

THE
LORD
is Near

DAILY REFLECTIONS
ON THE 2020 ADVENT MASS READINGS

INTRODUCTION

During Advent we attend to God's coming into our world through Jesus' birth, into our hearts through the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit, and into our future when Christ will return for the final judgement and restoration of all creation under God's rule. This handy Advent booklet offers spiritual reflections related to the daily Mass readings for Advent together with a prayer starter to encourage you to discover God's presence in new and surprising ways.

And if you find that this booklet helps you to discover anew how present God is now in your life, we invite you to consider using the 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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Come, Lord Jesus!

Is 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7 / 1 Cor 1:3-9 / Mk 13:33-37

For the Church the word *Advent* has two meanings: presence and anticipation. Presence: the light is present, Christ is the new Adam, with us and among us. His light is already shining and we must open the eyes of our hearts to see the light and be grateful that God himself entered history as a new source of good. But Advent also means anticipation. The dark night of evil is still strong. And therefore in Advent we pray insistently: “Come Jesus.” Come, give power to light and to good. Come where falsehood, ignorance of God, violence and injustice predominate. Come Lord Jesus, give power to the good in the world and help us be bearers of your light, peacemakers, witnesses of the truth. Come, Lord Jesus!

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How might I make presence
and anticipation more prominent in my Advent?*

Advent (Latin, “coming”) is the 4-week liturgical season of preparation for the coming of Jesus by remembering his birth in Bethlehem (past), by anticipating his coming in glory (future) and by celebrating his coming to us in word and sacrament (present).

Falling for Christ

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

The New Testament gives us two distinct versions of Andrew's vocation story. Today's Gospel has Jesus call him to leave his boat and nets to follow. John's Gospel tells us that John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to Andrew and an unnamed other and that as soon as he met Jesus, Andrew not only decided to stay with him, but got his brother Peter to join them as well. No matter which story got the details right, Andrew fell in love with Jesus on the spot. He would spend the rest of his life understanding what our Psalm refrain proclaims: "Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life."

—Mary M. McGlone, CSJ

How will I listen for Jesus' call to me today?

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.

Be Watchful!

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

Watchfulness means, among other things, *to be present where we are*—at this specific point in space, at this particular moment in time. All too often we are scattered and dispersed; we are living, not with alertness in the present, but with nostalgia in the past, or with misgiving and wishful thinking in the future. While we are indeed required responsibly to plan for the future—for watchfulness is the opposite of fecklessness—we are to think about the future only so far as it depends upon the present moment. Anxiety over remote possibilities which lie altogether beyond our immediate control is sheer waste of our spiritual energies. The watchful person is the one who understands this “sacrament of the present moment,” and who tries to live by it.

—Kallistos Ware
The Orthodox Way

*How might I be more attentive to God
during this Advent season?*

The **Advent Wreath**, usually made from evergreens with 4 candles (three purple and one rose color), symbolizes the approaching celebration of Christ's coming at Christmas. Each Sunday (and the nights in between) the four candles are lighted successively and biblical readings or prayers are recited to prepare for Christmas.

God's Mountain

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

Today's readings beckon us to the mountain where a generous God awaits us. Isaiah tells us that we will find "rich food and choice wine" there. God's same generosity is evident when the crowds were fed until contented, a miracle well beyond a few loaves and fish. Every Eucharist is a call to that mountain of God, who waits for us in order to wipe the "tears from all faces" and "destroy death forever." This gives us confidence for a future that is "not yet" but experienced right now with others as we await the fullness of hope? Go to God's mountain today, whether at liturgy or not, and find the food and wine of goodness in the actions of those who are leading you toward God.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

*What has been the mountain
where I have found God to be?*

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

Both Prayer & Action

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

Listening to God's word, contemplation, and practical service to our neighbor are not two opposed attitudes but two essential aspects in our Christian life that can never be separated but are lived out in profound unity and harmony. Prayer and action must always be deeply united. A prayer that does not lead you to practical action for others—the poor, the sick, those in need of help or in difficulty—is a sterile and incomplete prayer. But when time is not set aside for dialogue with God in prayer, we risk serving ourselves and not God present in our needy brother and sister. So let us meditate in our hearts on God's Word, pray faithfully and be more attentive in practical ways to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

—Pope Francis

*How might I better unite my prayer
and my action for those in need?*

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

Their Eyes Were Opened

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

Living consciously is a state of being mentally active rather than passive, the ability to look at the world through fresh eyes. Living consciously is seeking to be aware of everything that bears on our interests, actions, values, purposes and goals. It is the willingness to confront facts, pleasant or unpleasant, the desire to discover our mistakes and correct them. Within the range of our interests and concerns, it is the quest to keep expanding our awareness and understanding both of the external world and of the world within. It is respect for reality and for the distinction between the real and the unreal. It is the commitment to see what we see and know what we know. It is recognition that the act of dismissing reality is the root of all evil.

—Nathaniel Branden
The Art of Living Consciously

*How has my prayer and reading brought me
to a deeper knowledge of spiritual reality?*

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

The Kingdom Is Near

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

We must find the effects of Jesus' cross and resurrection in the world, not just in our inner lives, nor in the Church. The way in which Jesus both declared the kingdom and lived in the freedom of the kingdom provides the model of what the Church is created to be. The Church is not the kingdom but, through the Spirit indwelling their fellowship, Christians live the kingdom life as men and women of the world. The mission of the Church, therefore, is to live the ordinary life of human beings in that extraordinary awareness of the other and self-sacrifice for the other which the Spirit gives.

—John V. Taylor
The Go-Between God

*What greater experience of God's presence
have I discovered this Advent?*

In his teaching and preaching, Jesus identifies God's ideal community as the **kingdom of God**, a new way of living together that includes everyone as sisters and brothers who will relate to God as their Father whose benevolent rule over them guides every moment of their lives.

Prepare the Way

Is 40:1-5, 9-11 / 2 Pt 3:8-14 / Mk 1:1-8

God not only desires that we should be saved, but gives us all we need to achieve salvation. We are not to stop at merely desiring salvation, but go a step further and accept all the graces God has prepared for us that are constantly offered to us. It is all very well to say, “I want to be saved” but not much use merely saying, “I want to take the necessary steps.” We must actually take the steps. We need to make a definite resolution to take and use the graces God holds out to us. We should also welcome the means to salvation that God intends us to take. That is why general acts of devotion and prayer should always be followed by particular resolutions.

—St. Francis de Sales
Finding God Wherever You Are

*What steps am I taking to respond better
to God's graces this Advent?*

John the Baptist's **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** identifies the two stages preparing for God's inevitably coming judgment of Israel. Repentance means turning from sin back to God and forgiveness of sins indicates God's mercy at judgment time—what everyone wants instead of condemnation.

Be Strong, Fear Not!

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

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

The Holy Way

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

"We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by *metanoia*. This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge and arrange one's life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in God's Son."

—The Catholic Rite of Penance, #6

Humble before God

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

Mary's exchange with Gabriel helps us understand that Mary is truly humble and does not try to be noticed. She recognizes that she is small before God and is happy to be so. But she is aware that the fulfillment of God's plan depends on her response, and she accepts it with her whole being. Mary's behavior corresponds perfectly to that of Jesus who wants to become the servant of the Lord, to put himself at the service of humanity to fulfill God's plan. Mary shows that she is also in perfect accord with God's plan. Furthermore she reveals herself as a disciple of his Son. As we admire her response to God's call to mission, we ask her to help us welcome God's plan into our lives.

—Pope Francis

*How am I bringing Jesus to birth in myself
and in my life today? With what results?*

Mary's **Immaculate Conception** describes her own 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 conception and birth from the womb of Mary.

Come You Who Are Burdened

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

So many of us in this anxiety-ridden, compulsively work-oriented culture of ours find it difficult to enjoy silence and would rather do anything than be quiet. The only entry into the life that God offers us and wants us to enjoy is through silence and “in-touchness” with him who fills the world with the sounds of silence and ultimate meaning. Information doesn’t usually feed our spirit. But communion always does, and the only way to communion—with ourselves, with others, with God—is through silence. It strikes me that most of the first part of our lives is spent filling our heads with information. The last part—the most important part—is spent emptying our heads of all that trivia so that our hearts may be free to learn wisdom—in silence.

—Kieran M. Kay, OFM Conv
Common Bushes Afire with God

*What can I do today to empty myself
and meet God in the silence?*

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.

Our Pilgrim Journey

Is 41:13-20 / Mt 11:11-15

We are pilgrims on a spiritual journey in which God travels with us, indeed, pilgrims on the way home to God. Our hearts are restless because they are pilgrim hearts whose home is not here. It is joy, not sorrow, that Christian pilgrims carry in their hearts, because they know that they are on their way to their home in this God who is love. The spiritual life is a journey about change. As you pray you will undoubtedly experience opportunities for growth. The heart of the pilgrim journey is about putting God first and trusting in this abiding presence and providence. None of us know when or how opening the door of our heart might make a difference to those nearby or to those in the larger global story of transformation.

—Joyce Rupp
The Cup of Our Life

*What would most help me to put God first
and open my heart wider to God?*

The **kingdom of heaven** is Matthew's characteristic description of the kingdom of God. Since out of reverence Jews often substituted another word instead of saying God's sacred name, this might be an indication that Matthew had a previous Jewish background.

The Struggle for Holiness

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

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

—Thomas Merton
Honorable Reader

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

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 or relative who had either been jailed or enslaved.

The Way of Love

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

It is natural that those who truly want to be Jesus' companion really share in his love for the poor. For us, the option for the poor is not ideological but is born from the Gospel. Just as we cannot ignore the poor on our spiritual journey to Christ, so we cannot ignore our faith as we labor for the poor. In Our Lady of Guadalupe, we have a model of "the preferential option for the poor" in a woman who came to conquered and conqueror alike in order to show to all—even the poorest and those without hope—the way to true resurrection. In her, we hear a voice expressing the true means to overcoming difficulties through personal generosity and the "way of love."

—Carl A. Anderson & Msgr. Eduardo Chávez
Our Lady of Guadalupe

*How might I reach out somehow
to make a poor person's life better today?*

"Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of the Americas, intercede with the Lord that he may instill a hunger for holiness in the whole people of God. Look upon us with compassion, teach us to go continually to Jesus and, if we fall, help us to rise again, to return to him."

—Pope St. John Paul II

Rejoice Always

Is 61:1-2a, 10-11 / 1 Thes 5:16-24 / Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

Joy is not simply a matter of temperament. In the service of God and others, it is always hard to be joyful—all the more reason why we should try to acquire it and make it grow in our hearts. Joy is prayer; joy is strength; joy is love; joy is a net of love by which we catch others. God loves a cheerful giver. She gives most who gives with joy. If in your work you have difficulties and you accept them with joy, with a big smile—in this, like in any other thing—people will see your good works and glorify the Father. The best way to show your gratitude is to accept everything with joy. A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love.

—St. Mother Teresa
Total Surrender

*What most helps me to be more joyful
in my daily life?*

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.

Love Doesn't Test, it Trusts

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

In one television sitcom, a husband and wife leave a suitcase unpacked as a test of love. It is not uncommon for friends and spouses to test each other in similar ways: “I won’t call to see if she calls first” or “I’ll give an expensive gift to challenge him to match it.” Sometimes we test God by waiting for signs before acting in faith, but God will have no part of it, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” Authentic love does not test; it believes. Testing fosters suspicion and suspicion weakens love. In the end, love cannot be proven, but only revealed. As we trust each other in the mutual vulnerability of love, we invite love to grow deeper and stronger.

—Jerry Welte

*What games do I play in my faith
and relationships that weaken love and trust?*

The Jerusalem Temple was not a quiet prayer building like our churches. Although it had a quiet innermost room reserved for God alone, it was surrounded by the busy public gathering **temple area** where foreign money was changed into temple coinage, offerings were collected and animals were daily sacrificed.

Advent Hope and Promise

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

Zephaniah prophesied at a time of international upheaval and change. Assyria was going down as a world power and Babylon was rising. There is urgency in his words. After issuing a word of judgment, he offers hope because God's ultimate aim isn't destruction, but rather cleansing and renewal and restoration to a faithful remnant. To hope implies that there is something or someone to be hoped for. We too live in difficult times. For what is it that we hope during this Advent season? For what we are longing? The hope and the promise of these days are intimately connected. It's the promise of Christmas, God's special presence with us, incarnation, Emmanuel, that gives us a reason to hope during this Advent season.

—Angeline Hubert

*For what am I most longing
during this Advent season?*

Rome set the amount of revenue to be raised by each district and sold the right to collect taxes to the highest bidder, who could charge whatever he wished to make a profit. Thus Jewish **tax collectors** were considered as both extortioners and traitors to their fellow Jews.

Hidden in the Poor

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

Christ is not only a healer of individuals. He is also a prophet to the nations. While he walked the earth, Jesus delivered people from paralysis, insanity, leprosy, suppurating wounds, deformity and muteness. But again and again in word and deed he returned to the plight of the poor, whose poverty, in true prophetic fashion, he considered no historical accident, but the fruit of social injustice. The world with its triumphs and despairs, its beauty and ugliness, has today moved next door to every one of us. Only spiritual deafness can prevent our hearing the voice of God in the clamor of the cities. Only blindness of a willful sort can prevent our seeing the face of the Risen Lord in the faces of the suffering poor.

—William Sloane Coffin
Credo

*How can I be more attentive to Christ's presence
in those who are poor and in need?*

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.

Jesus' Family Honor

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

Jesus' genealogy reveals his high honor status. Honor was a central value in the first-century Mediterranean cultures and grounds the public claim to recognition, rank and social status that others ought to acknowledge. Like a credit report today that reveals the value of one's economic assets, a genealogy served somewhat similarly to "open the books" on the family's deposit of honor that others in the community ought then to respect. The genealogy tells first-century readers what they would really want to know—what family is Jesus from and what is their social status? Matthew's genealogy indicates that Jesus' lineage is royal (Son of David) and even extends back beyond royalty to the most ancient Jewish ancestor Abraham (Son of Abraham). Jesus is indeed a very special Jew.

—Steve Mueller

*How might I honor Jesus today
in my words and actions?*

Matthew's opening **genealogy** or list of family ancestors serves several purposes. It aids the memory by tying together a family history and also legitimates the messianic claim that Jesus was of the Davidic royal lineage and so could be what the gospel claims he is, the "King of the Judeans."

God's Promises Fulfilled

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

Christmas is the celebration of God's new decision about who will be king in the human world. All the fake kings would be dethroned because a new king shall come from Bethlehem. But think what it means. It means to anybody who knows, that the promises of God have been kept. God is faithful. He has not reneged. For a thousand years earlier he had said, I will keep this royal family and this royal promise and this royal vision. I will send the true David and he will turn the world back to its sanity. Where there has been fear, he will bring joy. Where there has been oppression, he will bring justice. Where there has been suffering and sorrow, he will bring wholeness.

—Walter Brueggemann
The Collected Sermons

*What gift would I most want Jesus
to bring to me this Christmas?*

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

Open-Ended Hope

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

Open-ended waiting such as we see in Mary is hard for us. We seek to control the future. We want the future to go in a specific way, and if it does not, we are disappointed and can even slip into despair. But Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary were not filled with wishes but with hope. Hope is something very different. Hope is trusting that something will be fulfilled, but fulfilled according to the promises and not just according to our wishes. So hope is always open-ended. I have found it very important in my own life to let go of my wishes and start hoping. It is only when I was willing to let go of wishes that something really new, something beyond my own expectations, could happen to me.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Seeds of Hope

*How has my open-ended hope been answered
with something unexpected from God?*

Since God had commanded humans to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28), to be a **barren** woman created great anxiety and shame. But since God was the giver of life, God alone could rectify the situation and give the gift of a child to a childless couple.

Saying “Yes” to God

2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 / Rom 16:25-27 / Lk 1:26-38

With God’s help the world is poised for something new, something that even Mary may not be able to understand fully, perhaps until the resurrection. Remember that Mary was told that her son would be the Son of God, not that he would be tortured, put to death on a cross, and then rise from the dead. Mary says “yes” to a future that she does not know. She is an example of letting God do God’s work, without trying to figure it out. When we say “yes” to God, we are usually surprised by the results. We say “I do” during a wedding and receive blessings far beyond what we could have imagined. More simply, we say “yes” to God and are completely transformed.

—James Martin, SJ
Jesus: A Pilgrimage

*How has my “yes” to God most transformed myself
and my life?*

Unlike ourselves, biblical people did not think the world was progressing but always regressing. God’s original vision for creation was disordered by sin but the hope was that God would one day reorder things into a **new creation** without evil. Christians believed God had begun this re-ordering in Jesus.

Share Your Joy

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

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

—William F. Maestri
My Rosary Journal

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

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

Mary, Sign of Hope

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

Mary is a constant sign and cause of hope. We do not want to lose sight of her or forget that she is the same woman who lived a very ordinary human life in a little town called Nazareth, who didn't understand everything, even though her son was God, living right with her, praying and reading the Scriptures with her. She had her questions and her fears. Our daily stumbling and bumbling does not separate us from our ultimate fulfillment and glorification. Do you feel uncomfortable, as I do, in thinking about and speaking about your own glorification? We have been so schooled in adopting a hangdog humility before God that it is difficult for us to break free and really sing our own *Magnificat*. We are destined to be glorious!

—M. Basil Pennington, OCSO

Mary Today

*How does Mary's example most
give me a sense of hope?*

The **Magnificat** is the popular name for Mary's song in today's Gospel. Inspired by the Old Testament song of Hannah, Samuel's mother (1 Sam 2:1-10), it expresses her maternal joy and hope for a better world for her child because of God's concern for the poor and action for justice.

God's Incarnation in Jesus

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

When preparing for Christmas, we should reflect about the essential, spiritual significance of the Incarnation. By it God has touched our lives in Jesus, and the great importance of the feast of Christmas is that it is the celebration of our humanity, redeemed by being touched by God. God assumes the mortality of the human condition in Jesus so that we can burst through the bonds of death in him. What we learn from his life is that the destiny of each one of us is to begin to live our lives fully now, in our present earthly, mortal condition. To live our lives now, as free men and women, not bound by fear or enchained by desire, but utterly in harmony with the liberating power of God's own energy.

—John Main
Essential Writings

*How have I most experienced living my life now
more in harmony with God's divine energy?*

St. Francis of Assisi popularized the custom of making a **Christmas crib** or crèche to represent the nativity in 1223 when he obtained permission from Pope Honorius III to celebrate Christmas Mass in a cave with a hay-filled manger and a live ox and ass.

Come Closer

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

God does not want us to be afraid, distant, or envious. God wants to come close, very close, so close that we can rest in the intimacy of God as children in their mother's arms. Therefore God became a little baby. Who can be afraid of a little baby? A tiny little baby is completely dependent on its parents, nurses and caregivers. Yes, indeed, God chose to become so powerless that the realization of God's own mission among us became completely dependent on us. That's the mystery of the incarnation. God became human, in no way different from other human beings, to break through the walls of power in total weakness. That is the story of Jesus.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Finding My Way Home

*How might I try to come closer to God
during this sacred time?*

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

God Comes Close to Us

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

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

Christmas is the feast of the presence of God, who comes among us to save us. The birth of Jesus is no fable! It is an historic event which truly occurred in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Faith enables us to recognize the child born of the virgin Mary as the true son of God, who for love for us became human. In the face of little Jesus we contemplate the face of God, who does not reveal himself in strength and power but in the weakness and frailty of a newborn babe. This is what our God is like—God comes so close, in a child. This child reveals the faithfulness and tenderness of the unconditional love with which God surrounds each one of us. —Pope Francis

*How has Christ revealed himself to me
when I was weak and vulnerable?*

The **Incarnation** (Latin, *incarnare*, enfleshment) the coming into flesh or becoming fully human of God's Son, the second person of the divine Trinity, in Jesus of Nazareth. This is a fundamental mystery of the Christian faith, which although we can affirm it as true, we can never fully explain it.

Sorrow Amidst Joy

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

As yet heaven and earth are not united. The star of Bethlehem is a star shining in a dark night, even today. On the day after Christmas the Church already lays aside her white festive vestments and clothes herself in the color of blood, and on the fourth day in the purple of mourning. For the crib of the child is surrounded by martyrs. There is Stephen, the first martyr to follow his Lord to death. There are the innocent children, the babes of Bethlehem and Judah, who were cruelly slaughtered by the hands of brutal executioners. What does this mean? The Son of the eternal Father descended from the glory of heaven, because the mystery of iniquity had shrouded the earth in the darkness of night.

—St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross
Edith Stein: Essential Writings

*How can I help those who are suffering today
because of their faith commitment?*

Martyr (Greek, a witness) identifies one who gives testimony to the faith, even if that means death. In the Early Church, martyrs were the first to be honored as saints. The Church's official listing of saints and blessed is contained in a book still called the *Roman Martyrology*.

Sunday, December 27

The Holy Family
of Jesus, Mary & Joseph

Joining Young & Old

Gn 15:1-6; 21:1-3 / Heb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19 / Lk 2:22-40

Today's Gospel describes the encounter between two young spouses full of joy and faith due to the grace of the Lord, and two elderly people also filled with joy and faith through the action of the Holy Spirit. Who causes them to meet? Jesus. He joins young and old, bringing generations closer. He is the font of that love that unites families and people, conquering all diffidence, all isolation, all distance. This causes us also to think of grandparents and how important their presence is! How precious is their role in the family and in society! A good relationship between the young and the elderly is crucial for the civil and ecclesial community. Looking at these two elderly people—Simeon and Anna—let us remember all the worlds' grandparents.

—Pope Francis

What can I do today to strengthen relationships with those younger and older than myself?

When a Jewish mother gave birth to a baby boy she was ceremonially “unclean” for 40 days (Lv 12:1-8). Then she brought her gift for **purification** to the priest. Joseph and Mary's gift reveals that they are poor because they could not afford the usual offering of a lamb.

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*