



# ADVENT 2021

MARRIAGE FAMILY ADVENT PROGRAM



Catholic Archdiocese of  
Canberra and Goulburn

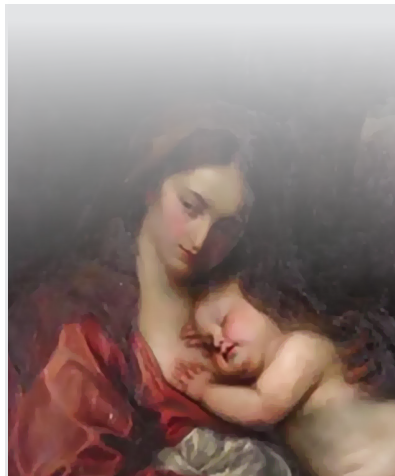
**AMORIS LAETITIA**  
FAMILY YEAR 2011 - 2022



## WEEK FOUR

FAMILIES RESPONDING TO THE  
NEEDS OF OUR WORLD

4th Sunday in Advent - 19th December



## FACILITATOR:

Begin the group time by asking each group member to introduce themselves. Be clear about the finish time. Then read the following introduction to the session:

## FACILITATOR:

Ask a group member to read the scripture passage slowly and clearly so that the group can reflect on the text as it is read.

## FACILITATOR:

Ask what struck the group members from today's passage (1 or 2 minute discussion)

## INTRODUCTION

**Pope Francis** acknowledges the pressures and complexities of modern life which adversely impact family relationships. He challenges us to encourage each other with a vision of marriage as "a dynamic path to personal development" while also staying close to and supportive of each other when we experience struggle and frailty in family life.

In this week's video **Archbishop Christopher** points out that Mary's first impulse after discovering she was called to be the mother of God was to take the perilous journey to support her cousin Elizabeth. Mary carried Jesus within her to another family in need of encouragement. Our families too can 'carry Jesus' to other families who are struggling. We can also be 'evangelisers of the hope of family life' in a world which 'has a big question mark over marriage and family life'

In the **Gospel** this Sunday we see that Mary is not overly pre-occupied with the meaning of her own special calling. Instead she is oriented towards the needs of others, going "as quickly as she could, to give support and encouragement to her cousin Elizabeth and to share with her the Hope that was within her.

## SCRIPTURE READING

**Gospel Reading, Luke 1:39-45**

*Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled."*

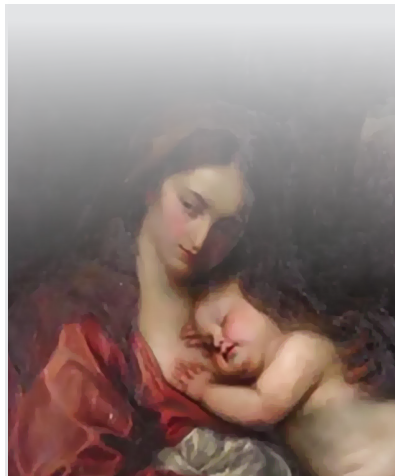
WATCH THE  
VIDEO:



## WEEK FOUR

### FAMILIES RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF OUR WORLD

4th Sunday in Advent - 19th December



#### FACILITATOR:

*Decide ahead how much time you are allowing for this group discussion time and let the group know.*

*Ask for initial impressions from the video. What struck you about the content? (1 or 2 minutes)*

*Now read each question aloud and give each member of the group an opportunity to respond*

#### FACILITATOR:

*As you wrap up the session remind participants:*

- *There is bonus video content available online if they would like to listen to more stories or reflections from the families interviewed in the main video.*

- *Relevant excerpts from Pope Francis' Amoris Laetitia are provided at the end of this handout for further reflection during the week.*

*Agree on when and where you will meet next week.*

*Close in prayer asking each group member to read one stanza from the prayer overleaf:*

#### GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you understand the Christian vision of marriage?
- Pope Francis reflects on the multiplicity of pressures in the modern world which mitigate against the Christian vision of marriage.

What are these pressures and how can we, as a Church, respond?

**Advent** is a time for starting afresh. We review our lives, express sorry for failures to love and ask Jesus to be born anew in our hearts. It is a time of waiting for Christ.

It is also a time for reflecting on the various comings (advents) of Christ into our lives.

Besides his first coming at Bethlehem, Jesus comes into our lives in the people we meet in each present moment, including family members, through the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), through the Word of God, through the worshipping community, at the moment of our death and, finally, in his Second Coming at the end of time.



## WEEK FOUR

## PRAYER



Heavenly Father,

We come before You to praise You and to thank You for the great gift of the family.

We pray to You for all families consecrated by the Sacrament of Matrimony. May they rediscover each day the grace they have received, and as small domestic Churches, may they know how to witness to your Presence and to the love with which Christ loves the Church.

We pray to You for all families faced with difficulty and suffering caused by illness or circumstances of which only You know. Sustain them and make them aware of the path to holiness upon which You call them, so that they might experience your infinite Mercy and find new ways to grow in love.

We pray to You for children and young people: may they encounter You and respond joyfully to the vocation You have in mind for them;

We pray for parents and grandparents: may they be aware that they are signs of the fatherhood and motherhood of God in caring for the children who, in body and spirit, You entrust to them; for the experience of fraternity that the family can give to the world.

Lord, grant that each family might live their specific vocation to holiness in the Church as a call to become missionary disciples, in the service of life and peace, in communion with our priests, religious, and all vocations in the Church.

Bless the World Meeting of Families.

Amen.

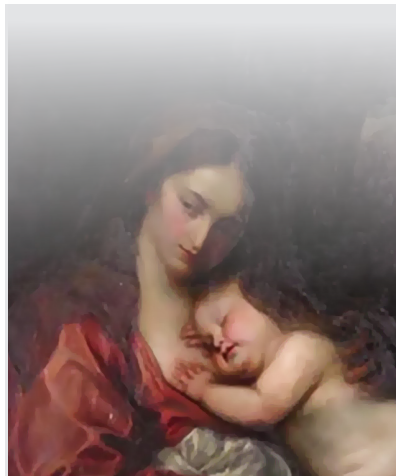
*Official prayer for the X World Meeting of Families 22-26 June 2022*



## WEEK FOUR

## EXTRA READING

4th Sunday in Advent - 19th December



**32.** ... We look to the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows ... families have come to enjoy greater freedom "through an equitable distribution of duties, responsibilities and tasks" ... "a greater emphasis on personal communication between the spouses helps to make family life more humane ...

**33.** On the other hand, "equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by an extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that one's personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute". "The tensions created by an overly individualistic culture, caught up with possessions and pleasures, leads to intolerance and hostility in families". Here I would also include today's fast pace of life, stress and the organization of society and labour, since all these are cultural factors which militate against permanent decisions. ...

**34.** When these factors affect our understanding of the family, it can come to be seen as a way station, helpful when convenient, or a setting in which rights can be asserted while relationships are left to the changing winds of personal desire and circumstances. Ultimately, it is easy nowadays to confuse genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and everything were possible and permissible. The ideal of marriage, marked by a commitment to exclusivity and stability, is swept aside whenever it proves inconvenient or tiresome.

**36.** We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today's problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism. Then too, we often present marriage in such a way that its unitive meaning, its call to grow in love and its ideal of mutual assistance are overshadowed by an almost exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation. ... At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God's grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite.

**37.** We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden. We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.

**38.** We must be grateful that most people do value family relationships that are permanent and marked by mutual respect. ... Nowadays we are grateful too for the witness of marriages that have not only proved lasting, but also fruitful and loving. All these factors can inspire a positive and welcoming pastoral approach capable of helping couples to grow in appreciation of the demands of the Gospel. Yet we have often been on the defensive, wasting pastoral energy on denouncing a decadent world without being proactive in proposing ways of finding true happiness. Many people feel that the Church's message on marriage and the family does not clearly reflect the preaching and attitudes of Jesus, who set forth a demanding ideal yet never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery.