

# DECEMBER

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## YEAR C WEEKDAYS II

Wednesday, December 1, 2021  
(Lec. 177)

1) Isaiah 25:6-10a

2) Matthew 15:29-37

Gospel related: CCC 1329, 1335

WEDNESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: *They all ate and were satisfied.*

They all came to Jesus. Those with disabilities. The blind. The mute. Those with many different hardships and suffering. They had been shunned by society. They were longing, hungry, and searching for answers to their ailments. They were exhausted from their pain. They had heard of his great power. They came to him, expectant and hopeful.

And he cured them all. Their disabilities were gone. They were able to see. They were able to talk. They all went away fed and satisfied.

Isaiah foretold all of this. In the beautiful passage we just heard, he speaks of a perfect time of a great feast where God's mercy *will destroy death forever*. In today's Gospel, Isaiah's prophecy is being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, for he has come as the Son of God to save us. Our tears are wiped away; our sins are forgiven. A Eucharistic feast is now shared by all.

We come here today with our own hungers and longings – with different hardships and different needs. As God has already done so much for us, we trust him with even more. In this time of Advent, we place our needs before God, recognizing and naming the healing that we seek from him, and we prepare our hearts for Christ once again. We are all gathered together around this one table. We trust in God.

As in today's Gospel, bread will be taken, thanks will be given, and the bread broken and shared with all of us. We will be sent away satisfied to continue our Advent journey together.

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Thursday, December 2, 2021  
(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: A wise man builds his house on a rock; a fool builds his on sand.

Jesus warns us over and over again in the Gospels to not only hear what he has to say, but to put his words into action. In the first verse of today's Gospel from Matthew, he tells us very clearly that just praying *Lord, Lord* is not enough to gain eternal life. But in addition to prayer, we must, in Jesus' words, do *the will of my Father in heaven*.

For only the Father is a firm foundation. God created the heavens and the earth, and all things visible and invisible. He is eternal and immutable (unchanging). He is the firmest of foundations, and as such, only fools would build houses on sand.

Those who follow Jesus and practice what he preached will be like the wise man who builds his house on rock, while the fool hears Jesus' words, but doesn't act. This section of Matthew brings Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to an end, the message of which is to live as Jesus lived. And like the rest of Scripture, the message is not just for those who walked with Jesus 2,000 years ago.

Pope Benedict XVI once said: "The Sermon on the Mount is addressed to ... the entire present and future ... and can be ... lived out only by following Jesus and accompanying him on his journey" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 69).

Let's accompany him this Advent season.

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Friday, December 3, 2021  
(Lec. 179)

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

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

Gospel related: CCC 439, 2616

FOCUS: When the Lord asks, *Do you believe that I can do this?*, we say “Amen.”

As we near the end of this first week of Advent, the prophet Isaiah continues to provide consoling messages of hope. Today’s first reading, looking forward to the Messianic age, that is, the kingdom of God, is a majestic, enthralling promise of both mercy and justice. In language similar to what we find in Mary’s Magnificat, Isaiah celebrates the vindication and restoration of the poor, the disabled, and the unjustly oppressed. Tyrants and evildoers will be cut off, and God will perform saving deeds for his people in fulfillment of his promises to the patriarchs. Even the trees will be recreated!

The Gospel shows how Jesus has ushered in that Messianic age in his own person. This passage recounts Jesus fulfilling one of the most important signs of the Messiah – giving sight to the blind. The physical restoration of sight points to the spiritually blind having their eyes open to all that God wishes to bestow on his people. We thus observe the two-fold anticipation so characteristic of Advent: the first coming of Jesus within time, and the last coming at the end of time.

Jesus told the blind men not to let anyone know about their healing, but, of course, they broadcast the event far and wide! Since his Ascension, Christians have had a duty to do the same: to spread the Good News to those who have not heard it, or to seek out in love and compassion those who have lost their faith. Like the blind men, when the Lord asks, *Do you believe that I can do this?*, we say “Amen”; yes, *Lord*, and it will be *done for [us] according to [our] faith*.

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Saturday, December 4, 2021

(Lec. 180)

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

2) Matthew 9:35–10:1,  
5a, 6-8

SATURDAY

OF ADVENT

- FIRST WEEK

(Opt. Mem.

Saint John Damascene,

Priest and Doctor

of the Church)

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

**FOCUS:** Proclaim the Gospel far and wide that all may come to know what the Lord has done for us.

In our first reading today from the prophet Isaiah, we hear of a promise that the Lord will come to his hurting people. He will be a *Teacher*, and bring healing. Jesus has answered our cry for help and restoration. Christ came as the prophets said he would.

In the Gospel from Matthew, Jesus has pity upon the crowds and teaches them and heals them. After he ministers to the people, he calls the Twelve Apostles to himself and sends them out to *go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. He gives them the power to bring healing and freedom to the people in his holy name. Jesus desires the Gospel to be proclaimed far and wide so that people can receive the promises God made to them through the prophets.

After Pentecost, this mission is given to all the baptized. That means that all of us are also given the Good News of the kingdom of God to proclaim to those who are lost or without a shepherd. What a privilege it is for us to be a part of the mission of Jesus! There are so many without hope or who are suffering, who need to hear about the mercy and salvation that Jesus offers.

In our baptism we were anointed prophets for the King. We have the great honor to bring the King's message of love and salvation to the world.

**Saint John Damascene (c. 676-749)** – Raised in Damascus, Syria, John was a Christian monk who became a Doctor of the Church. He spent much of his life in a monastery near Jerusalem writing, studying, and preaching. He also composed hymns. He is well-known for defending the veneration of icons prohibited by the Eastern Christian Emperor Leo in 730. His *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* is a comprehensive summary of the Greek fathers and an essential text in Eastern theology. Saint John was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIII in 1890.

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**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2021**

(Lec. 6)

1) Baruch 5:1-9

2) Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

3) Luke 3:1-6

Gospel related: CCC 535

**SECOND SUNDAY  
OF ADVENT**

FOCUS: We unite ourselves with the people who awaited the coming of Christ long ago.

The Advent season is the Church's time of preparing for the coming of the Lord. We prepare our homes and we prepare our hearts. As God's chosen people awaited the Messiah, we now look forward to celebrating that Messiah's birth, and we also anticipate his return in glory.

In the first reading, the prophet Baruch proclaims to all of Israel that God is *leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company*. The Lord has commanded that the gorges be filled and the mountains be laid low, *that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God*.

John the Baptist will proclaim similar words as he himself directly prepares the way of the Lord. The tradition around John the Baptist is a rich one. John, son of Mary's cousin Elizabeth, is the one destined to announce the coming of the Messiah. He proclaims Jesus' coming and foretells of his importance. He is a powerful witness to the Son of God who came to take away our sins, calling out to all of us: Prepare the way of the Lord; he is coming.

God is faithful to his promises. The prophets foretold that God was sending a Savior to the world, and he did. God sent his Son, Jesus, born of Mary, just as he promised. Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's promises. The Father has prepared the world for the coming of Christ, who came to save us from sin and to restore our relationship with God.

Jesus is the Savior of the world, and the new covenant. By his incarnation, he unites us to the Father and the Spirit. He has restored the relationship that was lost because of original sin.

This season helps us prepare for Christ's birth at Christmas, while being filled with hope and a joyful expectation of when he will come again. We are uniquely united to all those who awaited the coming of Christ long ago, and in the sleep of death now await his second coming, bringing the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. What a wondrous gift.

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Monday, December 6, 2021

(Lec. 181)

1) Isaiah 35:1-10

2) Luke 5:17-26

MONDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Nicholas,  
Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 1116

FOCUS: The good things we have been promised in the Old Testament can be ours through Jesus.

Today's first reading from Isaiah should considerably brighten our day. This is among the most joyful, uplifting messages in the entire Old or New Testament. It paints a picture of what those who belong to the Lord can look forward to, both in this life and in eternal life. Things continue to be uplifting as we move into the Gospel and see that Jesus is making some of Isaiah's prophecies manifest as he begins his public ministry.

We hear Isaiah proclaim, the lame will *leap like a stag*; and then we read the Gospel, in which Jesus heals a young man who is paralyzed. An Old Testament prophecy is manifested in and through Jesus. This is the Good News Jesus came to bring us.

The Gospel also tells us that Jesus makes the young man clean by forgiving his sins. He has made all that Isaiah envisioned true. That is why today's readings are so important and encouraging. God fulfilled his promises in the person of his Son, and through him we are reconciled to God forever.

Another aspect of today's Gospel is interesting, if not noteworthy: The presence of the friends of the paralyzed man, and their audacity. There was no reward for them, personally, in getting their friend in front of Jesus. They simply did it out of concern for him.

In the end, this Gospel not only helps strengthen our trust and faith in Jesus, it gives us the message that nothing should stop anyone from getting to Jesus – especially if we ask for God's help. It encourages us to be bold, to be creative, to be persistent in our efforts to live the Gospel, and to help others do so when necessary.

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Tuesday, December 7, 2021

(Lec. 182)

- 1) Isaiah 40:1-11
- 2) Matthew 18:12-14

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

Gospel related: CCC 605, 2822

**FOCUS:** *Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!*

Today's first reading echoes a popular Advent theme: Prepare the way of the Lord. The voice of Isaiah encourages the reader to make straight the highway for God.

We can see this as a call during Advent and throughout our lives to open up a place in our hearts for God to come in easily – to examine what mountains may exist in our hearts that prevent us from knowing that God dwells in us. There may be rugged land – habits or ways of staying busy – that needs to be made smooth to welcome him. These are helpful reflections for us to make during this Advent, that we might call upon the Lord for his help in doing his bidding.

For the Gospel gives us the comforting reminder that, as we strive to make ourselves more available to God, Christ is present within and among us. As our Good Shepherd, Jesus will make every effort possible to find us on the days when we're lost, if only we are open to him. He will reach out to us through prayer, Scripture, and even the voices and encouragement of friends and family.

As once Isaiah proclaimed reprieve for Jerusalem and cried out to the cities of Judah, *Here is your God*, so we experience that same comfort and salvation in the Eucharist and in our participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Jesus has brought light into our lives, and we are commissioned to take that light to the world. In simple ways, we can help the Good Shepherd to care for all his sheep. Let us *make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!*

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Wednesday, December 8, 2021  
(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 Feast day  
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 **CSDC** 59

**FOCUS:** God chose one like us, keeping her free from sin that we might experience healing and grace through her Son.

Today we celebrate that unique grace given to Mary and her role in the drama of our salvation. Mary was conceived without sin and is described as *full of grace*. This dogma of faith was officially proclaimed in 1854 by Pope Pius IX:

“We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful” (Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854).

This belief has deep scriptural roots and is present from the very beginning of the Church. The Church has always honored Mary and her maternal role in our salvation. Her *fiat*, freely given, allowed that great plan to unfold in time. Yet while the external focus of today might seem to be on Mary, the real focus is always on Christ. Like all Marian feasts, today’s solemnity cannot be celebrated without reference to Christ. That’s why Pius IX emphasized that the dogma comes about through the *merits of Jesus Christ*. It is Christ who redeems, but in the mystery of the Incarnation, God has chosen to preserve Mary from original sin as a fitting mother for his Son.

Mary is the perfect example of God’s redeeming grace, but she was able to receive the fullness of this grace only because Christ would later redeem all humanity through his death and resurrection. As Saint John Paul II said, “Chosen in advance to be *the Mother of the Incarnate Word*, Mary is at the same time the first-fruits of his redeeming action. The grace of Christ the Redeemer acted in her in anticipation, preserving her from original sin and from any contagion of guilt” (Dec 8, 2003). In other words, Mary was sinless so that she could give birth in the flesh to the Savior.

Mary was blessed both as the mother of Jesus and for her faithful life of discipleship. We are far from sinless, but through sacramental and sanctifying grace – that is, with God’s help – we are strengthened and healed from sin. In this way, we, too, can bear Jesus: in our bodies, in our hearts, and in our lives of discipleship. God chose one like us, keeping her free from sin that we might experience healing and grace through her Son. Thanks be to God for his holy mother.

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Thursday, December 9, 2021  
(Lec. 184)

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

THURSDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK  
(Opt. Mem.

Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin)

Gospel related: CCC 523, 719

FOCUS: Nothing is beyond the redeeming hand of God.

The prophet Isaiah in today's first reading uses striking language to describe the Israelites. They are likened to some of the most repulsive insects we can think of: worms and maggots. Yet Isaiah's point in this passage is clear: God's mercy extends even to the most slippery, to the lowliest. He goes on to employ beautiful imagery to describe the work of the Lord. God turns the maggots into *a threshing sledge* – powerful and purposeful; God waters the thirsty and plants life-giving trees; the deserts become marshlands and the dry ground turns to springs of water by God's hand. Truly, nothing is beyond the redeeming love of God, not even the worms and maggots.

This love is on full display to us this Advent season. Amidst the darkness of the winter months, amidst the lowliness of our own hearts at times, God is preparing to turn the darkness into light, to raise up the lowly. This is the message John the Baptist brought to his generation, namely that their lowly ways would be brought to light by the one who was to follow him. Jesus praises John for his humble message, yet even prophets such as John will be dependent on the redeeming hand of God.

May our hearts be full with the hope that Advent brings. For no darkness is too dark, no desert too dry, no maggot too lowly. The one who redeems everything is breaking into our world, eager to love us back into wholeness. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

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Friday, December 10, 2021

(Lec. 185)

1) Isaiah 48:17-19

2) Matthew 11:16-19

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

FOCUS: The Lord will lead us on the way we should go.

As with all prophets, John the Baptist had those who liked and followed him, and those who did not. And we might wonder, given his particular eccentricities and asceticism, how many people missed the opportunity to encounter God in a new and deeper way because John the Baptist wasn't the type of person they expected to herald the coming Messiah. The Gospels are full of accounts of those who missed the opportunity to encounter God himself in the person of Jesus because he didn't behave in the manner they expected.

Similarly, we may have missed an opportunity to encounter God because he showed up in a way we didn't expect, or because we ignored a person or situation.

This week, let us pray for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to be attentive to the people and situations God is leading us to. The first reading assures us that the Lord will lead us on the way we should go if we follow his commands. Let's look for God in the unexpected, and may he help us to see him everywhere that he is, not just where we think he "should" be.

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Saturday, December 11, 2021

(Lec. 186)

- 1) Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11
- 2) Matthew 17:9a, 10-13

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

Gospel related: CCC 718

FOCUS: God draws us into deeper communion in moments of awe and wonder.

Imagine hearing the prophet Elijah speak and witnessing him being taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. The Scriptures teach us that Elijah brought down fire from heaven. This would have been a moment of awe and wonder, if not a few other emotions! It certainly was something the Jewish people knew about, and perhaps anticipated seeing again, as they awaited Elijah's return as a sign of the Messiah's imminent appearance.

In fact, today's Gospel is a small part of the larger Transfiguration story in which Jesus is seen speaking to the prophets Elijah and Moses, where the disciples witnessed Jesus transfigure into garments of dazzling white. Immediately following this event, the disciples question Jesus about Elijah. Jesus explains that John the Baptist came to fulfill the prophecy as the prophet to precede the Messiah.

If the disciples had to ask questions of Jesus, then we ought not feel bad when we ask God to help us understand the Scriptures we hear or read, the things that happen in our life, or the times when what we "see" is not the full truth of what God is revealing to us. God gave us intellect and reason so that we can search for truth. Saint Augustine and Saint Anselm of Canterbury refer to this as "faith seeking understanding." We may not see literal fire come down from heaven, but sometimes there is a burning in our hearts when we experience God's presence. These are times when God is present to us, helping us to dive deeper into faith and grow closer to him.

Sometimes God uses these moments to draw us deeper into the mystery of God. Moments of awe can remind us to praise God. Moments of curiosity can invite us to deeper understanding. And moments of apprehension can help us learn to trust God. We can attune ourselves to our own souls in order to then turn outward toward God. As the psalmist prays, *Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.*

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**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2021**

(Lec. 9)

1) Zephaniah 3:14-18a

2) Philippians 4:4-7

3) Luke 3:10-18

Gospel related: CCC 535, 696, 2447

**THIRD SUNDAY  
OF ADVENT**

FOCUS: We are called to share the joy of Christ in our lives.

In today's Gospel, three different groups approach John the Baptist and ask, *What should we do?* He is asked by crowds. He is asked by tax collectors. He is asked by soldiers. We hear it so much, the questions come across as a refrain as we listen to it.

All of these groups are united in their searching. They turn to John the Baptist for answers. Indeed, many of us today come to our liturgy asking that very question. As a sacred season of the liturgical year, Advent is a time when we put a special focus on what we should do. We ask this as a way of preparing our hearts for the Incarnation, the coming of the Lord.

As we gather here today, the Gospel sheds light for us on that question. John the Baptist has a clear answer for the three different groups. He tells the crowds to share their possessions with those who have none. He tells the tax collectors to stop their corrupt ways and collect only what they have to from others. He tells the soldiers to live justly. All of them are being asked to take steps to open their hearts. In this very preparation, there is joy. Their new practices will bring joy to those who are in need or have been victimized.

John the Baptist connects the announcement of the Good News with a call to action. Since the kingdom of God is at hand, it demands certain behaviors of us. Our acts should be just and show love to others. To live a life of discipleship like this can be a source of profound joy.

In our first reading from Zephaniah, we hear more about this source of joy. We are joyful because the Lord protects us from fear and anxiety. We are joyful because the Lord is in our midst. We are joyful because he has renewed us in his love. This joy is something we are called to constantly be true to in our lives. It takes practice to live this joy. That is what Advent calls us to and that is what we celebrate in particular this Third Sunday of Advent.

Now that we are more than halfway through our journey of Advent, the Lord gives us an opportunity to recommit ourselves in his joy, and to bring the joy of the Lord to practice in our lives. We must take courage to always ask the Lord "What should we do?" like the crowds did in the Gospel. The search for answers will always lead us closer to him.

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Monday, December 13, 2021

(Lec. 187)

1) Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a

2) Matthew 21:23-27

MONDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Lucy,  
Virgin and Martyr)

FOCUS: *Teach me your ways, O Lord.*

The crowd knew where John's baptism had come from. They knew that the work John was doing was of heavenly origin.

What, then, can explain the stance of the chief priests and the elders in this story? They already know the answer to their question. They knew the prophecies, like the one we hear in our first reading today. They were looking for the star advancing from Jacob, for the staff rising from Israel. And yet they cannot see what is so clear to the crowds gathered around Jesus.

God is at work. God prepared the way through John the Baptist. And Jesus' authority is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. God has drawn near.

As we journey through Advent, the growing light of our wreath reminds us that Christ's coming dispels the darkness of sin and death. Jesus shows us God at work. Christ makes known God's saving love.

The chief priests and elders do not see this, however. *We do not know*, is their reply in this passage. What is the difference between the crowd who clearly knows the divine origin of John's baptism and the darkness that entombs these leaders? A simple openness. A searching. Imagine a door, blocking light, but the moment it is opened, even a crack, the light can pour through. This openness is faith.

Let us ask the Lord to show us his love and teach us his ways. And to give us increased faith this Advent that we might recognize and receive him ever more fully in this holy season.

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Tuesday, December 14, 2021

(Lec. 188)

1) Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13

2) Matthew 21:28-32

TUESDAY

OF ADVENT

- THIRD WEEK

(OBL MEM

Saint John of the Cross,

Priest and Doctor

of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 535, 546

FOCUS: God looks with favor on the lowly and humble.

In today's first reading, God rejects the officials, rulers, prophets, and priests of Jerusalem, but promises his favor to a humble and lowly remnant of Israel. In the Gospel, Jesus calls out the leaders of Israel, telling them that prostitutes and tax collectors will enter the kingdom of God before they do. In both cases, the religious and political leaders are condemned for their arrogance. They have refused to accept correction from God's messengers – Zephaniah and John the Baptist.

Jesus' parable illustrates this point. It is not because of their sins that the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God, but because they have listened to John the Baptist and repented. The chief priests and elders, on the other hand, have promised to serve God, yet failed to believe God's messenger.

To enter the kingdom of God, we must be lowly and humble like the remnant of Israel, who *do no wrong and speak no lies*. To be humble is to know the truth about ourselves. It is to recognize that God is God, and we are not, and to accept correction when we stray. As we prepare to welcome Christ into our hearts, may we reflect on how God is calling us to serve. It is the opportunity to discern whether our "yes" to God is mere lip service, or whether it takes us into the vineyard to work.

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Wednesday, December 15, 2021  
(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: *I am the Lord, there is no other.*

In today's readings, we hear variations on a question that comes straight from the human heart. The question is anticipated by the Lord in the reading from Isaiah, and asked by John the Baptist's disciples when they approach Jesus: *Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?*

In today's first reading, the Lord asserts over and over some variance of, *I am the Lord, there is no other.* It is he, the Lord who created all things, foretold all things, and is the only *just and saving God*. To him can we turn and be safe; in him shall be our vindication and glory. Time and again, the Lord revealed himself to the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament. The people waited for the Messiah he would send.

John the Baptist's followers imply this when they ask, *Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?* They were waiting, they were ready. They knew the prophets and the Scriptures. Yet they were not sure, and so they asked.

We know the One who came, and who is to come. Saint Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*, "Our heart is restless until it rests in you," speaking to that searching desire of people. We can pray for the Holy Spirit's help this Advent to allow ourselves to rest in God – to counter the temptations that push us to look elsewhere for our peace, whether it be social standing or worldly achievement. Lord, you are who you say you are. [*You are*] *the Lord, there is no other.*

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Thursday, December 16, 2021

(Lec. 190)

1) Isaiah 54:1-10

2) Luke 7:24-30

Gospel related: CCC 523, 719

THURSDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: God welcomes with great joy any repentant sinner.

*Raise a glad cry and break forth in jubilant song.*

Through Isaiah, God tells Israel that, whenever it turned its back on him, the nation became incapable of bearing good fruit. They were barren, full of youthful shame. And yet, God never completely abandoned them. God knows the weakness of the human heart, and still bound himself in covenant with us. The only heart that becomes barren is the one that refuses to ask for forgiveness. God eagerly welcomes back those who repent. The last verse of our first reading shouts this loud and clear: *My love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the Lord, who has mercy on you.*

This barrenness is no different with the Pharisees in today's Gospel. The Pharisees and scholars of the law, who had refused to be baptized by John the Baptist, *rejected the plan of God for themselves*. This is the plan of which Isaiah spoke: forgiveness, love, mercy, and renewing the covenant. They did not acknowledge *the righteousness of God*, even when *all the people who listened, including the tax collectors*, did.

The lowest of the low – tax collectors and other non-elite, those who would have borne youthful shame – came to repentance through John, and through the words of Jesus Christ. Jesus, who is the love of God personified, promised to never leave us. His death and dying, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, are the mercy of God come to save us and sanctify us. He has told us again and again ... and again, that he welcomes the repentant sinner.

That indeed is worth raising a loud cry and breaking into jubilant song.

Friday, December 17, 2021

(Lec. 193)

1) Genesis 49:2, 8-10

2) Matthew 1:1-17

Gospel related: CCC 437, CSDC 378

FRIDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: Christ's salvation is a gift offered to the entire world.

Today's Gospel is from the very beginning of Matthew. Although it may seem strange to essentially read a list of names – a complete genealogy of Jesus – it is a rich introduction to Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew wrote his Gospel for a community that was both Jewish and Gentile Christian. To those who were knowledgeable of the Jewish Scriptures, these names were tied to their history, beginning in Genesis, in which God revealed himself to his people and called them into a covenant relationship with him. For those unfamiliar with God's activity in human history, Matthew's use of Jesus' ancestors, which includes both Gentiles and those married to non-Jews signifies that the covenantal relationship that God entered into with the Jews will be extended to all people.

There are other literary devices used here that give us an appreciation of all that is encompassed in God's saving plan. One of those is Matthew's reference to the Exile which parallels Jesus to Moses. As "the new Moses," Jesus will come out of Egypt, wander the desert for 40 days, and bring down his new law from the mountain in the Sermon on the Mount. He will not abolish but fulfill the law, and as such all (not just the chosen ones) are free to be in relationship with God.

The beauty of this genealogy, and all of salvation history – is that we who inherit the faith from our ancestors come from a long line of perfectly imperfect human beings. Our past is full of untold numbers of sinners and saints, as is our future. Yet we are all connected through baptism to the family of Christ. We are sisters and brothers to the King, and heirs to the eternal kingdom of God. For Christ's salvation is a gift offered to the entire world.

\* \* \*

Saturday, December 18, 2021

(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

SATURDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

**FOCUS:** Joseph is a model of the truly great – the magnanimous – life that all Christians are invited to.

Magnanimity is a virtue which literally means “greatness of soul.” It names that quality of a person who habitually seeks out true greatness – that person who strives forward to do the very best with his or her life and make the most of each day in it.

We may be tempted to believe that true greatness is reserved for those persons who stand out above the rest – world leaders or social activists, Fortune 500 CEOs, bishops, or popes. But this is not so. In the Gospel today, Joseph reveals that the “ordinary” greatness to which we are all called can be found by simply following the will of God rather than seeking one’s own comfort.

Joseph is a faithful man, evidently concerned with following the law, but he is also merciful and compassionate. For these reasons he decided to divorce Mary quietly. But after receiving the message of the angel, we hear that immediately, *when Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him*. This would not have been a comfortable choice. It would potentially expose Joseph to the same shame from which he had sought to shield Mary. It would mean taking responsibility for protecting and raising the Savior of Israel, the new David, God’s own son! But Joseph moves to act right away, quietly giving his own “yes” in deed to echo Mary’s “yes” in word.

This is that mark of a truly great man. In what remains of Advent this year let us prepare, with Joseph, to say our own great “yes” to Christ at Christmas – because greatness is truly better than comfort.

\* \* \*

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2021**

(Lec. 12)

- 1) Micah 5:1-4a
- 2) Hebrews 10:5-10
- 3) Luke 1:39-45

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

**FOURTH SUNDAY  
OF ADVENT**

FOCUS: Through everything, Jesus is in our midst.

When we find out that we passed a big test or are offered an exciting job, we naturally want to share that news with others. Mary and Elizabeth demonstrate that natural inclination to share joy in today's Gospel. When the two expectant women see and hear each other, they express joy and gratitude – even the infant, John, leaps in Elizabeth's womb.

While expecting a child is a wondrous experience, it is one that can be marked by anxiety and difficulty as well. Surely these women shared their difficulties as well as their joy. In this way, Mary and Elizabeth teach us something about Christian community. They draw closer together to share in joy, pain, and difficulty. All the while, Jesus was in their midst.

Yet from an outsider's perspective, they probably looked like any other women. Who would have expected the Messiah to be born as a vulnerable infant? The first reading includes the prophecy of the birth of the Messiah. Micah proclaims that the ruler of Israel will come from Bethlehem-Ephrathah, and even adds that Bethlehem is *too small to be among the clans of Judah*. The Messiah will be born in a place of little worldly significance, just as the Messiah will be born of a lowly virgin. Lowly in the world's eyes, but surely not lowly to God. In this way, God will establish the new covenant.

God sanctifies these lowly and seemingly insignificant people and places. Through them, the Messiah is brought into the world for the salvation of all people. What a joyous truth that we are invited to share. The call of Jesus can be difficult at times, but he is here in our midst and has given us the Holy Spirit to help us. The season of Advent reminds us of the joyful anticipation of celebrating our Messiah's birth, and of his second coming.

And so, like Mary and Elizabeth, we gather as a Christian family to share in this joyful anticipation. We can share our joys and triumphs, as well as our pains and difficulties. When we gather around this altar, we ask Jesus to be present amidst our shared experience of life. Some of us gather around this table with things to celebrate. Others of us carry grief in our hearts, especially as the holidays approach and serve as a reminder of those who will not be with us this year. As a Christian community, we are called to embrace one another to provide support, and most especially to share in the joy that through everything, Jesus is in our midst.

\* \* \*

Monday, December 20, 2021

(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

MONDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: Mary is our model of faithful obedience to God.

During Advent we prepare for Christ's coming. Nothing could have prepared Mary for Gabriel's announcement, and yet, she submitted to God's plan. Her humility and faithful obedience make her a model of discipleship.

In today's readings, we hear two birth announcements. One is given to Ahaz to assure him that God will remain faithful to his promise to David. Isaiah tells Ahaz that a virgin will conceive and bear a son named Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." Gabriel tells Mary that she will bear a son named Jesus, which means, "God saves." Mary questions how this is possible because she herself is a virgin. Ultimately, she accepts God's will, saying, *May it be done to me according to your word.* Mary's response, known as her *fiat*, is her "yes" to everything God has planned for her. While Ahaz prefers to rely on the might of armies to ensure God's will is done, Mary humbly assents to the angel's message, as confusing and frightening as it may be.

Mary accepts the blessing and burden of motherhood, the responsibility of raising not just any child, but God's own Son. Her willingness to surrender her whole self to God makes it possible for God to be with us, historically and bodily. God takes on flesh and becomes one of us to save us.

Mary's humility and faith are not just to be admired but emulated. Like Mary, we are called to humbly obey the Lord, giving over our bodies, our plans, and our very selves to the will of God. When we do this, God can use us to bear his love and light into the world. As we journey through this final week of Advent, let us say with Mary, "May it be done to me according to your word."

\* \* \*

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

(Lec. 197)

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

TUESDAY  
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: We are Christ's beloved ones.

In an idyllic Advent-time scene, with just a couple of days until Christmas, we can imagine a house sprinkled in snow, lined with strings of lights. Outside it is cold but you see a warm glow in the windows as those inside eagerly await the coming of Christ at Christmas. If they are eager for Christ, Christ is even more eager for them. They long for Christ, and Christ longs for them, to be with them as Emmanuel – God with us. He will come to them like the gazelle in our first reading from Song of Songs that springs and leaps across the hills and gazes and peers through the windows. He seeks them out to say, I am here! *Arise, my beloved ... and come!*

We speak of Christ coming to us at Christmas as our Lord and Savior, King of all nations, Light of the World, and Prince of Peace. Less often do we speak of Christ coming as our beloved one. But today's readings remind us that we are Christ's beloved, beautiful ones, and he comes to us as one who desires intimacy with us, who cherishes us, and who holds us dear to his heart. He comes in total self-gift, bearing unconditional love, and leaping with eager anticipation, longing to see us and hear our voice. This joyous experience of Christ's love is like the rains being over and gone, flowers appearing again on the earth, and the fragrance of vine blossoms in the air. Like the psalmist, we respond with exaltation and sing to him a new song, *for in him our hearts rejoice*. In the Gospel, Elizabeth cries out and John leaps for joy in Elizabeth's womb in response to Christ's love. This is the joy of Christmas: Christ coming to our hearts and homes to love us, and we respond with joy. God is with us; the promise of his love is realized.

**Saint Peter Canisius (1521-97)** - 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.

\* \* \*

Wednesday, December 22, 2021

(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

WEDNESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: Praise God for all he has done for us.

In today's Gospel, we hear Mary's prayer of praise in which she extols and names some of the wonderful things God has done for her and for her people throughout the ages. For many of us, prayers of praise aren't usually ones we offer with much frequency. Prayers of petition, thanksgiving, contrition – those might come more naturally.

But taking the time to praise God might do wonders for our spiritual life. Praising God, as Mary does, means spending time remembering the good things God has done for us – the good things for us specifically, but also for our families, for our Church, for our communities – and praising, not just thanking, God for them. What's the difference? Think about it a moment. When we thank God, we make it about us. We focus on how we feel, how grateful we are. And we should be thankful, of course. But when we praise God, we focus on God, on who God is, what God is like that he has done such things for us. Focusing on God's goodness, mercy, kindness, compassion, love, and forgiveness evokes a different kind of response in our hearts.

In addition, remembering what God has done for us, how God has come through for us in the past, can help us persevere in times of dryness and hardship. It can help us be patient with God and his timeline, be patient with ourselves and our frustration when things don't seem to be working out as planned or hoped. It can help us remember that, even in the midst of our suffering, our sorrow, Christ has already triumphed on our behalf; our victory is assured, our true prize is won.

\* \* \*

Thursday, December 23, 2021

(Lec. 199)

1) Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24

2) Luke 1:57-66

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

FOCUS: Good and upright is the Lord; he teaches the humble his way.

The name “John” means “the grace of God,” or “God is gracious.” This was the name the angel Gabriel had previously instructed Zechariah to give his son when he was born, and in today’s Gospel we see both Elizabeth and Zechariah publicly announce this as their son’s name. All present were witness to God’s divine grace, for it was by that, and not by nature, that Elizabeth had conceived at all. They had awaited this child with cautious optimism (Cf. Lk 1:24-25), and his arrival was met with great rejoicing.

John, of course, would grow up and be known as John the Baptist, the one who heralded Christ’s coming and “prepared the way,” as we are so often reminded. The story of his birth in today’s liturgy is not accidental, for it serves to herald the imminent coming of Christ – as the Christ Child. Christmas begins in the late afternoon tomorrow with the celebration of the Christmas Vigil Mass. It will be a time of rejoicing and bearing witness to another action of divine grace, one that brought the Father’s Son into human time and history. We have spent weeks in preparation, anticipation, joy, and hope for it. And though all of the secular activities surrounding us embody these characteristics, we, as Christians, know there is so much more.

The phrase “Jesus is the reason for the season” may seem trite and overused, but it best illustrates the real truth of this time. Perhaps we can hear John the Baptist telling us that preparation is not just about buying gifts and preparing food, but about praying and cleansing our hearts to welcome the Lord. Anticipation is not simply waiting for gatherings and gifts, but about looking forward to the ultimate gift of our Savior. Joy and hope are not about lights and decorations, ribbons and packages. They point to the greatest gift of all – our salvation embodied in the infant Jesus.

God is indeed gracious. And no matter what our names are, we have the privilege, and are commanded, to be a messenger for the Lord, preparing the way before him, and bringing others to him. *For Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice, he teaches the humble his way.*

\* \* \*



Friday, December 24, 2021

(Lec. 200)

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

2) Luke 1:67-79

Gospel related: CCC 422, 523, 706, 717

FRIDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: God is working in our midst, and he is most deserving and worthy of blessing and praise.

Zechariah's song of praise in today's Gospel, what we call "the Canticle of Zechariah," or "The Benedictus," is prayed every day during Morning Prayer in the Church's Liturgy of the Hours. In our joining of Zechariah in praise, we also remember his son, John, who would prepare the way for the Lord.

That Zechariah speaks at all is a momentous event: Nine months prior to today's passage, he had been made mute by the angel of the Lord because he doubted the angel's message to him that he and his wife would have a son. But with the birth of John, his tongue is loosened and he – filled with the Holy Spirit – gives blessing and offers praise and prophecy in thanksgiving for all that the Lord has done and will continue to do.

In all of this, Zechariah offers us a model for our own life of prayer and evangelization. God is working in our midst, and he is most deserving and worthy of blessing and praise. We also know that, like Zechariah's son, John, we are to share the Good News – to evangelize – *to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.*

We are living witnesses of God's salvation. We are recipients and heirs to *the tender compassion of our God, from whom the dawn from on high [came to] break upon us; who shine[s] on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; who guide[s] our feet into the way of peace.* We have what Zechariah foretold, and we are about to receive it into our very bodies: Jesus himself in the Eucharist. There is nothing more worthy of our blessing and praise.

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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 2021 – 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: Jesus' lineage has now become our own and we are all part of God's family.

The birth of our Savior was both an answer to prayer and the fulfillment of prophecy. In the Christ Child lie all the hopes of God's people throughout time. In him, the Word made flesh, God has become like us to help all of us to become more like him.

The genealogy that begins Matthew's Gospel is given for a purpose. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. In this long list of names, we see saints and sinners, prophets and prostitutes. More importantly, Jesus' family tree is also our family tree. As adopted sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, his lineage has become our own and we are powerfully reminded that we are all part of God's family.

This genealogy is a further reminder that the birth of Jesus was always part of God's saving plan. We see in these three sets of 14 generations – which stretch back through history more than 2,000 years – that God was planning for our salvation and setting in motion the chain of events that would lead to the coming of the New Adam born of the New Eve. Even as Israel continued to sin against God and his covenant, he was busy at work preparing his people for the coming of his only begotten Son.

In today's second reading from the Book of Acts, Saint Paul also focuses on Jesus' ancestry, as he testifies to God raising up a savior from his chosen people: *From this man's descendants God, according to his promise, has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus.* Paul speaks about the Exodus; King David, who was the son of Jesse; and of John the Baptist and his *proclaiming a baptism of repentance*, all to show that in the person of Jesus we find the natural "progression," we might say, of God's original covenant. There is no intended disconnect between those who followed the Mosaic law and those who now follow Christ. Christ is the fulfillment of all that came before him – of all that God promised.

This Christmas, the Gospel reminds us how the birth of Christ came about. Every last detail was fulfilled according to prophecy and the plan of a loving God who went to such great lengths to save us and set us free. Lying in the manger, we receive the greatest gift of Christmas, the one we have heard called Wonder-Counselor, and the Prince of Peace. Come, let us adore him.

\* \* \*

## CHRISTMAS 2021 – 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: God became one of us so we could one day become one with him.

Glory to God in the Highest! God is with us! And we are *here*, in our spiritual home, together again – to celebrate the birth of our Savior.

Last year, many of us celebrated Christmas by watching Mass from home or gathered with about 25 percent of our fellow parishioners. It was just not the same. Worldwide, we were commemorating the great feast of the Incarnation of our Lord – when God literally came to be with us – and yet we could not be with one another.

And so there is gratefulness and relief in our being together today. Saint Augustine says our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Here, in this place, our restless hearts settle. We take comfort in the gift of the Son, given to us to be a light for all people. This Son, this Savior, chose to come to us as a vulnerable, tiny infant. He became one of us to save us and help us find our way home to God. Because he shared in our humanity, he understands our pain and suffering and restlessness. He was misunderstood, betrayed, and rejected. He knew the sadness of losing friends, and endured the pain and suffering of crucifixion and death.

Whatever pain, loss, or disappointment we have endured this past year, we know that Jesus understands and wants to strengthen and comfort us. In the Gospel, we hear the angel say: *I proclaim to you good news of great joy ... a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.* This good news is of God's love that calls us to come home to him. We sing Glory to God with the angels that his love is so complete, so unconditional, so forgiving, that he became one of us so we could one day become one with him.

On this Christmas night, it is good to feel at home. As we give thanks for the tiny child who came to change the world and had no place to lay his head, let us welcome him into our hearts and invite him to change our lives.

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## CHRISTMAS 2021 – 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** 262

**THE NATIVITY  
OF THE LORD  
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: The world is created anew in the life of the Christ Child, who is the light of the world.

On this Christmas morning, the words of Scripture help us rejoice and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Isaiah, the prophet of consolation, speaks of a time when Zion will break into song as they see the exiles returning: *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings*. Having experienced the pain of exile in Babylon and the destruction of its culture and community, Isaiah proclaims a vision of future happiness for Israel; his words echo across the mountaintops, bringing consolation and hope, a message of peace, and the promise of redemption. All the ends of the earth will behold this salvation. No longer will it be for one nation – now all nations will benefit and participate.

The writer of Hebrews takes up this message of hope and directs our focus to Jesus – the Son of God who now fulfills those earlier promises. He is, the writer tells us, *the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being*. In other words, he is the radiant light of God’s glory, a glory that fills our hearts with joy this Christmas morn, the one who ushers in this moment of renewal and restoration.

The image of Christ as the light of the world is at the heart of John’s message in the prologue to his Gospel, which we just heard. John does not concern himself with the details of the birth of Jesus; instead, his focus is on Jesus’ divine identity, his true origins, and the purpose of his earthly mission. In words that seem to echo the opening words of Genesis, the mystery of earth’s re-creation begins to unfold in and through Christ, who is that light and whose birth we celebrate today.

As we gather around the Nativity Scene, whether in church or at home, we, too, can see and embrace the joy that this holy day brings. For in this newborn child, all our hopes and dreams are made new. In him, who now dwells among us, our lives find new meaning. In this child, who is both the child of Bethlehem and the Christ of Calvary, the struggles and achievements of our lives can find hope and consolation.

May the light of this Christmas day and the hope of this newborn King shine in our hearts today and always, and may it drive out all that threatens to separate us from God or block our vision of salvation. May our voices soar to the very mountaintops to proclaim to the whole world the glad tidings that announce that God is King.

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**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2021**

(Lec. 17)

- 1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
- 2) 1 Colossians 3:12-21  
or 3:12-17
- 3) Luke 2:41-52

Or, in Year C

- 1) 1 Samuel 1: 20-22, 24-28
- 2) 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24
- 3) Luke 2:41-52

Gospel related: CCC 472, 503, 517, 531, 534, 583, 2196, 2599 **CSDC** 259

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

**FOCUS:** Our family life is enriched when we worship the One who created and loves us.

Each year, as this feast of the Holy Family arises, we have the opportunity to reflect on their lives. What can we learn from these holy people? How might we imitate them? Perhaps the answer is clear. In an age when we are faced with relentless messaging from social media, television, and competing ideologies, modern families need to be grounded in prayer and religious traditions.

We know very little about Christ's life between his birth and the beginning of his public ministry. We know that he was born in Bethlehem in a humble stable. Soon, his young life was threatened and his family escaped to Egypt. Eventually, they returned to Nazareth. We can only imagine Jesus growing up in a simple household with Mary, his loving Mother, and Saint Joseph, his protective guardian. We picture him in Mary's lap or learning a carpenter's trade at Joseph's workbench. The early years of Christ's life are often identified by scholars as the "hidden life" of Jesus.

The beginning of today's Gospel states that Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem annually for Passover *according to festival custom*. On one such occasion, when Christ was 12, he remained at the temple; his parents found him there, discussing Scriptures with the rabbis. Significantly, this story of finding him in the temple "is the only event that breaks the silence of the Gospels about the hidden years of Jesus" (CCC 534).

These visits to a house of worship are significant. The temple in Jerusalem was seen as God's dwelling place. Even Jesus – God's dwelling place among men – took the time to go there (CCC 586). The temple was a house of prayer, where sacrifices were offered and God's praises were sung. At the temple, in the synagogues, and in his home, a young Jesus would have learned the words and rhythms of his people's prayers.

Like Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, we are part of a holy family – we, too, are *children of God*. Just like Mary and Joseph, our family life is enriched when we go to church to worship the One who created and loves us. Like Mary and Joseph, we must be attentive to the presence of Christ in our lives, to hold all he did and said in our hearts, and to willingly participate in God's divine plan. By being attentive to God's word and by keeping his commandments, we, too, will grow in wisdom and grace and favor.

\* \* \*

Monday, December 27, 2021  
(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: We proclaim that we have seen, heard, and touched the Lord Jesus.

As we celebrate the feast of Saint John the Evangelist, it is tempting to be a bit jealous of him. After all, John walked with Jesus as he walked the earth. John saw, heard, and touched Jesus; he was the disciple who ran with Peter to the empty tomb and saw the burial cloths there – *he saw and believed*. John had the privilege of spending time with Jesus during his time on earth. As the centuries move us further and further from Christ's earthly life, we can feel far removed from the Christian witness that John proclaimed. But is that really the case?

Those who saw Jesus in the flesh as a man and we who see Jesus in the flesh of the Eucharist are encountering the same Lord. In both cases, the body of Christ is truly visible and tangible, though in different forms. Those who heard Jesus speak from his lips and we who hear the Scriptures proclaimed are encountering the same Gospel message. In both cases, the words of Christ are truly heard.

Though none of today's Christians were present at the empty tomb, we rejoice in the same resurrected Lord. This is because the Spirit of Jesus has been given to the Church. Jesus himself said that it was better that he go to the Father so that he could send the Holy Spirit to us. Jesus has not left us orphans, but continues to teach, preach, and heal through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is truly alive through the ministry of the Church, which now reaches to the ends of the earth.

Therefore, our opportunity to know Jesus Christ is not "less than," but simply "different than" that of Saint John. We, too, then, can proclaim that we have seen, heard, and touched Jesus. What we have seen and heard, we proclaim now to this generation, so that they may have fellowship with us. Like Saint John, our fellowship is truly with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

\* \* \*

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

(Lec. 698)

1) 1 John 1:5–2:2

2) Matthew 2:13-18

Gospel related: CCC 333, 530

**THE HOLY INNOCENTS,  
- FEAST**

**FOCUS:** *Our soul has been rescued like a bird from the fowler's snare. Broken was the snare, and we were freed.*

The young children – toddlers and infants – murdered under Herod's order, and at the hands of his henchmen, are remembered and celebrated by the Church today, in a liturgical feast known as the Feast of the Holy Innocents. Victims of Herod's bloodlust, they are unknown in number and unnamed, holy, innocent children. We honor them as the first to give their lives for Christ. Geographically and chronologically adjacent to the birth of Jesus, they therefore suffered death in his name.

The juxtaposition of this darkness, this evil – perpetrated in the name of narcissism and pride – with God's love and light, incarnate in his Son, Jesus, whose birth we just celebrated, is jarring. And yet, how even more glorious is God's dwelling among us in light of Herod's action; how clearly evident it was, and is, that we are a sinful people in need of redemption. Where God brought light and peace, Herod sowed darkness and fear. Herod felt threatened, rather than comforted, by the presence of the Christ Child. And his jealousy, ambition, and history of dysfunctional relationships (Herod was a brutal man who had killed two of his sons, several of his wives, his father-in-law, and quite likely many others) led naturally to his vicious, rather than virtuous, response to the greatest gift from God ever, given to him, and to all the world.

The pain and devastation that this massacre brought about is almost unimaginable. And so it seems strange, if not downright insensitive, to say that, in the end, Herod failed. Yet these martyrs are themselves testimony to that fact. The light that Jesus Christ brought into the world overcomes all darkness. As they died for Christ, Christ in turn would one day suffer death for *them*: offering himself as the one, perfect sacrifice for all the world, living and dead.

One day, through God's mercy, we will meet these children in the Kingdom. And we shall bless them, praise them, and rejoice with them: *Our soul has been rescued like a bird from the fowler's snare. Broken was the snare, and we were freed. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

\* \* \*

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

(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: Love is the way, the guiding light of life.

As disciples of Jesus today, we refer to ourselves as “Christians,” and to our religion as “Christianity.” Yet these terms were nonexistent for the first disciples. Instead, they were known simply as “followers of the Way.” Today’s first reading expounds on this: *Whoever claims to abide in him ought to walk just as he walked.*

*Just as he walked.* Need we cast off our sneakers or heels for first-century sandals? Are we to find dirt paths to trod on instead of our paved sidewalks and roads? No, it has nothing to do with shoes or surface-type. To walk as Jesus walked is to keep the commandments; more specifically, it is to love our brothers and sisters. *Whoever hates his brother is in darkness; he walks in darkness and does not know where he is going.* Love truly is the way, the guiding light of our lives.

Simeon, after years of waiting, knew this light immediately upon laying eyes on Jesus in the temple. He proclaimed Jesus as the *light* who would reveal God to the nations. Indeed, God’s love has been revealed to us through the incarnation of Jesus. And today, love is revealed to us in a most intimate way through the Eucharist that we soon approach. When our hearts are touched by this love, we cannot help but follow the way of Christ, to walk as he walked, by loving each and every person we encounter along the way.

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Thursday, December 30, 2021

(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: God calls us to faithfulness in him.

In today's Gospel, we hear about the prophetess Anna. Although her story is relatively short, her faithfulness to God is worthy of emulation. Anna had been a widow for most of her life, and in the face of the isolation and poverty that widowhood often evoked, she dedicated her life to God.

Anna never left the temple, worshipping day and night with both fasting and prayer. She is present, then, when Jesus' parents bring him to the temple, the story of which immediately precedes today's Gospel passage. Her faithfulness is rewarded by seeing the arrival of the baby Jesus in the temple. And, like Simeon before her, she gives thanks and announces his arrival for the redemption of all. Her example of faithfulness is mirrored in Luke's description of the Holy Family, as well, as he remarks on their fulfillment of the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, and that *the child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.*

The examples of the faithfulness of Anna and the Holy Family provide an opportunity for us to consider how we live our own faithfulness to the Father who loves us. In the first reading, we hear that faithfulness is putting aside the things of this world and focusing on the love of God. The things that can distract us in this world are transient. But the love of God endures forever. When we commit to faithfulness to God, we live justly according to his will.

By coming to the Eucharistic table today, we are focusing on what endures. Praying together, breaking bread together, receiving the body of Christ together, we are aligned with God's will. May all of us strengthen our faithfulness to him as we work to grow closer to God.

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Friday, December 31, 2021

(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, 2787 **CSDC** 121, 262

FOCUS: The Word is the fullness of God's revelation and truth.

In this internet age, especially in the world of social media, we can't help but notice the power of words. One tweet can spark a movement or cause a backlash. Anyone can be scrutinized for the words posted on social media accounts.

Words are powerful because we use language to express our thoughts, ideas, needs, and desires. Our words reveal who we are and so, as children, we are taught to "choose our words carefully." We speak in certain ways when among our closest friends, and then speak in a different way when we go to work or maybe even church. Words have power. What does it mean, then, when John's Gospel talks about *the Word*?

God's word – his spoken word, *logos* in Greek – harkens back to Creation, when through the power of his word all the visible world arose (Cf. Gen chapter 1). Jesus is God's word enfleshed – incarnated. He is "God-made-man," and the second person of the Holy Trinity. John's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus, the Son, was present with the Father at the time of Creation, but then at a particular time and place he entered human history as the Messiah, the fullness of God's Revelation – the one come to save us. This passage also tells us that John the Baptist was the prophet who would proceed the Messiah. In this passage, Jesus is the Word. He is God's Word made flesh.

Just as our own words reveal who we are, God's Word, Jesus, reveals the fullness of God's truth. This passage is the introduction to John's Gospel – officially known as the Prologue – and so prepares the reader to pay attention to Jesus so that they can learn more about God's truth. We turn to the Gospels and the celebration of the Eucharist to seek understanding of God's mysteries. We turn to the Scriptures and immerse ourselves in the power of God's word to grow as disciples in Christ.

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