

LUTHERAN MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER POST WEEKEND RESOURCE

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE - ADVENT

During the busy holiday season our own special love relationship may grow a little thin, as we rush about shopping, baking, decorating, planning and going to parties and events, and hardly noticing each other.

This year, let's try something different, for ourselves and our family. Advent begins four weeks before Christmas. In our family we have created an Advent wreath of a styrofoam ring, wrapped with greenery. We made holes in the styrofoam for four equally spaced candles. This wreath becomes the focal point of our kitchen table. It is not merely a decoration - Advent represents the world that lay in darkness for thousands of years, and since Christ was born when the light begins to gain ascendancy over darkness the lighting of the Advent candles is a most appropriate custom.

On Advent Eve the first candle is lighted; we light it and read a scripture passage with our family. We pray together and we may sing a hymn. Each week an additional candle is lighted so that by Christmas week the four candles are all aglow. If you have small children in the home, they could begin a picture with crayons, adding new features each week and finally adding the baby in the manger on Christmas Eve. Share informally as a family how you feel either about the scripture, or "now" feelings. Give each one a chance to share, even the youngest. We feel warmth and closeness as we share. This is a very special time and a wonderful way to prepare for Christmas.

As a couple you may want to use the scripture reading of that day from your Daily Devotional, or the references that follow, as a springboard for your dialogue (refer to the Introduction to Scripture Dialogue found in "Call To Be Family" May/June 1982, vol.4, issue 5, or the weekend packet handout, or Handout #PWR 83-13 that was available at the 1983 International Family Reunion).

Briefly, the way we dialogue on scripture is - we read the passage; choose something especially meaningful to us as a couple from it. Then we set the scene and try to imagine ourselves living in the time it was taking place. We may read prior paragraphs and beyond our selected verse or two in order to help us immerse ourselves into that event, walking in the observer or writer's sandals, so to speak. We write the scripture reference and some key words or a sentence or two in our notebooks. The question we use for our dialogue may be approached a couple of different ways to reflect how you feel observing the event or hearing the words spoken. Example questions will follow some suggested readings for this Advent season, but you may think of different dialogue questions.

1. Matthew 24: 37-44 "Watch therefore for the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect."
(Q) Christ is coming. HDIFAT?
2. Genesis 9: 8-17 "When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature."
(Q) When I see a rainbow I think of God's promise. HDIFAT?
3. Matthew 25: 31-40 "As you did it to the least of these you did it for me."
(Q) HDIF looking at you and realizing that the special things I do for you I do for Christ?

4. Luke 1: 26-38 (you may want to read all of Luke 1)
(Q) Can I answer with Mary - "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word"? HDIFAT
5. Luke 2: 1-20, Matthew 2: 1-12 (to be read Christmas Eve or Christmas Day)
(Q) HDIF kneeling at the manger with the shepherds and seeing my Savior for the first time? or HDIF if I were one of the wisemen presenting Christ with a precious gift?
6. Luke 2: 8-14 "For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."
(Q) HDIF hearing the angels tell that Christ is born?
7. Luke 10: 38-42 "But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.'"
(Q) Am I like Martha or Mary this Christmas season? HDIFAMA?

This same approach can be used for any scripture passage if you immerse yourselves in that time and place.

MORE DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. God's son was born for us. HDIFAT?
2. The greatest gift is love. Have we shared our love with community, family, friends and those in need this Christmas season? HDIFAT?
3. What are my feelings about the poverty and simplicity of Jesus' birth?
4. What are my feelings when I picture our family kneeling at the manger?
5. If I could give a gift to Jesus, what would it be? HDIFAMA?
6. Our most important guest is Jesus. HDIFAT?

Additional suggestions for the four weeks prior to Christmas:

WEEK 1 - Light the first candle on your advent wreath and share some special time with each other and your family. As a couple, bring out all the Christmas cards you received last year. Over the next few days pray for each family/person who sent Christmas wishes last year. Share how you feel praying for these people.

WEEK 2 - Light two candles on your wreath. As a couple, write love notes and letters to other Marriage Encounter couples, to your pastor and his wife, to your parents or other very special relatives and friends. Share how writing these love notes/letters together feels.

WEEK 3 - Light three candles on your Advent wreath. Take some time to listen, especially to each other; and together, to your children, to your neighbors. Invite a lonely widow or widower, or anyone else who lives alone to join your family for Christmas dinner, or offer to take them shopping. For a shut-in, bring a sampling of Christmas baking or a small house plant, but most especially bring yourselves and visit. HDIF when I really listen to you? (or to our children, etc.)

WEEK 4 - How beautiful the wreath looks with all four candles aglow, signifying that the light of the World has come. Rejoice, laugh, sing! Be quiet, share, care, enjoy, pray, play. Do it all together. Hug someone. Be a gift to each other. He is here among us, just as He promised He would be. Speak your love, speak His love - speak it again . . . Show it!!! Share how you feel giving / showing your love.

PROPHETIC BIBLE REFERENCES (from Advent booklet)

Genesis 3: 1-24, 9: 1-19, 49: 1-28; Numbers 24: 14-25; I Chronicles 17: 1-27; II Chronicles 7:11-22; Isaiah 2: 1-5, 7:1-17, 11: 1-10, 24: 21-25, 25: 6-10, 26: 1-21, 28: 14-19, 32: 1-8, 40: 1-11, 46: 3-13, 49: 1-13, 51: 1-16, 52: 1-12; Micah 4: 1-8, 5: 1-5; Jeremiah 23: 2-8, 30: 1-22, 33: 14-26; Malachi 3: 1-7, 4: 1-6.

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