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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall name him Jesus.” - Lk 1:31

SUNDAY'S READINGS

FIRST READING:

"When your times comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will establish his kingdom firm." (2 Sm 12)

PSALM:

For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord. (Ps 89)

SECOND READING:

According to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God. (Rom 16:25b-26a)

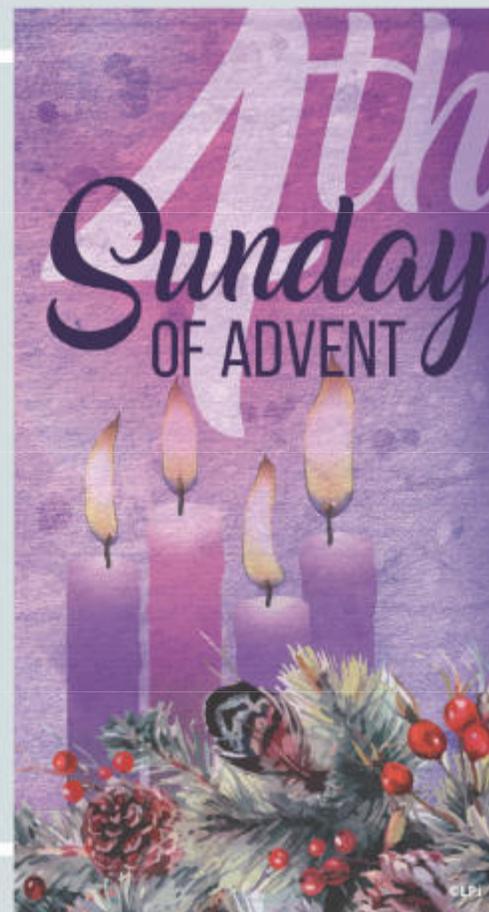
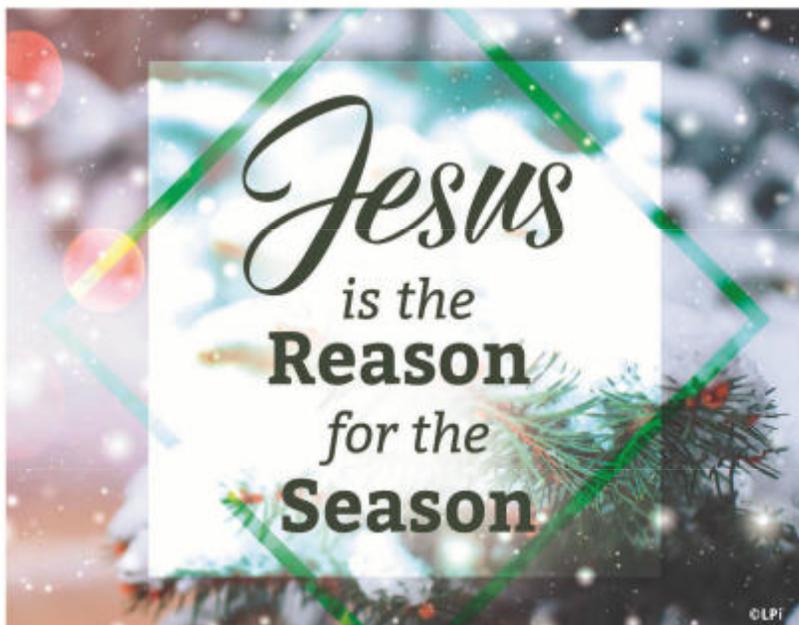
GOSPEL:

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High." (Lk 1:31-32a)

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OBSERVANCES FOR THE WEEK OF DECEMBER 20, 2020

- Sunday: 4th Sunday of Advent
- Monday: St. Peter Canisius, Priest and Doctor of the Church
- Wednesday: St. John of Kanty, Priest
- Thursday: Christmas Eve
- Friday: The Nativity of the Lord (holy day of obligation)
- Saturday: St. Stephen, the First Martyr
- Next Sunday: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph



REFLECT

FIRST READING

Today's reading from Second Samuel narrates the context in which God establishes his covenantal promise to King David around the year 1000 B.C. In the birth of Jesus, God fulfills his covenant with David. What does this teach us about the idea of "salvation history?"

SECOND READING

Paul concludes his letter to the Romans with a hymn of praise to God for the long-awaited revelation that all are saved and justified through faith in Christ. In what ways are you praising God during this season of Advent?

GOSPEL READING

Today's Gospel reading records the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary of the upcoming birth of Christ. Mary's acceptance of God's will for her life ("May it be done to me according to your word.") models for all of us unconditional faith. How can we encourage others to embrace such faith?

THE JOURNEY

Advent comes along every year and will continue to do so until Jesus returns. As this season draws to a close, we can each ask ourselves, "Am I now any better a disciple of Jesus Christ and more of a steward of all my gifts than before the Advent season started?" I have been on this earth for 40+ years. I have had 40+ Advents to draw closer to God and to work on taking more seriously my baptismal call. Some have gone better than others, but I would like to think my spiritual life progressed at least a small amount during each of them.

Conversion is a process. Stewardship is about a way of living and it is about more than simply being generous when

a situation calls for it. Stewardship and conversion go hand-in-hand and we are always moving closer to holiness in Jesus Christ. Living in this way takes practice and commitment. If this Advent didn't go as you had hoped, remember is not really an end. It is just another step along your journey.

This Christmas, while you are giving and receiving gifts and hopefully spending time with those you love, may you take the time to cherish the true gift that came to us over 2000 years ago and continues to call us to this day: Jesus. Let us be grateful beyond measure for this gift above all gifts, let us continue on our journey, and let our lives give testimony to the one who leads us.

—Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN APOSTLES AND DISCIPLES?

When we look at the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, we see two special titles applied to his followers: *apostles* and *disciples*. At first glance, we might think that these two words are interchangeable, but when we look at what each one means, we quickly see that the evangelists were using them very specifically. When we look more closely, we see that while Jesus had many *disciples*, the group of *apostles* was much more limited and referred to Jesus' closest collaborators.

The word *apostle* essentially means "one who is sent forth" or, as we might think of it today, "an ambassador." The group of apostles — sometimes called the Twelve — included those twelve men who formed Jesus' inner circle (see Mark 3:13-14; Luke 6:12-13). It was this group that received the gift of the Holy Spirit and who were sent out by Jesus with the special mission of forgiving sins on that first Easter Sunday (see John 20:19-23). In time, the Catholic Tradition also recognize Saint Paul

and Saint Barnabas as apostles, recognizing that they also shared the mandate of going out in the Lord's name to pray, to bless, and to preach. In 2016, during the Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis raised the liturgical celebration of Saint Mary Magdalene to the rank of feast, recognizing that she also received a special mandate to proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the Eleven, becoming the "apostle to the apostles." In a particular way, the bishops continue the mission of the apostles in our own time.

When we think of the word *disciple*, we see that it has a very different meaning. Rather than referring to those who were sent out to carry on the mission of Jesus, disciple literally means "student" or, more specially, an "apprentice learner." The task of the disciple is to learn and integrate into their lives the teachings, values, and way of life of their master teacher. Although a disciple might be called on to explain or represent aspects of their life, in light of the teachings they

receive from this master teacher, Christian discipleship is ultimately about living our lives with faith and integrity, guided by the life and mission of Jesus, our Master Teacher. The call to discipleship is the common vocation of all Christians.



LIVE THE LITURGY

INSPIRATION FOR THE WEEK

Does the world realize that it is waiting? As we go about all of the busyness of our lives and entertain our distractions, there are many holes and gaps in our lives that need to be filled. We are always wanting more, but not really sure what that "more" needs to be. Fulfillment, happiness, contentment, and true satisfactions are fleeting occurrences and often come to us in illusive ways. What we think is the ultimate fix to our anxious emptiness really is only a fancy trend that we entertain. The world does not realize any more today than it did over two thousand years ago that it is waiting for a Savior. We need a Savior. We need to see and embrace the God who has broken into history and become one with us. It is this union of God and man that sets us on a straight path, orders our relationships, establishes proper focus and goals, and tells us whose kingdom we really are meant to serve. The world does not know how truly lost it is. Do you realize how lost you are and that the One you need most is here among us and within your grasp?



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4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



GOSPEL MEDITATION

ENCOURAGE DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE

In Blaise Pascal's work, *Pensees*, he says: "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself."

We have a difficult time accepting that fulfillment and happiness are not achieved by our own merits but through a relationship with God. We are hardwired for this relationship and it is in our DNA. The simple fact is that we come from God and are designed to return to God. Our beginning and our end define who we are, why would we not want to seek the One who can truly satisfy? The world does not realize that it is waiting. It is waiting for the birth of God in time, within one's soul and in eternity. We get so confused by seeking other momentary satisfactions that we misinterpret the hunger within. We crave God.



The union of God and humanity, revealed in Jesus Christ, is precisely what sets us on a straight path, orders our relationships, establishes proper focus and goals and tells us whose kingdom we really are meant to serve. We are so lost. God is with us. The prophet Nathan told this to King David, the angel said this to Mary and the birth of Christ brings this Good News to us. We do not need to be busily looking for more things but must learn to find contentment and blessing in the One Presence. This is the beautiful simple message of Advent!

If you are feeling unsettled, anxious, angry, disgruntled, disconnected, unhappy, worried, fearful, off center, becoming overly self-indulgent, unable to spend time alone and without distraction, then there's a good chance you are lost. Now is the time to allow God to find you! Ponder the holy simplicity of Mary's call to be the Mother of God. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." When we are helpless and at home with our emptiness, God will fill us. Our Savior has come.

And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." - Lk 1:35

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3 EASY STEPS

TO KEEPING YOURSELF & OTHERS HEALTHY!

We are cautioned to be especially careful during the Coronavirus outbreak. Here are some simple ways to keep sickness away.



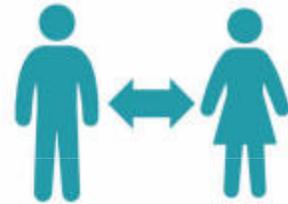
WASH YOUR HANDS

Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds using soap and water. If you can't wash your hands, use hand sanitizer frequently.



DON'T TOUCH YOUR FACE

Especially around the eyes, nose and mouth. If you must sneeze, use a tissue or your arm.



KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Practice social distancing during this epidemic and stay away from large groups. Instead, call, email or check up on family and friends using social media.

**LET YOUR
LONGING LEAD
YOU TO THE
FATHER**

Kids Corner

READ THE
GOSPEL &
COLOR



Think of the people you trust. These are people you can count on, no matter what happens. Both Mary and Elizabeth were amazed to learn that they were pregnant. God had surprised each of them with a special miracle - a baby. God trusted them both to take care of their babies. Mary and Elizabeth trusted God to help them. You can trust God, too.

PRAYER

God, help me to trust you like Mary and Elizabeth did.

MISSION FOR THE WEEK

Name three reasons you can always trust God.



*Invest just five minutes a day,
and your faith will deepen and grow
a day at a time.*

Monday, Dec 21, 2020

Advent Weekday (O Radiant Dawn)

They say it's darkest just before the dawn, and today we've reached that moment on the darkest day of what has been a very dark year. Our hope in the worst of circumstances reaches a crescendo in today's O Antiphon: "O Radiant Dawn,/splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:/come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the/shadow of death." We've reached the edge of a dramatic precipice in our waiting. Have faith and get ready—daybreak is coming.

*TODAY'S READINGS: Song of Songs 2:8-14 or
Zephaniah 3:14-18a; Luke 1:39-45*

Tuesday, Dec 22, 2020

Advent Weekday (O King of all Nations)

Today's O Antiphon heralds the Messiah's long-expected arrival as king. But clearly Jesus is not a typical king—because God's kingdom is not a typical earthly kingdom. Jesus will later proclaim, through the Beatitudes, that the kingdom of God is the inverse of what we humans expect. "Blessed are the meek," he insists—and the poor, the persecuted, and those who mourn. In fact, according to Saint Matthew's version of the Final Judgment, Jesus will be the king wielding harsh judgment against all who've neglected the "least of these." How will you serve our expected-but-unexpected king today?

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 Samuel 1:24-28; Luke 1:46-56

Wednesday, Dec 23, 2020

Advent Weekday (O Emmanuel)

As we the church celebrate Evening Prayer—whether in monasteries or in our own homes, the domestic church—tonight we pray or sing the seventh and final O Antiphon of Advent with these words: "O Emmanuel, our king and giver of law, come to save us, Lord our God." The name Emmanuel means God-with-us. As the season of Advent longing comes to a close, in a world that is in need of God's compassionate and saving presence, let us pray tonight for eyes to see and hearts to embrace the presence of God-with-us in the events and conversations of these holy holidays. Indeed, O come, O come Emmanuel.

TODAY'S READINGS: Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Luke 1:57-66

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Scripture citations from the NAB Rev. Ed.

Thursday, Dec 24, 2020

Advent Weekday

For many Catholics of Mexican heritage, today is the final celebration of Las Posadas, nine days of reenacting Mary and Joseph's search for posada, shelter. Each day the ritual is the same: Participants knock on doors, sing songs begging for shelter, while hosts respond with songs denying shelter, and finally end with the glorious moment when the door is opened wide and the Holy Family is given shelter for the night. The repetition drives home the desperation of the most famous migrant family and migrants of all times and places, including our own. Can you take some action in support of migrants and refugees this Christmas season?

*TODAY'S READINGS: Morning: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b12,14a,16;
Luke 1:67-79*

Friday, Dec 25, 2020

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Today as we gaze upon a tiny infant born in difficult circumstances, we are also gazing upon a powerful love that has transformed the world—and us. Fragility and strength, new life and enduring love—these are not mutually exclusive. In the Incarnation, we encounter a God who has loved us since before the creation of the world and who longs to draw close and bring us life. This life is not to be "spiritualized" but to be incarnate in our whole life, including our places of pain and challenge. Saint Athanasius writes, "For the Lord touched all parts of creation, and freed and undeceived them all from every deceit." What is the freedom that God has begun to unfold within you?

TODAY'S READINGS: Vigil: Isaiah 62:1-5; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Matthew 1:1-25 (13); Night: Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 (14); Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

Saturday, Dec 26, 2020

Feast of Stephen, First Martyr

Even the greatest among us have their darkest moment. The great Saint Paul had such a moment before his conversion, when he looked on approvingly and guarded the cloaks of those who stoned the church's first martyr, the young and courageous deacon Stephen. Saul of Tarsus, as Paul was known before his conversion, no doubt was convinced that righteousness called for such a cruel and harsh death sentence. Be on guard for misguided righteousness wherever it rears its head, especially when that head is on your own shoulders. It rarely leads to compassion or mercy, God's signposts. Saint Stephen, pray for us.

*TODAY'S READINGS: Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59;
Matthew 10:17-22*



MASS INTENTIONS

Weekend of December 19th & 20th

For the People of St. Steven's

- ✝ Janice Marie Brown
- ✝ Jim Kiefer
- ✝ Donald Linstrom
- ✝ Diane Brass

Monday December 21st

- ✝ Guadalupe Romero

Tuesday December 22nd

- ✝ Regina Kramer

Wednesday December 23rd

- ✝ Marybeth Campbell



MASS INTENTIONS

Christmas Eve
Thursday December 24th

- ✝ Marsh West
- ✝ Caroline Campion
- ✝ Dorothy Topel



Christmas Day
Friday December 25th

- ✝ Martin & Phyllis Sadler
- ✝ James Rogan
- ✝ Gerald Bollinger



Weekend of December 26th & 27th

- ✝ Steven Lamy
- For the People of St. Steven's
- ✝ Larry Page
- ✝ Patricia Kaiser
- ✝ Diane Brass



THE NATIVITY *of the Lord*

"For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you
who is Christ and Lord." - Lk 2:11

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass ©2001, 1998, 1978 CCD

GOSPEL MEDITATION — DECEMBER 25, 2020

The Nativity of the Lord

"I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all of the people." This year everything has changed. We, too, have waited in darkness, a new darkness of quarantine and fear. We, too, have felt in the desert of the modern world. Our hearts miss the candles of midnight Mass and sounds of everyone singing our favorite Christmas hymns. The Eucharist—that simple little host resting in the stable of our hearts—has new meaning. Our joy lifts at the sight of long-unseen family, now via facetime or zoom. The wonder of the season is here. Glory to God indeed!

But for some of us, perhaps the patterns feel too familiar, almost grating. Or someone is missing from our story this year. Unlike Mary and Joseph—

who found refuge in a stable—perhaps we still feel like we are searching for a place to rest. This Christmas season let Jesus be that place.

Let the Christmas story wash over you in all its human relevance. In the Holy Family, we see the fear of a first-time father trying to shelter and protect his family, a deeply vulnerable moment on a cold, uncomfortable night, and giving birth with little assistance. In the shepherds, we see an entirely unexpected encounter with wonder, a divine revelation none were expecting. We see the dazzling hope of a promise fulfilled.

In the celebration of Christmas, we celebrate the Incarnation. God becomes man because we humans need someone we can touch, see, and feel. Some of us may be especially sensitive to a lack of incarnate love in our lives. Whatever our experience, God invites us to receive HIM - His story, His presence, His love. And He invites us to give it away, to make His love a little more incarnate in the world by our actions. Look for someone to love today that they, too, might recognize Emmanuel, God with us!



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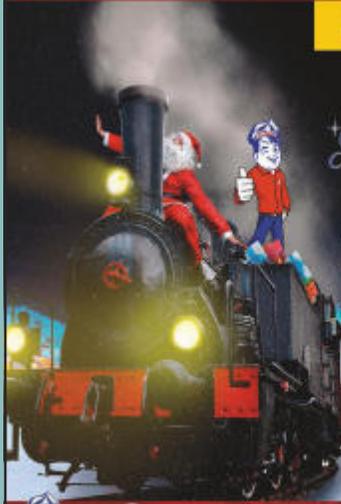
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