

DECEMBER

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9 10 11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18 19

20 21 22 23 24

25 VIGIL

25 NIGHT

25 DAY

26 27 28 29 30 31

Friday, December 1, 2017
(Lec. 507)

- 1) Daniel 7:2-14
- 2) Luke 21:29-33

FRIDAY OF
34TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *The Kingdom of God is near.*

Today, as we near the end of Ordinary Time and approach Advent, we are faced with some rather frightening visions from Daniel: a lion with eagle's wings, a bear with three tusks that is ordered to *devour much flesh*; a leopard with wings and four heads; and the most terrifying beast – one with iron teeth. These nightmarish creatures, however, lose their power when *one like a Son of Man* – whom we identify as Jesus – takes everlasting dominion from God. The one who is most like us – who has taught us to love one another and give our lives to God – has more power than all of these beasts put together.

For people in the twenty-first century, these creatures in Daniel's visions might seem like myths – terrifying in their own way, but hardly believable. Yet in our day, we have our own nightmarish "beasts" that can bring fear to our hearts: nuclear weapons, drones that can bring cameras to spy on unsuspecting people or weapons to kill them, terrorists who can strike at any time, unexpected illness, and all manner of storms and natural disasters. We have enough to fear in our own lives, in our own time, without having to focus on Daniel's beasts.

But Daniel's vision – especially of Jesus receiving dominion, glory and kingship from God – has as much meaning for us today as it did for the people of his own time. Whether we face creatures with terrifying tusks or claws or technology that can kill us or destroy our world, we know that ultimately we can trust in our all-powerful and good God, who has everlasting dominion over everything. Perhaps Paul expresses it best in Romans 8:38-39: *For I am certain that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers ... nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

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Saturday, December 2, 2017
(Lec. 508)

- 1) Daniel 7:15-27
- 2) Luke 21:34-36

SATURDAY OF
34TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC 2612**

FOCUS: Be still and listen for God's voice calling us.

We are reminded throughout the liturgical year to reflect on the nature of our relationship with God, and what we can do to improve it. We especially think about this when the priest dons the purple vestments of Advent and Lent. The seasonal messages are similar – at the beginning of the liturgical calendar, the “advent,” the message focuses on the second coming by recalling the birth of Christ. During Lent, the faithful recall the promise of salvation and eternal life awaiting all those who believe in the Resurrection.

The two readings for today touch on a central theme of Advent: the coming of the Savior. Daniel's vision of the final judgment is interpreted by the angel in the first reading, concluding with an image of hope for *the holy people of the Most High*. Luke's Gospel reminds the people of God not to attach themselves to the temptations of the world: *Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap*, Jesus says.

We hear the message throughout the year that we must stay watchful – prayerfully watchful – because we don't know the day or the time when we will have to *stand before the Son of Man*. We are encouraged to “let go and let God,” to place our troubles at the foot of the cross, to pray for guidance, to invite Jesus into a dialogue with us and open the door of our hearts to his love.

But at Advent the language is stronger, perhaps because the temptation of secularism is stronger, too, especially in Western culture. This is the season when people often find themselves caught up in the materialism of the holidays. Life becomes busier, and it's easy for the “reason for the season” to be shunted aside or even lost completely. And in some homes, just trying to make ends meet for basic needs can compromise a deeper prayer life. With the distractions of the world, it can be difficult to be still and listen for the voice of God calling to us.

Yet, this is precisely what is required. The catechism states it quite succinctly: “In Jesus, the ‘Kingdom of God’ is at hand. He calls his hearers to conversion and faith, but also to watchfulness. In prayer, the disciple keeps watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes” (CCC 2612).

As Saint Teresa of Calcutta put it, “Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at his disposition, and listening to his voice in the depths of our heart.”

So in this time of Advent, let us be still ... and listen.

YEAR B - WEEKDAYS II

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2017

(Lec. 2)

1) Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

2) 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

3) Mark 13:33-37

Gospel related: **CCC** 672, 2612, 2849

**FIRST SUNDAY
OF ADVENT**

FOCUS: Let us be watchful and alert for the *Lord of the house* to come.

It is fitting that the very first reading we hear this Advent is a lament imploring God's personal intervention. For Advent is a time of waiting: waiting for the opportunity to celebrate God's intervention in human history; waiting for, and preparing for, Jesus' return.

The writers of the book of Isaiah – which we will hear proclaimed these first three Sundays of Advent – witnessed colossal historical events in the life of the Israelites: wars, revolts, dethroned rulers. Yet in Isaiah, no military or political power compares in importance to God's majesty, and to the intimate relationship between God and his beloved, chosen people.

So in the midst of the Israelites' exile, Isaiah recalls all the times in history that God provided protection, and begs for the Lord to come once more to their aid. He acknowledges that they have sinned, but is confident in God's abiding covenantal promise.

Isaiah's plea is one of confident hope, proclaimed by someone who knows that nothing the Israelites have done changes God's love for them. Isaiah emphasizes God as Father and redeemer – a God who shapes us with the loving tenderness of a potter molding clay.

We hear this same confidence in the Gospel message of Jesus to his disciples. His words, *Be watchful! Be alert!* are not a threat or some doom message. They are instead instructions for how to live with assurance: we don't have to wonder or worry, because we know with certainty that the *Lord of the house* will come! We will not be abandoned or forgotten. The Master will return.

The nights are much longer than the days in this dark time of the year. We may be facing harsh difficulties, unknown risks or painful circumstances. Yet what the prophet Isaiah names is what Paul the Apostle confirms: *In him you were enriched in every way, because God is faithful.* We have already been given the graces we need to face our specific circumstances. In the words of Saint Paul in today's reading: *you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

God is, indeed, faithful. The only question we must answer is, how are we responding to this awesome grace?

Monday, December 4, 2017
(Lec. 175)

- 1) Isaiah 2:1-5
- 2) Matthew 8:5-11

MONDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint John Damascene,
Priest and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 543, 1386, 2610

FOCUS: May we have such faith as the centurion.

Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. The centurion who spoke these words in today's Gospel was not an Israelite who has been anticipating the coming of the Messiah, but a soldier of the occupying force of Rome – a military officer who commanded a unit of men. That this interaction took place the way it did, between him and Jesus, is astonishing when we think about it.

On the one hand, his words to Jesus are not surprising. As a commander, the centurion would not only be familiar with, but believe in, the absolute immediacy of and obedience to a given order. He clearly recognizes that Jesus has the capability, using only his words, to unleash the power of healing. It also appears that he does not exactly *ask* Jesus to do this, nor does he command him to, but simply states as fact something he knows to be true: *say the word and my servant will be healed.*

On the other hand, however, are the surprising preparatory words to Jesus. Rather than simply saying, “no, you do not have to come to my house ... your words are enough,” the centurion humbles himself before the Lord, citing his unworthiness to receive him into his home. This would have been unheard of – a Roman military officer considering himself beneath the status of an itinerant Jewish preacher, and suspected troublemaker! Jesus' response is to declare that, *in no one in Israel have I found such faith.*

In a few moments, as we prepare ourselves to approach the altar for the Eucharist, we will appeal to Jesus in a similar way as the centurion did, saying, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” Do we believe in this statement as much as the centurion did? After all, we are receiving the same Jesus Christ, in his body and blood, who is alive and present just as much as he was when talking to the centurion.

In this season of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the event of Christ's birth, and anticipate his coming again, let us ask God to grant us the faith and confidence of the centurion. May we have the fortitude to humbly acknowledge our fallen nature while trusting completely in his word. And while the centurion never had the pleasure of Christ in his home, let us be truly open to receiving him in our lives, our homes and our bodies.

Tuesday, December 5, 2017
(Lec. 176)

1) Isaiah 11:1-10

2) Luke 10:21-24

Gospel related: **CCC** 1083, 2603

TUESDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: Through Jesus, we have the privilege of knowing God intimately, for we are his children.

Today's readings are powerful affirmations of the Good News Jesus came to proclaim to the world. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that no one can know the Father except the Son, *and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him*. The good news for us is that *we* are among those to whom Jesus has revealed the Father.

Through our baptism, we have gained access to knowledge of the Father. We have been made members of the family of God in a special way, with all the benefits that come with being part of the divine family. This means that our knowledge of God transcends an intellectual understanding, and is on a heart and soul level. This is the best way to know anyone, but especially God.

In the words of our first reading for today, we have more good news. Our reading from Isaiah reminds us of the characteristics the Messiah will have. They include wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength (or fortitude), knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. These may sound familiar. The Church calls them the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

These attributes are expressed in their fullness in Jesus, but they also are gifts for *us*. They come to us through God's grace – the life of God within us. They not only are attributes of the Messiah, they can be our attributes, as well. Good news, indeed!

And this is a great time to think about knowing God in all three persons – Father and Son and Holy Spirit. We have just begun the season of Advent, designed to help us prepare not only to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but to anticipate his coming in glory, as well. There is no better way to prepare for these events than to know God more deeply. Our gathering together here at Mass, on a Tuesday in December when we are already bombarded with the commercial aspects of the holiday season, is evidence of the gifts of the Spirit working in us, and calling us to that deeper relationship with God.

With this as our beginning, let us take today's readings as reminders of two important things. First, that Jesus has chosen us to know God the Father in a special way. And second, that through the Holy Spirit we have the tools of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord to help us do so.

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Wednesday, December 6, 2017
(Lec. 177)

- 1) Isaiah 25:6-10a
- 2) Matthew 15:29-37

WEDNESDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Nicholas, Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1329, 1335

FOCUS: The Lord feeds us abundantly.

The United Nations estimates that one in nine people don't have enough food to live a healthy life. While physical hunger is one of the greatest threats to health worldwide, many are starving in a different way. They experience spiritual hunger, which can be satisfied only by knowing God. Today's readings reveal that our compassionate Lord responds to both types of hunger by feeding us abundantly.

Our first reading from Isaiah begins with a foretelling of the time, when, *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a great feast to celebrate their salvation.* We see this same promise demonstrated in today's Gospel, on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee. Here, after healing many, Jesus feeds a crowd of four thousand with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. In the end, there are enough fragments left over to fill seven baskets.

Moved with pity, Jesus has recognized the physical nature of his followers' hunger. They have had nothing to eat for three days, and he worries they will collapse. Rather than provide only enough food to satisfy their hunger, he gives them more than they can eat.

Beyond feeding those who are physically hungry, the Lord satisfies our spiritual hunger through Christ, his living Word. As our catechism says, "The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves, when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist" (CCC 1335). After all, this isn't just any bread; it's the bread of eternal life.

So during Advent, as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christ's birth – the celebration of his presence in the world – let's keep in mind that it is through this great gift that our Lord feeds us abundantly.

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Thursday, December 7, 2017
(Lec. 178)

- 1) Isaiah 26:1-6
- 2) Matthew 7:21, 24-27

THURSDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK
(OBL MEM
Saint Ambrose,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 1821, 1970, 2611, 2826 **CSDC** 70

FOCUS: God is our foundation and our eternal hope.

Most of us have probably heard a university's fight song, or a sports team's rallying chant. Maybe we have even participated in an event where we have sung such a thing, filled with the excitement of competition and institutional pride. These songs and chants express unity of purpose, camaraderie and hopefulness, and serve as a kind of "primal focal point" of belief and faith in a team and/or a mission.

We might think of today's passage from Isaiah as being an Old Testament version of this very thing. We don't have the tune in front of us (which is probably best, because we probably could not do it justice!) but we do have the powerful sentiments it expresses, which offer us some insight into the community.

An anthem of deliverance, it proclaims God's protection of them – they who keep the faith and *trust in the Lord forever*. For God is an eternal rock: uncreated and unending; immovable and unchangeable; strong in support and never failing in provision. A firm foundation that cannot be crushed, brought down or trampled underfoot.

We hear only six of the twenty-one verses of this song, but it is enough to know that from the beginning, God's people knew his promises. They waited, in hope and with uniting refrain, for the coming of the Messiah. So when Jesus proclaimed in today's Gospel that salvation and the kingdom of God were at hand, the disciples would have felt that "primal anthem" in their bones, and resonated with the imagery he used.

Jesus tells us that only those who do the will of the Father in heaven will enter the Kingdom: that is, those who build their foundation on the solid rock of God, and who listen to Christ's words and act on them. He compares a wise man and a foolish man who each build a house. The wise man builds on rock, and his house withstands all forces. The foolish man builds his house on sand, and it is lost to shifting sands and indiscriminate nature.

We, too, should resonate with this imagery. Modern communication allows us to see the devastation of structures due to poor foundations, or cities due to terrible forces of nature. If the world can so easily destroy *these* things, how much *more* easily can our lives be thrown into utter disarray – and the salvation of our souls be jeopardized if we are not firmly grounded on the rock of God.

So let us ground ourselves on this rock, and acknowledge God as our foundation.

Friday, December 8, 2017
(Lec. 689)

- 1) Genesis 3:9-15, 20
- 2) Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12
- 3) Luke 1:26-38

**THE IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION OF THE
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
(Patronal Feastday
of the United States of America
- SOLEMNITY
(Holyday of Obligation)**

Gospel related: **CCC** 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 494, 497, 505, 510, 559, 697, 706, 2571, 2617, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 **CSDC** 59

FOCUS: The Immaculate Conception.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Catholic Church proclaims that, "The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin" (*Ineffabilis Deus* 1854; *DS* 2803; *CCC* 491).

Mary's freedom from sin was something that made her a suitable vessel to contain the most Holy of Holies. That is, it was only right and good that Jesus, son of the Father but born of a woman, should have a mother on earth who would never be without the splendor of holiness.

God our Father preserved Mary, the mother of his Son, from the effects of human sin. Her Immaculate Conception is not just about her, then, it is also directly a part of who Jesus Christ really is. He is the Holy One of God born of a holy woman in God's new creation.

Our readings today help us understand God's plan for us, and Mary's role in it. In the first reading from Genesis, we see the initial effects of sin entering the world through Adam and the woman's disobedience: enmity between humans and all of creation. And the woman, who became the mother of all the living, now tainted with this fallen nature, was called Eve.

Paul tells the Ephesians, however, that *God chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him*. Thus, we are reminded that God desires us to be with him forever, and therefore, *In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will*.

We come to God the Father through his son, Jesus Christ, whose impending conception is announced in today's Gospel by the angel Gabriel to Mary who, in her pure sinless nature and being, accepts and agrees to God's plan.

Confusion sometimes arises at the use of the Gospel story of Jesus' conception, when we are celebrating the Immaculate Conception of *Mary*. But it is the essence of Mary's Immaculate Conception that *allows* for Christ's entrance into the world without sin, untainted by the legacy of Eve and Adam, the mother – and father – of all the living. And through Christ, we are reconciled to God.

It is no wonder, then, that we honor and celebrate this divine gift of grace bestowed upon Mary. Redeemed through the merits of her son, Mary is an icon of faithfulness to God and of trusting in the promises he makes. She truly was blessed among women. May we someday be worthy of such a description.

Saturday, December 9, 2017
(Lec. 180)

- 1) Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26
- 2) Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6-8

SATURDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK
(Opt. Mem.

Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2611 **CSDC** 184, 259

FOCUS: We share in the compassion and work of Christ as laborers sent for the harvest.

Today's Gospel reveals the deep connection Christ has with us, and with the Father. It also indicates our own responsibility in relationship with our brothers and sisters. We are called in the compassion of Christ, and in cooperation with God, to show love and concern for others – especially those who have not yet heard the Good News. For we share in the work of Christ as laborers sent for the harvest.

Harvest is a theme we find in today's readings. In the first reading from Isaiah, the prophet is comforting the people, assuring them that there will come a day when the lands will be perfectly prepared to bring forth a bountiful harvest. He says, *[The Lord] will give rain for the seed that you sow in the ground, [A]nd the wheat that the soil produces will be rich and abundant.*

In Matthew's Gospel today, Jesus is traveling around to all towns and villages, *curing every disease and illness*. The crowds of people needing help were large, and Jesus had great pity on them. Jesus says to his disciples, *The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.* He then summons the Twelve, giving them authority to minister in his name, and proceeds to send them out to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Isaiah foretold the harvest; Jesus brought it to fruition; and we – like the earliest disciples – are called to work in it. Perhaps our fields are the people in our workplace, or our family, friends or even strangers. Anywhere there are seeds to plant, cultivate or reap, that is where we are to go.

Each of us has special gifts given to us by God to use in this work on behalf of the Gospel. Recognizing our gifts and using them however God calls us to is central to our sharing in Christ's prophetic and royal mission (CCC 1268). We are God's laborers and there remains a great harvest to be worked. Let us go joyfully into the field.

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2017

(Lec. 5)

1) Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2) 2 Peter 3:8-14

3) Mark 1:1-8

Gospel related: **CCC** 422, 515 **CSDC** 378

**SECOND SUNDAY
OF ADVENT**

FOCUS: Prepare the way of the Lord in our hearts and in the hearts of those around us.

In today's Gospel, we hear that a prophecy from Isaiah is being fulfilled by John the Baptist. John is the one of whom it is written, *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."* John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy two thousand years ago by preaching that Jesus was the Messiah, and pointing toward him in all of his words and actions. But preparing the way for the Lord was not just a task for John the Baptist — it's a task for each one of us. Now it's our turn to prepare the way of the Lord in our own hearts as well as in the world around us.

One of the most important things we can do this Advent season is to prepare our own heart to receive Jesus. The big question is: how do I do this? First and foremost, we must spend some time with Jesus in prayer. We can treat our prayer time like an appointment, setting aside some time each day to spend with God, even if it's only five or ten minutes. We can refrain from giving God the "leftovers" of our day, instead offering the first fruits of time when we're awake and alert. We might prepare the way of the Lord in our hearts by spending time reading Scripture, praying a rosary or praying in adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Whatever we do, it will help us prepare our hearts to receive Jesus.

But our focus can't be only on self during this season of Advent. Just like John the Baptist, we want to prepare the way of the Lord in such a way that those around us might more easily be brought into an encounter with Jesus. John the Baptist, through his words and actions, was able to bring people into an encounter with the Lord; our words and actions can have the same effect if we're intentional about them.

During this Advent season, we can take some time to talk to family, friends, co-workers, or classmates about the true meaning of Christmas. It may be a small action or a simple word from us that opens up the way of the Lord in that person's heart. Just like John, we should point to Jesus in all that we do and say. Be a witness for Christ. After all, we have all been called by name to a life of discipleship.

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Monday, December 11, 2017
(Lec. 181)

- 1) Isaiah 35:1-10
- 2) Luke 5:17-26

MONDAY
OF ADVENT
- SECOND WEEK
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Damasus I,
Pope)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1116

FOCUS: The risen Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to save us from our sins.

Prophets are, in a real sense, intermediaries between God and people, yet their message is not always welcome. Isaiah played a major prophetic role in his day by communicating God's message to the Israelites. In today's reading, Isaiah offers words of consolation to the Israelites toward the end of their Babylonian exile. Oppressed, enslaved and exiled, the Israelites long to return to their homeland and former way of life. Isaiah gives them hope that God will come and save them, and he paints a picture for them of what life will look like once this divine intervention takes place. Life will be good.

That divine intervention, the day of God's salvation, appears in the person of Jesus. As he teaches the people in today's Gospel, *The power of the Lord was with him for healing*. It is Jesus who brings healing to God's people, as spoken of by Isaiah. Jesus is the promise of God who comes to save us – to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, healing to the lame and voice to those without. Jesus communicates the love of the Father for all who are in need of God's love. Jesus makes God's saving power present in all that he does among the people as he heals the paralyzed man.

How is God's saving power present to us today? We have only to look to the sacraments of the Church to find the fulfillment of God's promise. It is in each of the sacraments that we encounter the Risen Lord. There we find his healing power bringing forgiveness and wholeness to each of us who celebrates them in faith. Let us not forget to listen for the voice of God as we celebrate the sacramental life of the Church. Here we will meet the person of the Risen Christ who is God among us.

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Tuesday, December 12, 2017
(Lec. 690A)

**OUR LADY
OF GUADALUPE
- FEAST**

- 1) Zechariah 2:14-17
or Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab
- 2) Luke 1:26-38
or Luke 1:39-47

Note: or any readings from the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* (vol. IV), the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary, nos. 707-712 Pss Prop

Gospel related: **CCC** 64, 158, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 448, 484, 488, 490, 494, 495, 497, 505, 510, 523, 559, 697, 706, 709, 717, 722, 723, 2097, 2571, 2617, 2619, 2675, 2676, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 **CSDC** 59

FOCUS: Mary's role is to direct all nations to Christ.

Today, we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, recalling the apparition of Mary to Saint Juan Diego in 1531 on Tepeyac Hill near what is now Mexico City. We hail her as Patroness of the Americas, and invoke her intercession for all the nations of the Americas.

Tradition holds that Juan Diego, a simple laborer and farmer who had previously converted to Christianity from the local Aztec religion, was on his way to Mass when he encountered the first of several mysterious apparitions. Seeing a radiant light and hearing heavenly music, Juan Diego came face to face with a young woman who identified herself as the Virgin Mary, and who spoke to him in his native tongue and asked that a church be built there in her honor.

Bewildered and somewhat fearful, Juan made his way with this request to the archbishop, but was met with unbelief. Juan Diego persisted, and the bishop asked him to bring back a sign. Juan lacked confidence and even tried to avoid encountering the Virgin. But Mary would not release him from the mission. In words which are now inscribed on the door to the Basilica of Guadalupe, she reassured him: *Am I not here, I who am your mother?*

Mary instructed Juan Diego to gather wild flowers, and miraculously arranged them in his cloak, or *tilma*. Bringing them to the bishop, he opened the *tilma* letting the flowers, Castilian roses, fall out, revealing the holy image of the Virgin of Guadalupe imprinted on the material.

With the *tilma*, and the miraculous healing of several in the community, the newly conquered Spanish colonies began to embrace Christianity – their peoples embracing Mary as their own, allowing her to become the conduit through which they would encounter Christ and take their rightful place within the universal Church.

As with other nations where Mary has appeared, the purpose and impact here are similar. With a message of reassurance, faith and forgiveness, she directs the peoples of the Americas to place their trust and faith in Christ. If she is the fulfillment of the image of the woman in Revelation, then Jesus is that child, the one destined to rule all the nations – the one through whom salvation has come and who now holds the authority of the kingdom of God.

In almost five hundred years of veneration, this image of the Virgin and all that it stands for has become for all the Americas a symbol of great affection and devotion. In the *tilma*, Mary is depicted as being with child and so has become a symbol of true discipleship. Like Mary, who gave her assent to God in Luke's Gospel, we, too, are entrusted with bringing Christ to others; and like Saint Juan Diego, we have been given a holy and life-changing message.

Wednesday, December 13, 2017
(Lec. 183)

- 1) Isaiah 40:25-31
- 2) Matthew 11:28-30

WEDNESDAY
OF ADVENT
- SECOND WEEK
(OBL MEM

Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 459, 1615, 1658

FOCUS: We are sustained by Christ's power and grace as we prepare for his coming this Advent.

In these early days of Advent, we focus on preparation for the Lord's coming – the celebration of his historic coming to earth and his coming again at the end of time. Today's readings give us powerful advice on *how* we are to prepare.

Sometimes, it may seem that Jesus is speaking directly to us when he says, *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened*. Secular society urges us to create the "perfect Christmas" with shopping, baking and decorating. We may worry about our job security. We may worry about our families, or we worry because we are alone. Perhaps we worry about our failing health or the illness of a loved one. If we let our own worries be compounded with the daily news from a violent world, it might seem more than we can bear.

But we never have to bear it alone. Isaiah reminds us that true strength comes from relying on God, who *does not faint nor grow weary*. The Holy One, the Almighty, still cares for his creation and sustains us with his power and his grace.

One of the ways he does that is through each one of us. As followers of our Savior who was born in Bethlehem, we share in the divine nature and we are sustained by his grace. This makes us capable, and responsible, to share his message of love and mercy with a world sorely in need of it. We have the power to make burdens lighter. We have the power to bring light to darkness. We have the power to change how the world thinks and acts.

"No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who 'labor and are heavy laden'" (CCC 1658). As a member of the body of Christ, we must be attentive to the needs of all and, learning from the One who is *meek and humble of heart*, become the source of strength for others. Then, finally, will the world be prepared for Christ's coming.

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Thursday, December 14, 2017
(Lec. 184)

- 1) Isaiah 41:13-20
- 2) Matthew 11:11-15

THURSDAY
OF ADVENT
- SECOND WEEK
(OBL MEM
Saint John of the Cross,
Priest and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 523, 719

FOCUS: God gives us opportunities to know him; let us respond by embracing those opportunities

Jesus and Isaiah remind us in today's readings that faith is a gift.

God loves us so much that he's always reaching out to us. He gives us evidence of his existence in the order we see throughout the universe and the beauty that is observable in nature. God provides us with sacred Scripture to show us how his relationship with us developed through what is called salvation history. God gives us the Church, where we can experience God's presence in the sacraments.

In these and additional ways God says to us, "I love you and I want us to have relationship." It is up to us to respond.

Let us be attentive to God's activity in our lives and in the lives of those around us. When we struggle to perceive God's presence or understand his decisions, we can ask him to help us grow in faith. Faith, as a virtue, is a both God's gift to us, and our response *to* that gift in our openness to growing in this specific way.

Isaiah says that God will do many things, *That all may see and know, observe and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.* Jesus references the prophets and the law, pointing out that we must accept some realities as matters of faith; then he invites us to have faith in him by saying, *whoever has ears ought to hear.*

These are comforting words from Isaiah and Jesus, because they remind us that God is in charge. We do not have to take on the burden of saving the world – that's already been done. What we *can* do, however, is allow God to do his holy and creative work in and through us, so that all may come to know the saving power of God, in faith.

Let us pray that all God's children, including ourselves, will persevere in faith and in a thriving relationship with the one, true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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Friday, December 15, 2017
(Lec. 185)

- 1) Isaiah 48:17-19
- 2) Matthew 11:16-19

FRIDAY
OF ADVENT
- SECOND WEEK

FOCUS: The Lord our God teaches us what is for our good, and leads us on the way we should go

The moody children in today's Gospel teach us a lesson about the human heart. Children often do not make decisions based on logic – they are at the mercy of their whims. Sometimes they want something in particular, but are unhappy when they get it and it doesn't match their expectations. Often, in that case, they blame others for the discrepancy, rather than realizing that their own understanding could be wrong. We might categorize this as *childish* behavior.

This is the category of children Jesus is referring to in today's Gospel when he asks, *To what shall I compare this generation?* To be clear, this is *not* the type of children we hear about in other Scriptures: children who come to Jesus with open hearts and minds, and faithful trusting hearts. We can think of that description as "like a child," or "childlike."

Instead, Jesus is talking today about *childish* behavior – the behavior of his opponents who refuse to see the truth of who John the Baptist was, and who he, Jesus, is. These same opponents who believe that what they know and perceive to be right about salvation and God's kingdom is correct, and that any teaching that says otherwise must mean there is something wrong with the teacher. John the Baptist? *He is possessed by a demon.* Jesus? *Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.*

This certainly sounds like childish behavior, and we can see why Jesus is so frustrated. But it's not just that early Christian community of Matthew that this Gospel message addresses. It is every generation since, including this one. For who among us does not recognize this childishness in our own journey of faith, or discipleship, at times? Something about our "inner child" taking over?

If because of our sinful nature our inner child gets the upper hand in certain situations, well ... God is always forgiving when we are repentant. And with his grace, we can become more *childlike*, with open hearts and minds, and faithful trusting hearts. As we heard in today's reading from Isaiah, *I, the Lord, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go. If you would hearken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river.*

If we would just settle down our own expectations of the world around us, and relax our incessant need to control our lives, we might hear those words of the Lord a bit more clearly. We might find ourselves with more joy than we thought possible. And in this Advent season, we might find our longing for Christ deepening in our hearts. May it be so.

Saturday, December 16, 2017
(Lec. 186)

- 1) Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11
 - 2) Matthew 17:9a, 10-13
- Gospel related: **CCC** 718

SATURDAY
OF ADVENT
- SECOND WEEK

FOCUS: Finding the time to prepare for Christ's birth is both challenging and rewarding.

In today's Gospel, Jesus and the disciples are coming down the mountain following the Transfiguration, discussing the importance of Elijah's return. Jesus surprises the disciples by saying Elijah had already come. As he explains himself, the disciples understand he was referring to John the Baptist, the last of the great prophets before the fulfillment of the long-awaited promise: the coming of the Messiah.

John the Baptist is one of the great Advent figures. It is not his nontraditional dress or diet that is attracting followers. It is his message of promise – his message of hope. Most preachers identify with John this time of year, as we herald the good news of Jesus' imminent arrival amidst all the hustle and bustle of the season. We wonder whether anyone is pondering the dual message of Advent.

Does the reality that Jesus is on his way again sink in? Do we grasp this important reality of Advent? As we prepare our homes and ourselves to celebrate once again the birth of our Savior, are we preparing our hearts for Jesus' return?

With the time remaining this Advent, let us renew our resolve to scrape away from our hearts whatever hurtful scars may still exist – scars that are holding us back from embracing the wonderment of the disciples in today's Gospel.

As we move deeper into our Advent experience, let us acknowledge our joyful anticipation and humble appreciation for the Lord's arrival this Christmas into our homes. And let us also acknowledge our joyful anticipation and humble appreciation for his glorious return to us at the end of time.

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2017

(Lec. 8)

- 1) Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11
- 2) 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
- 3) John 1:6-8, 19-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 613, 717, 719 **CSDC** 121

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FOCUS: Let us be prophets for our time.

As we always do in the first part of Advent, today we encounter John the Baptist in the town of Bethany, near the Jordan. In John's Gospel, the Baptist is being confronted by religious officials: priests and Levites who have come from Jerusalem to question him. He readily admits that he is not the Christ, nor is he Elijah or the Prophet. He insists, quoting Isaiah, that he is only *the voice of one crying out in the desert, "make straight the way of the Lord."*

The religious leaders questioned him further, asking: *Why then do you baptize?* John answers, *I baptize with water; but there is one ... coming after me whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.*

Like all prophets, then, this was John's calling – to prepare the world for Jesus, to announce his coming. Even in his mother Elizabeth's womb, he had leapt for joy at the visit of Mary and his Lord. He was to confront the sins and sinners of his age, to encourage their repentance and to give them a ritual bath in the Jordan. John the Baptist brought to completion the work of the Old Testament prophets, and bore witness to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God (CCC 719).

How can we be more like John the Baptist? We can begin by better appreciating our own baptism, our own anointing, and our own call to holiness and mission. The Spirit of the Lord is upon *us*, and the Lord has anointed *us* to *bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord.*

Each of us can be the *voice of one crying out in the desert*. Strengthened by the word, graced by the sacraments, surrounded by our parish and fortified by a worldwide community of believers, we can truly live as followers of Jesus.

Let us pledge to stand together for the sake of the Gospel, and to raise our voices in defense of the truth. Speak up. That's what prophets do best.

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Monday, December 18, 2017
(Lec. 194)

- 1) Jeremiah 23:5-8
- 2) Matthew 1:18-25

Gospel related: CCC 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 744, 1507, 1846, 2666, 2812

MONDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: Set aside fear of the future and trust in God, who is present now and always.

It is very difficult to truly live in the present. Even in the midst of the happiest of moments, it is easy to be distracted thinking about the future or simply anticipating what's next. And it's just as easy to drift back into our memories, analyzing past events or regretting previous behavior. Living in the present takes courage, prayer and discipline. It demands that we be still, and be willing to notice our actions and emotions in this moment — that we look at reality as it is, and not as we wish it would be.

At first glance, Jeremiah's focus seems to be only on the future. He states two times in four sentences, "The days are coming!" Rather than a prediction, however, his statements are a promise. They are meant to offer encouragement, as well as courage, to help us live the moment that is now. For when those days *do* come, promises the prophet Jeremiah, a king shall reign and govern wisely, and Israel shall dwell in security. So hang in there right now, he says, and wait for God's plan to unfold.

There's a similar emphasis in today's Gospel. Aware that Mary was with child before they lived together, Joseph decided to divorce her quietly, privately. No one would have blamed Joseph if he had made that choice. He could have dwelt on what happened or allowed resentment about the past to become anger. He could have focused on the future and its unknowns. What would his friends say? What would they think about him? Who would care for the child?

Yet Joseph, a righteous man, chooses to respond in love toward his wife. So, when the angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph in a dream, the angel affirms Joseph's decision to love – and asks him to trust now, at this moment, in God's promise for his future: *Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home... She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus.*

Fear is a roadblock to recognizing God in the present moment. It derails our inner peace and stalls our ability for clarity. But Joseph did not allow fear – whether of the past or of the future – to keep him from acting as the righteous, loving man he was.

At the end of today's Gospel, Joseph makes the decision to take Mary into his home, and in so doing, claims Jesus as his own. As this Advent season draws to an end, may we, too, resolve to set aside fear so our hearts may become a more welcome home for Jesus. Then, when we celebrate the birth of our Savior anew this coming Christmas season, Jesus may be born more fully into our lives and hearts.

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Tuesday, December 19, 2017
(Lec. 195)

1) Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a

2) Luke 1:5-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 332, 523, 696, 716, 717, 718, 724, 1070, 2684

TUESDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: Let's keep our hearts and minds open to hear God's word.

In today's Scripture passages, we have two stories, centuries apart, about angels announcing the prospective births of sons. The first account, from the Old Testament, foretells the birth of Samson; the second, that of John the Baptist. In the first, the angel appears to the woman who will be Samson's mother. The angel in the second story appears to Zechariah, John's father.

Apart from the distinction of who receives the angel's message, there are many parallels between the two stories. Both mothers were past childbearing age; both families were childless, which was heartbreaking for them; both sons would be obliged to abstain from wine and strong drink; and both sons would be set apart for God's service, to have a definitive role in Israel's history and salvation.

The book of Judges tells us that Samson *is to be consecrated to God from the womb. It is he who will begin the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines.* Luke's Gospel says of John that, *he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him ... to prepare a people fit for the Lord.*

We know from history that both of these men became exactly who God promised them to be. And while to our own ears these stories may sound familiar, yet somewhat difficult to relate to, we might consider the overall message as more important than the medium in which it is given, while accepting that God's message can come to us innumerable ways.

The message is simple: God gives himself completely to us, wills only our good and always keeps his promises. In this time of Advent, as we focus on the history of our salvation, this is a good message to keep in mind. And we might keep our own hearts attentive to what God is saying to us, and how that message might be delivered. God often speaks to us through others, sometimes at Mass or in daily interactions. Maybe we've had someone reach out to us in an unexpected way that was profound and life-changing. Possibly, we have had one of those times when we just know that God was with us – one of those "God moments."

So let us take time to listen to him in prayer during this Advent. We may not have an angel of God appear to us, but soon we will celebrate God's most perfect revelation of himself: Jesus Christ, sent by our heavenly Father as a gift to a world in great need of him. May we be prepared to receive that gift with open hearts and minds.

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Wednesday, December 20, 2017
(Lec. 196)

- 1) Isaiah 7:10-14
- 2) Luke 1:26-38

WEDNESDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

Gospel related: **CCC** 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 494, 497, 505, 510, 559, 697, 706, 709, 723, 2571, 2617, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 **CSDC** 59

FOCUS: Emmanuel, God is with us.

As we move into the third week of Advent, our readings have shifted. They have gone from the prospect of the end times, when Christ will come again, to the prophecies and preparations for Christ's nativity, which was his coming into the world in human history. The readings are more upbeat, to our way of thinking. Most of these readings will be repeated several times over the next few weeks.

The Old Testament holds the treasures of our salvation history, and the birth of Jesus marks the culmination of the world's waiting for the promised Messiah. The first reading from Isaiah includes the prophecy that God will send a sign of his love and commitment to his people: *The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.*

In the Gospel, we hear the beginnings of the fulfillment of that promise centuries later. Gabriel appears to the young Mary in Nazareth, the virgin who would conceive and bear a son. With great humility and utmost trust in God's plan, Mary assents to be the mother of the Son of God. Through her faith and her participation in our salvation, God – who has always been present *to* us, and *for* us – will now be incarnated and *with* us. Emmanuel, or God with us.

What an honor, and what a challenge! It is unlikely that Mary had any idea of what sorrow would come with her humble acceptance of her role as mother of the Messiah. Neither did she likely have a full understanding of the glory that would be hers because of her yes to God. Still, it was not a naive decision. She loved and trusted God and submitted to his will, whatever that brought with it.

How at the ready is our yes to God? How disposed are we to submit to his will and to fully participate in his plans? Advent is an opportunity for us to reflect on our own attitude toward allowing God to be present in our lives. Are we ready? Are we willing? Are we welcoming? Can we say yes, as Mary did?

As we continue our own preparations to welcome Jesus anew into the world and into our hearts, let us say an extra prayer of thanksgiving for the choice of Mary as Jesus' mother, and for the example she gives us in accepting him into our lives.

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Thursday, December 21, 2017
(Lec. 197)

- 1) Song of Songs 2:8-14 or
Zephaniah 3:14-18a
- 2) Luke 1:39-45

THURSDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK
(Opt. Mem.

Saint Peter Canisius,
Priest and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 148, 448, 495, 523, 717, 2676, 2677

FOCUS: As we prepare for the coming of our Lord, we're invited to rejoice and to share our joy with others.

There are two choices for today's first reading. One is taken from the Song of Songs. This love poem has been interpreted as symbolizing God's love for his people, and Christ's love for the Church. Today's passage captures the joy of two people in love, both eagerly looking forward to being together again.

The other choice for the first reading comes from the prophet Zephaniah's song of joy. Zephaniah invited the Israelites to rejoice in anticipation of a time when God would not only come to his people, but would delight in them and renew them with his love.

Today's Gospel continues, and in a sense completes, this theme of joyful anticipation. The passage begins after the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive and give birth to Jesus, the promised Savior. After hearing this, Mary hurried off to visit her relative, Elizabeth. As Gabriel had also foretold, Elizabeth, in spite of her advanced age, was soon to give birth to a child. That child was John the Baptist.

When Mary arrived, Elizabeth was filled with elation. We're even told the baby within her *leaped for joy*. Both Mary and Elizabeth were overjoyed that God had kept his promise, and was sending his own Son to be with his people and to save them from their sins. Both women shared their happiness as they looked forward to Jesus' birth.

During Advent, we, too, look forward to celebrating Jesus' birth. We make room to welcome Christ in our hearts. We clear away everything that might crowd him out. We also rejoice with the delight of expecting a loved one's arrival.

Mary, the first to hear the good news, quickly reached out in loving service to her elderly relative, Elizabeth. Together, they joyfully anticipated Jesus entering human history on the first Christmas. Like Mary, by reaching out to others — even with a simple word or smile — we can enhance our own joy and the joy of those around us.

Our Lord is coming to be with us in a celebration of love! We can look forward eagerly to our own union with Christ as he offers himself to us, not only at Christmas, but in every celebration of the Eucharist. Can there be a more intimate giving of himself to us? Can there be any greater reason to rejoice? Can we wait for and receive him in joyful surrender?

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Friday, December 22, 2017
(Lec. 198)

- 1) 1 Samuel 1:24-28
- 2) Luke 1:46-56

Gospel related: **CCC** 148, 273, 422, 706, 722, 971, 2097, 2465, 2599, 2619, 2675, 2676, 2807, 2827 **CSDC** 59

FRIDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: Let our souls proclaim the greatness of the Lord.

With all of the festivities leading up to the holidays, it's easy to become overwhelmed — to lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas. The words Mary speaks in today's Gospel help rekindle the joy that resounds in each of our hearts as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior.

Mary's hymn of praise, her *Magnificat*, begins with adoration as her soul *proclaims the greatness of the Lord* and her *spirit rejoices*. She humbly acknowledges how God has blessed her, *his lowly servant*, and recalls how his involvement in human history offers us hope for fulfillment of the promise he makes to Israel.

The Church finds a model of faith and obedience in our Blessed Virgin. It is only through this gift of faith that we can embrace the mystery of our Lord's power and majesty. Mary accepts that nothing is impossible with God and offers her fiat, her yes to his will, even though it defies human reasoning and expectations.

The Word of God dwells within her — in her soul and in her womb. At this pivotal moment in her life, she thanks God in much the same way as Hannah did in our first reading. Hannah praises God for answering her prayers, and then dedicates her son to him.

Prayer is central to our faith. Hannah teaches us to persist in prayer and gives us confidence that our prayers will be answered. Mary upholds this tradition in her praise of God. And Jesus will later tell us, *Ask and you shall receive* (Mt. 7:7). Our Lord wants us to rely on him; it reveals our faith and trust. Mary's *Magnificat* expresses the power of our prayer as she acknowledges great things that the Mighty One has done. We can expect great things when we are in communion with God and obedient to his will.

In these next two days before Christmas, let us spend some time in prayer. Perhaps we might go to adoration, meditate on Scripture, contemplate the mysteries of Christ's life by praying the rosary, or spontaneously share what is in our hearts with God. Let our souls rejoice with Mary as we await the birth of our Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Saturday, December 23, 2017
(Lec. 199)

- 1) Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24
- 2) Luke 1:57-66

SATURDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John of Kanty, Priest)

FOCUS: God's mercy is ever present and available.

How many of us have had an experience where we have just thrown up our hands, and said, "give me a break!" Our frustration arises out of disbelief, or annoyance, or a true need for respite from some trial. But how often does that break come? Does the flat tire, or the last straw of a busy morning trying to get to work, magically fix itself? Does the referee who made a call we disagree with change his mind? Probably not.

But what about when we cry out to God to give us a break? When we cry, "Mercy!" does *he* answer? This entire season of Advent is a resounding "yes!" to that question as we celebrate the anniversary of God's mercy and grace coming to us two thousand years ago in the person of his Son. All of creation was awaiting salvation with eager expectation (cf. Rom: 8:19), and we remember that in these darkening days with the words of the Advent hymn "Oh Holy Night": "long lay the world, in sin and error pining, 'til He appeared and the soul felt its worth." All of creation was crying out for a break, and God answered.

God has answered our cries from the very beginning of time: in his leading the people out of Egypt, and in his promise to the Jewish people after their return from Babylonian exile, as we heard in our first reading. God answered in his promise to Elizabeth and Zechariah that they would have a son, and in the birth of that son, John, whom we heard about in today's Gospel.

But God's most gracious answer is found in Jesus Christ, his son. God's answer is to be "God with us": Emmanuel. In the promise of Christ's resurrection and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our world, God has given us the ultimate relief to our cries for mercy. We have been given the biggest break of all.

It is true that in our lives we will have times of great difficulty and trials, and perhaps even periods of doubt and desolation. We will still have moments of "give me a break!" But the hope that lies in Jesus Christ is that all of these worldly concerns will one day pass away. There are no flat tires, or bad referee calls in heaven.

"Give us a break," we cry. "Have mercy," we pray. And God does. Let us give thanks for that – then, now and always.

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2017

(Lec. 11)

1) 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

2) Romans 16:25-27

3) Luke 1:26-38

Gospel related: CCC 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 494, 497, 505, 510, 559, 697, 706, 709, 723, 2571, 2617, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 CSDC 59

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FOCUS: Mary is the model of trusting faith.

What is faith? For many, perhaps, the word refers to those truths we profess when we recite the Creed. Those articles of belief are *the* faith. Faith has another meaning, however: a *personal* meaning. Faith is not merely mental acceptance of truths. Faith is also *personal trust*. The Creed itself indicates this in its opening words. Not, "I believe *that* ..." but, "I believe *in* ..." The one we believe in, whom we trust, is God.

The greatest model of this trusting faith is the woman the Church places before us in today's Gospel: Mary, the trusting and faith-filled mother of the Lord.

The kind of trusting faith we see in Mary models a faith that is always open to God. She believes in God's love for her and in his promises, and gives herself wholly over to him to do with her and her life whatever he would.

Yet Mary's faith was not blind. She doubted and questioned. *How can this be?* Mary asked the angel who told her she was to be the mother of God's Son. What Mary questioned, however, was not so much God, as her own ability to *understand* God and his plan for her life. Even in the midst of perplexity, however, Mary confessed that God knew best, even if she could not understand what he was about: *May it be done to me according to your word*, she told the angel.

That assent to God's plan for her was not a one-time thing. She lived this faithfulness every day forward from that moment, amid joys and sufferings. We are familiar with some of those: the challenges of traveling to Bethlehem, and childbirth in a stable; searching for the child Jesus for several days when he had remained in the Temple to teach; watching Jesus leave home to begin his ministry; and, of course, standing at the foot of the cross as he was crucified.

Can there be any doubt that it is precisely this trusting faith of Mary's that we need today? We need the kind of faith that Mary had, the faith she models for us: faith which continues to trust in God amid events in our world and our lives we do not understand.

Faith, then, is not something we can summon up by willpower. Faith, the catechism tells us, "is a supernatural gift from God" (179). And who can doubt that this faith will be given to us in the same measure in which it was given to Mary who herself modeled this faith? Her faith allowed Jesus to be born into the world. Let our faith welcome that birth tomorrow, and share it with the world.

CHRISTMAS, 2017- VIGIL

(Lec. 13)

- 1) Isaiah 62:1-5
- 2) Acts 13:16-17, 22-25
- 3) Matthew 1:1-25 or 1:18-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 744, 1507, 1846, 2666, 2812 **CSDC** 378

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY (Vigil Mass)

FOCUS: The mystery of Christmas is meant for everyone.

There is a great story about a family with young children, and their manger scene at home. It goes like this: one day, a young mom with five young children decided early in Advent that it was time to set up the manger scene at home. She and the children worked all day getting things set up. Of course, Baby Jesus was left out of the scene, to be placed there late on Christmas Eve. Everyone seemed to be happy to take part in the manger scene project, and it was a good opportunity for a young mom to help her children grow in faith.

A few days later, she noticed that a Star Wars action figure had been carefully placed at the manger. She removed it. The next day, the figure was back, and was joined by a teddy bear. Again, she removed both figures. They returned the next day, joined by a couple of dolls. Instead of removing them, she decided just to watch what would happen next. The following day, Raggedy Andy appeared, joining the others at the manger. It was quite a collection of characters that her children placed at the manger. Finally, she asked the oldest child why they were doing this. She replied, "Because you told us that Christmas is meant for everyone!"

The interesting collection of characters that found their way to this family's manger scene echoes the interesting collection of characters in this evening's beautiful Gospel. This telling of the genealogy of Jesus includes its own curious collection of characters that were a part of the line of people that God used to bring about the Incarnation — Jesus' birth into our world. This history of Jesus' human family includes people who strove to live lives of great holiness, and people who were notorious in their sinfulness. There are men and women who sought to live their lives of faith as well as they could, and there are those who strayed from the path of holiness. Like that bunch at the family's manger scene, they are quite a collection of characters, and each of them, guided in a most mysterious way by God, had a role to play in the unfolding mystery of salvation.

Take a moment and look around this evening's very full church. What an interesting collection of characters gathered here! We are young and old, tall and short, male and female, from near and far, and each of us is here in response to God's invitation. Each of us is here because of the great mystery we celebrate tonight, which is this: that God so loves each of us that he has given us the gift of his only Son, so that through his life we might know true life, eternal life. Each of us has a part to play in the continued unfolding of this mystery of salvation, because, as the young child in our story so wisely noted, looking at that manger scene at home, "Christmas is for everyone!"

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CHRISTMAS, 2017 - NIGHT

(Lec. 14)

- 1) Isaiah 9:1-6
- 2) Titus 2:11-14
- 3) Luke 2:1-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 486, 515, 525

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY (Mass at Night)

FOCUS: The newborn Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. He is God's presence in our world.

We are all very familiar with the events of the Christmas story. We know the story of the virgin mother who, with Joseph, her husband, must leave home and family to comply with a census edict, sending them almost a hundred miles away. We know the story of a young soon-to-be-father whose life is turned upside down by the news of this child, and yet who trusts, even if he does not always understand. We are familiar with the shepherds: folks on the very fringes of society whose lives are considered insignificant and unclean, and yet they have been chosen by the Lord to be chief witnesses of this great and glorious event. They are witnesses to the birth of one who will forever change the course of human history, and the direction of every human heart and mind.

We recall the appearance of the star, a heavenly light that comes to hover over the manger and illuminates a newborn child, so precious, so pure and so full of love that even the very heavens are in awe. And how could we forget the splendid angels, whose heavenly voices fill the night skies with songs of praise and wonder?

This is, indeed, a night like no other: it's a night that unites all generations, all cultures, all races and all people of good will. For on this night the very heavens are joined to earth, and God's presence with his creation is seen in a new and unique way.

Tonight, we gather to celebrate the birth of Christ: God's greatest gift; his last and greatest initiative in the great drama of our salvation. After all, it is the gift of God's presence itself made real in this holy child that lifts our hearts and fuels our song of joy.

So how do we give thanks for this greatest of all gifts? Christmas is a time for giving gifts. We love to share with loved ones, to surprise them with a well-thought-out and unexpected gift, to see our children's eyes light up with joy and excitement as they receive their gifts from Santa and from family. Oh yes, we love our gifts!

So what gift will we bring to the newborn king this Christmas day? Perhaps a commitment to love others a little more deeply, to forgive others a little more easily? To be a people of dialogue and peace-building, who see the dignity of all and the potential in the least?

Perhaps our gift could be a stronger commitment to our Christian faith, to live it well and to let it guide our actions and words. To be part of a community of faith that gathers each week to worship this newborn king who is Lord and Savior of all.

There is joy in our hearts this night as we join the shepherds in adoration. May the light of this holy joy be with us this day and always. May we grow ever deeper in our love of this great and holy gift who is Christ the Lord.

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CHRISTMAS, 2017 - DAY

(Lec. 16)

- 1) Isaiah 52:7-10
- 2) Hebrews 1:1-6
- 3) John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 541, 268, 291, 423, 445, 454, 461, 473, 496, 504, 505, 526, 530, 594, 612, 705, 706, 717, 719, 1216, 1692, 1996, 2466, 2780, 2787 **CSDC** 121, 262

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY

(Mass during the Day)

FOCUS: We all have a part to play in the proclamation of the Word becoming flesh.

The pastor and Parish Worship Commission decided one year to do something different in the Christmas pageant than using a doll in the role of Jesus. They debated back and forth what to do instead, then finally settled on putting a light inside the manger that would glow upward at just the right moment during the pageant.

Everything went well during the rehearsals, and then came the big night! When the moment came for Jesus to be born, the stagehand forgot to turn on the light in the manger. Off- stage you could hear the director saying in a loud whisper, "Turn on Jesus."

Saint John wrote: *What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* One of the great synonyms used by Saint John for Jesus is Light.

On this great and glorious day, we are reminded once again that no matter how many people try to bring darkness upon the earth, Jesus will always be found dispersing the darkness with his own glorious Light. Some may wonder how this comes about – the darkness of the world being dispersed by the Light of Jesus – but we do not have to wonder.

Every glad tidings we bring by taking warm clothing to the town's shelter disperses the darkness of despair with the light of Jesus' hope. Every glad tidings we bring by supporting our Advent Giving Tree project disperses the darkness of despair with the light of Jesus' hope. Every glad tidings we bring by sharing a meal with a lonely widow disperses the darkness of despair with the light of Jesus' hope.

The suffering that humanity endures must give way to the better angels that dwell within us. While few, if any, of us have the power necessary to end world violence, hunger or disease, all of us have the power to bring the Light of Jesus, where possible, right here to our personal worlds of influence.

We also pray that the littlest and youngest among us – all starry-eyed today over the presents under our trees – will be the diplomat, farmer or researcher who brings lasting peace, the eradication of hunger or the cure to the diseases that plague our world, as they grow up knowing the warm embrace of the Light of the World.

If we understand the meaning of "the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us," then we know when all the presents have been opened, the decorations have come down and the parties have subsided, our *Christmas Joy* is far from depleted. For our mission as disciples of the newborn King is to always make sure to "Turn on Jesus."

Tuesday, December 26, 2017
(Lec. 696)

1) Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59

2) Matthew 10:17-22

Gospel related: CCC 161, 728, 1821

**SAINT STEPHEN,
THE FIRST MARTYR
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Let us trust in Jesus when we experience hardship or rejection as his disciples.

Christmas is a feast of joy, of course. But the day after Christmas each year reminds us that this joy has a price when we remember Saint Stephen, the Church's first martyr. In a dispute with his enemies, the deacon Stephen cries out: *Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.* Infuriated by the supposed blasphemy in those words, his enemies take Stephen outside the city and stone him to death.

Jesus never promised his disciples that they would have only joy, success and happiness. Both of today's readings are about the *price* of discipleship. As exemplified with Stephen, *You will be hated by all because of my name*, Jesus says at the end of today's Gospel. Only after these words of warning about the cost of discipleship does he proclaim the Good News: *But whoever endures to the end will be saved.*

But central to the heart of his message, and our Christian faith, is his promise that we are never alone. He counsels us in the Gospel, *do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* We see the fruits of that promise in Stephen's witness, for what strengthened him in his proclamation before his opponents was that he was *filled with the Holy Spirit ... and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*

Choosing to follow Jesus will often be a joyful and satisfying experience for us, his disciples. But it also may include failures, disappointments and rejection. While Jesus repeatedly tells his followers to not be afraid, he minces no words in preparing them, and us, for the challenges that come along with proclaiming him Lord and Savior.

We need to remember Jesus' words of encouragement and promise when we become discouraged or rejected by others because of our love for Jesus. And we can find hope and inspiration in the example of Saint Stephen, who endured to the end because he believed in Jesus' promise of salvation. Let us trust in Jesus' words and depend on his Spirit to provide the words to speak when challenged. And let us confidently anticipate the joy awaiting us when we ultimately meet him face to face.

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Wednesday, December, 27, 2017
(Lec. 697)

1) 1 John 1:1-4

2) John 20:1a, 2-8

Gospel related: CCC 575, 640, 2174

**SAINT JOHN,
APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Are we prepared to enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus?

A good question to ask ourselves today is this: do I believe that Jesus is real? It seems that some people have an idea or concept of Jesus, but it is very abstract. It's as if Jesus is "The Force" from *Star Wars*: something that we know is out there, somewhere far away and we can sometimes feel, but definitely not some *one*. Jesus is not like "The Force." He is someone – a person whom we are able to encounter and be in relationship with. This is what Saint John is trying to convey to us in the first reading today. He speaks of what he has *heard, seen, looked upon* and *touched* because Jesus is not an abstract idea, he is very real.

This is what we just celebrated at Christmas – that Jesus freely chose to become man, to take on flesh, to share in our nature. God did not want to remain at a distance and communicate through prophets and intermediaries anymore. He wanted to show us how real he is. So he became man, he lived our life, he called disciples to follow him and they entered into relationship with him. Jesus is just as real today as he was two thousand years ago, but now he calls to you and me, desiring to encounter us and to enter into relationship with us.

This can be an intimidating task for us, because we look at Jesus' life and the lives of the Apostles and see that they encountered so much suffering in striving to do God's will. As we encounter Jesus, enter into relationship with him and strive to follow his will there will certainly be times of suffering, but that is not the point. As Saint John says, we do this so *that our joy may be complete*.

Jesus is very real; he is here today ready to encounter us and enter more deeply into a relationship with us. He does this not to throw a cross at us and tell us to offer it up, but to give us the fullness of joy that we were made for. This finds its completion in the Resurrection, which we heard about in today's Gospel. Jesus is able to take all of the suffering, all of the pain, all of the trials of our lives and nail them to the cross that they might be transformed through his power into the joy and life of the Resurrection.

As we continue through this Christmas season let us ask ourselves these questions: Do I believe that Jesus is real? Do I believe that he is here today ready to encounter me? Do I believe that I can enter into a deeper relationship with him? Do I believe that he can take all the pain and suffering in my life and, through his cross and Resurrection, bring joy and life out of it? We ask these questions not to impose a burden on anyone, but *that our joy may be complete*.

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Thursday, December, 28, 2017
(Lec. 698)

- 1) 1 John 1:5–2:2
- 2) Matthew 2:13-18

Gospel related: CCC 333, 530

**THE HOLY INNOCENTS,
MARTYRS
- FEAST**

FOCUS: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

Today, on this fourth day of the Octave of Christmas, we celebrate a martyr's feast for the third day in a row. Two days ago was the feast of Saint Stephen. Yesterday was that of the disciple John. And now, on this day, we remember those Holy Innocents slaughtered by King Herod, as we just heard in Matthew's Gospel. It might seem strange to celebrate the birth of Christ, and then follow it immediately with memorials for those who were martyred. Strange, that is, until we realize that what we are commemorating is not these martyrs' deaths, but their birth into eternal life in heaven. Christ was born into humanity so that humanity would be born into Christ.

Our first reading today gives us insight to further reflect on this juxtaposition of feasts. John's Letter is a proclamation of Christ's message and an exhortation to not only *understand* the message, intellectually, but to *live* the message, practically and faithfully. It's the early Christian community's version of "if you're going to talk the talk, you better walk the walk." John says, *This is the message that we have heard from Jesus Christ and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.* That light, without shadow or darkness, cannot lead us astray or down the wrong path.

Contrast the message of John, and the lives of the martyrs, with King Herod in today's Gospel. His reaction to the birth of Christ was not to choose light and life, but to act out of fear, pride, hatred and malice. *When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under.* Let us think about that for a moment – a king is so afraid of losing power, and so furious at being deceived and humiliated, that he orders the massacre of *toddler and infant boys*. Toddler and infant boys! It is beyond rational comprehension.

Yet, the very evil that he perpetrates upon these children – these Holy Innocents – is conquered for them by the reason he perpetrates it: the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus' birth, of which Herod is so terrified, is the salvation of all who walk in his light. The children Herod slaughtered became martyrs because they gave their lives for their Savior.

We may not undergo martyrdom in the way those we honor this week did. We may never give our lives *for* Christ in the ultimate sense. But we are called by our baptism to give our lives over *to* Christ, and John reminds us that the path is brightly lighted.

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Friday, December, 29, 2017
(Lec. 202)

- 1) 1 John 2:3-11
- 2) Luke 2:22-35

THE FIFTH DAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF THE NATIVITY
OF THE LORD
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Thomas Becket, Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 149, 529, 575, 583, 587, 618, 695, 711, 713

FOCUS: The love and light of Christ is revealed in the lives of those who keep his commandments.

The psalm today implores us *to announce his salvation, day after day. Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.*

This isn't just poetic rhetoric. In keeping God's commandments, our lives will reveal the love and light of Christ. As the Letter of John tells us today, *the true light is already shining*. The writer of the First Letter of John was not only speaking *to* the community of Christians at that time, he was speaking *of* their community: Christ's light shines through them.

Even Simeon, in today's Gospel, recognized the infant Christ as the true light shining (long before John's community of Christians existed). In this passage, we learn that Simeon was a righteous and devout man, *awaiting the consolation of Israel*. Because of his faith, when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus into the Temple, Simeon recognized, in the Christ child, the sign of hope that God had promised the Israelites. He took the child into his arms and blessed God, praying, *Lord ... your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you prepared ... a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.*

As a righteous and devout man, Simeon both saw and professed the light of Christ. The early Christians to whom John was writing did the same. As the community of believers today, the Church continues to bring the light of Christ to the world when we keep his commandments to love one another.

This light shines through in the care and concern for others; in the hope that prevails, despite disappointments and obstacles; in the work for peace in this violent world; in the love of others, whether family or strangers.

When we treat others with love, when we seek *to walk just as he walked*, we find that we do remain in the light. We grow in our knowledge of and belief in Jesus. When we keep his commandments, and believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are inspired and motivated to share Christ's light faithfully.

May we be like Simeon and like John's Christian community as we continue to celebrate the birth of our Savior. May we express our gratitude for the Father's gift of his Son by loving one another so that Christ's light may shine brightly in our world.

Saturday, December, 30, 2017
(Lec. 203)

1) 1 John 2:12-17

2) Luke 2:36-40

Gospel related: **CCC** 711

THE SIXTH DAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF THE NATIVITY
OF THE LORD

FOCUS: Proclaim the Good News of the Savior's birth and remain confident in his promises.

In our Gospel today, we heard of the prophetess Anna and her encounter with the infant Jesus when he was presented for his consecration in the Temple. Anna was a widow of many years, and now eighty-four years old she had devoted her life to prayer and fasting, never leaving the Temple.

As a widow, Anna was among the least powerful in her community – completely dependent on God's goodness for her livelihood. Yet it was she, not the religious leaders, who was present in the Temple, and who *spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem*. Anna was an unlikely and unexpected source of God's message of salvation to those who encountered her.

In the reading from the First Letter of John, the writer addresses all generations of God's family who are part of the Christian community. They are encouraged, because they have experienced and believe in the saving power of God's forgiveness, to be confident in their ability to stand strong in the face of temptation and the enticements of the world. They are reminded that if they do the will of God, they will remain forever.

Our readings today build on the messages of Christmas. Jesus, our Savior, has come for all people, especially the weak and powerless. The message of God's goodness can often be found in the places we least expect, proclaimed by the powerless – like the shepherds on the night of his birth, and by the prophetess Anna, at the time of his consecration.

As we reflect on the simple and unusual ways the message of God's love and mercy comes to us, let us also be aware of the ways we are each called to proclaim our belief in his goodness. Like those encouraged by the writer of the First Letter of John, let our belief in God's goodness empower us to do his will. And like the prophetess, Anna, who couldn't keep from sharing the good news of the Savior's birth with all she met, let us have the courage to proclaim his goodness to all who need to hear his saving message.

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER, 31, 2017

(Lec. 17)

- 1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
or Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3
- 2) Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17
or Hebrews 11:18, 11-12, 17-19
- 3) Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22, 39-40

Gospel related: **CCC** 149, 529, 575, 583, 587, 618, 695, 711, 713

**THE HOLY FAMILY
OF JESUS, MARY
AND JOSEPH
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Feast of the Holy Family.

Each of our readings today gives us a glimpse into the complications of family life – and those glimpses let us know we are not alone in our trials and tribulations. From the earliest days of Israel's history, God was interceding in the difficulties of relationships: commanding honor and respect of parents by children, and of children by parents; relieving childlessness and promising faithfulness to those who abided in faithfulness to him; instructing us in what it means to love as Christ loves; and ordering the family to raising of children and the placing of God at the center of their lives.

We are also reminded today of the importance of the fact that Jesus Christ was born into a human family, and that offers us hope for making Christ the center of our own families. God could have chosen any number of ways to enter into human history, and the way he chose was to have Jesus be incarnate of a woman – the Blessed Virgin Mary – and be raised by her and Joseph in a household common to that time. In other words, God did not just take on human form in the person of Jesus, but entered into every aspect of human life, engaging with the authentic human experience of family life. Family life is sanctifying, and as Jesus sanctified his family, he will sanctify ours when we welcome him in.

That we celebrate this feast today, on New Year's Eve, also offers food for thought, for it ties into the calendar practice of new beginnings. Many of us will make resolutions for the New Year. Many of us will break them shortly thereafter! But following the example of the Holy Family can strengthen our resolve to grow our families in faith and joy, and give us the confidence to weather the storms of its difficulties.

As we look ahead to this new calendar year, and think about the families in which we reside – whether they are by blood or by choice – let us entrust them to the Lord. And let us ask for the grace necessary to unite ourselves and our families to Christ in the same way he united himself to his family, and to us.

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