

# DECEMBER

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18 19

20 21 22 23

24(day)

CHRISTMAS 26

27 28 29 30 31

**YEAR A  
WEEKDAYS II**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2019**

(Lec. 1)

- 1) Isaiah 2:1-5
  - 2) Romans 13:11-14
  - 3) Matthew 24:37-44
- Gospel related: CCC 673

**FIRST SUNDAY  
OF ADVENT**

**FOCUS:** Jesus wants us to use the Advent season wisely – with prayer, penance and longing for God.

*Adventus* in Latin means to await the arrival of someone or something of great importance. For Christians, this season is very much identified with preparations for the birth of Christ, so much so that the second meaning of Advent is often diminished, that of preparing for the Second Coming of Christ in Glory. The readings that begin the Advent season capture that second meaning more than the first.

Isaiah was prophesying at a particularly dark time for Israel and Judah. It was nearly eight centuries before the coming of the Messiah. The chosen people were under attack from the Assyrians marching from their capital city Nineveh in the north. What was to follow would be a long period of war, exile and bloodshed. To shine a light into this darkness, Isaiah was given a message of hopefulness to help God's people keep the faith during their time of affliction.

Wars will end, the suffering will give way once more to glory, when swords would become plowshares and spears would be pruning hooks. Jerusalem will be restored, the Temple rebuilt and *all nations shall stream toward it*. Isaiah was given a double prophecy – the people would return to their land in the near future, but in the distance, God promised to bring them to the new and heavenly Jerusalem where it will be *established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills*. It is quite simply the hope of heaven, and in the Savior who will bring it about. Armed with that powerful hope, Isaiah tells his countrymen: *Let us walk in the light of the Lord!*

When Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, for them it was also a time of darkness and uncertain futures. The Church was being persecuted in its infancy, something Paul knew well as he himself was once the cause of the Christian's pain. Like Isaiah, Paul points to a brighter future for those who endure the cross – they will one day wear the crown of righteousness. He encourages the Christians at Rome to *throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed*. The same can be said for us today. Our suffering is earthly, but our hope is eternal. Advent calls us to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* and let him guide us to himself and to the kingdom.

In today's Gospel from Matthew, Jesus is also facing a time of testing and challenge. It is Wednesday of Holy Week. He will soon experience betrayal and abandonment and will be put on trial, sentenced to die and led out to the cross. He knew the hour of his passing, the means by which it would occur, and by whose hand the deed would be committed. We, however, do not receive that same knowledge: *for you do not know on which day your Lord will come*. Therefore, Jesus admonishes all to be awake and alert, preparing for the end of our lives, the end of the world and his second coming in glory. We must learn from those in Scripture and throughout history who did nothing to prepare themselves.

Jesus wants us to use the Advent season wisely, not only to prepare for the coming of Christmas, but with prayer, penance and longing for God, to prepare for the coming of Christ, as a baby and as a king.

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Monday, December 2, 2019

(Lec. 175)

1) Isaiah 4:2-6

2) Matthew 8:5-11

Gospel related: CCC 543, 1386, 2610

MONDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: God's mercy and healing bring each of us abundant grace.

There are some very familiar words to us in today's Gospel passage from Matthew – words very similar to the ones we say every time we celebrate at the Lord's Table. But the speaker today is not a disciple of Jesus, he is a centurion: a professional officer of the Roman – that is, the occupying country's – army. He is an educated, literate, military man in charge of about 100 men.

As foreign, perhaps, as the idea of a centurion is to us, his faith is certainly familiar. Despite his power and cultural differences with Jesus, he approaches Jesus with the utmost humility to ask for healing for his servant. This act of humility is eye-opening. First, we see how deeply he cares for his servant in actively seeking to relieve his suffering. Furthermore, it is striking that he seeks help from Jesus – someone so different from him politically and religiously. But Jesus never asks him why. He simply responds that he will go to his servant.

And the centurion says in response, *Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant shall be healed.* In doing so, he shows his faith in Jesus and his power. This is certainly an unexpected – and therefore unfamiliar – action by a Roman official. But the centurion's faith is not any different from the faith of the Communion of Saints. Ultimately, while his identity is unfamiliar to us, his faith is not.

Our season of Advent is also a time of the familiar. Our spiritual practices during this holy season might echo the familiar to us. We hear similar songs, readings, and prayers as in previous Advent times. The familiar is good, and invites us to a deeper relationship with God.

But we can also not lose sight of the opportunities for growth that can come from the unexpected and the unfamiliar. We can keep our hearts open to the unexpected grace of the season. And with that grace, may we, like Isaiah, behold the *smoking cloud by day and a light of flaming fire by night* as our hearts journey to the unexpected places God invites us.

As we gather around the eucharistic table today, let us pray in a special way the words of the centurion. May our humility before the Lord help us to grow to an exceptional faith, like his. And may we recognize that God's mercy and healing transcend all barriers to bring each of us abundant grace.

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Tuesday, December 3, 2019  
(Lec. 176)

- 1) Isaiah 11:1-10
- 2) Luke 10:21-24

TUESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FIRST WEEK  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Francis Xavier,  
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 1083, 2603

FOCUS: In Christ, the Father reveals his plan of salvation for the world.

Advent is our preparation for Christmas. Once Advent begins, we start thinking of the holidays – we decorate our homes, plan for family gatherings and parties and purchase our Christmas gifts and presents. All of this is good, and if done in the context of our Christian belief, it can be a truly holy time. But that is not the whole story.

While it is true that Advent leads to Christmas, the real focus of this holy season is the return of Christ in glory. To help us in that, the Church places before us a selection of Scripture passages highlighting our Christian hope and the wisdom of God revealed to us in Jesus, whose birth we celebrate and whose return in glory we anticipate.

Like the other prophets of old, Isaiah comes with a message of consolation for Israel in its time of trial. Today he gives us a series of powerful images that describe the long-awaited Messiah as well as the impact his Gospel will have on our world.

In the image of the *shoot from the stump of Jesse*, Isaiah wants us to see this branch as a living shoot pregnant with new life – full of potential. As Christians, we now recognize this shoot as Christ, who while bearing the fullness of divinity, is also one with us in our humanity. It is through Christ that the new world Isaiah proclaims will come into being.

And this new world, grounded in God's wisdom and not in the demands and desires of humanity, will certainly be different from its broken predecessor. To underpin this difference, Isaiah uses several thought-provoking images that at first glance seem far-fetched: the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the child, the cow and the bear, the baby and the cobra. Surely they could never share the same space!

Yet because this new world is God's plan, it can only come about through his action and power. Jesus makes it a reality through his mission and passion. Rejoicing in the Spirit that Isaiah described, Jesus reminds us that to share in this new world, we must set aside former ways and with childlike hope, embrace the truth of God's plan for humanity.

Today the Church celebrates Saint Francis Xavier, one of the great Jesuit missionaries of the sixteenth century. In doing so, we honor a life dedicated to sharing that vision of a new world where God's Spirit will change the hearts of many and his glory will be known by all. May Saint Francis Xavier intercede for us in whatever way we need him this Advent, so that we may be ready at all times to meet Christ in the Eucharist, and when he returns in glory.

Wednesday, December 4, 2019  
(Lec. 177)  
1) Isaiah 25:6-10a  
2) Matthew 15:29-37

WEDNESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FIRST WEEK  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint John Damascene,  
Priest and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 1329, 1335

**FOCUS:** God comes to meet us, respond to our deepest needs and save us.

Humans have always been inspired by mountains. They are impressive in size and seem immovable. Their peaks offer beautiful vistas where the messiness of life seems far away. No wonder mountaintops are experienced as sacred spaces, closer to the heavens and to God.

In Scripture, there are many sacred mountaintops. In the Old Testament, there is Mount Sinai/Mount Horeb [Exodus/Deuteronomy respectively], where God gives the Ten Commandments; Mount Horeb, where Elijah hears God in a whisper, and Mount Zion, where the Temple is built. On these mountains, people experience God in their midst; these are sacred spaces of encounter and communication between God and his people.

Mountains have spiritual significance in the New Testament as well. Jesus goes to mountaintops for prayer, such as the mountain of the Transfiguration and the Mount of Olives. Jesus goes to mountains to preach and inspire, to give the Sermon on the Mount and the Great Commission.

But Jesus' sacred mountains do not always seem like places of peaceful retreat and inspiration, away from the messiness of life. In today's Gospel, great crowds follow Jesus up the mountain: *the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute* – desperate for his mercy and healing touch. For three days, Jesus works wonders among this needy crowd, curing people and making them whole. His heart is moved with pity for them. Not wanting them to go away hungry, he miraculously feeds them all with a few loaves and fish. This sacred mountain is full of activity, crowds and noise. It is not where people escape the messiness of the world to meet God, but where God comes to meet people, respond to their deepest needs and save them.

The prophet Isaiah foresaw this, as we heard in the first reading. Isaiah's prophesy is that God's mountain is a place of wholeness for all people of all nations. There is no hunger or thirst, no pain or death. People rejoice together in the saving power of God. In today's Gospel, Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. On God's mountain, Jesus heals and cures; he has mercy on the crowd and feeds them. The people are amazed and give glory to God who is in their midst.

Our God is not far away from us, but incarnate in our lives and hearts through Jesus. We need not escape the world to meet God, but rather God comes to meet us. In this liturgy, as on God's mountain, he is in our midst. He communicates with us through his Word, and now we encounter him in the Eucharist. Partaking of his body and blood, he comes to meet us most intimately, to feed us, heal us and save us.

Thursday, December 5, 2019  
(Lec. 178)

1) Isaiah 26:1-6

2) Matthew 7:21, 24-27

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

THURSDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FIRST WEEK

**FOCUS:** Amidst all the shifting sands of the world, Jesus offers himself as the eternal foundation of our lives.

Picture a storm: the rain pelts down like a violent attack, soaking us to the bone; the wind howls noisily, attempting to uproot our feet from the earth. Surrounded by such elements, our intuition is to seek shelter – a place of warmth and safety.

We have ample options for such refuge amid the storms of our lives. While one person might look to material goods or daily pleasures, someone else might find comfort in busyness and productive work, while a third person relies on human relationships or popularity. Though none of these things are bad in and of themselves, Jesus in today's Gospel speaks of a stronghold that will stand the test of time, one that cannot be shaken. Jesus himself is this stronghold on whom our lives can be built. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: *the Lord is an eternal Rock*.

But what does it look like to shelter ourselves in Jesus, as opposed to in the shifting sands that surround us on a daily basis? Jesus gives us the key, which is to listen to his words and act on them. He phrases this another way: to do the will of his Father in heaven. For many of us, this instruction may appear vague or confusing. Which of Jesus' words are most important to listen to? How should we act on them in our modern context? What exactly is the will of God the Father?

Today's first reading proves more specific, providing a glimpse of God's priorities and, in turn, what our priorities should be like if we commit ourselves to following God's will. According to the prophet Isaiah, *God humbles those in high places, and the lofty city he brings down. This city is trampled underfoot by the needy, by the footsteps of the poor*. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture, God reveals his heart for the poor – not simply the materially impoverished, but also the poor in spirit, the sick, the outcast. Such individuals have faced torrential storms, and these storms have forced them to rely on nothing and no one but God himself. Material goods or pleasures; physical or mental health; work or relationships – all these things fall short as a source of refuge or healing at the end of the day.

To do the will of the Father, to listen and act on Jesus' words, then, is to model our lives on the poor, who stand in stark contrast to the prestige and wealth of the world. As we prepare for the birth of Jesus this Advent, let us remember that we await a God who made himself poor, vulnerable and weak. Just as Jesus was dependent fully on his Father, may we, too, grow in our dependence on God first and foremost. There is no shelter more firm, no refuge that can stand the test of time, as Jesus himself.

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Friday, December 6, 2019  
(Lec. 179)

- 1) Isaiah 29:17-24
- 2) Matthew 9:27-31

Gospel related: CCC 439, 2616

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

**FOCUS:** Jesus' coming changes everything.

This time of year, we start seeing holiday movies centering on the idea of "the magic of Christmas spirit." At the end of many of these films, the antagonist is fundamentally changed for the better: the Grinch's heart grows, Scrooge becomes generous, and dozens of films end with skeptics finding joy in the season. While most of these holiday classics are secular, they do touch on an idea that we as Catholics believe: Christmas changes things. The difference is that we don't believe that Santa or magic is what causes these changes; rather, we know that Jesus' coming is what changed everything.

During this preparatory season of Advent, we focus on paving the way for Christ's coming, both at Christmas and at the second coming. Isaiah prophesies many wonderful changes when the Lord comes: the deaf will hear, the blind will see, tyrants will be gone. People will rejoice, reverencing and honoring God.

We also consider how welcoming Christ into our lives can change us. The blind men in today's Gospel cry out in faith to Jesus for mercy, and Jesus gives them sight.

While Jesus healed many physical and spiritual ailments during his time on earth, the greater change was felt by all creation. Jesus' incarnation, followed by his death and resurrection, healed the divide between God and humanity, conquering sin and death and opening the gates of heaven for us.

This is the fundamental difference that Jesus can make in each of our lives: the difference between joy and sorrow, spiritual blindness and sight, life and death. This is why each year we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," asking him to come into the darkness of the world and our lives. Jesus makes all the difference. He can guide us to be more loving, more generous, more faithful people. He can heal our wounds and save our souls, if we simply open our hearts to him.

We are inspired by the blind men in the Gospel, who are cured based on their faith. They realized that Jesus had the power to make a huge difference in their lives, even if they didn't fully understand how. Still, they approached him, asked for his pity and their lives were changed. What might Jesus do for us if we simply dared to ask?

May God increase our understanding and belief that the true meaning of Christmas is that Jesus' coming can fundamentally change everything. And we pray that as we continue through the Advent season, the Holy Spirit will open our hearts to receive Christ and allow him to work in us and through us for the glory of God. Come, Lord Jesus.

**Saint Nicholas (270-342)** - Historically, little is known of Nicholas. As Bishop of Myra, a small town in present-day Turkey, he was imprisoned for his refusal to denounce Christianity during the persecution by Diocletian. Released after Constantine became emperor, it is believed that Nicholas attended the first Council of Nicaea in 325. Legends of Nicholas' concern for the poor became popular throughout Europe, as did his practice of secret gift-giving.

Saturday, December 7, 2019  
(Lec. 180)  
1) Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26  
2) Matthew 9:35–10:1,  
5a, 6-8

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

Gospel related: CCC 543, 1509, 2121, 2443, 2611 CSDC 184, 251

FOCUS: Let us give without cost all that we have received without cost.

Matthew has an interesting observation in today's Gospel: *At the sight of the crowds, [Jesus'] heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.* This is an interesting observation, because one might ask, "How could they be so?" The people Jesus is encountering are faithful Jews who go to synagogue. Yes, they have physical and other tangible problems – we know this, because he cures them of *every disease and illness*. But that's not what moves him to pity, according to Matthew. What moves him is what is implied here, and what we know to be true from other Scriptures: the people's religious leaders have failed them.

The Pharisees and Sadducees are consistently portrayed as hypocrites who place undue demands on their people while taking advantage of their own status, wealth and power. They uphold the letter of the law while decimating its spirit.

It is not surprising, then, that Jesus' response, after curing the physical ills of the people, is to call forth his Twelve disciples and give them authority to act in his name. He calls forth new leadership for the people: new shepherds who will not abandon them, and who will proclaim, as Jesus does, that *the Kingdom of heaven is at hand*. And who will freely give – unlike their current religious leadership who demanded tithes, tax and other things in return – what they have themselves received.

We today are not so different. We are a people, a Church, a body of Christ who are troubled and abandoned by some of our shepherds. We, too, cause Jesus' heart to be moved with pity for us. And yet his response today is the same: *the Kingdom of heaven is at hand*. And we know that it is he whom we follow, not men. It is he who calls forth new leadership from among all of his followers, to labor in his harvest in whatever way he provides for us: lay and ordained alike. To purify and sanctify this holy Church by giving without cost all that we have received without cost.

The Church honors Saint Ambrose today with a memorial. A Doctor of the Church, he is a perfect example of one called forth by Christ to lead a people who were troubled (during the Arian controversy) and needed good shepherding. Classically educated, but with no specific training in theology and unbaptized, he was called forth by the Christian community in Milan to be the next bishop, because of his giftedness in dealing with the Arian controversy. He initially refused out of humility, and hid, but within short order was baptized, ordained and made bishop. Known for his dedication to the poor, giving freely what he had been given, Ambrose became a prolific author and preacher, and had a great influence on the conversion of Saint Augustine, whom he baptized.

None of us is Saint Ambrose, nor do we need to be. But each of us is capable, through God's grace, of responding to Christ's call and leading according to our gifts. May Saint Ambrose, and all the saints, come to our aid as we proclaim the kingdom of heaven, follow Christ and reclaim our spiritual birthright to be faithful shepherds.

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**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2019**

(Lec. 4)

1) Isaiah 11:1-10

2) Romans 15:4-9

3) Matthew 3:1-12

Gospel related: CCC 523, 535, 678

**SECOND SUNDAY  
OF ADVENT**

FOCUS: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* This is John the Baptist's nine-word, takeaway message. In many ways, the best homily ever! And seemingly without much trouble or extensive explanation – at least, we are not privy to it in Scripture if it did exist – large numbers of people hear and heed his direction. People from all over a significant geographical area come to him, repent and are baptized *as they acknowledged their sins*.

Why? Granted, the people of that time had a sense of urgency about the kingdom of heaven, believing it to indicate the beginning of the end of the world. So they came. Hence also the Pharisees and Sadducees: who showed up more with the intention of *flee[ing] from the coming wrath* than actually producing fruit of their repentance. More important, John was the one whom Isaiah foretold, and his preaching resonated with the people of Judea. They listened. They listened because, ultimately, the message was not about him, but the One to come.

And there is something else important in this story. Perhaps it is not as obvious or is maybe less considered: There is no expiration date to John's message; to his invitation; to his, if we really think about it, *command*. There was no "be here by 6 p.m. because we're locking the doors" added on to his exhortation. There is no Scripture passage in which God rescinds this invitation made through John the Baptist.

That's because the One who follows John, the One to whom John points, is the Son who comes to reconcile us, finally and forever, to the Father. He himself is the kingdom of heaven at hand. He *is* the invitation. And he, too, tells us to repent – and to follow him. And so far, through God's mercy and grace, human beings have had that opportunity for 2,000 years.

That we are here, together, worshiping the God who invites us to eternal life means that we've paid at least *some* attention to the message. In our baptism, and brought to completion in our confirmation, we have the fullness of the Holy Spirit which binds us to the Father and the Son. We have the fruit and gifts of the Spirit, and God's grace to help us as we strive to follow Christ.

Yet John's message is no less urgent for us today, because just like the people of Judea, we know not the hour or day of Christ's return. So thank God that he does not ever revoke this invitation! Because, despite the tools God gives us, we still fall short: we sin; we fail to change what we need to change. Therefore, we still need to repent when it is called for. And God, in his infinite mercy and love, rejoices in this reconciliation. He encourages us *in [our] harmony with one another, and our keeping with Christ Jesus*, as Paul says.

This is the Good News we proclaim. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, and we have a small taste of its fullness here in our celebration of the Mass, and by our partaking of the Eucharist. God is truly good.

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Monday, December 9, 2019  
(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**

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:** We, too, are chosen by God.

People are often confused about this great solemnity. Perhaps they mistake it for the celebration of the Annunciation (March 25), since that, too, anticipates the coming celebration of Christmas. The Church even uses the same Gospel story: the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her she is to be the mother of the Messiah.

Today we celebrate the fact that Saint Anne and Saint Joachim, Mary's parents, conceived her without original sin. Mary, chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus, was perfect from the moment of her conception. Pope Pius IX declared this as dogma of the Church in 1854 (*Ineffabilis Deus*). Nine months from now, the Church calendar will mark Mary's nativity (day of birth) on September ninth. But today, we celebrate *why* Mary is so special in God's plan of salvation.

In the first reading, Adam and Eve are in the garden. They have eaten of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden and they realize that they are naked. They admit their sin to God. Adam blames Eve; Eve blames the serpent; and God bans the serpent from all the other creatures and condemns it to crawl on its belly.

But – at the same time God is doing this – he, the God of love, the God of mercy, the God of all power and might, offers a future of hope: for in the very act of placing enmity between the offspring of the serpent and the woman, he is also promising them a future. That is, there will be offspring! And the offspring of the woman will strike at the serpent's head, while the serpent's will strike at his heel.

God's plan of salvation is put into action. Eve may be the mother of death, but Mary will be the Mother of the Living (cf. Saint Irenaeus and *Lumen Gentium* 56, 61). This future of hope, promised by the prophets, is fulfilled with the assent of a poor girl in Nazareth.

And thus the angel Gabriel greets her as *Hail, full of grace*, for God has predestined her to be the mother of his Son. Filled with grace, Mary has immense faith and believes what the angel has told her. It is this same faith that causes her to give her unqualified assent to what seems like an impossible request. Mary is nothing more nor nothing less than the handmaid of the Lord. She is wholly God's, because he is wholly ours (CCC 2617). Her "fiat" is vital to the plan of salvation.

We can learn a lot from Mary's "yes." Today's second reading reminds us that we, too, have been chosen *before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him*. We, too, have been destined in accord with God's will, given the gift of faith in Christ, *so that we might exist for the praise of [God's] glory*. We, too, possess the grace of baptism and the other sacraments. We can prayerfully ask what our role is in God's plan of salvation and allow our faith to lead us where God is calling.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary – our mother and God's mother – intercede for us as we pray for the grace to discern God's will.

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Tuesday, December 10, 2019  
(Lec. 182)  
1) Isaiah 40:1-11  
2) Matthew 18:12-14  
Gospel related: CCC 605, 2822

TUESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK

FOCUS: Preparing a path for God in the wilderness of our own souls.

The first time we try to enter deeply into our own spiritual lives can be a bit like entering into the woods without a path. Prayer, meditation and contemplation can also sometimes feel like entering into a spiritual wilderness or maybe even a desert. Yet Isaiah says that it is in these deserted and wild places that we are to prepare the way of the Lord. The prophet Isaiah proclaims, *In the desert prepare the way of the Lord*. Not in the city or the crowded marketplace, but the desert.

Later, Isaiah proclaims that believers should *Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God*. Isaiah wants his listeners to clear a path for God in the wasted and lonely places of their lives. For us, that can mean entering into the “wasteland” of our own souls. It means entering into our own spiritual wilderness to prepare a way to our hearts – to prepare a path for God to enter through.

Each of our “deserts” will look different. Some of us have places of pain and grief that simmer just below the surface. For others, our wilderness might not be so fresh, but still pain and anger can reside in our souls. God wishes to enter into these very places of resentment, pain and grief. God wants to be in the wilderness of our lives. God wants to be able to traverse whatever lies in our wilderness so that he can reach our hearts.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of a man who will leave 99 sheep in search of the one that has gone astray. Imagine the places that man went while looking for the lost sheep! Imagine the wilderness he had to traverse just to find one sheep. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He is ready to enter into the wilderness of our souls – ready to enter into our hearts. We may have some metaphorical trees to clear off the path, and that path may not be clear by Christmas. But if we take time to start making a path for God, then God will be able to help us. God will be able to enter into our souls and transform them by his presence.

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Wednesday, December 11, 2019  
(Lec. 183)

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

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

Gospel related: CCC 459, 1615, 1658

**FOCUS:** Jesus offers us respite and rejuvenation that will strengthen us beyond what we can imagine.

The Lord is God, the Creator, abounding in knowledge and power, ever strong and never tiring. There is no one who is equal to God, especially not us! Hearing this message from Isaiah at this time of the year, when Christmas shopping and end-of-the-year deadlines tax our energies, is a reminder of how limited and weak we are compared to God. Indeed, we tire and grow weary – we stagger and fall – and we all know what it is like to need strength and rest.

We are so different from the untiring, all-knowing, all-powerful and ever-living God. Yet God does not lord his power over us or disdain our weakness. Rather, as Isaiah tells us, God calls us to himself to share in his unfailing strength and his deep rest. For those who hope in the Lord, an almost unimaginable transformation is promised: *Leaning on the Lord, the faithful will soar as with eagles' wings. They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint.*

Running and not growing weary – can we imagine it? Does it seem impossible, just the stuff of fantasy? Perhaps it does, yet we also know that in this Advent season, we are preparing to enter into mysteries that prove that nothing is impossible for God.

In the Gospel today, Jesus calls to his followers and friends: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.* The beginning of the transformation Isaiah describes takes place here, heeding the call of Jesus and coming to rest in him. Jesus offers us respite and rejuvenation that will strengthen us beyond what we can imagine. How can we come to him and receive these gifts of rest and strength? We can come to him in our hearts, resting our heads on his shoulder like the beloved disciple at the Last Supper, bringing our fatigue and burdens to him. We can come to him in our daily life, seeking in all we do to live as he called us. And we come to him now at the eucharistic table. May we approach with grateful hearts, and receive the rest and strength that the Lord in his mercy desires to share with us.

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Thursday, December 12, 2019  
(Lec. 690A)

**OUR LADY  
OF GUADALUPE  
- USA: 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. Gospel related: **CCC** 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 448, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 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:** Make haste to spread the Good News.

Today's Gospel depicts "the visitation" of Mary to Elizabeth. Without repeating the entirety of what we just heard proclaimed, we can highlight three parts of it: Mary travels from Nazareth to a town of Judah, and greets Elizabeth. When Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting, the child leaps within her womb. Finally, Elizabeth is also filled with the Holy Spirit, and speaks those famous words of recognition and greeting that form part of the Hail Mary: *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*

This is a lot to happen in a story! There is very little inaction and passivity. Instead, there are decisive, discrete moments: verbs of action. But what sets all of this in motion?

Luke writes, *Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste.* Now this was approximately 90 miles, depending on where exactly she may have gone in Judah (e.g., Hebron or Ein Karem). We do not know whether she traveled alone or in a group/caravan, how she traveled – by foot or by beast, or how long it took. And given that these were more "mountains" than "hills," this was not exactly a walk in the park, so to speak.

Therefore, Luke's description is important, for Mary had a mission. She had good news to share, thousands of years of waiting for God's promises to bring to fruition, and a cousin with whom to celebrate. There was no time for hesitating, or worrying about her own health or abilities, or any of the things one might tell oneself are obstacles to getting done what needs to be done. It was time to go. *Now.*

And her efforts are rewarded. In addition to the human comfort of seeing her cousin and sharing the joy of carrying new life, she encountered in the leaping child in Elizabeth's womb the one who we know would grow to become John the Baptist. John, who even before birth, was preparing the way, recognizing in Mary the presence of Jesus. She is the first tabernacle of the new covenant.

Then Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she is the first to openly recognize Mary's unique role in salvation history. She asks, *And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* This phrase, *mother of my Lord*, is both a Marian dogma and a profession of faith in the identity of Jesus. Together, Mary's "yes," John's leap and Elizabeth's, *mother of my Lord* express a core proclamation of the Christian faith – the mystery of God becoming flesh in Jesus.

Today the Church celebrates the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This feast commemorates another sort of "visitation": that of Mary to the humble farmer, Juan Diego. As with the passage in Luke, this is not a passive encounter: Mary speaks, Juan Diego hears and listens, and he immediately takes on the mission of carrying her message to his bishop, and ultimately the world. Like Elizabeth who bore John, Juan Diego bears the faith that points to Jesus. And through his actions, the Gospel begins to spread and take hold in the Americas.

Mary went in haste. Elizabeth and John reacted immediately. Juan Diego did not hesitate. We, too, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, can choose to make every moment count in proclaiming the mystery of God becoming flesh in Jesus. The salvation of the world depends upon it.

Friday, December 13, 2019  
(Lec. 185)  
1) Isaiah 48:17-19  
2) Matthew 11:16-19

FRIDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Lucy,  
Virgin and martyr)

FOCUS: May we open our hearts to respond to Christ and his goodness.

It's easy to make excuses in our life of faith. We find reasons to hesitate, to draw back, to limit our response to God's invitation ... I would pray more if I weren't so busy ... I would do more service if I didn't have these other responsibilities .... I would practice the virtue of patience more if I weren't so tired ... I would share my faith more with my neighbor if it weren't so socially risky.

In our first reading today, Isaiah speaks to the Israelites with God's encouraging words. The Lord is exhorting his people to listen to his call, for what he is calling them *to* is ultimately the best good possible! He promises them prosperity and descendants, and a relationship with him that will be *never cut off or blotted out from [his] presence*. He is asking that they have trust – that they have faith – in his promises.

So, too, the crowds in the Gospel today. Jesus points out that when John had called them to turn to God, they complained of his strangeness, using his asceticism as an excuse not to follow. They even said, *He is possessed by a demon*. When Jesus calls them, they once again find a reason to refuse, this time using his joy and mercy as the excuse not to follow. They did not trust. They did not have faith in who Jesus is.

Trust in God does, after all, hearken back to the original temptation. Adam and Eve did not trust that what God wanted for them was the best good possible. They thought that, just maybe, there was something better. And, we've been falling for the same lie ever since.

As we prepare our hearts during this season of Advent, may God deliver us from every excuse not to trust – from every blindness that causes us to miss the presence of Christ in our midst. And may the grace found in Word and sacrament open our hearts to respond to Christ and his goodness.

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Saturday, December 14, 2019  
(Lec. 186)  
1) Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11  
2) Matthew 17:9a, 10-13

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

Gospel related: CCC 718

FOCUS: Each of us can be a messenger of God who points the way to Jesus.

Elijah, the great prophet, was known for amazing feats, from calling down fire on wet wood to prove the power of his God, to bringing down a three-year drought and leaving Earth on a fiery chariot. That Jesus in today's Gospel speaks of John the Baptist in the same vein as Elijah was a bold statement, signifying God's fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah.

John the Baptist certainly gave people reason to equate him with Elijah, for he approached his calling from God with the same zeal. He spoke directly and boldly, calling for repentance from people of all walks of life and eventually pointing out Jesus as the Son of God.

Our catechism also makes the connection, as it notes that the Holy Spirit dwells in both Elijah and John the Baptist, the *precursor* of the Lord, to *complete the work of making ready a people prepared for the Lord* (CCC 718). The Holy Spirit continues to be at work today, in disciples of Jesus: anyone baptized and receiving the sacraments who raises the next generation in the faith; those who give their lives to God as priests or in consecrated religious life; and in people throughout the world who respond to the call to make a difference in the lives of others. All of them – all of us – are, in a sense, the precursor to Jesus in the lives of those who may not yet know him.

In our lives, we are all called to be present-day Elijahs and John the Baptists. We are all called to point the way to Jesus for people in our world who are so in need of his presence in their lives. As we continue into the second half of Advent, may the grace of God help us to be the voice in the wilderness wherever we are called.

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**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2019**

(Lec. 7)

1) Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

2) James 5:7-10

3) Matthew 11:2-11

Gospel related: CCC 548-549, 2443 CSDC 183

**THIRD SUNDAY  
OF ADVENT**

**FOCUS:** Emmanuel – the Messiah is with us.

Today we celebrate the third Sunday of Advent. With the presence of the rose-coloured candle, we notice there is something different. We discover the difference through the readings. Instead of waiting in hopeful anticipation, now we are called to rejoice because the Messiah is in our midst and we recognize him through the attributes h Scripture provides for us today. It is as if we have just received the job description written by God.

In the first reading, Isaiah prophesies that the Messiah will be the one who will bring hope of healing to the blind, deaf and lame. The psalm even gives praise for God's faithfulness, and adds to Isaiah's list the hungry, the oppressed, and orphans and widows. When Jesus tells John the Baptist's disciples, *go and tell John what you hear and see*, he is confirming these attributes, while revealing that his coming is more than an historical event. The Messiah is in our midst.

John must have been filled with joy when his disciples confirmed that Jesus is the *one who is to come*. We are filled with joy when we see and hear the healing and transformative works of God taking place all around us. The Messiah is with us. This joy is intended to be shared.

John the Baptist was the messenger sent to prepare the way for Jesus, which he did with joy. Jesus is the message. In him we learn the Messiah is the one who brings good news to the poor and healing to all those in need. We rejoice in this knowledge. We are faithful to Christ, and truly his disciples, whenever we allow God to work through us and make visible the Messiah in our works of charity. Emmanuel – God is with us.

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Monday, December 16, 2019  
(Lec. 187)  
1) Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a  
2) Matthew 21:23-27

MONDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: We have encountered the One who saves us, and we are transformed.

In the first reading, we are introduced to Balaam. He is not an Israelite. He is a prophet who has been called on by the king of Moab to curse the Israelites. But he doesn't. He blesses them, comments favorably upon them and speaks of the greatness of the Lord. He even foretells of the one who will deliver all of Israel – a fitting message at this halfway point in Advent. One who had, in essence, no means or right to understand the Israelites and God sees both for who they are.

The Gospel, on the other hand, presents the opposite scenario. Yet again, the chief priests and the elders, who are descendants of the very Israelites that Balaam blessed, cannot see what is in front of them. They fail to understand what they witness, or who Jesus is. And, as is their *modus operandi*, they question him – and not in good faith. *By what authority are you doing these things?* they ask, *And who gave you this authority?*

In classic rabbinical form, Jesus answers their questions with a question of his own, which they cannot answer. And *that* they cannot answer removes any semblance of authority they might have – for are they not the religious teachers? They should know the answer. So Jesus refuses to engage them on this point.

What an interesting contrast of characters in these two Scriptures: One who sees what he has no particular reason to see, and those who should see, but do not, and therefore cannot believe that Jesus is the One sent by God. Nor can they bring themselves to believe that John the Baptist was imbued with grace from heaven. Their unbelief condemns them to a blindness that prevents them from seeing Jesus for who he truly is.

We here today do not have the luxury of excuses for not knowing who Jesus is. Baptized into his life and nourished in Word and sacrament, we are given every opportunity to see, know and love him. Sin can certainly affect our vision at times – but again, with God's grace and our repentance, our sight can be restored. Obstinacy in sin and vice, however, will make us as tongue-tied, blind and ridiculous as the chief priests and elders.

Balaam had it right. He saw what he saw: the blessings of Israel, that is, the goodness of God, and he proclaimed it. With prayer and God's help, we can do the same. For we have encountered the One who saves us, and we are transformed.

\* \* \*

Tuesday, December 17, 2019  
(Lec. 193)  
1) Genesis 49:2, 8-10  
2) Matthew 1:1-17  
Gospel related: CCC 437 CSDC 378

TUESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: If we place our hope in the Lord, we will not be disappointed.

Waiting is hard. Whether it's at the doctor's office or the checkout line, waiting is not something we would rate highly on our list of enjoyable experiences. Most of our waiting involves daily activities and, in the grand scheme of things, is not that long. But some waiting centers on more meaningful events and dreams in our lives. Waiting for the birth of a child, retirement, or that once-in-a-lifetime trip requires patience, planning and dedication because these events don't happen by chance.

In today's Gospel, by highlighting the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew tells us something about waiting. The Israelites had waited for a Messiah for thousands of years. In that time of waiting, generations of Israelites had lived their lives – some of them in ways pleasing to God, some of them not. Some of them lived in the Promised Land, while others experienced exile, never seeing or setting foot on the land of their ancestors. They'd experienced slavery, invasions and oppression. Through it all, as a people, they continued to wait in hopeful expectation that the day would come when the Lord would fulfill his promise.

Matthew was announcing that that day had arrived. The waiting was over. During all those years of waiting, the Lord had not forgotten or abandoned them. Here now was the birth of Jesus, the Christ – the long-awaited Messiah. Some of the names Matthew listed may be unfamiliar to us, but his doing so exemplifies the importance of the moment: that thing for which all had been waiting for so long was finally here, finally happening. And even more important, the Israelites were affirmed in the hope they had placed in the Lord.

The Messiah, the Christ, has indeed come into the world. His coming affirms that if we place our hope in the Lord, we will not be disappointed. Our hope may involve waiting, which is hard, but, the fulfillment of the Lord's promises is more than worth that wait. And to sustain us as we wait in hope, the Lord has given us the gift of himself which we are blessed to receive this day. So we come to the table and allow the Lord to nourish our hope for another day.

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Wednesday, December 18, 2019  
(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

WEDNESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: We profess our faith in the Triune God.

Whenever we watch a movie, we observe the action from a point of view chosen by the writer or director. Sometimes, we're given an omniscient point of view whereby we can see everything develop – similar to sitting up high in a football stadium and watching each play take shape. Sometimes we see everything from a point of view that does not have the same elements as another's. That is what we get in the two Gospel narratives of Jesus' birth. In Luke, we see the story play out through Mary – through the Annunciation, the Visitation and the birth of Jesus surrounded by angels and shepherds. Then there is Jesus' circumcision and presentation in the Temple.

Today, however, Matthew's Gospel focuses on Saint Joseph. In a matter of seven verses, we see how he said "yes" to God – taking Mary into his home, though she was with child through the Holy Spirit. And how he said "yes" to naming him Jesus, which means "God saves," thus giving Jesus the prophetic link to David and his role as the royal Messiah.

Luke tells us of the monumental "yes" Mary gave the Lord to be the mother of the Savior. Matthew tells us today of Joseph's multiple "yesses" to take Mary into his home, name the child Jesus and later take his family to Egypt.

Details surrounding Jesus' birth differ between Matthew and Luke, but the crux of the story remains the same – through the Holy Spirit, Jesus was conceived in the Virgin Mary's womb. He was born in Bethlehem as part of the lineage of David. He entered this world to save us from our sins.

We are now one week from Christmas and *this* is the point of view that is important, *this* is the good news we long to hear: We are saved from our sins. We celebrate and give gifts to one another in remembrance of this moment in human history, but also in the joy of anticipation for Christ's return. In between, we rely on grace to say "yes" to the roles God has given us in this world. And with our "Amen" to the Eucharist we are about to receive, we profess our faith in the Triune God who became one of us on that day so long ago – but resides among and within us as the greatest gift of all.

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Thursday, December 19, 2019  
(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

THURSDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

**FOCUS:** God's plan for us has unfolded through many generations and his gift of salvation is freely given.

*Do not be afraid*, the angel Gabriel tells Zechariah when he appears to him in the Temple. He has good news for him as he announces that his wife, Elizabeth, who is advanced in years and was thought to be barren, would conceive and bear a son. Gabriel tells Zachariah that he should name him John, which means "God's favor." Today's Old Testament reading tells of an angel appearing to the wife of Manoah, to announce that she, who was also barren, would bear a son.

Their child, Samson, was consecrated in service to God even as he was still in the womb. It is interesting to note that tomorrow's Gospel also has the angel Gabriel saying, *Do not be afraid*. In that instance he is telling Mary that she, too, will conceive a son, who shall be named Jesus, which means "God saves."

These stories, and many others, retell the "infancy narratives" of people of God who played important roles in our salvation history. Samson would eventually deliver the Hebrews from the hands of the Philistines. John, the messenger, would take on the mission of preparing the Hebrew people for the imminent coming of the Savior. And Jesus, our Messiah, would become the ultimate sacrifice to assure our redemption.

In all of these examples, the initial fear felt upon being in the presence of God's angel changed to hope, joy and gladness. When faith and trust in God replaced the fear, good things happened. They opened themselves up to God's will and let him work in them. There is certainly a lesson in this for all of us.

The season of Advent is nearly at an end with Christmas only six days away. The "coming" of the Lord is nearly at hand. The gift of salvation, freely given, is about to be celebrated in remembrance of the birth of Jesus. With the grace of God, our fears, too, can be replaced with hope, joy and gladness. For salvation came in the form of a child, and we will taste of it in his body and blood. And we look with hope for the time when we will be brought into its fullness for eternity. What better gift, than this one – freely given.

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Friday, December 20, 2019  
(Lec. 196)

- 1) Isaiah 7:10-14
- 2) 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

FRIDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: We have the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

We are only a few days away from celebrating the joy of the Christmas season. What a glorious time awaits us! It can be easy to get caught up in the everyday tasks such as planning meals, buying gifts, preparing for travel or doing other good and necessary things. So it is worth taking a moment to immerse ourselves in the true meaning and purpose behind all of our plans and celebrations.

Our readings today help us with that. In the first reading from Isaiah, he prophesies of a sign that would one day emerge from God's goodness. The sign would be that *the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel*. We might consider this a bit of an odd prophecy, given the context. After all, Isaiah did not say who this woman was, or when this was to occur. But the larger meaning was clear: God would not abandon his people. Throughout their history, Israel had times of obedience as well as times of disobedience. Despite their sins and faults, the Israelites were given hope that God would fulfill his promises to send a Savior who would restore their nation and allow them to walk in communion with God.

Today's Gospel heralds that promise being fulfilled. The angel Gabriel greets Mary with his announcement about her bearing a son, and he tells her: *Do not be afraid*. It had to be a shock since, as she stated, *I have no relations with a man*. Yet she hears the message he brings with more than just her eyes and ears. She hears with the heart of every person throughout her history who has been in covenant with God. She understands with the faith of all the Israelite people who have believed in God's word, and waited with expectant hope for its fruition. Mary trusted God completely, and is our model for how we might do the same.

For we, too, are descendants of Abraham. We, too, are heirs to the original covenant, and are now reconciled and bonded to God in the new one brought about by Christ. We, too, can depend on God. As Mary trusted him and walked in obedience to him, our goal is to do the same. God has fulfilled his promise of salvation – our role is to accept it, have faith in it and direct our lives toward it. Our journey toward Christmas, therefore, may be busy, full of all those tasks which beg our attention. Yet in the midst of all of that, God is essentially saying to us, "This is why we have Advent. To remind all the faithful that through God's love and goodness, what was once long-awaited came to be. And that what is still to come, in Christ's return, is well worth waiting for."

May how we have prepared for Christmas be pleasing to God, and may his grace enable us to remain vigilant and always prepared.

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Saturday, December 21, 2019

(Lec. 197)

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

SATURDAY  
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:** Mary invites us to prepare for the coming of Christ – an arrival which brings great hope and great challenge.

Throughout this season of expectation and waiting, the anticipation has been building. The Messiah, Emmanuel, is on his way – soon to be born, and with him new life, new joy and new hope. We are close now to Christmas, but not quite there. These final days of the Advent season are becoming increasingly full of this same life, joy and hope but maybe also planning, preparation and traveling. While it is entirely possible for us to be distracted and even overwhelmed by the secular celebrations of Christmas already well under way, this final flurry of activity is in a way beautifully reflected in today's Gospel.

Today Mary brings this same feeling of expectation and joy with her when she travels to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. These two blessed women, each with tremendous faith in God, meet here on the edge of something great. They both have been visited by God, given the impossible gift of life where none should be possible. They are literally bearers of new life, heralds of a new springtime.

Mary, though, is a pilgrim here. She has traveled quite far. That journey itself would have been some work, would have come with some challenge. And why has she come? Certainly to share the good news, but also to help with the planning and the preparation for the new child about to be born to her older cousin. In addition, Elizabeth has conceived "in her old age" – a reality which would not make the final months and days of her pregnancy any easier. Mary has come as much to help as to celebrate and revel in the work of the Lord.

We, too, then stand in this place of expectation, joy and excitement, but also preparation. As we make plans and preparations for our celebration of Christmas, we can work also to prepare our hearts. The anticipation, the waiting, the soon-but-not-yet of the season of Advent invites us to stretch our hearts, to enlarge them so that they might be filled ever more when Christ comes.

Mary is bringing us today the good news of the coming birth of Christ. This is certainly exciting, but also sure to be challenging. But Mary does not only share this news, she offers her help. We know that Jesus has come to bring us everything, but also to ask everything from us. Mary can help us prepare for Christ's coming – to be ready to welcome him with great joy.

**Saint Peter Canisius (1521-1597)** - Peter Canisius, a Doctor of the Church, was a well-known Jesuit priest in the sixteenth century. Born in the Netherlands, he became known for defending the Catholic faith during the Protestant Reformation in Germany. He also wrote a catechism in German which was easy for the average person to understand and became very influential. His writings and his work establishing German-speaking Jesuit colleges throughout northern Europe helped bring many people to a clearer understanding of their faith.

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2019

(Lec. 10)

1) Isaiah 7:10-14

2) Romans 1:1-7

3) Matthew 1:18-24

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

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

**FOCUS:** Wherever God places us, that is where we live out our divine call.

Advent is a time in which we prepare for the two comings of Christ: We remember his first, as a child; and anticipate his second at the end of time. All of our Scriptures are dedicated to this preparation. Thus far in Advent, the Scripture readings have been alternately full of consolation and challenge. They have spoken of God's fidelity, his mercy and his justice, and have called us to repentance and newness of life. They have scolded our indifference and reassured us of God's enduring love – a love that will become incarnate in Christ's birth.

Now we begin to hear of the events surrounding that birth: the reason for our celebration of Christmas! Isaiah reminds us of the promise once made to the House of David that a maiden would bear a son who would be named Emmanuel – God is with us. Written about 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah clearly speaks of something unique, even mysterious, something that only God in his power could bring about.

As devout Jews, Mary and Joseph would have known of this long-cherished promise at the heart of their faith. Today, Joseph is at the center of our Gospel. Today he is a *specific* recipient of God's promise, and given consolation and peace in the knowledge of Scripture being fulfilled. He obeys God's commands, takes Mary into his home and becomes the human father of the Son of God.

We are not called to such a mysterious and holy role as parents of the Christ child, yet we, too, are inheritors of this promise as it continues to unfold through the generations. Thus, God speaks to each one of us in specific ways, just as he did to Isaiah, to Mary, to Joseph – and to all who have come to accept God's promise of new life in Jesus Christ. Our participation in the life of Christ will be manifested in our vocation, our state in life, our strengths and our weaknesses. Some will enter religious life and priesthood, some may remain single, many will marry and have a family. Wherever God places us, that is where we live out our divine call.

As we stand on the threshold of our celebration of the birth of Christ, we thank God for his promise of Christ – both as Christ child, and as the One who will return in glory. For in him we have salvation, and for him we await with further Advent hope.

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Monday, December 23, 2019  
(Lec. 199)  
1) Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24  
2) Luke 1:57-66

MONDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: As Christians, we prepare our hearts to be united around Christ in celebration of his coming.

For weeks we have been preparing for Christmas; now it is just two days away. For some people, Christmas is mostly about food and feasting. For others, it is mostly about decorations, putting up trees and hanging lights. For others, it is all about shopping, giving and receiving gifts.

For us, as Christians, Christmas may include some of these, but it is first and foremost about the birth of Christ. For us, Christmas is the coming of the Lord whom we have been seeking. He is Emmanuel – God with us. And, as Christians here in *this place*, we celebrate this holy occasion with our Christian family in *every place*: that of believers throughout all of time, and of all over the world. It is a special and sacred time for us, not just for sharing food and gifts, but for praying together, and celebrating together the coming of Christ, the light of the world. For us, the past, present and future family of Christ is essential to Christmas.

Yesterday's Gospel focused on the holy family: Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Today's Gospel focuses on another family: Elizabeth, Zechariah and John, the messenger foretold by Malachi and other prophets of old. John, Jesus' cousin, is born just before Jesus; he will prepare the way of the Lord. God is working miracles within these families. It is by God's grace that John is born to his elderly parents; it is a heavenly sign that Zechariah regains his lost voice when he confirms the name Elizabeth gives for his son. Mothers and fathers, the wonder of child-bearing and the joy of children, the loving intimacy of families touched by God's hand – these are all central to the Christmas story.

As we prepare the food, decorations and gifts for our celebrations of Christmas, our most important preparation is that of preparing our hearts. As the prophet Malachi declared, the one preparing the way for the Lord *turn(s) the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers*. This Scripture specifically referred to John, but also reflects the movement of Christ in all people, throughout all time and throughout all of history.

Gathering at this altar for the Eucharist, we gather around Christ. As our Advent preparations end and our celebrations of Christ's coming begin, we keep Christ at the center of our hearts as he is at this altar. May we surround and embrace Christ as did Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth, Zechariah and John, and as the Christian family throughout the world has been called to do for centuries.



Tuesday, December 24, 2019  
(Lec. 200)

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

2) Luke 1:67-79

Gospel related: CCC 422, 523, 706, 717

TUESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

**FOCUS:** The sun is rising and we await the instant it shatters the darkness.

The moment before sunrise is a special time each day. The light of the dawn begins to reveal the promise of the day, and there is a hazy moment in which it is not dark out, but it is not daytime either. Sometimes when we are lucky, we can behold the sunrise when the sky begins to change colors, just before the rays of the sun appear on the horizon. In Advent we spend our energies in anticipation, waiting to commemorate the promise God fulfilled in Jesus. Advent is like waiting in the dawn's dim light for the sun to break suddenly on the horizon. That instant for which we have been waiting is about to happen.

The arrival of the dawn and anticipation of the sunrise is an analogy that the Church uses with great effect. Some of the Church's official prayers speak of Jesus Christ as the Radiant Dawn; he himself personifies the moment when darkness turns to light. The Church also calls him the Sun of Justice, noting that as Christ the Light comes into the world, he brings with him God's reign of justice and peace. We are at the moment now in which the light is coming, but the sun itself is not quite visible.

The Gospel today is a lengthy prayer recited by Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. In the prayer, Zechariah initiates that motif of the sunrise. He speaks of olden times when all one could hope for was the promise that God would not forget his people. In those dark times, it was a promise of a Savior that consoled him and his ancestors. But the moment when the promise is fulfilled has nearly come. Zechariah says that *In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.* The dawn is here, and the sun is an instant away from peeking above the horizon.

This is the last day of Advent, the last moment of dawn before the darkness is fully banished and the morning is filled with light. We recall today the promises made so long ago to Abraham, to David, as we pray the canticle prayer of Zechariah. The promise of "God with us" is about to be born.

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come shine on us. We await the daybreak.

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## Three Homilies are given for the Solemnity of Christmas: Vigil, Night and Day – Holy Day of Obligation

### CHRISTMAS 2019 – 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.

We often expend a lot of time and energy to make sure that Christmas is a memorable time for everyone. Even if we have to go without something, we scrimp and save and sacrifice to make sure that even the youngest among us will know the joy of receiving gifts for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. That is why so many parishes, religious orders, schools and other faith communities work so hard during the weeks of Advent to encourage the generosity of so many. They provide gifts for children and families who, due to so many different circumstances, might otherwise go without at Christmas. Whether we offer one gift or many, there is a kind of joy that comes from knowing we will brighten Christmas for another.

The effort and generosity which we expend in the days leading up to Christmas are a kind of reflection of the effort and generosity expended by God to bring about the birth of Jesus Christ. Let's think about the family line of Jesus we have just heard proclaimed in this evening's Gospel. Those many generations, filled with a curious collection of characters, reflect God's efforts in love and generosity to bring about the very miracle that we recall and celebrate tonight: that the second person of the Blessed Trinity – the Son – should be born into time, born into human life, born into our lives.

Tonight's Scriptures encourage us to remember that Jesus, our Savior, was given to us as a gift and a promise. The gift of Jesus represents God's overwhelming generosity to us and to the whole human race. The gift of Jesus also represents God's promise to show us a better way to live – one which pulls us out of our sin and sadness and which sets us on the path to eternal life.

As we gather on this eve of Christmas, it is good for us to remember that the gift which God has given us – the gift of Jesus – is meant for people of all ages and all times. Just as God has worked in ages past to bring this gift about, so, too, God is still hard at work, encouraging and strengthening us to open our hearts and our lives to receive and to share this great gift, who is for us both Christ and Lord.

## CHRISTMAS 2019 – NIGHT

(Lec. 14)

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

Gospel related: CCC 333, 437, 448, 486, 515, 525, 559, 695, 725

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

**FOCUS:** We are meant to be transformed by Christ.

The short Oscar-winning film from 1945, “Star in the Night,” takes place at a remote inn, miles away from the nearest town. The innkeeper, Nick, interacts with guests who express varying degrees of anger or selfishness: one woman complains about the noise; another about the heat; a furious businessman gripes that his expensive dress shirts have not been cleaned properly. For Nick, Christmas is not a time of love or good will; it is all fake. He is a man who has been “beaten up” by life. “Everybody mean, stingy all year round,” he says in his Italian accent, “all of a sudden at Christmas everyone all smiles! ... Peace, brotherhood and love! That’s a lotta baloney!”

Things change for everyone, however, when a couple unexpectedly arrives, the wife close to giving birth. Scene by scene, selfishness gives way to generosity. Each guest goes against everything they once complained about in order to help this couple and their newborn child. Each becomes an adoptive caregiver. Nick, completely surprised by the goodness in others, begins to have his own outlook transformed. Christmas, and the love and presence of God, comes to Nick in a way that is unexpected.

Tonight, we are reminded that we, too, may be surprised by God’s presence, and that what appears one way, may in fact be different: We are reminded that we are meant to be transformed by Christ. Many of us, like Nick, can sometimes feel “beat up” by life. God invites us, in the comforting words of Isaiah, to have hope: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.*

God can surprise us; God does surprise us. We may have to look more closely, but there are places we least expect to find God, and yet do. There are experiences we least expect to reveal his presence, and yet they do. There are people we never imagine would lead us to him, and yet they do.

Even in the midst of moments that are dark, problematic or difficult, God may be found. Consider that an angel comes not to those in the comfort of their own homes, but to shepherds living in the fields. Consider that God becomes one of us, not in the arrival of a king on a throne, but in the birth of a child – a child born without a home, a child born to a family with few resources. Consider that Christ comes to us, fully present in his humanity and divinity, in the Eucharist. Consider that the Holy Spirit, and grace, come to each one of us in the sacraments. All of this is meant to transform us, just as Christ’s initial coming transformed the world.

The invitation to find God is just that, an *invitation*. It is not a demand; it is not an oppressive thing in our lives. God does not come as a controlling figure or a fierce ruler. God does not intimidate. No, *do not be afraid*, the angel says. God comes in the most gentle way possible, as an infant who depends upon the care of others. God’s invitation is unassuming, asking for whatever is already good in ourselves to be made manifest. Asking us to see what is already good in others more clearly, so that Christ’s presence is known more and more in our world, for the transformation and salvation of the world.

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## CHRISTMAS 2019 – 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, 241, 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:** The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit empower us as disciples of Christ.

The “Festival of Lights” is a common theme this time of year. We know that the days are finally getting longer. And we all enjoy it when God’s little ones entertain us with a whimsical rendition of “This Little Light of Mine.” The most important of all, however, is Saint John’s proclamation heard in today’s Christmas Gospel: that Jesus is *the light [that] shines in the darkness*.

We can all agree there is too much darkness in the world. Darkness comes from violence and vengeance, but Jesus came to disperse that darkness. And while he overcame the ultimate power of sin and death, they still darken our earthly lives. So Jesus has empowered us to disperse that darkness in his name.

As his disciples, baptized into his life and recipients of his Spirit, we have the grace to be agents of the Light of Lights! We cannot afford to stand idly on the sidelines. If the darkness of this world is going to be dispersed, it will take every child of the light to make it happen. God has empowered us. God is counting on us. And God has given us the Good News to make it possible.

Almost everyone is familiar with the Prayer of Saint Francis. The first half reads: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.”

These are not simply pious words or platitudes. In them are Jesus’ marching orders, so to speak. For sowing love, pardon, faith, hope, light and joy is possible for a disciple of Jesus who has the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. We cannot wrap this gift up and place it nicely under the tree with a tag that reads “to Jesus.” Instead, we unleash these gifts and give them to the world.

In this way we will be ambassadors of Christ’s light to the world. In this way we will truly have a Merry and Most Blessed Christmastide. In this way, the darkness of this world will be dispersed – one new light at a time.

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Thursday, December 26, 2019  
(Lec. 696)

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

2) Matthew 10:17-22

Gospel related: CCC 161, 728, 1821

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

**FOCUS:** Stephen gave his life for the Lord and for the sake of all who would believe in the Gospel.

It may seem odd to some that on the day after Christmas we honor the death of a martyr. There is more than one reason for this. First, Jesus was born to die. Those who would be with him in paradise must first pass from this life. Stephen, a deacon who was the first martyr of Christendom, is a stark reminder of the cost of discipleship. Second, it was on December twenty-sixth in the year 415 that the relics of Stephen's body were found. It was thought they had been lost for centuries. They were recovered in miraculous circumstances, and countless more miraculous healings have occurred in the presence of the bones of this humble, holy man.

Like Jesus and so many others, Stephen committed no crime. He was in charge of the alms of the early Christian community at Jerusalem, and would use them to care for the widows and orphans left helpless when their husbands and fathers were being martyred in the first persecutions to afflict the young Church. What solidified his death sentence, however, was his performance of signs and wonders in the name of Christ, and his denunciation of the Sanhedrin and the refusal of the community to acknowledge Jesus' fulfillment of the law.

Like Jesus, Stephen said nothing in his defense; he forgave those who were persecuting him; and he gave up his spirit with serenity and the hope of heaven. Certainly, his death was not in vain as it would lead eventually to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus who ordered his death. As Paul the Apostle, he would be the greatest missionary ever.

Stephen perhaps was strengthened by Jesus' words in the Gospel: *When they hand you over, 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.*

Jesus knew those who loved him and followed him would suffer in this life because of it. He also understood and made known that those sufferings would seem as nothing compared to the glory that awaits us in his kingdom, for *whoever endures to the end will be saved.*

This hope of triumph over tragedy, life from death, and light from darkness has been the hope of suffering Christians for 20 centuries. It is our hope, too, and it is most needed in this world where so many people are persecuted for their faith and too many others have rejected God's hand in friendship.

As we continue to celebrate the birth of Christ, he who was born to die that we might live – we can also hail the martyrs like Stephen who gave their lives for the Lord, and for the sake of all who would believe in the Gospel. Through them, and the continuous passing on of the faith, all of us may one day enjoy true and lasting freedom.

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Friday, December 27, 2019

(Lec. 697)

1) 1 John 1:1-4

2) John 20:1a, 2-8

Gospel related: CCC 515, 640, 2174

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

**FOCUS:** Faith in Christ will give us hope in the “empty tomb” moments of life.

*We are writing this so that our joy may be complete.* These words sum up John’s hope for all of us. He desires that all people believe what he has heard, seen and touched concerning Jesus, *the Word of life* made visible. This powerful testimony of faith is seen in his relationship with Jesus as outlined in the Gospels and his letters. John was a “beloved disciple”; the one *whom Jesus loved* (John 13:23). We know that as a disciple of Jesus, he was loyal, even willing to stand at the cross, while others fled. He was the one to whom Jesus entrusted his own mother, and the one whom Mary took as her own son.

John believed, as Jesus had prophesied earlier: *Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up* (John 2:19). This belief that no tomb on earth could contain Jesus was not the product of an analytical mind at work. It wasn’t just “reason” that John was employing. John believed because he saw with the eyes of love. He also heard Jesus preach, touched Jesus’ human form and shared the first Eucharist – Christ’s own body and blood – with him. He allowed all of his senses to receive the fullness of God’s revelation. Reason and faith are two ways of arriving at truth. John used his faith to build on reason, ultimately fully grasping the truth with love.

John’s experience teaches us that our senses – of seeing, hearing, speaking, proclaiming and even the energy to run like the disciples – can lead us to Christ. For our faith is a sensual one: that is, it is an embodied relationship that requires and takes advantage of our many senses. We have water for blessing; oil for anointing; specific postures for prayer. We have colorful paintings, mosaics and stained-glass windows; we are enveloped in incense and the fragrance of holy oils; we are moved by the resonance of an organ or choral hymn. We hear the Word proclaimed, and we partake of the Word made flesh. Like John, we see, hear, touch and taste Jesus Christ, the Word of life made visible.

So today, in honor of this beloved disciple who teaches us so much, the Church celebrates a feast in his name. John, whose own testimony reminds us that when we, as he did, find ourselves standing in some kind of “empty tomb” in our life, our reason and faith can help us grasp the truth that Christ is no longer “there” [in that empty tomb], but “here,” present among and within us. Further, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, we, too, can see and believe in the new possibilities and life that the risen Christ has provided. This, of course, is the hope grounding the life of a disciple. It is also, by John’s own words, a way of being that we will make his joy complete.

Thank God for the testimony and witness of Saint John, and for the faith that he passed on.

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Saturday, December 28, 2019  
(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's Gospel reveals the horrific cruelty of Herod, who allowed the darkness of jealousy and pride to overtake him when he learned about the birth of Jesus. He set out to destroy Jesus, but was deceived and thwarted. In his rage, Herod *ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under*. Herod felt threatened by the existence of this child, Jesus – destined to be *the king of the Jews* (cf., Matthew 2:2).

The message from the First Letter of John reminds us of just the opposite – the hope we have in Jesus, rather than a need to be threatened by him. For *Jesus Christ the righteous one ... is expiation for our sins*. This, despite the evil we know continues to exist. Sin and darkness are clearly present in poverty, cruelty, war and the many other ways we fail to treat one another with basic human dignity. At the same time, however, our hope comes from the words the disciples of Jesus heard him proclaim: *God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all*. Or as John is intending to impress upon his readers, God is goodness and truth; darkness is error and depravity (cf., USCCB commentary).

Thus, John writes, *if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another*. And, of course, we want to walk in the light! We want to live in truth and goodness, and be free from depravity and error. But John also warns us to not deceive ourselves. If we want to be reflections of Christ's light and love, we first need to be honest about our own actions and admit to the darkness we hold within before we can dispel the darkness we see around us.

Herod was unable to do this, and in his fury he murdered innumerable innocent children. Holy Innocents, we call these children, and the Church celebrates their feast today. Holy and innocent – just as Jesus was. Martyred under a cloud of darkness and ignorance, just as Jesus was crucified under the same. And yet, from *Rachel[']s weeping for her children*, and the death and resurrection of Christ, arises the hope of a light in which *there is no darkness*.

For in God's generous love for us, he has sent his Advocate, Jesus, as *expiation for our sins and ... those of the whole world*. *Jesus cleanses us from all sin*. We need only to seek his forgiveness and we can again walk in the light of his love. We are restored to fellowship with Jesus and one another.

Being fully alive in God and his goodness – his light – keeps us from darkness and sin. We can then work together to share the Light of the World with the whole world. This is just as God intended when, in his immense love for us, he took on our humanity in the darkness of Bethlehem on that night long ago.

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**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2019**

(Lec. 17)

1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

2) Colossians 3:12-21  
or 3:12-17

3) Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Gospel related: CCC 333, 530

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

FOCUS: Do everything in the name of Jesus.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The readings call us to attitudes and actions that can bring harmony and joy to our family life. Sirach, echoing the lesson of the Fourth Commandment, emphasizes our call to obey, honor, respect and even revere our parents. He notes the many blessings that this reverent and respectful attitude can bring us.

In a sense, when we honor our parents, we also honor our God, who worked through those parents to bring us life. The catechism reminds us that respect and honor to parents “derives from gratitude toward those who, by the gift of life, their love and their work, have brought their children into the world and enabled them to grow in stature, wisdom, and grace” (CCC 2215). This gratitude to our parents and to God can lead us to deeper appreciation of the gifts we have received through the basic gift of life.

Paul, in his Letter to the Colossians, gives us tools to bring healing to our family relationships. As God’s children, *holy and beloved*, we are called to put on *heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience*, and to top these qualities off with forgiveness and the bond of love. Perhaps most important, Paul reminds us as Christian families to put Jesus at the very center of our family life: to be controlled by the peace of Christ, to let Jesus’ word dwell within us, and to do everything in the name of Jesus.

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Monday, December 30, 2019  
(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: Like Anna, let us wait for the Lord with a single-minded devotion.

Perhaps we have met someone with a single-minded devotion – someone passionately dedicated to his or her family, profession or hobby, so much so that little else matters in life. This character trait often is viewed in a negative light, as it seems to contradict the modern values of balance and diversification of interests. But what of someone with a single-minded devotion for the Lord?

Today's Gospel provides an example of this type of dedication. Anna is a Jewish prophetess who has spent the majority of her adult life, following the death of her husband, in the Temple. The Gospel tells us that she *worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer*, never leaving the Temple. She has been waiting patiently for the Messiah, praying for the salvation of her people. Perhaps most impressively, she has given up everything to do so.

The first reading from 1 John creates a strong dichotomy between the things of the world versus the things of God. This passage is clear: to love the world more than we love God is unwise. But should our lives look as extreme as that of Anna, whereby we cast off everything of the world in order to dedicate ourselves to God?

While the world and its enticements are not evil in and of themselves, we have much to learn from Anna's example of dedication and renunciation of the world. She gave priority to God in the unique ways that God had called her. Though our lives need not look like Anna's, with God's grace we can be dedicated to the Lord with the fervency and devotion that led her to wait for Jesus for all those years. We may not need to renounce everything of the world, but we can keep an eye on our hearts to ensure that our love for God has primacy above all else. Jesus has come and will come again, and by God's grace we will be ready, like Anna.

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Tuesday, December 31, 2019  
(Lec. 204)

- 1) 1 John 2:18-21
- 2) John 1:1-18

THE SEVENTH DAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF THE NATIVITY  
OF THE LORD  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Sylvester I,  
Pope)

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 241, 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

**FOCUS:** God became human so we could become divine.

*In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word became flesh.*

These words come from John in today's Gospel, describing the infinite existence and power of God. The Word of God is eternal; he was there *in the beginning*. The Word of God created the world. *All things came to be through him*. And this same Word became a human in order to save *all* humans. God created the world and then he was born into it. *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*.

But the eternal Word did not take on flesh as a mighty king to sit on a throne. The all-powerful God did not zap himself into being the wisest professor or having the powers of a super-hero. Rather, the all-powerful God became a baby, born of a woman, and delivered into the world without fanfare and without wealth.

The birth of this vulnerable baby opened salvation to all humankind. Through the life and work of the man he became, we have come to know the truth about God. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through whom we are redeemed. Further, *to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God*. As God took on the nature of a child in the stable, born in poverty, so we, too, can take on the divine nature of a child of God, born into the promise of eternal life.

In this Christmastime, as we assemble here as God's children, we have gratitude for the gift of eternal life – that God became one of us so we might share in his divinity for eternity.

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