



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Advent (B)
December 6, 2020

Waiting Expectantly

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Most of us are not good at waiting. We want things right away and would rather arrive just on time than stand around uselessly. Few things are as annoying as waiting in a doctor's office, a government office, or being stuck in traffic.

Yet waiting can also be an exciting and busy time, like a bride and groom preparing for their wedding. There is no time to waste, since the date is approaching and there is so much to do in order for everything to be prepared perfectly. Advent waiting should be more like this expectant waiting.

John the Baptist was sent to point toward Christ and invite the people to their wedding with God. The divine spouse was coming back to his beloved and sent the groom ahead to let everyone know he was coming.

Thus, John preached preparation, conversion, and setting aside everything that would distract people from getting the heart ready for Jesus. Loving, active planning was as necessary for those who listened to John the Baptist as it is for us.

This means going up the mountain and into the desert. Set aside normal distractions and dedicate more time to think about Christ, preparing our hearts and minds for the big day of his arrival.

Advent isn't a nervous time of sitting around and hoping the line goes quickly. It is an active, engaged, and hopeful anticipation of one we eagerly await. +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Go up onto a high mountain,
Zion, herald of good news!

2 Peter 3:8-14

The Lord...is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Mark 1:1-8

"Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; / he will prepare your way."

John preached preparation, conversion, and setting aside everything that would distract people from getting ready for Jesus.

A Word from Pope Francis

How beautiful it is to think of ourselves as proclaimers of the resurrection of Jesus, not only in words, but also in our conduct and testimony of life! Jesus does not want disciples who are merely able to repeat memorized formulas. He wants witnesses: people who spread hope with their way of welcoming, smiling, and loving.

—General Audience, October 4, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What distractions am I setting aside to make this Advent special?
- How is this time of repentance, fasting, and almsgiving going?

Our Celestial Company

By Kathryn Gniadek

Although I was so little I cannot remember my exact age, I will never forget the picture in my bedroom of a fabulously huge-winged benevolent angel guarding a little boy and girl crossing a bridge. My mother told me this was a picture of my very own guardian angel, who watched over my brother and me as we played. I studied the details of the picture every night, and then I would gaze out my window into the starry sky and wonder if my angel would fly into my room for a visit. The Guardian Angel Prayer was in my heart and on my lips every night as a child:

*Angel of God, my guardian dear,
To whom God's love commits me here,
Ever this day be at my side,
To light and guard, rule and guide.*

People have seen angels in cloud formations and heard timely messages of love and support in a song, a television program, a sermon, or a conversation with a friend. When we consider angels in relation to our faith, it's crucial to understand that, as Catholics, we believe that angels are by nature all spirit and servants of the Most High on our behalf. Hebrews 1:14 says angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation."

Beside each believer, from the moment of conception until death, the watchful care and intercession of our angel is present to us. In God's infinite



wisdom and goodness, he has lovingly provided for us as we journey home to him. There are so many temptations and lies supplied by the evil one to ensnare us and destroy our souls. Yet, as St. Thomas said in his *Summa Theologica*, "The angels work together for the benefit of us all" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 350).

Angels are messengers of peace, love, and the will of God as well as the guardians of our souls. In my own life, the presence of my guardian angel is amplified in moments of grave struggle. After my best friend died, I was praying in church, feeling quite distraught over the unexpected loss. As I looked down, I saw a shiny dime on the floor near my pew. Since that moment, when I have

needed angelic comfort the most, I have found dimes everywhere—in the lint trap of my dryer, in the sink drain after doing the dishes, and in the soles of my sneakers as I prepared to lace up for a workout. In that instant I was assured that, always, my angel was "at my side, to light and guard, rule and guide." Finding a dime prompts me to acknowledge and welcome the presence of my guardian angel. When I do so, I always feel closer to the love of God. In those moments, the peace-filled, loving spirit of my guardian angel feels closer to me than my own breath.

Invoke the loving care and concern of your angel, and you will know you are truly loved and never alone. Your angel will guide you to the loving arms of our Creator and Lord, he who is above all things. As we journey toward heaven, we have blessed company. Moreover, when we take our last breaths, our guardian angel will be there to guide us safely to our Father's house. +

PRAYER

Lord, you are the compassion of God in the world. You never forget any of your people. Give me the courage to be the compassion of God for others.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 7–12

Monday, St. Ambrose:
Is 35:1–10 / Lk 5:17–26


Tuesday, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Gn 3:9–15, 20 / Eph 1:3–6, 11–12 / Lk 1:26–38

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Is 40:25–31 / Mt 11:28–30

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Is 41:13–20 / Mt 11:11–15

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Is 48:17–19 / Mt 11:16–19

Saturday, Our Lady of Guadalupe:
Zec 2:14–17 or Rv 11:19a; 12:1–6a, 10ab / Lk 1:26–38 or 1:39–47

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Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Advent (B)
December 13, 2020

John's Joyful Preaching

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Why go into the desert and cry out? The voice in the desert is lonesome, heard only by those who go there to listen. Let's leave our routines, go into the spiritual deserts of our hearts, and listen today.

The words of preparation John preaches are joyful. Why? First, to be told you are on the wrong path is good news. Have you ever followed your GPS to the wrong place because of an address typo? "It would have been nice to know this before I traveled across town to the wrong place," you thought.

Second, it is joyful to be told what makes your beloved happy, because you then know what will please him or her.

Good news! John's preaching points us to our destination in Jesus and to what makes him happy. The rose vestments worn by our priests today symbolize that joy. Notice in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco titled *Prophet Isaiah*, the prophet is wearing that color, too.

Another interesting detail is that Isaiah is holding his finger in the book while looking back at a young cherub, who in turn points to his neighbor. Isaiah's finger is in the Gospels, where he is the most quoted prophet of the Old Testament. Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, and John the Baptist quotes Isaiah's prophesy about "the voice crying out in the desert."

Perhaps the cherub behind Isaiah is John the Baptist. And perhaps the barely visible baby to whom the little John the Baptist is pointing represents Christ, the reason for our joy. +

A Word from Pope Francis

Anxieties, difficulties, and sufferings permeate our lives, and so many times the reality around us seems to be inhospitable and arid, like the desert....But the words of [John] the Baptist reveal that our joy rests on the certainty that this desert is inhabited: "Among you there is one whom you do not know."

—Angelus, Gaudete Sunday, December 17, 2017



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

I will rejoice heartily in the LORD,
my being exults in my God.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always.
Pray without ceasing.

John 1:6-8, 19-28

[John the Baptist said,] "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

*Let's leave our routines,
go into the spiritual
deserts of our hearts,
and listen today.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What makes you joyful? Would those same things make Jesus joyful, too?
- Do I point people toward the true source of joy with my words and example?

Celebrate the Incarnation

By Kathleen M. Basi

Soon after I met my husband, I began experiencing paralyzing anxiety. Was he or was he not the one God meant for me to marry? I was terrified of misinterpreting God's will, yet I was too afraid of hearing an unwelcome answer to ask for help. So, it went on for four years. Thankfully, once we were married, that particular fear resolved itself.

Nonetheless, to this day, severe anxiety still crops up occasionally. The trigger is always different—infertility, insomnia, professional concerns—but the symptoms are the same: my heart pounds, my brain fixates on *what-if* questions, and my chest tightens to the point that I find it difficult to even draw a deep breath. Anxiety consumes my thoughts and spoils the enjoyment of everyday life. And then...in the midst of this darkness, sometimes, I find relief in thinking: *by becoming human, Jesus sanctified even this plague of humankind.*

Sometimes we forget how relevant the celebration of the Incarnation is to our faith.

At this time of year, our senses are filled with the celebration of the Incarnation—God becoming a human being. Stories of stables, shepherds, and angels remind us that God is with us. Yet



sometimes, we forget just how relevant this tenet of faith really is.

When God took on human flesh, he accepted the whole works, including human imperfections. Jesus could have stayed up in heaven to hang out with the choirs of angels. Instead, he came down and got his hands dirty. He took on everything but sin, and for that reason, the entire human experience has been made holy—even the difficult parts.

It's in the Garden of Gethsemane that I see this most clearly. Jesus' prayer rings so true: *Please don't make me go through this. You know I want to do your will, God—but is this really it?* To be fully human is to know uncertainty and feelings of abandonment. It's a

lonely place to inhabit, and seemingly reassuring Scripture can sometimes have the opposite effect. Philippians 4:6–7 says, “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Such passages as these can actually feed the *what-if* questions: What if I'm mired in this darkness because my faith isn't strong enough to lift me above it?

We're not alone, though. Jesus experienced terror and uncertainty, too. He walked a similar path of darkness right to the cross. And because he did, there's light in times of darkness—right here, right in the middle of the mire. And while knowing that doesn't take away my anxiety, it does help me get through it. +

PRAYER

Lord, you are the source of my strength, peace, and joy. Send your Spirit to renew my trust and hope in you and give me peace.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 14–19

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Nm 24:2–7, 15–17a / Mt 21:23–27


Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Zep 3:1–2, 9–13 / Mt 21:28–32

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Is 45:6c–8, 18, 21c–25 / Lk 7:18b–23

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Gn 49:2, 8–10 / Mt 1:1–17

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Jer 23:5–8 / Mt 1:18–25

Saturday, Advent Weekday:
Jgs 13:2–7, 24–25a / Lk 1:5–25

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Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Advent (B)
December 20, 2020

Extreme Makeover: Home Edition

By Fr. Mark Haydu

King David wants to build God a home! He had first built his own palace and afterward realized that he hadn't built a space for God—a place of worship and family communion.

It is admirable that David wants to give back, but do we have to take care of God or, rather, is it God who cares for us? Obviously, God doesn't need David to build him a house. The whole world is his. Didn't God build up David all along, bringing him to a place where he might consider offering God something in return? It is like children who want to

give their parents a gift. First, they ask a parent for money or a gift idea. On their own, they cannot give.

God turns the tables on David, saying God will build David a house—an everlasting lineage to rule over the people. God will build something much bigger than anything David had ever dreamt of. He will build David a kingdom that will become a nation and give birth to a worldwide universal Church.

In the painting, *The Annunciation with City by the Sea* by Marco Palmezzano, Mary stands in front of an ornate house. She stands like us, at the entrance, welcoming God's coming. It was her yes that allowed the master builder to enter into our world to begin building this house, which became a Church.

Like Mary, we await Jesus. With her, let us say yes to him, celebrating the one who has established that house where we celebrate today!

***God turns the tables,
saying God will build
David a house—
an everlasting lineage
to rule over the people.***

Sunday Readings

2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16

The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you.

Romans 16:25–27

Now to him who can strengthen you... through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever.

Luke 1:26–38

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

A Word from Pope Francis

The angel Gabriel calls Mary "full of grace": in her there is no room for sin, because God chose her from eternity to be the mother of Jesus and preserved her from original sin... We too are asked to listen to God who speaks to us, and to accept his will... The Lord is always speaking to us!

—Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Is giving myself to God in prayer a way to let him accomplish his dreams for me?
- How can I offer hospitality to others so they can encounter God's love?

An Exhibit of Wonder and Love

By Johan van Parys

Growing up I attended midnight Mass on Christmas with my family. I insisted on arriving early because I didn't want to miss the moment before the beginning of the Mass when the sacristan carried the Baby Jesus into the church and placed him in the manger. He was an elderly man who had worked for the church his entire life. He walked with great difficulty and could barely make it down the steps of the sanctuary. Yet, he held the plaster image of Jesus in his arms with such tenderness and reverence he might as well have been carrying a real baby. He knew this image represented the Savior of the world.

As a teenager, I quickly lost interest in the Baby Jesus. I was too *cool* to fuss about any baby, let alone a plaster one. As a student at Notre Dame, I thought it theologically unsophisticated to pay much attention to Christmas beyond the reality of the Incarnation celebrated on that day. I had little patience for the obsession of people for Christmas trees and Nativity scenes. I wondered if they really understood the meaning of Christmas.

But my outlook on Christmas completely changed when I was given a small Nativity set from Burkina Faso, a country in West Africa. It was carved in local wood by a Christian villager. Although the figures were rather primitive, one could clearly see that the artist had carved the Holy Family in the



image of the people of his village. I loved it so much that this first Nativity set became the start of a large collection of Nativities from all around the world, all of which are in the image of the people who created them.

Each year, I carefully unwrap close to 400 Nativity sets. I do this deliberately, thinking of the people who carved each set in his or her own image. As I gently place the Baby Jesus in the manger, set after set, I also think of the old man in my home church from so many years ago and the woman in our church today who carries the Baby Jesus to the Nativity scene with such love and reverence.

In a simple yet poignant way, these many Nativity sets with their varied

features and skin tones and the way we treat them underline the essence of the Incarnation. The artist and beholder alike know that, though very different from us, Jesus became like all of us. Through Jesus, no matter who we are, we are all able to encounter God in a real and tangible way. The Nativity scenes and the rituals around them symbolize and affirm this wondrous reality.

Nativity scenes help symbolize the reality that, through Jesus, we're able to encounter God in a tangible way.

Indeed, this encounter with God in Jesus Christ is not a mere theological exercise or pietistic drivel. Rather, it's a great reality. We celebrate that he took on our image and became like us so we might take on his image and become like him. +

PRAYER

Lord, you have called us to be your instruments of peace and reconciliation in the world. Give me the courage to make peace with those who have hurt me and caused me pain.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 21–26

Monday, Advent Weekday: Sg 2:8–14
or Zep 3:14–18a / Lk 1:39–45


Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
1 Sm 1:24–28 / Lk 1:46–56

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Mal 3:1–4, 23–24 / Lk 1:57–66

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
2 Sm 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16 / Lk 1:67–79

Friday, Christmas: Is 52:7–10 /
Heb 1:1–6 / Jn 1:1–18 or Jn 1:1–5, 9–14

Saturday, St. Stephen:
Acts 6:8–10, 7:54–59 / Mt 10:17–22

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Bringing Home the Word

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (B)

December 27, 2020

Family Peace

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

In his painting, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* by Federico Flori, the artist captures details of the Holy Family's escape. Although they are refugees in a dramatic, stressful situation, he chooses to show the delightful communion among them. Mary sits comfortably in the center of the family, busily collecting water. Perhaps she will wash the cherries or the toddler's dirty hands. Her face, full of serenity and joy, is lost in thoughts that go beyond the work of the present. She is the model of so many mothers who, in spite of challenging

circumstances, focus their energy on loving their children and creating an oasis of peace.

Saint Joseph stands behind the Madonna and reaches up into the tree to pull off a branch for the child Jesus. His strong arm and hand extend straight down toward the child as they both grasp the wood from opposite ends—one giving and the other receiving. This simple domestic gesture of providing for the son is strongly symbolic of what so many husbands and fathers do on a daily basis. Alongside their wives, they care for their families with hard work.

Jesus is next to Mary and reaches out to Joseph. He receives love from both parents while returning that love with joy and gratitude.

The Holy Family reflects the divine family. One day the heavenly Father will also extend a piece of fruit—this time the bitter passion and the wood of the cross. Although it costs his human nature, Jesus accepts it, thanks in part to the strength he finds in Mary. +

*In spite of challenges,
mothers focus their energy
on their children and
creating an oasis of peace.*

A Word from Pope Francis

Instead of returning home with his family, he stayed in Jerusalem, in the Temple, causing great distress to Mary and Joseph who were unable to find him....

Returning home, Jesus surely remained close to them, as a sign of his complete affection and obedience. Moments like these become part of the pilgrimage of each family.

—Feast of the Holy Family,
December 27, 2015



Sunday Readings

**Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14 or
Genesis 15:1–6; 21:1–3**

Those who honor their father will have joy in their own children, / and when they pray they are heard.

**Colossians 3:12–21 or
Colossians 3:12–17 or
Hebrews 11:8, 11–12, 17–19**

And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

**Luke 2:22–40 or
Luke 2:22, 39–40**

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Does my family know how to gracefully encounter trying times?
- What attitudes allowed the Holy Family to have peace amidst the crosses?

We Can Save Each Other

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSSR

There is something peculiar about the birth of Jesus, our Savior. God becomes small, a tiny infant-God. Think about it for a moment. Who really needs to be saved?

The kind innkeeper saves Jesus from being born in the street by providing a stall, straw, and a crib. The angels save him from the silence of night and lull him to sleep singing songs of “joy to the world.” The animals breathe warmth over the newborn Jesus, saving him from the cold. The star shines brightly overhead, saving Jesus from the darkness. Mary saves him from hunger. The kings come from afar to share their gifts, saving Jesus from the pain of need and poverty. An angel comes to Joseph in a dream, saving the Baby Jesus from jealous Herod’s wrath.

Jesus uses small things to make a big point.

Of all of the figures in the story, the only one who is helpless, vulnerable, frail, and in need of saving is Jesus. What’s peculiar about the birth of our Lord is that we are given a Savior who needs to be saved! Everyone comes to his rescue, giving him what he needs.

Jesus always uses small things to make a big point—salt, a coin, a mustard seed, yeast, a lamp, wineskins, and a splinter—all small and seemingly insignificant



until Jesus wraps them up in a parable and delivers them as the centerpiece of a big message. God becomes small to make a big point. God gives us a Savior who needs to be saved to teach us what salvation means.

I remember standing in line at a corner store in East Harlem waiting to buy milk. A rough-looking teenager came up to me and said, “Pastor, my mother says, ‘Never buy milk here. It’s always spoiled.’” I looked and, sure enough, the milk was past the expiration date. The young man saved me from spoiled milk and a return trip. Salvation can mean so many things. The parish food pantry...you saved me! A ride to

the doctor...you saved me! A few dollars when I was short...you’re my salvation! We’ve all been there. I’ll bet you’ve said it to someone who has been there for you in your time of need: “You’re my only hope. You’re my salvation. You saved me!”

And it’s Jesus, tiny and frail in the manger, showing us how we can be salvation for each other. Our Savior is born needing to be saved, and in doing so, teaches us that we can be “salvation” for each other. +

PRAYER

Lord, Mary and Joseph helped you to grow in love and wisdom. Surround me with loving and caring people to help me to be a wise, loving, and caring person.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 28–
January 2

Monday, Holy Innocents:
1 Jn 1:5—2:2 / Mt 2:13–18


Tuesday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 2:3–11 / Lk 2:22–35

Wednesday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 2:12–17 / Lk 2:36–40

Thursday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 2:18–21 / Jn 1:1–18

Friday, Solemnity of Mary:
Nm 6:22–27 / Gal 4:4–7 / Lk 2:16–21

Saturday, Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen: 1 Jn 2:22–28 / Jn 1:19–28

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