

St. Joseph Catholic Church



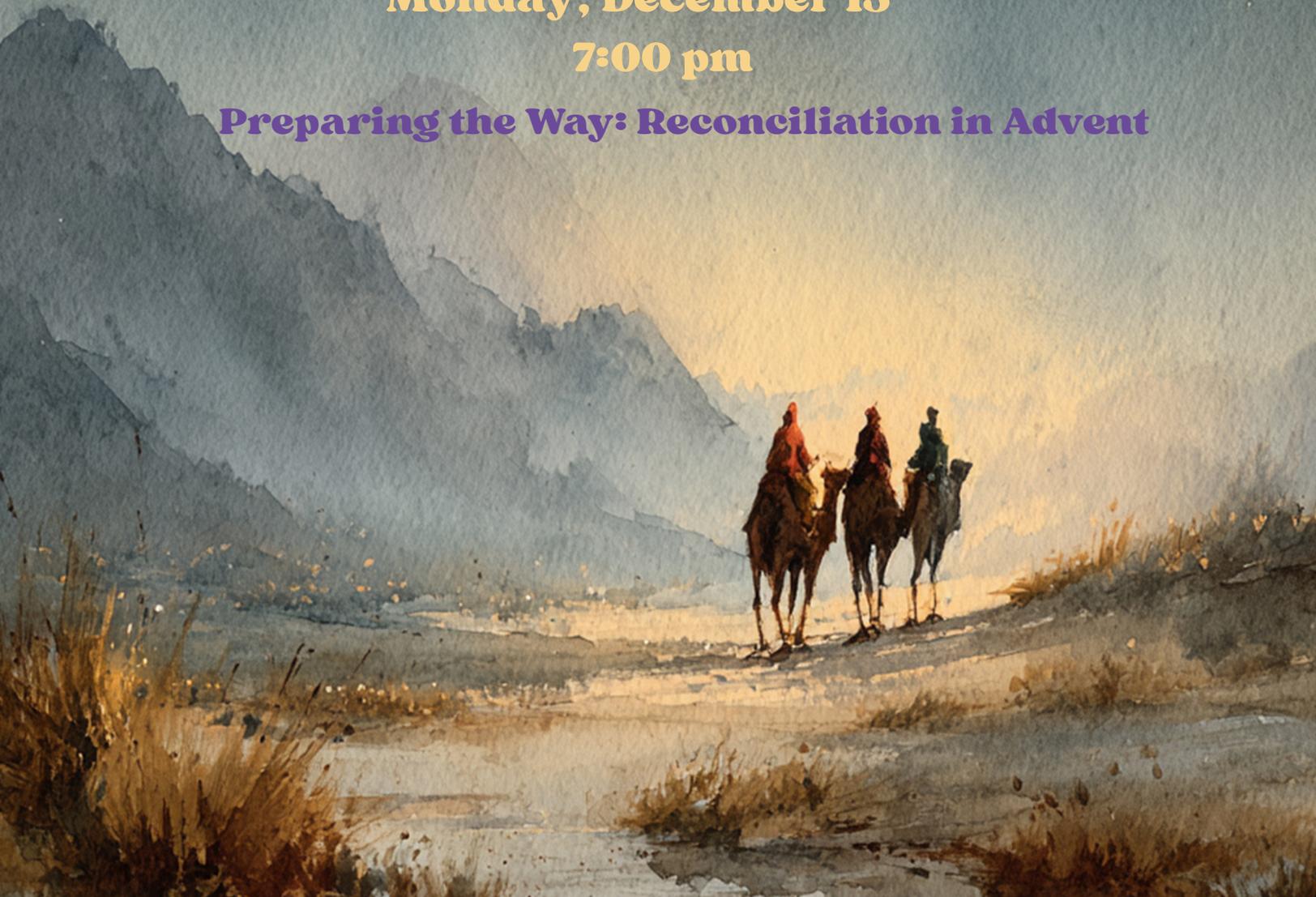
Advent

Penance Service

Monday, December 15th

7:00 pm

Preparing the Way: Reconciliation in Advent



Advent Penance Service

An Advent penance service with an Advent wreath incorporates the wreath's symbolism of preparation and penance, with a communal service that often includes scripture readings, prayers, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance). The service may feature the lighting of the Advent wreath candles, especially the purple "penance" candles, and often has a focus on light overcoming darkness as a theme of hope. During Advent, the journey of the Magi can be contemplated as a parallel to our own spiritual pilgrimage to the Nativity.

Lessons from the Magi for Advent

Seek with Intentionality: The Magi were not passive observers; they were intentional and observant in their search for Jesus, studying scriptures and the stars to find the sign of the new king. You can prepare by looking for opportunities to find and understand God's presence in your life.

- **Take Action and Journey:** The Magi didn't just notice the star; they undertook a long, arduous journey to follow it, bringing gifts and worshiping. Readiness means being willing to move beyond intentions to actions that reflect your values, even when the path is uncertain.
- **Embrace Hope and Anticipation:** The Magi's journey was one of hopeful anticipation, believing the star was a sign of a new king. You can prepare by embracing a hopeful outlook for the season and for your own life.
- **Give Generously:** The Magi brought costly gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. A heart that is ready for Advent is often a heart that overflows with generosity, both in material gifts and in love, grace, and peace.
- **Be Transformed:** Their encounter with Jesus changed them, and they returned home by a different route. Spiritual readiness involves being open to transformation, ready to be changed by the message of Advent and to live a different way.

Structure and symbolism of Advent Wreath

- **Penance and preparation:** The Advent season is a time of penance and preparation, symbolized by the liturgical color violet and the purple candles on the wreath.
- **Communal service:** The service is a communal celebration of penance, distinct from individual confession. It brings the community together for prayer, reflection, and reconciliation.
- **Lighting the wreath:** The Advent wreath is often lit as part of the service, with a focus on the progression of the season.

Week 1: One purple candle is lit, representing the Prophets' Candle. In an Advent wreath, the first candle (numbered 1) is purple because that color traditionally signifies a time of prayer, penance, and sacrifice in preparation for Christmas.

Week 2: Two purple candles are lit. Represent a period of preparation, prayer, and penance leading up to Christmas. The second candle often symbolizes faith or preparation.

Week 3: Two purple candles and the pink or rose candle are lit for Gaudete Sunday, marking a time of celebration. The third candle is pink (or rose) to represent a shift to joy, as it marks Gaudete Sunday, the midpoint of Advent when Christians anticipate the arrival of Jesus.

Week 4: All four candles are lit. Represent a period of preparation, prayer, and penance leading up to Christmas. The fourth candle often symbolizes peace.

- **Scripture and prayer:** The service includes appropriate scripture readings and prayers that focus on themes of Advent and the coming of Christ.
- **Light overcoming darkness:** The service often highlights Jesus as the light that dispels the darkness of sin and uncertainty, and the light from the candles serves as a reminder of this hope.

Penance Service Overview

Advent is a beautiful time to celebrate the reconciling love and the healing graces our Lord offers us. Reconciliation is what God does: receiving it and celebrating it is what we do. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a most natural way to celebrate His forgiveness and love. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the opportunity to grow closer to God.

Penance Services are a form of sacramental confession. It mixes public prayer and individual confession to a priest, followed by absolution. A communal penance service always includes the following: The Act of Contrition, Confession of sins to a priest with absolution given, penance.

To Prepare for Penance Service

Penance services are important for Catholic children because they:

- Show God's love
 - Penance services demonstrate that God is merciful and forgiving, and that He wants all people to be reconciled with Him and each other.

- Help children understand sin
 - Penance services help children understand that their words and actions can hurt themselves, others, and Jesus, and that they need healing.

- Help children prepare for a relationship with God
 - Penance services help children prepare to renew their relationship with God by confessing their sins and expressing their sorrow.

- Help children learn responsibility
 - Penance services help children learn about responsibility, relationships, and how to serve God and others.

The Structure of the Service

A penance service usually includes a Scripture reading and a brief exhortation by the priest. An examination of conscience follows this, and the community prays the Act of Contrition together. A single, general penance may be assigned to everyone participating; at other times, a penance is given during the individual confession.

After the communal part of the ceremony, those who have already had their First Reconciliation may individually confess their sins to the priest and receive absolution and penance if it has not been assigned in the communal setting. The Act of Contrition is not repeated privately because it has been part of the communal service. The priest prays the words of absolution individually over the penitent, or a collective penance is given.