



Christ
Comes Anew

Daily Reflections on the
2018 Advent Mass Readings

INTRODUCTION

As we begin the Advent season, we once again marvel at God's surprising presence in our world and in our hearts. God's most astonishing characteristic is how much God desires to be with us and enter into a relationship. From the scripture readings, we discover the long history of God-with-us, Emmanuel, first in creation and then through the covenant communities of Adam and Eve, Noah and his family and Abraham and his Israelite descendants, and then most surprising of all in Jesus of Nazareth, God's unique son and the revealer of the hidden depths of God. But we also know that God is even now hidden in the people and situations of our daily lives. God has always been and still is near to us, always inviting us ever deeper into a relationship of love and service to God's dream for an evil-free world. Indeed, as we will discover through our daily reflection and prayer, the Lord is always near.

And if you find that this handy Advent booklet helps you discover anew how near God is, we invite you to consider using the reflections for each day of the year found in the quarterly editions of *Words of Grace: Daily Reflections & Prayers for Catholics* available from *AllSaintsPress.com*.

—Steve Mueller, Editor

OUR ADVENT JOURNEY

Sunday December 2

First Sunday of Advent

Jer 33:14-16 / 1 Thes 3:12—4:2 / Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

Today we begin a new liturgical year and a new journey of the People of God with Jesus Christ, our shepherd, who guides us through history toward the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. Therefore, this day makes us experience deeply the meaning of history. We rediscover the beauty of us all—the Church, with her vocation and mission, and all humanity, peoples, civilizations, cultures—being on a journey across the paths of time. But where are we journeying? Is there a common goal? And what is this goal? Jesus Christ is both guide and goal of our pilgrimage, of the pilgrimage of the entire People of God. And in his light the other peoples may also walk toward the kingdom of justice and peace.

—Pope Francis

*What can I do this Advent to walk
more faithfully with others toward Jesus?*

The four week season that begins the Church year is called **Advent** (Latin, “coming”). We prepare for the coming of Jesus by remembering his birth in Bethlehem (past), anticipating his coming in glory (future) and by celebrating his coming to us now in word and sacrament (present).

EXAMINING YOUR DAY

Monday December 3

St. Francis Xavier, Priest

Is 2:1-5 / Mt 8:5-11

I earnestly pray you not to forget your own progress in virtue: for you are well aware that one who does not make progress in virtue, goes backwards. At night, before you go to sleep, examine your conscience, enquiring into the thoughts, words, and deeds of the whole day. Look very closely into what you have omitted to do from negligence, or what you have done badly, and resolve seriously on the necessary correction, which you must then carry out with great fidelity. If as soon as you have perceived your fault, you strive to correct it, our merciful Lord will not fail to accompany your repentance with his voluntary gifts, and turn even your past errors to your great profit by loading you with divine graces.

—St. Francis Xavier

*What obstacles to my progress in virtue
most need my attention now?*

Special **Advent devotions** remind us of the meaning of the season and include the lighting of the Advent wreath, the Advent calendar which helps remind us of the season with daily thoughts and activities and Advent prayers that prepare us spiritually for the birth of Jesus Christ.

CHRIST COMES ANEW

Tuesday December 4

Advent Weekday

Is 11:1-10 / Lk 10:21-24

Beloved, now is the acceptable time spoken of by the Spirit, the day of salvation, peace and reconciliation—the great season of Advent. The Church has always celebrated this season with special solemnity. We too should observe it with faith and love, offering praise and thanksgiving to the Father for the mercy and love shown us in this mystery. The Church asks us to understand that Christ, who came once in the flesh, is prepared to come again. When we remove all obstacles to his presence he will come, at any hour and moment, to dwell spiritually in our hearts, bringing with him the riches of his grace. Our hearts should be as much prepared for Christ's coming as if he were still to come into this world.

—St. Charles Borromeo

Liturgy of the Hours

What might I do to prepare for Christ to come more fully into my heart in the next few weeks?

Usually made from evergreens with 4 candles (three purple and one rose color), the **Advent Wreath** symbolizes the approaching celebration of Christ's coming at Christmas. Each Sunday (and the nights in between) the four candles are lighted successively and biblical readings or prayers are recited to prepare for Christmas.

MOVING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Wednesday December 5

Advent Weekday

Is 25:6-10a / Mt 15:29-37

Advent bids us confront the tyranny of the past, chuck it, get over it, put it away and get on with the future. Christians possess the future because that is where God intends to meet us once again. So we must always look ahead and not back, trust and not fear. For the Christian the imperishable slogan must always be “Our best days are before us!” Christian hope is meant to guide you into the place where you have not yet been, and into becoming the person that you have not yet become. That is the radical dimension of the Christian faith, and it is not content with the notion of Christianity celebrating the things that are or, worse still, of Christianity celebrating things as we imagine them once to have been.

—Peter J. Gomes
Strength for the Journey

*How is my hope leading me to new encounters
with God in my prayer and action?*

The Greek word for what Jesus feels for the crowd (translated as **pity**, which unfortunately today usually means to feel sorry for someone) is much closer to our sense of compassion—a strong emotional reaction felt deep within (or as we would say in our “guts”) in response to someone else’s difficulty or suffering.

A FIRM FOUNDATION

Thursday December 6

Advent Weekday

Is 26:1-6 | Mt 7:21, 24-27

Irreverent though the comparison may seem, Jesus' parable in today's gospel reminds me of the story of *The Three Little Pigs*. Both stories praise the one who is wise, the prudent one who builds a house that will survive the onslaught of adversity. This Advent season is a good time to take stock of our spiritual houses. How firm is the foundation of our faith? Is it vulnerable to the blowing winds of our times? What aspects of the gospel message might help us as we prepare to open our hearts and minds more fully to the one whose coming we anticipate during this holy season. Jesus invites us to build our house on his word and to put his words into action in our lives.

—Angeline Hubert

How can I more fully practice the words of the gospel during this Advent season?

At Mass the **Penitential Rite** is a general acknowledgment of sinfulness by the entire assembly, with requests for God's mercy and forgiveness. It has always been an essential moment of confession, petition for forgiveness and interior purification before entering into the celebration of the sacred mysteries.

THAT WE MAY SEE

Friday December 7

St. Ambrose, Bishop
& Doctor of the Church

Is 29:17-24 / Mt 9:27-31

An awareness of our sinfulness is part of holiness. You simply cannot have holiness without it because it is an inevitable effect of God's closeness. This is why true sorrow for sin is never morbid or depressed, for it carries within it the certainty of forgiveness. Scripture assures us that Jesus comes to heal our blindness, and blindness in regard to sin is our chief blindness. To a great extent—perhaps completely—we choose how much we see. We cannot have God unless we are prepared to see ourselves, our lives, our past and present as they are, and half-consciously we know this revelation would be terrible. Therefore we make a choice not to see—or not to see very much.

—Ruth Burrows, OCD

The Watchful Heart

How has God's healing touch helped me be more aware of God's presence in my life?

The **Holy One of Israel** is a brief description of God summarizing God's most important characteristics. Holiness identifies God as transcendent—totally other and different from all created things. But Yahweh is also Israel's special God by the covenant established with them from among all the nations.

MARY'S SINLESSNESS

Saturday December 8

The Immaculate Conception
of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Gn 3:9-15, 20 / Eph 1:3-6, 11-12 / Lk 1:26-38

We must carefully consider the advantages that Mary has enjoyed over all other creatures as a consequence of her Immaculate Conception. The first is that she never harbored tendencies that could push her to sin. Oh, what peace, gentleness, charity, and humility there were in her soul since this instinct causes us so much trouble by leading us into sin. Her mind never indulged in useless thoughts nor was it occupied with sin. She never omitted anything that God asked of her. Consequently, she was filled with virtue. This is why I desire to love and to honor her to the best of my ability by my gratitude to the Blessed Trinity for the choice made of the Holy Virgin to be so closely united to the Divinity.

—St. Louise de Marillac

*What tendencies pushing me toward sin
do I most need to fight against?*

Mary's conception without sin in the womb of her mother Anne is called her **Immaculate Conception**. It is not to be confused as some commentators do with Jesus' Virgin Birth, which describes his birth from the womb of Mary.

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

Sunday December 9

Second Sunday of Advent

Bar 5:1-9 / Phil 1:4-6, 8-11 / Lk 3:1-6

The Lord wishes to find a way to enter our hearts. What way are we to prepare for the Lord? Is it a material way? Can God's Word take such a way? Ought we not rather to prepare an inner way for the Lord by making the paths of our heart straight and smooth? Indeed, this is the way by which God's Word enters to take up his abode in the human heart made ready to receive him. Now we can prepare the way of the Lord in our hearts and make straight the way where the Word will walk. Make straight the way so that God's Word may walk within you without stumbling and may give you knowledge of God's mysteries and of God's coming.

—Origen

Homily on Luke's Gospel

*What am I doing to open a way for God
to come into my heart this Advent?*

Repentance for the forgiveness of sins identifies the 2 stages preparing for God's inevitable (and thus coming) judgment of Israel. Repentance means turning from sin back to God and forgiveness of sins indicates God's acquittal at the judgment—what everyone wants instead of condemnation.

WAITING IN JOYFUL HOPE

Monday December 10

Advent Weekday

Is 35:1-10 / Lk 5:17-26

Although I've spent too much time with my orthopedic doctor, I am still deeply touched by the scripture text on his wall: *Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak* (Is 35:3). Most of us feel it's too much to ask to walk without pain when there are so many who suffer much more than we do. But the Hebrew prophet says, "No! God knows our needs (and our knees!) and promises to restore us to the vigor of our youth." Those with much more severe challenges, like blindness and deafness, will one day know the joyful use of all of their senses. Ah, Advent. It draws us close to the desires of our hearts, which line up exactly with God's heart too.

—Kathy McGovern

*What do I most look forward
to when I think about eternal life?*

The **desert** for biblical people includes not only the vast sandy stretches that we call deserts but more often indicates what we call "wilderness," whether the semi-arid areas with a seasonal grassy covering (steppe) favored by nomads or the inhospitable and uninhabited arid and rocky wastelands.

LOVE & GENEROSITY

Tuesday December 11

Advent Weekday

Is 40:1-11 / Mt 18:12-14

“Love” is a precious word which we ought to use precisely and with meaning, never carelessly or cheaply, and back up its use with action. God tells us that he loves us—and means what is said. One characteristic of true love is generosity, a generosity which knows no limit. Love and giving are synonymous. How much does God love us? “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” God simply had no gift to give more precious than his only Son. Nor is the gift merely precious and actually useless—as is a diamond which a man gives to his wife. God’s gift is both immeasurably precious and eminently practical. God gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life.

—Charles E. Miller, CM
Opening the Treasures

*What gifts have I received from God
and how do I use them?*

In the biblical world, **holiness** described God’s essential otherness from all created beings, hence it characterized God alone. So anything on earth that we call holy (the temple, the altar, the vessels on the altar, the offering, the priest and people) can only be made holy through direct contact with God.

MOTHER OF THE MARGINAL

Wednesday December 12

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Zec 2:14-17 / or Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab / Lk 1:26-38

This Mary is the woman of the land, sister to the poor and the mother of compassion and healing for all who live on the edges of life, walking the roads on the outskirts of the cities, living in slums, *favelas*, tenements, and the neighborhoods where no one ever wants to get caught having to raise their children. She is barefoot upon the earth; her presence causes roses to bloom in December and the birds to sing wildly and the land to bring forth its seed and bread for those desperate for daily sustenance and freedom. She is the symbol of the small earth, inconsequential except to God, found with all those who live faithfully in situations of darkness, despair, lack and need, yet powerful in their very weakness and numbers.

—Megan McKenna

in *Spiritual Writings on Mary*, ed. Mary Ford-Grabowsky

*How can I make a big difference to others
by my small acts of faithful love and service?*

Blessing identifies whatever contributes to earthly fulfillment, especially wealth and prosperity, family and children, health and long life. Elizabeth's address to Mary as "blessed among women" recognizes God's special election of her as the mother of the promised Messiah.

FEAR NOT!

Thursday December 13

St. Lucy, Virgin & Martyr

Is 41:13-20 / Mt 11:11-15

Deliver me, O Jesus, from the desire of being loved, from the desire of being extolled, from the desire of being honored, from the desire of being praised, from the desire of being preferred, from the desire of being consulted, from the desire of being approved, from the desire of being popular, from the fear of being humiliated, from the fear of being despised, from the fear of suffering rebukes, from the fear of being calumniated, from the fear of being forgotten, from the fear of being wronged, from the fear of being ridiculed, from the fear of being forgotten. Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth, from despair to hope, from fear to truth.

—St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta
A Simple Path

What desires and fears most frustrate God's work in me?

Only Matthew usually calls God's kingdom the **kingdom of heaven**. Since out of reverence Jews often substituted another word instead of saying God's personal name, this might be one more indication that Matthew had a previous Jewish background.

GROWING IN THE DARKNESS

Friday December 14

St. John of the Cross, Priest &
Doctor of the Church

Is 48:17-19 / Mt 11:16-19

The proper atmosphere of meditation is one of tranquility and peace and balance. The mind should be able to give itself to simple and peaceful reflection. Intellectual brilliance is never required. The will should find itself directed toward the good and strengthened in its desire for union with God. It does not have to feel itself enkindled with raptures of ardent love. A good meditation may well be quite “dry” and “cold” and “dark.” It may even be considerably disturbed by involuntary distractions. St. John of the Cross says somewhere that “the best fruit grows in land that is cold and dry.” But this arid meditation nevertheless fills the soul with humility, peace, courage, and the determination to persevere in negotiating the obstacles in our spiritual progress.

—Thomas Merton
Spiritual Direction & Meditation

What helps me cope with times of distraction in my prayer?

Before it became a more technical theological term, a **redeemer** was one who rescued someone or something from a difficult situation. In particular, it described the one who paid for the release of a family member or relative who had either been jailed or enslaved.

THE MESSIAH MUST SUFFER

Saturday December 15

Advent Weekday

Sir 48:1-4, 9-11 / Mt 17:9a, 10-13

We know what the world's power looks like. When push comes to shove, as it often does, it is the power of violence, using the threat of pain and death. It is the power of tanks and bombs, of guns and knives, whips and prisons, barbed wire and bulldozers. Weapons to destroy people's lives; machines to destroy their homes. Cruelty in the home or at work. Malice and manipulation where there should be gentleness, kindness and wisdom. Jesus' power is totally different, as he explained to the Roman governor a few minutes before the governor sent him to his death—thereby proving the point. The kingdoms of the world run on violence. The kingdom of God, Jesus declared, runs on love. That is the good news.

—N.T. Wright
Simply Good News

How might I respond out of love rather than cruelty and power in dealing with others today?

In Hebrew “son of” designates the individual member of a group, so “son of man” means a human being. The prophet Daniel (7:13) describes God’s final agent who will accomplish God’s rule in the world as a “son of man.” Jesus adds a new factor when he says this envoy must suffer.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Sunday December 16

Third Sunday of Advent

Zep 3:14-18a / Phil 4:4-7 / Lk 3:10-18

John the Baptist's audience recognized that hearing the good news of Christ's coming demanded an appropriate response. But what exactly does his coming require? Recognizing the messiah and his demands requires changing one's life. For the crowds, it meant sharing their food and clothes with the less fortunate. For the tax collectors, it meant dealing fairly with their clients and not just exploiting them. For the soldiers it meant not abusing their power or satisfying their greed. And for John the Baptist it meant recognizing his subordinate role as the ambassador and spokesperson for the greater one who was to come. When Jesus the messiah comes into our life, what will we be required to do?

—Steve Mueller

How can I respond better to the Holy Spirit nudging me to change my life?

The Third Sunday of Advent is called **Gaudete Sunday** (Latin, rejoice), so named from the Latin opening words of the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass "Gaudete in Domino semper" ("Rejoice in the Lord always," Philippians 4:4). On this Sunday the celebrant normally wears rose vestments at Mass.

COME, LORD JESUS

Monday December 17

Advent Weekday

Gn 49:2, 8-10 / Mt 1:1-17

Our hope is that the winter of humanity will gradually be transformed to the bursting forth of love. We will pass through the winter of suffering to the kingdom of God and rebirth. We can begin to sense them already, as the peace of the Spirit comes into our hearts, quelling bitterness and recreating hope. We sense the light which is a tiny sign of what we are called to live in the glory of the wedding feast of eternity. As yet, we have to walk the paths of life. Now we are pilgrims walking towards the kingdom and the promised land with our brothers and sisters, through our wounds and those of humanity. But we can say with hope, with confidence, with trust, “Come, Come Lord Jesus!”

—Jean Vanier
Be Not Afraid

*How has my life changed because
of my desire that Christ come?*

Matthew’s opening **genealogy** or list of family ancestors serves several purposes. It aids the memory by tying together a family history and also legitimates the messianic claim that Jesus was of the Davidic royal lineage and so could be what the gospel claims he is, the ‘King of the Judeans.’

PUTTING OURSELVES INTO THE STORY

Tuesday December 18

Advent Weekday

Jer 23:5-8 / Mt 1:18-25

Who might we be in the stories of the first Christmas? Are we like Mary, obedient to the role she had been given in bringing about a different kind of world? Or the shepherds who represent those of lowly status, the socially and economically marginalized who dream of and seek a different kingdom? Or are we among those who hear the story of Jesus, but aren't sure what to make of what we hear? No doubt there were many in this category who heard Jesus during his lifetime. Is this who we are? We are meant to be changed by Advent and Christmas. This is the sacramental purpose of this season of the Christian liturgical year.

—Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan

The First Christmas

*Which biblical character do I most relate to
in my life right now?*

Betrothal (from the Middle English *troth*, a pledge or commitment) was similar to a marriage engagement, which would intensify social relations between the 2 families. To discover that one's fiancée was pregnant by another man would be a major reason for ending the engagement and sending her back to her family in shame.

GOD'S GOOD NEWS

Wednesday December 19

Advent Weekday

Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a / Lk 1:5-25

The last word on human beings is that they are loved and freely able to go forward to better things, to begin all over again with the child Jesus, to become like little children, to recover their experience of life and take up again the rebuilding of society. This last word of hope lies behind all the good wishes we exchange and is the truth of all the gifts we give each other. Even beneath our irritability, our quarrels, our inability to get organized during the days of Christmas, beneath the divisions which sometimes happen over little things, there is the immense desire to communicate, to love, to be understood and to be loved. The child coming among us is the sign that God has opened the door to this life-giving journey.

—Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, SJ
Journeying with the Lord

*How might I show my willingness to begin again
as a child in my relationship to God?*

Zechariah's priestly service occurs when his priestly group is chosen by lot to perform the daily Temple rituals—a morning and evening sacrifice of a lamb and an offering of flour mixed with oil, a libation of wine and an **incense offering**—which is what he performs.

ASKING FOR A SIGN

Thursday December 20

Advent Weekday

Is 7:10-14 / Lk 1:26-38

Asking for a sign can be challenging. Maybe you really desire something from God but it's not what God desires for you. You might not receive the answer that you had expected. Then you might have to go down a different road. I suspect that Mary did not know what to expect when she was troubled with the angel's message. Like Ahaz, she did not "ask for a sign" but, unlike him, she did not try to tempt the Lord. She was able to accept the outcome and all its consequences, although she must have immediately known that her life was never going to be the same. So, the next time you "ask for a sign," remember God's generosity is giving you more than you might have desired.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

*When has God given me far more than
I was willing to ask for?*

In most Bible translations today, God's sacred personal name, Yahweh, is put in small capital letters as LORD. God's name was so sacred, the Jews like Isaiah did not speak it aloud but would instead often say *Adoni*, the Hebrew word for Lord."

GATHERED BY A PROMISE

Friday December 21

Advent Weekday

Sg 2:8-14 / or Zep 3:14-18a / Lk 1:39-45

Mary's visit to Elizabeth is one of the Bible's most beautiful expressions of what it means to form community, to be together, gathered around a promise, affirming what is happening among us. Waiting together with family and friends is better than waiting alone. Waiting together is more human and more divine. Mary visited Elizabeth just after she had received the promise of bearing a son. Something was happening to Elizabeth as well as to Mary. They came together and enabled each other to wait. Mary's visit made Elizabeth aware of what she was waiting for. The child leapt for joy in her. By being together these two women created space for each other to wait and affirmed for each other that something was happening that was worth waiting for.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Finding My Way Home

What am I most waiting for in my relation to God?

The ancient name of the high hill in Jerusalem is **Zion**. It was most probably the site of a fortress conquered by David and on which Solomon built the Temple. Thus it became synonymous with the sacred place where heaven and earth, God and the people met.

MARY, SIGN OF HOPE

Saturday December 22

Advent Weekday

1 Sm 1:24-28 / Lk 1:46-56

Mary is a constant sign and cause of hope. We do not want to lose sight of her or forget that she is the same woman who lived a very ordinary human life in a little town called Nazareth, who didn't understand everything, even though her son was God, living right with her, praying and reading the Scriptures with her. She had her questions and her fears. Our daily stumbling and bumbling does not separate us from our ultimate fulfillment and glorification. Do you feel uncomfortable, as I do, in thinking about and speaking about your own glorification? We have been so schooled in adopting a hangdog humility before God that it is difficult for us to break free and really sing our own *Magnificat*. We are destined to be glorious!

—M. Basil Pennington, OCSO
Mary Today

How does Mary's example most give me a sense of hope?

As her offering to God to be shared with the Shiloh priests, Hannah brings a young bull, an **ephaph** (about two-thirds of a bushel) of flour and a skin of wine. Priests were fed by sharing part of these food offerings because they had no land to farm.

THE GRACE OF VISITATION

Sunday December 23

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Mi 5:1-4a / Heb 10:5-10 / Lk 1:39-45

Sunday was visiting day in my childhood family. As a homebody by nature, something in me resisted giving up my time for socializing. As an adult, however, those visitations have graced me with many warm memories of sitting on my grandmother's sofa with cookies or lying by a roaring fire at the home of family friends. I realize now that there was a Christ child within me on those visits, the spirit of hospitality and kinship that is rarely born without self-sacrifice. My parents taught me to use that gift to fill others with the holy spirit of love and joy the way Mary did for Elizabeth. Advent reminds us that we are all pregnant with the life of Christ to share with our extended family in faith.

—Jerry Welte

*O Emmanuel, as you visited us from on high,
help us to grace others with your presence.*

Blessing identifies whatever contributes to earthly fulfillment, especially wealth and prosperity, family and children, health and long life. Thus Elizabeth considers Mary blessed to be chosen to give birth to the messiah.

JESUS BECOMES ONE OF US

Monday December 24

Advent Weekday

2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 / Lk 1:67-79

In the fullness of time, chosen in the unfathomable depths of God's wisdom, the Son of God took on himself our human nature in order to reconcile us with our Creator. He came to overthrow the devil, the origin of death, in that very nature by which the devil had overthrown humankind. In this conflict undertaken for us, a war has been waged on the mighty and highest principles of justice. The almighty Lord has gone into battle against our cruel enemy clothed not in his own majesty, but in our weakness. In Christ, majesty has taken on humility, strength has taken on weakness, eternity has taken on mortality, and all in order to settle the debt we owe for our condition.

—Pope St. Leo I, the Great
Christmas Homily

*What most fascinates me about Christ's
becoming fully human? Why?*

The word **Christmas** comes from the Old English *Cristes Maesse*, the Mass of Christ, and is first found in 1038. In Latin it was called *Dies Natalis*, the Day of Birth, from which comes the French *Noël*. The first evidence of its celebration is attested in Egypt around AD 200.

THE LORD IS NEAR

Tuesday December 25 The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Vigil: Is 62:1-5 / Acts 13:16-17, 22-25 / Mt 1:1-25

Night: Is 9:1-6 / Ti 2:11-14 / Lk 2:1-14

Dawn: Is 62:11-12 / Ti 3:4-7 / Lk 2:15-20

Day: Is 52:7-10 / Heb 1:1-6 / Jn 1:1-18

Christmas is the feast of the presence of God, who comes among us to save us. The birth of Jesus is no fable! It is an historic event which truly occurred in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Faith enables us to recognize the child born of the virgin Mary as the true son of God, who for love for us became human. In the face of little Jesus we contemplate the face of God, who does not reveal himself in strength and power but in the weakness and frailty of a newborn babe. This is what our God is like—God comes so close, in a child. This child reveals the faithfulness and tenderness of the unconditional love with which God surrounds each one of us.

—Pope Francis

*How has Christ revealed himself to me
when I was weak and vulnerable?*

Jesus is at once both **human and divine**. A human like us, he is nevertheless our Lord, to whom we give honor and praise, glory and worship just as we do to God. He is also God's unique Son, and thus fully and completely what God is—divine.

JESUS' CRIB IS SURROUNDED BY MARTYRS

Wednesday December 26

St. Stephen, The First Martyr

Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59 / Mt 10:17-22

As yet heaven and earth are not united. The star of Bethlehem is a star shining in a dark night, even today. On the day after Christmas the church already lays aside her white festive vestments and clothes herself in the color of blood, and on the fourth day in the purple of mourning. For the crib of the child is surrounded by martyrs. There is Stephen, the first martyr to follow his Lord to death; there are the innocent children, the babes of Bethlehem and Judah, who were cruelly slaughtered by the hands of brutal hangmen. What does this mean? The Son of the eternal Father descended from the glory of heaven, because the mystery of iniquity had shrouded the earth in the darkness of night.

—St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross
Edith Stein: Essential Writings

*How can I help those who are suffering today
because of their faith commitment?*

The official list of saints venerated by the Church arranged according to the annual calendar is found in the **Roman Martyrology**. Additions to the list are made when new saints are officially beatified and canonized and their memorial days are determined.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE ORDINARY KIND

Thursday December 27

St. John, Apostle & Evangelist

1 Jn 1:1-4 / Jn 20:1a, 2-8

John the apostle describes with awe how close he had been to the Word of life. How ordinary is our God-encounter, right at one's own doorstep in something as simple as a dewdrop on a plain vegetable. I don't know about you, but something in me hesitates to trust revelations of God when they are too ordinary. I like to think that God is mostly revealed in something "big" or outstandingly beautiful, like the Swiss Alps. The truth is, however, that God is being revealed to us every day in those nearest to us, wherever we are. It is how we look for God, what we expect, that makes the difference. Let us give up the high mountains and vast oceans as our major searching places and come home to our simple lives.

—Joyce Rupp
Inviting God In

How have I experienced God's presence in those around me during these days of Christmas?

In John's Gospel, **eternal life** is our future destiny—a permanent and undying existence in God's presence forever. It is qualitatively different from natural life for death cannot destroy it. It begins now in us by our association with Jesus and our participation in God's Holy Spirit.

CHILDREN ARE GOD'S MESSAGE TO THE WORLD

Friday December 28

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

1 Jn 1:5—2:2 / Mt 2:13-18

When God wants an important thing done in this world or a wrong righted, God simply has a tiny baby born, perhaps of a very humble home or of a very humble mother. And God puts the idea or purpose into the mother's heart. And she puts it in the baby's mind, and then—God waits. The great events of this world are not battles and elections but rather babies, for each child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity but is still expecting good-will to become incarnate in each human life.

—Edmond McDonald

in *Guide My Feet* by Marian Wright Edelman

What can I do today to help protect and nourish the lives of children who are especially vulnerable and in need?

Herod was appointed “King of the Jews” by the Romans (37–4 BC). Although there is no historical evidence for this particular massacre in Bethlehem, he was known for his cruelty and when his rule was threatened he would certainly act quickly and ruthlessly to eliminate any possible rivals.

GOD IS BEING BORN AGAIN

Saturday December 29

5th Day in the Christmas Octave

1 Jn 2:3-11 / Lk 2:22-35

My God is not dead, the whole world speaks of him and tells me of his birth. I see God's birth in the struggle to end poverty and in the protests that hope to end war. I see his birth in the hearts of people who wince with every bullet, who shudder at napalm and who detest every bomb. I see him born in the screams of the children who do not understand the gunfire that keeps them from playing. I see him in the mothers who will not give their sons to war and violence, in the young women who will not watch their husbands die in vain. I see him in any effort to give men and women hope and to make their lives mean something.

—James Kavanaugh
God Lives

Where have I most experienced God in the situations of my life this year?

Before it became a theological term, **salvation** described a sick person's return to health (Latin, *salus*) or rescue from a difficult or life-threatening situation. For Christians, Jesus rescued us from our broken relationship with God and offered us a new relationship under God's kingdom rule.

A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION

Sunday December 30

The Holy Family of Jesus,
Mary & Joseph

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14 / Col 3:12-21 / Mt 2:13-15, 19-23
or 1 Sm 1:20-22, 24-28 / 1 Jn 3:1-2, 21-24 / Lk 2:41-52

God enters the temple not as a potentate or mighty one but as a small child in his mother's arms. The king of glory does not arrive in a great demonstration of human strength and power, with great pomp and noise. He enters the temple as he entered the world, as an infant in silence, in poverty and in the company of the poor and the wise. God's first entrance into the temple of his people is wrapped in the mystery of helplessness. Yes, his power is concealed in the baby's defenselessness. Simeon predicted that Jesus would be a "sign that will be opposed." He is destined to be for all ages a sign of rejection, a sign that will provoke hostility, a sign of contradiction.

—Pope St. John Paul II
Draw Near to God

*What most tempts me to reject Jesus
and his challenge to be holy?*

For biblical people, **love** was not so much the romantic personal attachment we envision today but a fierce attachment to one's group, especially the family. This attitude was matched by actions. Love presumed intense loyalty and expected one to do good for those in one's group.

OUR ADVENT PRAYER

Jesus, you are our hope.

Remain with us!

You who came from the Father,
lead us to him in the Holy Spirit,
along the path which you alone know
and which you have revealed to us,
that we might have life
and have it in abundance.

Be for us the door which leads us
into the mystery of God. Amen.

—Pope St. John Paul II

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