7. Closing Prayer

O God of love,
hear our prayers;
protect our dreams
and listen to our silent hopes.

Deal gently with our pain
speak to our sadness
and remove the barriers
that imprison our spirits.

Shed your light
where shadows are cast
that we may feel your warmth
and know your presence.

God over all
Christ within us
Spirit around us
hear our prayer
and send your messenger
of peace to us and
to our troubled world.

Cafod and Iona

Rose of Sharon

The Rose of Sharon grew in unfavourable conditions in Palestine but the reference can also be to the abundance of spring flowers that burst open on the plains, pastures and hills of the Carmel and Sharon areas.It is a symbol of hope, beauty and love.
'I am the rose of Sharon'.
Song of Songs 2:1

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Sadhbh Lawlor & Gareth Gowran 2026

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Rose of Sharon
Gospel reflections for small groups

Making Space for Joy

First Sunday of Advent 2026

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Holy God, in this quiet season of the earth, the season of waiting,
we rest in the shelter of your love.

In this season of darkness,
of guiding stars,
we trust in the light of your promise.

In this season of solitude, when we listen for our own hearts' rhythm,
we find warmth in the signs of your presence.

In this season when nature cradles seeds in gentle readiness
we look forward to the dawn
of your loving-kindness.

2. Gospel text: Mark 13: 33-37

Be on your guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back -
whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you,
I say to everyone: “Watch!”

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the text again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud.
When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with
themselves, their community, society or the world. Then some sharing.
NB This is not time for argument.

4. Background notes for Mark 13: 33-37

When Jesus speaks these words he is in Jerusalem and will not leave it alive. He has enraged the Jewish elders, overturning the changing tables in the Temple, publicly and provocatively. They are more determined than ever to get rid of him.

At the time of Mark's writing, traumatic events were affecting the Christians. There had been a Jewish call to arms against the Romans which resulted in the violent destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Nero had unleashed a horrific persecution of Christians in Rome.

Mark is urging the people he addresses to stay awake in these dark times of history, trusting in God's faithfulness
who accompanied Jesus on the cross and will accompany them through every suffering.

The Temple is gone but God is in control, God who is about melting hearts, compassion and restoration. They need to watch out for the new signs of God's presence, creating new spaces of flourishing, replacing the old destructive ones.

5. Reflection Question for Mark 13: 33-37

'Making Space for Joy': where does joy seep in in these dark times?

6. Prayers

Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

Blessing of Hope
May we know the hope
that is not just for some day -
but for this day-
here and now in this moment
that opens to us.

Hope not made of wishes
but of substance,
hope made of sinew and bone
hope that has breath
and a beating heart.

Hope that knows to shout out
when it is called for
hope that raises us from the dead
not someday but this very day
and again and again and again.

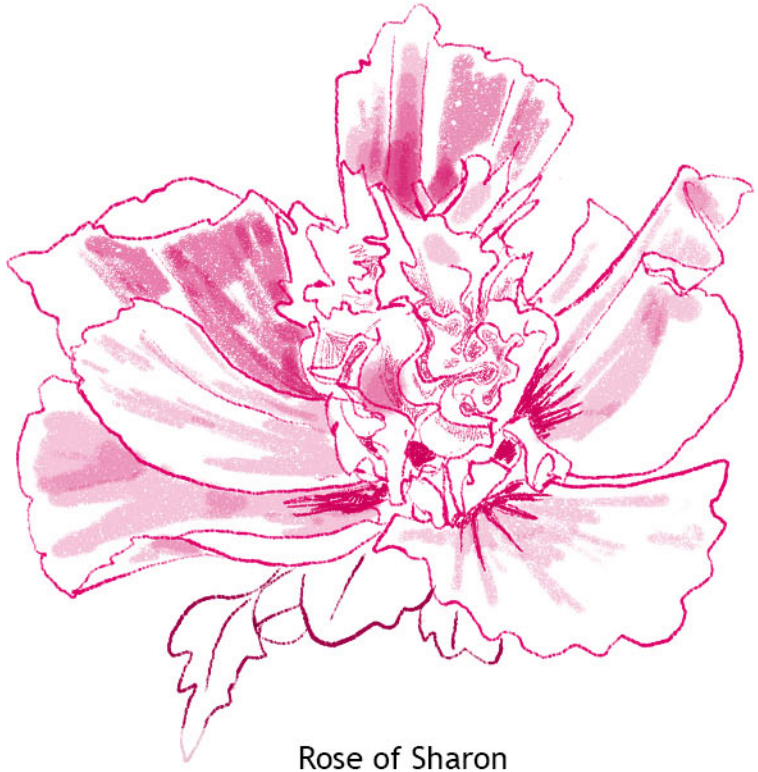
Jan Richardson.

Rose of Sharon

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Rose of Sharon
Gospel reflections for small groups

Making Space for Joy

Second Sunday of Advent 2026

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Lord, we live in a world that needs to change.
We are part of that world and we do things and let things happen that hurt people.
O God, help us change our ways.

O God, we live in a world which pretends that nothing can ever really change
and that things can never be fair.
But you have promised a different world, a world of Good News.
O God, help us change our ways.

O God
Give your light to make us unafraid,
your power to protect us
your joy to heal us
your grace to bless us
your courage to challenge us
your hope to help us keep trying.

Iona

2. Gospel text: Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the Prophet:

"See, I will send my messenger ahead
of you,
who will prepare your way;
A voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way for the Lord.
Make straight paths for him."

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
The people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message:
'After me comes the one more powerful.
I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit'.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the text again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud.
When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society or the world. Then some sharing.
NB This is not time for argument.

4. Background notes for Mark 1:1-8

These very first verses of Marks' Gospel sound an irresistible hope. The announcement of the 'Good news' is not the dreaded approach of a victorious, conquering army, as it would have been for the Roman occupiers. It is not the message of an imperial herald; but of a man at the margins of society, announcing God's coming with healing and forgiveness. The desert setting is far from the influence of political or religious rulers.
John's way of baptising was to plunge people into the strong flow of the river, a startling way of cleansing, of shaking them up, 'preparing the way of the Lord, making straight his paths.'
It was a call to change their world-view and live accordingly. To be open to what God wants.
Jesus, coming after John, will undertake the radical quest to uncover the root causes of people's problems and usher in the incredible truth of God's tremendous, healing compassion and love available for everyone.

Mark gives Jesus the title 'Son of God', a title given to Roman Emperors but their power was neither healing or protective.

'By the Holy Spirit' - reference to the Holy Spirit was already part of the Christian baptism ritual at the time Mark was writing.

5. Reflection Question for Mark 1:1-8

When did you last get 'shaken up' by some event and come to a deeper understanding of life?

6. Prayers

Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

O Holy One who lives in our hearts,
We celebrate your radiant image
in men and women everywhere.
Your creativity flows through our beings.
Your joy fills us.
Your blessings are the wellspring of grace around us.
Your mercy is fresh, like the dew every morning.
Your healing liberates us from all darkness and oppression.
Your empowerment bubbles up inside us.
For you are the Love that dwells in our depths,
The Wisdom of the Ages that speaks within us and through us.
You are the Divine Passion that makes us all one.

Bridget Mary Meehan

Rose of Sharon

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Rose of Sharon
Gospel reflections for small groups

Making Space for Joy

Third Sunday of Advent 2026

1. Welcome and opening prayer

As Advent continues may we join with you
in bringing your light into this world.
May we be bearers of your light and love
by doing special acts of kindness,
not cursing the darkness.

May every candle we light
symbolise our longing to brighten
a world of darkness
and bring hope into a world of despair.
May we never give up trusting
in the power you give us
to act with wisdom and courage.

May our presence, in work, at home,
wherever we go, bring blessings of
hope and restoration.

2. Gospel text: John 1:1-6, 19-28

There was man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah".
They asked him, "Then, who are you? Are you Elijah?"
He said, "I am not."
"Are you the prophet?"
He answered "No"
Finally they said:"Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'

John replied, in the words of Isaiah the prophet:
"'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"
Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, "Why then do you baptise if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"
"I baptise with water," John replied, "but among you stands the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan where John was baptising.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the text again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud.
When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society or the world. Then some sharing.
NB This is not time for argument.

4. Background notes for John 1:1-6, 19-28

The Jewish authorities are disturbed by all the people streaming out to John, leaving Jerusalem and the Temple. Unnerved, they send down Levites, priests and Pharisees armed with a string of loaded questions based on their sacred history.

John's answers, based on the same sacred history, go far beyond their expectations or what they could have imagined. A new era is dawning, inevitable and unstoppable.

The light will conquer darkness and have power to open hearts, to uncover truth and energise people to be sources of goodness. While John drew the focus away from himself, Jesus watched, listened, learned and changed.

As for the people, they have been waiting for God but God has been waiting for them.

5. Reflection Question for John 1:1-6, 19-28

'With God, you can; without you, God won't' Comment

6. Prayers

Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

With expectant waiting
we anticipate your coming.
Come close to us, Lord,
come very close.

Come Alpha and Omega
who is from before the ages.
Come, morning star who named the stars,
Come, carpenter of Nazareth
who knows the smell of planed wood.
Come, beloved Son of God
who knows the heart of God
Come, son of man
who knows the hearts of God's people.

Come, Lord of Life and Prince of Peace
Come, Dayspring and Rising Sun,
Come, Wonderful Counsellor,
Come, Emmanuel, God with us.
God very close to us

Ged Johnson Cafod

The light of the Christmas star to you,
the warmth of a house and hearth to you,
the cheer and goodwill of friends to you,
the hope of a childlike heart to you,
the joy of a thousand angels to you
the love of the Son of God and God's
peace to you.

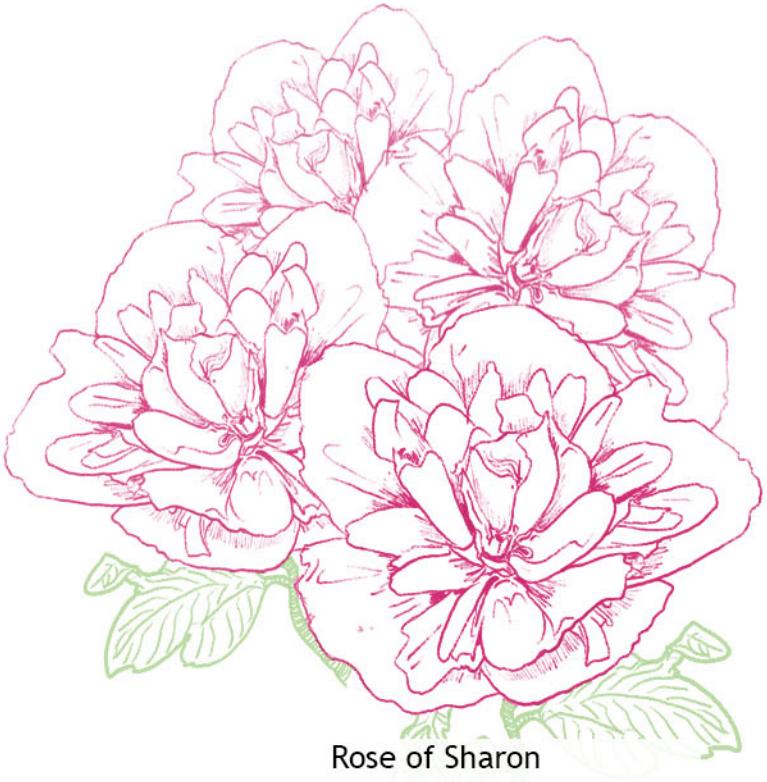
Irish Christmas Blessing

Rose of Sharon

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Rose of Sharon
Gospel reflections for small groups

Making Space for Joy

Fourth Sunday of Advent 2026

1. Welcome and opening prayer

God our hope and our desire,
we wait for your coming
as a woman longs for her child,
as an exile longs for home,
as a lover for the touch of the beloved
as the disturbed mind for peace.

Stir up our complacency
brush away our fear,
whisper through our numbness
energize our love,
so that we can bring light into the darkness
hope to despair,
warmth to the cold
safety to those at risk,
shelter for the wandering.
And open our hearts to what you want to be for us

S. Ni Ch

2. Gospel text: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel to a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said,
"Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be", asked Mary, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant, "Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."
Then the angel left her.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the text again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud.
When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society or the world. Then some sharing.
NB This is not time for argument.

4. Background notes for Luke 1:26-38

Luke links the emergence of the man in the wilderness back to the home of a young girl in a small village, far from any sources of power. An unlikely starting point for a world-shaking event. This young girl has none of the certainties of John the baptist or the Jewish authorities. She is confused and disturbed. But God has sought out this person of humility and courage to hear and respond. Mary chooses to believe, opening her heart and mind to co-operate. And the world changed forever.

Saying 'Yes' puts Mary in a difficult, dangerous position socially, culturally and religiously but she goes on her way, pondering what has happened
.
Luke links two women - regarded in Jewish society as insignificant -who really enter into what is happening and respond with faith, joy, trust and hope. They bring blessings to each other and their lives change forever.
God has no longer need of a Temple.

5. Reflection Question for Luke 1:26-38

What do you want to make room for this Christmas?

6. Prayers

Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.