



## First Sunday of Advent

November 27

**Matthew 24:42-43 †** *“Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into.”*

*Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,  
the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ  
with righteous deeds at his coming,  
so that, gathered at his right hand,  
they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.*

Christ's first coming has already happened. This is what we mostly prepare to celebrate by Advent preparation. What we fill our time with during Advent will determine our readiness for this celebration. We must be watchful, so that we will be ready. How can this time be fruitful? It will be fruitful by not being occupied with things not of God. Christmas preparations can become neglectful of Jesus. Jesus' exhortation to be watchful does not mean we abandon everything. His call to watchfulness includes performing our everyday activities as *righteous deeds*. There are far too many unnecessary distractions to derail us. These may include TV, sports, games, gadgets, and a whole slew of physical and non-physical distraction we call "pastimes." Many of these "pastimes", though different in nature and different for each person, are like all taking place in Noah's time. They are distractions keeping us from conforming our lives to God's will.

*Lord, you ask me to be the steward of my own household, a temple of the Holy Spirit and a treasure to be guarded. Give me the light of your Holy Spirit to see the "thieves" taking this treasure by force or by deceit. Strengthen me with your grace for Christ's coming each day, at the celebration of His Incarnation, and at His final coming in glory.*

Monday of the First Week of Advent

November 28

**Matthew 8:11 †** *“I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven.”*

*Keep us alert, we pray, O Lord our God,  
as we await the advent of Christ your Son,  
so that, when he comes and knocks,  
he may find us watchful in prayer  
and exultant in his praise.*

We may think ourselves unworthy to receive the Lord. We admit this before presenting ourselves for Holy Communion. *“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”* These words echo the words of the centurion in today’s Gospel reading from Matthew. Yet, the first reading today from Isaiah chapter 4, shows us God himself will make clean what needs to be made clean. This same cleansing offered to Israel is meant for all people having the faith of Abraham. The centurion was respectful of the Jewish tradition by not wanting to let Jesus be defiled by entering the house of a Gentile. At the same time this show us the centurion’s acceptance of his own unworthiness. Jesus respects us even more than this. This calls to mind the image of Jesus standing outside a door and knocking. In that image there is no handle on the outside of the door. This is an image of Jesus knocking at the door of our hearts. It is up to us to let him in. We prepare for this best when we are at prayer. If we still feel unworthy, we can recall the words of the centurion, but then trust in the healing Jesus gives.

*Lord, when I pray is when we are standing, each on opposite sides of the door of my heart. Let my fears of unworthiness melt before the knowledge of your mercy. Let me see your love that calls people from all nations through the vulnerability of the Christ child.*

**Luke 10:22 †** *“All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.”*

*Look with favor, Lord God, on our petitions,  
and in our trials grant us your compassionate help,  
that, consoled by the presence of your Son,  
whose coming we now await,  
we may be tainted no longer  
by the corruption of former ways.*

What are the *petitions* we want God to *look with favor* on? These petitions, along with our trials, must certainly already be known to God, who is all knowing. God the Father does know all things and calls us into a relationship with Himself and His Son. The petitions we make are always in the form of prayer. Petitions often are made to ask for something we need or **think** we need. The most important petition, as is seen in today's collect for the Mass, is that which asks for the forgiveness of sin. The Catechism of the Catholic Church at article 2631 says that *“asking forgiveness”* should come first. We have “knowledge” of sin in two ways. We know of it by our intellect that some thoughts, words, and actions are sinful. The second and destructive way of knowing is when we commit sin. Turning away from former sinful ways, through the forgiveness of our sins, allows us to come to know the presence of God's Son. God the Father has handed us over to His Son. Let us come to know Him as He already knows us. He is close and he will remove the obstacles of sin if we just ask.

*Lord Jesus, you are close. Your life, death, and resurrection made possible the forgiveness of my sins. Your grace makes possible the knowledge of the Father. Let me see you with eyes of faith not clouded by sin. Let my trials show forth the powerful help of the Father, that I may know Him and praise Him now and forever.*

Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

November 30

**Matthew 15:32 †** *Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way."*

*Prepare our hearts, we pray, O Lord our God,  
by your divine power,  
so that at the coming of Christ your Son  
we may be found worthy of the banquet of eternal life  
and merit to receive heavenly nourishment from his hands.*

Earthly nourishment, the food that makes our bodies grow and sustains them with the energy we need each day, was certainly important to Jesus. His compassion for the crowds who followed him shows us this quite clearly. But this compassion for them to feed their bodies is a small part of his compassion. He cures many of their physical ailments and disabilities. We could stop here and think this is enough to understand Jesus' compassion. He was born into this world and placed in a manger, the feeding trough for animals. This is an image of the eternal mysteries of His compassion for us. From the manger through the cross he made possible the nourishment needed to sustain us in this world and hunger longingly for the *banquet of eternal life*.

*O Jesus, ever present for me in the Eucharist. How wonderful this food that sustains me in both body and soul. Heal me of the infirmities caused by my own sinfulness. Help me to understand I can never be completely satisfied with earthly food. May I long for that superabundant food that satisfies. May fragments of this food be my life's work for others.*

Thursday of the First Week of Advent

December 1

Matthew 7:21 † *“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.*

*Stir up your power, O Lord,  
and come to our help with mighty strength,  
that what our sins impede  
the grace of your mercy may hasten.*

Walking along a river after a flood reveals how sand is pushed along from place to place by powerful waters. It is unsettled by the rushing water, taking it from one place to be deposited in another. The sand in a desert is moved constantly by the wind, at times by the slightest breezes. Through these simple physical examples Jesus reveals to us the spiritual disasters caused by sin. Even the slightest sin can become the foundation of spiritual sand that when temptations come, we become prone to greater sins. Sometimes catastrophically. Some think that simply believing in Jesus and confessing their sins secretly to Him will suffice for entering into eternal life. Jesus tells us otherwise. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.”* Matthew 7:24a. Sacramental confession removes the sand of sin and reveals the only rock we can stand on. This rock is the Lord Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God.

*O Jesus, the power of your mercy is what saves me. Give me the humility to confess all my sins. Give me clear sight by your Holy Spirit to recognize even the smallest sin, the seemingly most insignificant faults within me, to be freed from all that keeps me from the Father. Then I may call upon your name with confidence.*

Friday of the First Week of Advent

December 2

Matthew 9:30a † *And their eyes were opened.*

*Stir up your power, we pray, O Lord, and come,  
that with you to protect us,  
we may find rescue  
from the pressing dangers of our sins,  
and with you to set us free,  
we may be found worthy of salvation.*

There are many *pressing dangers* that come with physical blindness. The two men Jesus healed have certainly experienced these dangers in their blindness. There are many ways in which those who have been born with the lack of sight and those whose sight has diminished, cope with blindness. We can find solace in the fact that even when there is no cure for some physical blindness there are ways to live safely with that disability. We should not assume this is so in the spiritual realm. We must know sin blinds us in a different but more devastating way. Those sins leading to addiction for example show us how devastating this can be in the physical realm, let alone how destructive it can be to the soul. We must believe that sin has devastating, even catastrophic effects, on our souls. We must also believe that Jesus has the will and power to heal us of even the most grievous sins.

*O Jesus, your power to save me from the devastation of my sins is greater than any of my sins themselves. Free me from all my sins as I humbly submit to confess them sacramentally. With my blindness removed, may I continue with your powerful protection to grow in holiness. May my eyes see you more clearly in the that lowliness you accepted to become one of us.*

Saturday of the First Week of Advent

December 3

Matthew 9:36 † *At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.*

*O God, who sent your Only Begotten Son into this world to free the human race from its ancient enslavement, bestow on those who devoutly await him the grace of your compassion from on high, that we may attain the prize of true freedom.*

The first enslavement to sin came from the Garden of Eden. Even there God's compassion was shown in a promise to our first parents against the enemy of human nature. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." Genesis 3:15. The one who defeats our ancient enemy is the Incarnate Son of God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." John 3:16. Advent gives us the opportunity, not just to prepare for Christmas celebrations, but importantly to reflect on God's compassion, this God who sent us his only begotten Son born of the Virgin Mary.

*O God, Father most compassionate, your care for me is beyond my imagination. You freed me from the ancient enslavement through the waters of Baptism. Let me not waste this freedom but let me grow in the love of your only begotten Son born of Mary in such a lowly state. May I grow in the humility of your Son and our beloved Mother the Virgin Mary, to crush all inclination of sin in my heart.*

## Second Sunday of Advent

December 4

**Matthew 3:1-2 †** *In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"*

*Almighty and merciful God,  
may no earthly undertaking hinder those  
who set out in haste to meet your Son,  
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom  
gain us admittance to his company.*

Certainly, in the desert there was nothing to hinder John the Baptist as he prepared himself and others for the Son of God. John had already welcomed him whilst in his mother's womb when Mary came to visit Elizabeth. We know that Mary went in haste by an act of charity with Jesus in her womb. Without the distractions of so many obstacles, John had plenty of opportunity to reflect upon the promises of the coming Messiah. The promise of the one to come with justice. This is the kingdom of heaven. The injustices of the original sin and personal sin will be overcome by the justice of the Son of God. Isaiah shows how this justice will take effect. The arrogant ones will become humble. The savage ones will become meek. The selfish ones will become generous. How can this be? It is through repentance and the forgiveness of sins that this will happen. Lack of repentance will bring destruction instead of the kingdom. The choice is ours.

*Merciful and mighty God, give me the wisdom to accept with humility the grace of repentance. Let no obstacles of sin or busyness keep me from straying from your company. May my Advent preparations not hinder me or others from receiving your Son enthusiastically.*

Monday of the Second Week of Advent

December 5

Luke 5:22-24 † *Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them in reply, "What are you thinking in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? I But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" —he said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home."*

*May our prayer of petition  
rise before you, we pray, O Lord,  
that, with purity unblemished,  
we, your servants, may come, as we desire,  
to celebrate the great mystery  
of the Incarnation of your Only Begotten Son.*

Most of us are experienced at asking for what we need. Some of us require the help of friends to bring us to the source of realizing the fulfilment of our needs. This is true of the paralytic who was brought to Jesus. The "why, what, and how" we ask must always be considered well before we ask. That God can provide all we need is understood. Jesus' detractors believed that God could forgive sins, but Jesus they doubted. Those who brought the paralytic believed, had faith. Their faith was the "why" they asked by bringing him to Jesus. The "what" they were asking was healing for the one brought on a stretcher. The "how" was a mystery to them and to all who witness how Jesus answers their petition. Our primary petition should be for the forgiveness of our sins. The other part, "*Rise and Walk*," comes about as a revelation of the mystery revealing Jesus as the Father's Only Begotten Son.

*Let my only petition be the healing of my soul. May I feel and know the mystery of the Incarnation within my heart. By your grace Father, may this great mystery be with me and in me.*

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

December 6

Matthew 18:12-14 † *What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.*

*O God, who have shown forth your salvation  
to all the ends of the earth,  
grant, we pray,  
that we may look forward in joy  
to the glorious Nativity of Christ.*

How radical is the love of God? How far does his mercy extend? How illogical must have Jesus' proposal about God's mercy been to those who heard him speak this parable? There was a reason why shepherd stayed with the ninety-nine sheep, even amidst rain, cold and various other dangers, instead of going after one lost one. It was so he could keep them together and to keep them from harm. To those hearing him, leaving the ninety-nine behind for one would have sounded like nonsense. To those thinking of the monetary worth the ninety-nine this was a risky tradeoff. In the eyes of God one soul, yours and mine, is more valuable, more loved, than hundreds of coveted Christmas items for sale in a store display.

*My soul yearns to know the fullness of your love that would go to the ends of the earth to find one who has fallen away from you. Let my yearning turn to joy through this mystery revealed in the Nativity of Christ.*

Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent

December 7

Matthew 11:28-30 † *“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”*

*Almighty God, who command us  
to prepare the way for Christ the Lord,  
grant in your kindness, we pray,  
that no infirmity may weary us  
as we long for the comforting presence  
of our heavenly physician.*

If only we could understand this scripture reading better and apply it daily. As Advent slips by, more and more busyness erupts, less and less reflection on the meaning of this season of preparation takes place. Is it any wonder that the reason for the Season of Christmas is so lost to us when we focus on and are burdened by so many false hopes and activities. Mary can be our guide in so many ways when it comes to accepting the easy yoke of waiting upon the Lord. Our heavy labors and burdens are of our own making, are they not? Mary shows us how easy it is to fulfill God's will by simply saying yes. In the quiet times we can say yes to the quiet, to let Jesus comfort us. How comforting must the presence of the heavenly physician been to Mary as she contemplated him in her womb?

*I accept your invitation Jesus my Lord to learn from you. Enter into my heart. I say yes to your will that your yoke may be my delight. Let me contemplate you within me that nothing may be a burden. May I know you as the compassionate physician of my soul.*

Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

December 8

Matthew 11:11 † *Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

*Stir up our hearts, O Lord,  
to make ready the paths  
of your Only Begotten Son,  
that through his coming,  
we may be found worthy to serve you  
with minds made pure.*

There is only one who was born of a Virgin, he is the Incarnate Son of God. Jesus' praise of John on the other hand is ultimately the praise of who John is and his mission. The one who is less than John the Baptist, is already in heaven, who was great in his own right. John is the return of Elijah. Elijah, who was taken into heaven in a whirlwind in the presence of Elisha, was the prefiguring of John who proclaims of God's salvation. Elijah is considered the father of those who call themselves contemplatives, especially in the Carmelite order. How then can we understand this about John as the coming of Elijah to help us prepare for Christ's coming? We do so by meditating on the mysteries of the Incarnation itself. The more we do so, the more our minds be made pure. Prayer and meditation will prepare us for contemplation, the gift of God given to us within.

*"My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready: I will sing, and will give praise, with my glory." Psalm 107:2. Lord, let my mind be the path to your glory by meditation on Your word of truth.*

Friday of the Second Week of Advent

December 9

Matthew 11:18-19 † *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by her works*

*Grant that your people, we pray, almighty God,  
may be ever watchful  
for the coming of your Only Begotten Son,  
that, as the author of our salvation himself has taught us,  
we may hasten, alert and with lighted lamps,  
to meet him when he comes.*

All flavors of the songs for dancing and songs for mourning, with everything else in between, are found in the prophets, the psalms, and other places in the Old Testament. The mourning called for by John the Baptist is a call to repentance. The dancing called for by Jesus is the salvation to eternal life, coming from him as sinners turn to him in repentance. This work of salvation is lost when criticism of it or skepticism of it or rejection of it is found in our minds and hearts. What is this criticism? One such criticism is when we are told not to make anyone feel bad for sins they have committed. Skepticism is found when one sin or another is not accepted as sin. Outright rejection is found when we say that something which is evil, like murder, is not evil. All of these extinguish the lamps we need to carry as we go forward to meet Jesus.

*Let me abhor my sins, O Lord. Let me admit to them without any pretense. Let me come through a humble confession of my sins to a place of light, joy, and dancing. O Jesus, my salvation, transform the mourning for my sins into a greater anticipation of union with you when you appear.*

Matthew 17:10-12 † *Then the disciples asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" He said in reply, "Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased.*

*May the splendor of your glory dawn in our hearts,  
we pray, almighty God,  
that all shadows of the night may be scattered  
and we may be shown to be children of light  
by the advent of your Only Begotten Son.*

Jesus has been transfigured before his disciples on the mountain. Moses and Elijah appeared conversing with him as this happened. The revelation of Jesus' glory and mission have been revealed to us up to our age. Now the question about the return of Elijah makes clear who John the Baptist is. John's mission was to reveal the Messiah when he came. John's fate was the fate of many of the prophets of the old testament. He was put to death for proclaiming the truth. The persecution and killing of the prophets were shadows of the night caused by sin. Advent is our time to dismiss the darkness in our own lives and the lives of others. Tomorrow is the Third Sunday of Advent. The Advent candle we light is typically a lighter color. It represents the truth of the Only Begotten Son of God who entered this world. This world can be transformed by his light. John as the returning Elijah directs us to that light.

*O Jesus, my light and my love, Only Begotten Son of my merciful Father, let your light shine in my heart. You made me a child of light at Baptism. You brightened this light with the Holy Spirit at Confirmation. Unite me completely to your light as you come to me in Holy Communion that no darkness might impede my coming to you.*

Third Sunday of Advent

December 11

Matthew 11:10 † *This is the one about whom it is written: 'Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.'*

*O God, who see how your people  
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,  
enable us, we pray,  
to attain the joys of so great a salvation  
and to celebrate them always  
with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.*

Light is not the source of light. This might seem to be a ridiculous statement to make with regards to light as not the origin of itself. It needs to be recognized if we are to understand the truth of where light originates, especially as we enjoy the benefits of light. We delight in light in so many ways, but its benefits are only possible due to the source, from the sun as an example. Light allows us to see where we are going. A messenger is a kind of light. John the Baptist is that kind of light, showing us the way to Jesus. Some delighted in John's light but he was not the source of light. Jesus is the Light and the source of all light. The symbols of light in the Advent candles are a reminder to us of some truths about the Nativity of the Lord. Our solemn worship at the Eucharist is to be the truest light for rejoicing. May we come to the Eucharist with the same joy of salvation.

*May you be born in my heart, O Lord, at each and every Eucharist. Bring me to celebrate your Nativity with true gladness for the salvation you offer. I am unworthy, O Lord, to receive you, but make me ready that my joy may be complete at your coming.*

Monday of the Third Week of Advent

December 12

Matthew 21:23 † *When he had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?"*

*Incline a merciful ear to our cry, we pray, O Lord,  
and, casting light on the darkness of our hearts,  
visit us with the grace of your Son.*

Even those who opposed Jesus could approach him. When they did so, it was insincerely, thus preventing them from clarity about the mysteries of God's redemption. Rather, they came to question his authority, seeking ways of condemning him. We who are baptized have been given a share in Jesus' authority. The questions have changed but the rejection of Jesus and God's revelation of truths that save are still directed at us. Have you ever been told, "that's just your **opinion**" when you proclaimed a truth about a particular sin? This use of "**opinion**" is really simply the same two question posed to Jesus in a new way. We must in these dark times cry out for God to enlighten our minds with the fulness of truth that we may proclaim that truth to others so they too, by the grace of God, may be brought into the light of God's mercy.

*My heart aches because of the darkness enveloping so many hearts and minds. Visit me with your grace that I may remain strong in faith. May the grace you give me in Holy Communion be somehow shared with those in need of your mercy.*

Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

December 13

Matthew 21:32 † *When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.*

*O God, who through your Only Begotten Son  
have made us a new creation,  
look kindly, we pray,  
on the handiwork of your mercy,  
and at your Son's coming  
cleans us from every stain of the old way of life.*

John the Baptist preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Those who recognized the errors of their ways humbled themselves and believed his message. Those who were proud and opposed Jesus looked down on Jesus who welcomed the sinners who had repented and were receiving forgiveness of their sins through him. There is a phrase in one of the prefaces of ordinary time that says, *"For, although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praise adds nothing to your greatness but profits us for salvation."* We can say that this truth applies to the forgiveness of our sins as a prompting within us of *"the handiwork of [God's] mercy."* It only follows that giving thanks and praise at the Eucharist must be our full response to his mercy.

*Open my eyes, Lord, to the gift of salvation found in the mystery of the Incarnation. I praise you, I adore you, I give you thanks for your most precious gift of the Eucharist.*

Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

December 14

Luke 7:22-23 † *And he said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."*

*Grant, we pray, almighty God,  
that the coming solemnity of your Son  
may bestow healing upon us in this present life  
and bring us the rewards of life eternal.*

Even the most faithful, those with long practice of fidelity to God's commands, can come to a point of insecurity and doubt. These are temptations. We should always reject them. These are not from a good spirit. They are definitely not from the Holy Spirit. John may not have been in despair or doubt prompting these questions to Jesus. They may have been from a right understanding of the nature of the kingdom of heaven as more spiritual in its final form. But in light of the physical resuscitation of the young man, the kingdom of heaven was not to have its fulfilment only on earth. Jesus reiterates to John that the kingdom of heaven does not exclude all John is hearing about. Having those things happen does not diminish, but rather is by God's gift of grace a sign of the kingdom. This is a kingdom not of this world, but benefits to this world are not excluded either.

*Lord Jesus, I ask only for the healing of my soul. Let me not be offended if I do not see or receive physical healing. May it be that if restoration in the physical world is made possible it may be only the foretaste of "the rewards of life eternal."*

Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

December 15

Luke 7:29-30 † *All the people who listened, including the tax collectors, and who were baptized with the baptism of John, acknowledged the righteousness of God; but the Pharisees and scholars of the law, who were not baptized by him, rejected the plan of God for themselves.*

*Unworthy servants that we are, O Lord,  
grieved by the guilt of our deeds,  
we pray that you may gladden us  
by the saving advent of your Only Begotten Son.*

The humble are those who accept the salvation of God in Jesus. The proud are those who reject salvation from start to finish. How interesting that those who were most likely more learned, the Pharisees and scholars of the law, were the ones rejecting their salvation in Jesus. The righteousness of God is salvation coming through humble acknowledgement of our sins and confessing them in Sacramental Confession.

*O Lord, I acknowledge my sinfulness and am truly grieved for having offended you. Gladden my heart through a sincere confession of all my sins that I may rejoice in the coming of the Christ child.*

Friday of the Third Week of Advent

December 16

John 5:35-36 † *He was a burning and shining lamp, and for a while you were content to rejoice in his light. But I have testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.*

*May your grace, almighty God,  
always go before us and follow after,  
so that we, who await with heartfelt desire  
the coming of your Only Begotten Son,  
may receive your help both now and in the life to come.*

If only we would truly recognize how the help of God's Only Begotten Son is with us now in the Eucharist. It is grace from God that is our light. In Sunday's reflection you heard that light is not its own source, a seemingly silly observation. But as Jesus says of those who listened to John that they "*were content to rejoice in his light.*" John was not the source of this light. Rather, Jesus is the source. Light is a sort of testimony to its source. Jesus' works of mercy, healing and instruction are testimony to the light Himself. These are the light of the works of the Jesus' Father. By this same understanding we should look with the eyes of faith at the mystery of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the Source and Summit of our Christian life. The Eucharist is where Jesus has gone before us, and where we hope to follow into eternal life.

*Jesus, I know that you are present in the Eucharist. May I come to love you more and more in this great mystery of your presence among us. May it help me to celebrate your first coming in such a way as to better prepare me for when you come in glory.*

Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

December 17

Matthew 1:17 † *Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.*

*O God, Creator and Redeemer of human nature,  
who willed that your Word should take flesh  
in an ever-virgin womb,  
look with favor on our prayers,  
that your Only Begotten Son,  
having taken to himself our humanity,  
may be pleased to grant us a share in his divinity.*

Today we see a big change in the collects and Gospel readings for Mass. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of November we are in a countdown of eight days to Christmas. We ponder two things in the prayers and scriptures from this point forward. One is the humanity of Christ in the line from Abraham, through David, through the fulfillment of the prophecy of his birth of the Virgin Mary. It is stated of Him as "*having taken to himself our humanity.*" Probably, due to our limited human understanding, this first part is easier to grasp than the second. The second point is that which is told to us in the end of the collect of today's Mass. This one is that we could, by his generous pleasure, have him "*grant us a share in his divinity.*" WOW, just WOW!

*The mystery of your Incarnation, Lord Jesus, telling us you became one of us is wonderful to contemplate. That you would share with me your divinity is beyond my mind's grasp. My heart yearns for this. Let me ponder this gift with Mary as my guide, she who pondered the gift of God in her womb.*

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 18

Matthew 1:20-21 † *“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

*Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,  
your grace into our hearts,  
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son  
was made known by the message of an Angel,  
may by his Passion and Cross  
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.*

To anyone who has prayed the Angelus, today's collect should sound familiar. The Angelus is an opportunity to reflect on the Incarnation. It helps us reflect on Mary's fiat to God's saving plan. Today's Gospel gives us the opportunity to reflect on Joseph's acceptance of his role to bring Mary into his home. We too should accept Mary into our hearts, meditating with her and Joseph on the mystery of the Incarnation.

V. The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary full of grace ...

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it done to me according to thy word.

Hail Mary full of grace ...

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary full of grace ...

V. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: Pour forth, ...

*O good Joseph, humble and chaste of heart, show me how to let Mary into my heart. O Mary loving mother of Jesus, show me how to adore Jesus in the way you adored him with a love beyond all telling.*

Monday of the fourth Week of Advent

December 19

Luke 1:19-20 † *And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time."*

*O God, who through the child-bearing of the holy Virgin graciously revealed the radiance of your glory to the world, grant, we pray, that we may venerate with integrity of faith the mystery of so wondrous an Incarnation and always celebrate it with due reverence.*

Similar messages from the angel Gabriel have two different reaction and seemingly different outcomes. We can say, "seemingly different outcomes," because each message was supposed to have a different outcome. One message was to announce the coming of John the Baptist, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." One message was to announce the coming of the Son of God, the one John was to proclaim. There is a mystical message in all of this. It is that the one who doubted he could have a son in his old age, Zechariah who was priest in the temple, would be made silent until the one who was the precursor of the Messiah was born. We should pray for a faith that accepts the mystery of the Incarnation so we might welcome him with the songs of joy.

*O God, may the light of Christ be always in my heart. May I never doubt but with Mary celebrate your mercy by sharing that light with others.*

Tuesday of the fourth Week of Advent

December 20

Luke 1:35-37 † *“The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.”*

*O God, eternal majesty, whose ineffable Word  
the immaculate Virgin received through the message of an Angel  
and so became the dwelling-place of divinity,  
filled with the light of the Holy Spirit,  
grant, we pray, that by her example  
we may in humility hold fast to your will.*

*“For nothing will be impossible for God.”* We saw what happened as Zechariah was made mute for not believing what God could do. Despite this unbelief, God nonetheless accomplish what he had announced to Zechariah through the angel Gabriel. Mary learns this as she wonders how a virgin could conceive outside the normal order of nature. God made possible what could not be understood as possible for mere creatures. Jesus is begotten, not made, within the womb of the Virgin Mary. There was a similar incredible possibility we encountered in our reflection from December 17. It was the possibility of our sharing in the divinity of Christ. Impossible!? Remember, *“nothing will be impossible for God.”*

*O God, fill me with the light of your Holy Spirit, that what seems impossible may be possible!*

Luke 1:39-45 † *During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."*

*Hear in kindness, O Lord,  
the prayers of your people,  
that those who rejoice  
at the coming of your Only Begotten Son in our flesh  
may, when at last he comes in glory,  
gain the reward of eternal life*

*"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."* Believing all that was revealed to her, Mary accomplishes much charity in her visit to Elizabeth. Likely Mary would have helped with the many household chores that became harder for Elizabeth in pregnancy and old age. She brought with her the source of charity. Both Elizabeth and the child in her womb are joyful with the presence of the Lord in Mary's womb. We learn another valuable application of charity in this moment as well. It is in the example of Mary sharing not only in the chores, not only bringing to another the Lord of life within her, rather, it is that all of this is possible when we believe in God's Word made flesh.

*O God, fill me again with your Holy Spirit, that my faith may grow to fulfil all charity!*

Luke 1:46-55 † *And Mary said:*

*“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.*

*For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness;  
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.*

*The Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.*

*His mercy is from age to age  
to those who fear him.*

*He has shown might with his arm,  
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.*

*He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones  
but lifted up the lowly.*

*The hungry he has filled with good things;  
the rich he has sent away empty.*

*He has helped Israel his servant,  
remembering his mercy,*

*according to his promise to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”*

Collect for Mass

*O God, who, seeing the human race fallen into death,  
willed to redeem it by the coming of your Only Begotten Son,  
grant, we pray,*

*that those who confess his Incarnation with humble fervor  
may merit his company as their Redeemer.*

Today simply pray with Mary the Canticle of Praise (Mary’s Magnificat).

Friday of the Fourth Week of Advent

December 23

Luke 1:63-66 † *He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be?" For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.*

*Almighty ever-living God,  
as we see how the Nativity of your Son  
according to the flesh draws near,  
we pray that to us, your unworthy servants,  
mercy may flow from your Word,  
who chose to become flesh of the Virgin Mary  
and establish among us his dwelling,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Zacharia's voice, previously shut by his disbelief, is opened as he accepts and proclaims the truth. The fulness of Truth will be proclaimed by John. The Messiah is about to be revealed.

*O God, help me to see, believe, and proclaim your salvation! Let your hand be on me to guide me to your Son.*

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Advent  
(Christmas Eve Day) December 24

Luke 1:67-79 † *Then Zechariah [John's] father, filled with the holy Spirit, prophesied, saying:*

*“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
for he has visited and brought redemption to his people.  
He has raised up a horn for our salvation  
within the house of David his servant,  
even as he promised  
through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old:  
salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,  
to show mercy to our fathers  
and to be mindful of his holy covenant  
and of the oath he swore to Abraham our father,  
and to grant us that, rescued from the hand of enemies,  
without fear we might worship him in holiness and righteousness  
before him all our days.  
And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High,  
for you will go before the Lord\* to prepare his ways,  
to give his people knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our Gods  
by which the daybreak from on high will visit us  
to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”*

*O God, who, seeing the human race fallen into death,  
willed to redeem it by the coming of your Only Begotten Son,  
grant, we pray,  
that those who confess his Incarnation with humble fervor  
may merit his company as their Redeemer.*

Today pray with Zacharia's Canticle.



