

DECEMBER

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24(day)

CHRISTMAS 26

27 28 29 30 31

**YEAR B
WEEKDAYS I**

Tuesday, December 1, 2020
(Lec. 176)

1) Isaiah 11:1-10

2) Luke 10:21-24

Gospel related: CCC 1083, 2603

TUESDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: We are called to be children of God.

What would it be like to become a child again? To have the energy of a child? The mind of a child? And the heart of a child? Children have such active imaginations. They pretend to have super powers, they give personalities to stuffed animals, they create imaginary friends, and they truly believe that anything is possible. They have innocence, rather than arrogance.

In today's Gospel reading, we get a glimpse of Jesus rejoicing in the Father's revelation of all things *to the childlike*. That is, God has revealed himself, Father and Son, to those who had eyes to see, and ears to hear – to the innocent and not arrogant of heart. Jesus rejoices in the same for us – when we, too, through God's gracious will, come to know the Father and Son.

As we grow older, we experience the limitations, sufferings, and disappointments of life. We can become weighed down by sadness and slowly lose the simple joys we knew as children. The good news is that the grace of God allows our hearts to become more childlike as they are united to the heart of Jesus. When we give our hearts to Jesus, he molds them after the pattern of his own heart. We are now children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

What does this mean in our daily lives? First, to be children of God means that we see ourselves as beloved sons and daughters who know the love of our heavenly Father. It means that we still believe anything is possible because we know the power of the Holy Spirit is present among us. It means that we still use our imaginations regularly, so that our prayer life is animated by heavenly images. It means that we still rely upon the help of many "invisible friends" in the form of our guardian angels and all the saints.

This may appear foolish to the world. The mysteries of our faith are, as Jesus says, truly hidden from the wise and the learned but revealed to the childlike. During this Advent, let's ask the child, Jesus, to grow in us the childlike identity God wants for us. Let's rediscover the simple joys of being a child of God.

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Wednesday, December 2, 2020
(Lec. 177)

1) Isaiah 25:6-10a

2) Matthew 15:29-37

Gospel related: CCC 1329, 1335

WEDNESDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: God looks with compassion upon our needs, especially our need for union with Jesus.

Jesus' compassion moves him to heal the sick. He comforts the afflicted. He feeds the hungry. As the Lord travels and teaches the crowds, he is moved with pity at their sufferings and burdens.

So as we gather in this sacred space, we each bring our burdens and our prayers – that his mercy and empathy might enfold us. Maybe we need healing from the Lord today. Perhaps we are praying for children or grandchildren or other family members to be safe and happy. We may be praying for someone we know who is searching for work or direction. We gather to pray for justice and peace in our world, and we ask for wisdom for our leaders, or for ourselves. Jesus sees our need.

In all our needs, prayers, and intentions, the Lord knows our *greatest* hunger is for Jesus. We were created to know, love, and serve our Redeemer. This burns in us like a hunger that we cannot quench, without his help. Today in the Gospel, Jesus multiplies the bread and fish to feed the crowd. In his passion and death, he does even more than that. He gives us his own body and blood to sustain us. The gift of the Eucharist is a miracle that truly meets our greatest need, our greatest longing.

Wherever his people gather around the altar, call upon his name, and invoke the Holy Spirit, he again feeds a hungry crowd with what they need. The Lord hears our prayers and wants to help us in this life. Our greatest desire is to be united with Christ forever. It is for that very reason that we exist. While we may come today seeking other blessings, it is this miracle that underlies and gives life and purpose to our Church.

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Thursday, December 3, 2020
(Lec. 178)

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

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

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

FOCUS: Christ is the firm foundation for our lives.

A common method in coaching people through a tough time in life is to ask them to examine two things they use in their daily lives as a way of getting an objective view on their priorities. Many advisors suggest the following: a credit card statement, and a daily log or calendar. It can be very revealing – how we spend our time and how we spend our money.

What two things could give us a window into what we value?

Both the first reading and the Gospel remind us that what is so often considered by the world to be successful will eventually be brought down. It will not last. Isaiah proclaims that the Lord will humble *those in high places*, while the lowly and needy will trample over the lofty city. Jesus tells his listeners that those who build their life on anything but his words are creating a house on sand, one that will collapse.

At the Day of Judgment, we ourselves will come face to face with the reality of the house that we have built, and whether it is built upon the foundation of Christ, or upon that which will fade away. Therefore, before that time comes, we have the opportunity, and the grace of God available to help us, to ensure that our foundation is indeed Christ, and that we spend our lives pursuing things that bring us closer to him.

Jesus says, *Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.* Everyone who *listens* and *acts*. This Advent season is a graced opportunity to take the time to be alone with Christ. To listen to Christ. To spend time with him in prayer, to examine our own lives and our own priorities. Perhaps we might consider ways to depend more upon the Lord and to spend our time and our money on what matters most. Perhaps we can examine the foundation upon which our lives are built, and after *listening* to Christ, we may be prepared to *act*. We can choose one or two bricks, one or two areas of our life that are on shaky foundations, and move them onto the firm foundation of Christ.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, the prophet Isaiah tells us. Call him while he is near. Now is the time.

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Friday, December 4, 2020
(Lec. 179)

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

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

Gospel related: CCC 439, 2616

FOCUS: *Out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see.*

During Advent, many of our first readings are from the prophet Isaiah, who paints a picture of peace and prosperity for God's people, and speaks God's promise for the redemption of Israel. In our reading today, Isaiah says, *On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book; And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see.*

Jesus engages a bit of that prophecy in today's Gospel, as he cures two blind men. He has passed them on his travels, and they begin to pursue him. They call out to him, *Son of David, have pity on us!* When Jesus asks, *Do you believe that I can do this?* and they answer *Yes, Lord*, their affirmation echoes the responses of other disciples in other stories: Martha's "Yes, Lord," affirming that she believes Jesus is the Messiah, and John's "Yes, Lord," affirming how he loves the risen Lord.

The blind men did not see Jesus pass by – but they knew he had. And they did not hesitate to follow. They recognized, even without sight, who Jesus is – Son of David; Lord. Even in the darkest of times, our own "yes, Lord" is added to that chorus every time we approach the Lord in faith. Like the blind men, we can believe that he will have pity and respond to us in our very human need. And as they couldn't contain the Good News to themselves, we cannot help but share it with the world. And so we are sent from this Mass, to glorify God with our lives. With God's help, we may be able to enlighten the eyes of others, and they too shall *be in awe of the God of Israel.*

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Saturday, December 5, 2020
(Lec. 180)

1) Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26

2) Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6-8

Gospel related: CCC 543, 1509, 2121, 2443, 2611 CSDC 184, 259

SATURDAY
OF ADVENT
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: Let us prepare our hearts to receive Christ's goodness.

The word "Gospel" is derived from an Old English translation of the Greek *evangelion* – literally meaning "good news." The story of Christ is indeed good! We are loved, and salvation is ours if only we say *yes* to Christ. However much we have heard it before, and however much we have experienced the goodness of God, we still need to be reminded. In these first weeks of Advent, we get this reminder. We look forward to the coming of Christ again, and we prepare our hearts to receive his goodness.

We know that there is much darkness in this world. We see the wounds which need to be healed, we grieve over the people we have lost, and we are frustrated by patterns of sin in ourselves and others. And so we long for the day that Isaiah speaks of in the first reading: *The day the Lord binds up the wounds of his people; the day when the Lord will give you the bread you need and the water for which you thirst.* This is good news indeed, and so we say come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

But this is not all there is to Advent. This season is not only about the coming we still await, it is also about the coming we have already received. In the person of Jesus, God indeed has come. He has already been moved with pity and has already dwelt among us. We hear today that Jesus *proclaim[ed] the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the towns and villages.* He brought them hope and healing – "good news." By his life, death, and resurrection, he has already won the victory for us and has already begun his reign. The kingdom of God truly is at hand.

And yet, still we wait. Salvation is assured and the love of God is undoubted, but the work is unfinished. This is the tension of Advent. The story of Jesus looking with pity at the *troubled and abandoned* crowds rings as true now as it did 2,000 years ago. We still have those crowds, and at times perhaps we even find ourselves among them. The good news of Christ's love and salvation cannot leave us unmoved. This Advent, let us go out to cure the sick, bind the wounds, and proclaim the good news we have heard. *Without cost [we] have received* and so *without cost [we] are to give.*

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2020

(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

**SECOND SUNDAY
OF ADVENT**

FOCUS: During this holy season, may we grow in devotion so as to prepare the way of the Lord in our homes and our hearts.

John the Baptist is the last prophet before the coming of the Christ, and he is the first to recognize Jesus once he came. John fulfills Isaiah's prophecy as that voice crying out in the desert – *prepare the way of the Lord*. His clothing of camel's hair was traditional garb for prophets, and his diet of *locusts and wild honey* perhaps reflected either Jewish purity laws or a particular communal asceticism. As it was, it stood in stark contrast to the finery of the Jewish religious leaders and elders of that time, namely the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Yet John was drawing large crowds to the Jordan riverbank. Some likely came out of desire, believing he would lead them to the Messiah. Others perhaps came out of curiosity. John spoke like no one else, and called them to conversion, speaking with conviction. With such a following, it would have been easy for John to proclaim himself the Christ, and even easier for the people to believe him. Yet his humility and holiness meant that John could not lie or mislead them. He made it clear that his message and baptism were both inferior to the one, as he said, *who is mightier than I*.

John's preparation of the way for Christ is a model for us, especially in this Advent season. He challenges us to consider whether we lead others to Jesus, or whether our actions are motivated by a need for attention and affirmation. Is our lived faith attractive to those who have none? This last question is especially important, for while we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, we also prepare for his Second Coming. And, as Saint Peter says in our second reading, *The day of the Lord will come like a thief*.

Peter helps us regain the sense of urgency regarding our preparations for the return of our king, when he says, *the Lord does not delay . . . he is patient with you . . . not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*. Jesus is giving the whole world time for conversion; that we might play a part in sharing the Good News of Christ with the world, for the salvation of the world, is a great and weighty gift. And now is the time.

As we await the new heavens and a new earth, Saint Peter tells us we get to choose what *sort of persons [we] ought to be*. We are given these days to grow in holiness and devotion so that we will be *eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace*, when he comes. During this busy time of year, a time when we are doing so much to prepare for the coming of Christmas, let us make sure to heed the voice crying out in the wilderness – to prepare for the coming of the Christ, not just as a babe in Bethlehem, but his imminent return in glory as our King.

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Monday, December 7, 2020
(Lec. 181)

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

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

Gospel related: CCC 1116

FOCUS: The desert will bloom and the lame shall leap as the Lord comes with vindication.

As we begin another week of our Advent journey, we hear again from Isaiah, the prophet of consolation. Writing some 700 years before the birth of Jesus at a time of great uncertainty for the Kingdom of Judah, Isaiah begins to foretell the coming of the Messiah and the fulfillment of the promises once made to the House of David. God will come to save his people: “the desert will bloom, streams of waters will burst forth, the blind will see, the deaf will hear and the mute will sing.” Here, all creation will see God’s vindication and know his redemption.

Israel waited with hope for the Messiah’s coming. And yet, when he did come, many failed to recognize him and even rejected him. In today’s Gospel, we see one such example of this rejection. As Jesus is teaching he is presented with a paralyzed man, lowered by his friends through the tiles of a roof, and laid in front of Jesus.

Here, in a powerful and life-restoring moment, Jesus fulfills the very words of the prophet, as he heals the paralyzed man, strengthening his feeble frame, making firm what was weak. Yet, even in witness to this event, the Pharisees and scribes are full of doubts and questions, preferring instead to question his authority and accuse him of blasphemy rather than rejoicing in his healing powers.

As with all healing accounts in the Gospels, we can simply see them as moments confined to the past, or we can see how God’s word is alive and working in us. We reflect on our own relationship with Jesus. Where are we in today’s Gospel? On the floor in need of God’s healing? Listening attentively to Jesus as he teaches us? Or are we in the corner with those whose hearts are closed, preferring to question rather than be filled with awe and rejoicing?

Wherever we are, there is one thing for certain – we are all offered healing and restoration. So, let us use those gifts this Advent time to allow the desert of our hearts to rejoice and bloom, and the waters of God’s mercy to soak in. Together, let us glorify God for the incredible things he has done.

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Tuesday, December 8, 2020
(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, 709, 723, 2571, 2617, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 **CSDC** 59

FOCUS: Mary is a model disciple and foretells what is possible for all of us through life in Christ.

Today we celebrate one of the great Marian feast days – the Immaculate Conception. It is a feast often confused with the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. In fact, today's Gospel recounts that very event.

Today's feast, though, is not about Jesus' conception, but about Mary's. And within this Gospel text we find the truths about Mary and her person. These truths help establish the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

The Church's veneration and honoring of Mary stems, of course, from the understanding of Christ. The Council of Chalcedon, in 451, canonized the Christian conception of Christ as a unique person, existing in two complete natures. Early Christians tended to place a good deal of stress on the holiness of the mother of Jesus as a way of explaining the full humanity of her son. The mother of Jesus, the one who gave birth to the Word of God into humanity, was by necessity the purest and holiest of human beings. This has been part of the Christian tradition from the second century on.

In today's Gospel account, we see that which gives rise to this truth: The angel Gabriel addresses Mary: *Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.* Mary is "full of grace." That means she literally has no sin within her, for grace and sin are opposed to one another. She is unique and set apart, as the angel attests. Mary's ability to freely respond with an eager *yes* to the uncertainty of a child, born out of wedlock, not a child of her betrothed, marks her as special as well. Mary said, *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.*

Mary's selfless *yes* is a participation in God's saving mission. The beautiful reality is that God, who *could* effect the Incarnation without her, does not. He so respects human freedom, and the dignity of Mary's freedom, that he asks.

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Wednesday, December 9, 2020
(Lec. 183)

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

Gospel related: CCC 459, 1615, 1658

WEDNESDAY
OF ADVENT
- SECOND WEEK
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin)

FOCUS: We place our hope and trust in God each day.

We all have burdens – we are parents striving to feed and clothe our children and raise them to be responsible Christian adults; we are priests and religious evangelizing a culture often hostile to our message; we are health care workers trying to keep up with the daily demands of our patients. Some of us also may have extraordinary additional challenges, such as living with a chronic or life-threatening disease. As Christians, we are no different from others who face these challenges.

Yet today's readings remind us that, as believers, we have special help in dealing with our burdens. Through Isaiah, God reminds the people of Israel of his *great might and strength*, and of his knowledge of all that happens in their lives. God has not forgotten his people and, in fact, reminds them that those who hope in him will find renewed strength and will even *soar as with eagles' wings*. When we do the work God calls us to – the ordinary, everyday work that our vocations demand – God gives us the energy and strength we need. At the same time, Jesus promises rest to those who labor and are burdened – the rest that comes from being yoked with him, from working side by side with him throughout our lives.

We can be assured that God walks with us and works through us when we strive to do the work to which we are called. God also knows when we need rest from our labors and burdens. If we hope in God, if we walk with Jesus throughout our daily lives, we can be assured that God will give us whatever strength, energy, and rest we need at each moment.

Let us yoke ourselves to Jesus through daily prayer, knowing that this time with Jesus in itself gives us rest, restores our energy, and makes us ever aware of what God calls us to do each day. May God grant each of us renewal of strength as we face this day and God's call to us.

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Thursday, December 10, 2020
(Lec. 184)

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

Gospel related: CCC 523, 719

THURSDAY
OF ADVENT
- SECOND WEEK
(Opt. Mem.
Our Lady of Loreto)

FOCUS: Just as John the Baptist kept his focus on the coming of the Messiah, let us keep our focus this season on Jesus.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is extolling the greatness of John the Baptist, comparing him to the great prophet, Elijah.

It is interesting to note that John the Baptist was the last of the great prophets who foretold of Jesus' coming, while being one of the first to recognize him – when they were both in their mothers' wombs. John was killed before Jesus' public ministry was completed; he did not get to witness the death and resurrection of Jesus; and yet his faith was strong and unwavering even as the story continued without him. *Whoever has ears ought to hear*, Jesus tells us. How much easier is it for us to believe when we know the rest of the story?

Advent is a time of waiting – of preparation for the coming of our Lord. Often, in the midst of this busy season, we feel swamped with all there is to do in order to prepare for Christmas. Gift buying, decorating our homes, planning meals, putting up the Christmas tree, aligning calendars, shopping, and coordinating travel plans are the things that consume us. Advent easily becomes a time of preparation for the secular trappings of Christmas rather than a time of waiting and preparing for the coming of Jesus.

It is a good time for us to ask ourselves what we are doing to *really* prepare for his coming. We all know that Jesus should take precedence during this time, but the truth is we get caught up in the tasks of the season and sometimes we don't give Jesus the attention he deserves. There are practical remedies for this: spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

As we buy gifts for our loved ones, we can also buy for those in need. Planning meals can include gifts of food for our local food bank. As we decorate our homes, we can make an even bigger deal about adding a nativity scene to the mantle. This could include a special prayer time with our family gathered around the scene. Our daily calendars can include daily prayer time and/or the use of a book of daily meditations.

John foretold the coming of Christ. We can, too. *The Lord is gracious and merciful* – that is the real Christmas story we ought to tell.

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Friday, December 11, 2020
(Lec. 185)

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

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

FOCUS: Let us be open to God's plan for our lives.

The call to holiness is always personal. The ways in which God calls us to follow him, to be transformed by our relationship with him, and to share his love in the world are always unique. What a glorious mosaic we see when we begin to look through the lives of the saints – no two exactly alike, each one called, through God's power, to change the world in which they lived, to participate in God's plan through their unique personality traits, gifts, and skills.

While we know this on a rational level, we may dismiss this fundamental truth when it comes to our own call to holiness.

And yet, God leads us where we are meant to go. For example, Karol Józef Wojtyła could have spent his life trying to be a monastic like Saint Benedict. But that is not where God led him, for the world needed the future Pope John Paul II to be holy in a way that was uniquely him. Saint John Paul II was called to tour the world, to be profoundly visible, and so to shine the light of Christ which illumined his soul around the globe. We, too, are called to holiness, but in a way that is unique to us and to the needs God knows surround us.

Our Gospel today highlights this truth. John the Baptist was called to follow God's call, neither eating nor drinking, but proclaiming repentance to God's people. Jesus lives out his Father's will in a vastly different way, but both are led by the wisdom that is transforming the world.

The world needs *each one of us* to be holy in a way that only we can be. God knows us. God knows the circumstances we live in, the needs around us, the gifts he has given us. God is calling us in and through all these personal details.

May our hearts be opened today to being led on the way we should go.

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Saturday, December 12, 2020
(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 Mass* (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: The poor and humble of the Lord – prophets of our time.

On December 9, 1531, on the Hill of Tepeyac (which would become the town of Guadalupe), the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared for the first time to an Aztec peasant by the name of Juan Diego. She spoke to him in his native tongue, identified herself as the Mother of God, and asked that a church be built on the site. Juan Diego told the local archbishop of his encounter and the Blessed Mother's request, but the archbishop asked for a miraculous sign before he would agree.

On December 12, the Virgin once again appeared before Juan Diego, and told him to gather flowers on the top of the hill. Even though the hill was cold and barren in December, Juan Diego found roses blooming there and gathered them in his cloak. When Juan Diego opened his cloak before Archbishop Zumárraga that same day, the flowers fell to the floor, and on the fabric was the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Today, that cloak [*tilma*] is enshrined in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, one of the most-visited Catholic pilgrimage sites in the world.

Juan Diego had a lot in common with other people who have been chosen by God. Isn't it interesting that the almighty and ever-living God should choose the poor and humble to tell of his glory? Abraham, obedient to God's request to sacrifice his son, became the leader of a great nation. Moses, abandoned in a basket on the Nile, led the Israelites out of slavery. David slew Goliath and became a king. Holy women such as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Judith, and Esther helped Israel remember and keep hope for their salvation (CCC 64).

Similarly, God chose a poor, humble girl from Nazareth to become the Mother of his Son, Jesus. Jesus chose simple fishermen, a tax collector, and other disciples to bring the good news of his salvation to the world.

See, I am coming to dwell among you, says the Lord, the prophet Zechariah tells us in the first reading. This is indeed Good News! God is not far removed from us, he has chosen to become one of us, that we might be reconciled to him now and forever. Zechariah continues: Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, and they shall be his people, and he will dwell among you.

Mary's appearance to Juan Diego was one that, in essence, repeated this prophetic message. Her own life was a participation in the fulfillment of it. For Christ had indeed come among us, dwelling within her first. And as the first tabernacle of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary draws our attention to this same Christ who now dwells within each one of us. When we see her, we see the glory of God she bore. This is Mary, our Mother. This is the Blessed Virgin. This is Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The archbishop did not believe Juan Diego, but the beauty of Mary and the truth of the Christ she points us to become the good in which the archbishop soon placed his faith. We do not require signs, but we are transformed by mystery: of Christ present in the sacraments, and God's grace working within us. Let us pray for Our Lady of Guadalupe's help in opening our hearts to encounters with the Lord, and to see him always with the eyes of faith.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2020

(Lec. 8)

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

Gospel related: 575, 613, 717, 719 **CSDC** 121, 262

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FOCUS: Our Lord sustains us in joyful hope.

The past two Sundays, our church was adorned in violet for Advent. Today, it is in rose for *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete* means “rejoice,” and rose is a bright and beautiful color of rejoicing for this third Sunday of Advent, since we are more than halfway through our journey to Christmas.

But, did we not get the memo? Because it seems Christmas has already come. Outside of church there is no violet and rose, but red and green. There is Christmas music on the radio and Christmas specials on the screen. Our homes and communities are decorated. Stores have been decked out for Christmas for weeks. The rejoicing has begun. So, why *Gaudete* Sunday now?

First, *Gaudete* Sunday affirms the *value* of rejoicing. Isaiah, in the first reading, rejoices heartily in the Lord, who is the joy of his soul. In the responsorial, we acclaim together with Mary: *My soul rejoices in my God*. In the second reading, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to *rejoice always and do not quench the Spirit*. The rejoicing we are experiencing and sharing with others is a good and holy thing. We can enjoy these times, and give thanks for the gift of family and friends.

Second, *Gaudete* Sunday gives us *reasons* for rejoicing. Isaiah rejoices as he brings glad tidings of God’s vindication for his people. Mary rejoices in the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a Messiah. John the Baptist cries out in the desert because the Lord is on his way. Paul rejoices as God prepares his people for the return of the risen Lord. Through Isaiah, Mary, John, and Paul, God gives hope to his people waiting for redemption. Given this hope, they can wait with rejoicing. We are God’s people today, waiting with rejoicing in what God has already accomplished and will yet accomplish through Christ. The hope God gives prepares our hearts and makes straight the way for Christ.

Finally, *Gaudete* Sunday means that Advent waiting is joyful, hopeful waiting, for Christmas and more. Often, the day after Christmas, the music on the radio stops, the decorations in the streets and stores come down, and the trees get thrown to the curb. Post-holiday clean-up and blues begin. But for the Church, the rejoicing goes on. Our Advent rejoicing becomes Christmas rejoicing up to the celebration of Jesus’ baptism, well into January. Rejoicing carries us into a new year, and new celebrations of God’s redeeming work.

No matter what the colors of the season – violet, rose, red, or green – every time we gather to hear God’s word and celebrate the Eucharist, we do so with rejoicing. Through the grace of Word and sacrament, our Lord sustains us in joyful hope, not only for Advent and Christmas, but for every season of the year as we await the coming of his Kingdom.

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Monday, December 14, 2020
(Lec. 187)

- 1) Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a
- 2) Matthew 21:23-27

MONDAY
OF ADVENT
(OBL MEM
Saint John of the Cross,
Priest and Doctor
of the Church)

FOCUS: Let us pray the Lord will soften our hearts to be open to his promptings.

A great temptation is to say what we think others want to hear. In today's readings, we see a contrast between someone who chooses to listen to God's promptings rather than a king's, and those whose concern over how to answer prevents them from a deeper encounter with Christ.

In the first reading, the Israelites are in the ancient kingdom of Moab – located in what is modern Jordan – as they wander through the wilderness in search of the Promised Land. The Moabite king had tried several times to send a famed sorcerer – Balaam, whose name we heard – to curse the Israelites. Each time, Balaam had been moved by God to bless the Israelites, rather than curse them. In today's reading, this same Balaam gives two prophecies which foresee the nation of Israel being blessed. Though his king commanded Balaam to curse the Israelites, he chose to be open to God's promptings and he spoke the word of the Lord. This openness enabled him to *hear what God says and know what the Most High knows*. What a gift!

In the Gospel, the religious leaders behave very differently. They concern themselves primarily with the reactions of others. They worried that, depending on how they answered Jesus' question about John's authority, they would either elicit the anger of the crowds or earn a rebuke from Jesus. Therefore, they chose not to give an answer, instead saying, *we do not know*.

As leaders who claimed to have no knowledge, they forfeited any claim they might have to authority. What might have happened if they had answered? Perhaps they would have had the opportunity to enter into a deeper encounter with Jesus – an encounter that would have allowed them to learn, understand, and thus *hear what God says and know what the Most High knows*. It would have been a first step – a necessary step for anyone desiring faith.

It is a step we are all called to take: listening to God's will and daring to follow him. It is about being concerned with what God wants, not what others expect of us. For our faithfulness, we are promised eternal life with him.

Today, let us pray the Lord will soften our hearts to be open to his promptings, so that we may be bold enough to take just one step and let God speak to us, so as to learn and understand.

* * *

Tuesday, December 15, 2020
(Lec. 188)

- 1) Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13
- 2) Matthew 21:28-32

Gospel related: CCC 535, 546

TUESDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: God calls us to hear his Word and act on it.

Zephaniah was a prophet in Jerusalem in the seventh century B.C, during a time when many of the citizens of Jerusalem had fallen into the sin of idolatry under the rulers of the Assyrian Empire. He has words of judgment and woe for all who have turned their backs on the Lord. Zephaniah speaks of the coming Day of the Lord, which will be a day of judgment for the Jews and other nations.

But along with judgment there will be healing and redemption. So the prophet announces that God *will change and purify the lips of the peoples*. God promises a *remnant* that will remain, *who shall take refuge in the name of the Lord*. And along with the chosen people, others, *from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia and as far as the recesses of the North*, will come to him. Zephaniah's message indicates that salvation will be for all nations since God is the god of all the earth.

In today's Gospel, Jesus addresses the parable to *the chief priests and the elders of the people*, two groups *who* are frequently depicted as his opponents in the Gospel. The story of the two sons contrasts those who do the will of the Father with those who do not. Jesus says that *tax collectors and prostitutes*, who responded positively to John the Baptist's call to conversion, *are entering the Kingdom of God* before these priests and elders. For it is one thing to say "yes," but it is another thing to *do* what is asked.

For us as believers, Advent is a privileged time. We prepare to celebrate Christ's birth and the salvation he brought for us. But we also look ahead, as Zephaniah did, to the Day of the Lord when he will come to judge the living and the dead. We have been commanded by the vineyard owner, and anointed in our baptism, to go work in the vineyard. May we have the grace to be the best of both sons in today's parable: saying yes to our Father, and showing up in the field.

* * *

Wednesday, December 16, 2020
(Lec. 189)

- 1) Isaiah 45:6b-8, 18, 21c-25
- 2) Luke 7:18b-23

Gospel related: CCC 453, 544, 547

WEDNESDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: *There is no just and saving God but [he].*

How hard it can be to see Christ before us, and around us. We are predisposed, after all, to look for God in grandiose things. As today's first reading from Isaiah proclaims, God is the creator of the heavens and the earth, the one who separates the darkness from the light. God's grandeur extends beyond what the human eye can see, though we catch glimpses of it as we watch a sunset from a beautiful mountaintop, or an infant placed in her mother's arms for the first time. Such awe-filled moments inspire, as Isaiah recommends, every knee to bend.

In today's Gospel, the disciples of John are looking for a similarly awe-inspiring God. They have just watched Jesus raise a boy from the dead, yet they still are unsure as to whether Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited "anointed-one" who will redeem Israel. In their eyes, the Messiah was to be a powerful king who would bring not only spiritual, but also political liberation.

But Jesus did not come as an earthly king, but as the son of a carpenter. Yes, he performed miraculous works, but he did so dressed not in fine, purple garb, but in a well-worn tunic. His mission was not to dazzle people to prove his divinity, but to live the compassion and mercy of God, inspiring all of us to do the same.

As we progress through Advent, may we remember that we need not always look "up" to see God. In fact, at times, we are better off looking "around," to the gifts he has given us: all of creation, *not creating it to be a waste, but designing it to be lived in*; one another, whom we love and with whom we journey in this life; and even something within ourselves. Sinners though we are, we also are temples of the Holy Spirit. God entered human history to dwell among us, and he dwells within each one of us still. *There is no just and saving God but [he].*

* * *

Thursday, December 17, 2020
(Lec. 193)

- 1) Genesis 49:2, 8-10
- 2) Matthew 1:1-17

Gospel related: CCC 437 CSDC 378

THURSDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: Regardless of our lineage, God can use us to carry out his plan.

Today's Gospel passage was written by Matthew in order to emphasize the royal lineage of Jesus: namely that he is a son of David and a son of Abraham. Though Jesus is the Messiah expected by Israel, he has come to save all people.

Matthew's genealogy includes patriarchs, prophets, and kings. It shows the working of God throughout history to prepare for the moment of Jesus' birth, and for the salvation of the whole world. And while the genealogy focuses mostly on paternity, a few mothers are included as well. These four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, have something in common: They each conceived a child with someone other than their husband. They also were not Jewish. The vagaries and complexities of human experience were not barriers to the emergence of Jesus in God's plan of salvation – for God directs everything toward his own purposes.

The seasons of Advent and Christmas provide many opportunities for family gatherings. Whether a family is large or small, tensions can arise when we gather. We can get caught up in creating perfect holiday memories and place undue pressure on our family members to act accordingly. Inevitably, we are disappointed when things do not go according to our plans, perhaps when our family members surprise us by not performing the roles we have prescribed.

Today's readings remind us that Jesus was born into a family, too. Like us, the Son of God was born into a particular family at a particular time in history. The twists and turns in his family tree lead up to the biggest twist of all: a sinless, grace-filled woman who conceives the child Jesus – not with her husband, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. It calls to mind the saying, "God writes straight with crooked lines." No matter how broken our families are, no matter how many twists and turns there are in our own family trees, God can still use us to carry out his plan. We need only to turn over our lives, and our families, to him.

* * *

Friday, December 18, 2020
(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

FRIDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: Emmanuel, God is with us. He always has been, he always will be.

Even if we hadn't looked at a calendar first, we could listen to today's readings and determine that Christmas is just around the corner. Our first reading from Jeremiah points toward a righteous and just king for Judah, and the Gospel from Matthew gives us details on Mary and Joseph's lives leading up to the birth of Jesus – Jeremiah's righteous and just king.

There are just over 200 words in today's Gospel, perhaps none more important than *Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us." We usually consider the name *Emmanuel* only in relation to the Christmas narrative. But when we see that name as "God is with us," it takes on much greater parameters. It actually frames the entirety of Matthew's Gospel, which ends (28:20) with these words from Jesus: *Behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.*

And as we know, Jesus as the second person of the Trinity "always was, always is and always will be" – described at the beginning of John's Gospel as "the Word." The *Word became flesh* is what we focus on at Christmas – Jesus, as human, born to the Virgin Mary. So, if we really grasp the meaning of *Emmanuel* as "God is with us," we see the Christmas narrative as something much more than a cute-baby-in-a-manger story. It is a sign of God's continual presence in our lives. He is not only with us now, but with all those who came before us and all those to come after us.

We have one week now until Christmas. We will hear the word *Emmanuel* over and over here in church and perhaps on the radio through the Christmas season. It is up to us to remember that the word is not just limited to a baby born 2,000 years ago, but to a loving God who has been with us and will continue to be there for us.

It is incumbent upon us to take the spirit of giving that marks this season and make it a permanent part of our lives. As *Emmanuel* gives every day, so must we give every day. For we know that through our joy and through our pain, God is with us – always with us.

* * *

Saturday, December 19, 2020
(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

SATURDAY
OF ADVENT
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: Only faith rooted in love can lead us to respond to God's call.

Today's readings follow each other closely. Both the unnamed wife of Manoah, and Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, were advanced in years; they had already experienced what it felt like to have a barren womb. It was seen as a profound misfortune at best, and a curse at the worst. When God promised they would bear a child, Elizabeth and the wife of Manoah had to maintain trust even in the face of seemingly ridiculous odds. The reward of their fidelity was amazing. Samson defended Israel against her enemies, and John the Baptist became the greatest of all the prophets.

Zechariah's experience in all of this is slightly different. He receives the visit from the archangel Gabriel who tells him that Elizabeth will bear a son, and they are to name him John. Gabriel promised that their son would go *in the spirit and power of Elijah* to prepare Israel for the Lord.

Yet Zechariah couldn't respond fully in faith, perhaps because of the fear he felt, or perhaps simply because he was human and we sometimes fail to let go of our need to understand and control everything. Regardless, he accepted the discipline of speechlessness, and continued his ministry in the Temple. He may not have fully trusted, yet, but he never stopped loving God. Of course, we know that Zechariah eventually comes to a fullness of faith and trust at the birth of John. So even in moments of human imperfection, there is redemption.

Love is how we maintain the fullness of faith. That may sound like a simplistic answer, but it is the logic of the entire plan of salvation. God created us out of love, and wants us to be united with him forever in heaven. When he asks us to trust him in large or small ways, he's asking for our love.

Just like Elizabeth and the wife of Manoah, our trust in God will result in great rewards for us and for those around us. And likely in far greater ways than we expect.

* * *

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020

(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: God has promised us he will not forsake us, or leave us alone.

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

There is a somewhat humorous, if not also very insightful, observation about the often-used command in Scripture: Do not be afraid. This observation is that any time we hear “fear not,” or “do not be afraid,” something very-worth-being-afraid-of is about to happen. In other words, the words “fear not” ought to strike fear into our hearts, because we are about to be asked to do something far outside of our comfort zone: to trust, to have faith, to grow, to love, to follow where the Lord is leading us.

There is something amusing in this, because there is also some truth to it. How many of us have had children say, “don’t be mad, but...” (followed by something that likely makes us mad), or heard someone say, “don’t worry, but...” (followed by something no one would blame us for worrying about).

But there is something quite insightful in this observation, too. And that is, we can laugh at the idea of it because we know, in the end, that all will be well. How do we know this? Because of *why* we are told not to be afraid: *Do not fear, I am with you* (Isaiah 41:10); *Be strong, do not fear! He comes to save you* (Isaiah 35:4); *Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid* (Mark 6:50). From the beginning of human time, God has promised us he will not forsake us, or leave us alone. And so today: *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*

Mary, perfected in grace, has been chosen by God for something we’d agree that anyone of common sense would find frightening. But in her knowledge of God’s favor upon her (another way of saying God would always be with her), she steps boldly and fully into the unknown. She has been told that *the Holy Spirit will come upon [her]*; and *that the power of the Most High will overshadow [her]*. She will not be alone. She will have the help and grace of God, for whom nothing will be impossible.

And so her *fiat* – *May it be done to me according to your word* – makes perfect sense. How could she not say *yes*, when her faith and trust in a God who had nurtured his covenant and fulfilled his every promise, was affirmed by his envelopment of her in his love and protection? How could we not say *yes*, when the same God who found favor with Mary, finds favor with us and never forsakes us? He can strengthen us, Paul writes to the Romans. Where we cannot, God can. We do nothing alone, and all things through the grace of God.

The angels and prophets, and Jesus himself, are right to tell us “fear not.” For God is with us. *Emmanuel*. And so we can laugh at the observation regarding Scripture, and we can laugh in the face of our fear. And in these remaining days of Advent, we give thanks for our Triune God who desires to be in relationship with us, who dwelt among us and whose Holy Spirit empowers us in our faith. We do not have to be afraid.

* * *

Monday, December 21, 2020
(Lec. 197)

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

MONDAY
OF ADVENT
- FOURTH 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 listen to the voice of Mary, we are inspired to draw closer to the Holy Spirit.

There is something about hearing the voice of someone who loves us dearly, especially the voice of our mother. Her voice was probably the first we learned to recognize, even when we were still in her womb. When we were children, it may have comforted us when we were hurting, or encouraged us when we felt weak. Even as we grew into adulthood, hearing the voice of our mother can continue to be a cause of great joy, peace, and consolation. How much more is the voice of Mary like that for Christians!

Whenever Mary speaks to our hearts, the Holy Spirit is speaking through her to bring glory and honor to Jesus. Mary is the mystical spouse of the Holy Spirit, and her voice is united to the Holy Spirit as she mothers the Church. Mary's greeting is Spirit-filled, with the power and presence of God. Of course, Mary is not divine in herself, but because the Holy Spirit flows so freely through her, God does amazing things through her words. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the infant in her womb *leaped for joy* and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

As we come closer to Christmas, let's draw closer to Mary. Let's ask her to speak to us today in our prayer time, to greet us with the same joyful greeting she gave to Elizabeth. At the sound of her voice, our own hearts will leap for joy and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Of course, this encounter with the joy of the Lord in Mary is not meant to end with us. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, God uses our own words to bring his power and presence to others. Like Mary, this is not our own doing but the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Like Mary, we are bearers of Jesus Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit, so that others might come to know God through us. We can celebrate Christmas with the joyful faith of Mary, knowing that God can do great things through us as we celebrate the birth of her Son.

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.

Tuesday, December 22, 2020
(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

TUESDAY
OF ADVENT
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: Our hearts are filled with song; we praise and worship the Lord.

The heart of our Gospel reading today is the beautiful song of praise offered by our Blessed Mother. In addition, our responsorial psalm comes not from the Book of Psalms but is instead a song of praise offered by Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, of whom we heard in the first reading. These holy women offer up their praise to God and inspire generations of believers.

This, of course, is one of the blessings that we receive as Catholics when we gather for the sacred liturgy. Not only do we hear the Word proclaimed, and receive the Blessed Sacrament, but we also get to sing praise to and worship the Holy Trinity.

As we near the celebration of Christmas, we will hear stories about shepherds coming to worship the baby Jesus. We will exalt with angels as they gather to praise the newborn King. Even Magi will come from the East to offer homage and gifts to Jesus.

Our worship is really a joining in an eternal chorus of praise and song. The Scriptures are filled with songs, prayers, and even dances of praise offered to God. Our celebration of the Mass is a part of that history of recognizing and giving thanks to the One who created and saved us.

Soon, we will be ringing the bells in celebration of Christmas, and Christians around the world will be filled with joy. It is good for us to follow the example of Mary and Hannah and tell people the source of our joy. If we praise Jesus before others, then he will certainly greet us with joy in heaven. May our hearts be filled with praise and worship as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, and all throughout our lives.

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Wednesday, December 23, 2020
(Lec. 199)

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

WEDNESDAY
OF ADVENT
- FOURTH WEEK
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John of Kanty,
Priest)

FOCUS: God has prepared the way to salvation through his Son.

These past three-and-a-half weeks, we have been anticipating Christmas; our time of preparation will soon be over and we will celebrate the birth of Christ. We all know how different preparing is from celebrating: before the artist steps back to enjoy his finished work, he or she has spent hours upon hours at the easel; before the mother holds her child, she has completed a time of pregnancy and the great work of laboring her child into the world; before the Christmas feast is enjoyed with loved ones, much time has been spent preparing and cooking it. In each of these, what was hoped for becomes a reality through preparation.

In today's Gospel, we hear some of the final preparations that God made for Jesus to come and dwell among us. We hear the story of John's birth, which came about through God's intervention and the faithful, if imperfect, response of John's parents to receive it. The miraculous signs around John's birth show that God is at work, sending the one who later would prepare a way in the desert for people to receive Jesus. John is born to prepare the way, and he will join in God's primary work of making a way for Christ. John's birth is one more step in the long, patient work of God giving us a Savior: the unimaginable gift of his own Self in Jesus Christ.

The celebration of God-with-us – *Emmanuel* – coming into the world is so very near to us. We may have more preparations we need to make to be ready for our own celebrations. Yet at this Mass on this last full day of Advent, let us pause to consider and savor the ways the Lord has been preparing us to celebrate and receive the gift of himself: how he has drawn us to himself this Advent. The time is short, but it is not over! What final preparations can we make, as well, to be ready for the feast, to receive his gift with open hands and grateful hearts?

We praise the Lord who gives us himself, preparing the way for our salvation. May we entrust ourselves to him so as to be ready to fully celebrate the feast of Emmanuel, God with us.

* * *

Thursday, December 24, 2020
(Lec. 200)

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

2) Luke 1:67-79

Gospel related: CCC 422, 523, 706, 717

THURSDAY
OF ADVENT
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: The birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises God made concerning the House of David.

In this, the last Advent liturgy before Christmas begins this evening, we see both the beginning and the culmination of the messianic prophecies. In response to King David's generous desire to build a house – that is, a temple – for the ark of God, God himself promises to build a house – that is, a dynasty – for David. He further assures security and prosperity for his people, Israel. His greatest promise, though, is that of the Son of David. We can see a partial fulfillment of this promise in Solomon, the biological son of David, who literally built a house for God.

The prophets and psalmists, though, saw an ultimate fulfillment in the royal Messiah to come. God would be a Father to him, and he a Son to God. Moreover, his kingdom would last forever. Neither of these prophecies were realized in the earthly kingdom of Judah, nor in its kings. Both were destroyed by the Babylonians in the sixth century, B.C. Even so, God's people retained their hope that God would be faithful to the House of David. Only in Jesus Christ do we see the culmination and the literal fulfillment of the pledges God made to David.

In the Gospel reading, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, regains his voice for the first time in more than nine months. And he gives voice to the thrilling and imminent expectation of the completion of the messianic prophecies. He says: *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty Savior, born of the house of his servant David.*

Zechariah is of the priestly line of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi. But his own son will fulfill his own prophecies as forerunner to the Messiah. He *will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.*

In our day, we have inherited all the blessings that the Messiah and those who preceded him brought to the world. Beginning this evening, we will celebrate the manifestation of these blessings. Let us lift up our hearts in humble gratitude to God for his gracious and faithful keeping of his covenant promises. Let us rejoice that we will soon have him on our altar and in our very bodies in the Eucharist.

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Three Homilies are given for the Solemnity of The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas): Vigil, Night and Day – Holyday of Obligation

CHRISTMAS 2020 – VIGIL

(Lec. 13)

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

FOCUS: Let us not be afraid to take this child into our hearts and homes, for he is *Emmanuel*.

Each Christmas we hear the very familiar narratives regarding the birth of Christ: A young couple invited by God to play a central role in the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. Today, as we hear Matthew's account, the focus is not on Mary and her unborn child but on her spouse, Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth.

As a faithful Jew, writing to a predominantly Jewish audience, Matthew is at pains to emphasize that Jesus is the legitimate heir to David. Conscious always of that royal identity, Matthew recalls the genealogy of Jesus so as to set his birth in the greater context of the Davidic covenant.

As devout Jews, Mary and Joseph would have been aware of the promises made to David. And we know from Luke's Gospel how Mary gave thanks and magnified the Lord for her role in their fulfillment. Today, however, Joseph – the silent man of Scripture – is at the center of our Gospel.

One can only imagine the questions and doubts that must have swirled around in Joseph's heart on discovering that that his betrothed is with child – the confusion and pain, the fear of public ridicule, not to mention the rules set down in Scripture for those who are found to be with child outside of marriage. So we can understand why he wants to deal with this situation quietly and quickly by withdrawing from the marriage.

But God had other ideas, for this child has not been conceived through the choice of man, but in fulfillment of the Father's plan. Reassured by the angel, Joseph is able to embrace his new role, to put aside fears and concerns, and to do God's will.

We are not called to such a mysterious role as parents of the Christ-child, but we are called to be part of this great salvation history as it continues to unfold through the generations: Through our baptism, we live out our divine call.

As we celebrate Christmas, let us take this opportunity to review our response to God's call. Even as we face the ups and downs of life, we are always buoyed by the same faith and hope that inspired Joseph and Mary to say yes to God. May the Christ-child be born in our hearts today so that others may come to know that God is indeed faithful. May all come to know that the life he offers us through his Son fulfills the words of Isaiah – that the one who is to be born is *Emmanuel*: God with us.

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CHRISTMAS – 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**

FOCUS: Jesus brings hope to our troubled world.

Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.

These words of the angel to the shepherds are meant for us as well. Tonight we gather to celebrate a wondrous event: the birth of God into our world; a helpless baby born in a stable to poor, unknown, and holy parents. The story of Jesus' birth is familiar to all of us, but it's good on a night like this to reflect on the meaning of that birth.

The Advent waiting that we experienced for the past four weeks pales in comparison to the centuries that human beings had waited for a reason for hope. The people in Isaiah's day through to the days of Jesus waited for the Messiah in the midst of violence, slavery, oppression, occupation by a foreign power, and poverty. The people longed for God's promised Messiah to come and set them free from these hardships. Perhaps they were inspired and heartened to hear Isaiah's description of the Messiah: *Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.*

The people in Isaiah's day did not live to see his arrival. As with Jesus' contemporaries, Jesus most likely would not have met their expectations in his humble birth, his ministry as a carpenter and then a preacher and healer, and most certainly in his terrible death on the cross. But God always exceeds any human expectations. Jesus is fully human, yes, but also fully divine. Jesus is the very presence of God among us, who loves all whom he created and with whom he wants to live in joy and peace in his eternal Kingdom.

Jesus brought the kingdom of God to us, but we still await its fullness in time. Like the people in Isaiah's time, we suffer from war, poverty, oppression, illness, and violence of all kinds. Yet, we have seen Jesus, have given our lives to him, and know that he was born, suffered greatly for us, and died to bring us salvation. We know that Jesus will be with us in any of our tragedies or struggles.

Tonight, though, let us rejoice at the birth of this baby, our God and our Savior. Let us sit in the straw with Mary and Joseph and adore the child who was born to us, and let us continue to give that child our very lives and our hearts. Jesus has already given us great joy. We can imagine the joy that we'll experience when we let him work through us to build up the Kingdom, and when we dwell in that Kingdom with our Messiah forever.

* * *

CHRISTMAS – DAY

(Lec. 16)

- 1) Isaiah 52:7-10
- 2) Hebrews 1:1-6
- 3) John 1:1-18

or John 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**

FOCUS: Let the joyful mystery of the Incarnation change our hearts day after day.

The day a baby is born is an occasion of great joy and celebration. Family and friends visit the new parents, excited phone calls are made, and social media announcements invite all to share the family's excitement. Everyone gets caught up in the jubilation, taking turns holding the baby and rejoicing over the new miracle.

And then, whether abruptly or gradually, the excitement wanes. The visitors leave. The hubbub gives way to silence interrupted by little baby coos. The parents sit, staring in bleary-eyed awe at the tiny bundle that has changed their lives forever.

Christmas is the meeting of heaven and earth, the moment when the eternal God enters our broken world as both fully God and fully human – the fulfillment of the hopes and prophecies of millennia. This truth is so monumental that it should define every single day of our lives. The excitement of the birth of this child should never wane. That is the challenge: to allow the wondrous, wonderful mystery of the Incarnation to truly permeate our hearts and minds every day.

The celebration of Christmas gives us the opportunity to visit the Christ-child in the manger, and to sit in awe with Mary and Joseph in the presence of Jesus. We rejoice with angels and shepherds; we celebrate with family and friends. It is also an opportunity to ask ourselves how *this* baby's birth changes our lives. Each one of us can ask God to help us realize, and act upon, how our life is different because of Jesus' presence in the world.

John's Gospel tells us why Jesus' birth is the pivotal moment in history: The Incarnation brings God to us. *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory.* God humbled himself to become one of us, to teach us about himself and show us how to live, love, and serve him. In doing so, the eternal Son revealed the Father to us. He opened the gates of heaven through his death and resurrection, enabling us to live with God forever. Jesus lowered himself to bring us something we could never reach for ourselves.

But the question remains: How does this baby's birth change *me*?

New parents might say that their first child taught them to be less selfish and more self-giving, that they experienced a deep joy even during difficult times, or that a child inspired them to improve themselves. Can we say the same about our encounter with Jesus?

Imagine the God of the universe, who created the stars and angels, and you and me, swaddled tightly and napping in his mother's arms. With a loving smile, she hands her son to you. Imagine his heavy eyes opening as he looks at you before drifting back to sleep. You're holding the Messiah, who will one day die for you. Rise for you. The same Jesus whom you will receive in the Eucharist.

How does this encounter with Jesus change you? Not just today, but forever?

Saturday, December 26, 2020
(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 we who would follow.

Stephen is the first martyr of Christendom, and a stark reminder of the cost of discipleship and the power of love. Stephen's feast is placed the day after Christmas because it was on this date in the year 415 A.D. that his relics were found. Lost for centuries, they were recovered under miraculous circumstances, and countless more miracles have surely come from the intercession of this humble, holy man.

Stephen was not guilty of a crime. Instead, he preached the Gospel and, *filled with grace and power, [worked] great wonders and signs among the people.* Those who were his enemies accused him of blasphemy, and he was put on trial before the Sanhedrin.

Stephen's witness to the saving work of God in history infuriated the religious leaders, and *they threw him out of the city, and began to stone him.* Yet, in the midst of all of this, he forgave those who were persecuting him.

Stephen perhaps was strengthened by Jesus' own words which we heard in the Gospel. When put to the test: *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 the cost of discipleship. He paid it in full with his life. He also knew that those who loved him and followed him would suffer in this life. To Jesus and those who love him, those sufferings 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 over darkness has been the hope of suffering Christians for 20 centuries. It is our hope, too.

As we continue to celebrate the birth of Christ – he who was born to die that we might live – let us hail the martyrs like Stephen who gave their lives for the Lord and for us. And we pray for the protection and the preservation of the lives of our Christian sisters and brothers the whole world over, especially those who risk their lives to profess the faith.

Saint Stephen, Deacon and Martyr, pray for us.

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2020

(Lec. 17)

- 1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
- 2) Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17
- 3) Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22, 39-40

Or in Year B

- 1) Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3
- 2) Hebrews 11:8, 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: The Holy Family helps to guide us and to give us strength.

Today is the Feast of the Holy Family. It is always celebrated on the first Sunday after Christmas, appropriately linking the Incarnation of Jesus to the human family who loved, protected, and taught him.

Sometimes, when we think of the Holy Family, we imagine them as different from ourselves: holier and more spiritual. Well, that is certainly true. They were perfect in obedience and virtue, and fulfilled the biblical prescriptions for properly caring for and loving one another in the sight of God, as explicated throughout our first reading and the psalm: *God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them. When he prays, he is heard; he stores up riches who reveres his mother. And Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.*

So yes, the reality is that they were holy, but they were also fully human – which means that what they attained is possible for each one of us. Often, we try to make them more like us so we can “relate” to them, when really we are called to imitate them in their holiness. We are here, in Church, as a Church family, precisely because they were *not* ordinary! Rather than make Jesus, Mary, and Joseph more like us, we are given the command, opportunity, and grace to be more like them.

They were committed to God and to one another, despite terrible hardships and circumstances. In Saints Joseph and Mary, we not only have human saints who give us an example of how to live together in mutual love and concern while facing day-to-day demands and challenges, but we also have intercessors in prayer who can help us through difficult times. And, of course, in the Son – both fully human and fully divine – we have the example of perfect love who provides the Way to eternal life, and the Holy Spirit who remains in his place to assist us in all we do.

In an address a few years ago on this feast day, Pope Francis said: *Every nativity scene shows us Jesus together with Our Lady and St. Joseph in the grotto of Bethlehem. God wanted to be born into a human family, he wanted to have a mother and father like us. Like us, today, Mary and Joseph felt sorrow, grief, fear, uncertainty, and unease. He continued, Jesus wanted to belong to a family that experienced these hardships, so that no one would ever feel excluded from the loving closeness of God* (Angelus address, Dec. 29, 2013).

The Gospel tells us, *When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.* The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph can help us, guide us, give us strength, and remind us that God has a plan for our lives. He asks us to conform our hearts and minds to him and what he wills for us. When we do, the road may still be filled with difficulties, but we are able to meet them with trust and confidence that God is an integral part of our family, helping us face whatever comes our way, that we, too, may become *strong, filled with wisdom*, and have the favor of God upon us.

Monday, December 28, 2020
(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; in him there is no darkness.

Three short days after celebrating the coming of the Light of the World, the Church reminds us of the darkness that existed, and still exists in our world. The Gospel reveals the horrific cruelty of Herod who succumbed to the darkness of jealousy and pride and, in his rage, *massacred all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under* in an effort to extinguish the Light of the World. Certainly, this was evil at work.

The same darkness motivated the evil actions that challenged and condemned Jesus as he spoke and demonstrated the light and life that comes from the love of God. The darkness and evil of the world seemed to succeed and finally killed Jesus. But light and life and love prevail! Evil cannot win. Jesus overpowers the darkness with his Resurrection, and the power of love lives on as he sends the Holy Spirit to inspire and empower his followers.

The message from the First Letter of John, in our first reading, is a reminder of the hope we have as we witness the darkness of the world that exists today. Yes, evil continues to exist – we see it in the darkness of poverty, cruelty, war, violence, racism, discrimination, and the many ways we fail to treat one another with the dignity due beloved children of God. Our hope comes from the words the disciples of Jesus heard him proclaim: *God is light, and in him there is no darkness.*

This letter from John reminds us that *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! But John warns us to not deceive ourselves. If we want to be sources of light and love, we first need to be honest about our own actions and admit the darkness we hold within before we can dispel the darkness we see around us.

John goes on to assure us that yes, we all commit sin, but in God's brilliant love for us, he has sent his Advocate, Jesus, as expiation for our sins. *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 again children of light. We are restored to fellowship with Jesus and others who walk in the light. We can therefore work together to share the Light of the World with the whole world, as God intended when his immense love for us took on our humanity in the darkness of Bethlehem on that night long ago.

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Tuesday, December 29, 2020
(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: We are invited to remain united with the Lord through obedience to his commands.

As we continue in the season of Christmas, today we meet Simeon, a *righteous and devout* elderly man who prayed often in the temple. In the Gospel passage we just heard, Simeon was moved by the Spirit to come to the temple that day. This is the same Spirit through whom Mary conceived the Child she and Joseph were now bringing to the temple in obedience to the Law; the same Spirit who would come upon Jesus at his baptism and would lead him out into the desert.

And there was baby Jesus in Mary's arms. Simeon saw past that moment to what lay ahead: Jesus would be fully revealed as the Christ, the Savior, and Mary would suffer in her love for him.

The mystery of the Incarnation that we continue to celebrate is a mystery that demands a response from us: Just as God chose to become one of us, we must choose to stand with God. We are to see what Simeon saw – Jesus as *the salvation which [God] prepared in the sight of every people* – and therefore choose to continue to obey his commands, as the Holy Family did and as Saint John calls us to do in the first reading. In this way, we might remain united to him in the light of his love.

As we continue with our liturgy, let us give thanks to the Lord for choosing to draw near to us, and pray for the grace to remain united to him through continued obedience to his commands.

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Wednesday, December 30, 2020
(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: Let us give thanks for our redemption.

In our Gospel, Luke tells us of the prophetess, Anna. While we are not told much about her life, we do find out some key details. As a prophetess, she is understood to be a messenger of God. She is older in years, and most of her life she has been widowed. At this time, it was extremely difficult to be a widow. They were a marginalized group of society, often struggling to make ends meet. After just seven years of marriage, Anna has survived to the age of 84 on her own. We also learn that she never leaves the temple, worshipping there around the clock with fasting and prayer.

This holy woman was prepared for and greatly anticipating the arrival of the Messiah. Upon meeting the infant Jesus, she gives thanks to God and announces his arrival to all of those around her. She was truly a worthy messenger of this joy, given her life's circumstances. In fact, it is precisely her circumstances that makes her so appropriate to announce this unbelievable news. The pain and hardship in her life gave her all the more appreciation for the joy of the arrival of the Messiah. She knew what redemption brought to the world, which is evident in that she immediately starts sharing this joyful news with others.

In our first reading, John reminds us to hold steady to our need for redemption. We might be tempted to find fulfilment in the things of this world, but they all will pass. What endures is the Father's love for us. Are there times when we have tried to meet our deepest needs, our hurts, our suffering, with things that will only pass?

We do not have to rely on these feeble solutions. Christ is born! Our Messiah has come for each and every one of us, to bring the light of redemption to our lives. Here at this Eucharistic celebration, God invites us to bring our needs before him, and to encounter the grace of Christ at this table. May we have the humility to acknowledge our need for redemption. May we have the wisdom to receive the light of the Messiah. May we have the courage to share this joy with others.

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Thursday, December 31, 2020
(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: In Christ we have *the power to become children of God*.

Saint John's words in today's Gospel help us realize that nothing in this world can be the same ever since *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*. There's no longer any separation between us and our creator, and John repeatedly emphasizes how the Son's presence among us throws everything into stark contrast: light and darkness, truth and falsehood, heaven and the world.

Christ's light even reveals this division in ourselves. On the one hand, we see that we are good and infinitely valuable in our Father's eyes; on the other, we stand convicted of all our self-centered mindsets and habits that still oppose his will. We might prefer it if the light were dimmer!

But comfortable compromise with the world is no longer an option. We can either belong to light or darkness, and every decision we make either brings us closer to Christ or takes us further away from him. This is cause for rejoicing, not anxiety. For not only has God given us the way, we have God's assurance that he will always be with us on that way.

Tonight at midnight, many will symbolically put their old selves behind them by launching New Year's resolutions. If we choose to belong to Christ, we, too, need to make practical resolutions, and not just once a year. We could commit to taking 15 minutes of silent prayer time every morning, doing a daily Scripture reading, monthly confession, or finding someone to keep us accountable for a sinful habit we'd like to break.

It's no secret that roughly 80 percent of New Year's resolutions, fueled only by human willpower, will fizzle out by the second week of February. But we have infinitely more power behind us. God's Word made flesh has come to make his dwelling within us in the fullest way possible, when we receive his body, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist. Through confession, he offers total forgiveness and a fresh start every time we fall. In him we have *the power to become children of God*, and we have received *grace in place of grace* [replacement of the Old Covenant with the New].

This is the last hour, and our battle is with the darkness in our own hearts. So let's never be afraid to let the light shine on that darkness, however uncomfortable it might make us, for *the darkness* [can never] *overcome it*.

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