

Leader's Guide for
AN ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS JOURNEY
WITH FATHER MICHAEL HIMES
Advent I: Hope in the Darkness

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Although we must die, you have given us the miracle we need—an abundance of life and hope. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- “We who must die, demand a miracle,” writes W.H. Auden. What do you think the miracle is, according to this video?
- “All of life is Advent.” What does Michael Himes mean by this? How is this true in your life?
- “Eternity does not mean lots of time....It means timelessness.” How do you understand this statement?
- “Nothing satisfies but God.” Do you believe this? Have you always believed this? When did you think something other than God could satisfy?
- To be human is to be restless. How does secular society keep us from acknowledging this truth? How does Christianity help us deal with the restlessness (but never takes it away)?
- In this video, Father Himes invites us to depth. It has been said that American spirituality is “a mile wide and an inch deep.” Is that true? How do you search for depth?

Closing Prayer

Lord our God, our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Give us the courage to live in an eternal Advent. Do not let us settle for the shallow, superficial and material. Grant us the will to go deeper until we find you. Amen.

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Leader's Guide for
AN ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS JOURNEY
WITH FATHER MICHAEL HIMES
Advent II: The Second Coming is NOW

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, in your rising from the dead we know you are already among us, building the Kingdom. The leaven is in the bread. The net has been cast and is gathering all into your love. May your grace so grow within us that we will individually grow into the full stature of Christ and collectively realize the Kingdom. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Father Himes tells us that Scripture is about hope. He also tells us that hope does not equal optimism. How do you see that? What is the difference between hope and optimism?
- “Hope emerges when there is no reason to think things are getting better.” When has that been true in your life?
- Who in this group has read any books from the Left Behind series? Please tell others about your experience of reading those books. How is Father Himes’ viewpoint the opposite of the Left Behind series?
- “Reconciliation is for everyone. We don’t want it because everything changes,” says Father Himes. What changes? What is being threatened by reconciliation?
- What do you feel like when you hear that God is relentless, that God is reconciling all things and will not stop until that happens?
- The Kingdom of God is relentless and hidden because it comes upon us in ordinary ways. Spend a few moments in silent prayer reflecting on how the Kingdom of God might be coming to you in ordinary, hidden ways. At the end of that time, contribute those insights.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, your Kingdom comes among us in relentless, surprising, ordinary ways. Keep us awake to these ways. Let us see your Spirit all around us, leading us not to the destruction and end of all that is, but to the fullness and completion of all that is. Amen.

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Advent III: Threatened by Grace

Opening Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us. We know you are working all things to the good and that your grace will bring all to the fullness of life. Let us not be threatened by that grace as Herod was, but let us be set free by your Spirit. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Sometimes the “world” is seen as good in the Bible and sometimes as evil. We live in that tension. How does the world reflect God? How does the world oppose God?
- The world is in transition. That is true for all times. How is our world in transition? What are the signs of hope?
- “God will not destroy the world; God will transform the world.” How is that statement by Father Himes in conflict with so much of popular religion today?
- Himes quotes the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins: “beauty serves to keep men’s wits warm to things that are.” Poetry has many dimensions, many interpretations. What does that line mean to you?
- Herod is threatened by grace. Why are we also threatened by change?
- “The challenge of Advent—helping our brothers and sisters in need—will bring about the transformation of the world.” What is your parish doing to meet the challenge of Advent? What are you doing?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, we are more than halfway through Advent. Inspire us to help you transform the world in small ways, in great ways, in the ways you open for us. Help us to make this second half of Advent all that it can be. Amen.

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Advent IV: Prophets—John, Mary, Joseph

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, we reject Herod's desire to be in control. We reject narcissism and accept the call of John, Mary and Joseph to embrace Mystery, knowing you are with us in all things. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Herod refused to accept the “new.” Has that ever been true for you or for your parish?
- John the Baptist “knows who he is and knows who he isn't.” When was that true for you?
- How do you see the difference between the era of John the Baptist and the Kingdom Jesus brings?
- How does Father Himes' portrayal of Mary compare with the images you have had of Mary?
- How does Mary, the “radical prophet,” challenge us today on the personal level and in the wider world of economics and politics?
- Joseph never says a word throughout the Gospels, but his actions demonstrate his faith. What is your favorite story of Joseph?
- Like Joseph, have you ever felt tempted to trust more in the law than the Spirit?
- God speaks to Joseph in his dreams. Do you think God still speaks to us in dreams? How else does God speak to us?

Closing Prayer

God, bless us with the courage and self-awareness of John the Baptist. Bless us with the insight and boldness of Mary. Teach us, like Joseph, to be not afraid and to trust in you. Amen.

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Leader's Guide for
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Christmas: The Eternal Giving of God

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word. Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- A big controversy in the early Church centered on the divinity and humanity of Jesus. What are your questions about this controversy? When you speak of Jesus and when you pray, do you emphasize humanity or divinity?
- Father Himes is clear that Jesus comes “out of history.” Jesus is part of the tradition. Do you think of Jesus in this way? How important to you is the Jewish tradition of Jesus? What is the most important part of that tradition for you (or what is your favorite story from the Old Testament)?
- Father Himes draws several comparisons between Christmas and Easter. Can you think of others?
- How do you deal with the secularization of Christmas?
- Father Himes challenges us to not reject the secularization of Christmas but to reinterpret it. How can you do that? How can your parish do that?
- “God exists by giving God’s self away.” How does this interpretation of God fit with other interpretations of God?
- What is your favorite Christmas memory?

Closing Prayer

Lord our God, we know through the gift of Christmas that you are pure gift. May we respond to your generosity with lives of service, dedicated to creating a just world. Amen.

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