

# Introducing the Season

To orientate leaders to the focus scriptures, art images, and music offered by *Seasons of the Spirit* for Advent, Christmas, and the Season after the Epiphany 2018–19.

## Before the session

- Remind leaders of the meeting and ask them to review their Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2018–19 materials and bring them to this gathering.
- Bring newsprint, markers, and refreshments.

## Gather

- Bring name tags (optional), matches, and taper.
- Bring copies of the resource sheet “[Prayers for Gathering and Blessing](#)” (p. 5).
- Set a worship space with a length of blue or purple coloured fabric (depending on the tradition of your church), a length of white fabric, and a length of green fabric, an Advent wreath and candles (including a central white candle), and a Bible with a bookmark placed in the gospel of Luke.
- Bring, if possible, a recording of the song “May Peace Be with You” (#24 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8). A flip chart with the lyrics from the song (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8)

## Engage

- Setting the scene:** copies of “This Season at a Glance” (from “Planning” section of website); if possible, bring the *Seasons of the Church Year* poster (available for purchase on the website).
- Engaging the scriptures:** Bibles and copies of the resource sheet “[Bible Discussion](#)” (p. 6); cut sections apart.
- Engaging the art:** copies of the resource sheet “[Art Reflection](#)” (p. 7); display the two seasonal posters; for optional art activity, bring a variety of art supplies (such as charcoals, oil pastels, markers, crayons, watercolour pencils) and drawing paper.

- Engaging the music:** if available, bring copies of Volumes 2, 5, and 8 of the *Seasons Songbooks* and *Music CDs*, *Seasons Growing Faith Songbook* and *Music CD*; and CD or MP3 player. Downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings (including full CDs) are available for purchase at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca). Option: invite a music leader to teach and lead the songs. Option: invite a music leader to teach and lead the songs.

## Respond

- Bring copies of “Introducing *Seasons of the Spirit*” and “Seasons Session Flow” (from “Planning” 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” section of website) if needed.
- Bring copies of several recent postings to *Lectio Connection* (on website).

## Bless

- Bring, if possible, the song, “Guide My Feet” (p. 19 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 2; #34 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 2).
- Bring copies of Lectionary Bookmarks for this season (from “Planning” section of website).

## PREPARE



## GATHER

(10 minutes)

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

**Welcome** participants and invite them to gather in the worship space. Point out the colours in the worship space and explain that these represent the symbolic colours for Advent (blue or purple, signifying hope and waiting), Christmas (white, signifying celebration), and the Season after the Epiphany (green, signifying growing in discipleship).

### Opening ritual

**Sing, or listen to**, if possible, the song “May Peace Be with You” (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #24 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8), using the words hope, peace, joy, and love.

**Pray** Gather around the Advent wreath. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Prayers for Gathering and Blessing](#)” (p. 5) and lead the group in the “Litany for the Season of Advent.” Invite participants to read the bolded phrases as you light the four Advent candles.

## Making connections

Advent is a season of longing, waiting, promise, and preparation. Invite the group to spend a few moments in silence reflecting on some of the things for which they are longing, waiting, and preparing during this season. Invite the group to share their responses to the following questions:

- As you enter the Season of Advent this year, what things in your life and in this world seem to be “spilling over”?**
- What hopes and promises would you like to see flowing out into the world in the coming year?**

Invite the group to reflect silently on the following questions:

- In what ways have you experienced being beloved by God?**
- What hands have held you, reached out for you in the last few weeks?**

## ENGAGE

(45 minutes)

### Setting the scene

**Introducing the seasons** These three seasons form the beginning of the church year. If possible, look at the *Seasons of the Church Year* poster.

Review together the introductory material, “About this Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany” (p. 1). Then distribute copies of the chart “This Season at a Glance” (from the “Planning” section of the Library) and review the information together, noting the focus passages and titles for each week. Invite participants to read p. 2 in their resources, noting specific rituals and other information offered for their age group.

**Reviewing the articles** Invite participants to find the extra resource sheets and articles at the back of their age-level resources and note what is included there. Point out the shared article, “Questions to Live” which is common to all of the age-level resources.

### Engaging the scriptures

Form three groups and give each group one of the sections on the resource sheet “[Bible Discussion](#)” (p. 6). Invite participants to use the questions to help explore the scripture passages in their sections. Ask each group to record some responses and then gather as a whole group to share these responses.

### Engaging the art

**Introduction** Invite participants to find the article, “Connecting with the Art – Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany 2018–2019” in the last section of their materials. In addition to the two fine art posters, note that the materials for Ages 3–5 and Ages 6–8 also include *Storytelling* and *Story Props* posters, respectively.

**Personal reflection** Invite participants to find the posters in their packages or to sit where they can see the displayed posters. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Art Reflection](#)” (p. 7) and invite



participants to use the questions on this page to guide their reflections. (Option: gather as a large group afterwards to share insights.)

**Artistic response** If time permits, invite group members to participate in the optional art activity described on the bottom of the [“Art Reflection”](#) page.

## Engaging the music

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

**Introduction** The music for this Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany comes from volumes 2, 5, and 8 of the *Seasons Songbooks* and the *Seasons Music CDs*. Point out that the resources for Ages 3–5 and Ages 6–8 include pages of additional songs and fingerplays to augment the *Seasons* music resources. Ages 3–5 resources also refer to the *Growing Faith Music CD* and *Songbook*, which contain music for young children.

**Review music** Invite participants to look through the *Seasons Songbooks*, if available, noting the types of music included. Point out the songs that could be used for gathering and blessing during these seasons: “All Is Wonder,” “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa, Emimimo,” “May Peace Be with You,” “Spirit Come,” and “Hebrew Benediction”) and the songs that help explore the seasons’ themes

(“Guide My Feet,” “You Are Holy/Hamba Nathi,” “Glory to God/*Gloria a Dios*,” “Listen, God Is Calling,” “Who Is a Disciple?” and “Stand, O Stand Firm”). Draw attention to the margin notes with tips for leading the music in groups. Discuss together the ways you might include music in church school, youth group, and adult study groups.

**Sing or listen** Invite a music leader to lead the group in singing through some of the selected pieces, above, or listen to some of the recordings on volumes 2, 5, and 8 of the *Season Music CDs*. Note that these music CDs also include recordings of meditative music (sounds of a mid-east bazaar and shofar, #39 and 40, vol. 2; “Voice Tones” #35, vol. 5; “Autumn Harp” #29, vol. 8) for use during times of reflection. Please note that if you have not purchased the *Seasons Songbooks* and/or *Seasons Music CDs* but would still like to use the music, downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings (including full CDs) are available for purchase at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

## Moving into Respond

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

**What are some words, images, or melodies that might guide your leadership in these seasons?**



## RESPOND

(20 minutes)

- ❑ **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.
- ❑ **Resources for leadership** 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 *Seasons* website. Point out that there is a *Virtual Resources Booklet* in the Library as well. Distribute copies of the Registration form and the current Leader Record chart, if these are used in your program.
- ❑ **Links** Note that session materials will occasionally refer to the Links section of the *Seasons* website. Children, young people, and adults as well as leaders can access these links for further information on a story or theme.
- ❑ **Lection Connection** Explain that *Lection Connections* links current events to the scriptures each week, and can be accessed through the Lection Connection tab on the website. Distribute copies of recent *Lection Connection* posts and review together. Encourage leaders to read these each week.

## BLESS

(10 minutes)

**Gather** in the worship space.

**Pray** Lead the group in the “Blessing prayer” on the resource sheet “[Prayers for Gathering and Blessing](#)” (p. 5).

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the song, “Guide My Feet” (p. 19 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 2; #34 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 2).

**Blessing** Offer the following words of blessing: “May the expectation of Advent, the joy of Christmas, and the revelation of Epiphany guide your journey through the coming seasons.”

Distribute copies of the **Lectionary Bookmarks** for participants to use at home.



## Resource sheet

# Prayers for Gathering and Blessing

## Litany for the Season of Advent

The Season of Advent invites us to share in God's promises,  
as we wait for those promises to be revealed.

**We light a candle to represent our anticipation** (*light one blue or purple candle*).

The Season of Advent invites us to share in God's blessing,  
as we live toward God's reign.

**We light a second candle to represent our longing for peace** (*light second blue or purple candle*).

The Season of Advent invites us to look forward,  
to re-orient our lives to reflect God's reign of justice.

**We light a third candle to represent our repentance and joy** (*light another blue or the pink candle*).

The Season of Advent invites us to celebrate,  
to sing of birth and re-birth for all creation.

**We light the last candle to remind us  
of Mary's song of justice and salvation** (*light last blue or purple candle*).

May we wait with patience and with trust.

May we live with expectation and hope.

**O God, come journey with us through Advent,  
as we live with love in this "now and not yet" time. Amen.**

*(adapted from the resources for Adults)*

## Blessing prayer

*(Light the central Christ candle in the Advent wreath.)*

**ONE:** O God, your light gives light to all people.

**TWO:** Your love reaches beyond the stars.

**ONE:** Your promise is revealed in Jesus.

**TWO:** And you tell us that we are your beloved.

**ALL:** May your Spirit be with us this day and always. Amen.

*(adapted from the resources for Ages 15–18)*



# Bible Discussion

## Advent scriptures group

*Read the following focus passages and discuss the questions together.*

**Advent 1:** Jeremiah 33:14–16

**Advent 2:** Luke 1:68–79

**Advent 3:** Luke 3:7–18

**Advent 4:** Luke 1:39–45, (46–55)

- What does each passage say about the hope and promise of this season?**
- How do the words of the prophets Jeremiah, Zechariah, John, Elizabeth, and Mary inform your understanding of what it means to live with expectation and hope for God's reign?**

## Christmas and Epiphany Day scriptures group

*Read the following focus passages and discuss the questions together.*

**Christmas 1:** Psalm 148

**Day of the Epiphany:** Matthew 2:1–12

The Christmas season invites us to celebrate and Psalm 148 reminds us that we are surrounded by the holy.

- How might this psalm of praise help us to experience the joy of Christmas?**

For the wise ones, a star and a dream became signs for their journeys.

- Where have you seen signs in your own life, ones that perhaps called you to take another road?**

## Season after the Epiphany scriptures group

*Read the focus passages and discuss the questions with a partner.*

**Baptism of Jesus:** Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

**Epiphany 2:** John 2:1–11

**Epiphany 3:** Luke 4:14–21

**Epiphany 4:** Luke 4:21–30

**Epiphany 5:** Luke 5:1–11

**Epiphany 6:** Luke 6:17–26

**Epiphany 7:** Luke 6:27–38

**Transfiguration:** Luke 9:28–36, (37–43)

Some of these focus scriptures offer challenging stories and teachings, and call us to ponder what we might be called to do as followers of Jesus the Christ.

- What is revealed about the journey of discipleship in each reading?**
- What challenges have you experienced practicing the teachings of Jesus in the world today?**

The Season after the Epiphany begins with the story of Jesus' baptism and the promise that we are beloved by God. The focus scriptures during the rest of the season invite us to ponder what we are called to do as followers of Jesus the Christ.

- What connections do you see between the call to love and the call to be prophetic?**



## Resource sheet

# Art Reflection

Look at the posters in your package or sit where you can see the displayed posters.

1. Spend some quiet time looking at each poster, reflecting on the colours, shapes, and movements of the image. Think about what you know about the seasons of Advent and Christmas, and the Season after the Epiphany.

**What can you see in these images as you consider each of these three seasons through their eyes?**

2. Review the following titles for each week of the session materials.

**Where can you see these themes reflected in the poster images?**

**Sprouting Leaves**

**The Sound of a Promise Kept**

**Collide with a Promise Kept**

**Welcoming the Goodness of God**

**Universal Glory**

**Consumed by the Fire of a Star**

**Remembering God's Promises**

**Witness to God's New Way in the World**

**Shaped by God's Word**

**Power of the Word**

**Being Surprised**

**Being Blessed**

**Be Holy**

3. Distribute copies of the article "Connecting with the Art – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2018–2019" (found at the end of your package of resources). Reflect on each poster image and read the background information. Review the section "Art engagement suggestions for individual or groups" for each poster image.

## Optional art activity

**Abstract art** In the story of Jesus' baptism we hear God's voice speaking words of affirmation.

1. Use the art supplies to create abstract images that symbolize for you the emotions and feelings and encouragement that come from hearing the words "You are my beloved, with you I am well pleased."

*(from the resources for Ages 12–14)*

