living Advent Now: We are called to be a People of Hope.

Jesus showed us that here and now we can live in the Kingdom of God. However we still live in world where there is injustice, war, hatred and disharmony. If we follow Jesus we become signs of hope showing that the kingdom is possible. Whenever we celebrate Mass we are reminded that we are called to live in "joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour". No one knows when this is, but if we live in joyful hope we will notice each day the ways in which God is already present. If we live in joyful hope we will allow others to notice God's presence in the world. As Christians we are called to believe that despite all the mess, the conclusion of history will be very good. Exceedingly Good!

Reader 8

A reading from the letter of James:

(James 5:7-8)

Now be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has had the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too must be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon.

The Father now concludes the feast by leading the final prayer

Father: Now our Advent feast is over
we ask you Father for your blessings.
Our hearts desire the warmth of your love
and our minds are searching for the light of your Word.
Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour
and give us the strength to grow in love,
so that the dawn of the new creation
may find us rejoicing in his presence
and welcoming the light of his truth.

Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus!

Everyone: Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus!

Suitable Advent hymns and songs may now be sung if desired.

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