An ADVENT Penance Service

Opening Hymn

INTRODUCTION:
Advent is a very special time. It is the start of a new year for the Church. It is a time of waiting, a time of getting ready; it is a time for us to think about how we are living our lives. Sometimes, Advent can be a very busy time. We rush around looking for presents, putting up decorations and trying to get everything done before Christmas arrives. But, today, we are going to remember that Advent is also a time to pray, a time to remember what Christmas is really about and a time to make peace with ourselves, with each other and with God.

OPENING PRAYER:
God our Father, we thank you for this Advent time so that we can prepare for the coming of your Son, Jesus. We gather today knowing that you always love us and you always forgive us even when we forget to be the best that we can be. Give us a new heart this Advent so that we can love you and each other more each day. Amen

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

A reading from the prophet Isaiah
Thus says the Lord:
The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises.
Jacob, you have not invoked me,
you have not troubled yourself, Israel, on my behalf.
Instead you have burdened me with your sins,
Troubled me with your inquities.
I it is, I it is, who must blot out everything
And not remember your sins
The word of the Lord.

The Response is: The Lord is my light and my help

The Lord is my light and my help:
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life:
Before whom shall I shrink?

There is one thing I ask of the Lord,
For this I long,
To live in the house of the Lord,
All the days of my life.

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and right living and truth. Try to discover what the Lord wants of you, having nothing to do with the futile works of darkness.
The word of the Lord.

Gospel acclamation
Alleluia
I am the light of the world says the Lord
Anyone who follows me will have the light of life
Alleluia

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew
Hearing that John had been arrested Jesus went back to Galilee, and leaving Nazareth he went and settled in Capernaum, a lakeside town on the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali. In this way the prophecy of Isaiah was to be fulfilled:
Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali!
Way of the sea on the far side of Jordon,
Galilee of the nations!
The people that lived in darkness
Has seen a great light;
on those who dwell in the land and shadow of death
a light has dawned.
From that moment Jesus began his teaching with the message Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.
The Gospel of the Lord.

Jesus stands, lantern in hand, at night-time outside a door that is overgrown with foliage. The house too looks neglected and sad. Clearly something is wrong. Jesus’ face is in the shade. Even his halo
does not brighten the visage. He knocks at the door which does not appear to have a knob or latch. Jesus is splendidly dressed, but he wears a spiky crown entwined with thorns. Regal, yes, but also vulnerable. In the background is a garden that looks autumnal. The presence of apples on the ground hints at the possibility of nourishment, but reinforces the sense that not only is it late in the day, but it is late in the year. He looks at the viewer pleadingly. The door might remain shut and he will not force it. The time to respond is running out.

**Reflection on life:**

What about your relationship with Jesus? Is Jesus knocking on your door to no avail? Do you make time to hear Jesus, to just be aware of his presence? As you look at the door in the picture, you will see that there is no knob or latch. If the door is to be opened, the person on the inside must answer the knock. Jesus is knocking on your door this Christmas. Will you open the door? Or like the inn-keeper that first Christmas, will you have no room for Jesus?

When Jesus knocks at your door, does the door open easily and smoothly? Are you someone who is always inviting Jesus into your life? When you hear Jesus knock, do you stop what you’re doing and immediately answer his call? Or is your door like the one in the painting? Is it covered with overgrown vines and branches because you haven’t opened it in a very long time? Is it so long since you have answered the door that you aren’t even sure that you really heard a knock?

Jesus will wait patiently. He will not break down the door. He will not force a relationship. It is up to you to hear and answer his knock. Jesus is standing at the door knocking this Christmas. Jesus wants a relationship with you. He wants you to open the door of your heart.
No-one can open that door for you. You have to choose to open the door. Are you willing to invite Jesus in this Christmas?

All Pray:

**I confess** to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore, I ask blessed Mary ever-virgin all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Act of sorrow:

O my God, I thank you for loving me. 
I am sorry for all my sins, 
for not loving others and not loving you. 
Help me to live like Jesus 
and not sin again . Amen

After Confession      Our Father.

**Child of promise come,**
Revealer of God come,
Bringer of life come,
Come to the beaten and the battered,
Come to the despised and rejected
Come to all in whom the divine image is still distorted

We wait in joyful expectation.

Come not as an distant emperor but as a helpless babe
Come not as a prince in a gold palace, but as a displaced and frightened refugee
Come not as a man of power, but in love and compassion
Come to those outcast like shepherds in the field
Come to foreigners like Magi watching from afar
Come to rich and poor, young and old, male and female,

We wait in hopeful anticipation

Come to bless all creation with your love
Come to bring salvation on the earth
Come to rule with justice and in peace
Come Child of promise, open the windows of our hearts
Come Christ of compassion, open the doors of our homes
Come Prince of Peace, open the pathways to our lives
We wait with all the peoples of the earth
Child of hope we welcome your coming
Christ of life we welcome your coming
King of glory we welcome your coming

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord God, we thank you for the gift of forgiveness. May we always find the strength to forgive those who have hurt us. In forgiving us you give us a freedom to forgive others. As we journey together towards Bethlehem, may we draw closer to you and to one another. Grant us the wisdom to see you in everyone we meet each day. Make us people of peace, love, joy and hope. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

Blessing:
May the Blessing of Almighty God, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit come down upon you now and remain with you and yours this Holy Christmas and throughout the coming New Year. Amen.

Go in Peace, our service is ended. Thanks be to God.