



A  
thrill  
of  
hope

ADVENT  
*Meditations*  
2019

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

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## Advent Meditations

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

## Themes For Each Week

New this year, we've established a theme for each week of Advent.

Week 1	Hope
Week 2	Faith
Week 3	Joy
Week 4	Peace

## Advent Wreath

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

## Focus on Why We're Celebrating

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

## Cover Art

Thank you to Katie LaPenna for designing and drawing the cover art for this booklet.



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# EVENTS AND SERVICES

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## Advent

Sun, Dec. 1		First Sunday of Advent
Sat, Dec. 7	9:00-10:30am	St. Nicholas Breakfast and Christmas is for Children Gift Drop Off
Sun, Dec. 8	5:00pm	Advent Lessons and Carols
Tues, Dec. 10	6:30pm	St. Laurence Women's Cookie Exchange
Sat, Dec. 14	9:00am-1:00pm 6:30pm	Advent Retreat St. Laurence Men and Women's Christmas Party
Sun, Dec. 22	5:00pm	Children's Christmas Pageant followed by Live Nativity

## Christmas Services

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

# SUNDAY, DEC. 1

By Fr. Jordan

## First Sunday of Advent

### Isaiah 11:1-10

#### Week 1 Theme - Hope

A stump has one little shoot growing up out of it, a sign of new life. A sign that even though the tree had been cut down, and looked to be dead and gone, it wasn't after all. All was not lost.

Isaiah uses this image in today's passage when he writes that "a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse." Jesse was the father of David, the great king of Israel, and Isaiah sees a vision of a new king who will come to reign over God's people. Just when things were looking dead and hopeless for Israel, Isaiah sees restoration and new life in a new king who will have wisdom and a keen sense of justice. We know that king to be "the King of kings," our Lord Jesus Christ.

This stump image is also helpful when we think about "the four last things" which are the main 4 things that we think about in the Church during Advent: Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell. We are reminded that in Jesus, death is not the final word. Even when things look bleak; even when we are tempted to think there is no hope, Jesus comes to bring new life. The stump was thought to be dead but it wasn't. So it is with God's people. In Jesus, there is always hope, thus the theme of this first week of Advent is hope. Even if things are looking bleak, even if life is tough, we are forever a people of hope because of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

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

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# MONDAY, DEC. 2

By Fr. Jordan

## Romans 15:4-13

### Week 1 Theme - Hope

My guess is that most of the time we use the word hope, we're really using it in a slightly different way than it is used in Holy Scripture. Let me explain. When there is a long drought in the summertime, we say things like, "I sure hope it rains soon." Or when the Dallas Cowboys are losing, we say, "we're really hoping for a touchdown on this drive." We are wishing for a new reality in those situations, whether there are storm clouds in the sky or whether the Cowboys have even been making first downs. We are wishing things would be different than they currently are. Ordinarily, when we express hope we are expressing uncertainty about a future situation.

The bible however talks about hope as one of the three great virtues and uses the word in a slightly different way. Biblical hope is a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future. Biblical hope not only

desires something good for the future — it expects it to happen. And it not only expects it to happen — it is confident that it will happen. There is a certainty that the good we expect and desire will be done.

St. Paul writes in today's reading, "...By the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope"(Romans 15:4). We have hope because we know the facts as they are told to us in Holy Scripture. And we know the end of the story. We know that God wins. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the retired Anglican Archbishop of Capetown, South Africa, of apartheid fame, said it well, "The texture of our universe is one where there is no question at all but that good and laughter and justice will prevail because God always prevails." We have hope because we know how everything is going to end. We are certain that God wins.

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*Father, help us to always be people of hope. Help us to always remember your son Jesus' final victory where all things will be made new. Amen.*

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# TUESDAY, DEC. 3

By Fr. Wilson

## Isaiah 35:1-10

### Week 1 Theme - Hope

Faith, hope and love –the “theological virtues” given to us from St. Paul– shape the Christian’s life. Isaiah 35, in particular, is about hope. Hope as a virtue is not used in the weaker sense that we often use it: “I hope it doesn’t rain on my picnic tomorrow!” Hope rather is what St. Paul meant when he said, “rejoice always, again I say rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4) - regardless of the dips and twists of life that we see in front of us. Hope is the foundation of a good attitude about life, and it is all based on God’s promises. Jesus made many wonderful promises to us. If we believe these promises, and take them to heart, we have nothing but great things to look forward to: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

When the people of Israel read the words of Isaiah 35, their

hearts must indeed have been lifted up, they were greatly encouraged: “the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion ... with everlasting joy upon their heads.” They will be shouting in excitement with crowns of joy upon their heads. For them, it is hope of a return to their promised land; for us, it is the anticipated arrival in our promised land - heaven; and to be in Christ now is to be standing already at the foothills of the Kingdom of God - the Kingdom of Love.

I am writing this the day a very good friend died. He is a deeply loving and committed Christian man. And though I share in the sadness of grief with his wife and family, I rejoice with great rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that he is with our Lord. This is how we live in hope - by rejoicing now because of the wonderful things we know are coming!

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*O heavenly Father, who has filled us with the hope of your kingdom above, grant us faith and patience through our days on earth that we may celebrate with joy the wonderful things to come.*

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# WEDNESDAY, DEC. 4

By Fr. Morelock

## Titus 3:4-7

### Week 1 Theme - Hope

One of the great things about being Christian is that, once we are baptized and enter into a relationship with Jesus, we can be certain that the pressure is off when it comes to us saving ourselves. Jesus gives us grace daily to live a life devoted to God. This is what Saint Paul talks about in his letter to Titus when he says Jesus "saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5).

We can try as hard as we want to save ourselves. In fact quite a few people in the world believe that as long as they remain good persons, things will be alright for

them in the next life. It's a stressful way to live! Thank God we have Jesus, who through His death and resurrection saved all who repent of their sins and live a life devoted to Him. Through Jesus we have a hope in eternal life, not as a result of how nice we are, but because Jesus saved us and renewed us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's important to remember that none of us are perfect, and everyone sins. Don't be discouraged! Salvation is a process, a relationship where Jesus helps us to become more and more like Him. And in the end we have a certain hope that we will see Him at last.

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*Heavenly Father, through Jesus you have given us hope in eternal life. Ever renew and increase in us that love and devotion to you, so that at our deaths we may see you face to face. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# THURSDAY, DEC. 5

By Fr. Morelock

## Isaiah 40:1-10

### Week 1 Theme - Hope

The book of Isaiah is one of grief and hope. Isaiah did not live in a very happy time. Massive empires were growing around God's people in the promised land. God's people had forgotten God, despite His promise to protect them so long as they remained faithful and kept His commandments. Isaiah is essentially trying to wake Israel up to the danger around them and convince them to turn back to God and worship Him alone before it is too late.

But Isaiah also gives messages of hope like in today's reading. He says that after everything has come to pass, the Lord will come and rule over His people. This message continues in the New Testament, except this time it is

John the Baptist who is telling everyone to prepare for the Lord's coming, that is, Jesus. Jesus Christ came and established His kingdom on earth, the Church, and we remember that He will come again to rule over His people forever.

Advent is about preparation. But we aren't just preparing ourselves for the Lord's second coming. Truly we're preparing ourselves for an eternity spent in the loving arms of our Savior and Maker. In the midst of a period of enormous grief and uncertainty, Isaiah looked with hope to the time when the Lord would comfort and rule over His people. We can do the same.

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*Dear Jesus, just as we struggle through this earthly life, so give us a hope in our eternal life with you. In your name we pray. Amen.*

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# FRIDAY, DEC. 6

By Fr. Jordan

## Feast of St. Nicholas

### Isaiah 2:1-5

#### Week 1 Theme - Hope

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (Isaiah 2:4). I don't know about you, but in my garage, I don't have any plowshares or pruning hooks. I honestly had to go look up what they were some years ago to understand what Isaiah's vision was all about.

What the Prophet Isaiah is saying here is that there will be a day when violence will be no more. A day when all the people of the earth will worship God together and will live in peace. That's what the whole plowshare and pruning hook thing is about. Plowshares and pruning hooks are old-school farming equipment. What Isaiah is saying is that there will be a day when swords and spears are not needed and so he envisions that they will be turned into farming equipment. Weapons won't be needed because all will worship

together on "Mount Zion" and live together in peace.

It's quite an ambitious and hopeful vision. I doubt that most of us can really imagine a world where weapons are not needed; where missiles, guns, and all of that no longer exist. But that is precisely the type of world that Christian people are praying and working for. A world where people are joined together in love for each other and for God. A world where instead of people being at odds with each other, they are in communion with each other.

At the heart of our mission is the hope that all the people of the earth would acknowledge and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. We work and pray for the kingdom to be built, for God to reign in every human heart, for all the people of the earth to live in communion with each other and God.

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*Holy God, you call us to live in communion with each other and with you. Draw us closer to you and to one another. Help us to live in love and peace. In Jesus name. Amen.*

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# SATURDAY, DEC. 7

By Fr. Crary

**Isaiah 62:2-12**

**Week 1 Theme - Hope**

Hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised and its strength is in His faithfulness. Hope anticipates a future reality.

Our text from Isaiah expresses hope for the nation returning from the Babylonian exile. God has rescued His people and will save them. He will re-build the holy city Jerusalem and its new splendor will exceed its previous glory.

Advent reminds us Christians that we are a people of hope. For many, the present life is a vale of tears. In Jesus Christ, we have hope in a greater and more glorious existence. Why? Because of our baptism, we are grafted into (made a part of) His body, a body that experienced the

fullness of our humanity, a body that suffered, died on the cross, was buried and rose again. A risen body that was ascended into heaven, taking with it our humanity.

We have hope because in Jesus we see beyond the cross, pain, and disappointments of this life, trusting that in Him we will be delivered into a new, heavenly existence where God will “wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

We hope for what we do not see because we worship and belong to a merciful God who always fulfills His promises.

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*O Lord, in you we place our trust. In this Advent season, strengthen our hope, so that in the power of the Holy Spirit we may put all our trust in you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# SUNDAY, DEC. 8

By Fr. Morelock

## Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7:10-15

### Week 2 Theme - Faith

I'm going to be honest with you. Some parts of the Old Testament can get a little dull. Just open up First or Second Chronicles and you'll see what I mean. Even the famous prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah can get a little long-winded at times. But every now and then you come across a passage that makes your ears perk up with excitement:

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The word Immanuel literally means "God with us." Here, during the time of Isaiah, around 750 BC, God is hinting that He will walk among us in the person of Jesus Christ, and He

will accomplish this through the faith of the Virgin Mary. It is so exciting to see that God had this plan to save us all along, even in the Old Testament!

As a sign, God did the impossible. In fulfillment of the prophecy made in this passage of Isaiah, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. These are stories of faith. Through faith God was able to work through the prophet Isaiah, and through Mary's faith she was able to say yes to God and bring Jesus into the world so that He might save us. The impossible is made possible through our faith. How can God work through us according to our faith?

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

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# MONDAY, DEC. 9

By Fr. Jordan

## The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Luke 1:26-38

### Week 2 Theme - Faith

Today's feast invites us to reflect for just a few moments on the nature of God. With our theme this week being faith, we pause to reflect on the nature of the God that we put our faith in. God is, in the view of nearly everyone who believes in Him, perfect and righteous. He is sinless and all that He does and all that He touches is good and holy. God cannot co-exist in any way with sin because His nature is goodness and love. Sin represents a departure from those things. Therefore, when God became a little baby in the womb of His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, He couldn't co-exist with a sinful woman and so Christian people have always believed that God must have granted her something special so that He could dwell within her.

What did He grant her? The same thing He gives to each of us when we get baptized: He makes us clean and forgives our sins. Of course, without this reality, the all-perfect God couldn't dwell in us either. But we believe that, in fact, the Holy Spirit does dwell within each of us (2 Tim. 1:14). We have faith then not in a far-off, aloof God but in a God who is very near to each us, who loves us dearly and gives us all that we need. Therefore today's feast isn't really all that earth shattering after all. God became a man: that is earth shattering. God became a weak little baby: that is earth shattering. God made someone holy: that happens every day, and we are so grateful that each of us has been made holy and been forgiven.

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*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen*

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# TUESDAY, DEC. 10

By Fr. Morelock

## Micah 5:2-4

### Week 2 Theme - Faith

At the time of King David, Bethlehem was just a tiny village about a day's walk to Jerusalem, and it remains a small town even today. Given its seeming insignificance, it was always surprising that a king such as David should come from it. But this passage in Micah declares that someone even greater than David will come out of Bethlehem, "one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from the ancient of days." We know this person to be Jesus Christ who was born in Bethlehem, and whose origin stretches back beyond David all the way to before the beginning of time. Jesus himself says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before

Abraham was, I am." Jesus was, and is, and always has been God, our savior and redeemer.

Bethlehem is actually a Hebrew construction meaning "House of Bread." It is no coincidence that Jesus calls himself "the Bread of Life." He is the only bread that truly satisfies, that truly nourishes, that truly sustains us in our need. Christ is the bread that saves and gives life. It is out of Bethlehem, the House of Bread, that we receive in faith the Bread of Immortality, and we partake of this Bread every time we receive the Eucharist. Again, remember the words of Jesus: "Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

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*Almighty and everliving God, increase our faith particularly in the Eucharist as the means by which we receive your Body and Blood and are ever drawn into a deeper union with you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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# WEDNESDAY, DEC. 11

By Fr. Wilson

**Isaiah 52:7-10**

**Week 2 Theme - Faith**

Faith is the God-given ability to believe in things we cannot see. Jesus loved to see faith. When the centurion told Jesus He need not come to his house to heal his paralyzed servant, "just say the word" right here and it will be good enough, Jesus marveled, He was delighted! And it worked!

To appreciate this passage in Isaiah, let's take a look at it. "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news ..." In sixth-century BC there was no texting (!) nor any telegraph. Messages were conveyed by runners. The best of the runners - the ones who would be champs in high-school cross-country meets - would be the ones who got the job. Good news brought from the field of battle was rewarded, so the spirited running of these messengers as

they crossed the crest of the mountains was a beautiful thing to see. The "happier" they could see them running, the more they anticipated good news.

We are in Advent and we expect good news, soon. The good news we will hear is the message of the angel, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Remember that if God knows everything about you, He certainly knows you. The good news promised the shepherds in the fields that night was every bit intended as good news for you, too. Jesus is Everything. Show your faith in Him and let Him be Everything for you, too.

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*O Lord, increase my faith. Grant that I may evermore seek the things above, the wonderful things of your Kingdom; and lay aside the things of this world. For the things of this world are passing away, and the promises and blessings of your Kingdom will last into eternity. Teach me now to trust in you completely for indeed your love for me is the greatest news ever.*

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# THURSDAY, DEC. 12

By Fr. Young

**Hebrews 11:1-13**

**Week 2 Theme - Faith**

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Advent and Christmas are the seasons of things hoped for. For hundreds of years the Jewish people had hoped for a Messiah and at the first Christmas He came. In Advent we look not only back to Jesus' birth, but also forward to His Second Coming, a thing hoped for but not yet seen.

Today's passage from the Book of Hebrews goes on to say that, by faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. In other words, by seeing the incredible beauty and order in creation, we may have faith in God's promise of the resurrection of the dead and eternal life. A few months ago at St. Laurence, we had a class on Christianity and science, and considered how the discoveries of modern science almost compel a belief in a divine

Creator. Of course, faith that a Creator exists does not necessarily lead to acceptance that the Creator is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God does not force us to believe in Him. There must be some room left to the heart as well as the mind, faith as well as reason.

The overpowering argument for the truth of Jesus' promises is Jesus Himself. Those who come to truly know Jesus through the Scriptures, the sacraments, and the example of faithful Christians find Him the best argument for His promises. The one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, must know more about God's providence than anyone else. One of the privileges of being a Christian is to be able to have a "sure and certain hope" that our Creator is not some distant entity but an incomprehensibly loving Father who cares about every hair on our heads. Now that is assurance indeed.

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*O God, give us faith that as your promises under the Old Covenant were fulfilled in your Son according to your providential plan, so your New Covenant promise of His coming again will be fulfilled in the fullness of time. Grant us patience by the assurance of your love for us as we wait for that Last Great Day; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# FRIDAY, DEC. 13

By Fr. Jordan

## Galatians 4:3-7

### Week 2 Theme - Faith

We are getting closer! My guess is that by now many of us have our Christmas trees up, maybe even some presents are wrapped, the stockings are hung by the chimney with care, and we are nearly ready to celebrate Christmas.

And with all of these preparations underway, it's important to note that it's not too late to keep preparing our souls for the coming Feast. We can do that by hearing the message of St. John the Baptist: Repent! An examination of conscience and a sacramental confession are good ways to prepare. A few minutes contemplating the "fullness of time" is another good way to prepare.

When we read this beautiful expression in the fourth chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, we are reminded that God had a plan all along. From the very beginning, God had a plan, and when lots of things had gone

wrong and when people were caught in futility, God still had a plan. When sin and darkness seemed to reign over all of the earth, God had a plan. And that plan reaches its fulfillment when God approached a young woman, a girl really, who was saying her prayers and asked her to be the mother of His son. It's quite a thought that God's plan from the beginning hinged on the decision of a teenager. The moment of Mary's "yes" and Jesus' conception in her womb is the fullness of time, the moment when the plan reached its fulfillment.

In our lives, God has a plan too. And in our lives, there are "fullness of time moments."

There are things God has been preparing us for; moments that God gives to us when we can say "yes" or "no." May these days of Advent be days to prepare ourselves so that we are ready to say "yes" when the time comes.

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*Father, we love you and we ask that you open our eyes to see the plans you have for us. Give us the wisdom we need to know your plan and the strength and courage to say yes to it. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# SATURDAY, DEC. 14

By Fr. Morelock

## 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

### Week 2 Theme - Faith

This year something crazy happened to me. In early October, I was feeling particularly unwell and went to see a doctor. After a chest X-ray, I was informed that I had pneumonia. It was terrible! It took me a couple of weeks to recover. Thankfully I'm all better, but I know that at some point in my life I will catch something and end up sick again. That's just life, and it's fine. Our bodies are imperfect. They age, they injure, they catch the flu, and eventually they expire. Thank God we shall be transformed, and our heavenly bodies will be perfect.

Regarding today's passage from 2 Corinthians, Didymus the Blind (great name) once wrote: "Paul is talking here about two different worlds. One is the earthly, made with hands and visible. The other

is invisible, made without hands and heavenly. On earth, our soul is clothed in flesh and blood, which is the visible and organic body. But once this body is left behind, the soul will move to the heavenly realm, where it will receive its body back, but one that has been transformed into a heavenly body."

Because we know that God will bring us one day to be with Him in heaven, in this life we "walk by faith and not by sight." Walking by faith means keeping our eyes on Jesus each day. It means each day taking up our cross and being willing to make sacrifices for Him. It means every day doing the little things that we know God has called us to do. Walking by faith ultimately means living with the assurance that God is with us and is drawing us to Himself.

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*Heavenly Father, you formed man out of the dust and to dust we shall return. But you will give us a new, perfect body in heaven. Help us to remember that although our bodies decay, you are ever perfect and eternal, and we shall rest in you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

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# SUNDAY, DEC. 15

By Fr. Jordan

## Third Sunday of Advent

### Philippians 4:4-9

#### Week 3 Theme - Joy

Today is the day that we light the pink, or rose, colored candle on our Advent wreath. This candle is different in color because it's said to be a bit more joyful and festive than the others on the wreath and so the theme of this week is Joy.

Way back in the day, Christians kept Advent as a very strict fast, similar to Lent, and only on this one day were they allowed to lighten things up a bit. They suspended their fasting because of one of the scripture readings at Mass on the third Sunday of Advent. The reading was the same one that we've just read and the key verse they honed in on was Philippians 4:4 "rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say rejoice!" And so rejoice they did

because they knew that Christmas was soon near and they would again be feasting and making merry over the birth of our Savior.

We still keep this tradition on the third Sunday of Advent by lighting the rose colored candle and rejoicing because of all that God has done for us. The Gospel after all is "good news" and we rejoice to hear the good news of God in Christ. God has made us His sons and daughters, which brings great joy to our lives. It is our prayer that we would be joyful people always, not because life doesn't have difficulties but because we have a God who is always near, who loves us and delights in us.

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

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# MONDAY, DEC. 16

By Fr. Morelock

**Luke 1:46-55**

**Week 3 Theme - Joy**

Mary's world had been turned upside down. She had just been minding her own business when the Archangel Gabriel suddenly appeared in her kitchen saying she was going to conceive God's Son, and that her elder cousin Elizabeth was also miraculously pregnant with the prophet that would prepare the way for the Messiah to come. Mary then went to visit Elizabeth, and upon her arrival, the baby, John the Baptist, leapt in Elizabeth's womb in joy at the presence of the world's Savior. Elizabeth responded to her baby by addressing Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" Mary was so filled with joy at this point that she literally burst into song, praising God for

blessing her and the entire world through the saving work of Jesus.

Mary's song of joy is known as the Magnificat, and it is traditionally prayed or sung at Evening Prayer. It's an amazing reminder of God's faithfulness to His people. He has mercy on those who fear Him. He has filled the hungry with good things. He has remembered His promise to Abraham that all the nations of the world would be blessed through His offspring, Jesus Christ.

We can be joyful because God is a God that loves us and is always faithful to us even when we sin and fall short of the mark. What God did through Mary, He did for all of us in giving us Jesus. Take a moment to give thanks to God and be joyful.

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*Lord, may you be magnified in my life, and may my soul ever be giving thanks to you for sending your son to take on our flesh, to die so that we may live eternally with you. My spirit rejoices in you, my savior. Amen.*

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# TUESDAY, DEC. 17

By Fr. Crary

## Psalm 47

### Week 3 Theme - Joy

“Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!” (Psalm 47:1). This psalm is a hymn celebrating God’s enthronement as King of all nations. It is appropriately used on Ascension Day to celebrate Jesus’ re-entry into the heavenly realm, taking with Him our redeemed humanity. This psalm is a hymn of great joy.

Consider if you will, that joy and happiness are two different things. Happiness occurs from the good things around us. Joy on the other hand is what happens deep inside the human soul and spirit. Joy is the sense that finally, life and things are what they ought to be, the way God intended.

Paul expresses his personal joy in Philippians 3:7-9, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss. Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.”

That is joy par excellence! Paul has had to sacrifice much for his faith in Jesus Christ and his ministry of proclaiming the gospel. Despite all those sacrifices, Paul knows Jesus and is therefore full of joy. Despite all those sacrifices, Paul has fulfillment because he has done what God has asked him to do. Joy and fulfillment go hand in hand. When we answer God’s call we live in the joy of the Lord.

This Advent, contemplate what we as Christians should really desire. Is it more and more things? Things which pass away and are discarded? Or is it real joy, a closer walk with Jesus who saves us from sin and death and promises us eternal life with Him?

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*Lord Jesus, give me strength to resist the pressures and temptations of the material world. Increase my desire for deeper intimacy with you so that I can enjoy you now and in the heavenly Jerusalem. This I pray in your name. Amen*

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# WEDNESDAY, DEC. 18

By Fr. Wilson

**Zephaniah 3:14-20**

**Week 3 Theme - Joy**

“Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you.”

What encouraging words from the prophet Zephaniah! They were said in the seventh century BC, but are applicable for us today. St. Paul said for us to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). He is saying much the same thing. The meaning is simple. Be joyful! No matter what bad is happening in your life right now, you still have a deeply established cause to be filled with joy. Joy is at the very foundation of our new life in Christ!

It is a joy deep in our hearts because of what God has done for us: through the death of Jesus Christ, He has taken away the

power of sin in our lives; He has removed all condemnation from us. For His followers, Jesus has gone ahead for us to the Kingdom of Heaven and reserved a place for us. He has written our names in the “Book of Life.” He is with us through every minute of every day, loving us and giving us His divine guidance. In the end, no matter the grief we may feel now, we will rejoice. And knowing that, the prophet urges us to rejoice now.

Christians must live joyful lives. While it sometimes may be a duty to smile and live a rejoicing life, it truly is a privilege to accept all that God has given us. God has given us a lot and He wants to give us so much more. So, we live by faith, and faith tells us to rejoice now!

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*O Lord, grant us to see beyond our present circumstances and embrace the many wonderful promises we have in you. Help us to rejoice daily and praise your Name, because you are our eternal Lord. Amen.*

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# THURSDAY, DEC. 19

By Fr. Crary

**1 Peter 1:3-9**

**Week 3 Theme - Joy**

If a person follows the news, locally and worldwide, it is readily apparent that Christians are persecuted in many places. In our own country, public schools prohibit display of the 10 commandments and prayer before football games. Politicians are urged, even pressured, not to let Jewish or Christian faith influence their decisions and actions. If you, as a Christian, live in certain neighborhoods around the country, you may be viewed as some kind of an odd-ball. This is not new. Christians have almost always been persecuted.

The apostle Peter, writing in the 1st century (mid 60's), addresses this problem. His readers are mainly Gentile converts whom he urges not to be surprised at the "fiery ordeal" which has come

upon them. They are to rejoice in their trials. By sharing in the sufferings of Christ, they will demonstrate the sincerity of their faith.

In the midst of Advent 2019, we know that life is not as it should be. The best thing is, that as Christians, we have confidence that life in this world is not the end. Proof of this is the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, we have faith. The author of Hebrews tells us, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

And we know that God fulfills His promises. This is the source of joy we find in the present life. Things will get better! Thanks be to God!

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*O Lord, when my circumstances and situation are difficult and unpleasant, help me to remember that Jesus suffered rejection, trial before Pilate and a cruel death on the cross, and then was raised to new life on the 3rd day. Give me confidence to follow where He has led the way so that I may experience the joy of eternal life with Him. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

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# FRIDAY, DEC. 20

By Fr. Young

**Luke 15:1-7**

## **Week 3 Theme - Joy**

In the passage for today from St. Luke, the parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus says that when one sinner repents, heaven rejoices. We should not be surprised. At Jesus' birth, the angel choir sang with holy joy when the one who would bring sinners to repentance and save them was born. Heaven cares, and from its very beginning Christianity has been the proclamation of joy: Joy to the world. In fact, without the proclamation of this joy, Christianity is ultimately incomprehensible.

It is good to know that heaven rejoices over the repentant. Does repentance bring us that same joy? What, in God's plan for His creation, did He intend to be our source for holy joy? The simple answer is God. Holy Joy comes from knowing God and loving Him in His Son Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who saves us.

The theologians tell us that holy joy is rooted in being pleased with what is pleasing to God.

Indeed, holy joy has the power to make us so glad over God's goodness that we want nothing but that goodness. Moreover, it moves us to want to share God's goodness with everyone. True love for God, genuine faith in God, heartfelt worship of God, sincere Christian living and holy joy in God naturally belong together.

It is important to recognize that holy joy is more than an emotion. There is something in us that not only desires, but needs, more than fleeting happiness. And that something is holy joy. Emotions are ever changing, but by its perfect nature, holy joy must necessarily be unlimited. God has given every human heart a need and longing for the endless possession of the infinitely good. This desire is one that only the Lord Himself can satisfy for all eternity. He alone can bring to humanity true and perfect joy. The Good News is that He has - in Jesus Christ.

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*O God, you have given us a foretaste of eternal joy in Holy Communion, help us to share that joy with all those we meet, that we may take our part in bringing your lost sheep back to your fold and bring joy to heaven; through the King of Angels, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# SATURDAY, DEC. 21

By Fr. Jordan

**Matthew 1:18-26**

**Week 3 Theme - Joy**

Today we give thanks to God for St. Joseph and his decision to care for Mary and her unborn child, even at great personal risk. He risked being shunned by family and friends. He likely risked business relationships and his own personal reputation. But God gave him the strength to endure all of that to protect and care for Mary and Jesus.

As we wrap up this week of thinking about joy, we are reminded that joy and happiness are not always the same thing. Undoubtedly when Joseph was struggling with how to proceed, he wasn't a totally happy camper. He was no doubt criticized and went through some very mixed

emotions. But when God spoke to him, Joseph obeyed God and walked down the path to joy. Obeying God is always the path to joy. Think of the joy that Jesus eventually brought to Joseph's life and the joy that Jesus has brought to so many billions of lives. All of that was only possible because St. Joseph was willing to do what God asked him to do, even if he wasn't always happy about it.

The fact is that sometimes it's not easy to do what God calls us to do. Yet, we are reminded of the many blessings and great joy that are sure to come if we trust Him and give Him our very best.

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*Almighty God, you gave St. Joseph the courage to follow your plan for him. Give us that same courage that we might experience the joy you have in store for us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# SUNDAY, DEC. 22

By Fr. Jordan

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

### Isaiah 9:2-7

#### Week 4 Theme - Peace

The Lord is our Prince of Peace. I wonder, with only a few days left until Christmas, and undoubtedly lots left to accomplish, how peaceful many of us feel? Things are frantic as we prepare for Christmas. At the stores right now, the lines are long and people don't appear to be all that peaceful. We look at the world around us and it doesn't really seem to be a very peaceful place. And yet the Angels sing when Jesus is born "glory to God in the highest; and peace to his people on earth." Where is our peace?

Peace comes from God and will only be truly planted in this world when all have "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding" in their hearts.

And that can only happen when we have a personal relationship with God in Christ. The bumper sticker theology of "no Jesus: no peace; know Jesus: know peace" in this case is right on...a rare thing for bumper stickers! And this is where we have much work to do. It is our hope as Christians that one day there would be peace on earth. It is our hope that all of the people of the earth would live peaceably under the rule of Christ our king and that will only happen if they actually know Him. And so we work, pray, and give for the spread of His kingdom that one day all may know the Lord and there will indeed be "peace on earth, good will towards men."

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

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# MONDAY, DEC. 23

By Fr. Morelock

**Titus 2:11-14**

**Week 4 Theme - Peace**

We are only two days away from Christmas!

At Christmas we celebrate the first coming of Jesus. We celebrate His Incarnation which means He took on our flesh. He was born into the world so that He could redeem our sinful human nature and open up the way to eternal life in Him. But there will certainly be a second coming, and this is what Paul talks about in his letter to Titus when he says we are "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." This is really what Advent is about: waiting for Jesus' second coming.

Christianity is a religion that likes to look at the big picture. We look back to that significant moment when Jesus walked the earth, died for us and redeemed us. In scripture we look further back to the prophets and covenants that laid the groundwork for Jesus to come. We look at our present day and interpret what God is doing in the world. And finally we look at the future with a certain hope in Jesus' second coming when He will make all things new. We look at this big picture and are at peace because we know God has always had a plan, and He will always be in control.

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*Heavenly Father, from you comes peace that surpasses all understanding. Keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of you and your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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# TUESDAY, DEC. 24

By Fr. Morelock

## Christmas Eve

Luke 2:1-20

### Week 4 Theme - Peace

One of my favorite Christmas hymns is Silent Night because of its description of this holy night of nights when God became man: "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace."

Since that moment in the Garden of Eden when sin entered into the world, there have been terrible moments. Tragedy and loss occurred as God's people continually struggled in their relationship with Him. Promises were made and broken. Great empires rose and fell. False gods were worshipped. God's people were swept away from the land of promise and then brought back and ruled over by foreign nations. It was a world of chaos and confusion.

Then came this night. All the noise of this crazy world fades as we hone in on this night, in that stable, and that special baby in the arms of His virgin mother. It's a night of utter peace. That baby in the manger, the Prince of Peace, has finally arrived to spread His peace to all the world.

The hymn Silent Night is a beautiful reflection on the meaning of that first Christmas night. Despite the fact that Jesus came into the world in very humble surroundings, the hymn points out how beautiful and holy and wonderful that moment was. And that moment brings so much joy and peace to us always, especially on Christmas Eve. As we begin our celebration of Christmas we remember that what happened in that humble place, where God became man, was for us.

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

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# WEDNESDAY, DEC. 25

By Fr. Jordan

## Feast of the Incarnation—Christmas Day

John 1:1-18

### Week 4 Theme - Peace

Christmas is here! If Christmas isn't the very best day of the year, then it's got to be pretty close. I love all the traditions: watching Christmas movies, decorating, giving and receiving gifts, family around the tree, the baking, the music, the food, the eggnog! I love every part of it.

At some point in the midst of it all today, I'll take a pause to give thanks for the most important moment the world has ever known, when a young mom gave birth to a baby boy, swaddled Him tight, kissed Him, and welcomed God into the world.

The Incarnation that we celebrate today is an overwhelming mystery. God, present everywhere all at once, all powerful, and all knowing, being born as a tiny child, in a little cave, in a little out of the way town, is a mystery that surpasses our understanding. It's over-

whelming to stop and consider. But that's exactly what all of the celebrations today are about: the fact that God loves us so much, that He sought us out, that He wrote Himself into the story, that He became a person just like us.

One of my favorite Christmas traditions is putting the little baby in the manger on Christmas Eve. We always hide him away in the days that lead up to Christmas, so we have a manger scene with Mary, Joseph and Gabriel looking at nothing. The figures stand there waiting for the Christ-child. It's a great image of what the world would be like without the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. We would be standing there, incomplete, waiting for something to happen. Our great joy today is that all things reach completion at the moment of the Incarnation and the baby changes everything. Merry Christmas!

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*Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Him, and to be born this day of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.*

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