

# Advent

FOR MARRIED COUPLES

2022



PRAY

BUILD UNITY

TALK

LEARN MORE

ACT

LOVE BETTER

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Meditations by William C. Wacker.

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## **Introduction**

God wants to transform marriages today. One of the best ways to cooperate with God in that grand vision is to immerse ourselves as couples in praying together with Sacred Scripture. The Scriptures reveal the true story of God's good creation, and of mankind's nature, purpose, fall, and rescue. As we are immersed in the grand story that runs from creation to the ultimate restoration of creation in the new heaven and the new earth, we discover how our own stories as individuals and as a married couple with our children are wonderfully woven into that big story.

We offer these meditations as a way for couples to stay connected during the hectic Advent season.

## **Pattern**

All the Scripture readings from the Catholic Lectionary for Advent 2022 are listed for each day. We have selected one of the daily readings for the couple to read together as part of their prayer. It is followed by the usual pattern of meditation, quiet reflection, discussion, and prayer.

## **A Note about Advent**

The word "advent" means an arrival or a coming. It is the season when the Church celebrates the "arrival" of the Messiah at his birth. It looks with longing to his coming at the end of the present age.

Reading through the Scriptures that the Church has selected for Advent is like listening to the punch line of a story that begins, "I have bad news and good news; which do you want first?" Most of the readings announce the good news, but the season is punctuated by other days when the readings give us the bad news. What we see is that the answer to both the good news and the bad news is the same: the King is coming!

It was bad news for Israel, who had forgotten their true vocation. The King was coming, and he would not be happy with what he found. His arrival would coincide with stiff punishment for those who were oppressing the poor, worshiping false gods, keeping the good news to themselves, and in general, not keeping the covenant that their God had made with them. These passages function as a warning for us as well.

That the King is coming was very good news for Israel. They had been waiting for their long exile in Babylon to come to an end. It was true that they had returned to the land, but they were still subject to foreign powers, and they had not seen the glory of the Lord return to their temple. They were longing for the true King, the Messiah, to come. In him God would act. God would defeat their enemies, return to the Temple, and usher in the great and glorious day of the Lord. On that day the resurrection would occur and creation itself would be healed and transformed. There would be a new heaven and a new earth.

That the King is coming is very good news for us as well. The King is here. And he is coming again in all of his glory and splendor—to set the world right, to defeat death, to restore creation.



## First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2022

Isaiah 2:1–5; Romans 13:11–14; Matthew 24:37–42

### Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– **Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



### Reading: Matthew 24:37–42

For as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> In (those) days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. <sup>39</sup> They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be (also) at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. <sup>42</sup> Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

### Meditation

The flood surprised the men and women of Noah's time. They thought everything was going well. Jesus is asking his audience (and us) to imagine what it would be like for the Romans to abruptly arrest our friend and leave us shocked and standing alone in the field. There is more than a hint of danger in today's reading. But surprises can be pleasant or perilous. The Son of Man came as a small child—and that was a surprise. As a mature man he offered his life on the cross as a ransom for us—and that was a surprise. He rose from the grave to defeat death, our worst enemy—and that was a surprise. He fills us as individuals and as married couples with his Holy Spirit—and that is a surprise. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. But it will it be a surprise? Will it be pleasure or peril? Stay awake!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



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## Reading: Matthew 8:5–11

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, <sup>6</sup> saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully." <sup>7</sup> He said to him, "I will come and cure him." <sup>8</sup> The centurion said in reply, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed." <sup>9</sup> For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." <sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. <sup>11</sup> 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."

## Meditation

Our marriages function as a sign of that great day when the nations will come to recline with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the saints at the wedding banquet of Christ and his bride, the Church. However, it may take an act of faith comparable to that of the centurion to see it, to believe it, and to live as if it is true. Jesus desires to heal us, strengthen us, and make us into a bright and shining beacon of hope in a very confused and dark world. Advent is a time when we as couples say with the centurion, "Lord, only say the word. . . ."

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## First Week, Tuesday, November 29, 2022

Isaiah 11:1–10; Luke 10:21–24

### Pray

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### Reading: Luke 10:21–24

At that very moment he rejoiced (in) the holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will." <sup>22</sup> 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." <sup>23</sup> Turning to the disciples in private he said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see." <sup>24</sup> For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

### Meditation

We know the Father because we know Jesus. How is that possible? They love the same things and hate the same things. Jesus only desires what his Father desires and the Father has handed all things to his Son. The unity of Jesus and his Father is such that to see one is to see the other. It is a great mystery. Advent is a time when we, as married couples, can more deeply reflect on the truth of what Jesus said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

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## **Reading: Matthew 15:29–37**

Moving on from there Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, went up on the mountain, and sat down there. <sup>30</sup> Great crowds came to him, having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them. <sup>31</sup> The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see, and they glorified the God of Israel. <sup>32</sup> 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." <sup>33</sup> The disciples said to him, "Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" "Seven," they replied, "and a few fish." <sup>35</sup> He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. <sup>36</sup> Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. <sup>37</sup> They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full.

## **Meditation**

There will be a great banquet when we celebrate the wedding feast of Christ and his bride, the Church. In this story, we get a preview of that feast. What do we see? We see seven baskets of leftovers, more food than a great crowd can eat! We see the bridegroom himself, preparing food and helping his disciples serve it. When God throws a party, the sick are cured, the lonely are given a place, and no one goes home hungry. Advent is a time to celebrate that the party has begun and one day will be in full swing. This child whose birth we are anticipating is Emmanuel, God with us.

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## Reading: Matthew 7:21, 24–27

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. . . .<sup>24</sup> Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined."

## Meditation

In Jesus' time, the "house built on a rock" was code for the Temple. The Temple was the unique dwelling place of God on earth. But the "rock" was not a physical, geological feature; rather, God was their true Rock (see Psalms 18:3; 19:15; 28:1; 42:10; 62:2–8). But there was a great storm on the horizon, and if the people did not turn from their national sin and trust in God, the Temple was in danger of being destroyed. That storm was the violent and cruel Roman Empire. In AD 70 that storm broke upon Jerusalem, and the Temple was destroyed. But Jesus was not simply talking about a building or an actual rock. In all that he said and did, Jesus was announcing that he himself was the Temple; he was the unique dwelling place of God on earth; he was the Rock in which we find refuge. Trust him, do what he says, and we will be able to withstand the storms that will buffet our lives, marriages, and families.

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## **Reading: Matthew 9:27–31**

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" <sup>28</sup> When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." <sup>29</sup> Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." <sup>30</sup> And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, "See that no one knows of this." <sup>31</sup> But they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district. (NRSV)

## **Meditation**

If you were blind and suddenly you could see the world in all its glory, how could you not tell everyone you know? If, suddenly, you could see for the first time in your life the face of your children, your spouse, your friends and family, how could you not tell everyone you know? Likewise, if you caught a glimpse of the beauty and splendor of God reflected in your spouse, how could you not tell everyone you know? Like the two blind men, your story is too good to keep quiet. The Son of David, the long-awaited king, desires to transform our marriages into a story that is too good **not** to tell. It is time to spread the good news. The King is coming!

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## Reading: Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26

O people of Zion, who dwell in Jerusalem, no more will you weep; He will be gracious to you when you cry out, as soon as he hears he will answer you. <sup>20</sup> The Lord will give you the bread you need and the water for which you thirst. No longer will your Teacher hide himself, but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher, <sup>21</sup> While from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears: "This is the way; walk in it," when you would turn to the right or to the left. <sup>23</sup> He will give rain for the seed that you sow in the ground, And the wheat that the soil produces will be rich and abundant. On that day your cattle will graze in spacious meadows; <sup>24</sup> The oxen and the asses that till the ground will eat silage tossed to them with shovel and pitchfork. <sup>25</sup> Upon every high mountain and lofty hill there will be streams of running water. On the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall, <sup>26</sup> The light of the moon will be like that of the sun and the light of the sun will be seven times greater (like the light of seven days). On the day the LORD binds up the wounds of his people, he will heal the bruises left by his blows.

## Meditation

The prophet promises that one day we will hear the voice of the Lord directing our steps. That happens when we pray with and listen to the Scripture as a couple. When we pray for our daily bread, for our children, and for all the great concerns that are on our heart, he responds as a loving Father. He is especially generous with his Holy Spirit. The promises of rich and abundant food, timely rains, creation restored, the healing of all wounds, and the defeat of all our enemies will happen in the fullness of time. Advent reminds us that we live in the often-confusing time between the arrival of Jesus which is the great act of salvation, and his second coming—his second Advent.

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## Reading: Isaiah 11:1–10

But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. <sup>2</sup>The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, <sup>3</sup> and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, <sup>4</sup> But he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. <sup>6</sup> Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. <sup>9</sup> There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea. <sup>10</sup> On that day, The root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, The Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.

## Meditation

Again, the Scriptures offer us as a couple a way to live and to be shaped by hope. We know the promised shoot from the stump of Jesse has come. He was filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit and all his gifts. He is the just judge who will set all wickedness and injustice to right. But that judgment has not been fully realized yet. Creation is longing with us for the day in which the wolf will be the guest of the lamb and our innocent children can play without fear of great harm. We too long for that great day to come, but in the meantime, we are united with Jesus. In that unity we are part of the great sign to the nations that a new day has dawned. The Lord has made his dwelling place in our hearts and in our marriages.

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## Reading: Luke 5:17–26

One day as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with him for healing. <sup>18</sup> And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him in and set (him) in his presence. <sup>19</sup> But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. <sup>20</sup> When he saw their faith, he said, "As for you, your sins are forgiven." <sup>21</sup> Then the scribes and Pharisees began to ask themselves, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who but God alone can forgive sins?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them in reply, "What are you thinking in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> He stood up immediately before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. <sup>26</sup> Then astonishment seized them all and they glorified God, and, struck with awe, they said, "We have seen incredible things today."

## Meditation

This story recounts one of the truly revolutionary moments in the life and ministry of Jesus. Everyone knew that the unique dwelling place of God on earth was the Temple in Jerusalem. Everyone knew that the only way to receive forgiveness of sin was to make the appropriate sacrifices in the Temple. Imagine the shock when Jesus bypassed the whole Temple system. Forgiveness of sins now comes directly from him. He is in essence replacing the whole Temple structure with himself. He is the unique dwelling place of God on earth, the new Temple. He is God with us.

Consider too the actions of the paralyzed man's friends. While they didn't anticipate the whole replacement of the Temple, they knew that if they could but get their friend to Jesus, he would do miraculous things for the poor man. During this season of Advent, we not only prepare our own hearts to encounter Emmanuel, "God with us," but we work to bring each other and our families to him as well.

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## **Reading: Isaiah 40:9–11**

Go up onto a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; Cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! <sup>10</sup> Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by his strong arm; Here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. <sup>11</sup> Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

## **Meditation**

Just before this passage, the prophet announced the end of Israel's long exile. "Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; Indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD double for all her sins (Isaiah 40:1–2). He went on to say that the most unexpected things would happen. Imagine valleys being filled in, mountains being leveled, and deserts in full bloom. The most unexpected thing of all would be for God himself to become an innocent baby, then grow into a man who would gladly give himself to rescue us. When that happened, ordinary married life, the life of fathers, mothers, and children, was transformed into an unmistakable symbol of God's great love for all of us. Advent is the time for us to go up on a mountain and shout from the top of our lungs, " We have good news!" Our God has poured out a great grace on married couples. Like a shepherd he will feed us and carry us in his arms.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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## **Reading: Matthew 11:28–30**

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

## **Meditation**

It is so easy to get caught up in the chaos of the season. Holiday parties. The pressure to find and give just the right gift. And financial pressures are amplified in this season, in part because we are burdened by the consumer culture's constant call to "win the holidays." It is possible that we have gotten it all wrong. Listen to Jesus. Turn to him. Trust him. He says that his "yoke is easy." The word here for easy is *chrestos*, which sounds so much like Christos: Christ. The word has a range of meanings that include kind, loving, good, merciful, and easy to bear. This Advent, when you find yourselves burdened and overwhelmed, stop and pray. Try on Jesus' yoke, which is kind, loving, good, merciful, and of course, easy to bear.

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## Second Week, Thursday, December 8, 2022

Immaculate Conception: Genesis 3:9–15, 20; Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12; Luke 1:26–38

### Pray

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### Reading: Luke 1:26–31, 34–35, 38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God." <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. (NRSV)

### Meditation

Only a woman can be the Mother of God. She is not just the mother of his human nature; rather, she is the mother of the whole person who is the Second Person of the Trinity. It is pure gift and could only happen because the Holy Spirit came upon her. But at the same time, it could not happen without Mary's free and full yes. Mary participates in the mystery of the Incarnation in a way that is hers alone. She is the Mother of God. And at the foot of the cross, Jesus will give her to the disciple, and to us.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## **Pray**

God, come to our assistance.

**– Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

**– As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



## **Reading: Matthew 11:16–19**

"To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, <sup>17</sup> 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.'

<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' <sup>19</sup> 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."

## **Meditation**

Jesus had just compared his contemporaries to whiny children who weren't playing their games right. The leaders of the Jewish people were supposedly the wise ones. But they did not even know when to sing or dance or mourn. Jesus was the one they were looking for, but they got it all wrong. If they had truly been wise, then Wisdom would have recognized her children. As it was, they were no better than spoiled brats who wanted things their own way. Advent is the announcement that the King is coming. Will Wisdom recognize us as her children?

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## **Pray**

God, come to our assistance.

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## **Reading: Matthew 17:9–13**

As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision <sup>2</sup> to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" <sup>11</sup> He said in reply, "Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; <sup>12</sup> but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands." <sup>13</sup>Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

## **Meditation**

His brother-in-law said the cabin was easy to find. He said, "It's just outside of town; you can't miss it." Unfortunately, the "obvious sign" was only obvious if you knew what you were looking for. That must have been what it was like for Jesus' contemporaries. They missed the sign. They weren't looking in the right place, or they didn't want to see the sign in the first place. They didn't see that John the Baptist was Elijah, and they went on doing whatever they pleased. Advent is the season that allows us to pay more attention to the signs. The Scriptures remind us each day to be intentional in looking for the signs of God's presence in our lives, lest we miss it too.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– **Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



## Reading: Matthew 11:2–11

When John heard in prison <sup>2</sup>of the works of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to him <sup>3</sup>with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" <sup>4</sup> Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." <sup>7</sup>As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>8</sup> Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup> Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> 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.' <sup>11</sup> 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."

## Meditation

Jesus responds to John's question by quoting from the prophet Isaiah. He didn't need the scroll to find what we know as chapter 35. He knew it by heart; he was living it—and that is what he told John's disciples to report back. In essence, he said, "Let John know that God is at work. He is keeping his promises and he is doing it in and through me." This was his first response. Second, he turned to the crowd and challenged them. When you went to hear John, were you expecting some sort of dandy, dressed in finery, pretending to be royalty? Did you expect someone quaking like the reeds along the Jordan River? If you were, you were very wrong. He is the one who prepares the way for me, the true King. There is no one greater than him! Third, so great is my kingdom that the lowest citizen in it is greater than the greatest you have seen so far, even John.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Third Week, Monday, December 12, 2022

Our Lady of Guadalupe: Zechariah 2:14–17 or Revelation 11:19a, 12:1–6a, 10ab; Luke 1:26–38

### Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– **Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



### Reading: Zechariah 2:14–17

Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! See, I am coming to dwell among you, says the LORD. <sup>15</sup> Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they shall be his people, and he will dwell among you, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. <sup>16</sup> The LORD will possess Judah as his portion of the holy land, and he will again choose Jerusalem. <sup>17</sup> Silence, all mankind, in the presence of the LORD! for he stirs forth from his holy dwelling.

### Meditation

The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, and the Jews went into Exile in 587 BC. Fifty years later the Jews returned from Exile, and about ten years after that began the process of rebuilding the Temple, in 520 BC. The prophet Zechariah expressed the longing and hope of the people for the Lord to return in glory to the Temple. He anticipated that return to happen in his lifetime. But it would take more than 500 years for the Lord to return to the Temple. Many missed it because he came as an infant. We celebrate the fulfillment of that promise and the hope for God's return in glory at the end of the present evil age. Advent is the season in which we renew our hope and pray for his return!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– **Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



## Reading: Matthew 1:1–17 (excerpts; boldface mine)

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. <sup>2</sup> Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. <sup>3</sup> Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, **whose mother was Tamar**. . . <sup>5</sup> Salmon [was] the father of Boaz, **whose mother was Rahab**. Boaz became the father of Obed, **whose mother was Ruth**. Obed became the father of Jesse, <sup>6</sup> Jesse the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, **whose mother had been the wife of Uriah**. <sup>7</sup> Solomon became the father of Rehoboam. . . <sup>11</sup> Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.

<sup>12</sup>After the Babylonian exile, . . . <sup>15</sup>Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob,

<sup>16</sup> Jacob the father of Joseph, **the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.**

## Meditation

I found my great-grandfather's name on the 1880 census list. His name was right there along with those of his brothers, sisters, and parents. The next census listed his wife, and the next one had my grandfather. Just names, dates, and the city they lived in. But now I had a piece of the puzzle that is me. Matthew does for Jesus what Ancestry.com did for me, only on a much bigger scale. Jesus is the goal toward which the whole of Israel's history has been inexorably heading. He is the one in whom the promises made to Abraham and David are fulfilled. He is the solution for the all-too-human story of sin and failing (prostitutes, adultery, murder, national exile). He is the one who ultimately makes sense out of my story and the puzzle that is me and my spouse.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

*Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.

one to whom he points.



## Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– **Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



## Reading: Matthew 1:18–25

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,<sup>2</sup> but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.<sup>20</sup> Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "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."<sup>21</sup> She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,<sup>1</sup> because he will save his people from their sins."<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:<sup>23</sup> <sup>1</sup>"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us."<sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.<sup>25</sup> He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

## Meditation

Being the foster father of God's own son did not spare Joseph from hardship, struggles, death threats from the king, or ridicule. Being the foster father of God's own son did not spare him from the back-breaking work of providing for his family, or spare him from difficult choices, or spare him from having to have deep trust in God every step of the way for his whole life. How often he must have had to cling to those words with all his might: "Joseph, don't be afraid, I am with you." During this Advent, hear the angel of the Lord call your name. Hear him say, "Don't be afraid, I am with you."

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## **Pray**

God, come to our assistance.

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## **Reading: Luke 1:5–25 (excerpts)**

<sup>8</sup> Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God. . . .<sup>11</sup> the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. <sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of (the) Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, <sup>16</sup> and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord."

## **Meditation**

Zechariah knew the story of Israel well enough to know that if his child had the spirit and power of Elijah, he would announce that at long last the Lord, the God of Israel, was acting. His son would herald the long-awaited Messiah. He also knew that his son would be in danger; that was the lot of prophets. We know that the King did come. We also know that he will come again at the end of the present evil age. And he will come in glory— surrounded by more than one angel. It is good news and a sobering challenge for us to be like John and "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Fourth Week, Tuesday, December 20, 2022

Isaiah 7:10–14; Luke 1:26–38

### Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– **Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



### Reading: Isaiah 7:10–14

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: <sup>11</sup>Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God; let it be deep as the nether world, or high as the sky! <sup>12</sup>But Ahaz answered, "I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!" <sup>13</sup>Then he said: Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary men, must you also weary my God? <sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

### Meditation

The usher taking tickets at the movie theater was a perfect stranger. But he looked at the young man with a cynical grin and said, "Can I have that cross?" It was a beautiful pewter cross that had been made in Thessalonica. It represented the radical change that had taken place in his life not more than a year before. The young man had gone from a hard-partying college football player to a seminarian contemplating life as a Catholic priest. He said a little prayer, "Lord, if you want me to give that man my cross, give me a sign." Then he had a terrifying thought: if he got the sign, he would have to give away the precious cross. King Ahaz had an even bigger dilemma. He was asked not for a simple piece of jewelry, but to trust God with his very life and his kingdom. He rejected a sign because he did not want to do what the prophet had asked. God's sign, for the king and for us, was a child—God with us! The young man in our story came out of the movie about St. Francis, who gave everything away to follow the Lord. That was his sign. He gave the cross to the dumbfounded usher and walked away with great joy in his heart.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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## Reading: Song of Solomon 2:8–14

Hark! my lover—here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. <sup>9</sup> My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Here he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices. <sup>10</sup> My lover speaks; he says to me, "Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come! <sup>11</sup> For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. <sup>12</sup> The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, and the song of the dove is heard in our land. <sup>13</sup> The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come! <sup>14</sup> O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, Let me see you, let me hear your voice, For your voice is sweet, and you are lovely."

## Meditation

Close your eyes and let the Song of Solomon take you to a beautiful valley in the springtime. Feel the warm sun on your face. Smell the fragrant blossoms, soak in the beauty of the flowers bursting in a rainbow of colors, hear the birds sing, the rustle of a gentle breeze in the trees, and water tripping down tiny waterfalls. Now see your beloved coming toward you. He or she has never been lovelier. Your heart bursts with joy. Come, then, my love, my fair one, come away with me. It is the Lord calling; it is your beloved calling. It is the promise in and of a small child full of possibilities, the promise of new life on the other side of intense suffering. As Advent draws closer to the miracle of the Incarnation, the Scriptures invite us to imagine that day, the day in which we delight in the love of the child grown to a man—the love of our bridegroom.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



## Reading: 1 Samuel 1:24–28

Once he was weaned, she brought him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and presented him at the temple of the LORD in Shiloh. <sup>25</sup> After the boy's father had sacrificed the young bull, Hannah, his mother, approached Eli <sup>26</sup> and said: "Pardon, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood near you here, praying to the LORD. <sup>27</sup> I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request. <sup>28</sup> Now I, in turn, give him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the LORD." She left him there.

## Meditation

How hard it must have been for Hannah to leave Samuel with the priest at Shiloh. God doesn't ask most of us to leave our children to the care of others from such a young age, but he does ask all of us to dedicate them to him and his purposes. God does not have grandchildren. He only has children. And our role as parents is, at the appropriate time, to let each of our children find their own way to their own deep personal relationship with the Lord. We desire to protect them, but we should not, nor really cannot, keep them from the cross. Hannah did not cling to her only son; God did not spare his only son; Mary did not prevent her only son from responding to the will of his Father. This Advent we meditate on the awesome and often terrifying responsibility of being parents whose ultimate job is to entrust our children to their Father in heaven.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

*Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– Lord, make haste to help us.

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– As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.



## Reading: Luke 1:57–66

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup> Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. <sup>59</sup> On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. <sup>60</sup> But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." <sup>61</sup> They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." <sup>62</sup> Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. <sup>63</sup> He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. <sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup> Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. <sup>66</sup> All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

## Meditation

Remember how afraid Zechariah was when the angel appeared to him? Well, imagine a whole village being frightened. Imagine the whole village, maybe a couple of hundred people, talking and whispering. Some were rejoicing with her; others were turning their heads away when Elizabeth walked by with her baby. What were they saying? An old barren woman has given birth to a baby boy; a mute husband speaks after writing "John" on a tablet— not a family name at all. Rumors about angels in the temple; her cousin is pregnant, but by whom? Messianic overtones—how will Herod respond? How will Caesar respond? What do we do with all of this? What a curious mix of fear and hope. The fear is oh, so real. But what is hope? Our hope is not wishful thinking, a vague longing for a better future, or more cynically, a deceptive expectation like a carrot on a stick that we will never quite reach. Christian hope is real, because it flows from the love of God, who cannot lie. While we don't know the details, we have certain knowledge of a future life with God. Genuine hope is life changing, and allows us to act with confidence in this life. As Pope Benedict XVI said, "The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life." We are so close now. Advent is coming to an end soon. We are filled with hope!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Saturday, December 24, 2022, Christmas Eve

2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Luke 1:67–79

### Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– **Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**



### Reading: Luke 1:67–79

Then Zechariah his father, filled with the holy Spirit, prophesied, saying: <sup>68</sup> "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and brought redemption to his people. <sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn for our salvation within the house of David his servant, <sup>70</sup> even as he promised through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old: <sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, <sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our fathers and to be mindful of his holy covenant <sup>73</sup> and of the oath he swore to Abraham our father, and to grant us that, <sup>74</sup> rescued from the hand of enemies, without fear we might worship him <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. <sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup> to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us <sup>79</sup> to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

### Meditation

The Holy Spirit moves Zechariah to announce that God is about to act in a strange and unexpected way. First two babies will be born. Then they will grow up into strong young men. Cousins. One will announce, the other will fulfill the promises made to Abraham nearly two thousand years earlier. It is a story that continues to echo through the ages to this very day. God acted, God is acting, God will act. He does not forget. He is never late. His arm is not too short to save. He is filled with compassion. The good news of Christmas is that God himself has come to rescue his people. Tomorrow we celebrate the fact that the love of God is so real that it is a person. It is Jesus, who is the Christ.

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## Christmas Day, December 25, 2022

Isaiah 52:7–1; Hebrews 1:1–6; John 1:1–18

### Pray

God, come to our assistance.

– **Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

– **As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**

### Reading: John 1:1–18 (excerpts)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> <sup>1</sup> All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be <sup>4</sup> through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; <sup>5</sup> the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" <sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, <sup>17</sup> because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

### Meditation

John's opening phrase, "in the beginning," deliberately echoes the majestic opening lines of the book of Genesis. Creation was always intended to be the place where human beings and God would dwell together. Tragically, we invited sin, darkness, and death into that good and beautiful creation. But darkness and death could never overcome the light that is God. Their victory is temporary. Rather than abandoning us to our folly, God became man and dwelt with us in the person of his Son, Jesus. In Jesus, we see the glory of God. In Jesus, we see and experience God's great love. In Jesus, God gives light and life to those who simply believe in him. What an incredible gift to unwrap this morning. Merry Christmas!

**Quiet meditation:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.