



Watch and Wait!

DAILY REFLECTIONS
ON THE 2021 ADVENT MASS READINGS

INTRODUCTION

To prepare his disciples for life in his absence, Jesus tells them to watch and wait, anticipating the time when he will come again. Advent is our season to intensify our watching and waiting as we recall Jesus' past presence on earth, anticipate his future coming in glory, and celebrate his presence now in our hearts, in the sacraments, and in our Christian communities. This handy Advent booklet offers spiritual reflections related to each day's Mass readings for Advent together with a personal reflection/prayer starter to encourage you to discover God's presence in new and surprising ways.

And if you find that this little booklet helps you to discover anew how present God is now in yourself and your life, we invite you to consider using the similar reflections for each day of the year found in the quarterly editions of *Words of Grace: Daily Reflections & Prayers for Catholics* available from AllSaintsPress.com.

—Steve Mueller, *Editor*

Author Acknowledgements: Words of Grace would like to thank all the authors and publishers for the excerpts of their publications appearing in this booklet. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Mowbrays, 1979). Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Finding My Way Home: Pathways to Life & the Spirit* (Crossroad, 2001). Eugene H. Petersen, *The Jesus Way* (William B. Eerdmans, 2007). Deidre Cornell, *Jesus Was a Migrant* (Orbis, 2014). Fr. Carroll Stuhlmüller, CP, *Biblical Meditations for Advent* (Paulist, 1980). John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (SCM Press, 2004). Peter Gomes, *Strength for the Journey: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2004). Paula Huston, *The Holy Way: Practices for a Simple Life* (Loyola Press, 2010). Dom Helder Camara, *The Desert Is Fertile* (Orbis, 1974). N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good* (HarperOne, 2015). Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* (Simon & Schuster, 1981). Marcus Borg, *The Gospel of Mark* (Morehouse Publishing, 2009). Walter Brueggemann, *The Collected Sermons* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011). Thomas Keating, *Awakenings* (Crossroad, 1990). Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (Jossey-Bass, 2000). Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan, *The First Christmas: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Birth* (HarperCollins, 2009). Joyce Rupp, *Inviting God In* (Ave Maria Press, 2001). Pope St. John Paul II, *Draw Near to God* (Servant, 1987). St. Mother Teresa, *Heart of Joy* (Garborg's Incorporated, 2001). James Martin, SJ, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (HarperOne, 2014).

Be Watchful!

Jer 33:14-16 / 1 Thes 3:12—4:2 / Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

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 the coming Advent season?*

During the four week season that begins the Church year called **Advent** (Latin, “coming”), we prepare for the coming of Jesus by remembering his birth in Bethlehem (past), anticipating his coming in glory (future) and by celebrating his coming to us in word and sacrament (present).

Waiting with Trust

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

To wait with openness and trust is an enormously radical attitude toward life. It is choosing to hope that something is happening for us that is far beyond our own imaginings. It is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life. It is living with the conviction that God molds us in love, holds us in tenderness and moves us away from the sources of our fear. Our spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, expecting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination or prediction. This, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Finding My Way Home

*What new things do I hope will happen
during this Advent time of waiting?*

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.

Come, Follow Me!

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

Following Jesus gets us moving obediently in a way of life that is visible and audible in Jesus, a way of speaking and thinking, imagining and praying, that is congruent with the present, immediate kingdom realities. To follow Jesus implies that we enter into a way of life that is given character and shape and direction by the one who calls us. To follow Jesus means picking up rhythms and ways of doing things that are often unsaid but always derivative from Jesus, formed by the influence of Jesus. To follow Jesus means we can't separate what Jesus is saying from what he is doing and the way he is doing it. To follow Jesus is as much, or maybe even more, about feet as it is about ears and eyes.

—Eugene H. Petersen
The Jesus Way

*How have myself and my life most changed
by following Jesus' way of life?*

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.

Satisfying Our Hunger

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

Standing in the communion line, I acknowledge my need to be fed. I am hungry, Lord, feed me. I thirst; give me to drink. I came not because I am satisfied, but because I want to be made full. I came to find you. Here is my brokenness, my sin, my failure—and my desire. We give him our longing to be filled with his presence, to be so close to him that he becomes part of our very bodies. We bring with us the meagerness of what little we have. Jesus works miracles with even the most limited of offerings. Perhaps after all is said and done, hunger and thirst are our most important gifts. Now we give them to the Lord. He will use them to feed the world.

—Deidre Cornell
Jesus Was a Migrant

What might I do to share Jesus' actions to feed others?

Isaiah's description of God as **Lord of Hosts** has nothing to do with the white wafers we receive at communion (Latin *hostia*, a victim for a sacrifice) but rather to the angelic armies (Latin *hostis*, a stranger or enemy, hence hostile soldiers in an army) who do God's bidding.

Build on Rock

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

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

—Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP
Biblical Meditations for Advent

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

In most Bible translations today, God’s sacred personal name, Yahweh, is put in small capital letters. So when Solomon prays to the **LORD** God this means “Yahweh God.” And when **GOD** is in small capitals, it also means YHWH, thus Lord **GOD** means “Lord Yahweh.”

Open Our Eyes

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

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

—Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch
Apology to Autolytus

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

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

God's 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?*

Jesus was “**moved with pity**” does not mean our common modern sense of feeling sorry for someone. The Greek word means a strong emotional reaction felt deep within (as we would say in our “guts”) in response to someone else’s suffering.

Preparing the Way

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

Knowing the risk of giving, now try the even greater risk of receiving. Learn to be a generous receiver. Somebody wants to love you; think of that. Let down the barriers, open the doors, remove the inhibitions, let him in. Somebody less worthy of you wants you to accept him or her. Try it. Open your hand to receive what someone else is prepared to give to you. The old spiritual fathers used to say that we get so little from God because we are prepared to accept so little from God. Open your hands that you may be prepared to receive what is there for you. Open your hands, and open your hearts to the abundance that is waiting to fill them both.

—Peter Gomes
Strength for the Journey

What might I most need to change to be a better receiver of the gifts that God and others want to bestow on me?

Baptism means to immerse or wash in water and so is a natural sign for ritual purity or holiness. In Judaism, there were many ceremonial washings. Thus John the Baptist uses a **baptism of repentance** to symbolize one's desire to put off sinful ways and live as God wants.

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?*

In the Bible, the **desert** includes not only the vast sandy stretches that we call deserts but more often indicates what we call "wilderness," whether the semi-arid areas with a seasonal grassy covering (steppe) favored by nomads or the inhospitable and uninhabited arid and rocky wastelands.

Tuesday, December 7

St. Ambrose, Bishop
& Doctor of the Church

Listening for the Lost

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

Are we so deaf that we do not hear the just God demanding that we do all we can to stop the injustice suffocating the world? Are we so alienated that we can worship God at our ease in luxurious temples and fail to see, hear, and serve God where he is present and where he requires our presence—among the poor, the oppressed, the victims of injustices in which we ourselves are often involved? It is not difficult to hear God's call today in the world about us. It is difficult to do more than offer an emotional response, sorrow and regret. It is even more difficult to give up our comfort, break with old habits, let ourselves be moved by grace and change our life, be converted.

—Dom Helder Camara
The Desert Is Fertile

*How might I overcome my comfort
to do something for those in need today?*

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

—St. Ambrose

Hail, Favored One!

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

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

—Pope Francis

How might I cut through the busyness of Christmas preparations to refocus on Jesus’ coming?

Mary’s **Immaculate Conception** describes her conception in the womb of her mother Anne and is not to be confused as some popular commentators do with Jesus’ Virgin Birth, which describes his conception and birth from the womb of Mary.

Don't Be Afraid

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

The God of Israel is constantly telling people, “Don’t be afraid,” not because he isn’t interested, not because he is simply the sum total of all natural forces, but because he is interested and is active within the world—but his interest and activity are those of a wise creator who loves his creation and is determined to put it right in the end. He is the God of good news. Now put all this into the time of the early Christians. Everything we know about Israel’s God comes into sudden and shocking focus with Jesus. His first followers quickly came to the conclusion that the God of Israel had come at last in person, as he had promised, to rescue his people and establish his rule in the world.

—N.T. Wright
Simply Good News

How has my life most changed because of what I learned about God from Jesus?

The **kingdom of heaven** is Matthew’s characteristic description of what the other gospel writers call the kingdom of God. Since out of reverence Jews often substituted another word instead of saying God’s name, this might be one more indication that Matthew had a previous Jewish background.

God's Dream for Us

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

There is a divine dream which the prophets and rabbis have cherished and which fills our prayers and permeates the acts of true piety. It is the dream of a world, rid of evil by God's grace as well as by our efforts, dedicated to establishing God's kingship in the world. God is waiting for us to redeem the world. We should not spend our life hunting for trivial satisfactions while God is waiting constantly and keenly for our effort and devotion. The Almighty has not created the universe that we may have opportunities to satisfy our greed, envy and ambition. We have not survived that we may waste our years in vulgar vanities. The martyrdom of millions demands that we consecrate ourselves to the fulfillment of God's dream of salvation.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel
Man's Quest for God

*How might I share today in God's dream for
the salvation for all?*

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.

A Kingdom of Justice and Peace

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

God's kingdom is about the transformation of life in this world—of individual lives and of the world itself. It is “the dream of God” for our earth. Grounded in the Jewish Bible, God's dream—God's will, God's passion—is a transformed world. The two main features of God's dream are justice and peace. Justice means distributive justice—everybody should have enough of God's earth, not as a result of charity but as a product of justice, namely, the way the world is put together. The other primary feature is peace—a world in which to echo Isaiah and Micah, the instruments of war become implements of agriculture: the nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and war will be no more (Is 2:4; Mic 4:1-4).

—Marcus Borg
The Gospel of Mark

*How have myself and my life been
most transformed this Advent?*

The Hebrew word for **peace** (*shalom*) describes the experience of fullness or completeness—lacking nothing that one needs for a full and happy life. Peace is a gift that comes with God's presence. Thus it is also the goal for the life of the covenant community.

Rejoice in the Lord!

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

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

—Mary M. McGlone, CSJ

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

Today is called **Gaudete Sunday** (Latin, *rejoice*), from the Latin opening words of the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass “*Gaudete in Domino semper*” (“Rejoice in the Lord always,” Phil 4:4). Lent is now half done and Christmas draws nearer. The celebrant usually wears rose vestments at Mass.

Love Doesn't Test but Instead 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 killed and sacrificed.

Getting My Mind Right

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

I wonder what made the son change his mind about going into the vineyard, after telling his father that he would not go? At first, he seemed like some of the cocky, young teenagers I meet at college, who often callously disappoint their fathers and not do what's expected of them. Surprisingly, the son changes his mind and goes to work as his father requested. Perhaps he gained some humility and realized he wasn't in charge of his finances. Perhaps he began to trust that his father would take care of his needs if he would be cooperative. Motivation is difficult to determine but the reminder of the Gospel that some may enter the "kingdom of God" before others could make us think about what we do.

—Dorothy Jonaitis

*What motivates me to do what am told to do
and what is my attitude about doing that?*

"Live in faith and hope, though it be in darkness, for in this darkness God protects the soul. Cast your care upon God, for you are God's, and God will not forget you. In giving us the Son, God's only Word, God spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word—and has no more to say."
—St. John of the Cross

A New Way of Living

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

In today's Gospel, Jesus offers a catalogue of newnesses—miracles, wonders, transformations that take people in their fear and failure and disability, and wrap their lives in newness beyond themselves. Everywhere he goes, newness happens. That is what it means to live in the new world birthed at Christmas. John the Baptist can draw his own conclusions, but Jesus is surely doing everything promised, everything hoped for. Not bragging, just reporting on the birth of newness that the world cannot manufacture. If you pay attention to this voice of newness, the whole consumer rat race at Christmas for friends and family and stuff is not about anything. It is no preparation. It is not readiness. It is no direction from which to enter the birth of newness.

—Walter Brueggemann
The Collected Sermons

*How might I be more attentive to the newness
that Jesus is inviting me to this Advent?*

Although we use the word **miracles**, the biblical writers used the terms “deeds of power,” “signs” and “wonders” to describe Jesus’ actions (cures, exorcisms, resuscitations and nature wonders) that reorder our world from the domination of Satan and evil powers to the kingdom governance of God.

Be Open to Change

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

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

—Thomas Keating
Awakenings

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

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 17-23. These Antiphons have been part of the liturgy since the 8th century.

Being What God Calls Us to Be

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

Today I understand vocation quite differently—not as a goal to be achieved but as a gift to be received. Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice “out there” calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice “in here” calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God. It is a strange gift, this birthright gift of self. I have sometimes responded by ignoring the gift, or hiding it, or fleeing from it, or squandering it—and I think I am not alone.

—Parker J. Palmer
Let Your Life Speak

*O Wisdom, help me understand and respond
to my call to be what God has made me*

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

—Liturgy of the Hours

Putting Ourselves into the Story

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

Who might we be in the stories of the first Christmas? Are we like Mary, obedient to the role she had been given in bringing about a different kind of world? Or the shepherds who represent those of lowly status, the socially and economically marginalized who dream of and seek a different kingdom? Or are we among those who hear the story of Jesus, but aren't sure what to make of what we hear? No doubt there were many in this category who heard Jesus during his lifetime. Is this who we are? We are meant to be changed by Advent and Christmas. This is the sacramental purpose of this season of the Christian liturgical year.

—Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan
The First Christmas

*Which biblical character do I most relate to
in my life right now?*

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

—*Liturgy of the Hours*

Elizabeth's Wisdom

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

Elizabeth was a wise woman because of the way she perceived life. Her wisdom is evident in her greeting to Mary. Elizabeth knew there was a deeper message for her when she felt the baby kicking in her womb. She recognized the power of Mary's visit and how faithful God was and how fully God was present with them. As Christmas draws near, it is easy to forget God's nearness as we rush around with many last-minute preparations. We need to slow down and catch Elizabeth's wisdom. She experienced a special moment and recognized it as an opportunity to sense God's nearness. Let us look for signs of God's nearness as we complete Christmas preparations and enter into the joy of the season.

—Joyce Rupp
Inviting God In

O Root of Jesse, strengthen my faith and hope so that you can do great things with my life.

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

—Liturgy of the Hours

Fiat—Let It Be!

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

At the annunciation, Mary gives her assent and shows her obedience in faith. This assent, her *fiat*, is the *key moment*. The mystery of the incarnation is a divine mystery yet a human mystery. God's advent is fulfilled through human action and through the obedience of faith. In Advent we are urged by grace to have the inner attitude of faith and expectancy of all those who have waited on the Lord, all those who have believed and loved Jesus. This approach to Advent enables our faith to become vibrant as we constantly meditate and feed upon his word. For Christians this continues to be the first and fundamental point of reference for their spiritual life, a life that must be nourished by prayers of adoration and praise to God.

—Pope St. John Paul II
Draw Near to God

*O Key of David, open my heart to your presence
within me and around me in others.*

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

Giving Jesus to Others

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

As I read the Gospels, I am deeply impressed by the fact that before explaining the word of God, before presenting to the crowds the eight beatitudes, Jesus had compassion and gave them food. Only then did he begin to teach. What Our Lady does is similar. At the moment Jesus entered her life, at the very moment when—so to speak—she made her first communion, Mary hurried to go and serve Elizabeth. And what did she do? She became the handmaiden of the Lord. We too—you and I—have to begin by giving Jesus to others. People nowadays suffer much, but above all they are hungry for God.

—St. Mother Teresa
Heart of Joy

*O Rising Sun, help me be attentive to the ways
others support and enlighten me each day.*

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

—Liturgy of the Hours

My Song Magnifies the Lord

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

How well I remember the songs my mother taught me. There were songs from the radio where she worked as a writer, songs from the Second World War, and songs she made up while her children splashed in the bath. Today we hear Hannah's canticle of joy in the responsorial psalm, and a slightly redacted version of that on Mary's lips when she greets her cousin Elizabeth. It's fun to imagine that Mary learned Hannah's canticle from her own Jewish mother, whom the *Infancy Gospel of James* names Anna. It makes sense that Anna knew this song especially well because it was sung by the ancestress (Hannah) for whom she was named. But she could never have imagined that her daughter Mary would sing it as a way of introducing Jesus into the world!

—Kathy McGovern

*O King of the Nations, help me recognize
and thank you for all your generous blessings.*

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

—Liturgy of the Hours

Hopes Fulfilled

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

Christmas is almost here and our anticipation is building. Today we read about the birth of John the Baptist, the Elijah promised by Malachi, the precursor of Jesus. John's birth sets the stage for the birth of Jesus. His elderly parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were good people from priestly families, but I suspect that after years of longing and desire, they had given up hope of ever having a child. They were after all "advanced in years." Then they received the surprising promise that they would have a son. Like them, we have experienced anticipation, waiting, watching, longing, desire, patience, trust, and hope during this Advent season, and we too are filled with joy knowing that God is faithful to his promises.

—Angeline Hubert

*O Emmanuel, as you visited us from on high,
help us to grace others with your presence.*

"O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Savior. Come and save us, O Lord our God."

—Liturgy of the Hours

God Meets Us Where We Are

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

God could have come to the world in any way that God desired. We may be so conditioned to the story of Jesus' birth in humble circumstances that we forget that this was a choice. God could have come to us as a powerful ruler, born into a family of wealth and privilege. But God wanted to meet us where we are. So God came, first of all, as a human being, as someone other men and women could approach. God is one of us and came in the least threatening of human states: a baby. God entered our world screaming and crying, dependent on someone to change him, feed him, nurse him, and care for his bodily needs. God came helplessly into the world to help us.

—James Martin, SJ
Jesus: A Pilgrimage

*What most amazes me about the way
Jesus chose to become human?*

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.

Come Closer to God

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

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 **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.

God Comes Close to Us

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?*

“May the power of Christ, which brings freedom and service, by its meekness, take away our hardness of heart and his redeeming strength transform arms into ploughshares, destruction into creativity, hatred into love and tenderness. With these thoughts I wish you all a Happy Christmas!”

—Pope Francis

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*