**Advent 2020**

**Resources for Discussion and Reflection**

Prepared by the Lutheran-Catholic Covenant Commission of the

Northeastern Ohio Lutheran Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America &

Catholic Diocese of Youngstown

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**First Sunday of Advent, November 29**

**Keep Awake**

**Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7/Isaiah 64:1-91 Corinthians 1:3-9**

**Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19/Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 Mark 13:24-37**

As we enter into this holy season our readings remind us that we are a people in waiting. We are living in the “already” but “not yet” of God’s kingdom and therefore we yearn for that day with great hope. While waiting, sometimes we cry out like Isaiah “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!” The Psalmist cries out for restoration before God as we wait. Jesus reminds us to keep awake as we wait and Paul reminds us where our strength comes from as we wait through these turbulent times.

* For what have I waited a long time? How did I fill that time? What gives me the strength to persevere in waiting?
* This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Covenant signed between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Northeastern Ohio Synod) and the Roman Catholic Church (Diocese of Youngstown) which unites our Diocese and Synod in prayer, study and action. How might I pray, study and act in support of this covenant while waiting patiently for the day of unity?
* In what ways can I keep awake to the cries of injustice being lifted up today by people of color, by immigrants, by those who feel the weight of systemic hatred as they wait in hope?

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**Second Sunday of Advent, December 6**

**Repent**

**Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11 2 Peter 3:8-15a**

**Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14 Mark 1:1-8**

We are waiting for God in a world of strife. Isaiah comforts us with the good news that God is coming to save us. The Psalmist reassures us that the salvation of God is near. Peter exhorts us to “conduct [our]selves in holiness” as we wait. In announcing the coming of the Lord, John the Baptist “proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”.

* What strife am I waiting for God to resolve? What can I do while I am waiting?
* How do I practice the virtue of Christian unity?
* Of what sins against justice, racial harmony, love of the stranger do I have to repent?

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**Third Sunday of Advent, December 13**

**Active Waiting and Watching**

**Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

**Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54 John 1:6-8, 19-28**

In his book, *Seeds of Hope,* the beloved spiritual guide, Henri Nouwen, writes, *“waiting is active. Most of us think of waiting as something very passive, a hopeless state determined by events totally out of our hands.”* What if we thought of Advent’s waiting as watching for the ways, places, and people through whom God is *“Writing the divine word of hope in the midst of our dark world?”* (Nouwen). Isaiah invites us to consider how we might participate in the ushering in of good news to the oppressed, mournful, brokenhearted, and imprisoned. Even as God’s people awaited a Messiah, God was active in the life of Mary, whom God had chosen to participate in the gift of salvation. Perhaps in our Advent waiting, we, too, can be changed – becoming more loving, more caring, more patient, more hopeful. Let us remember, though, that it is Christ who comes as the agent of hope and of change, even as we wait and watch. He is the one for whom we truly wait and hope. Come, Lord Jesus.

* As I wait for life to return to “normal,” post COVID-19, how can I shine the light of Christ’s love in the lives of those who wait in despair?
* How is hope already being shared in the darkness and uncertainty that seems to define our current state of affairs?
* What enables me to *“give thanks in all circumstances,”* in places and lives where Christ is continually at work?

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**Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 20**

**2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 Romans 16:25-27**

**Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29 Luke 1:26-38**

**God’s Home**

When we talk about being “at home” we are referring to a feeling we get in certain spaces. Today’s Scriptures deal with the question, “where is God’s home?” In the reading from 2 Samuel, King David believes that God should have a building in which to dwell, but God turns around and tells King David that God is going to “build” a house out of people, particularly King David’s family, his descendants. God goes even further in the passage from Luke, when the angel Gabriel reveals to Mary that she will be the “home” for God’s presence, this child whom she will carry, to whom she will give birth and give him the name Jesus. What kind of God makes a home in these ways? A God who loves God’s human creation. A God who will be the Savior for God’s people. A God who will be born of woman and live among a sinful, limited humanity. The ways of God’s love are a mystery, but the object of God’s love is not. It is us, ALL of us! This is what we celebrate at the birth of Christ. Jesus makes God’s home with us, in us, to bring the gifts of faith, hope, love, peace and salvation into our hearts, our lives, our homes, our communities.

* Where do I feel most at home in God’s presence? Is it a place? A specific activity or experience?
* We so often think that God is confined to the four walls of the church. Where have I experienced God’s presence in places that have no walls?
* At a time when people have been spending more time “at home,” what are some ways I can remind myself that God’s presence is with me?

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