



Advent

HOPE & PROMISE

2022

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Daily Reflections
on the Advent Mass Readings
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Introduction

Advent is a time for renewing our hope. Religious hope is different from just wishing that everything will change for the better for it is intimately connected to the person and promises of God. The Bible's fundamental revelation is that God desires and thus promises to be present with us for a relationship. This promise becomes the ground of our hope, because, as we profess in our Creed, we don't just "believe God" but we believe "in God." Our trust is placed in the reliability and faithfulness of God to fulfill God's promise to be with us and transform ourselves and our world. And if this Advent booklet of daily reflections helps you discover anew how present God is now in yourself and in your life, we invite you to consider similar reflections and prayers for each day of the year found in the quarterly booklets of *Words of Grace* available from *AllSaintsPress.com*.

—Steve Mueller, *Editor*

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Our Weekly Prayers

Week 1

O Christ Jesus, when all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness, give us the sense of your presence, your love and your strength. Help us to have perfect trust in your protecting love and strengthening power, so that nothing may frighten or worry us. —*St. Ignatius of Loyola*

Week 2

How is it, my God, that you have given me this hectic busy life when I have so little time to enjoy your presence. I know that you are constantly beside me, help me to think about and love you even in the midst of such hectic activity. —*St. Teresa of Avila*

Week 3

Holy Spirit, open our hearts to “rejoice in the Lord always.” Help us go forward with joy towards the mystery of Christmas. May Mary, who silently and prayerfully awaited the redeemer’s birth, help us to make our hearts a dwelling place to receive him worthily. —*Pope St. John Paul II*

Week 4

Child of Bethlehem, let us share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into our hearts the peace we seek so desperately and you alone can give us. Help us know one another better, and live as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father. —*Pope St. John XXIII*

Watchful Waiting

Is 2:1-5 / Rom 13:11-14 / Mt 24:37-44

We've entered into that beautiful season of Advent, a time of joyful watching and waiting, a time of hope and promise. Our reading from Isaiah presents a hopeful vision for the future. He looks forward to a time of peace when an ideal king will rule justly. He announces a time when all nations and races will come together, when fears and prejudices will be broken down. All people will walk in God's light, and they will transform their weapons of war into instruments of peace. Like Isaiah's first hearers, we too long for peace. During Advent we look for the coming of Christ, the Prince of Peace, in our lives and our world now, and we look forward to his coming in glory at the end of time.

—Angeline Hubert

What peace do I most long for this Advent?

“Beloved, now is the acceptable time spoken of by the Spirit, the day of salvation, peace and reconciliation—the great season of Advent. We should always observe it with faith and love, offering praise and thanksgiving to the Father for the mercy and love shown us in this mystery.”

—**St. Charles Borromeo**

Looking Backward & Forward

Is 4:2-6 / Mt 8:5-11

Advent expectation is anchored in the event of God's incarnation. The more I come in touch with what happened in the past, the more I come in touch with what is to come. The gospel not only reminds me of what took place but also of what will take place. In the contemplation of Christ's first coming, I can discover the signs of his second coming. By looking back in meditation, I can look forward in expectation. By reflection, I can project; by conserving the memory of Christ's birth, I can progress to the fulfillment of his kingdom. The prophets speaking about Israel's future kept reminding their people of God's great works in the past. They could look forward with confidence because they could look backward with awe to Yahweh's great deeds.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

The Genesee Diary

*How has my reflection on God's past deeds
helped me find God acting today?*

“Advent invites us to open our hearts to welcome Jesus. During Advent we do not just anticipate Christmas but are also called to anticipate the glorious return of Christ—when he will return at the end of time—preparing ourselves, with consistent and courageous choices, for our final encounter with him.” —**Pope Francis**

Silent Before the Mystery

Is 11:1-10 / Lk 10:21-24

If you are called to contemplative prayer, which is not some esoteric adventure for the very few but by God's grace a normal flowering of baptismal life, you have to live in day-to-day fidelity to mysteries you do not fully understand. This is what Advent is about, but it is also a general law of our lives, which are an Advent. You have to wait in hope, waiting for the mystery to unfold, going on doing ordinary things but all the time listening, learning, pondering, growing and energetically serving. You have to be silent before the mystery. By your closeness to Christ his mind is being formed in you, and he is leading you into his own experience, his own joy and longing, and his own knowledge of the Father.

—Maria Boulding
The Coming of God

*How might I find more time to be silent
with God during this Advent season?*

Biblical **justice** means rightly-ordered relationships and their obligations—proper interpersonal behavior toward both God and others. Humans must strive (though faithful obedience to law) to make the world as just as possible, but true justice comes only from God's action (God's justice).

Follow His Way

Rom 10:9-18 / Mt 4:18-22

Let us open wide our eyes to the light that transfigures, and unstop our ears to the sound of God's voice which daily cries out to us. Dear friends, what can be more delightful than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in his loving mercy, the Lord is showing us the way of life. Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, and with the Gospels as our guide, let us set out on this way of life that we may deserve to see the God who is calling us into his kingdom. As we progress in this way of life and in faith, our hearts will be enlarged, and we shall run in the way of God's commandments with an inexpressible delight of love.

—St. Benedict

*How might I more eagerly follow Christ's way
in my daily life this Advent?*

"The apostles saw Christ and believed in a church they did not see. May we who see the church believe in Christ whom we do not yet see."

—St. Augustine of Hippo

Build on Rock

Is 26:1-6 / Mt 7:21, 24-27

There are times in our lives for action, when it is simply not enough to cry out, “Lord, Lord!” To do nothing is like building a house on sandy ground. Once the rainy season sets in, the water will lash at the foundation and the house will collapse. Only when each of our actions is directed by a conscious turning to the Lord for guidance, only when a sense of the Lord’s presence accompanies us in all that we do, only then will there be an integral wholeness about life. No single action will be out of harmony with the others nor disrupt the peace of our lives. Whether we are silent or speak, remain motionless or act, we must rest upon the rock of the Lord.

—Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP

Biblical Meditations for Advent

*What has most helped me turn toward
God so far this Advent?*

Confession is a shorthand way of describing the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation because the ritual requires that one tell or “confess” one’s sins to a priest who is authorized to forgive sins in the name of Jesus and the Church.

Open Your Eyes

Is 29:17-24 / Mt 9:27-31

All have eyes, but some have eyes that are shrouded in darkness, unable to see the sun's light. Because the blind cannot see it, it does not follow that the sun does not shine. The blind must trace the cause back to themselves and their eyes. In the same way, you have eyes in your mind that are shrouded in darkness because of your sins and evil deeds. No one who has sin within can see God. But if you want, you can be healed. Entrust yourself to the doctor, to the One who will be able to open the eyes of your mind and heart. Who is this doctor? It is God, who heals and gives life through God's Word and God's wisdom.

—Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch

Apology to Autolytus

*What blindspot most keeps me from
accepting Jesus' healing touch?*

The **Holy One of Israel** is a brief description of God summarizing God's most important characteristics. Holiness identifies God as transcendent—totally other and different from all created things. But Yahweh is also Israel's special God by the covenant established with them from among all the nations.

Trusting Our Divine Teacher

Is 30:19-21, 23-26 / Mt 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6-8

Knowing God's will for us can be difficult, especially when all the options seem to be basically good ones. How do we choose? The prophet Isaiah speaks of God as our Teacher. We need to trust that God will be with us in our searching and our decision-making. If we long to follow God's ways, Holy Wisdom will surely guide us and teach us what is best for us. Isaiah also implies that we need to listen. Rarely will we hear God's words as clearly as Isaiah did, but if we daily attune to God through prayer, try to be open, be aware of our resistances, and live life as best we can, then I believe we can trust that we will make good decisions.

—Joyce Rupp
Inviting God In

*How might I bring God's perspective more
into my daily decision-making?*

At Mass the **Penitential Rite** is a general acknowledgment of sinfulness by the entire assembly, with requests for God's mercy and forgiveness. It has always been an essential moment of confession, petition for forgiveness and interior purification before entering into the celebration of the sacred mysteries.

Change Your Life

Is 11:1-10 / Rom 15:4-9 / Mt 3:1-12

The Gospel introduces the unkempt, unwelcome figure of John the Baptizer. He is dressed in hair shirt. He eats wild honey and such other gifts that he can forage in the rough. He comes in anger and demand, and threat and insistence. He speaks really only one word: Repent! Recognize the danger you are in and change. John embodies the best and the last of the old tradition of Torah demand. He has this deep sense of urgency about the world, but it is not an urgency of newness. It is an urgency of threat and danger and jeopardy, one that we ourselves sense now about our world. He is the key player in the Advent narrative. Advent is not a time of casual waiting. It is a demanding piece of work.

—Walter Brueggemann

The Collected Sermons

*What do I most want to change so I can draw
nearer to God this Advent?*

John declares that Jesus will “**baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.**” Like baptism with water, the outpouring of God’s Spirit (the power of life associated with breathing) not only purifies the person (like fire does) but also energizes one to carry on Jesus’ mission and ministry in our world.

Be Strong, Fear Not!

Is 35:1-10 / Lk 5:17-26

Understand that the path of holy simplicity has a certain sweep to it. Stages must be moved through. We crawl before we walk. Keep praying for ears to hear and eyes to see. Anxiety prevents that. You'll know when it's time for the next thing. How? If you are going slowly, prayerfully, without anxiety, you'll "hear" the call when it comes. Understand that there are dark times; times of self-doubt and discouragement; stages that feel cold; demons in the night. Remember that the simple path involves stripping. We lose social identity. We lose consoling fantasies about ourselves. We give up certain comforts and conveniences. When darkness overwhelms, read Isaiah 35 and pray to rise with Christ in the morning light.

—Paula Huston

The Holy Way

How might I be more attentive to what and where God is calling me today?

This week's first readings are from the collection of oracles of the **Isaiah** who prophesied about 740–700 BC to give hope to the tiny kingdom of Judah during and after its larger sister kingdom of Israel had been conquered and swallowed up by the emerging Assyrian empire (721 BC).

Try A Little Tenderness

Is 40:1-11 / Mt 18:12-14

The coming of Christ bids us to reclaim tenderness as a mainstay of our cultural value system. Popular entertainment too often embodies an escalating scale of cruelty. Movie violence has grown increasingly brutal; video games reward ruthless behavior; and pro sports showcase vicious hits. Relatively rare are the mainstream media that celebrate God's Tender Mercies, as did the 1983 film of the same name. Long before Elvis crooned "Love Me Tender" or "Don't Be Cruel," God showed the way by bidding the prophet to "speak tenderly to Jerusalem" and Paul urged us to embrace mercy, kindness, meekness, and patience. Violence may sell movie tickets, but only love can save the world: "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us."

—Jerry Welte

In what ways can I be more kind and gentle in my treatment of others?

Holiness as unique to God—no human analogy, that is, nothing in our experience is the starting point for understanding it and elevating it to the divine level. It separates God's type of being from our own and thus nothing created can be called "holy" unless it comes into contact with God and God bestows holiness on it.

Take My Yoke

Is 40:25-31 / Mt 11:28-30

O Lord, you are meek and merciful. Who would not give oneself wholeheartedly to your service. “Take my yoke upon you,” you say. And what is this yoke of yours like? “My yoke,” you say, “is easy and my burden light.” Who would not be glad to bear a yoke that does not press hard but caresses? Who would not be glad for a burden that does not weigh heavy but refreshes? And what is this yoke of yours that does not weary, but gives rest? It is, of course, that first and greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.” What is easier, sweeter, more pleasant, than to love goodness, beauty, and love, the fullness of which you are, O Lord, my God?

—St. Robert Bellarmine

*What burden am I willing to take up for
and with Christ today?*

“There is your brother or sister, naked, crying! And you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering.”

—St. Ambrose of Milan

Preserved from Sin

Gn 3:9-15, 20 / Eph 1:3-6, 11-12 / Lk 1:26-38

In view of her motherhood, Mary was preserved from original sin, that fracture in communion with God, with others and with creation, which deeply wounds every human being. By contemplating our immaculate mother, let us also recognize our truest destiny and deepest vocation: to be loved, to be transformed by love, to be transformed by the beauty of God. Let us look to her and allow her to look upon us, for she is our mother and loves us so much. Let us allow ourselves to be watched over by her so that we may learn how to be more humble and more courageous in following God's Word. Let us learn to welcome the tender embrace of her son Jesus, which gives us life, hope and peace.

—Pope Francis

*Like Mary, how might I let myself be transformed
by love this Advent?*

“The most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin.” —**Pope Pius IX**

The Struggle for Holiness

Is 48:17-19 / Mt 11:16-19

One cannot live the Christian life as it is meant to be lived without seeking to be holy. But holiness is not easy, and is not just a matter of will power and good intentions. In this difficult struggle we gain experience of our limitations and weaknesses. But we also learn, by experience, that if we trust in the power of God, and seek to imitate Jesus Christ in his passion and his victory, we receive mysterious strength that has no human source. Then we begin to become more closely identified with Christ and to realize, at least in the silence of the heart that loves and trusts him, that Jesus himself lives in us and is our strength. Jesus Christ is our new and hidden self.

—Thomas Merton

Honorable Reader

*How have I most experienced Jesus' presence
dwelling within me?*

“We do not preach only one coming of Christ, but a second as well. At the first he was wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. At his second he will be clothed in light as in a garment. So we look beyond the first and await the second.”

—*St. Cyril of Jerusalem*

In the Spirit of Elijah

Sir 48:1-4, 9-11 / Mt 17:9a, 10-13

It's hard for us to imagine how deeply ingrained the stories of the prophets were in the collective memory of the first-century Jews in Israel. It was inevitable, then, that when John the Baptizer appeared in the desert, wearing a "garment of camel's hair, a leather girdle around his waist, and eating locusts and wild honey" (Mt 1:4), the first thing people thought was, "Could this be Elijah?" His dress, his diet, and his fiery preaching evoked the stories they knew of Elijah, the miracle-working ninth century BC prophet who lived in northern Israel and spoke truth to power. Elijah went to heaven in a "chariot of fire" (2 Kgs 2: 12). John also spoke truth to power, and went to heaven via Herod's sword in the dungeon. Advent saints, both.

—Kathy McGovern

*What consequences have I paid
for speaking truth to power?*

For the Jews, the "son of man" identified God's human messianic agent who would accomplish God's final judgment and rule over the world. But Jesus adds a new factor by connecting this promised son of man with the suffering that is to be part of his messianic role.

See What Is Happening

Is 35:1-6a, 10 / Jas 5:7-10 / Mt 11:2-11

Jesus gave a gentle and cryptic answer to John the Baptist: look what's happening and draw your own conclusions. Jesus was quoting from Isaiah, from the heart of the good news passage. This was how the great plan was to be accomplished. The good news Jesus announced was that the plan was now being put into effect. People found forgiveness, as the power of new creation reached into their moral and spiritual lives with the warm assurance of God's love. People who had seen themselves at the bottom of the pile, economically, socially, morally, and physically, suddenly found their lives turned upside down. He was claiming, in effect, to be the good news in person.

—N.T. Wright

Simply Good News

*What signs around me show
God is at work changing everything?*

“Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action and that action is service. A mission of love can come only from union with God. From that union, love for the family, love for one's neighbor, love for the poor is the natural fruit.”

—*St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

Mary Our Intercessor

Zec 2:14-17 / or Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab

Lk 1:26-38 / or Lk 1:39-47

If you have an opportunity to visit Mexico City, you will be inspired by the faith of the pilgrims at the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Mass is celebrated every hour on Sundays and people arrive early to attend the end of one liturgy and the beginning of the next one. Pilgrims walk on their knees up to the shrine, asking her special intercession for their daily needs. You can tell the pilgrims from the tourists, because the latter are taking pictures but the pilgrims are praying for grace through Mary. This scene inspired me to consider the role of Mary in my own life. She who proclaimed “My soul magnifies the Lord” is always ready to carry our prayers to Jesus.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

*How do I show my trust in Mary
to carry my prayers to Jesus?*

“O gracious and loving Mary, Lady of Guadalupe, through your presence make us aware of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son. May Christ send us blessings of peace and harmony, and may we receive love and the healing we need to get closer to him. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

—**Pope St. John XXIII**

The Way of Righteousness

Zep 3:1-2, 9-13 / Mt 21:28-32 (188)

“Righteousness” suggests seeking to work out the divine–human relationship in all the relationships of life. The most basic decision is which advice to follow: that of those determined to rule the world or that of the creator. The most basic decision to follow God’s direction makes it possible to be rooted, grounded and fruitful. The wisdom teacher operates from the belief that God created a moral order to life and has observed that openness to divine instruction brings the possibility for full living. What directs life—how people live—matters. Thus Jesus places before hearers and readers the most basic decision about living in connection with God and God’s torah, and so embrace life’s fruitful possibilities.

—Walter Brueggemann

Psalms

*How might I better express my choice
to live daily according to God’s ways?*

For biblical people, mountains—where heaven and earth touched—were the natural location for meeting with God. Thus the Jerusalem Temple was built on the highest point in the city (Mount Zion) which could also be identified as **God’s holy mountain.**

God at Work

Is 45:6c-8, 18, 21c-25 / Lk 7:18b-23

John of the Cross strikes a deathblow to the notion that the deepest spirituality is something we can do, something within the working realm of our will's control and effectiveness. The dark night is about realizing the absolute poverty of our spiritual efforts, the inevitable element of self in even the best of our goodness and striving for the light; it is about being broken by God, stripped naked of all accomplishment. It is about trusting God because it is the only thing we can do. And to reach that point, all the right things we do and all the good things we do and all the spiritual advances we have believed ourselves to be making must be shown to us for the empty things they are.

—Tim Farrington

A Hell of Mercy

*What “dark night” did I have to endure this year
and how did I come through it?*

In Jesus' time, people awaited **“the one to come,”** God's chosen agent of salvation or the anointed one (Hebrew: *messiah*, Greek: *christos*) who would finally deliver the covenant people from oppression, restore the Jewish nation, create God's kingdom on earth and usher in God's final definitive judgment of the world.

Be Open to Change

Is 54:1-10 / Lk 7:24-30

Every time we move to a new level of faith, the previous world that we lived in with all its relationships ends. This is what John the Baptist and Jesus meant when they began their ministries with the word, “Repent.” The process of conversion begins with genuine openness to change; openness to the possibility that just as natural life evolves, so too the spiritual life evolves. Our psychological world is the result of natural growth, events over which we had no control in early childhood, and of grace. Grace is Christ’s presence and action in our lives inviting us to let go of where we are now and to be open to the new values that are born every time we penetrate to a new understanding of the Gospel.

—Thomas Keating

Awakenings

*Where does Christ seem to be drawing me
during this Advent season?*

Baptism means to immerse or wash in water and so is a natural sign for ritual purity or holiness. Thus John the Baptist uses a **baptism of repentance or conversion** (Mk 1:4, Lk 3:3) to symbolize one’s desire to die to sinful ways and live as God wants.

Do What Is Just

Is 56:1-3a, 6-8 / Jn 5:33-36

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the more holistic concept of *shalom* (peace) is a deeper and wider notion than the securing of individual rights. The vision of *shalom* requires us to reestablish “right relationships.” It is a call to justice in the whole community and even to the rest of God’s creatures and whole of creation. Restoring right relationships takes us further than respecting individual rights. It pushes us to begin to see ourselves as part of a community, even as members of an extended but deeply interconnected global family, and ultimately as strands in the web of life that we all share and depend upon. The biblical vision of *shalom* could be a basis for a new politics of community and the social healing we so need.

—Jim Wallis

The Soul of Politics

*What relationships in my life most
need to be made right?*

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”

—1971 Synod of Catholic Bishops

Rooted in the Covenant

Jer 23:5-8 / Mt 1:18-25

Matthew went to great pains to record Jesus' lineage. He makes it clear that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham and of David. That makes him a son of God's core covenant with the Chosen People, and a royal leader. But what is that to us who are neither Jewish nor fans of monarchy? Just as we may quote our parents or explore our genealogy, this is a reminder of our background in faith. The God who took flesh in Jesus was involved with humanity long before the first Christmas Day—and continues to be the covenanting God whose kingdom on earth is hidden among us. Matthew's genealogy invites us to remember the roots of our faith—from the level of our own family to the history of the universe.

—Mary M. McGlone, CSJ

*How do the roots of my faith relate me to Jesus
and his father Abraham?*

The “**O Antiphons,**” (because all begin with the interjection “O”) refer to the 7 special antiphons or invitations to prayer recited before the *Magnificat* during evening Vespers of the Liturgy of the Hours during the Octave before Christmas, December 17-24. These Antiphons have been part of the liturgy since the 8th century.

Let Me Be Your Manger

Is 7:10-14 / Rom 1:1-7 / Mt 1:18-24

Lord, how hard it is to accept your way. You come to me as a small, powerless child born away from home. As I prepare to celebrate your birth, I am trying to feel loved, accepted and at home in this world. But I wonder now if my deep sense of homelessness does not bring me closer to you than my occasional feelings of belonging. Where do I truly celebrate your birth: in a cozy home or in an unfamiliar house, among welcoming friends or among unknown strangers, with feelings of well-being or with feelings of loneliness? Come, Lord Jesus, and be with me where I feel poorest. I trust that this is the place where you will find your manger and bring your light. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

The Road to Daybreak

*What preparations can I make today
for Jesus to be born anew in my heart?*

Betrothal (from the Middle English *troth*, a pledge or commitment) was similar to a marriage engagement, which would intensify relations between the 2 families. To discover that one's fiancée was pregnant by another man would be a major reason for ending the engagement and sending her back to her family in shame.

Finding God in All Things

Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a / Lk 1:5-25

God's Incarnation is not just about God's coming to earth in Jesus but about Christ's continued presence and "fleshiness" in the world. Living a deeply spiritual life is about finding God in all things, in the plain and ordinary spaces of daily life: at school, at work, in the car, or with friends and within ourselves. God's presence dwells in everything. God gives life and being and existence to everything, so finding God in all things is just a matter of paying attention. In the hustle of life, it's easy for us to miss these God moments. Time and time again, we must remind ourselves to look and listen more attentively to the ways God is present to us. God takes on flesh in the various experiences and people around me.

—Andy Otto

God Moments

In the busyness of Christmas preparation, how might I pay better attention to God's mysterious presence?

Zechariah's priestly service occurs when his priestly group is chosen by lot to perform the daily Temple rituals—a morning and evening sacrifice of a lamb and an offering of flour mixed with oil, a libation of wine and an **incense offering**—which is what he performs.

Saying “Yes” to God

Is 7:10-14 / Lk 1:26-38

We all need to be told that God loves us, and the mystery of the Annunciation reveals an aspect of that love. But it also suggests that our response to this love is critical. Mary’s “How can this be?” is a simple yet profound response. Like any of the prophets, she asserts herself before God, saying, “Here am I.” Mary proceeds—as we must do in life—making her commitment without knowing much about what it will entail or where it will lead. I treasure the story because it forces me to ask: When the mystery of God’s love breaks through into my consciousness, do I run from it? Or am I virgin enough to respond from my deepest, truest self, and say something new, a “yes” that will change me forever?

—Kathleen Norris

Amazing Grace

*How might I say “yes” to what God
is asking to be born in me this Advent?*

Gabriel greets Mary as “**full of grace.**” Grace (Greek: *charis*, Latin: *gratia*) described a benefactor’s free gift that is neither owed or merited but given to favor or honor the recipient. Mary’s gift is that God is with her, which is indeed both a great favor and a great honor.

Share Your Joy

Sg 2:8-14 / or Zep 3:14-18a / Lk 1:39-45

The deepest joy and the best good news is the experience of being loved in a totally accepting and non-judgmental way. Such is God's love for us. Such is the Love who comes to be born in Mary. And the good news of this love must be shared with another. Mary goes in haste to be with Elizabeth. Love is not an idea to be contemplated or endlessly refined through philosophical speculation. Love is a verb—an action in which we risk revealing ourselves by affecting the world around us. Likewise, love is the willingness to be affected by others. Christian love in action is not mindless, compulsive, selfish behavior. Christian love is the life of action in which we bring the joy of the gospel to the world.

—William F. Maestri

My Rosary Journal

*How can I share the joy of the gospel
with someone today?*

Blessing identifies whatever contributes to earthly fulfillment, especially wealth and prosperity, family and children, health and long life. Elizabeth's address to Mary as "blessed among women" recognizes God's special election of her as the mother of the promised Messiah.

God of Mercy & Justice

1 Sm 1:24-28 / Lk 1:46-56

Mary's *Magnificat* is not just a hymn of praise to God. It is that and much more, a manifesto of non-violence and a call, not to arms, but to disarmament and justice. She publicly proclaims what God is doing in the world—bringing justice to the poor, fulfilling his promise of peace. She testifies that God is a God of mercy, a God of nonviolence, a God of peace. Such serious words cause trouble in our own times, too. Our nonviolence begins as we face the violence within us. It requires that we declare a cease-fire, place our inner violence before our God, reconcile the conflicting sides within us, and make peace with ourselves. It is a daily project that we must undertake for the rest of our lives.

—John Dear
Mary of Nazareth

*What fears that provoke anger and violence
in me do I most need to eliminate?*

As her offering to God to be shared with the Shiloh priests, Hannah brings a young bull, an **ephaph** (about two-thirds of a bushel) of flour and a skin of wine. Priests were fed by sharing part of these food offerings because they had no land to farm.

I Am Sending My Messenger

Mal 3:1-4, 23-24 / Lk 1:57-66

Faith is not a thing of the mind nor an intellectual certainty nor a felt conviction of the heart. It is a sustained decision to take God with utter seriousness as the God of our life; to shift the center of our lives from ourselves to God. Faith covers every aspect of our relation to God in our earthly existence: from its beginning, which is the grace to accept Jesus of Nazareth as God's messenger, to that encounter with him which must surely come if we are faithful, an encounter which means a going down with him into death, in order to rise with him in perfect fulfillment. The essence of the divine goal is an embrace of love, and faith is the arms by which we enfold the beloved.

—Ruth Burrows, OCD

The Watchful Heart

*How has my faith most grown this year
by taking God more seriously?*

The custom of erecting Christmas **Crib** or **Crèche** to represent the mystery of the Nativity is generally attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, who in 1223 obtained from Pope Honorius III permission to use a crib and figures of the Christ child, Mary, Joseph, and others.

Light in Our Darkness

2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 / Lk 1:67-79

On this day before Christmas, we hear Zechariah's familiar canticle telling us that the dawn from on high will break upon us. He knew about darkness. He sat through nine months of it, unable to speak. He also knew about light, experiencing the power of divine revelation when he prophesied through his canticle. As we approach the celebration of Jesus' birth, we are invited to look within our own selves and within our world. Always we find some darkness there, mixed in with the light. To these dark corners of our hurrying, our self-centeredness, our weakness, our frustration, our half-lived lives the Savior comes bringing light. The Light yearns to dawn upon us; we have only to open our hearts to receive this gift of loving presence.

—Joyce Rupp

Inviting God In

*What dark corners of myself and
my life most need Christ's Christmas light?*

“What came about bodily in Mary—the fullness of the godhead shining through Christ—takes place in every soul. The Lord does not come in bodily form but dwells in us spiritually. In this way the child Jesus is born in each one of us.” —*St. Gregory of Nyssa*

Messengers of Hope

Vigil: Is 62:1-5 / Acts 13:16-17, 22-25 / Mt 1:1-25 or 1:18-25

Night: Is 9:1-6 / Ti 2:11-14 / Lk 2:1-14

Dawn: Is 62:11-12 / Ti 3:4-7 / Lk 2:15-20

Day: Is 52:7-10 / Heb 1:1-6 / Jn 1:1-18

In the child of Bethlehem, God comes to meet us and make us active sharers in the life around us. God offers himself to us, so that we can take him into our arms, lift him and embrace him. Do not be afraid! In this child, God invites us to be messengers of hope for all those bowed down by the despair born of encountering so many closed doors. This is the joy that we are called to share, to celebrate and to proclaim. The joy with which God, in his infinite mercy, has embraced us and demands that we do the same. The faith we proclaim now makes us see God present in all those situations where we think God is absent.

—Pope Francis

*What might I do today to make Jesus
more present in myself and to others?*

The word **Christmas** comes from the Old English *Cristes Maesse*, the Mass of Christ, and is first found in 1038. In Latin it was called *Dies Natalis*, the Day of Birth, from which comes the French *Noël*. The first evidence of its celebration is attested in Egypt around AD 200.
