



*the  
weary  
world  
rejoices*

Advent Meditations  
2020

# 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**

The theme of our Booklet this year is "The Weary World Rejoices." It's a lyric from the much-loved Christmas song, "O Holy Night" and perfect for us to think, pray and meditate on during Advent and Christmas in the year 2020.

## **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 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.

# EVENTS AND SERVICES

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Sun, Dec. 20                      4:00-5:30pm      Live Nativity with scripture readings and Christmas carols

## **Christmas Services - Reservations will be needed**

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, NOV. 29, First Sunday of Advent

By Fr. Jordan

## Zephaniah 3:14-20,

The Weary World Rejoices.

This year has been tough for 100% of us and we're all weary at this point. Masks, COVID, civil unrest, our country wrestling with lasting racial tension, and a difficult presidential election haven't exactly made life any easier for anyone in the year 2020. People say to me all of the time, "I'll be happy when 2020 is over!" It's been a rough year and as I write this, I'm in quarantine myself, recovering after having contracted the virus.

We're weary but the Scripture we read today from the prophet Zephaniah calls us to rejoice. It refocuses our thoughts, asking us to rejoice in all that God has done and will do for us. This passage that we read today is the very end of the book of Zephaniah and it sticks out like a sore thumb from the rest of the book. The book is two and a half chapters of bad news, and then 7 verses of

rejoicing; 7 verses to end the book, remembering with joy what God has done for us. And I wonder if it can serve as something of a spiritual metaphor for us here at the end of 2020. I'm wondering if we can end this year not on a downtrodden note but with an intentional focus on rejoicing and gratitude.

In the weeks ahead, despite all of the challenges of this year, we'll sing "Joy to the World" and we'll be reminded of the great joy that broke into the world in Bethlehem. Weariness and yet rejoicing can stand side by side this Advent and Christmas season if we remember that this season is not primarily about ugly sweaters or delicious cookies, but about giving thanks and rejoicing that God has come among us. Instead of focusing on how difficult things have been, we turn our hearts and minds during this season to the great things God has done for us.

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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, NOV. 30, Feast of St. Andrew

By Fr. Jordan

## John 1:35-41

Today in the church year we remember St. Andrew, the first of the twelve Apostles to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. In our reading today, Andrew is with Jesus for the very first time and he is so excited by the meeting that he just has to go tell somebody about it. So he goes and tells his brother St. Peter "we have found the Messiah."

This is a remarkable thing that Andrew does. Having met the Lord, he immediately wants to go tell somebody about it. But it wasn't just anybody that he wanted to talk with, it was a family member, his brother Peter. While we are supposed to be ready and willing to share our faith with absolutely everyone, the primary place where we live out our faith

is at home, with our family members. Sometimes our homes are called the "domestic church," reminding us that the church is not a place we go to on Sunday, and the church is not somebody else. We are the church, the Body of Christ.

This year, we've spent more time at home and more time with family. That's likely to continue for a while and so we have an opportunity to think about: How can we share the faith in more meaningful ways with our families? How can we share God's love more deeply in our homes? This season of Advent is a perfect time for families to adopt new spiritual practices that will bring us all closer to the Lord.

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*Almighty God, give us grace in our families to honor you. Bless our homes and make them places of peace. In Jesus name. Amen.*

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# TUESDAY, DEC. 1

By Fr. Rogers

## Isaiah 64:1-9

This year has been the ultimate test of patience. Just one year? The Israelites wandered for forty years. Isaiah emerges to offer hope. The opening is a desperate plea for God to come down. The prayer expresses honest struggle. We can empathize. They undoubtedly felt that God had hidden His face. God used to shake mountains, send pillars of smoke and fire. It seems different now. We are used to our own comforts, wanting to live on our terms. We often wish to be with God, just in our own familiar ways.

But see the opening and imagine if we were to pray with abundant boldness, even to the point of shouting! The zealous desire for

the sky to be rent and trumpets sound is followed by a meek request to be formed. "We are the clay and you are the potter." Imagine if we prayed with such earnestness.

That is part of Advent's purpose. We can certainly identify as we slowly come to the close of an incredibly challenging year. We have a time to look forward to a truly life-altering gift. We are preparing for an eternity in the loving arms of our Savior and Maker. In Isaiah's own time of grief and doubt, he led God's people to look with hope to the future coming of our Lord. In just a few weeks, we get a taste of that comfort in our Lord's birth.

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*O loving Father, come down and mold us. Make us what you will and reveal your love to us. In Jesus name. Amen.*

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# WEDNESDAY, DEC. 2

By Fr. Rogers

## Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah is full of promises. The beautiful thing is that we have confidence in these because these words come from the Lord. The prophet describes it with an extra assurance, "surely."

The days are surely coming. This reminder of what was foretold allows us to look forward with even greater anticipation for the gift of our Lord in the Nativity. This is described as a brand new thing. This covenant is a new gift to us from the Lord. What a joy to make ourselves ready for this grand event.

This comes to us every year. The calendar on our walls or our

advent wreathes depict the methodical passing of time. The movement from one day to the next is as sure as the promise given to us by God.

We can and should look forward to what God has in store for us. He is coming to us. This is expounded upon several times. "I will put my laws in their minds, and inscribe them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Hebrews 8:10) God is claiming us. He is coming to us in the most powerful and transformative way. We shall know Him and be thankful.

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*Almighty Father, through your prophet Jeremiah you have long foretold of your new Covenant with us. Keep us mindful and thankful for the gift of the new life through the birth of your Son. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# THURSDAY, DEC. 3

By Fr. Wilson

## Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah gave this prophecy around 750 B.C. That was a long, long time ago, yet he prophesies about something happening “in the last days.” When will this be? I envision Isaiah standing upon a high mountain, with his hand shielding his eyes from the sun, and looking far, far into the distant future. He then speaks of what he sees. For all we know these things could happen, soon.

I want us to look at this for how it touches us now. “The mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains.” The “mountain of the house of the Lord” represents the spiritual part of our lives. There are many mountains in our lives - work, play, fun, family, finances, etc. We often err by letting any or all of these things dominate our lives, but we must make the mountain of the Lord chief above the others. This is much like saying we love the Lord our God with All our heart, soul and mind.

“All the nations will flow to it.” I cannot make all the nations do that (though I wish I could!). But I can cause my life, with all its many parts, to take an upward direction endeavoring to bring all that I am closer to Him. “I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God,” similarly writes St Paul.

“... that He may teach us His ways.” How does God teach us? Primarily through His word - the bible. Studying His word is learning His ways. If we are going “to go up to the mountain” this means we will be doing what He wants of us - choosing to act in the ways that please Him. And indeed, it is important to Jesus that not only we hear His word, but those who are close to Him also commit to living it.

Meditate on this passage, and think not of it as a description of global national interests, but of yourself and how you can seek a deeper walk with your Lord, who promises to bless all those that draw close to Him!

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*Heavenly Father, grant to us a deep desire to be close to you, grant us a thirst for your presence, and help us see with joy the open arms of your love for us. For with this vision before us we will hunger to come to you with all our hearts.*

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# FRIDAY, DEC. 4

By Fr. Jordan

## Isaiah 11:1-10

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.

Over and over again in Scripture we see the virtue of hope. The

Biblical authors never give up hope that God is going to provide and we shouldn't either. It would be easy for us here at the end of 2020 to give into discouragement, to doubt God's provision. But God is always in the business of restoration, of bringing life out death. There's always reason to hope.

That's what the little shoot coming out of the stump is all about. And let's not forget the empty tomb that is right at the center of our faith and of all reality. Hope isn't wishful thinking. It's remembering all that God has done for us and remembering that He'll never forsake us. As the poet Alexander Pope wrote, "hope springs eternal."

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*Heavenly Father, you love us, provide for us, and teach us to never lose hope. Help us to recall all that you've done for us so that we can live our lives in hope. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# SATURDAY, DEC. 5

By Fr. Crary

## Isaiah 35:1-10

Isaiah was a citizen of Judah who prophesied to a nation that had turned a deaf ear to the Lord. The people of Judah did not offer love to their neighbors and they offered empty sacrifices to the Lord in the temple of Jerusalem. In this setting Isaiah offered pronouncements of judgment in the hope that God's people would return to him. But even in the midst of divisions and unpleasantness, there is hope for restoration.

Our passage envisions a new creation: "The desert shall rejoice and bloom," "be strong, fear not," "Behold your God will come with a vengeance." There is hope!

Consider our current situation. We live in a country deeply divided politically, a serious pandemic of COVID-19 invades every aspect of our lives and we are wearied with constant hand washing, perpetual reminders to wear masks and practice social distancing. When will it end? Can we return to normal living? Is there hope in the midst of fear?

The restoration pictured in Isaiah 35:1-10 is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. In Him there is a new creation. The gospels depict the healing of lepers, the lame, the blind, and the deaf. The hungry are fed. Even more significant than restoration, the life of Jesus Christ gives us a vision of life beyond this world, a life of perfection at last.

In Advent, we stand between two moments in time: the Incarnation (Jesus' birth in Bethlehem) and Christ's second coming at the end of the world. In the midst of fear, we are encouraged to look forward with confidence. Pope John Paul II pointed out that the phrase "be not afraid" is found 365 times in the Bible, one for each day of the year. 1 John 4:18 says it best. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." In the midst of fear and uncertainty we can love Jesus who saves and restores us and we can pass that love to our neighbors.

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*Lord Jesus, I open my heart to you. Fill it with yourself so that I can see beyond my present circumstances. Grant me the gift of hope to see and realize a life renewed and restored because of your birth, death on a cross and ascension into heaven. Lord Jesus, this I ask in your name. Amen.*

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# SUNDAY, DEC. 6, Second Sunday of Advent

By Fr. Rogers

Luke 1:67-79

Zechariah is the perfect example of someone who forgets the awesome power of God but offers immense gratitude when the promise is fulfilled. When Gabriel tells him that Elizabeth will give birth, he is in disbelief. He is left unable to speak until his son is born. So the promise is realized and he immediately gives thanks. Perhaps he was a little zealous, to the point that his neighbors were worried. (Luke 1:65) But his response is truly inspiring.

How often have we struggled to see the hand of God before us? How many times have we relied on ourselves instead of trusting in our Father? How often have we forgotten the past struggles, the moments of fear and desperation? Zechariah's response depicts a remarkably

honest retelling of the salvation narrative. He walks through the entirety of God's relationship with Israel, continually providing and caring for His people. He visited and redeemed his people. The Father did this before but will soon fully manifest Himself in the flesh.

In a single moment, Zechariah is said to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then he responds with abundant praise. He speaks of redemption, God raising a savior, being saved and divine providence, mercy, protection from enemies, and serving God with holiness and righteousness. That is what we prepare for too. This prayer from Zechariah is a powerful example of the praise that overshadows any past trouble.

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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. 7

By Fr. Jordan

## Isaiah 25:6-10

Isaiah sees a vision of an amazing mountain. There are rich foods and good wines on this mountain. Death isn't anywhere near this mountain and all tears get wiped away. We understand this to be a vision of heaven where we will feast with the Lord forever.

I was recently watching one of my favorite movies, "Field of Dreams." It's a movie about a guy who plows into his corn field to make a mystical baseball diamond. Baseball players from the past come to play there and eventually his own deceased father arrives. When Shoeless Joe Jackson arrives to play ball on the field, he asks Ray Consella, the main character, "Is this heaven?" "No," says Ray, "it's Iowa." "Huh," says Joe, "I could've sworn it was heaven."

Let's think about heaven for a minute. Heaven is a place where we will dwell with God forever.

We will be united with our Creator and we shall see Him face to face, in what theologians call The Beatific Vision. It will be a place of great feasting and joy.

But heaven isn't just a future reality; something we're waiting for. It's something we begin to taste and experience here and now, in the context of this life. That's what the Sacraments and the Body of Christ are all about: a beginning of this ultimate reality that we shall one day experience. So, while none of us are building mystical baseball fields, we are in the business of bringing heaven to earth, of providing opportunities for people to see God's goodness and love in a way that captures them, and makes them long for union with their Creator. The mountain of God is a highly desirable place, what are the things we can do to make it more of a reality today?

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*Father, help us to keep focused on the hope of heaven and to cooperate with you, that we might bring about little glimpses of heaven on earth. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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## TUESDAY, DEC. 8, Feast of the Immaculate Conception

By Fr. Rogers

### Luke 1:26-38

The Annunciation confirms some important things for us. God comes to meet His people. He wants to use us for His plan of salvation and does so often.

Sarah, the mother of Isaac, Anne, mother of Samuel, and Samson's mother were all visited by an angel. Gabriel's visit to Mary is the same. God physically comes to them.

Gabriel says to rejoice for God has found favor with her. This phrasing occurs with Moses, Jeremiah, and Gideon too. Mary is struck and seeks to understand. She asks a question any of us would ask. "How can this be since I have no husband?" But Mary does not ask this because of doubt but rather wonder. This comes out of a deep and humble

relationship with God. She is a true hearer of the Word and immediately responds out of Faith.

We have but one thing to offer. Yes. Mary responded, "be it unto me according to thy word." That is all that we have that the Father wants. That alone is how we can respond: yes. Jesus later commends His mother for hearing the Word and keeping it. (Luke 11:28) She is described as being "full of grace" because her life reveals that. Her eagerness to say yes is an inspiration for us. Mary's life encourages us to notice how God is with us.

God wants to give us grace. We have to believe and say yes. How can you say yes to God today?

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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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# WEDNESDAY, DEC. 9

By Fr. Young

## Luke 1:39-45

Familiarity with this story can blind us to how absurd it must have seemed to those who first heard it. It concerns God at work to overturn the way the world works. Yet, who does God choose to assist him in this revolutionary cosmic endeavor? In an age that generally esteemed most women very little, God selects a teenage peasant girl and an elderly, childless woman to be his co-conspirators and help him transform the world.

It doesn't stop there. Mary's presence elicits an immediate, silent, response from Elizabeth's unborn child. John leaps, acknowledging both Mary and the significance of the child she carries. John's reaction to Mary's voice fulfills Gabriel's prophecy concerning John, "even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15). Before he is born, the Spirit prompts John to do what he is destined to do later - point to the coming One, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Elizabeth takes on the role of prophet by speaking the prophetic word in this instance: she is filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaims what Mary has not yet told her, and what is not yet visible to the eye: Mary is pregnant. In addition, Elizabeth knows who Mary's child will be, for she calls Mary "the mother of my Lord."

Elizabeth not only prophesies but blesses. Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon will all add their blessings to the chain, praising God for what He is doing at this moment in history and recognizing that those who are privileged to be instruments of God's saving work have been richly blessed - no matter how poor or insignificant the world thinks them to be.

Is there someone in your life, whom many ignore or esteem little, that you could take the time to recognize and thereby honor God, their Creator and Redeemer?

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*Father in heaven, by your grace the virgin mother of your incarnate Son was blessed in bearing him, but still more blessed in keeping our word: Grant us who honor the exaltation of her lowliness to follow the example of her devotion to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# THURSDAY, DEC. 10

By Fr. Jordan

## Isaiah 40:1-11

God wants the prophet Isaiah to comfort his people. Isaiah writes "a voice says cry out and I say, what shall I cry?" In other words, Lord, what do you want me to say that will bring them comfort? How can I comfort them?

So many people around us are hurting and looking for comfort. This time of year, especially this year, many people are probably looking to be comforted by a bottle, or maybe by Amazon, or maybe by a gift that they are really hoping to get. If they could only receive that one thing, they think, then their hearts will be comforted. And to that we say, yes! We know that one thing that will still an anxious heart! That one thing is the baby coming in the manger. That one thing is the

son of God, who loves us and guides us into all truth. That one thing is the comfort that comes from belonging to Christ and being adopted as a son or daughter of the living God.

God wants all of us to comfort His people. He knows many of His people are hurting or anxious. He knows the distress of His people. And so He asks us to do the same thing He asked Isaiah to do long ago. He wants us to look to Jesus, to point to Jesus and say to the world, and those who are hurting, "here is your God." As St. Augustine said "our heartless are restless O God, until they rest in thee." The Lord is our comfort, our shelter and our refuge and we are invited to proclaim this to all.

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*Heavenly Father, comfort us with the blessed hope of everlasting life that you have given us in Jesus Christ and give us courage to proclaim this message to all. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# FRIDAY, DEC. 11

By Fr. Jordan

## Matthew 1:1-17

We've just read the very first words of the New Testament. How did you do pronouncing all of those names? :) St. Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy which many find confusing and tedious. There are a bunch of names that don't mean all that much to us and it's something we usually skip over.

But St. Matthew is doing something really important here that we don't want to miss. He's putting Jesus in great company, with Abraham, the Father of Faith, and David, the great King of Israel. He's also reminding us that Jesus came from a family with a long and well-documented lineage. Jesus didn't fall from the sky, he had a family: the very first thing Matthew wants us to know. Before he tells us about Jesus'

miracles and teachings, or before we hear of His death and resurrection, he tells us about His ancestors. The fact that Matthew wants us to know this first is critical to the rest of the story he wants to tell. Matthew wants us to understand Jesus as the fulfillment of all that has come before. Jesus doesn't erase the Old Testament, He fulfills it. Jesus is the one who comes to fulfill all of God's promises that we read about in the Old Testament.

These verses have been called the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament: they close the Old and open the New. And they remind us that Jesus Christ is the full and perfect revelation of the eternal God: the one who brings all of the rest of it into focus.

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*Almighty God, your son Jesus came not to abolish the law and prophets but to fulfill them. Help us be more dedicated to studying your Holy Word so that we might come to understand and appreciate more and more all that you've done for us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# SATURDAY, DEC. 12

By Fr. Rogers

## Isaiah 65:17-25

Isaiah spends a great amount of time describing impending grief and hardship. His own time not being the best. But he knows of God's plan which includes new houses and vineyards abounding. That sounds delightful to me. This is a fruitful and joyous vision for us to revel in. That is part of the hope promised.

But what about the now? What can we see in Isaiah that speaks to our situation? How do we embrace it? See verse 24, "before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." This speaks to two challenges with prayer. The first is concerned with whether God hears our prayers. It is a real feeling to struggle with unanswered prayers. But our perspective

means everything. Remembering who God is and what He *has done* and *will do* provides encouragement in the hardest of times. The second comes from not knowing the words to express our prayers. But the point of this verse is to remind us that God is listening. God puts no barrier between us. He is more than capable of understanding what is on our heart. The Holy Spirit is our guide. (Romans 8:26)

God meets us where we are, while proclaiming the coming future, the new heaven and earth. Even as the wolf and lamb eat together, so too does the lion eat the straw like the ox. The final verse is a promise that God's people will enjoy a peaceful life *with* him.

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*Heavenly Father, who has given us hope in you. Give us the faith, hope, and patience to give our life to you. Help us to see you this day. In Jesus name. Amen.*

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# SUNDAY, DEC. 13, Third Sunday of Advent

By Fr. Jordan

## John 1:19-28

Three times when questioned about his identity, St. John the Baptist says, "I am not." He's not the Messiah. He's not Elijah. He's not a prophet. There's a contrast happening that we don't want to miss.

Remember that St. John's Gospel is centered around Jesus' 7 "I am" statements. We hear Jesus say, "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the Vine and you are the branches," "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" and so on. These seven statements are the anchors of the Gospel. Essentially we hear Jesus saying "I am" over and over again throughout the gospel but here at the beginning we hear St. John the Baptist saying, "I am not." This contrast is

important. St. John the Baptist was a hugely important and popular religious figure in his day and he clearly points to the Lord Jesus as being greater than he was. Many were looking for help from John the Baptist but he's pointing them to another.

In our lives, there are many great figures that we look up to. We admire them and they help us; but, like St. John the Baptist, they're not the ones who will ultimately bring about our healing and our wholeness. Only Jesus can do that for us. If we're in distress right now or we're looking for something more, we know where we need to look.

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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. 14

By Fr. Young

## Micah 5:2-4

Today's passage became immensely important in the story of our salvation because it informed the response the chief priests and scribes in Jerusalem gave to Herod's question about where the Messiah was to be born.

Herod now knew that Bethlehem was where the king he supposed would be a rival to his own dynasty was prophesied to be born. It was the evil designs that knowledge prompted that caused an angel to warn the Holy Family to escape to Egypt and later to return from it. Likewise, Egypt was the birthplace of Moses. Moses was a prince who became the shepherd of God's people, fed them with bread from heaven (manna), and brought them out of bondage to freedom through the water of the Red Sea.

Jesus, born in Bethlehem, fulfilled the ministry of Moses and shepherded a new people of God (the Church) through the water of Baptism to true freedom,

freedom from slavery to sin and eternal death. Jesus gave the Lord's people the true bread from heaven, his resurrection Body in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Verse 4 says "he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD." Bethlehem was the birthplace of the Good Shepherd who was also the true Lamb of God. The special lambs destined to be sacrificed at the temple in Jerusalem were raised on the hillsides around Bethlehem. Jesus, born in Bethlehem, will grow up to be acknowledged as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). *Lamb of God* is an especially appropriate title by which to refer to a Savior born in Bethlehem.

Our understanding of Micah's prophecy should renew in us our appreciation for the wonderful plan of God for our salvation leading to the birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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*O God, Shepherd of the faithful, guide us throughout this holy season, that we may faithfully receive the Bread of Heaven in the Blessed Sacrament and make ready to receive Him with joy when He comes in the glory of His holy angels; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# TUESDAY, DEC. 15

By Fr. Crary

## Luke 1:5-25

Zechariah is a priest and has the privilege of offering the evening sacrifice. His wife, Elizabeth, is barren and they are too old to conceive. Yet God uses Elizabeth's barrenness to bring forth the miraculous birth of a holy person, just as He did for Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel.

The Angel Gabriel visits Zechariah in the temple, announces the coming birth and tells Zechariah to name the child John, which means the Lord has been gracious.

Perhaps some of us are thinking "I could use a miracle in my life" or "I would like relief from my situation, job, stress in marriage and family, financial obligations, etc." "How can the Lord help me?"

By definition, temple is the place where God dwells. In the Old Testament, there was only one temple and it was in Jerusalem. God's presence was in the Holy of holies, in the ark behind the curtain. In offering the evening

sacrifice, Zechariah placed himself in the presence of God.

For baptized Christians, God dwells in us. Rejoice! God's presence is immediate, thus I must not reflect on those things, persons or activities that numb or even deaden my awareness of the Lord's presence. Could it be my quest for success, financial riches, control of other people, the wrong friends? Is Christmas more about gifts than about the birth of Jesus? Are my family relationships so poor that I dread Christmas? The list goes on.

In Advent, we who have God dwelling within us are urged to take stock of our lives and repent – that is change direction, refocus, reset. Paul writes that we are to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. A sacramental confession is an excellent way to be transformed. We can experience the nearness of the Lord as did Zechariah in the temple. We can be made new.

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*Lord, I praise you for this season of Advent looking forward to the birth of your Son. He is knocking at the door of my heart. Give me courage to open wide and let Him into every corner of my life. This I ask in His name through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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# WEDNESDAY, DEC. 16

By Fr. Jordan

## Isaiah 7:10-15

About 700 years before it happened, Isaiah saw it. "A virgin will conceive and bear a son and his name will be Emmanuel." This is the first mention in the Bible of what is truly a wild idea.

Everybody knows that virgins do not have sons, much less name them "God with us." That would be a really wild name to give your baby boy under normal circumstances! Of course what makes this prophecy so mind-blowing is that it came true through the "yes" of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her baby boy, Jesus Christ.

The verses in this reading from Isaiah are so incredible, such a game-changer, that they have to be considered some of the most important words ever written.

They form the core of the doctrine of the incarnation wherein Christians hold that Jesus was truly "conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." (The Apostles' Creed) God became one of us, walked the earth, lived as a person just like you and me. And before the end of His life, He promised His friends that He would be with them always. God-with-us back when Jesus walked the earth, God-with-us even now.

The song "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" is probably the best known Advent song. As we sing that song, we are praying for God to come again into our lives, to be with us and to help us be constantly aware of His presence.

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*Come quickly into our presence Lord Jesus. Make us aware the you are near and that you are here to bring help and comfort. In your holy name we pray. Amen.*

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# THURSDAY, DEC. 17

By Fr. Rogers

## Genesis 49:2-10

Jacob gathers his sons for a little recap. Like with any large family, some siblings struggle a bit more than others. Jacob's sons are no different. Reuben is swayed by lust and power. Simon and Levi are tempted by violence. These sins of inner corruption and violence have been two chief evils since the Fall. The flood came to cleanse the world of mass violence.

As Jacob describes his sons, we can see something more. This whole chapter outlines the history of humanity with an emphasis upon Israel. We see a progression in Israel's history toward praise and hope. After the flood, Abraham enters into a covenant with God to serve only God. We know what happens. Failure after failure by God's

people leads to eventual relief through King David.

This cycle follows a similar trajectory ourselves. Our own history as children of God is far from perfect. We can see this in the first three sons. Our human nature is a great hindrance and distraction from the true calling of praise that is realized in Judah. Judah represents the blessing found in recognizing Christ's authority in our lives. The other sons show how the world entraps us. Our needs lead us to prayer. Verse 18 says, "I have waited for your salvation." Only God brings relief. Through the wonder that is the Nativity, we get to experience the joy of His love in a powerful way.

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*Father in Heaven, thank you for the witness of your servants Jacob and his sons. Help us to be faithful children to you. Help us to rely on your love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# FRIDAY, DEC. 18

By Fr. Jordan

## Jeremiah 23:5-8

One week to go until Christmas Day! So many things left to do. It doesn't seem to matter how early our preparations begin, every year there are always so many last minute little things to get ready for the big day. With so many things to do, carving out a little time to focus each day on our Advent devotions is all that much more important. We need to keep our focus. We need to keep our center.

In today's reading, the prophet Jeremiah saw a day coming when a new type of king would reign. He would rule with wisdom and would do what is right and just. He who would act with the power of God, a leader who would be named "the Lord is our righteousness." It's no secret who this leader is: the Lord Jesus

Christ, the Word made flesh. Rulers and leaders come and go but here's the thing about Jesus: He's never going away "and of His kingdom there shall be no end." Everything else we know will at some point pass away but the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, which began on this earth in Galilean fishing villages two thousand years ago is going strong to this very day and will go strong forever.

It's been said that the one constant thing in life is change. But that's not entirely true because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. He's a totally different kind of ruler who came just as Jeremiah anticipated and continues to reign as our king now and into eternity.

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*Lord Jesus Christ, you are the savior of the world and king of kings. We pray that every human being would come to know, worship, and obey you as Lord. In your holy name we pray. Amen.*

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# SATURDAY, DEC. 19

By Fr. Rogers

## Judges 13:2-7, 24-25

The story of the birth of Samson has many parallels to the Nativity that we are currently preparing for. The most prominent is that of the angel coming to a woman. The angel acknowledges the incredible circumstances of Samson's conception. There are numerous instances of a smaller event foreshadowing a much larger event. We find Manoah and his wife dutifully responding to God's message. In turn, they are blessed. This sets us up to see a pattern in scripture and even in our own life.

It's exciting to look at how God raises up Samson to deliver Israel from the Philistines. This story is emblematic of John the Baptist's life too. He becomes a great

forerunner to Christ. Elizabeth is barren just as Samson's mother is, but yet, an angel comes. God came and performed miracles for these women. He transformed their lives in an instant.

How can we look at our lives and recognize what could be lacking? Where could the Lord come and surprise? How can we make ourselves more ready and willing to accept the Lord? In this moment, we know that God is preparing something special. We wait with hope. The trees may have lost (most of) their leaves and the days are a bit more gloomy and gray. But we are making ourselves ready to receive Christ.

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*O God, who gives life to all of us, we give thanks for the miracle that was the birth of Samson, you answered and fulfilled your people's prayers. Open our hearts to the new life promised. May we respond with graciousness and patience in all things, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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# SUNDAY, DEC. 20, Fourth Sunday of Advent

By Fr. Jordan

## 2 Samuel 7:4-16

The Lord reveals that David's throne will never have an end. What are the things in life that never end? Sometimes it feels like this COVID time will never end. Sometimes it feels like the presidential election will never end. Sometimes it feels like the "holiday season" is so long, with Christmas stuff appearing in the stores way back in August, that it will never end. But seriously, what are the things in life that never end? Everything ends. I can only think of one thing in life that will never end and it's what was promised in today's Scripture, the reign of the King of Kings.

As we get closer to Christmas, this Scripture invites us to remember that we're not just celebrating a little baby's

birthday, as great as that may be. Christmas is about celebrating that God broke into the world in Bethlehem in a permanent and lasting way. The Incarnation means that God came among us in a way that He will never not be among us. He is always with us.

While other people and other things want His throne, and thus our allegiance and loyalty, they can't have it. Money, and more stuff, and all of the distractions that we get so focused on in this life: they cannot compete with the Lord's eternal throne because they all ultimately fail and fade away. There's only one thing in life that will never end: the Kingdom of God, brought about so clearly at the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

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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. 21

By Fr. Rogers

## Song of Solomon 2:8-14

The Song of Solomon contains inspired love poetry that you would not expect to find in the Bible. The book is best understood as a poetic imagination of the love of God and Israel or more pertinently, between Christ and His Church. In today's reading, "my beloved" is referring to Christ who is almost here. He is like a gazelle leaping over the mountains, perhaps at the rise of a new day.

But look closely at the beautiful world being depicted. The scene is picturesque. See in verse 11 and on, "The winter is past..." which indicates spring is coming. That means new life! The flowers appear for "the time of singing has come." Singing is for revelry

and rejoicing! Figs are dropping, vines are blossoming, and fragrance abounds. This is a garden that is alive and flourishing.

I am reminded of the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe when the winter is finally over. Advent and CS Lewis' novel share some similarities. He even has a character named Father Christmas who brings presents to the children. When winter ends and Christmas finally gets to happen, the whole world is renewed with joy and enthusiasm. How thankful we ought to be that our winters in Texas are not so bad and they never stop Christmas from arriving.

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*Loving Father, thank you for the gift of your Son and the promise of new life. Help us focus on the gift of your Son. In Jesus name. Amen.*

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# TUESDAY, DEC. 22

By Fr. Wilson

## Luke 1:46-56

Books have been written about this, the Magnificat. It would far exceed the scope of a short Advent meditation to inspect the many amazing details included in this inspired utterance of Mary the mother of our Lord. But what is really happening here? Mary, in words that seem to have just flowed from her heart, is proclaiming what God has done for her.

She is exclaiming the wonderful testimony of what God has done in her life to lift her up, bless her and even glorify her, "He has done great things for me." You are a Christian. This means Jesus is in your life. So, the question is can you proclaim what God has done for you? If you were witnessing to a non-believer, and he asked, "Why, what will accepting Jesus as Lord do to

make my life better?" can you give him an answer from your own experience?

Read the Magnificat one more time slowly and then sit down with a piece of paper and begin writing out what knowing Jesus Christ and having Him in your life does for you. Do not use flowery language like Mary, use the down-to-earth language that clearly and simply describes what He does for you. For example, "He gives me a purpose in life," "I don't have fear like I used to," "I know I will be in heaven when I die," "It feels great to be loved," "I no longer get so wrapped up in just myself." This and many other things could be said, but they need to be yours. Write these things down, and they will become your Magnificat! And then thank Him!

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*Lord, indeed, You "have done great things for me!" May I learn to be conscious every single day of what wonderful things you have brought to my life. And, I pray you open my eyes to see those things you do for me every day, that I may glorify you, praise you and give you thanks. Lastly, I pray for the others about me, that they will not forget you, but will be conscious of their own daily blessings, as well.*

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# WEDNESDAY, DEC. 23

By Fr. Jordan

## Matthew 1:18-24

When I was a kid, I always called today "Christmas Eve, Eve." There was such a sense of excitement in the air: we were so close to the long awaited day! And our Scripture lesson today takes us right up to the cusp of the main event.

St. Joseph has a decision he has to make. Is he going to be a good guy and take care of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her unborn child or is he going to look out for only himself?

Think about how torn he must have been. He risked being shunned by family and friends. He likely risked business relationships and his own personal reputation. But we read that he wasn't alone in having to make a tough decision: God gave

him the strength he needed to do the right thing, to protect and care for Mary and Jesus. When God spoke to him, Joseph obeyed 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 it wasn't easy.

Frequently God asks us to do things that aren't easy, just like He asked Joseph. Many blessings and great joy are sure to come if we trust God 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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# THURSDAY, DEC. 24, Christmas Eve

By Fr. Jordan

**Luke 2:1-20,**

Christmas music is playing. Lights are twinkling. Presents are wrapped and piled high. Making Merry has begun.

With our Christmas celebrations getting underway, we hear a story that inspires our imaginations every year at this time. It's a simple story about a teenage mom who travels into a dumpy little one-stoplight type town. There's no place for her family at the inn. There's no hospital room. Joseph isn't passing out cigars to his buddies. There's no baby shower. No registry at Babies R Us. Not even a crib...just a little place where they used to put the hay to feed the animals. There's no onesies or pacies. The story is about a very humble family that is brought to a very humble place. And there on the margins of society, the King of Glory comes into the world.

As He always does, God surprises us. His entire life Jesus surprises us by His humility, how He doesn't care about the things that everyone else in this world cares about. He doesn't care about gain and self-promotion. He doesn't care about material possessions: He has none. He doesn't care about saving His own skin. What He clearly does care about is us. He cares about love, faith and hope. He cares about service, about meekness, about putting others before yourself.

The baby whose birth we celebrate tonight changed everything, thanks be to God. And He continues to challenge us and inspire us to live lives of love and service. On this holy night in which our Savior Christ was born, we rejoice that He came for us. 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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# FRIDAY, DEC. 25, Christmas Day

By Fr. Rogers

## John 1:1-14

Well, here we have it. The fervor and excitement of Christmas day is so welcome after such a crazy year. Just like the two thousand that preceded it, we remember a miracle. John gives us words to imagine this singular moment.

Think of Christmas Eve when the world sits with quiet anticipation for the morning. We pause to bask in the true light of His life. Having spent a few years in bleak winters of Wisconsin, I am grateful for the abundant sunlight in Texas. But light spoken of here, is for the whole world. The true light that enlightens every man, woman, and child. The light provides healing, comfort, warmth, and love.

The text is a victory hymn that moves from Creation to the

Incarnation. I am struck thinking how we read this at the end of the year. We know what happens. It is quite familiar. But this is the beginning of a new year. A new year of hope and joy. A new year with the promise of greater joy and hope with Jesus Christ. I love the joy felt on Christmas morning with family, gifts, games, and food. In a single moment, I can see and feel so much to be thankful for. The real joy we commemorate at Christmas is the glory of the Word becoming flesh in the manger. The Gospel serves as an exclamation to our faith and fulfillment of God's promise. May we all rejoice with the Word of God this Christmas day.

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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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*Merry Christmas*





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