

Sunday Everyday

Preparing for the Four Sundays of Advent



Reflections Written by

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Author's Note and Introduction

For a few years now I have created at least one free Advent journal. These journals have been such a joy to write each year. Advent happens to be one of my favorite liturgical seasons, with O Come Emmanuel as one of my top 5 liturgical songs. Advent is a rich tapestry of images, themes, color, symbols and metaphors. Each reading is full of anticipation and fulfillment.

For this year's journal, I chose to focus on these common symbols, to dig deeper into them. Why is Jerusalem significant? Who is David? Aren't deserts a Lent thing? And more. There are also reflection questions included in this section.

Each week also includes a reflection on an aspect of Jesus that is highlighted within that week's readings.

It is my hope that this journal helps you walk through Advent in a more intentional way. I also hope that it enlivens the Sunday readings so that they can be at the forefront of your mind throughout the week. May God bless you this Advent season.

How to Use This Journal

The point of this journal is to help you enter more deeply into the Sunday readings for the four Sundays of Advent. Each week begins on Monday, looking forward to the following Sunday. This means your journal actually starts the Monday before Advent begins. So., you'll want to mark your calendar, make a reminder on your phone or a post-it note a work to start this journal on **Monday, November 25, 2019**.

Each day there is space for notes, reflections or questions you have about the reading as well as space for any reactions or inspiration you have after spending time with the reading. How is God speaking o you through this passage? What did you learn about, or what confused you? What do you want to remember at the end of the week going into Sunday Mass?

The journal is laid out as follows:

Monday: Read and reflect on the First Reading

Tuesday: Read and reflect on the Responsorial Psalm

Wednesday: Read and reflect on the Second Reading

Thursday: Read and reflect on the Gospel

Friday: Key Themes and Images and Reflection Questions

Saturday: Going Forward with Christ

Sunday: Space for additional journaling and homily notes that enhance your understanding of the readings.

First Sunday of Advent

First Reading

Monday

Isaiah 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz,
saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
In days to come,
the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest
mountain
and raised above the hills.
All nations shall stream toward it;
many peoples shall come and say:
"Come, let us climb the LORD's
mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths."

For from Zion shall go forth
instruction,
and the word of the LORD from
Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and impose terms on many peoples.
They shall beat their swords into
plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
one nation shall not raise the sword
against another,
nor shall they train for war again.
O house of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Notes	Reflect and Pray
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Responsorial Psalm

Tuesday

Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me,
"We will go up to the house of the LORD."

And now we have set foot
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Jerusalem, built as a city
with compact unity.

To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

In it are set up judgment seats,
seats for the house of David.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
May those who love you prosper!
May peace be within your walls,
prosperity in your buildings.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Because of my brothers and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you!"
Because of the house of the LORD,
our God,

I will pray for your good.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Second Reading

Wednesday

Romans 13:11-14

Brothers and sisters:

You know the time;

it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep.

For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed;

the night is advanced, the day is at hand.

Let us then throw off the works of darkness

and put on the armor of light;

let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day,

not in orgies and drunkenness,

not in promiscuity and lust,

not in rivalry and jealousy.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Gospel

Thursday

Matthew 24:37-44

Jesus said to his disciples:

"As it was in the days of Noah,
so it will be at the coming of the Son
of Man.

In those days before the flood,
they were eating and drinking,
marrying and giving in marriage,
up to the day that Noah entered the
ark.

They did not know until the flood
came and carried them all away.
So will it be also at the coming of the
Son of Man.

Two men will be out in the field;
one will be taken, and one will be left.
Two women will be grinding at the
mill;

one will be taken, and one will be left.
Therefore, stay awake!

For you do not know on which day
your Lord will come.

Be sure of this: if the master of the
house

had known the hour of night when the
thief was coming,

he would have stayed awake
and not let his house be broken into.

So too, you also must be prepared,
for at an hour you do not expect, the
Son of Man will come."

Notes

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Reflect and Pray

Key Words and Themes

Friday

Mountain

Mountains stand out as a key locations for many religions. A mountain, this incredibly vast and almost mystical place, stands as a mid-way point between the earth and the sky. There, at the summit, one can sit in complete silence and commune with God. In the Old Testament, it is in the mountains that Moses encounters the burning bush. God descends in a cloud at the top of Mt. Sinai to give Moses the 10 Commandments. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches the Beatitudes from a mountainside and is transfigured on a mountaintop.

In the first reading, Isaiah depicts the Kingdom of God as a mountain which all the nations will stream to. The highest place, the holiest place.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the critical location for the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Israelites are always trying to get to, live in or return to Jerusalem. In the New Testament, Jerusalem is the center of all religious life and where the drama of the Passion of Jesus unfolds.

Another name for Jerusalem is Zion, as said in the First Reading. Often in literature surrounding the Old Testament, these two terms are almost but not exactly interchangeable. Zion refers to the interior life of the people of Jerusalem. Zion will receive the instruction, internalize it and then from the gates of Jerusalem the rest of the world will hear of God's Word. Jerusalem is the focal point but Zion is the message.

Awake

In the Gospel, Jesus exhorts His followers to stay awake. Jesus doesn't mean we can never sleep. Rather, He is talking about a spiritual alertness. How can we be spiritually alert? Persistent prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, striving to be steeped in the Word and deepening our relationship with Jesus are all ways to stay on top of our

spiritual game. This type of life takes practice. It will not all fall into place overnight. But we should feel an urgency to acquire it, as Jesus emphasizes. We do not know the day or the hour of His return. If we aren't ready now, we had better get moving.

To Ponder:

- Where is my mountaintop place? Where can I go to be near God in silence and stillness? If I don't have a place, can I commit to finding one?
- What is one thing I can do to increase my spiritual awareness this Advent?

Going Forward with Christ

Saturday

Jesus the Way

Jesus has many titles and honorifics. He is the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace. He is the Christ, the Son of God. He is Mary's Son, our Savior and Redeemer.

Our readings this week emphasize Jesus, the Way. In John 14:6, Jesus tells His apostles, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In the First Reading and the Psalm, the peoples of the world are moving toward the house, or mountain, of the Lord. They are walking along a path which leads to our Father in heaven. Jesus is this path.

By encountering Jesus, our lives begin to orient themselves toward God. The more we walk along the path, the firmer our gaze fixes on that mountain top. We encounter and encourage others on a similar journey.

But, this walk isn't always easy. We often become tired, complacent or get distracted. We stumble and sin. We even stray from the path. But Jesus, the Way, is always waiting for us to turn back to Him. In fact, He will stretch out to us, gently guiding us back to the way forward.

During Advent, Jesus invites us to check our feet. Are they following along His sure path toward heaven? Are they near the path, but sometimes struggling to find our footing?

Take some time to reflect on this Advent season. What is one spiritual practice you can explore that will help you grow in your journey with Christ?

Life with Christ is a wonderful adventure

St. John Paul II

Second Sunday
of Advent

First Reading

Monday

Isaiah 11:1-10

On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist,

and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea. On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Responsorial Psalm

Tuesday

Psalm 72: 1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

R. (cf. 7) **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
he shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.

May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

May his name be blessed forever;
as long as the sun his name shall remain.

In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed;
all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.

R. **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Second Reading

Wednesday

Romans 15:4-9

Brothers and sisters:

Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.

For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written:

Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Gospel

Thursday

Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:

A voice of one crying out in the desert,

*Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.*

John wore clothing made of camel's hair

and had a leather belt around his waist.

His food was locusts and wild honey.

At that time Jerusalem, all Judea,

and the whole region around the

Jordan

were going out to him

and were being baptized by him in the

Jordan River

as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees

coming to his baptism, he said to

them, "You brood of vipers!

Who warned you to flee from the

coming wrath?

Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.

And do not presume to say to yourselves,

'We have Abraham as our father.'

For I tell you,

God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees.

Therefore every tree that does not

bear good fruit

will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

I am baptizing you with water, for repentance,

but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I.

I am not worthy to carry his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fan is in his hand.

He will clear his threshing floor

and gather his wheat into his barn,

but the chaff he will burn with

unquenchable fire."

Notes

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Reflect and Pray

Key Images and Themes

Friday

Jesse Tree

The Jesse Tree is a popular symbol for Advent. Many families have one which they use as a kind of calendar to help track the days until Christmas. Jesse Trees were used in Medieval Times to help tell the story of salvation. Beginning with our first parents, the Jesse Tree travels through the key moments in the Old Testament – Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, David, etc. The “trees” could be branches brought in from outdoors, but were often woven in tapestries or even used in stained glass windows. These works of art, with their bright colors and captivating images, were used as teaching tools.

In the First Reading, Isaiah prophesies that “a shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse.” Jesse is a figure all Israelites would have been familiar with. He is the father of King David. David is the paragon leader. Under his leadership the kingdom flourished, expanded even. The people were in right relationship with God. All was well. After David, things started to go downhill during the reign of his son, Solomon. The kingdom eventually split and was overtaken by others.

Isaiah’s prophecy pointed the people toward a new Anointed One, the Messiah, from the same line as David. Justice and peace will come forth from this Anointed One. Even the Gentiles will seek out this one from the Lord. Jesus is this Anointed One, the Messiah.

Desert

The Desert is often closely associated with the liturgical season of Lent. In the Gospel for this week we hear about John the Baptist announcing the coming of the Messiah. He isn’t in the city, or even a village. He didn’t go to Jerusalem, the religious center for the Jewish people. Instead, John heads to the desert.

The desert is a place of extremes. Extreme heat, extreme thirst, extreme silence, extreme simplicity. It is a place that strips you down and forces you to discover who you are at your core. “What matters most?” is a question the desert can help you answer.

While we all can’t escape to the actual desert, we can carve out one during our Advent journey. A quiet place, one with minimal distractions. Advent can be a time of letting go and simplifying our life. Just like John did as he prepared the people for Christ.

Fruit

Fruit is so often used as a metaphor. People talk about the fruits of their labor, or the apple never falling far from the tree. When life gives you lemons, make lemonade. Life can be peachy or a bowl of sour grapes. In our Gospel, John challenges the Pharisees and Sadducees to “produce good fruit.” What kind of fruit is John looking for?

John is pushing the religious leaders of the time. He wants he people to see that it is not enough to come from a good tradition. Each person is also responsible for their actions. Each of us is called to repentance, to make steady albeit often slow progress back to our Creator.

Fruit also indicates flourishing, another key word from our readings this week. Flourishing is more than simply growing. Flourishing is thriving. A tree can grow, even produce flowers. But unless the tree is flourishing those buds will fall away to nothing. As Christians we are called to growth, yes, but to fullness and flourishing. We should be producing fruits like love, joy, kindness, patience, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. John challenges us to bear them well.

To Ponder:

- Have I found time this Advent to sit in stillness and silence? What is holding me back from such an experience?
- What are one or two ways I can simply this week so I can better hear God's Will?
- Of the fruits listed, which one will I focus on cultivating this week so it can begin to flourish in my daily life?

Going Forward with Christ

Saturday

Jesus the Farmer

Jesus the Farmer is not the most common image of Jesus used by theologians or artists. Typically, God the Father is the good and gracious Gardener. God the Father is closely associated with the work of Creation so this image makes sense. However, John the Baptist seems to imply that it is the Son who also plays a part.

It is the Son who comes through the field with the winnowing fan. While a familiar scene for a First Century Jew, winnowing fans are not commonplace today. In Jesus' time, a winnowing fan was similar to a pitchfork. The farmer would thrust the fan into a pile of wheat that had been cut but was still needed the grain to be separated from the chaff. The chaff was the stalks, hulls and other pieces of the plant. One definition of chaff is, "worthless things, trash" (dictionary.com. Accessed 01 November 2019). Then, holding the winnowing fan high, the farmer shakes it to encourage the heavier grain to fall while the lighter chaff blows away in the wind.

We can read this message of John through the lens of both Jesus' first appearance in the world and when He returns at the end of time. When Jesus first walked the earth, He certainly picked things up, tossed them around and re-ordered the way we are meant to live. Jesus opened the eyes of His followers to His law of love above all else. By His willing sacrifice, death no longer holds power over creation.

When Jesus comes again, this world will pass away. Sin will finally be abolished and we will rediscover the perfect harmony we were destined to have between our body and soul. The chaff will be blown away, or as John foretells, gathered and burned into nothingness.

What chaff do we need to let go of in our life? What needs to be shaken off so that the true substance and purpose of life is revealed?

In the twilight of life, God will not judge us on our earthly possessions or human successes, but rather on how much we have loved.

St. John of the Cross

Third Sunday
of Advent

First Reading

Monday

Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

The desert and the parched land will exult;
the steppe will rejoice and bloom.
They will bloom with abundant flowers,
and rejoice with joyful song.

The glory of Lebanon will be given to them,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the LORD,
the splendor of our God.
Strengthen the hands that are feeble,
make firm the knees that are weak,
say to those whose hearts are frightened:

Be strong, fear not!
Here is your God,
he comes with vindication;
with divine recompense
he comes to save you.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,
the ears of the deaf be cleared;
then will the lame leap like a stag,
then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Those whom the LORD has ransomed
will return
and enter Zion singing,
crowned with everlasting joy;
they will meet with joy and gladness,
sorrow and mourning will flee.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Responsorial Psalm

Tuesday

Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

R. (cf. Is 35:4) **Lord, come and save us.**

or: R. **Alleluia.**

The LORD God keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets captives free.

R. **Lord, come and save us.**

or: R. **Alleluia.**

The LORD gives sight to the blind;
the LORD raises up those who were bowed down.

The LORD loves the just;
the LORD protects strangers.

R. **Lord, come and save us.**

or: R. **Alleluia.**

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The LORD shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations.

R. **Lord, come and save us.**

or: R. **Alleluia.**

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Second Reading

Wednesday

James 5:7-10

Be patient, brothers and sisters,
until the coming of the Lord.
See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth,
being patient with it
until it receives the early and the late rains.
You too must be patient.
Make your hearts firm,
because the coming of the Lord is at hand.
Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another,
that you may not be judged.
Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates.
Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters,
the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Gospel Thursday

Matthew 11:2-11

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John,

"What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you. Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Key Images and Themes

Friday

Impossible things

The readings for this week are full of a repeated theme of miraculous happens as a sign of God's presence. When the blind see, when the lame walk, when the deaf hear – these are indicators of God's movement in the world. In Isaiah, the people were looking for God to save them from their exile in Babylon. They were hoping for a warrior king, a second David. This savior would lead the people home and return them to a place of high status among the nations as the People of God.

Jesus pulls this Isaiah passage to the present time when John's followers ask if He is the Messiah. Jesus points to the miracles He has worked, what further proof do they need?

Margins

Jesus' concern and care during His time on earth was primarily focused on those living in the margins of society. He spoke to anyone who would listen, but He went out of His way to interact with the poor, the sick and the outcasts of acceptable society.

In Jesus' time, a person born deaf or blind was believed to be an indication of some sin on the part of their parents. If some calamity befell you like leprosy, clearly it was God's way of punishing you. This makes Jesus' interaction with these social outcasts something we should pay extra close attention to.

Jesus first and foremost affirms each person's dignity as a human being, a child of God. Their deformity or disability does not detract from their personhood. Then, Jesus heals them. This not only restores or fixes whatever was amiss, it also provides them the ability to rejoin society as a full, participating member. Jesus deliberately pulls people back who have been pushed aside. It wasn't enough to visit them or commiserate with them. Jesus radically restores them to their community.

To Ponder:

- Do you believe in a God who can make the seemingly impossible possible? Take some time to re-read the First Reading and Gospel for this week and ask God to open your eyes to His miracles in your life.
- Who is living in the margins of your life? What is something concrete you can do to include them more fully, especially during this holiday season?
- When was the last time you participated in an act of service? While this is often a busy time of year, it is also one full of opportunities to help others.

Going Forward with Christ

Saturday

Jesus the Sign

So often in life, we wish we had a sign. Which choice should I make? What am I supposed to do in this situation? Why is this happening to my friend? We look up to the heavens and beg in some form or fashion for a sign to explain what's going on or which way to go. It sounds so wonderful. If only we realized the sign was already there, waiting for us to see it.

John the Baptist was also looking for a sign. He had been imprisoned and heard the rumors about Jesus. Could this man, his cousin, be the Messiah? At the time, the Jewish people were governed by Rome. They lived in their homeland but their land did not belong to them. They were hoping and praying for a new David, someone who would restore the kingdom of Israel.

In our Old Testament reading, Isaiah clearly prophesies what will happen when the Messiah appears. Jesus fulfills all the prophecies, yet still the people are unsure. He does not fit the expected mold. Jesus is the sign of God's working in our world. He is the sign of the invisible made visible. Jesus is the sign that no matter what has happened in the past, the present moment is full of opportunity for love, grace and joy.

What expectations do we place on God? What restrictions do we try to enforce on His working in our life? Who are we to try to limit God, or to instruct Him on how to best perform signs and wonders in our lives?

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he is good. He’s the king, I tell you.”

CS Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*

Fourth Sunday
of Advent

First Reading

Monday

Isaiah 7:10-14

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying:

Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God;

let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky!

But Ahaz answered,

"I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!"

Then Isaiah said:

Listen, O house of David!

Is it not enough for you to weary people,

must you also weary my God?

Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign:

the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,

and shall name him Emmanuel.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Responsorial Psalm

Tuesday

Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

R. (7c and 10b) **Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.**

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness;
the world and those who dwell in it.

For he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

R. **Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.**

Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD?
or who may stand in his holy place?

One whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean,
who desires not what is vain.

R. **Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.**

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD,
a reward from God his savior.

Such is the race that seeks for him,
that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

R. **Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.**

Notes	Reflect and Pray
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Second Reading

Wednesday

Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus,
called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God,
which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,
the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh,
but established as Son of God in power
according to the Spirit of holiness
through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Through him we have received the grace of apostleship,
to bring about the obedience of faith,
for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles,
among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ;
to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy.
Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	

Gospel

Thursday

Matthew 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.
When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,
but before they lived together,
she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.
Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,
yet unwilling to expose her to shame,
decided to divorce her quietly.
Such was his intention when, behold,
the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,
"Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.
For it is through the Holy Spirit
that this child has been conceived in her.
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins."
All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means "God is with us."
When Joseph awoke,
he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him
and took his wife into his home.

Notes

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Reflect and Pray

Key Images and Themes

Friday

Emmanuel

The key word in a the classic Advent song, “O Come, Emmanuel,” our Gospel explains that *Emmanuel* means “God with us.” At first glance, this might not grip you as it ought. Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites celebrated God’s presence with them in the Ark of the Covenant and in the temple in Jerusalem. God was with His people through His prophets and judges.

By calling Jesus *Emmanuel*, the angel is declaring to Mary and Joseph that something radical is about to take place. God is not just *with* the people in a spiritual way. Rather, God is now *one of* the people in the person of Jesus.

Virgin

In Isaiah’s prophecy to Ahaz, a virgin will conceive and bear a son and that son shall be the Emmanuel. In Matthew’s Gospel, this prophecy is fulfilled through the announcement of the angel and Mary’s willing participation in the mystery. But why such an emphasis on virginity?

Paternity was a critical element of First Century Judaism. Who your father was placed directly correlated to what your future job would be, who you were eligible to marry and what social standing you could attain. Certain opportunities would be opened or closed to you, depending on who your father was. To emphasize Mary’s virginity highlights the fact that Joseph was not Jesus’ father.

With virginity comes a certain emphasis on purity. The fact that Mary was a virgin before Jesus was born and remained a virgin after he was born highlights her unique status among humans. Mary was born without Original Sin. She was the singularly perfect vessel in which the God-Man, Jesus, could enter the world. Mary is the living tabernacle.

King of Glory

Jesus is King. He is, as the Psalm proclaims, the King of Glory. When a king returned victorious from battle, the gates of the city would be thrown open to receive him. This Psalm is offered almost as the reverse side of coin. When Jesus entered the world, He was not greeted with gates thrown open, trumpets blaring and crowds of people pressing in to witness the seismic event. Rather, He came into the world through a humble virgin girl in a forgotten place with only shepherds as visitors.

To Ponder:

- When you receive the Eucharist, are you aware of Jesus' physical presence within the Bread and Wine? The Eucharist is not a mere symbol of Christ, but His actual Body and Blood. Emmanuel is still among us today.
- Mary physically carried Jesus within her womb. We too have the incredible privilege of bringing Jesus, our living Lord, into our own bodies. When we receive the Eucharist we become tabernacles of Jesus' presence. When you walk out of Mass you are quite literally carrying Jesus back with you. Spend some time thinking about this gift that Jesus gives to you each Mass.
- St. Teresa of Avila often referred to God as "your Majesty" in her writings. She is absolutely correct in saying this. Is Jesus your King? The next time you are in a church, consider addressing Jesus as Majesty when you genuflect.

Going Forward with Jesus Saturday

Jesus the Christ, the Lord

In order to understand the radical nature of what St. Paul is saying, a little etymology is necessary. “Lord” from the Greek word *Kyrios*. Lord, in the Old Testament, is the name used to replace the unutterable name God gave to Moses in the burning bush. For Jesus to claim this title as His own was unmistakable blasphemy in the eyes of the religious elite.

At the time of Jesus, a common secular phrase was *Caesar Kyrios* – Caesar is Lord! According to the Roman religious sensibilities, Caesar was at the level of the gods. When St. Paul and other Christians began using the title for Jesus, it is not so unimaginable that others would take offense. This was a radically subversive political statement. Jesus is asserting that He is God, both in the Jewish sense and the Roman sense.

“Christ” is the English translation of *Messiah*, which also means “the Anointed One.” Recall, the Jewish people were hoping for a Messiah, a new David. By this time, the people had some specific expectations from the Messiah. The Messiah was to gather all the people back together. He was to reclaim Jerusalem and establish his kingdom there. He would be a miracle worker and the Spirit of the Lord would be upon him. As Christians, we can look back on Jesus and see how He fulfilled each of these expectations.

Jesus preached to Jews and Gentiles alike. No one was outside of his notice. Jesus established His kingdom on earth, a kingdom not bound to one physical location but encompassing the whole universe. Jesus not only healed, he restored people to right relationship with their community and with their God. Jesus, the King of Glory.

His Majesty couldn't grant us a greater favor than to give us a life that would be an imitation of the life his beloved Son lived.

St. Teresa of Avila

Christmas Day

First Reading

Monday

Isaiah 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings glad tidings,
announcing peace, bearing good news,
announcing salvation, and saying to Zion,
"Your God is King!"

Hark! Your sentinels raise a cry,
together they shout for joy,
for they see directly, before their eyes,
the LORD restoring Zion.

Break out together in song,
O ruins of Jerusalem!

For the LORD comforts his people,
he redeems Jerusalem.

The LORD has bared his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations;
all the ends of the earth will behold
the salvation of our God.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
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Responsorial Psalm

Monday

Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6

R. (3c) **All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.**

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
his right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

R. **All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.**

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

R. **All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.**

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
break into song; sing praise.

R. **All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.**

Sing praise to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and melodious song.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
sing joyfully before the King, the LORD.

R. **All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.**

Notes	Reflect and Pray
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Second Reading Monday

Hebrews 1:1-6

Brothers and sisters:

In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways
to our ancestors through the prophets;
in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son,
whom he made heir of all things
and through whom he created the universe,
who is the refulgence of his glory,
the very imprint of his being,
and who sustains all things by his mighty word.
When he had accomplished purification from sins,
he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
as far superior to the angels
as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say:

You are my son; this day I have begotten you?

Or again:

I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me?

And again, when he leads the firstborn into the world, he says:

Let all the angels of God worship him.

Notes	Reflect and Pray
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Gospel Tuesday

John 1:1-5, 9-14

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human
race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.
The true light, which enlightens
everyone, was coming into the world.
He was in the world,
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him
he gave power to become children of
God,
to those who believe in his name,
who were born not by natural
generation
nor by human choice nor by a man's
decision
but of God.
And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.

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Reflect and Pray

Key Images and Themes

Zion

Earlier in Advent we spoke about the significance of Jerusalem, the holy city. Zion is commonly used as another name for Jerusalem. However, according to tradition, the names are used for different purposes. Zion was originally one of the hills that Jerusalem now encompasses. At the time of David, he had to conquer Zion in order to establish Jerusalem as the seat of his kingdom (see 2 Samuel 5). Then, as the city grew, the outer walls of Jerusalem included the area known as Zion.

While Jerusalem tends to be seen as the point at which the Word of God flows out of into the world, Zion has a different purpose. Zion is where the people of God learn, grow and are formed more perfectly into God's chosen ones. In our First Reading, God first comes as King to the people of Zion. They are restored and then the work begins on rebuilding Jerusalem, the place where all the people of the world come to gather. In Jerusalem, they are greeted by those who abide in Zion.

Son

Whole books have been devoted to the importance and implications of Jesus, the Son. It is, I believe, to be one of the inexhaustible theological topics. Here are just a few of the beautiful reasons why Jesus is God's Son.

As God's creations, we are His children. But we are no longer perfect children, due to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. We need a role model, someone who can teach us what it means to be in right relationship with God again. When Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, He doesn't tell them to address God as "Your Father," but "Our Father." These words which draw us into communion with God are given to us by God, who is our brother.

To be a son is to be in relationship with others. No one can be a son (or daughter) in isolation. Even if the community is fractured, the mere titles reveal an underscored relationship. Jesus the Son is in relationship with God the Father or *Abba*.

To give one's son is to give an ultimate gift. To give up a son is to forfeit the possibility of your family's future generations. We see this in the

sacrifice of Isaac, where Abraham was willing to withhold nothing from God, not even his only son. In one of the most famous passages in the whole Bible, John 3:16, we learn, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...” God entrusts His Son to us so we might come to know Him. The giving continues all the way to the Cross, where the Son is handed over for our ransom and salvation.

Word

Continuing in John’s Gospel, the opening verses of the first chapter offer a glimpse into the mystery of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This Word or *Logos* in the Greek, is Jesus. It was customary whenever introducing someone to list their genealogy. This is Benjamin, son of Benjamin, son of Nathan, etc. John does give us Jesus’ genealogy, but not His human one. While Jesus the historical person lived and died during a particular time in history, Jesus who is God has existed outside of time and space for all eternity.

Logos has a very broad meaning. It can be used for communication but also reasoning and rationale. What John reveals is that it is from this Divine Thought, Divine Communication, that all things come forth. He is affirming the words of Genesis, “And then God said...” What is incredible is that the Divine Thought has a name, Jesus.

To Ponder:

- What does it mean to you to be a son or daughter of God? When you pray, do you address God as Father? How does seeing Jesus as a brother highlight your relationship with Him?
- How often do you encounter God’s Word in Scripture? How has using this journal encouraged you to dive deeper into Scripture?

Going Forward with Jesus

Jesus the Incarnation

What can possibly be said to succinctly explain the Incarnation? The mystery of mysteries, Jesus, true God and true Man. He was not half and half, He was not one truly and the other as a costume or show. No. This is the critical point of Christianity. Because if Jesus wasn't God, what's the point? And if Jesus isn't a man, how can we possibly relate to Him?

One of the antiphons (a phrase repeated before and after a prayer) for Morning Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours goes like this:

“Marvelous is the mystery proclaimed today: man’s nature is made new as God becomes man; he remains what he was and becomes what he was not. Yet each nature stays distinct and for ever undivided.”

This means that Jesus had two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. Yet these two natures were not opposed to one another and in a mysterious, miraculous way, are able to exist perfectly within one Person.

Tomorrow, we will celebrate this incredible moment when Christ fully entered the world. This is the moment that changes everything,

*For a child is born to us, a son is given to us;
upon his shoulder dominion rests.
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,
Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:5*



I hope that you enjoyed this journal, I would love to hear from you. If you have any suggestions or comments for Lent or Advent next year, please reach out to me. You can find me at dailygraces.net, on the Facebook page Daily Graces, Twitter [@KateTaliaferro](https://twitter.com/KateTaliaferro) or on Instagram.

May your hearts and homes be blessed this Advent Season and may the peace of Christ come to reign in both forever.