



Advent by Candlelight Devotional Program Leader's Guide

...preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2).

[Please provide: seasonal table decorations (see below), 2017 LWML Sunday banner or banner art printed on a piece of poster board, copies of season signs (see end of this Leader's Guide) copies of seasonal symbol handouts on colored cardstock paper (see end of this Leader's Guide), pens or pencils, devotion leader, three actresses (a teenager or young adult, a woman in her late 20's, a woman in her 40's), three costumes (one costume for each stage of Mary's life), one copy of each of the "Mary Monologues" for the actresses (see end of this Leader's Guide), printed devotional programs for participants (see end of this Leader's Guide), pianist or organist, hymnals, Advent wreath with candles, candles for participants, candle lighter or matches.]

Table Decorations: Decorate tables with a "season" theme. Depending upon the size of your group, there should be one table decorated with winter/Christmas decorations (nativity scene, Christ-centered ornaments and figurines). Decorate another table for spring (silk tulips and daffodils in vases, gardening supplies, bird figurines). Decorate a third table for summer (beach, barbeque, vacation items). Decorate a fourth table for fall (colorful silk leaves, decorative pumpkins). If additional tables are needed, decorate these to reflect the "seasons of life" (childhood, wedding and young families, career, retirement, birthdays, anniversaries.)

Seasonal symbol handouts: Depending upon the number of participants, duplicate at least 12 copies of each seasonal symbol found at the end of this guide. Copy the flower pattern for spring on yellow cardstock paper, the leaf for summer on green cardstock paper, the leaf for fall on orange cardstock paper, and the snowflake on white cardstock paper. Cut out each pattern. Place a selection of these patterns in the center of each table along with pens or pencils.

Season signs: Print one of each of the four season signs found at the end of this Leader's Guide. Place the signs in the corners of your gathering area, one sign per corner.

As the participants arrive: Have a pianist or pre-recorded track play "Mary, Did You Know" or a medley of hymns such as "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" (LSB 338, LW 22), "The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came" (LSB 356), "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come" (LSB 358, TLH 85, LW 37), or "Gentle Mary Laid Her Child" (LSB 374, LW 57). Hand out Participant's Guides and direct people to sit at one of the decorated tables.

Leader: Discuss with others at your table, "What is your favorite season and why?" (*Now direct each participant to take a symbol from the center of the table that describes her favorite season. Explain that the flower is for spring, the green leaf is for summer, the orange leaf is for fall, and the snowflake is for winter.*) In three to five words on one side of your symbol, answer this question: "How would you describe the "season of life" that you are currently experiencing?" (*Direct the participants to set these symbols aside for use later.*)

Lighting of the Advent Wreath (*Light appropriate candles in the advent wreath according to the week of Advent you are in.*)

Welcome

Leader: Welcome friends. During this season of Advent we remember those who faithfully awaited the arrival of Jesus, the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior for humankind. We are also reminded that we too are in a spiritual season of waiting for Jesus to return and restore us to eternal life with Him. While we are living in hope, we are challenged by the apostle Paul to *preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching* (2 Timothy 4:2). Tonight you will meet a woman of faith who weathered many seasons of life: the birth of a child, motherhood, and the death of a child, to name a few. In every season of her life, Mary's trust in God remained constant as she treasured His blessings in her heart. Each one of us gathered here has her own unique story of life experiences; however, we—like Mary—have the same faithful God. We all have been given the same saving message of the Gospel to share with others. Let us ready our hearts this evening with a word of prayer.

Opening Prayer: (Leader and Participants)

All: Heavenly Father, You are constant in every season of our lives. Your unconditional love for us never falters or fades. Thank you for bringing us into fellowship with one another this day. We ask that You would bless this program. Allow it to strengthen our spirits as we patiently wait in this Advent season and in every season for Your Son, Jesus, to come again in glory. In His holy name we pray. Amen.

Mary's Seasons of Life

Leader: Let's spend a few moments now with Jesus' mother, Mary, as she experiences three seasons of life.

Pregnant Mary actress enters.

Pregnant Mary

A mother. The angel told me I was going to be a mother. It was the most confusing concept—no, conception—of my life! One minute I was day-dreaming about my upcoming marriage to Joseph, my betrothed. Then, in the blink of an eye, an angel was telling me—a virgin—how I would conceive a child—by the Holy Spirit—and that my baby would be the Son of God! There should have been a multitude of thoughts muddling my mind like, "Why is this happening to me?", "I don't know how to raise God!", "Joseph is going to kill me!" Yet, the words that passed my lips were, ... *Let it be* (Luke 1:38). The panic I felt when the angel appeared seemed peaceful compared to the distress of announcing the news of my pregnancy to Joseph. In the eyes of the law, I was guilty of adultery and should have died. However, in the eyes of my love, I was innocent and shown mercy. During these months of patient waiting, it became clear to me that, even in the most impossible of circumstances, God always works a way to bring us through.

Pregnant Mary actress exits.

Sing: "I Leave All Things to God's Direction" (LSB 719, TLH 529, LW 429)

Maternal Mary actress enters.

Maternal Mary

Where did the time go?! It seems like it was yesterday when Joseph and I hobbled into Bethlehem with no place to stay and a baby on the way! It wasn't an ideal situation for welcoming a King into this world,

but God prepared a manger for His bed. However, no one prepared us for what would come next: lowly shepherds, prophetic revelations, exotic Magi, escape to Egypt. I treasured many of these experiences in my heart but I specifically recall the significant moment when we were given a glimpse of who our son, Jesus, truly is. After three frantic and frightening days of searching for that young man, we found Him tactfully talking with teachers in the temple! It was not one of my proudest “mother moments,” but I still hear the innocence in His voice as He asked: *Why were you looking for me?* (Luke 2:49) Sometimes I wish I better understood what He was thinking! Later, when I approached Jesus at the wedding feast at Cana about the unfortunate shortage of wine, He replied, *What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come* (John 2:4). I don’t know what He was talking about but I do know that in every situation, God helps us to do the tasks He gives us!

Maternal Mary exits.

Sing: “Take My Life and Let It Be” (LSB 783, TLH 400, LW 404)

Grieving Mary enters.

Grieving Mary

It was the darkest day of my life. For nearly three years Jesus had been active in His ministry: healing, preaching, teaching, and performing miracles. My heart constantly overflowed with pride for my son! But then things changed. One minute the crowds shouted, *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!* (John 12:13) Then, just a few short days later, they yelled, *Crucify him, crucify him!* (John 19:6) One of the worst feelings as a mother is watching your child suffer and being powerless to help. My heart stung with every whip lash. My bones trembled with every suffering step He took. My head pounded with each clang of the nails. It was a nightmare from which I could not wake up. The last thing He said to me was: *Woman, behold, your son!* (John 19:26) Those words gave me little comfort as I stood there feeling so numb that it was even painful to take a breath. We were waiting for the kingdom; the reign the angel described to me the day I first heard His name: Jesus. What were we waiting for now? Waiting for the brokenness of our hearts to be restored? Waiting for a miracle that did not appear while Jesus agonized on that cross? Waiting to visit the tomb and refresh our anguish? All I saw in this darkness was waiting: waiting for the dawn and hoping that with it God would bring an answer.

Joy and Hope in All Seasons

Leader: The good news for Mary and us is that Jesus did not remain dead in the tomb. Although we experience times of trial, doubt, and despair in our seasons of life, we also have a reason to walk in a constant season of joy. As women of faith living on this side of the resurrection, we cling to the promise of eternal life through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ as we are called by God—as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, neighbors, friends—to *always be[ing] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you* (1 Peter 3:15).

Sing: “The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns” (LSB 348, LW 26)

Our Seasons of Life Activity

Leader: Earlier you were asked to write on a seasonal cutout as you reflected on the “season of life” you are currently experiencing. Take your cutout and a pen and move to the corresponding “corner” for your favorite season. (*Note: the Leader will need to have these “corners” clearly marked or take a minute here to explain each “corner” so participants may gather accordingly.*) Once you are there, share with this new group why this season is your favorite. (*Allow a few minutes for ladies to share.*) Each of you is walking through a season of life right now. If you feel comfortable, share with one another what you wrote on your cutout. (*Allow a few minutes for ladies to share.*) Now consider this:

How might God use you in this particular season of your life to share the hope you have in Jesus? Share your thoughts with your group. (*Allow a few minutes for ladies to share.*) On the blank side of your seasonal cutout, write the word "JOY". As believers of the risen Christ, we are called to live joy-filled lives here on Earth, until we are called to live with Him eternally. Take your cutout and place it on the corresponding section of the "seasons" banner/poster so that the word "JOY" is facing out for others to see. Instead of returning to your seats, collect a candle and gather around the Advent wreath as we close our program. (*Note: consider having an instrumental interlude begin playing here as the ladies complete this activity. Music may continue until participants have lit their candles and are ready to sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel".*)

Advent by Candlelight: Gather around the Advent wreath. As each participant lights her candle from the wreath When all the candles are lit, sing verses 1, 6, and 7 of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (LSB 357, TLH 62, LW 31).

Sing: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," verses 1, 6–7. Note: if using live accompaniment, consider allowing verse 7 to be sung acapella. It adds a beautiful sensory experience that will resonate with many of the participants.

Responsive Closing Prayer

Leader: Benevolent Father, we thank You for giving Your only Son to be our Savior. We pray that His resurrection and promised return fill our hearts with joy. Help us be ready...

Participants: in season and out of season.

Leader: Almighty God, we thank You for giving us Your Word. We pray that its doctrine is kept pure and its use be in accordance with Your Will. Help us be ready...

Participants: in season and out of season.

Leader: Gracious Lord, we thank You for the many gifts Your pour out upon us. We pray that in times of trial and darkness Your light would overwhelm our sinful condition and bring our focus back to the mission of the Gospel. Help us be ready...

Participants: in season and out of season.

Leader: And all God's people said...

All: Amen!

Advent by Candlelight
Written by Alli Bauck, Olathe, Kansas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2018

Copies of Mary Monologues for Actresses

Pregnant Mary

A mother. The angel told me I was going to be a mother. It was the most confusing concept—no, conception—of my life! One minute I was day-dreaming about my upcoming marriage to Joseph, my betrothed. Then, in the blink of an eye, an angel was in my room telling me—a virgin—how I would conceive a child—by the Holy Spirit—and that my baby would be the Son of God! There should have been a multitude of thoughts muddling my mind like, “Why is this happening to me?”, “I don’t know how to raise God!”, “Joseph is going to kill me!”, Yet, the words that passed my lips were, ... *Let it be* (Luke 1:38).

The panic I felt when the angel appeared seemed peaceful compared to the distress of announcing the news of my pregnancy to Joseph. In the eyes of the law, I was guilty of adultery and should have died. However, in the eyes of my love, I was shown mercy. During these months of patient waiting, it became clear to me that, even in the most impossible of circumstances, God always works a way to bring us through.

Maternal Mary

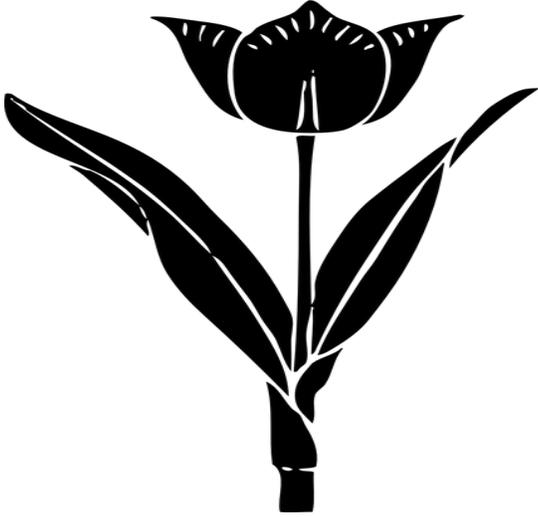
Where did the time go?! It seems like it was yesterday when Joseph and I hobbled into Bethlehem with no place to stay and a baby on the way! It wasn’t an ideal situation for welcoming a King into this world, but God prepared a manger for His bed. However, no one prepared us for what would come next: lowly shepherds, prophetic revelations, exotic Magi, escape to Egypt. I treasured many of these experiences in my heart but I specifically recall the significant moment when we were given a glimpse of who our son, Jesus, truly is. After three frantic and frightening days of searching for that young man, we found Him tactfully talking with teachers in the temple! It was not one of my proudest “mother moments,” but I still hear the innocence in His voice as He asked: *Why were you looking for me?* (Luke 2:49) Sometimes I wish I better understood what He was thinking! When I approached Jesus at the wedding feast at Cana about the unfortunate shortage of wine, He replied, *What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come* (John 2:4). I don’t know what He was talking about but I do know that in every situation, God helps us to do the tasks He gives us!

Grieving Mary

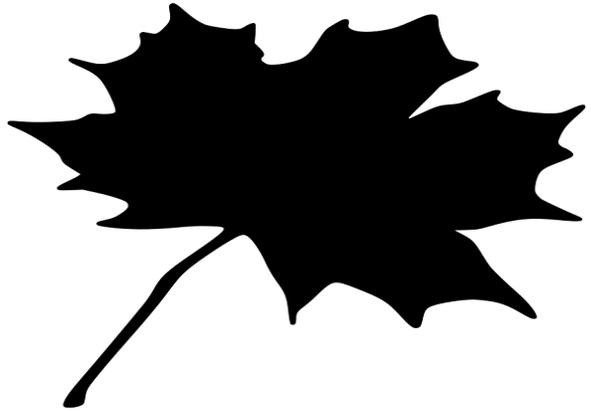
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Seasons of Life Patterns

spring flower



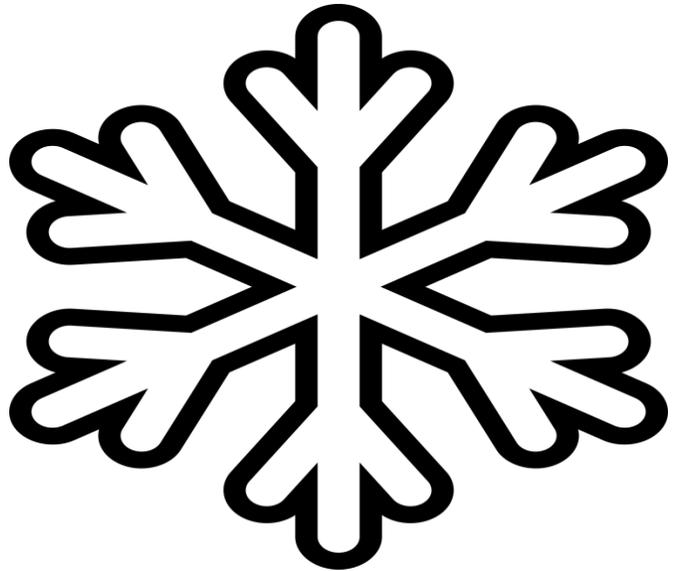
maple leaf



oak leaf



snowflake



Season Signs

WINTER

SPRING

SUMMER

FALL



Advent by Candlelight

Devotional Program
Participant's Guide

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Welcome

Opening Prayer (Leader and Participants): Heavenly Father, You are constant in every season of our lives. Your unconditional love for us never falters or fades. Thank you for bringing us into fellowship with one another this day. We ask that You would bless this program. Allow it to strengthen our spirits as we patiently wait in this Advent season and in every season for Your Son, Jesus, to come again in glory. In His holy name we pray. Amen.

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All: Amen!

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