

# Introducing the Season

To orientate leaders to the focus scriptures, art images, and music offered by *Seasons of the Spirit* for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany 2011–12.

## Before the session

- ❑ Remind leaders of the meeting and ask them to review their materials for Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2011-12 and bring them to this session.
- ❑ Bring newsprint, markers, and refreshments.

## Gather

- ❑ Bring nametags (optional), matches, and taper.
- ❑ Set a worship space with three lengths of fabric: blue or purple (depending on your tradition), gold, and green; a Bible; an Advent wreath with four candles (four blue, or three purple and one pink) and a central white pillar candle; and seven tealights.
- ❑ Bring copies of the resource sheet “Gathering and Blessing Prayers.”
- ❑ Bring, if possible, song “Invocation” (p. 6 in *Music Section*, p. 19 in *Seasons Songbook*, #5 on *Seasons Music CD*)

## Engage

- ❑ **Setting the scene:** a copy of “About this Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany” (p. 1), copies of “This Season at a Glance” (from “Planning and Overview” section of website), and some copies of the shared articles, “The Gospel According to Mark” (p. 87) and “Finding a Path” (p. 88)
- ❑ **Engaging the scriptures:** Bibles and copies of the resource sheet “Bible Discussion”
- ❑ **Engaging the art:** copies of the resource sheet “Art Reflection”; variety of art supplies (such as charcoals, oil pastels, markers, crayons); display seasonal posters, arranged according to

the order in article, “About the Art” (p. 89); set up several “galleries” if multiple sets available. (Note: Ages 3–5 and Ages 6–8 materials each have a poster that differs.)

- ❑ **Engaging the music:** copies of the *Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2011–12 Music Section*, if purchased, or copies of *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 7, and *Seasons Music CD*, vol. 7, and CD player; invite a music leader to teach and lead the songs; make copies of song lyrics on the last pages of *Music Section*

## Respond

- ❑ Bring copies of “Introducing *Seasons of the Spirit*” and “Seasons Session Flow” (from “Planning and Overview” section of website) for new leaders.
- ❑ Bring copies of articles as needed from the booklet *From Start to Finish* (in Library on website), such as, stages of faith development, multiple intelligences, creating a respectful learning environment, building community.
- ❑ Bring copies of Registration Form and Leader Record (from “Planning and Overview” section of website) if needed.
- ❑ Bring copies of several recent postings to *Spirit Sightings* (on website).

## Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, song “May You Find Peace” (p. 8 in *Music Section*, p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, #19 on *Seasons Music CD*)
- ❑ Bring copies of Lectionary Bookmarks (from “Planning and Overview” section of website).

## PREPARE

(Option: play *Seasons* music in the background as people are arriving and distribute nametags, if appropriate.)

**Welcome** participants and invite them to gather in the worship space. Point out the different colours of

fabric representing the three seasons of the church year that are celebrated in the coming months: Advent (blue or purple), Christmas and the Day of the Epiphany (gold), and the Season after the Epiphany (green).

## GATHER

(10 minutes)



## Opening ritual

**Pray** Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Gathering and Blessing Prayers” and invite two volunteers to read the prayer and light the candles. **Sing, or listen to** the song “Invocation” (p. 6 in the *Music Section*, p. 19 in the *Seasons Songbook*, #5 on the *Seasons Music CD*)

## Making connections

Ask participants to think of one thing they are hoping for and one thing they are waiting for in this coming Advent season. Invite those who wish to share their thoughts with the group.

- **In what ways are our longings and hopes similar? In what ways are they different?**
- **Do you think our hopes and longings are similar to those in other times in history? Why or why not?**

(From *Adults*, November 27)

## ENGAGE

(45 minutes)

### Setting the scene

Each year during Advent, the words of prophets from the Hebrew Scriptures are included in the lectionary readings. These prophets speak to the longings of God’s people for a world that is more just and peaceful. They point to a world that is more attuned to the ways of God’s reign. We read their writings during Advent because they capture our own yearnings for God to come and change things. The prophets proclaim the hope we find in God’s promises.

**Introducing the season** Invite participants to look at the poster *Landscape of Stars* as you read the introductory material from the materials, “About this Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany” (p. 1). Then distribute copies of the chart “This Season at a Glance” (from the “Planning and Overview” section of the Library) and review the information together, noting the focus passages and titles for each week. Invite participants to look at p. 2 in their resources, noting specific rituals and other information offered for their age group. (Note: if your congregation has ordered the *Seasons Fusion* materials, there is a Christmas pageant included with those resources. If your congregation has not ordered *Fusion* then previous pageants from the *Seasons of the Spirit* resources can be purchased and downloaded from the website.)

**Reviewing the articles** Invite participants to find the extra resource sheets and articles at the back of their age level resources. These articles provide helpful background and inspirational stories for these seasons. Note which ones will be used in specific seasons and sessions, and which ones provide material for leadership support and development. Review in particular the shared articles, “The

Gospel According to Mark” and “Finding a Path” on pp. 87–88 (pp. 109–110 in *Multiage*), providing copies as needed.

### Engaging the scriptures

Form pairs or small groups and distribute the focus passages among the groups (using the chart “This Season at a Glance”). Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Bible Discussion” and invite each group to read their assigned passage(s) and discuss these using questions on the resource sheet. Ask each group to record their responses. Gather back in the large group to review and reflect on responses to the discussion questions.

### Engaging the art

**Gallery** Invite participants to find the resource sheet “About the Art” (p. 89, p. 111 in *Multiage*) in their age level materials; distribute extra copies as needed. Invite the group to move quietly around the room, viewing the posters one at a time and reading the information about the images on the resource sheet.

**Personal reflection** Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Art Reflection” and invite participants to sit choose one poster image for further reflection. Have them sit near their chosen image, looking at it more closely, and using the questions on the resource sheet to guide their reflections. (Option: gather as a large group to share insights.)

**Artistic response** If time permits invite participants to respond to the art image which they have chosen by using the art supplies provided to write journal entry or a poem, or create an abstract art piece which captures their feelings or insights.



## Engaging the music

(Use this section if the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources have been purchased for use in your congregation.)

**Introduction** Saint Augustine said, “To sing is to pray twice.” When we gather to sing songs, hymns, chants, and carols, whether in church, at home, or in groups, we join with Christians around the world and down through the ages in recognizing and worshipping God among us. With Advent this year we return to the music of Volume 7 in the *Seasons Songbooks* and the *Seasons Music CDs*. These songs capture aspects of the faith journey across the generations, offering a wide range of themes, cultures, and styles.

**Review music** Invite participants to look through the *Music Sections* and or *Seasons Songbooks*, noting the types of music included. Point out the songs that could be used for gathering and blessing (“Circle Song,” “Invocation,” “May You Find Peace,” “Spirit of Life”) and the songs that help explore the seasons’ themes (“Celebrate

Emmanuel,” “I’ve Got a Voice,” “Pulsing Spirit,” “The Galilee Song”). Draw attention to the margin notes with tips for leading the music in groups. Discuss together the ways these songs might be used in church school, youth group, adult study groups, and in worship services.

**Sing or listen** Invite a music leader to lead the group in singing through the pieces in the *Music Section* or listen to the recordings on the music CD. Note that the *Season Music CD, volume 7* includes a recording of meditative music (“Adagio,” #29) for use during times of meditation and reflection.

## Moving into Respond

Invite participants to spend a few moments in silent reflection on the ways in which the scriptures, art, and music for these seasons have spoken into their lives.

■ **What are some words, images, or melodies that you will carry with you into the coming months?**

- **Review materials** Provide time for leaders to review and become familiar with their *Seasons* age-level materials. If some leaders are new, review the session flow, either as a group or by pairing off new and experienced leaders. Pay particular attention to any suggestions in the session materials for working with other groups or sharing in worship.
- **Service and outreach projects** Review suggestions for service and outreach projects in the age-level materials. What information about church projects will be helpful for age level groups? How might these projects be coordinated across age levels? Which age-level options might provide opportunities for the full congregation to be involved? How might this be encouraged and implemented? Identify church committees or other groups who might need to follow up on ideas that go beyond the responsibilities of this group or individual leaders.

- **Leadership tips** Distribute additional articles from the booklet *From Start to Finish*, if desired, and review together. Point out that this booklet is in the Library on the website, and also included in age level folders in *SeasonsOnline* and *SeasonsDisk* versions. Distribute copies of Registration form and Leader Record for this season, if these are used in your program. Talk together about how new families might be welcomed and included in the preparations for Advent, Christmas pageant, and congregational events planned for the Season after the Epiphany.
- **Spirit Sightings** Distribute copies of recent *Spirit Sightings* postings and review together. Encourage leaders to read these each week (information for accessing is included on each week’s biblical background page).

## RESPOND

(20 minutes)

**Gather** in the worship space and light the central white pillar candle.

**Sing, or listen to**, if possible, “May You Find Peace” (p. 8 in the *Music Section*, p. 26 in the *Seasons Songbook*, #19 on the *Seasons Music CD*)

**Pray** Lead the group in the Closing prayer on the resource sheet “Gathering and Blessing Prayers.” Distribute copies of the Lectionary Bookmarks for participants to use at home.

## BLESS

(10 minutes)



# Gathering and Blessing Prayers

## Gathering prayer for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany

- One:** For Advent we light four candles:  
one for our longing (*light blue or purple candle*),  
one for God's words of comfort (*light blue or purple candle*),
- Two:** one for joy and hope restored (*light blue or pink candle*),  
and one for the incarnation, God with us (*light last blue or purple candle*).
- One:** For Christmas and the Day of the Epiphany we light one candle (*light central white candle*),  
representing the joy of Jesus' birth and the gifts of the magi.
- Two:** For the Season after the Epiphany we light these lights (*use a taper to light the seven tealights*),  
reminding us of new beginnings and our call to follow Jesus in sustaining and healing ministry.
- All:** O God, come journey with us through these seasons. Amen.

## Blessing prayer

- One:** In the awesome beauty of creation,  
**All:** may we see God's glory.

- One:** In the thin places of our lives,  
**All:** may we be transformed by God's presence. Amen.

*(from Ages 15–18 resources for February 19, Transfiguration Sunday)*



## Resource sheet

# Bible Discussion

### Focus scripture discussion

Read the assigned biblical passage(s), discuss the questions below, and record some thoughts in the space provided.

### For Advent readings

(November 27–December 18)

- **What longing do you hear in these words?**
- **What assurance do you hear in these words about God's comfort and presence?**
- **What do you hear in these passages about the mystery of "God with us"?**

### For Christmas Day and Day of the Epiphany readings

(December 25 and January 1)

- **What do you hear in these passages about the joy as well as the challenges of this time of year?**
- **How do these passages invite us to celebrate?**

### For Season after the Epiphany readings

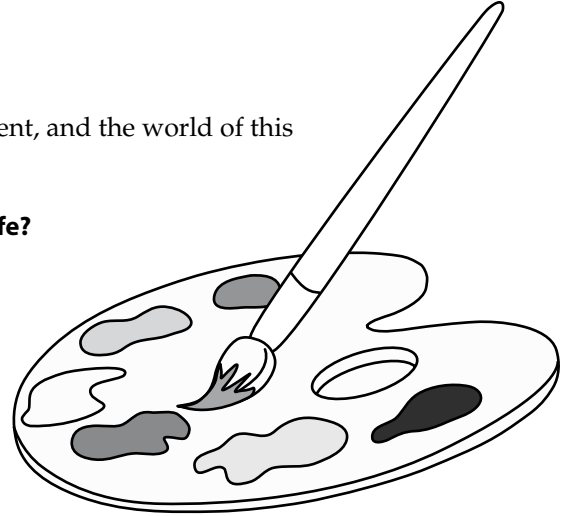
(January 8–February 19)

- **What do you hear in these passages new beginnings and call?**
- **What picture of God's way and realm is provided in these calls to ministry, healing, and prophetic word?**
- **How do these passages invite us to live out God's call in our lives?**

## Art Reflection

Choose one poster image on which to focus.  
As you enter into the art, its colour, shape, movement, and the world of this artist...

■ **Where does this image connect with your own life?**



■ **How does this image invite you into the mystery of God's presence?**

■ **How does this image speak into the joys and challenges of living in God's way?**

