



*Tidings of
Comfort
and Joy*

ADVENT MEDITATIONS | 2018

*God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay
Remember, Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Advent Meditations

This booklet contains a reading from Holy Scripture and a short original meditation for each day of Advent, written by one of our priests. Our hope is that we all open up the Bible (or use your Bible phone app!) and get into God's Holy Word during this season leading up to Christmas. These short readings can be done by families around the dinner table with the Advent Wreath lit or just individually as a short prayer time.

Advent Wreath

There are lots of ways to light the Advent Wreath. One way is to light the candle, or candles, for that week, saying "our King and Savior now draws near, O come let us adore Him." Then read the passage of scripture, followed by the meditation and short prayer for that particular day.

Advent Candles

Most sets of Advent candles come with three purple and one pink (rose) candle. We use blue candles instead of purple in the Church but either color is fine. The first candle to be lit (week 1) is the purple candle opposite the pink one. Then add a candle each week making sure that the pink one is lit during the third week.

Focus on Why We're Celebrating

We hope these short readings and meditations will enrich your spiritual life during what is usually a season of the material life. We are doing so many other things that are special this time of year to get ready for Christmas, please pause and take a moment to focus on why we're celebrating in the first place. May God bless each of you during this Advent and Christmas Season.

EVENTS AND SERVICES

Advent

Sun, Dec. 2	5:00pm	Advent Lessons and Carols
Thurs, Dec. 6	6:30pm	St. Laurence Women's Cookie Exchange
Sat, Dec. 8	9:00am	Advent Retreat
	5:45pm	Youngish Adult Group Christmas Party
Sat, Dec. 15	6:30pm	St. Laurence Men & Women's Christmas Party
Sun, Dec. 16	5:00pm	Children's Christmas Pageant followed by cookie decorating and Jesse Tree

Christmas Services

Christmas Eve	5:00pm	Mass with Children's Homily, Nursery Provided
	7:00pm	Mass, Nursery Provided
	10:30pm	Christmas Carols and Festive Music, No Nursery
	11:00pm	Solemn Mass, No Nursery
Christmas Day	10:00am	Mass, No Nursery

SUNDAY, DEC. 2

By Fr. Jordan

First Sunday of Advent

Jeremiah 31:7-14

For this year's Advent theme, we've chosen the lyric "Tidings of Comfort and Joy" from the popular Christmas carol, God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.

One way to read the lyric: it's one person wishing another person a merry Christmas and a restful and joyful celebration. There's also another way to read the lyric: it's a reflection on the meaning of the birth of Jesus Christ. God has come among us in the person of Jesus and as a result so much joy and reassurance has come to each of us.

Advent is a time of prophecy, when we remember the many events leading to the key event: the birth of Jesus Christ. Advent is a time to remember that God made promises through the Old Testament prophets and God keeps His promises in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In today's reading, the Prophet Jeremiah looks forward to a day

when mourning will be turned to joy and all of God's people will be comforted. Comfort and Joy. That day came when the Blessed Virgin Mary brought forth her baby in Bethlehem and the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people."

It's not that we will never feel sad again. It's not that we will never feel uneasy again. It's that God is forever with us. It's that even in our low moments, we have the great assurance that God loves us and is with us. In Jesus Christ, God's people are never alone. In Jesus Christ, God's people are never without hope. In Jesus Christ, God's people are full of the comfort of His presence and the joy of the abundant life offered to us. So be at rest, ye merry St. Laurence-ites, because God is at work spreading His love and reassuring us that He is always with us.

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

MONDAY, DEC. 3

By Fr. Wilson

Genesis 2:4-25

Genesis 1 and 2 are the biblical stories of creation, each chapter providing its own version of how it happened. They complement each other. In the first chapter there are six days of creation:

God speaks and light, water, seas, vegetation, fish, cattle and human beings all come into existence.

The second chapter emphasizes, above the others, the beginning of man. This, God does by forming man of the dust of the ground; and then from his rib, He fashions woman – the perfect mate for man. They are both placed in a beautiful garden with their Lord and Maker, and life in paradise has begun.

But paradise has a “but” in it. “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; BUT from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat ...” It is not easy for us to understand why

God would include in Adam and Eve’s paradise such a tree, one that must come with a prohibition. Though it is beyond my ability to fully explain, I think it must have to do with love!

Yes, God in creation wants a man and woman who will love Him back. He created them in love, so that He could love them. And in this great love, He makes them into people who will return His love. This is a risky business because love must come with a choice: the choice to love or not love, to obey or not obey. So this is who we are: greatly loved people from whom He awaits our great love. This is who He made us to be. May we not disappoint Him, but rather bring Him great joy!

O Lord, we know from your scripture that you are Love; and that out of this great love you created this world that you might pour your great love into it. You even gave your Son as a sacrifice to deliver us from our sins. Now, may we return this love to you by obeying all you command, especially in giving ourselves to you and by loving one another. This love you rightly deserve from us. Amen.

TUESDAY, DEC. 4

By Fr. Wilson

Genesis 3:1-15

Whoops! It happened. The tree which Adam and Eve were prohibited from eating, they ate. It was a risk God was willing to take, to put the prohibited tree in the garden, to see if this newly created man and his wife would return His love by obeying Him. But they stumbled and let Him down; they sinned and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Alas. What shall we do?!

We don't point our finger at Adam and Eve accusing, "Look now at what you have done to humanity!" Why? Because we would have done the same. Instead of what God wants, we so often do what we want, and fall from His grace.

Two good things must now happen. We confess. God asked Adam, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" Adam gave his reason, pointing to her, but nevertheless admitted, "I ate."

And she in turn gave her reason, pointing to the serpent, but nevertheless admitted, "I ate."

God paid a high price for our sins. In fact, He paid it up entirely. So, the second good thing that must happen is get up and begin walking again the right path. Jesus urged the disciples repeatedly in the other garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, to stay awake and pray. Yet, they slept. Finally, when Judas and the temple guards arrived, He said to the disciples, "Arise, let us be going." We cannot reverse time and fix it; we accept it, we get up off the ground, and placing one foot in front of the other, we go forward.

Our sins are a serious issue. But so is His forgiveness. So, we put aside our self-pity. We do love Him, and we do accept His forgiveness, and so we show it by arising and going forth confident in His service once again.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, you offered yourself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, now absolve us by the grace of the Holy Spirit and restore us in perfect peace. May we now be granted the courage and faith to arise from our fallen state, and press on courageously and faithfully toward the goal for the prize of the "upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 5

By Fr. Crary

Isaiah 42:1-4

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice in the nations."

The time for this passage is near the end of the 70 year Babylonian captivity. The servant is the nation Israel and the Lord has promised to bring release, and at last justice will be restored. The servant here is also a foreshadowing of a type of Jesus Christ, who will, in the end restore all things. Here in Isaiah, the servant brings comfort and assurance to a downtrodden, exiled people.

When we take stock of our lives in the Advent season, we are probably not in physical captivity, but there is the reality of spiritual bondage. How is this so? Consider, if you will, broken relationships that continue for decades. Years ago, a woman I

knew well told me that Christmas had been the worst time of the year for her since 1943 because of the forced family gatherings and constant grudges and snide remarks among relatives. This should cause us to take stock. Do I cross the street to avoid certain people? Do I harbor resentments in my heart? Who must I forgive in order to be right with the Lord?

Then there is financial bondage. Do credit cards and other debts keep me in chains? Am I too far beyond my limits financially?

Advent is a time to examine our spiritual lives and prepare for the one savior, Jesus Christ, who will free us from captivity and bondage. He will do it now, but there is one caveat; we must do it His way and on His terms. Do you want a life of spiritual comfort and joy? He awaits your response.

Lord, send your Holy Spirit and give me courage to examine my life and make appropriate changes so that I may greet with joy the coming of Jesus at Christmas and his second coming at the end of time. This I ask in his name. Amen.

THURSDAY, DEC. 6

By Fr. Jordan

Feast of St. Nicholas

1 John 4:7-14

St. Nicholas is probably the most talked about saint this time of year. You see his image, or someone who looks kind of like him, just about everywhere as we get closer to Christmas. "Jolly old St. Nick," as so many have come to know him, is a wonderful saint for this season because during his real life in Turkey in the 300's, he was known for his love and generosity. The story goes that, as a Bishop of the Church, he was very concerned for those in need and went out of his way to care for the poor and less fortunate. One night he dropped some coins into a needy family's stockings that were hanging in front of their fire place to dry out...and the rest is history.

With St. Nick as one of the key figures right at the center of the season, his story reminds us that

generously helping those in need is something that Christ asks of each one of us. I think about the St. Nicholas breakfast we have at Church each year and the outpouring of gifts that comes along with it. I think about so many serving the homeless or those in need this time of year. I think about the folks ringing bells outside of the grocery stores for the Salvation Army. This season is a time to give and St. Nicholas is just the right saint for it.

St. Nick's many acts of generosity stand as both a witness to his faith in Jesus Christ and as an example to us. We are called to be generous this time of year, and at all times, because we have a God who is generous, who in the gift of the christ-child gave us the one who is Love.

Almighty God, who in thy love didst give to thy servant Nicholas of Myra a perpetual name for deeds of kindness on land and sea: Grant, we pray thee, that thy Church may never cease to work for the happiness of children, the safety of sailors, the relief of the poor, and the help of those tossed by tempests of doubt or grief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FRIDAY, DEC. 7

By Fr. Jordan

Isaiah 64:1-9

This passage from the book of Isaiah gives voice to a powerful prayer — that God would enter this world with divine power and promise. “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,” the prophet Isaiah cries out.

This image of tearing open the heavens is a powerful one. When I read it, I think of Isaiah’s desperation. I think of him praying to God, “we really need you down here!” and I think of God saying, “Ok, enough is enough. I will tear open the heavens and come down to save

my people.” To me it speaks of Isaiah’s heart and it speaks of God’s strong desire to save His people.

This Advent, as we prepare our hearts and our homes to receive the Christ child, we should remember that God *has* entered time, space and human existence — that God *has* torn open the heavens and is remaking our world from the ground up, the way a potter starts with a lump of clay and eventually creates a beautiful vessel. God is around us, always doing a new thing — can we perceive it?

Heavenly Father, we pray for your Advent in our lives and we thank you for your promises of love and faithfulness toward us and toward all creation. Teach us to bear witness to your coming near in all we say and do. Amen.

SATURDAY, DEC. 8

By Fr. Morelock

The Immaculate Conception

Luke 1:26-38

“Hail Mary, full of grace,” are the words of the Archangel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and these words have been repeated by millions of faithful Christians across the world for two millennia. The words of Gabriel reveal one of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith: that God prepared for Himself a body, so that He might come and take on our human nature and redeem us from sin.

But why is the Immaculate Conception necessary? Recall what happens to all of us in Baptism. In Baptism, we are washed and made clean so that Jesus can be united to us, so that He can live within us. Christians are washed clean from sin in Baptism in order to be united to Jesus Christ. It was the same with Mary in an extremely special and unique way at her conception.

She received special grace that freed her from the bondage of Original Sin and made her womb an acceptable vessel to bear Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Since the beginning of creation God had been preparing for the advent of Jesus Christ, wherein He assumed our flesh and saved us from the bondage of sin. This preparation for His incarnation is nowhere more evident than in the Immaculate Conception of our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary. A great way to honor Jesus and Mary during this season of Advent is to frequently meditate on the mystery of the Incarnation. When the Archangel Gabriel proclaims, “Hail Mary, full of Grace,” what do you think he means?

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SUNDAY, DEC. 9

By Fr. Young

Second Sunday of Advent

Baruch 4:36-5:9

"Look east" the Book of Baruch says to the people of God. That is the direction from which God will come to "lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him." (5:9). And so we do. The first buildings archeologists know to have been specifically built to serve as church buildings were very like the synagogues of their time - with a very significant exception. The synagogues all faced toward Jerusalem, but the churches all faced East.

Before then, Christians met in homes that might be oriented any direction but once they could build themselves a structure explicitly for worship, the early Christians constructed them so that they faced eastward, partly because of Baruch's injunction. Baruch envisioned a day when the chosen people, scattered by defeat in war, would return to the Holy City: "Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look

towards the east and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them." (4:36-37)

To this day, traditional church buildings face East, because we look to Jesus Christ to fulfill Baruch's prophecy at the end of time. We face East when we pray, when we hear the Gospel proclaimed in the sermon, when we receive Communion, and when we recite the Creed.

In this way, we indicate with our bodies that we put our hope in Christ "coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead." This is important because living in the most prosperous and powerful nation that has ever been, we are tempted to look elsewhere to put our trust. All through Advent, the Scriptures remind us where we truly must look for meaning, hope and eternal life. "Look East".

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with Joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

MONDAY, DEC. 10

By Fr. Wilson

Isaiah 35:1-10

This neat passage is presented to us in Advent because it is ... exciting! For Christians, the Day of our Lord's return is the best day ever. This portion in Isaiah is written in prophetic/apocalyptic language filled with drama, excitement and symbolism. The troubles, adversity and hardship represent the life we now live on earth, but the Lord is coming and soon life will be transformed: "Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'be strong, fear not. Behold, your God will come ... He will come and save you.'"

The pathway to God is being carved out and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion (the Lord's mountain) with singing. The point of course, is that this is for us!

C. S. Lewis was drawn to Christianity by a wonderful realization: We don't belong

here! In this world we suffer sadness, loneliness, anger, jealousy, guilt and shame; but the human being is made for joy, love, intimacy, praise and glory, and these are the things of heaven. Therefore, Lewis concluded, there must be a heaven where our God-given human existence will find fulfillment.

Jesus prayed to His father for his disciples, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." But I "have sent them into the world." We are sojourners now, but our hope is in heaven.

Thus, while on earth, we pass our time working, living, loving, witnessing and praying. But one great day, "the ransomed of the Lord will return" and we will be brought into the kingdom of heaven and our greatest possible joys will be realized. The prophecy of Isaiah wants us to know: it could be soon!

O God, you made us in your image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Grant us patience, love, joy and courage as we live and walk in your service throughout our days in this world. Remind us often of the joy and love of heaven, so that with eager hope we may fulfill our callings here as your faithful servants, and be welcomed joyously into the Kingdom of Love when that great day shall come. Amen.

TUESDAY, DEC. 11

By Fr. Young

2 Samuel 7:8-16

God promised David that He would raise up one of His descendants to establish a kingdom that would last for ever. (2 Sam 7:16) When their small kingdom fell, first to the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans in turn, the Jewish people kept alive the hope that David's descendant would arise in their time and fulfill the prophecy. We know from the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus was just such a descendant of King David (Mt 1:1, 6). We also know from the gospels that many of the Jewish people fervently hoped that Jesus was indeed the one, the anointed king (Christ or Messiah) who was promised. In the Gospel of Matthew alone, Jesus is called "Son of David" six times: by the two blind men (Mt 9:27), by the crowd after a miraculous healing (Mt 12:23), by the Canaanite woman from whose daughter Jesus cast out a demon (Mt 15:22), in Jericho (Mt

20:30), and by the crowd going into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday who shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" (Mt 21:9)

All these people were right about Jesus, He was the promised Son of David. However, there was a problem - they wanted Him to be the Son of David they expected not the kind He was. Many rejected Jesus when He fulfilled the prophecy but not their expectations. Sometimes we are tempted to think God ought to do things our way, on our schedule, and to our satisfaction; when in fact, it is we who need to do things God's way, on His schedule and to His satisfaction. IF that seems difficult, it's well to remember that for nearly 2,000 years now faithful people have been able to testify that God's way works better in the long run than ours.

O God, who fulfilled your promise of a Son of David, help us to put our whole trust and love in you, give us confidence when our faith and hope are tested, and truly grateful hearts when your will is made manifest; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 12

By Fr. Morelock

Isaiah 9:1-7

The bible is stuffed full of words and phrases that, at first glance, seem pretty straightforward, but when studied more closely, are found to contain double, triple, or even quadruple meanings. One such word that contains multiple meanings and associations throughout the bible is the word "light" which is almost always associated with God. For example, the very first statement made in the bible is in Genesis 1:3 when, to begin His great work of creation God says, "Let there be light." Right at the beginning God is shown to be the source of light. Jesus himself is revealed to be that light in John 1:4-5, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Elsewhere in the bible, light is associated with goodness and salvation, living righteously and fearing God's law, as well as exposing the hearts of men. As Jesus says in John 3:21, "But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." Jesus is the light of the world and we are called to walk and rejoice in His light. When we walk with Jesus, we become the people that Isaiah prophesied about: those who "have seen a great light." Jesus has given us the victory over sin and death and has overcome all of the forces of darkness. Not only is He light; He is also our "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Almighty Father, where once we walked in the darkness of sin and ignorance you have now called us to see a great light in the glorious incarnation of your Son, Jesus Christ: help us always to reflect your light to the rest of the world, that you may always be glorified; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, DEC. 13

By Fr. Jordan

Feast of St. Lucy

Matthew 5:13-16

The name Lucy means “light” and it’s no mistake that St. Lucy’s day falls on one of the shortest days of the year. On these days when the sun goes down really early we are called to remember the world’s one true light shining in the darkness, our Lord Jesus Christ. We also remember today that there are millions of Christians, saints, who have lived in imitation of their savior and have shined in the darkness of their worlds.

During this season of Advent, it’s important to remember that God’s people were, for hundreds of years, looking and hoping for a Savior. They were hoping for some light shining into the darkness of the world. They were hoping to be able to say, as we

do, that God has broken into a dark world with His light and life.

In this time of anticipation, perhaps we can think about where and how we can shine the light of God’s presence into the shadows of human brokenness. The holidays are really hard for a lot of folks and we know that many could use God’s light shining in their lives right now. We can shine God’s light by sympathizing with the brokenhearted or reaching out to the lonely. We can shine God’s light by helping those who are caught in sin to see the liberty that comes only from Christ. We can shine God’s light when we help one another to see that God can overcome any situation with His love and mercy.

Loving God, for the salvation of all you gave Jesus Christ as light to a world in darkness: Illumine us with the light of Christ, that by the merits of his passion we may be led to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY, DEC. 14

By Fr. Crary

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Many things change in our lives. The advent of cell phones makes instant personal communication possible any time from any place. This was unthinkable only a few years ago. Our worship is changing. Prayer book revision is underway for the second time in my lifetime and it will touch all who worship in Anglican churches. In our Biblical text for the day, through the writings of Jeremiah, the Lord is announcing a new spiritual order. Because it was written on stone tablets, God's law was immutable, that is, fixed and unbending. Now, in this new spiritual order, God's law will become personal and interiorized, written on human hearts rather than stone tablets. Centuries after Jeremiah, this became a reality with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14) The perfect obedience of Jesus supersedes the written law of the old covenant. In Jesus the law is personal and interior. In the

sacrament of baptism, we Christians are literally dipped into the life, death, and resurrection. He lives in us and we in Him. The Holy Spirit is infused in our lives to provide the necessary guidance for a Holy life. Attentiveness and obedience is required on our part. GPS is only useful if we turn it on and follow directions. God living within our hearts will provide the guidance we seek.

During our observance of this Advent season, consider if you will:

1. Do my actions and words exhibit that God lives within me?
2. Would another person's observation of my life confirm that I am a follower of Christ?
3. With God dwelling in me, am I ready to confront the four last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell?
4. Am I thankful for participating in the life of Christ?

I thank you Lord for dwelling in my heart. Grant that I may believe more firmly and show forth in my words and actions that I am a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. This I ask in his name. Amen.

SATURDAY, DEC. 15

By Fr. Jordan

Isaiah 7:10-15

About 700 years before it happened, Isaiah saw it. "A virgin will conceive and bear a son and his name will be Emmanuel." This is the first mention in the Bible of what is truly a wild idea.

Everybody knows that virgins do not have sons, much-less name them "God with us." That would be a really wild name to give your baby boy under normal circumstances! Of course what makes this prophecy so mind-blowing is that it came true through the "yes" of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her baby boy, Jesus Christ.

The verses in this reading from Isaiah are so incredible, such a game-changer, that they have to be considered some of the most important words ever written.

They form the core of the doctrine of the incarnation wherein Christians hold that Jesus was truly "conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." (The Apostles' Creed) God became one of us, walked the earth, lived as a person just like you and me. And before the end of His life, He promised His friends that He would be with them always. God-with-us back when Jesus walked the earth, God-with-us even now.

The song "O Come, O Come Immanuel" is probably the best known Advent song. As we sing that song, we are praying for God to come again into our lives, to be with us and to help us be constantly aware of His presence.

Come quickly into our presence Lord Jesus. Make us aware the you are near and that you are here to bring help and comfort. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY, DEC. 16

By Fr. Crary

Third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday

Zephaniah 3:14-20

In this short book the prophet promises judgment on Israel for her sins against the law and idolatrous worship. In the end, however, there will be joy and restoration. Today's passage celebrates the day when the Lord will bring the people home from exile and restore their fortunes.

Advent reminds us that as Christians we are living between two events: the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and His second coming at the end of the world. In the Nicene Creed we profess: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead..." and "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." In our day-to-day lives the question we must ponder daily is, "Am I ready?"

This poses more personal questions:

1. Do I cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light or is part of my

life a shadowy existence I hope the Lord will overlook or not see at all?

2. Am I willing to make a fearless moral inventory and confess my sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Or do I consider my sins merely "mistakes" or "shortsightedness" or simply "just being human"?
3. Do I truly want the Lord to come and find me as I really am at this moment?
4. Do I yearn to be in heaven in the company of the Lord and His saints? Or do I think the present life is good enough if only I can fix a few problems?
5. These questions culminate in a final one: Is my conscience pure?

The joy of Advent is knowing that the Lord Jesus wants to come again and take us to Himself so that where He is, we may be also. Are you ready? Am I ready?

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us: through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

MONDAY, DEC. 17

By Fr. Jordan

Philippians 4:4-9

The reading for today hits the joyful tone enthusiastically when St. Paul proclaims in Philippians 4:4 "rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say rejoice!" And so we rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ because of who He is and all that He has done for us. And we rejoice always. Not just here and there. Not for just an hour and fifteen minutes on Sunday morning. But always, because we have been given the greatest gift that one could ever be given: the gift of knowing our Creator and the gift of living in a relationship with Him that will never end.

What is joy? What does it mean to rejoice? Some certainly would say that it's celebrating. Some would say it's being happy. But for the Christian, we mean something

more. We mean being in the place we are meant to be. We mean getting what God wants for our life. We mean God's will being done. And all that is joyful because God's will for us is "more than we can ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20) God wants better things for us than we even want for ourselves.

Throughout this Advent, we've been reflecting on the comfort and joy that has come to the world in Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus, we've been given the possibility of joy. It is our prayer that we would be joyful people always, not because life doesn't have difficulties but because we have a God who has a plan for us and wants the very best things for us.

Almighty God, help us with joy to serve you each day so that at the last we may rejoice forever with you in heaven. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, DEC. 18

By Fr. Young

Isaiah 40:1-11

The Scripture passage for today acts as a kind of hinge in the Book of Isaiah. While they are not altogether without words of hope, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah consistently confront God's Chosen People with their sins: especially their idolatry and consistent practice of putting their ultimate trust in something or someone other than the Lord God. This skews their thinking, they see the world upside down and wrong side out.

However, as chapter 40 begins with our verses for today, the whole trajectory of the book changes and seems to reverse itself. The People of God now need to hear glad tidings and not fear. The Lord God is coming to reward them, to shepherd them, and gently lead them. It is as if the book turns a corner and doubles back on itself. The message is now wonderful instead of dreadful. It is very like our Sunday worship. First, we confess our sins - the ways we have estranged ourselves from the Lord, then we are forgiven

and intimate communion with our God becomes readily available.

Some people find this hard to accept. They can understand "fire and brimstone" but cannot imagine God loving us so much that He would come to us under the humble signs of bread and wine. Others are just the reverse. They want a God who turns a blind eye to our sin or takes no notice of it - a God who makes no awkward demand for confession, who will let us take our pet sins with us into heaven. Neither of these is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The true Gospel is the good news that God loves and forgives us knowing our failures perfectly. He does not regard them lightly or blindly. Instead, He takes our lives, cleanses them, sanctifies them, and gives them back to us. And it begins when the Son of God becomes the Son of Man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Advent is the time when we prepare for Christmas and for the Last Great Day when Isaiah's promises will be fulfilled in all their greatness and splendor.

O God of the prophets, help us to see and confess our sins, and also to fully accept your forgiveness and love, that with hearts and minds renewed, we prepare with joy for the coming of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 19

By Fr. Jordan

Micah 5:2-4

The prophet Micah tells of the day when a new ruler will come from the little town of Bethlehem. If you remember the story of King David, you will remember that the great prophet Samuel came to the little town of Bethlehem one day looking for the man that God wanted to be king.

King Saul had displeased the Lord and God wanted Samuel to anoint a new king. And so Samuel went to the house of Jesse and each of Jesse's sons passed by and each time Samuel did not perceive that he was the one. Finally David, the littlest one who was out watching the sheep while all of this was going on, was called in and there was anointed the King of Israel. Several years

later, God promised that the house of David would reign over God's people forever.

And so, hundreds of years later, in a tiny village, a young woman rides into this little town of Bethlehem on a donkey and gives birth to Jesus Christ: the King of Kings, the heir of King David who reigns over God's people forever. Who would have thought that God would choose such a humble, out of the way place? But that's the way God is. God is frequently acting in the places we don't expect. Maybe we need to stop more often to look in those places so that we don't miss something God is doing.

Heavenly Father, help us to see you wherever we go and in everyone we meet. Open our eyes this Advent to your work in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THURSDAY, DEC. 20

By Fr. Morelock

Isaiah 11:1-9

The book of Isaiah was written during a very turbulent time in the history of God's people. It was a period built around the threat of Babylonian invasions. It was a period of war, unrest, and unfaithfulness to God. Due to sin, the ancient land of promise, and the city of Jerusalem (which means "city of peace") had become places of turmoil. The book of Isaiah portrays a lot of this unrest, but it is also a book of hope. There is a promise of peace, justice, and prosperity when we read, "A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse." This means that there will come a King from the line of David to fulfill God's promise to David that his throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7).

This new King's reign would be marked by a special fear of the

Lord among all the people.

Justice would prevail among the poor and meek and "with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked." Moreover His dominion would be marked by absolute peace. Compare this passage to Revelation 21: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." Jesus is the embodiment of this new King, that will bring to completion His kingdom of peace when He returns to make all things new.

Lord Jesus, you make all things new. Continue to bestow on us your grace, that we may one day come to share in your heavenly kingdom. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.

FRIDAY, DEC. 21

By Fr. Jordan

Feast of St. Thomas

John 20:24-29

We have all heard of “doubting Thomas.” Thomas wasn’t there when the other apostles got to see the Risen Lord. We don’t know where Thomas was when Jesus appeared to the others. Perhaps he had found something he thought was better to do than to wait around for Jesus? Perhaps Thomas had given up on Jesus? Imagine his great surprise when he realizes that Jesus really is alive! That he really did keep his promise! Thomas is overjoyed and in almost disbelief says to Jesus “My Lord and My God!”

During these last days leading up to Christmas there are so many

things to get done. Some years it feels like a mad dash to the finish line. Maybe we need to step back during these next few days and see if we are being like Thomas. Are we seeing the Lord clearly or are we focused on other things? Are we absent from our relationship with God? Or are we trying our best to focus?

May God give us the grace to see the Lord in our midst. May God increase our faith so that we are brought to our knees and overwhelmed as St. Thomas was.

Everliving God, who strengthened your apostle Thomas with firm and certain faith in your Son's resurrection: Grant us so perfectly and without doubt to believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, that our faith may never be found wanting in your sight; through Him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

SATURDAY, DEC. 22

By Fr. Crary

Hebrews 10:5-10

"Lo, I have come to do thy will." (Hebrews 10:7)

Christ's sacrifice on the cross supersedes the old testament animal sacrifice. His sacrifice is one of obedience to the Father which is superior to all sacrifices.

In Lent, many people are accustomed to "giving up" something. Even if we do, the question remains, "Am I obedient to the Lord?" We can say and do the right things, but what is the real disposition of our hearts?

1. Do I attend Mass and other services grudgingly?
2. Am I faithful to my spouse and family out of duty or is it self-giving love?
3. Do I give to the Church and charities sparingly or out of

the abundance God has bestowed upon me?

4. Are my prayers heartfelt with love of God or said perfunctorily so that I can check them off of my "to do" list?
5. Can I recognize Christ in other people, even those I do not admire?

These are questions we can reflect on in Advent and the rest of the year as we prepare for our own death and the second coming of Jesus at the end of time.

These are ways we can sacrifice in order to grow in Christ and make the most of the season.

Lord, I beseech you to open my heart so that I may realize how I stand in your sight. Give me strength and courage for daily repentance and amendment of life, that I may be pleasing and obedient in your sight. I ask this through your son, Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns forever. Amen.

SUNDAY, DEC. 23

By Fr. Wilson

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-56

“For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” My guess is that Mary of Nazareth, Israel, in the year 4 B.C., daughter of Anne and Joachim, did not think she would one day be famous. I could list a number of reasons, including Nathaniel’s comment, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Our dear, lowly, humble, faithful, subservient Mary turns out to be God’s choice. Oh, how He loves the humble; how favorably He looks upon an unpretentious, trusting heart; how well He sees good character deep in the heart of a childlike soul.

So, He chooses Mary. He “regarded the low estate of His handmaid,” and lifts her so high that every generation from then until now calls her, “blessed.” “Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you” (4:10), says the Book of James. Do you understand how blessed it is to be humble? Humility, mind you, is not false humility: Van Cliburn

saying he can’t play the piano well, for example. Humility is reality: acknowledging that no matter what good the world sees in any of us, we know and affirm that all the truly good and valuable in us comes from the Lord, and not from our own ability. In fact, Jesus says, “apart from Me, you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was asked how she hears all the accolades and world-wide attention she receives, and still remains humble. She responded, do you really think, even for a minute, that as He was entering the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and the people were spreading their garments in the road and branches of palm trees before him, shouting “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord;” do you think, even for a minute, that the donkey thought it was all about him?!

May we ever embrace Mary’s great humility, for it is key to our own growth in the Lord.

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

MONDAY, DEC. 24

By Fr. Morelock

Christmas Eve

Luke 2:1-20

St. Ambrose of Milan once wrote, "He was a baby and a child, so that you may be a perfect human. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, so that you may be freed from the snares of death. He was in a manger, so that you may be in the altar. He was on earth that you may be in the stars. He had no other place in the inn, so that you may have many mansions in the heavens."

The story of Jesus' birth is the ultimate story of love and humility. God the Son, through whom all things were created at the very beginning, became a baby at this point in time, so that we might have eternal life with Him. This baby, being held so lovingly in the arms of His virgin mother, will someday turn water into wine, heal the sick, cleanse the leper, feed five thousand,

walk on water, and perform countless other signs and miracles. This baby who now lies in a manger was born so that He may one day die, lifted high on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. This baby will one day rise from the dead so that we might also rise with Him.

The birth of this baby is the truest expression of love that the world has ever seen and that's the reason we celebrate. As we sing carols and open gifts, remember that we are celebrating that God is Love. As we gather with those we love for this great feast, remember that God loves us so much that He has given us all that we have. So, tonight let us take hold of His Love that we see so clearly in the Christ-child and allow it to change our lives once more.

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

TUESDAY, DEC. 25

By Fr. Young

Feast of the Incarnation—Christmas Day

John 1:1-14

The Gospel of John boldly declares that in the birth of Jesus Christ “The Word became flesh.” God took human nature. We affirm our belief in this statement Sunday after Sunday when we say: “For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”

When the ancient world heard this statement they were appalled, mystified, and amused. They were confident that the gods might pretend, from time to time, to be human but it was only a disguise. No, the divine and the human, the eternal and the temporal, could not possibly become one. People who thought they could, like the Christians, were naïve, misguided, misinformed, mistaken, ignorant, foolish, pitiable. Why would the gods do such a thing? The Christian answer was: “because God loves

us despite our sins, failures and foolishness.” St. John said it best: “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn 3:16) Christians believe this “incarnation” or “enfleshment” of God the Son is the greatest of all miracles. The pagans were right, it does not seem reasonable in the usual sense. Our human reason, limited by time and corrupted by sin, is inadequate to comprehend it. Faith alone will do. It seems unreasonable to celebrate the birth of a baby to a poor couple in a stable nearly 2,000 years ago. Yet, we do and so have countless millions before us.

We may not fully understand it, but that is not what is asked of us. We are asked instead to accept, worship and love because, ultimately, nothing else is reasonable before the divine mystery of the Word made flesh.

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light enkindled in our hearts may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Merry Christmas



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