ADVENT PRAYER SERVICE

Call to Prayer Bell Ringers

Leader In this season of Advent, as we gather to wait in the darkness of winter nights for Jesus our Light to come, may our hearts be filled with joy and promise. Let us pause for a moment to let God enter into the silence of our hearts.

(Silence)

Please stand and join in singing our Opening Song, *(announce name of song and page number)*.

Opening Song *Soon and Very Soon (suggestion)*

Leader We begin our Advent Prayer in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All **Amen.**

Leader Light and peace in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Leader We gather during this First Week of Advent to pray for the grace we need to live as people of hope. The Advent Wreath symbolizes our growing hope and anticipation that the Lord Jesus may enter our lives more fully. Let us pray that this wreath may remind us to bring the light of Christ to the darkness of this world.

Heavenly Father, your Church joyfully awaits the coming of its Savior, who enlightens our hearts and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin. Pour forth your blessings upon us and upon the candles of this wreath; may their light reflect the splendor of Christ, who is Lord, for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

Leader Please be seated.

PROCESSION OF ADVENT CANDLES

First Week of Advent (First purple candle is processed in.)

Reader God, we wait for the coming of your Son, Jesus, into our hearts and our lives this Advent. Help us to always follow him as the light of the world.

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All **Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.**

Second Week of Advent (Second purple candle is processed in.)

Reader God, we look forward to Christmas and the joy it brings. Help us to share our happiness with others during this Advent season.

All **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

Third Week of Advent (The pink candle is processed in.)

Reader God, as Christmas draws nearer we decorate our homes in preparation for our celebration of the birthday of Jesus. Help us remember always that Jesus is the reason for our celebration.

All **Lord, come and save us.**

Fourth Week of Advent (The last purple candle is processed in.)

Reader God, during this Advent season we prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. Help us to be the kind of people you created us to be now and throughout the year.

Response **Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.**

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Leader Please stand.
A reading from the holy Gospel according to John [John 1:6-9].

The Gospel of the Lord.

All **Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Leader Please be seated.

We pause in silence now to reflect on how we can open ourselves up to the light of Christ this Advent and on how we can bring that light to others.

(Silent reflection)

Leader As we continue to reflect on the light of Christ coming into our lives, let us sing the great Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

Hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

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MAGNIFICAT

Leader Please stand.
During Advent, we look to Mary who, by following God's will, gave birth to Jesus. We pray now the words of her great song of praise, *The Magnificat*, which she spoke in the presence of the angel upon learning that she would be the Mother of our Savior.

Right **My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;**

Left **For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.**
From this day all generations will call me blessed;

Right **the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.**

Left **He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.**

Right **He has shown the strength of his arm;**
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.

Left **He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,**
and has lifted up the lowly.

Right **He has filled the hungry with good things,**
and the rich he has sent away empty.

Left **He has come to the help of his servant Israel**
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

Right **The promise he made to our fathers,**
to Abraham and his children for ever.

PETITIONS

Reader May Advent be a time to prepare for the coming of Jesus, we pray.

All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader May Advent be a time of sharing with those in need, we pray.

All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader May Advent be a time of prayer and reflection, we pray.

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All	**Lord, hear our prayer.**
Reader	May Advent be a time of peace and joy, we pray.
All	**Lord, hear our prayer.**
Reader	May Advent be a time when we love others as God loves us, we pray.
All	**Lord, hear our prayer.**

CLOSING PRAYER *and* BLESSING

Leader	Let us pray that this Advent prayer will inspire us to prepare the way of the Lord. Dear God, you have heard our prayers. Help us to share what we have with others during this holy season. May we keep our minds and hearts on the coming of your kingdom now and always. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All	**Amen.**
Leader	May the light of Christ shine in our lives.
All	**Now and forever.**
Leader	Let us now pray our closing prayer together.
All	**Loving God,** **We give you thanks for the blessings of this holy Advent season.** **You are the source of life, of hope, and of all good things.** **We look forward to the coming of the light of Christ at Christmas.** **Help us to turn toward that light in our lives.** **We rejoice at the gift of your Son who taught us to love in your name.** **May we be people of peace and justice all the days of our lives.** **Your kingdom come and your will be done now and forever.** **Amen.**
Leader	The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.
All	**Amen.**
Closing Song	*Wait for the Lord (Taizé) (suggestion)*

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An Advent Penance Service: Becoming a Church of Mercy

INTRODUCTORY RITES

OPENING HYMN *(Procession and lighting of Advent Wreath)*

GREETING

Presider: Grace, mercy, and peace be with you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

All: And with your spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Presider:

We gather during this season of Advent, a season of hope, because we are confident that God is merciful. We have this confidence because in every age, God has shown his justice and his mercy. To show mercy is to treat someone like they are one of the family. God our loving Father most certainly treats us as his own children.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, tells us that "God always waits for us, even when we have left him behind! He is never far from us, and if we return to him, he is ready to embrace us." During Advent, we hear the Prophets calling us to return to God and experience his mercy. We hear John the Baptist call us to repent and experience God's mercy. And we anticipate the celebration of God's greatest act of mercy, the sending of his only Son, Jesus, to be with us. In this celebration, we encounter God's great mercy in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

And so, as we prepare to encounter God's mercy in this sacrament, let us pray.

(pause)

OPENING PRAYER

Presider: My brothers and sisters, God's mercy awaits us, if only we return to him. Let us ask for the grace to turn away from our sins and to experience the embrace of God's mercy.

(Silent prayer)

Merciful God, sometimes we feel as though we're so far away from you because of the things we do or say or even think. We often lack the courage to come back to you and to really believe that you will welcome us back into your loving embrace. It seems too good to be true that you are always waiting there for us, and yet, here you are, waiting with open arms. Give us the courage to return to you now and to remain in your loving and merciful embrace. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

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CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:6–11 ("Let them turn to the LORD to find mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving.")

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 145: 14–15; 16–17; 18–19 ("The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and abounding in mercy.")

SECOND READING: A reflection from Pope Francis

"Brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened, and sad? Do we feel weighted down by our sins? Do we think that we won't be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up. There are no situations that God cannot change; there is no sin that he cannot forgive if only we open ourselves to him."

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

GOSPEL: Luke 19:1–10 ("For the Son of Man has come to seek out and to save what was lost.")

HOMILY

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE
The assembly is now invited to make an examination of conscience. This can be done in silence or by using the below examination, which is based on the O Antiphons sung during the Advent season.

- **Reader 1:** "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."

  Reader 2: Wisdom is the ability to see the world as our merciful God sees it. Do I see my life, the life of others, and the world with the eyes of mercy, with the eyes of God? Do I rely on wisdom when making my choices?

- **Reader 1:** "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."

  Reader 2: God's Law makes us free to love others as God loves us. Do I love God with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength? Do I love my neighbor as myself?

- **Reader 1:** "O Flower of Jesse's stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid."

  Reader 2: Jesse was the father of King David. Through Jesus, God brought the house of David back to life and established a kingdom that would last forever. Do I trust that God's mercy can restore life to my soul? Do I bring light and life to others in need of God's mercy?

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- **Reader 1:** "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 into freedom."

  Reader 2: A key is needed to open locked doors. Jesus, our Emmanuel, unlocked the doors that separated people from one another. Who have I locked out of my heart? Do I strive to unlock doors and bring people together or do I lock doors by speaking unkind words, gossiping, or bullying? Is the door of my heart open for Emmanuel to be with me?

- **Reader 1:** "O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death."

  Reader 2: The coming of Christ brings the light of God's mercy to our world. In what ways am I living in darkness? Are my thoughts and desires pure or do they belong to the world of darkness? Am I open to receiving that light of God's mercy? Do I bring God's radiant dawn to others in need of his mercy?

- **Reader 1:** "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."

  Reader 2: God is king of all the nations but he doesn't rule by force but by love, mercy, and justice. Do I respect the freedom and dignity of others? Do I live according to God's justice by respecting the property of others?

- **Reader 1:** "O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God."

  Reader 2: Emmanuel means "God is with us." Do I trust that no matter what, my merciful God is always with me, always offering his mercy? Do I spend time with God in prayer and at Sunday Mass?

RITE OF RECONCILIATION

GENERAL CONFESSION OF SINS

Presider: Merciful God, we are sinners. We are in need of transformed hearts. Please remove from us our hearts of stone and replace them with hearts of flesh, hearts of mercy. Help us to become saints—not someone who is perfect, but a sinner who is saved by the grace of Christ, who is good, merciful, and who pardons us from our sins. We ask you to forgive all our sins as we confess them with sincerity of heart.

All: My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen.

INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

The presider or other minister explains to the assembly where the confessors will be located and offers some brief words regarding the manner of confession. Quiet instrumental music might be played during this time.

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PROCLAMATION OF PRAISE FOR GOD'S MERCY

Presider: In thanksgiving for God's great mercy, we pray now the words of Mary's Magnificat.

Left: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

Right: my spirit rejoices in God my Savior

Left: for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

Right: From this day all generations will call me blessed:

Left: the Almighty has done great things for me

Right: and holy is his Name.

Left: He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.

Right: He has shown the strength of his arm;

Left: he has scattered the proud in their conceit

Right: He has cast down the mighty from their thrones

Left: and has lifted up the lowly.

Right: He has filled the hungry with good things

Left: and the rich he has sent away empty.

Right: He has come to the help of his servant Israel

Left: for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

Right: the promise he made to our fathers,

Left: to Abraham and his children forever.

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Presider: Our Holy Father Pope Francis tells us, "Brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened, and sad? Do we feel weighted down by our sins? Do we think that we won't be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up. There are no situations that God cannot change; there is no sin that he cannot forgive if only we open ourselves to him."

Thankful that God has shown his mercy to us, let us pray.

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Merciful God, too often, we get wrapped up in ourselves because of our daily problems and worries that leave us feeling sad and bitter. Don't let us waste time rummaging through death when you offer us new life through your Son Jesus, our Emmanuel. Help us to welcome Christ into our lives and not to keep him at arm's length. Help us to take a risk and to not be indifferent or afraid of the newness that Emmanuel can bring into our lives. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

CONCLUDING RITE

BLESSING

Presider: May the God of mercy bless us for we are his children.

All: Amen.

Presider: May Jesus, our Emmanuel, show us his saving power.

All: Amen.

Presider: May the Holy Spirit dwell with us and lead us by the right path.

All: Amen.

Presider: May Almighty God bless us, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (+)

All: Amen.

DISMISSAL

Presider: The God of mercy has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.

All: Thanks be to God.

CLOSING HYMN

Quotes excerpted from Pope Francis's book The Church of Mercy *(2014; Loyola Press).*

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An Advent Guided Reflection on Emmanuel, "God with Us"

This Guided Reflection is a meditation on the name Emmanuel, "God with us," and invites children to focus on where in their lives they most need God to be with them.

Take a moment to get comfortable.

Imagine that whatever you're sitting on…the floor, a chair, a desk…is in the presence of God. You're in a very safe place.

Take a few deep breaths. In…hold it…out. In…hold it…out. Do that a few times on your own. Feel your heart slow down. Feel yourself relax.

Now we're ready to spend some time with Jesus.

During Advent, we sing, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!"

Emmanuel is a name that means "God with us."

When we are sad or frightened, none of us wants to be alone.
We want someone to be with us to give us strength, courage, and hope.

During Advent, we pray in a special way for God to be with us. Knowing that God will be with us gives us strength, courage, and hope to face the future, especially if our present is sad or frightening and if our future seems hopeless.

Take a moment to thank Jesus—Emmanuel—for being with us, for being with you.

Tell Jesus about anything in your life that is making you feel alone, sad, frightened, or confused.

Listen to Jesus as he tells you that he is with you and that you don't need to be afraid.

Ask Jesus for the courage, strength, and hope to face the present and the future, knowing that you're not alone.

Tell Jesus where you need him most in your life now and in the future.

Listen to what Jesus has to say to you.

In the song, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!" we sing, "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!"

And today, we can say, "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, [NAME]."
(Say the names of the children in your class.)

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ADVENT FAMILY PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for giving us
these four weeks to prepare to celebrate
the birth of your Son.

We are so thankful for all the people
that help us along this path we're traveling
to welcome Jesus.

God, bless our family and prepare our home
and hearts to welcome your Son,
Jesus Christ, into the world.

AMEN.

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