



Christ *Our* Light

Daily Reflections on the Advent 2024 Mass Readings

INTRODUCTION

Advent is a season in which we remember God's powerful saving and transforming presence coming into our world throughout history and especially in the embodiment of Jesus as one of us, and we intensify our hope for God's coming again now into ourselves and our lives. Our hope is demonstrated in our daily desire to encounter God through the risen Christ and the power of God's Holy Spirit at work in us. So we set aside some time each day to direct our hearts and our attention to a fresh encounter with God through our prayerful reflection on God's Word to us and our challenge to discover his presence anew within us and in those around us. And if this little Advent reflection booklet helps you to be more attuned to God's coming into yourself and your life, we invite you to consider using the similar reflections for each day of the year found in the quarterly editions of *Words of Grace: Daily Reflections & Prayers for Catholics* available from *AllSaintsPress.com*.

—Steve Mueller, *Editor*

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Paying Attention Noticing God's Presence

Jer 33:14-16 / Thes 3:12—4:2 / Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

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

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

During **Advent** (Latin: "coming"), we prepare for the coming of Jesus by remembering his birth in Bethlehem (past), anticipating his coming in glory (future) and by celebrating his coming to us in word and sacrament (present).

Wait & Watch Patiently

Is 2:1-5 / Mt 8:5-11

Attentiveness is vital to waiting. The word *wait* comes from a root word meaning “to watch.” Originally it meant to apply attentiveness or watchfulness throughout a period of time and was a highly regarded experience. To wait on God meant to watch keenly for God’s coming. Watchers and waiters were nearly synonymous. These days, the idea of waiting doesn’t conjure up the idea of being tuned in as much as it does of being tuned out. We denigrate it to idling. Jesus’ life was a balanced rhythm of waiting on God and expressing the fruits of waiting. Waiting makes it possible for grace to happen. Spirit needs a container to pour itself into. Grace needs an arena in which to incarnate. Waiting can be such a place, if we allow it.

—Sue Monk Kidd
When the Heart Waits

*What do I most want from Jesus’
coming into our lives anew?*

Advent devotions remind us of the meaning of the season. Special Advent devotions include the lighting of the Advent wreath, the Advent calendar which helps remind us of the season with daily thoughts and activities and Advent prayers that prepare us spiritually for the birth of Jesus Christ.

Waiting for the Mystery to Unfold

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

In prayer, you have to live in day-to-day fidelity to mysteries you do not fully understand. This is a general law of our lives. 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. Whatever the renunciations, the inner poverty and the successive little deaths and lettings-go, this life of contemplation is a life of joy, because lived in Jesus it is a journey into God, an unfinished tale.

—Maria Boulding
The Coming of God

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

“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

Preparing for Christ's Coming

Is 25:6-10a / Mt 15:29-37

The days leading up to Christmas must be days of deep prayer to prepare our hearts for Christ's coming. We must be really ready to receive him. He wants to be born in us, but we must be open, willing, receptive and truly welcoming. Christmas means believing that the salvation of the world is God's work and not mine. Into this broken world a child is born who is called Son of the Most High, Prince of Peace, Savior. Thank you, Lord, that you came, independent of my feelings and thoughts. Your heart is greater than mine. Maybe a "dry" Christmas, a Christmas without much to feel or think, will bring me closer to the true mystery of God-with-us. What it asks is pure, naked faith.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
The Road to Daybreak

*What might I do to be more prepared
to receive Christ now and be changed by him?*

Before it became a theological term, **salvation** described a sick person's return to health (Latin, *salus*) or rescue from a difficult or life-threatening situation. For Christians, Jesus as Savior rescued us from our broken relationship with God and offered us a new relationship under God's kingdom rule.

Listening to God's Word

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

“Prayer is talking to God.” With these words nearly all of us receive our first religious instruction. I was also encouraged to speak to God in my own words to give thanks for the blessings of the day and to ask for assistance with particular needs and concerns. But prayer is also listening to God who as a loving presence is always near. Contemplative prayer is a simple trust in that presence. In Christian spiritual literature, this term all too often has the aura of being an advanced and somewhat rarified form of prayer, mostly practiced by monks and mystics. But in essence, contemplative prayer is simply a wordless, trusting opening of self to the divine presence. Far from being advanced, it is about the simplest form of prayer there is.

—Cynthia Bourgeault
Centering Prayer & Inner Awakening

*How might I spend some time today
just being wordlessly in God's presence?*

Adoration is the highest act and purpose of religious worship, which is directed in love and reverence to God alone. Adoration, which is also called *latria*, consists of internal and external elements, private and social prayer, liturgical acts and ceremonies, and especially sacrifice.

A Very Little While

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

When I think about what the Israelite people suffered during the endless occupations of their land, and the terrifying armies that invaded them from all sides throughout their history, I wonder that the scriptures don't have more of the post-traumatic stress kinds of passages like the one we read today. Isaiah is often called the Advent saint because so many of our favorite Advent passages come from that book. But today's reading betrays the kind of low-grade dis-ease that the populace lived with all the time. *The tyrants shall be cut off.* That goes for those who can condemn a person just by uttering a word too. We all want to see that day when bullies are put in their place, and the just are raised up. Come, Lord Jesus!

—Kathy McGovern

What 3 things most characterize my dream of a day of justice and a world without evil?

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).

Saturday, December 7

St. Ambrose, Bishop &
Doctor of the Church

Jesus Cured Them

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

Jesus did not remove illness and suffering from human experience but by taking them upon himself he transformed them and gave them new meaning. New meaning because they no longer have the last word which, instead, is new and abundant life; transformed them, because in union with Christ they need no longer be negative but positive. When the son of God mounted the cross, he destroyed the solitude of suffering and illuminated its darkness. We thus find ourselves before the mystery of God's love for us, which gives us hope and courage: hope, because in the plan of God's love even the night of pain yields to the light of Christmas, and courage, which enables us to confront every hardship in his company, in union with him.

—Pope Francis

*When have I most felt that Jesus was
with me in my suffering?*

"You are medicine to me when I am sick, strength to me when I need help, life itself when I fear death, the way when I long for heaven, the light when all is dark and food when I need nourishment. Glory be to you forever. Amen."

—St. Ambrose

Something New Is Coming

Bar 5:1-9 / Phil 1:4-6, 8-11 / Lk 3:1-6

The Gospel gives a graphic description of what John the Baptist stood for. He lived frugally in the desert—with its echoes of the Jewish exodus from slavery in Egypt, as a place of personal meeting with God, and as a gathering place for discontents, rebels and mystics. The Baptist called the crowds to repentance and to a change of life before the coming judgment. When people asked him what they should do in those apocalyptic times, he responded with a prophetic image of a new society built on radical standards of equality, charity and justice. He told tax gatherers to be honest, soldiers to desist from bullying the weak and running protection rackets, and the man with two shirts and anyone with food to share what they have.

—Laurence Freeman
Jesus the Teacher Within

*What might John say to me to encourage
my repentance and change of life?*

The **wilderness** (literally, uninhabited land) was dangerous, demonic and often lethal for those who ventured there. It also evokes strong memories for John's audience because it was in the wilderness that God first tested Israel regarding its covenant loyalty. Thus it is where Israel must go to renew its covenant relationship.

Monday, December 9

The Immaculate Conception of
the Blessed Virgin Mary

Called to Be Holy

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

The feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is often misunderstood. What we celebrate today is Mary's freedom from sin from the first moment of her conception in her mother's womb. In the midst of this season of Advent preparation, we take time to reflect on the mystery of God's preparation of Mary from before her birth to become the mother of God and so to bring Christ into the world. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us that we too were chosen "from before the foundation of the world to be holy." Like Mary we are invited to say "yes," and to open ourselves to God's grace and call in our lives.

—Angeline Hubert

*How have I most experienced God's
gracious presence in my life this Advent?*

Mary's **Immaculate Conception** describes her conception in the womb of her mother Anne and is not to be confused as some commentators do with Jesus' Virgin Birth, which describes his birth from the womb of Mary without a human father.

Fear Not, Here Is Your God

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

There is so much fear in us. Fear of people, fear of God and much raw, undefined, free-floating anxiety. I wonder if fear is not our main obstacle to prayer. When we enter into the presence of God and start to sense that huge reservoir of fear in us, we want to run away into the many distractions which our busy world offers us so abundantly. But we should not be afraid of our fears. We can confront them, give words to them and lead them into the presence of him who says: “Do not be afraid, it is I.” Our inclination is to show our Lord only what we feel comfortable with. But the more we dare to reveal our whole trembling self to him, the more we will be able to sense that his love, which is perfect love, casts out all our fears.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
A Cry for Mercy

*What anxieties and fears most keep me
now from letting God draw near to me?*

Fear of the Lord describes the reverent respect or awe that one must have before God. Since God is so utterly different from anything created—awesome in power (almighty) and holiness—encountering God always creates an apprehension about what might happen. Thus God often counsels the person, “Don’t be afraid.”

“Come to Me”

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

Jesus' invitation is for everyone. But especially for those who suffer the most and are oppressed by life's precarious conditions and difficult situations. In both the poorest and the richest countries, there are so many weary people, worn out under the unbearable weight of neglect and indifference. Human indifference causes the needy so much pain! And worse, the indifference of Christians! On the fringes of society so many men and women are tried by indigence, but also by dissatisfaction with life and by frustration. So many are forced to emigrate from their homeland, risking their lives. Jesus also addresses this invitation even to those who have everything, but whose heart is empty and without God.

—Pope Francis

*How has Jesus once again been inviting me
to come to him this Advent?*

Jesus invites us to share his burden because he is **“meek and humble of heart,”** which means that he has a gentleness that arises from humility and expresses itself in kindness not violence toward others. He is a teacher who expects his disciples to be likewise.

Beneath Mary's Mantle

Zec 2:14-17 or Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab / Lk 1:26-38 or Lk 1:39-47

Our eyes turn spiritually towards the hill of Tepeyac, to the place where the Mother of God, under the title of “the ever-virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe” has been fervently honored for centuries as a sign of reconciliation and of God’s infinite goodness towards the world. At this time when so many families are separated or forced to emigrate, when so many are suffering due to war, poverty, corruption, domestic violence, drug trafficking, the crisis of values and increased crime, we come to Mary in search of consolation, strength and hope. She is the Mother of the true God, who invites us to stay with faith and charity beneath her mantle, so as to overcome in this way all evil and to establish a more just and fraternal society.

—Pope Benedict XVI

What might I do today to eliminate some evil in my household, workplace or neighborhood?

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 choice of her as the mother of the promised Messiah.

The Welcoming of Tradition

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

My wife and I sometimes wondered what would become of our dinner china after we are gone. In our increasingly casual culture, formal family dinners seem an endangered species. Advent is a season of rich traditions that preserve and enhance life's deepest meaning. One wonders what collective impoverishment of spirit we may suffer if advent wreaths, crèche displays, and sit-down Christmas dinners vanish from our homes. December is a time for celebrating family and welcoming beloved guests. As we host relatives and friends, we enhance and ennoble those relationships with the human touches that communicate divine grace. As we ready our homes for Emmanuel, God with us, formality and tradition provide outward manifestation to faith's inward hospitality: "Let every heart prepare him room."

—Jerry Welte

*What external touches in my life can
enhance internal preparedness for the Lord?*

Before it became a more technical theological term, a **redeemer** was one who rescued someone or something from a difficult situation. In particular, it described the one who paid for the release of a family member who had either been jailed or enslaved.

Saturday, December 14

St. John of the Cross,
Priest & Doctor of the Church

The Path to Restoration

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

Paranoia is a popular word that literally, (although, not technically) means to be out of your mind. To be paranoid is to have lost your way. There is another word, which has not yet entered popular speech, for the turning of the mind to the lost home: *metanoia*. The path of *metanoia* is a way of glory which leads us home. Paranoia (to be out of your mind) is that process by which the mind is unhinged and the personality splintered and fragmented. *Metanoia* (to turn the mind, to be right in your mind), which is usually translated in the New Testament as repentance, means the restoration of mind, the coming together of the shattered fragments of the self. It means a turning to God or conversion as the source and the power of life.

—Alan Jones
Journey into Christ

*How have I grown this year by better turning
my mind to God and God's ways?*

“Let us recognize our weakness, knowing we cannot stand for the twinkling of an eye except with the protection of grace, and let us reverently cling to and trust only in God.” —St. Julian of Norwich

Rejoice in the LORD!

Zep 3:14-18a / Phil 4:4-7 / Lk 3:10-18

Gaudete! Rejoice in the Lord always! That's the Entrance Antiphon for today's liturgy. The readings are of one accord: rejoice because God is near—even among us. Now, in the last days before Christmas, the spirit of the season can be contagious. Beyond the commercialism and the hassles of shopping, etc., people are wishing one another well—even if they avoid saying “Merry Christmas.” Today is a good day to soak in the spirit of the season and let it permeate our hearts. Let's let this season of gift-giving remind us how much we appreciate one another. Let's remember that deep down, everyone wants to give and receive love. Zephaniah says that as we do that, God will rejoice over us in gladness. How much more could we ask?

—Mary M. McGlone, CSJ

*What can I do today to let the spirit
of giving permeate and enlarge my heart?*

Today is called **Gaudete Sunday** (Latin: rejoice), so named from the opening Entrance Antiphon of the Mass “Gaudete in Domino semper” (Rejoice in the Lord always, Philippians 4:4). On this Sunday rose vestments are normally worn in the Eucharistic liturgy.

Let Your Joy Be Full

Nm 24:2-7, 15-17a / Mt 21:23-27

The first word that I wish to say to you: *joy!* Do not be men and women of sadness: a Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions, but from having encountered a Person: Jesus, in our midst. Our joy is born from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult moments, even when our life's journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable, and there are so many of them! We accompany, we follow Jesus, but above all we know that he accompanies us and carries us on his shoulders. This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world.

—Pope Francis

*How might I be more joyful and
share that with others today?*

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.

The Lord's Advent

Gn 49:2, 8-10 / Mt 1:1-17

O Lord, you are still in the process of your coming. Your appearance in the form of a slave was only the beginning of your coming, a beginning in which you chose to redeem people. From your incarnation to the end of this era is only an instant, even though millennia may elapse and, being blessed by you, pass on to become a small part of this instant. It is all only the one, single moment of your single act, which catches up our destiny into your own human life, and sweeps us along to our eternal home in the broad expanses of your divine life. There is only a single period left in this world: your Advent. When this last day comes to a close, then there will be no more time, but only you in your eternity.

—Karl Rahner, SJ
Encounters with Silence

*O Wisdom, help me understand and respond
to your transforming presence in me and my life.*

“O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the most high, reaching from one end to the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things. Come and teach us the way of prudence.”

—Liturgy of the Hours

Thirsting for God

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

The more I become aware of God's presence in my life, the more I thirst to know this Sacred One at an ever deeper and deeper level. Like a cup that seemingly has more and more room to be filled, so I feel that my capacity to be united with God keeps expanding. The more I know how loved I am by God (the more my cup is filled) the more I am always thirsting for more of God (seeing how much room the cup still has in it to receive). When I think about the spiritual life, I think of a life with God that is healthy and vibrant. This relationship feeds and nourishes my inner self and gives a vitality and vibrancy to all of my life.

—Joyce Rupp
The Cup of Our Life

*O Adonai, Lord, help me trust in you
who are now at work deeply within me.*

“O Adonai, and leader of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.”

—*Liturgy of the Hours*

Don't Be Afraid

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

Praying means being constantly ready to let go of your certainty and move on further than where you now are. To pray means to open your hands before God—slowly relaxing the tension which squeezes your hands together and accepting your existence with an increasing readiness, not as a possession to defend, but as a gift to receive. A first prayer is often a painful prayer because you discover you don't want to let go. When you want to pray, then, the first question is: How do I open my clenched hands? Certainly not by violence. Nor by a forced decision. Perhaps you can find your way to prayer by carefully listening to the angel's encouraging words to Zechariah, Mary, the shepherds, and women at the tomb: "Don't be afraid."

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
With Open Hands

*O Root of Jesse, strengthen my faith and hope
so that I can serve you and others better.*

"O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples, before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer. Come and deliver us, and delay no longer."

—Liturgy of the Hours

Saying “Yes” to God

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

Mary is our model of how to prepare for Christmas. Jesus, God’s Word, comes in the celebration of Christmas to knock once again at the heart of every Christian. Each of us is called to respond, like Mary, with a personal and sincere “yes,” placing oneself fully at the disposal of God and of God’s mercy and love. How many times has Jesus come into our lives, and how many times has he sent us an angel, and how many times have we not noticed because we are so taken, immersed in our own thoughts, in our own affairs and even, in these days, in our Christmas preparations, so as not to notice him who comes and knocks at the door of our hearts, asking for acceptance, asking for a “yes” like Mary’s?

—Pope Francis

*O Key of David, open my heart to say “yes”
to your presence within me and around me.*

“O Key of David and scepter of the house of Israel, you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open. Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”

—*Liturgy of the Hours*

Giving Jesus to Others

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

Like Mary, let us be full of zeal to go in haste to give Jesus to others. When Jesus entered her life, at that moment—so to speak—she made her first communion. Mary then hurried to go and serve Elizabeth. Like her, we too become full of grace every time we receive Holy Communion. So let us be full of zeal also to go in haste to give Jesus to others. We too have to begin by giving Jesus to the poor, the sick, the dying, the lepers, the unwanted and the unloved. By this we make Jesus present in the world today. People nowadays suffer much, but above all they are hungry not only for bread—but hungry for love, hungry for God.

—St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta
A Life for God

O Rising Sun, help me be attentive to the sufferings of others and do what I can to ease them.

“O Rising Sun, splendor of light eternal and sun of righteousness, come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”
—*Liturgy of the Hours*

Sharing Our Joy

Mi 5:1-4^a / Heb 10:5-10 / Lk 1:39-45

There are certain persons in our lives who, when we see them or hear their voices, make our hearts skip a beat with delight. They are the ones who can make us laugh when everything seems gray. They are the ones who have strong arms and soft hearts, who wrap us in a smothering bear hug that makes everything seem alright. They are the wise ones who have weathered many a storm and whose assurances that all will be well can be trusted absolutely. Such is the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth in today's Gospel. The moment Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, both her own heart and the babe in her womb leaped for joy. Mary undoubtedly felt the same.

—Barbara Reid, OP
Abiding Word

O King of the Nations, help me recognize and share all your generous blessings with others.

“O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one. Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.”
—*Liturgy of the Hours*

God Is with Us

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

Incarnation is the overcoming of the gap between God and everything visible and concrete. It is the synthesis of matter and spirit. Without incarnation, God remains separate from us and from creation. Because of incarnation, we can say, “God is with us!” In fact, God is in us, and in everything else that God created. We all have the divine DNA. Everything bears the divine fingerprint including, of course, the mystery of embodiment. The belief that God is “out there” is the basic dualism that is tearing us all apart. Our view of God as separate and distant has harmed our relationship to food, possessions, and money, to animals, nature and our own bodies. Jesus came precisely to put it all together for us and in us.

—Richard Rohr
Everything Belongs

*O Emmanuel, help us to respond to
your saving and transforming presence.*

“**O Emmanuel**, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Savior. Come and save us, O Lord our God.”
—Liturgy of the Hours

A Frazzled Christmas

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

How is it possible to bridge the gap between our sorry reality and the glad, grateful recognition of the Incarnation as the mainstay of our faith? If we are so exhausted and thoroughly frazzled by December 24, all is not lost. We are, in fact, in very good shape for Christmas. It is precisely because we are weary, and poor in spirit, that God can touch us with hope. This is not an easy truth. It means that we do accept our common lot, and take up our share of the cross, and do not gloss over the evils we confront every day. In a world as cold and cruel and unjust as it was at the time of Jesus' birth in a stable, we desire something better. And in desiring it, we come to believe that it is possible. We await its coming in hope.

—Kathleen Norris
“Christmas Eve Vigil” in *God with Us*

*What hope does Jesus' Incarnation
most inspire in me today?*

The custom of erecting a **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.

Christ Our Light

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

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

At Midnight Mass we listen to the words: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Is 9:1). The people—caught up in their activities and routines, amid their successes and failures, their worries and expectations, with all their joys and hopes, their disappointments and regrets—have seen a great light. In every age, the People of God are called to contemplate this light, a light for the nations meant to shine on every corner of our city, on our fellow citizens, on every part of our lives. One special quality of God’s people is their ability to see, to contemplate, even in “moments of darkness,” the light which Christ brings. God’s faithful people can see, discern and contemplate his living presence giving hope in the midst of life.

—Pope Francis

*In what important ways has God’s light
most illuminated my life this year?*

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 around AD 200.

In the Company of Martyrs

Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59 / Mt 10:17-22

The mind of the Church teems with the names of women and men who have acted differently, at risk, with power. They acted differently because they refused to accept dominant definitions of reality. The memory that is here given to the Church consists in the names of those who so trusted God that they were not seduced or bought off or compromised. The Church has a stock list of such names. We attend to them at Mass when we give thanks for prophets and apostles, saints and martyrs, the great company of those who enact and model and summon even us to resist seduction and compromise. The list needs to be updated to include unnoticed people who are not celebrated, but who stand for compassion and truth in the name of God.

—Walter Brueggemann
The Collected Sermons

*How might I speak and act more
for God's ways in my daily life?*

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands, no feet but yours; yours the eyes through which to look at Christ’s compassion to the world, yours the feet with which he is to go about doing good, and yours the hands with which he is to bless us now.”

—St. Teresa of Avila

Seeing Jesus Today

1 Jn 1:1-4 / Jn 20:1a, 2-8

We are the body of Christ when we open ourselves to the spirit of Jesus and continue what he began. Christ's body is one with embodied humanity. He referred to all humanity when he said that we will be judged on how we respond to those in need. When we attend to their bodily needs, when we give food, drink, clothing, care, compassion, empathy, shelter, we are doing these things for him. We tend to ignore those we consider "others" and focus instead on our own. Christ is telling us otherwise. The "other" is also, in our own times, an embodiment of Christ. Look into the face of the other—hungry, ill, lonely, depressed—and see the face of the spirit of Jesus incarnate once again.

—Miriam Therese Winter
Eucharist with a Small "e"

*Where and in whom has Jesus most surprised
me with his presence this year?*

In John's Gospel, **eternal life** is our future destiny—a permanent and undying existence in God's presence forever. It is qualitatively different from natural life for death cannot destroy it. It begins now in us by our association with Jesus and our participation in God's Holy Spirit.

Innocents Still Suffer Today

1 Jn 1:5—2:2 / Mt 2:13-18

Let us pray for those who suffer from famine or other disasters, from the ravages of war and the movement of populations; those who are the innocent victims of terrorism, whether political or not, of hatred, various forms of oppression, injustices of all kinds, those who are kidnapped, imprisoned illegally, tortured, condemned without recourse to justice; all those who suffer intolerable attacks on their human dignity and fundamental rights, who are prevented from expressing themselves freely and who are lured into corruption of all kinds. Let us pray, too, for those undergoing serious difficulties because of immigration, unemployment, sickness, infirmity or loneliness. Christ, the Son of Man, suffers in them.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How might I become more attentive to Christ
who is suffering in those around me?*

Although there is no historical evidence for this particular massacre in Bethlehem, **King Herod**, appointed “King of the Jews” by the Romans (37–4 BC), was known for his cruelty and when his rule was threatened he would certainly act quickly and ruthlessly to eliminate any possible rivals.

Treasuring A New Reality

1 Sm 1:20-22, 24-28 / 1 Jn 3:1-2, 21-24 / Lk 2:41-52

Mary, the Mother of Jesus knew she had, in her existence, something special, sacred and divine. She managed to respond to it through faith, fidelity and much love. She did not understand all of what was happening. In a sense, she did not need to understand because she was sure. Her faith was total. She “kept all these things in memory.” She “treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart.” And the salvation of the world spread out from that little home of that little village and transformed the universe and everything in it. This world in which we live, with all its imperfections and miseries, while remaining in a sense the same, has become a completely different world, precisely because we now have new eyes!

—Jean Maalouf

Jesus Laughed & Other Reflections on Being Human

*Like Mary, which of God's gifts do I
most “treasure and reflect on in my heart”?*

“Heavenly Father, you have given us the model of life in the holy family of Nazareth. Help us, O loving Father, to make our family another Nazareth where love, peace and joy reign. May we love one another as God loves each one of us, more and more each day.”

—St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Our Daily Advent Prayer

Let us open our hearts to receive
the grace of this Advent season,
which is Christ himself,
whom God our Father has revealed
to the entire world.

Where God is born, hope is born.
Where God is born, peace is born.

And where peace is born,
there is no longer room
for hatred and for war.

God alone can save us and free us
from the many forms of evil
and selfishness in our midst.

Let us welcome into our lives God's mercy,
which Jesus Christ has bestowed on us,
so that we in turn can show mercy
to our brothers and sisters.

In this way, we will make peace grow!

—*Pope Francis*