

Prayer for Living
Daily Reflections
Liturgical Year B



“The Word became flesh,
he lived among us...”

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PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR B

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Friday, 1st December, 34th Week in Ordinary Time.

Daniel 7:2-14, Luke 21: 29-33

Jesus told his disciples a parable, 'Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree. As soon as you see them bud, you can see for yourselves that summer is now near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that the kingdom of God is near. In truth I tell you, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.'

Lord, we cling to you

"Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away". As we reflect on Jesus' words, we know that many things in life are temporal and will one day pass away. No matter how badly we want to, we have to go through the somewhat painful process of facing changes and letting go of people, things, even our health and eventually our very life.

The comforting news is that the words of Jesus will never pass away. His words speak to us of God's love and give us direction in life. It is from His words that we can find strength and peace as we face changes in life. Jesus Himself, the Word of God, will never pass away but remains with us always. His loving presence is the foundation, the rock on which we stand firm in the midst of changes and uncertainties.

Reflective question:

How do I respond when people and things pass away?

Saturday, 2nd December, 34th Week in Ordinary Time.

Daniel 7:15-27, Luke 21:34-36

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will come upon you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come down on all those living on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to hold your ground before the Son of man.'

Praying at all times

"Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life". As we prepare ourselves to end the Ordinary Time and enter the season of Advent, we listen to Jesus as He

tells us not to allow the distractions, worries and pleasures of this life to harden our hearts to perceive His presence in the ordinary moments of each day.

Jesus' invitation to "*stay awake, praying at all times*" has to echo in us constantly. What does Jesus mean by that? Does it mean we have to pray without ceasing? How can we when we have many things to do? We are called to have a prayerful, contemplative attitude when we go through the routines of everyday life. As we do our work and fulfil our responsibilities, we need to be aware that we are not alone, but Jesus is with us all the time. Let us end this Liturgical year and start Advent with the desire to be prayerful people.

Reflective question:

How can I be a more prayerful person?

Sunday, 3rd December, 1st Sunday of Advent.

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1,3-8, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from his home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own work to do; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow or dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I am saying to you I say to all: Stay awake!'

Come, Lord!

In the first reading, Prophet Isaiah expressed his anguish at Israel's failure because they had repeatedly chosen to walk away from Him. He lamented, "*We were all like men unclean, all that integrity of ours like filthy clothing. We have all withered like leaves and our sins blew away like the wind*". Yet, the prophet continued to hope in God as He said, "*Lord, you are our Father; we the clay you the potter, we are all work of your hand*". He trusted that God would make something new from His imperfect and flawed people. Today, we begin the season of Advent with hopeful trust that God, our loving Father, will never give up on us. Despite our faults and messy lives, He commits Himself to shape us anew.

Today, listen again to Jesus' invitation to "*stay awake*" by making time for prayer and being attentive to His presence with us in the ordinary moments of each day. May we keep the prayer of Advent in our hearts, "*Come, Lord Jesus, come!*"

Reflective question:

How can I make this Advent season an enriching and fruitful experience?

Monday, 4th December, St. John Damascene.

Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 8:5-11

When Jesus went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralysed and in great pain.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him.' The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven.'

Be a reflection of God's love

"All the nations will stream to it, peoples without number will come to it and they will say, 'Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the Temple of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths..." (First reading). The prophet Isaiah presents God as a God who loves all humanity and welcomes each person, regardless of race, language, gender, status in life, etc., to His dwelling place. What about us? Do we welcome people into our lives, especially those we consider different?

In today's gospel, a Roman centurion asked Jesus to heal his sick servant. Jesus accepted. He did not turn away just because the centurion was not a Jew. Jesus revealed that nationalism, religious beliefs, race and status do not influence God's love. We are called to

reflect God's universal and unconditional love, but first, let us experience ourselves deeply loved by Him. From being loved, we go out and love.

Reflective question:

What strikes me as I pray with today's readings?

Tuesday, 5th December, 1st Week of Advent.

Isaiah 11:1-10, Luke 10:21-24

Filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, he said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it has pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Then turning to his disciples he spoke to them by themselves, *'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.'*

To be child-like

"I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children". Jesus rejoiced because some people welcomed His message about God's love. They were the "little children" who were open to being taught. On the other hand, the learned and clever shut themselves off from receiving Jesus' message because they thought they knew all about God and there was nothing new that Jesus could add to their knowledge. Let us ask for the grace to have the child-like openness to receive what Jesus wants to reveal.

"...and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him". Jesus speaks to us about the loving relationship between God and Himself. However, it is not a close relationship. He wants to lead us to know and love God more. Let us have the desire to enter into a relationship of love with God and live out that relationship fully in our daily life.

Reflective question:

Am I open to receiving what Jesus wants to offer me?

Wednesday, 6th December, St. Nicholas.

Isaiah 25:6-10, Matthew 15:29-37

Jesus reached the shores of the Lake of Galilee, and he went up onto the mountain. He took his seat, and large crowds came to him bringing the lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others; these they put down at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were astonished to see the dumb speaking, the cripples whole again, the lame walking and the blind with their sight, and they praised the God of Israel. But Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them off hungry, or they might collapse on the way.' The disciples said to him, 'Where in a deserted place could we get sufficient bread for such a large crowd to have enough to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves have you?' They said, 'Seven, and a few small fish.' Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks he broke them and began handing them to the disciples, who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected what was left of the scraps, seven baskets full.

Come to the feast

"On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of food rich and juicy, of fine strained wines..." (First reading). Let us find comfort in this good news that God is a God who is so close to us and wants us to have life and to have it to the full, here, now and forever. He Himself will prepare a feast for us and a place where we find joy and peace.

In the gospel, Jesus revealed the heart of God, who never abandoned His people. He fed the people with hope and joy as He made the dumb talk, the crippled walk, and the blind see. He prepared a feast for the hungry, who ate as much as they wanted. Jesus depended on the people to bring their sick to Him and also on the disciples to provide their resources for Him to feed the crowd. Today, Jesus needs us to help Him attend to the people around us. Let us cooperate with Jesus and be channels of His presence to others today.

Reflective question:

What can I do today to be an instrument of Jesus' presence?

Thursday, 7th December, St. Ambrose.

Isaiah 26:1-6, Matthew 7:21, 24-27

Jesus said to his disciples: 'It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had!'

God is my everlasting Rock

"Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord is the everlasting Rock" (First reading). Let these words from Prophet Isaiah invite us to put our trust in God, who is dependable, secure and stable. He will not let us down but sustain and uphold us. Thus, we can trust in God today and forever. As we enter the Advent season, let us build our lives on God, our Rock.

How can we build our lives on God, our Rock? In the gospel today, Jesus tells us that when we listen to His word and put it into practice, we are building our lives on Him. Storms of disappointments and hardships will not overwhelm us. Let us draw close to Jesus and choose today to allow His word to shape us in all we say and do. On Jesus, our solid ground, we can stand secure.

Reflective question:

Where and how will I build my foundation?

Friday, 8th December, Immaculate Conception of Mary.

Genesis 3:9-15, 20, Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12, Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you

who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you

"Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you". These were the Angel's words to Mary. She was full of God's favor, full of God's presence and lived her life striving to do God's will. Though Mary was full of God, she was still disturbed and frightened as she could not fully understand where He was leading her. Her initial response of being *"deeply disturbed"* encourages us because we too often do not understand God's ways and where He is leading us. In our confusion, let us always turn to God. Like Mary, we can go to God, ask Him questions and discern with Him.

Mary listened to what God had to say to her, and she freely chose to trust Him, thus accepting His plan and purpose for her. She responded, *"Let it happen to me as you have said"*. May we be as open as Mary was to God's will and presence and allow Him to work in and through us.

Reflective question:

What is God's message to me in this time of prayer?

Saturday, 9th December, St. Juan Diego Cuahtlatotzin.

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26, Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5, 6-8

Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all

kinds of diseases and illnesses. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest.' He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sicknesses. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.'

Sent out to become channels of God's love

"...when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd". Jesus looked at the crowd and immediately had compassion for them. His compassionate love for the people moved Him to action. He stayed with the people and worked for their good. At the same time, the compassion He had moved Him to invite His disciples to pray to God for more workers to help Him reach out to those harassed and dejected. He then sent His disciples to be with the people and serve them in their needs as He Himself did.

Today, let us understand that Jesus needs us to be His labourers to go out and reflect His compassionate love to those people who are harassed and dejected. The good news is that we are not alone in this mission of love and service. Jesus, who sends us, is with us and gives us the daily strength to do the work He entrusts us.

Reflective question:

What prevents me from becoming an instrument of His compassionate presence?

Sunday, 10th December, 2nd Sunday of Advent.

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11, 2 Peter 3:8-14, Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the prophet Isaiah: Look, I am going to send my messenger in front of you to prepare your way before you. A voice of one that cries in

the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. John the Baptist was in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

Prepare the way

Today, we are invited to stay in the wilderness. The wilderness does not refer to a physical location around us but to the inner place within us where there are no distractions and pretence. It is where we face ourselves and examine our hearts. By discovering more about ourselves, we recognise our need to place God at the centre of our lives again. So often, we allow the desire to accumulate more material securities, preoccupations with selfish ambitions, etc. Thus, it is a necessary Advent journey of entering the wilderness to prepare ourselves to welcome and receive Him at Christmas.

The good news is that we do not go to the wilderness by ourselves. God gives us John the Baptist as our guide. He is the voice in our wilderness that constantly reminds us, "*Prepare the way for the Lord, make his path straight*". He is a trustworthy guide we can trust because he truly lived his life with God and for God. As we enter into the 2nd week of Advent, go to our interior wilderness and let God have more room in our hearts.

Reflective question:

What prevents me from making more room for God in this season of Advent?

Monday, 11th December, St. Damascus I.

Isaiah 35:1-10, Luke 5:17-26

Jesus was teaching one day, and Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who had come from every village in Galilee, from Judaea and from Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was there so that he should heal. And now some men appeared, bringing on a bed a paralysed man whom they were trying to bring in and lay down in front

of him. But as they could find no way of getting the man through the crowd, they went up onto the top of the house and lowered him and his stretcher down through the tiles into the middle of the gathering, in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith he said, 'My friend, your sins are forgiven you.' The scribes and the Pharisees began to think this over. 'Who is this man, talking blasphemy? Who but God alone can forgive sins?' But Jesus, aware of their thoughts, made them this reply, 'What are these thoughts you have in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' -- he said to the paralysed man-'I order you: get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.' And immediately before their very eyes he got up, picked up what he had been lying on and went home praising God. They were all astounded and praised God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'

God comes

"Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, 'Courage! Do not be afraid. Look, your God is coming...'" (First reading). The prophet Isaiah expressed his hope of God's coming. Indeed, God is a God who comes not to punish us but to walk with us and gives us His strength to face the challenges that life brings.

In the person of Jesus, we see God who comes to be with us and that His presence brings restoration and new life to us. In the gospel, Jesus healed a paralysed man by saying, *"My friend, your sins are forgiven you"*. Jesus wanted the man to be free, not just from his physical impediment but also from his sins that prevented him from living life with freedom and joy. Let us be aware that God desires that we live life fully. He wants to free us from the hurt caused by broken relationships, a negative attitude that makes us quick to judge others, a fear that burdens us, etc. Let us draw close to God and ask Him to make us new again so that we can live life with freedom.

Reflective question:

What strikes me as I pray with today's passages?

Tuesday, 12th December, Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Isaiah 40:1-11, Matthew 18:12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? In truth I tell you, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.'

The Shepherd's love

"He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, hilding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes" (First reading). The prophet Isaiah paints a tender image of God as a shepherd who gathers his lambs and leads them to rest. Each of us has a place in God's heart because each of us is precious in His sight. He is our shepherd who is completely devoted to us. Today, let us walk on with the security that He is with us.

In the gospel, Jesus speaks of a shepherd who knows each of his sheep and notices when one sheep is not in the flock. For that one sheep, he leaves the ninety-nine and searches for it. This is the heart of God, our loving shepherd. No matter how insignificant the world regards him/her, each individual matters to God. In this Advent season, let us listen as our Shepherd calls us by our names and rejoice that we are deeply and personally loved by Him, who never gives up on us.

Reflective question:

When have I experienced God's personal and tender love concretely in my life?

Wednesday, 13th December, St. Lucy.

Isaiah 40:25-31, Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus exclaimed: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

Come

“He gives strength to the wearied, he strengthens the powerless. Young men may grow tired and weary, youths may stumble, but those who hope in the Lord renew their strength, they put their wings like eagles. They run and do not grow weary, walk and never tire” (First reading). Haven’t we ever felt that God seems far away from us and that life is against us? Let us listen to God as He tells us to come to Him because He is not far away from us. He is the one who can renew our daily strength and empower us to walk through the ups and downs of life with hope.

In today’s gospel, Jesus reminds us that we have a God who is close to us and cares for us. He says, *“Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest”*. Jesus does not promise to take away our heavy loads and give us a life without problems. Instead, He commits Himself to carry them with us. Let us go to Jesus and let Him love us again.

Reflective question:

What strikes me the most as I pray with today’s passages?

Thursday, 14th December, St. John of the Cross.

Isaiah 41: 13-20, Matthew 11:11-15

Jesus spoke to the crowds: ‘In truth I tell you, of all the children born to women, there has never been anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. Since John the Baptist came, up to this present time, the kingdom of Heaven has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it by storm. Because it was towards John that all the prophecies of the prophets and of the Law were leading; and he, if you will believe me, is the Elijah who was to return. Anyone who has ears should listen!’

Greater than John the Baptist

“...of all the children born to women, there has never been anyone greater than John the Baptist”. Jesus had high praise for John the Baptist. Yet, even though John the Baptist was great, he was just a voice crying out in the desert and pointing to someone greater than himself, Jesus. Because of his mission, he was executed and did not live to witness Jesus’ death and resurrection and respond to become His disciple and follow Him.

Jesus then continued, "*the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he*". He was referring to us, His disciples, who are greater than John the Baptist, because we have the privilege to taste the joy of His death and resurrection, and even today, we continue to enjoy His presence in and through the Scripture and the Eucharist. As we prepare for Christmas, let us not be so busy with shopping and feasting that we take for granted how truly blessed we are. May we enjoy the living presence of Jesus and commit ourselves to live as His disciples.

Reflective question:

Do I appreciate the gift of Jesus in my life?

Friday, 15th December, 2nd Week of Advent.

Isaiah 48:17-19, Matthew 11:16-19

Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'What comparison can I find for this generation? It is like children shouting to each other as they sit in the market place: 'We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't be mourners.' For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He is possessed." The Son of man came, eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.'

Move to God's tune

In today's gospel, Jesus spoke about the responses of the people towards His ministry and that of John the Baptist. They were indifferent, like the children playing in the marketplace who would neither dance to joyful songs nor mourn to sad hymns. The people of Jesus' generation rejected and chose to be deaf to Jesus and John the Baptist. For them, John the Baptist was "possessed" and Jesus was "a glutton and a drunkard" and "a friend of tax collectors and sinners".

We can be like the people who rejected John the Baptist and Jesus. We are deaf to the life-giving message of Jesus and unmoved by the different ways God comes into our lives. "*I, the Lord, your God. Teach you what is good for you, I lead you in the way you must go. If only you had been alert to my commandments, your happiness would have been*

like a river..." (First reading). May this Advent be a time when we grow to become more attentive to God's presence and move to His rhythm.

Reflective question:

How can I be more open to God's ways and walk to where He wants to lead me?

**Saturday, 16th December, 2nd Week of Advent.
Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4, 9-11, Matthew 17:10-13**

As they came down from the mountain, the disciples put this question to Jesus, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' He replied, 'Elijah is indeed coming, and he will set everything right again; however, I tell you that Elijah has come already and they did not recognise him but treated him as they pleased; and the Son of man will suffer similarly at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was speaking of John the Baptist.

Faithful to the end

In today's gospel, Jesus identified John the Baptist with the prophet Elijah. Jesus said that Elijah, whom the people expected to come before the Messiah, had come in the figure of John the Baptist. However, John the Baptist was taken for granted and beheaded by Herod. Jesus knew that He would face a similar ending as John the Baptist. He came to call people into a loving relationship with God, a loving Father. Many refused to accept His message and rejected Him. Thus, the child in the manger in Bethlehem would one day suffer and die on the cross in Calvary because He remained faithful to God's mission.

This Advent, let us not get so caught up with all the festivities that we forget that we too are called to follow Jesus by having the courage to share the Good News of God's love with those around us through our words and deeds. Even when we face rejections and misunderstandings, let us remain faithful to the work God has given to us.

Reflective question:

Am I open to accept the consequences of proclaiming the Good News in word and deed?

Sunday, 17th December, 3rd Sunday of Advent.

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, John 1:6-8, 19-28

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, he was to bear witness to the light. This was the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He declared, he did not deny but declared, 'I am not the Christ.' So they asked, 'Then are you Elijah?' He replied, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So he said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord. Make his paths straight!' Now those who had been sent were Pharisees, and they put this question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the Prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptise with water; but standing among you -- unknown to you- is the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

Joy

On this Gaudate Sunday, let us allow John the Baptist to show us how to live this time of preparation with humility in bringing others to Jesus and be heralds of joy to others. He was happy not to be in the limelight but to be a witness to Jesus, pointing people to the way to Him. How can we learn from John to be humble and joyful?

Humility: John was humble and at peace with the role that God had given him. Because of his humility, he guided people to recognise and welcome Jesus. Let us allow God to show us where He calls us to be and do and trust that He has a role, a place and a time for us. Through us, may we bring people to Jesus this Advent. Joy: We have known the joy of knowing and loving Jesus and experienced His loving presence. It is time to share the joy of our faith with others by simply living life with joy, gratitude and hope, even amid challenges. May our happiness infect others to live also with joy in Christ.

Reflective question:

How can I be a herald of joy that points others to Jesus?

Monday, 18th December, 3rd Week of Advent.

Jeremiah 23:5-8, Matthew 1:18-24

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Do not be afraid

In today's gospel, Joseph learned that Mary, his betrothed, was pregnant. In the face of this dilemma, he wanted to do the right thing, and thus, the only solution was to divorce Mary. It was difficult for Joseph to deal with this unexpected situation when things did not turn out the way he wanted. When life throws us a curveball, we, like Joseph, struggle to know what steps to take. In a dream, Joseph understood what God wanted of him and did not hesitate to act accordingly. Like Joseph, we too can be enlightened on what to do through prayer, talking to someone we trust, etc. Let us know that God will not abandon us but will always guide us and show us the way to go.

As we pray, let us listen to God telling us the same words He used to assure Joseph, "*Do not be afraid*". In the ups and downs of life, there is no need to be afraid because God, Emmanuel, is with us.

Reflective question:

What message does God want to tell me in this time of prayer?

Tuesday, 19th December, 3rd Week of Advent.

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25, Luke 1:5-25

In the days of King Herod of Judaea there lived a priest called Zechariah who belonged to the Abijah section of the priesthood, and he had a wife, Elizabeth by name, who was a descendant of Aaron. Both were upright in the sight of God and impeccably carried out all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless: Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in years. Now it happened that it was the turn of his section to serve, and he was exercising his priestly office before God when it fell to him by lot, as the priestly custom was, to enter the Lord's sanctuary and burn incense there. And at the hour of incense all the people were outside, praying. Then there appeared to him the angel of the Lord, standing on the right of the altar of incense. The sight disturbed Zechariah and he was overcome with fear. But the angel said to him, 'Zechariah, do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you shall name him John. He will be your joy and delight and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord; he must drink no wine, no strong drink; even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the Israelites to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to reconcile fathers to their children and the disobedient to the good sense of the upright, preparing for the Lord a people fit for him.' Zechariah said to the angel, 'How can I know this? I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years.' The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel, who stand in God's presence, and I have been sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. Look! Since you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time, you will be silenced and have no power of speech until this has happened.' Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he stayed in the sanctuary so long. When he came out he could not speak to them, and they realised that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. But he could only make signs to them and remained dumb. When his time of service came to an end he returned home. Some time later his wife Elizabeth conceived and for five months she kept to herself, saying, 'The Lord has done this for me, now that it has pleased him to take away the humiliation I suffered in public.'

God is faithful

In today's gospel, St Luke introduced us to Zechariah and his wife. Both of them were getting on in years and had no children. Thus, any hope of them having children was impossible. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and told him that Elizabeth would conceive and bear a son, he doubted. "*How can I know this? I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years*". Because of his disbelief, he found himself dumb. His long silence was not a punishment but a time to learn to watch and recognise God's faithful presence in his life.

We tend to despair when problems surround us. We often do not understand God's ways and become doubtful and hopeless. As we pray with the story of Zechariah, let us take comfort in the fact that we have a faithful God who never stops working for our good despite our doubts and hopelessness. He will always make a way when there seems to be no way. Let us open our hearts to recognise His faithful presence.

Reflective question:

What did God reveal to me in this time of prayer?

Wednesday, 20th December, 3rd Week of Advent.

Isaiah 7:10-14, Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing

is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

The Lord is with you

"Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you". These are the angel Gabriel's words to Mary, which reveal the reason for her joy: *"The Lord is with you"*. As we draw closer to Christmas, let us pause and allow these words to sink into our hearts: *"The Lord is with you"*. These words are meant for us and should be the reason for our joy. God comes and tells us, *"I am with you"*. God is with us in the good times and bad times. He is with us in our sickness and good health. He is with us in our worries, loneliness and fears. He is with us because He loves and cares for us as no one else can. Thus, we rejoice.

As we busy ourselves for Christmas, let us not forget to open the doors of our homes and hearts to God's presence. May we also reach out to others struggling for one reason or another and offer them the good news: *"Rejoice because the Lord is with you!"*.

Reflective question:

"Rejoice. The Lord is with you.": Is there someone I need to share this message with?

Thursday, 21st December, 3rd Week of Advent.

Song 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18, Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

A heart filled with deep joy

In today's gospel, we see the meeting of two pregnant women, two mothers, unsure of the future and facing a significant change in their

lives. Yet, both were women of great faith and rejoiced as they recognised the hand of God in their lives and praised Him for the great work He has done for them.

As we draw close to Christmas, we are invited to have joy. Joy is much more than just an emotion. It is the fruit of having God in our lives and recognising His work in and through our lives. Let us read slowly the gospel passage today and allow the joy of Mary and Elizabeth to uplift us and move us to see the hand of God at work in our lives.

Reflective question:

Is God the source of my joy?

Friday, 22nd December, 3rd Week of Advent.

1 Samuel 1:24-28, Luke 1:46-56

Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him. He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love - according to the promise he made to our ancestors -- of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever. Mary stayed with her some three months and then went home.

My song of praise

Today, we are invited to reflect on the prayer of Mary, the Magnificat. Mary gave praise to God for what He had done for her. Her humility opened her heart to see God's presence and His work in her life. We often see the bad things in our lives, the mistakes we make and the weaknesses we have. This time of Advent, let us also be aware of the good things God has blessed us with and the continuous work that He is doing in our lives. With Mary, we too can sing our Magnificat, our song of praise to God.

In her Magnificat, Mary also recognised that God was on the side of those whom the society considered poor and insignificant. It was the lowly whom He raised and the hungry whom He filled with good things. Today, let us go to God in our lowliness and acknowledge that we need Him. When we do so, we will experience Him close to us, uplifting us with His love and filling us with all we need.

Reflective question:

Can I write a Magnificat about the good things God has done for me?

Saturday, 23rd December, 3rd Week of Advent.

Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24, Luke 1:57-66

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had lavished on her his faithful love, they shared her joy. Now it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said, 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family has that name,' and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him.

Birth of John

In today's gospel, Elizabeth and Zechariah chose to name their baby, John. The baby's name surprised the rest of the family and neighbours because it went against the tradition of naming the child after his father. They wondered, "*What will this child turn out to be?*" Indeed, this child would be God's prophet who would prepare the people for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, Emmanuel God-with-us.

Today, as we stand at the threshold of Christmas, let us, like the neighbours and relations of Zechariah and Elizabeth, be filled with awe and excitement as we prepare ourselves to receive God's greatest gift, Jesus. Like John the Baptist, we too are born with a purpose. Thus, let

us be faithful to do what John the Baptist did, i.e., leading people to Jesus by what we say and do.

Reflective question:

What is the purpose of my life?

Sunday, 24th December, 4th Sunday of Advent.

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

For God's glory

"He alone is wisdom; give glory therefore to him through Jesus Christ for ever and ever. Amen." (2nd reading). We can only give glory to God when we recognise God as God and live in a relationship of love and dependence on Him. Today's invitation is to make our whole lives- our words and actions- be a doxology, an expression of daily praise to God. It is for us not to seek to take credit for the things we do but to bring glory to God.

In the gospel, when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would bear a child and be the Mother of God, she turned towards God, not to her pride or her fears. This is shown in her response at the end, *"I am the handmaid*

of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me". Despite not knowing her future, Mary took the leap of faith and trusted God more than herself. She let go of her own plans and let God take over her life. Thus, by living her life for God, she brought glory to Him.

Reflective question:

Do my words and actions bring glory to God?

Monday, 25th December, Nativity of the Lord.

Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-6, John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him. What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, he was to bear witness to the light. The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. He came to his own and 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 believed in his name who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself. The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John witnesses to him. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.' Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received -- one gift replacing another, for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

God dwells

Today, as we celebrate the feast of Christmas, let us listen to St. John the Evangelist as he tells us, "*The Word became flesh, he lived among us...*". These words express the true meaning of what Christmas is. The Word became flesh and stays with us. Let us ponder the reality that God

does not want to be distant from us but lives among us, dwells with us and remains in us.

“If we consider ourselves unworthy, that does not stop him: he comes. If we reject him, He does not tire of seeking us out. If we are not ready and willing to receive him, he prefers to come anyway. And if we close the door in his face, he waits. He is truly the Good Shepherd. And the most beautiful image of the Good Shepherd? The Word that becomes flesh to share in our life. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who comes to seek us right where we are: in our problems, in our suffering... He comes there.” (Pope Francis, 2022). Today, may we find comfort in God’s closeness to our suffering, fears and loneliness.

Reflective question:

What is the one thing I want to take away from this time of prayer?

Tuesday, 26th December, St. Stephen.

Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59, Matthew 10:17-22

Jesus said to his apostles: 'Be prepared for people to hand you over to sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as evidence to them and to the gentiles. But when you are handed over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will come forward against their parents and have them put to death. You will be universally hated on account of my name; but anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved.'

Making Jesus present today

Isn't it strange that we celebrate the feast of a martyr right after Christmas day? Shouldn't we continue the joyful celebration and not focus on suffering, rejection, persecution and death? St. Stephen, the first person who gave his life for Christ, brings us back to the authentic meaning of being a disciple of Jesus. We cannot remain neutral as His disciples but need to take a stand and bear witness to Jesus. St. Stephen was stoned to death for His works of mercy and proclamation of the good news of Jesus. Thus, he chose to live and die, not for an idea or a philosophy, but for a person, Jesus. Today, we are called to imitate his

example and dare to be living witnesses through our words and actions. By our witnessing, Jesus remains present in our world today.

As we continue our celebration of Christmas, let us be humble signs of the presence of Jesus to those around us. We also pray for Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

Reflective question:

Today, how can I be a witness of Jesus through my words and actions?

Wednesday, 27th December, St. John Apostle and Evangelist.

1 John 1:1-4, John 20:2-8

On the first day of the week Mary of Magdala came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,' she said, 'and we don't know where they have put him.' So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter, following him, also came up, went into the tomb, saw the linen cloths lying on the ground and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed.

The disciple whom Jesus loved

Today, we celebrate the feast of St John, Apostle and Evangelist, who gave His whole life to live and proclaim the Word of God. In today's gospel, there were three characters, but only two were named: Mary of Magdala and Peter. The nameless disciple, known as "*the one whom Jesus loved*", is usually associated with St. John. Today, we are invited to recognise that we are the disciples whom Jesus loves and are called to have a close and intimate friendship with Jesus.

In the passage, only this disciple whom Jesus loved saw and believed that his beloved Master had truly risen. His love for Jesus opened his sight to see new life beyond the empty tomb. Let us allow ourselves to

be deeply loved by Jesus and have the vision to see hope, joy and life, even in situations that seem discouraging and bleak.

Reflective question:

What is Jesus' message for me in this time of prayer?

Thursday, 28th December, Holy Innocents, Martyrs.

1 John 1:5-2:2, Matthew 2:13-18

After the wise men had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.' So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I called my son out of Egypt. Herod was furious on realising that he had been fooled by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or less, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men. Then were fulfilled the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamenting and weeping bitterly: it is Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more.

To be with God in His work of giving life

In today's gospel, we see how Herod was determined to kill all the male children under the age of two in the region of Bethlehem. He did so in order to ensure that baby Jesus would be destroyed. On the other hand, God worked hard to save the life of baby Jesus and also that of Joseph and Mary. What a contrast! Herod was on the side of death. God was on the side of life. Today, God continues actively working in our lives and our world to give life.

Today, we are challenged to answer the call to collaborate with God. Herod continues to live today in forces that disregard life, especially the life of the most vulnerable. God calls us today to be on His side by releasing life through our caring, protecting, sacrificing and loving. May God count on us in this mission of giving life.

Reflective question:

How can I concretely be a channel of God's life to people and situations around me?

Friday, 29th December, 5th Day within the Octave of Christmas.

1 John 2:3-11, Luke 2:22-35

When the day came for them to be purified in keeping with the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord- observing what is written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord- and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is prescribed in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said: Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations; a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel. As the child's father and mother were wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed- and a sword will pierce your soul too -- so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

My eyes have seen you, Lord

In today's gospel, we see Simeon, an upright and devout man, who was led by the Holy Spirit to the temple. He saw a couple bringing their newborn baby and recognised the presence of God in the form of that little baby. With joyful contentment, Simeon proclaimed, "*Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation...*"

In our journey of faith, there have been moments when we see God with eyes of faith and experience His closeness to us. We perceive His presence when we pray with the Scripture, receive Him in the Eucharist,

and see Him in the events of life and people around us. Like Simeon, we have experienced our hearts filled with blissful contentment and quiet joy. These experiences are God-moments when we rejoice that God is close to us. As we pray today, let us be open to the Holy Spirit as Simeon was and see God with eyes of faith.

Reflective question:

In this Christmas season, do I open to being led by the Holy Spirit to see God in my life?

Saturday, 30th December, 6th Day within Octave of Christmas.

1 John 2:12-17, Luke 2:36-40

There was a prophetess, too, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came up just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

Active-contemplative

In today's gospel, Anna, a prophetess, is in our spotlight. What do we know of this amazing woman? She was eighty-four years old and never left the Temple. She was a widow, but though she was alone in the world, she was not really alone because her whole life was filled with God. So much in love with Him that she spent her days serving Him with fasting and prayer. Her communion with God opened her eyes to see what God was doing in her and around her. Like the prophet Simeon, she saw the baby Jesus and started to praise God. Joyfully, she spoke of the child to all those waiting for the Messiah. She could have kept quiet and go about minding her business. She did not because her love for God pushed her to share Him with others.

Today, let us learn from Anna to be prayerful and contemplative people and active witnesses to God's presence and His work in what we say and do to those around us.

Reflective question:

What strikes me most as I pray with the gospel passage?

Sunday, 31st December, The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.**Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3, Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19, Luke 2:22-40**

When the day came for them to be purified in keeping with the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord- observing what is written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord- and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is prescribed in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said: Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations; a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel. As the child's father and mother were wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed- and a sword will pierce your soul too -- so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.' There was a prophetess, too, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came up just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

A family of faith

As we contemplate the Holy Family, we often think that they lived perfect lives, untouched by problems and suffering. Is it? Mary was pregnant before she was married to Joseph. She had to give birth to her son in a stable. She and Joseph had to flee from their homeland because Herod wanted to kill their newborn baby, and they became political refugees in Egypt. In today's gospel, the prophet Simeon told her that a sword would pierce her heart. The greatest sword would be the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. Yet, despite the ups and downs that life brought them, Jesus, Mary and Joseph remained rooted in God. God was the foundation that held them together and sustained them in facing the storms they encountered.

"It was faith..." (2nd reading). In today's second reading, we see Abraham and Sarah, like Mary and Joseph, were people of faith. As individuals and families, we are invited to put our faith in God. When we put our faith in God, we walk on despite challenges and encourage others to do the same.

Reflective question:

How can I imitate the Holy Family during challenging times?



By Mike Moyers