

MARRIAGE
IN CHRIST

Advent

FOR MARRIED COUPLES

2024



PRAY

BUILD UNITY

TALK

LEARN MORE

ACT

LOVE BETTER

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Meditations by William C. Wacker

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We are pleased to offer this series to married couples so that they may open their hearts to God and to each other while inviting the Holy Spirit into their daily lives.

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Introduction

The small, insignificant, rural village of Bethlehem was just seven miles south of Jerusalem. Although close geographically, it was as far from the power center of the country as one could imagine. However, nearly 700 years before the birth of the Christ Child, the prophet Micah had predicted “But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” Micah 5:1.

The prophet couldn’t imagine the full magnitude of what that meant. In a humble dwelling, in an insignificant village, God’s great love would take on a human face. In the person of his Son, God would empty himself and become a human being. He was born, just like the rest of us, as a helpless infant. And that was the joyful opening scene of the greatest period in human history.

Always in the background of Christmas are Good Friday and Easter. Bethlehem and Jerusalem are the concrete places on earth where the true nature of God’s love would be displayed for all to see. Pure love was made visible in the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of God’s Son, Jesus who is the Christ.

St. Paul put it this way in his letter to the Philippians,

“Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. ⁷ Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, ⁸ he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:6–11

Advent and the Christmas season present one of the most important chapters in the story of God’s good creation, his great love for us, and his rescue of humanity. It is an ongoing story, and we have a place in it. It is our story as well!

However, all the media, including social media, bombard us with an overwhelming amount of information. It is exceedingly difficult to sort out what is true from what is not. The result is often fear, division, and unrest. On top of that, the consumer society kicks into high gear at Christmastime. These confusing voices clamor for our attention and shape our view of reality. One of the reasons for praying with the Scriptures as a couple is to hear the truth clearly and to find and maintain our place in the true story of the world.

Special feasts and the seasons that prepare us to celebrate them are vital for our lives and our marriages. The Scriptures and our prayer together help to refocus us. We are living signs that point to God’s great love for his people, a love that became incarnate in the birth of his son, Jesus. When our marriages are marked by peace and unity, that peace and unity shows; we

become living proclamations of the birth of Jesus and the difference that it really makes in the world.

We offer these daily Scriptures and meditations as a way to help busy couples to stay connected during the hectic Advent season.

A note on the meditations on the Scripture readings

In this Advent series, we will list all the citations for the readings each day. And while we will print out in full only one of those daily readings, most of these meditations will have both the Old Testament reading and the Gospel in mind. We encourage you to have a Bible ready to look up the other reading for the day.

Note: During Advent several feast days take precedence in the lectionary. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, falls on the Second Sunday of Advent and will be observed on Monday, December 9, in the second week of Advent this year. The feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is on Thursday, December 12.

The Day of The Lord: A Key to Understanding Advent

One of the great promises that God makes in and through the prophets is that the day will come when he will act in a definitive way to set the world to rights. He will heal creation, he will bring justice, he will raise up the lowly, and bring down the haughty and proud. It will be “the day of the LORD”¹ or “the day of the messiah.” It is more than a single day; it is an age; it is the whole reign of God. The prophets often simply referred to it as “the age to come,” or “in those days,” or “on that day.”

Among the many great promises is that “on that day” a great king from the line of David will come. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will rule with justice and love.

The Jews at the time of Jesus had been waiting for their long exile in Babylon to come to an end. It was true that they had returned from Babylon 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.

The New Testament proclaims that the day of salvation has dawned in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. He has mounted his throne and ascended to his rightful place with his Father. That glorious, long-awaited day has begun and will be fulfilled when Jesus returns in glory, defeats all the enemies, and hands everything over to his Father so that “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15:24–28).

¹ LORD (in all capital letters) is the traditional way of indicating that the Hebrew word is God’s name, Yahweh. When we quote the Scripture text directly, we will follow this practice, using all capital letters. In the meditations, we will use “Lord.”

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. The Church looks with longing to his coming at the end of the present age, when “the day of the LORD” will be fully realized.

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: December 1, 2024

Jeremiah 33:14–16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2; Luke 21:25–28,34–36



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 21:25–28, 34–36

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand." ³⁴

"Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise ³⁵ like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. ³⁶ Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

Meditation

One of the more challenging tasks we have as readers of highly symbolic literature is to accurately decode the symbols. There are, of course, multiple layers of meanings. What did the original author intend to say to his original audience? Is great cosmic distress a metaphor? If so, for what? Do the signs point to events in the near or the distant future? Who is this Son of Man character?

Jesus answers the question by evoking Daniel 7:13–14: "As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. . . . ¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed." Jesus is that Son of Man; he is the Messiah, the human being who will come with great power and glory to reverse the course of human history. His coming would be an event of such significance that it could only be described with great cosmic symbols. And yet Jesus will redefine power and glory. Both will be most clearly revealed in his self-emptying love on the cross. And both will be verified in the resurrection. Everything has changed. New creation has burst into the midst of the old. Nothing will ever be the same.

Quiet reflection: *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 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.





First Week: Monday, December 2, 2024

Isaiah 2:1–5; Matthew 8:5–11



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 8:5–11

When Jesus entered Capernaum, ² a centurion approached him and appealed to him, ⁶ saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully." ⁷ He said to him, "I will come and cure him." ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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." ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven.

Meditation

In the first reading, Isaiah promised that the Day will come when nations will stream to the Lord's house. They will turn their weapons of war into tools to care for God's good creation. They will abandon war colleges and cease to fight with each other. That will be a great day! The stream began as a trickle. A Roman centurion, both a Gentile and an integral part of the most powerful fighting force in the world, came humbly to Jesus.

God's love, made manifest in the person of Jesus, is so majestic that when we perceive it, we are humbled and can only stand in awe. We are part of the great stream that has come from all over the world. We are unworthy and humbled by the fact that Jesus desires to share one life with us.

Quiet reflection: *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 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.





First Week: Tuesday, December 3, 2024

Isaiah 11:1–10; Luke 10:21–24

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 11:1–10

But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. ² 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, ³ and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. ⁶ 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. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. ⁸ The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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

On that day the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon the son of David. God's gracious love will be revealed to all of creation. When he rules all creation will be healed. The chaos that was reintroduced into God's good, ordered creation with the first sin will be undone. Traditional enemies will live together in peace. He will establish God's kingdom in the most wonderful and unexpected ways and that will be a signal to the nations to seek him. That day has arrived in Jesus, the son of David, who was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21). He rejoiced that all things had been handed over to him. In him, God has made himself known. We are truly blessed because we too have seen what prophets and kings longed to see. The Son has revealed himself to us. Now we participate in the great day of the Lord, which began with the birth of a small child in a small village in Judah.

Quiet reflection: *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 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.





First Week: Wednesday, December 4, 2024

Isaiah 25:6–10a; Matthew 15:29–37



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 25:6–10

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; ⁸ he will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces; The reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken. ⁹ On that day it will be said: "Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the LORD for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!" ¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

Meditation

God is pure love. That is all he is. One day, Love will host a great banquet. It will be the most wonderful feast one can imagine. On that day, death will be destroyed, and all tears will be wiped away. On that day, Love will save us. In Jesus, that day has arrived. He is Love incarnate. Love cures the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others (Matthew 15:30). His death on the cross manifests the true nature of love, and his resurrection manifests the unlimited power of love. Love will defeat our great enemy, death.

In a preview of what is to come, Jesus hosted a great feast. He turned seven loaves of bread and a few fish into a feast for the great multitude. And there are leftovers! What is most amazing is that he is not only the host of this fabulous meal, but he is also the broken bread and poured-out wine, the richest food imaginable. We know that love pours itself out for others, for us. Let us imitate our Lord.

Quiet reflection: *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 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.





First Week: Thursday, December 5, 2024

Isaiah 26:1–6; Matthew 7:21, 24–27



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 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. ²⁴ "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined."

Meditation

In today's first reading, we hear that "the LORD is an eternal Rock" and he will protect the nation that trusts in him, but the proud and haughty will be humbled. At the conclusion of his great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told a parable about two builders. One is wise, the other foolish. The wise builder builds on rock, the foolish on sand. The house built on rock will survive the inevitable storms of life; the other will collapse.

Two things should startle us. First, when Jesus claims to be "the Rock," he is claiming to be Israel's God. It is a remarkable assertion. Second, we are characters in the parable. We are the builders in the parable. God has granted us the freedom to choose the kind of builder we would like to be. We will build a life, a marriage, a family. The only real question for us is what will be the foundation upon which we will build that life. Will we build on the Rock who is Jesus? Or not? Our freedom is terrifying, and our choice has great consequences.

Jesus' words must do more than tickle our ears. We must allow them to transform us. They are a gift, filled with the power that gives us the ability to respond to the offer of love, to the person of Love incarnate. Advent is a time for us to hear God's words, to allow them to move us to act on them. Trust Jesus. Build your life and marriage on Jesus. He is the eternal rock.

Quiet reflection: *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 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: Isaiah 29:17–24

But a very little while, and Lebanon shall be changed into an orchard, and the orchard be regarded as a forest! ¹⁸ On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book; And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see. ¹⁹ The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD, and the poor rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. ²⁰ For the tyrant will be no more and the arrogant will have gone; All who are alert to do evil will be cut off, ²¹ those whose mere word condemns a man, Who ensnare his defender at the gate, and leave the just man with an empty claim. ²² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of the house of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham: Now Jacob shall have nothing to be ashamed of, nor shall his face grow pale. ²³ When his children see the work of my hands in his midst, they shall keep my name holy; they shall reverence the Holy One of Jacob, and be in awe of the God of Israel. ²⁴ Those who err in spirit shall acquire understanding, and those who find fault shall receive instruction.

Meditation

On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book; And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see. The poor and the lowly will find justice and peace. Our enemies will be defeated, and the tyrants cut off. That day has arrived. Two blind men asked Jesus to heal them (Matthew 9:27). Jesus asked a simple question: “Do you believe that I can do this?” They said yes. Then Jesus opened the eyes of the two blind men. Jesus asks us the same question: “Do you believe that I can do this?” What is your response?

Quiet reflection: *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 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.



First Week: Saturday, December 7, 2024
Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26; Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6–8



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 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. ²⁰ 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, ²¹ 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. ²³ 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; ²⁴ The oxen and the asses that till the ground will eat silage tossed to them with shovel and pitchfork. ²⁵ 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, ²⁶ 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

God is love and in a few short weeks we will celebrate the birth of the incarnate Son of God. We will see with our own eyes the promises fulfilled. He will be the bread that sustains us, and the living water that quenches our thirst. It is the promise that one day, we will weep no more. On that day, creation itself will be restored. On that day, the LORD will bind up the wounds of his people. That day has burst into the present evil age in an unexpected way. God began the rescue work with the birth of a small child. As an adult, he demonstrated the true nature of God as love when he emptied himself and poured out his life on the cross. His triumph over our most pernicious enemies, sin, Satan, and death was completed in his resurrection. Now, we are to be like Jesus, living our faith in public. Like Jesus, we are to be moved to compassion. We are to be agents of transformation. We are called to be the Lord's hands and feet, called to bind up the wounds of his people.

Quiet reflection: *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 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.





Second Sunday of Advent: December 8, 2024

Baruch 5:1–9; Philipians 1:4–6, 8–11; Luke 3:1–6



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 3:1–6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.³ He went throughout (the) whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

Meditation

In the wild territory along the Jordan River, John baptized people and called them to repentance. He was preparing the way for Israel's God to return as their rightful king and true Lord. At long last Israel's exile was coming to an end. Herod's sons were put on notice. Their reign was coming to an end. So too was that of the Roman emperor, who presumptuously claimed to be "son of god" and "lord of the world." John's mission was to announce that the true Son of God, the true Lord of the world, was coming. The course of human history was about to change.

Quiet reflection: *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 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.





Second Week: Monday, December 9, 2024

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

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, ³³ and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" ³⁵ And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; ³⁷ for nothing will be impossible for God." ³⁸ Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation

The Bible dramatically opens with the Spirit of God hovering over a watery, chaotic, trackless void. Then God speaks. He orders the chaos; he creates heaven and earth as place where he can dwell forever with those beings who bear his own image and likeness. But something went terribly, tragically wrong, and the image bearers were exiled from the Garden. A new home, a new sacred space for God and man to dwell together must be created. In a remarkable turn, the Creator God sends the same Spirit that once overshadowed a watery chaos to overshadow a young woman, a willing servant. In the person of her child, God reveals, in the most dramatic way imaginable, his desire to join heaven and earth. Not side by side, or one thing imposed on another, but two natures in one single person. That is the wonder of the Incarnation. That is the wonder of Christmas!

Quiet reflection: *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 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.*

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– **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 40:1–11

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. ² 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. ³ A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! ⁴ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. ⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all mankind shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. ⁶ A voice says, "Cry out!" I answer, "What shall I cry out?" "All mankind is grass, and all their glory like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower wilts, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it. (So then, the people is the grass.) ⁸ Though the grass withers and the flower wilts, the word of our God stands forever." ⁹ 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! ¹⁰ Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by his strong arm; Here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. ¹¹ 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

In the Sermon on the Mount, why did Jesus say, "O the happiness of those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4)? Because they would experience the comfort promised by the Lord in this passage from Isaiah. Isaiah saw the time when Israel's long exile would come to an end. God himself will be like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering his lambs in his arms, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care. In the person of Jesus, Israel's God, did exactly that. Jesus is "the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11). He is the shepherd who does the will of his Father and searches for every lost sheep (Matthew 18:14). He is the one who brings comfort to each of us. This Advent season, reflect on the stunning truth that God, in the person of Jesus, desires to put his arms around you as an individual and as a couple.

Quiet reflection: *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 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.



Second Week: Wednesday, December 11, 2024

Isaiah 40:25–31; Matthew 11:28–30



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 11:28–30

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Meditation

When my grandson was two-and-a-half-years-old, I found him lying on his back anchored to the ground by his father's backpack, which was still strapped to his tiny body. Like a turtle on its back, his legs and arms were flailing away, but he was going nowhere. He had indicated in no uncertain terms that he wanted to carry his dad's "big boy" backpack—not his own smaller version. So, I helped him put on the big boy backpack and watched him slowly tip backwards until he ended up in his current predicament. "Grandpa, need help" were his next words. Advent is the time when we acknowledge that we too are often lying on our backs, strapped to a big boy backpack, with our arms and legs flailing uselessly—and we finally say, "Jesus, need help."

Quiet reflection: *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 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.





Second Week: Thursday, December 12, 2024

Our Lady of Guadalupe: Zech 2:14–17; 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ The LORD will possess Judah as his portion of the holy land, and he will again choose Jerusalem. ¹⁷ 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 11:16–19

"To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, ¹⁷ 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.' ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' ¹⁹ 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

Some said John was possessed by a demon. He came preaching repentance and demonstrated the seriousness of his message by the way in which he lived. He believed what Isaiah had said, "If you would hearken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river, and your vindication like the waves of the sea; Your descendants would be like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, their name never cut off or blotted out from my presence." (Isaiah 48:18–19) But they would not listen. The bridegroom came and the wedding banquet began (Matthew 9:15). But they would not listen. John says the king is coming. Will we listen to him and the prophets who came before him?

Quiet reflection: *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 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.



Second Week: Saturday, December 14, 2024

Sirach 48:1–4, 9–11; Matthew 17:9a, 10–13



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 17:9a, 10–13

As they were coming down from the mountain, . . . the disciples asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" ¹¹ He said in reply, "Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; ¹² 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." ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

Meditation

The author of the first reading, Ben Sirach, knew that Elijah would come before the day of the Lord. "You, Elijah, are destined, it is written, in time to come to put an end to wrath before the day of the LORD, to turn back the hearts of fathers toward their sons, and to reestablish the tribes of Jacob. Blessed is he who shall have seen you before he dies" (Sirach 48:10–11). The prophet Malachi had also predicted that Elijah would return before the great and awesome day of the Lord (4:5). If Jesus is claiming that he is the Messiah, the logical question was, "What about Elijah?" To which Jesus replied, "I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him." Worse than that, they had killed John—and now the Son of Man will suffer the same fate at their hands. Blessed are we who recognize who John is, because through our recognition of him, we will see the one to whom he is pointing.

Quiet reflection: *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 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 Sunday of Advent: December 15, 2024

Zephaniah 3:14–18a; Philippians 4:4–7; Luke 3:10–18



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: Luke 3:10–18

And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" ¹¹ He said to them in reply, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" ¹³ He answered them, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And what is it that we should do?" He told them, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." ¹⁵ Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

Meditation

John baptized with water, part of the Jewish rituals of purification. Once purified, people could participate in the ritual life of the community. They could rightly worship in the Temple, for example. Yet something more than ritual purification was needed. Israel had to be radically transformed. John pointed to one who was coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He was pointing to a great judgment that was on the horizon, when Israel's God returned in person as her true king. God's arrival in the person of Jesus would be the turning point, not only of Israel's history, but of all humanity. Fire would come in the form of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD: the price for failing to receive their savior. The Holy Spirit came in the form of tongues of fire at Pentecost: the gift for receiving their savior. Advent offers us the same choice.

Quiet reflection: *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 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 21:23–27

When he had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" ²⁴ Jesus said to them in reply, "I shall ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I shall tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ Where was John's baptism from? Was it of heavenly or of human origin?" They discussed this among themselves and said, "If we say 'Of heavenly origin,' he will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' ²⁶ But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we fear the crowd, for they all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷ So they said to Jesus in reply, "We do not know." He himself said to them, "Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Meditation

Jesus' audience wouldn't answer the question about the origin of John's authority. However, our first reading offers an answer. John was like Balaam, one who hears what God says, and knows what the Most High knows. John's authority came from God himself. He was a prophet in the long line of prophets that God had sent to his people. And like the other prophets, the people would not listen, because it would mean they had to change. We are now compelled to answer the question, "Where was John's baptism from?" The birth of our Lord is coming soon. Are we ready? Will we listen?

Quiet reflection: *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 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)

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. ² Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. ³ Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, **whose mother was Tamar**. . . .⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, **whose mother was Rahab**. Boaz became the father of Obed, **whose mother was Ruth**. Obed became the father of Jesse, ⁶ Jesse the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, **whose mother had been the wife of Uriah**. ⁷ Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, . . .¹¹ Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. ¹²After the Babylonian exile, . . .¹⁵Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ Jacob the father of Joseph, **the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.**

Meditation

Genealogies are very important to us. They provide connections to our roots. They help explain who we are. We find a place, a way to fit into the great human story. Matthew does for Jesus what Ancestry.com does for so many of us, only much more. 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. Look at the list again, see the names and events that are bolded. It is the story of prostitution, adultery, murder, and national exile. See also the wonderful human response to God's grace, the "yes" of Joseph and Mary. Jesus is the one who ultimately makes sense out of our story, our genealogy. In him we find our place in the story.

Quiet reflection: *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 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 1:18–25**

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

Meditation

We know that God is just in all that he does. We know, too, that Jesus is God. So, it would follow that Jesus was also just. He would be a righteous King who would govern wisely and do what was right in the land, as Jeremiah had said (23:5). But in the same way that the child Jesus had to learn from his parents how to walk and talk like any human child, he must have learned something about justice from his parents as well. In this case, he learned a lesson from Joseph. Joseph was a righteous man, a just man. It was fortunate that Mary and the divine child in her womb were at the mercy of a man whose sense of justice came not from the law, but from the prophets. The law would have killed Mary and the unborn baby. But Joseph believed, with Isaiah, that a bruised reed should not be broken or a dimly burning wick quenched (Isaiah 42:3–4). Jesus learned that lesson well. Matthew described Jesus with the very same language. "A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope." (Matthew 12:17)

Quiet reflection: *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 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: Thursday, December 19, 2024

Judges 13:2–7, 24–25a; Luke 1:5–25



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 1:5–25 (excerpt)

In the days of Herod, King of Judea, ² there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; ⁸ Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, ⁹ according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. ¹⁰ Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, ¹¹ the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. ¹² Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. ¹³ 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." ¹⁸ Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹ And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. ²⁰ But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time."

Meditation

Zechariah's hair stood on end, adrenalin coursed through his body, his heart rate doubled, his breathing increased, the color drained from his face as blood rushed to his limbs. Fight or flight? He was **not** alone in the holiest place in the whole world. He had never been there before, but he knew that no one else was permitted to be here. Only the fortuitous roll of the dice had granted him access to this sacred place. Now he was terrified by the presence of what? An angel? Then he heard "Don't be afraid Zechariah, your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth will have a baby, a boy." But how could this be. He was an old man; Elizabeth was an old woman. He knew how things worked. Angel or not, this was hard to believe. The angel said, "Look, I'm Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God himself and he sent me to you with good news. Since you need a sign that this is true, you will be mute until the child is born!" And he was. Sometimes God's promises are hard to believe. Especially when it comes to trusting him with our children. But remember, the angel's words are good news for us as well.

Quiet reflection: *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 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: Friday, December 20, 2024

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: Luke 1:26–38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, ³³ and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" ³⁵ And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; ³⁷ for nothing will be impossible for God." ³⁸ Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation

What is the archangel Gabriel doing in her house? These are such strange words of greeting. What does he mean by "favored one"? Would you consider it a favor to be asked to bear a child out of wedlock? And what about poor Joseph, what will he think? How can this be? It will be as it was in the beginning. The same Holy Spirit who hovered over the chaotic water and transformed it into the good creation will come upon her. New creation will spring from the willing woman's womb. What was her response? "Oh, Gabriel, tell Him that the handmaid of the Lord says yes!" What will you say?

Quiet reflection: *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 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: Saturday, December 21, 2024
Song of Solomon 2:8–14 or Zephaniah 3:14–18a; Luke 1:39–45



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: Song of Solomon 2:8–14

Hark! My lover—here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. ⁹ My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Here he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices. ¹⁰ My lover speaks; he says to me, "Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come!" ¹¹ For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. ¹² 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. ¹³ The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come! ¹⁴ "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

The bride sings a song about her beloved. What is her beloved like? The beloved is larger than life. He can spring across mountains, leap across hills. His voice carries over great distances and yet speaks directly to her. A new season has dawned. It is springtime. Birds are singing, flowers blooming. She knows that he sees her beauty, and that she is altogether lovely in his eyes. What he sees is her unique beauty and splendor. He sees in her a reflection of his own glorious love for her. Then with the tenderest of words, she hears him beckon her join him. Take a moment and hear the Lord call to you. Hear him call your name. It is the promise of Advent that our beloved is coming for us.

Quiet reflection: *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 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 Sunday of Advent: December 22, 2024

Micah 5:1–4a; Hebrews 10:5–10; Luke 1:39–45

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 1:39–45

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, ⁴² cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.

Meditation

Two women, unexpectedly with child
The barren one in her sixth month
The unmarried one not yet starting to show.

What kind of reception will she find?
Shame or honor, support or rejection?
Families can be so unpredictable.

But where else to turn except to family?
She hastened to a little town, nestled in the
Hills of Judea, six miles from Jerusalem.

No shame awaited her.
"Blessed are you among women."
"Blessed is the child in your womb."

Rather a place of supreme honor
For the Mother of our Lord,
The Mother of God.

Quiet reflection: *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 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: Monday, December 23, 2024

Malachi 3:1–4, 23–24; Luke 1:57–66



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 1:57–66

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

You remember how afraid Zachariah was when the angel appeared to him? Well, imagine a whole village being frightened. Imagine the whole village, maybe a couple 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? What does all this mean? If God is really at work, how will Herod respond? How will Caesar respond? What do we do with all of this? What a curious mix of fear and hope. We are so close now. Advent is coming to an end soon. Hope and fear of the Lord is a good mix. Hope and fear of Herod or Caesar is not hope at all.

Quiet reflection: *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 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: Luke 1:67–79

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

Quiet reflection: *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 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, 2024

Isaiah 52:7–10; 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 (*excerpt*)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be ⁴ through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; ⁵ the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. . . . ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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.'" ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, ¹⁷ because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

Meditation

John's opening line, "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 reflection: *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 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.

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