

# *Prayer for Living Year © December*

**Emmanuel, God-with-us**



**Sr. Sandra Seow  
Verbum Dei Missionaries**

## PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR C

Copyright © 2024 Sr. Sandra Seow

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the author's written permission.

## **Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1st Sunday of Advent.**

**Jeremiah 33:14-16, 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2, Luke 21:25-28, 34-36**

*Jesus said to his disciples: 'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the turmoil of the ocean and its waves; men fainting away with terror and fear at what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.' '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.'*

### Be prepared, be prayerful

*"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."* Advent is here. Sadly, we often become so caught up in the external aspects of Christmas—decorating, shopping, and feasting—that we overlook the quiet, reflective season of Advent. Today, let us listen to Jesus as He calls us to watch ourselves and to be attentive by setting aside time and space for prayer. It is in the silence of prayer that we connect ourselves with Him.

Through the gospel, Jesus also encourages us to recognize that none of us knows when our final day on earth will come. What we do know is that we want to live with faith rather than fear. Each day in this Advent season, let us be determined to take moments to slow down and realign ourselves with Christ, allowing Him to be the centre of our lives once again.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I make Advent 2024 a fruitful experience?

## **Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent.**

**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.'*

### A caring heart

The Roman Centurion is a man of position and power, yet he deeply cares for his servant, who is enduring great pain. His heart is filled with compassion because he considers his servant a person worthy of his time and concern. For this reason, the Roman Centurion goes to Jesus and pleads with Him to come and heal his servant.

In the hustle and bustle of our busy lives, let us not get lost in our own routines. Instead, let us open our eyes to recognise the struggles and needs of those around us, extending our hands to offer help and service so that our presence can make a difference to them. We are all God's children, regardless of our race, social status, education level, or any other differences. This Advent, we inspire to be like the Roman Centurion by having a heart that truly cares for others.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I show someone I care today?

**Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, St. Francis Xavier.**

**1 Corinthians 9:16-19, Mark 16:15-20**

*Jesus showed himself to the Eleven, and he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.'* And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven;

*there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.*

### Solely for the love of God

Today, we celebrate the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, who devoted his life to evangelisation, finding joy in planting the seeds of faith in others. He went on dangerous voyages by sea to different parts of Asia, including India, Malacca, the islands of Indonesia and Japan. Despite facing rejection and loneliness among foreigners, Xavier's enthusiasm for the mission was not dampened. He lived for God and with God. He wrote, "*In this life, we find our greatest comfort living in the midst of danger, that is, if we confront them solely for the love of God.*" He died in 1552 on the Chinese island of Shangchuan, never reaching China, where he yearned to share his faith.

Jesus continues to count on us to be His instruments to bring others to God. We need to believe that through our words and actions, we can play a vital role in helping others come to know God deeply and embrace His message of love and hope. We undertake this mission solely out of love for God.

### **Reflective question:**

Do I believe that God has called and chosen me to be a bridge for people to encounter Him?

### **Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> December, St. John Damascene.**

#### **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.*

To collaborate with Jesus for others

*"...large crowds came to him bringing the lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others..."* Today, Jesus needs us to be like the crowds who brought to Him the lame, the crippled, the blind, the mute and many others in need. In this time of Advent, let us open our hearts and reach out to those who are struggling with deep-seated anxiety, overwhelming discouragement and the lingering weight of shame and guilt. We offer them Jesus as their source of comfort and hope.

When Jesus saw that the people were hungry for food, He did not send them away but chose to care for their needs. He turned to His disciples to give Him what they already had. Taking their meager supplies, Jesus transformed the little into an abundance of food for all. As we reflect on today's passage, let us hear Jesus inviting us to offer what little we have to Him—whether it is our resources, time or talents—so that He can transform them for the good of others. While we may be unable to help everyone, we can certainly make a difference to those around us.

### **Reflective question:**

What is the message for me in this time of prayer?

**Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent.**

**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 our everlasting rock

The parable of the two builders invites us to examine our own foundation of our lives. Are we building our lives on a weak foundation like the builder who used sand, or on a strong rock like the other builder? We need a strong kind of foundation that will sustain us when we face unforeseen challenges and turbulent times. Jesus offers us Himself to be the reliable foundation and the solid ground of our lives. In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah describes God as the “everlasting Rock.” Let us take comfort in knowing that God is our everlasting rock, and we can place our trust in Him.

How can we make God our solid foundation? Jesus tells us that we need to open ourselves to His word and allow it to guide and shape all that we do and say. As we journey through this Advent season, let us be receptive to God’s word and His presence. In doing so, we allow Him to become our rock, our source of strength, which remains unshaken in life’s storms.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I make God my rock today?

### **Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> December, St. Nicholas.**

#### **Isaiah 29:17-24, Matthew 9:27-31**

*As Jesus went on his way two blind men followed him shouting, 'Take pity on us, son of David.' And when Jesus reached the house the blind men came up to him and he said to them, 'Do you believe I can do this?' They said, 'Lord, we do.' Then he touched their eyes saying, 'According to your faith, let it be done to you.' And their sight returned. Then Jesus sternly warned them, 'Take care that no one learns about this.' But when they had gone away, they talked about him all over the countryside.*

## The eyes of the blind shall be open

In today’s gospel, the two blind men followed Jesus and shouted their deepest needs to Him. Their hearts were filled with hope, knowing that Jesus had the power to restore their sight. With unwavering faith, they called out to Him with the yearning to be freed from the darkness that had shrouded their world for so long. Like the two blind men, we too carry a profound blindness within our hearts that prevents us from perceiving

God's presence in our lives and hindering us from valuing the inherent dignity of those around us. This inner darkness causes us to live in preconceptions and distractions, preventing us from truly loving God and others.

In this Advent season, let us go close to Jesus, share our needs with Him and trust wholeheartedly that He alone can bring His true light that illuminates the darkness in us and brings His peace, hope and love to our hearts. Let Jesus open our eyes so that we may see Him and others with renewed vision, and touch our hearts to help us find the strength to love again.

**Reflective question:**

Am I open to recognizing my spiritual blindness?

**Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> December, St. Ambrose.**

**Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26, Matthew 9:35-10:1, 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 disease and all kinds of illness. He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. 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 drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; 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.'*

**Be a shepherd**

*"...he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd."* Jesus has deep compassion for the people devoid of hope and direction, like sheep



without a shepherd, yearning for guidance and support in their struggles. He wants to lead them back to the heart of God, back to where they belong. Today, Jesus continues to see people who are like sheep without a shepherd. There are many people who live in a state of loneliness, fear, and uncertainty due to the constant barrage of bad news. Are we aware of the pain of others around us?

Jesus calls us to join Him as labourers in His mission field, encouraging us to be His hands and feet, reaching out to offer relief, heal and make a difference.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I offer my hands and feet for Jesus' mission?

### **Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent.**

#### **Baruch 5:1-9, Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11, Luke 3:1-6**

*In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the territories of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, and while the high-priesthood was held by Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah, in the desert. He went through the whole Jordan area proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of Isaiah the prophet: A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight! Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be levelled, winding ways be straightened and rough roads made smooth, and all humanity will see the salvation of God.*

#### The word of God comes...

St. Luke the Evangelist begins by setting the geopolitical realm of the Roman Empire. He mentions powerful political people who were violent and oppressive toward the Jewish people. Annas and Caiaphas, the Jewish religious leaders, are also mentioned. They were influential figures, known for being somewhat corrupt and thriving on the tithes and donations of the temple. God stepped in at this particular point in human history among these powerful people in the political and religious scene. "...the word of God came to John..." It is comforting that amid a chaotic,

imperfect, and divided society with flawed political and religious leaders, the word of God came to John.

Today, amid the world's chaos, characterised by war, poverty, and division, and amid the complexities of our lives, the word of God comes to us. He calls us to listen to Him and allow Him to transform our minds so that we can have a new vision of life that makes us open up to hope. We can trust that God wants to work in and through us to accomplish something great in our lives.

### **Reflective question:**

How does God want me to live this second week of Advent?

### **Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> December, The 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.*

### Let it happen to me...

In today's gospel, God called Mary to become the mother of His Son. Upon hearing it, Mary was deeply disturbed and asked, "*How can this come about...?*". She looked at her reality as a young girl living in a small village and could not understand how she could possibly carry out such

a grand mission entrusted to her by God. The angel Gabriel's answer to her was, *"Do not be afraid...The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow...for nothing is impossible to God"*. Mary was invited to trust in God, not in herself.

Today, let us ask Mother Mary to help us trust in God more than in ourselves. Whenever we recognise that God is inviting us to do something—such as forgiving someone or finding a way to love someone who is challenging—we are reminded that we are not relying solely on our own strength and resources to accomplish what He asks of us. May we, like Mother Mary, have the courage to say "Yes" to God and open ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit within us and through us.

**Reflective question:**

How can I follow in Mother Mary's footsteps by placing my trust more fully in God?

**Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> December, Our Lady of Loreto.**

**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

*"Here is God coming with power... He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes."* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). The power of God is a gentle force that embraces us with compassion and love rather than one that seeks to dominate or control. During this Advent season, let us draw close to God, our Shepherd, for each of us has a special place in His heart.

In the gospel, we see the shepherd's deep love for each sheep. He left the ninety-nine to search for the one lost sheep. This parable reveals the heart of God, the Good Shepherd. Each individual is loved by Him, and

every person holds significance in His eyes. Today, Jesus calls us to embrace the heart of the Good Shepherd by valuing every person in our lives, including those who are overlooked and considered "lost" by their families, churches, faith communities, and society.

**Reflective questions:**

In this Advent season, who is the "one" whom Jesus is inviting me to love more? What needs to be changed in me in order to do so?

**Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> December, St. Damasus I.**

**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.'*

Rest

*"...those who hope in the Lord renew their strength, they put out wings like eagles, they run and not grow weary, walk and never tired"* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). In this society where power and efficiency are valued, weakness, powerlessness, and tiredness are seen as flaws. We often feel the pressure to appear strong and in control of situations, and we focus on doing things for others. However, when we need help, we struggle to ask for it and hesitate to show others that we are unable to cope. Today's passages invite us to realise that we are weak and tired and that it is okay. In the first reading, God is the source of our strength, offering us comfort and support in our moments of vulnerability.

*"Come to me, all of you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest"*. Jesus wants to give us rest, but we must first acknowledge our tiredness and our need for Him. He is ready to give us the rest that uplifts us and allows us to be renewed with a strength that is not our own.

**Reflective question:**

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

## **Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> December, Our Lady of Guadalupe.**

### **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!'*

### Face fear with faith

*"I, the Lord, your God, I am holding you by the right hand; I tell you, 'Do not be afraid, I will help you'..."* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). The call of God to us today is, *"Do not be afraid"*. One of the fears that we often face is the fear of the unknown. The uncertainty of what lies ahead can be unsettling, and it reminds us of our vulnerability and the unpredictability of the future. This uncertainty can lead to anxiety as we realise that we cannot control what will happen. We hold onto the words of the first reading, having faith that God stands alongside us in moments of fear, ready to help and support us.

*"...there has never been anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he...."*(The gospel). We are greater than John the Baptist because we have experienced the fruits of Jesus' death and resurrection- the gift of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments, the gospels, the faith community, etc. Let us not take our faith in Jesus for granted. May we never let our fears overcome our faith.

### **Reflective question:**

What is stopping me from living by faith?

## **Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> December, St. Lucy.**

### **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.'*

### Attune to God's presence

In today's gospel, Jesus likened the people around Him to children in the marketplace. These children called out to their friends, urging them to join in their games. Yet, no matter the music, be it happy tunes or sad melodies, the other children remained unmoved. Jesus' contemporaries were like these indifferent children. They regarded the melody played by John the Baptist as too austere. They saw Jesus eating and drinking, and they found his tune to be too celebratory. They were unable to recognise God's presence in both John the Baptist and Jesus.

In this Advent season, let us remain open to recognising God in both the joyful and sorrowful moments of life, including ways that may not match our expectations. Let us pray today, "*Come, Lord Jesus*", and be aware that He is with us in various circumstances of our lives. By doing so, we can walk alongside God and become a life-giving presence for others.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I open myself to recognize God in the various moments of today?

### **Saturday, 14th December, St. John of the Cross.**

#### **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.*

### To be like John the Baptist

The disciples questioned Jesus about Elijah, and He confirmed that Elijah would indeed return, mentioning that he had already come. Instead of being welcomed, he was rejected and mistreated by the people. They understood that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was faithful to his mission to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, even when he faced opposition and rejection. Let us remember that we have the mission, like John the Baptist, to prepare the way for Jesus to enter our lives and the lives of those around us. Like John the Baptist, we too will face resistance from people who may reject and dismiss the Good News we embody and communicate. Let us not give up; instead, let us follow Jesus closely and live joyfully and faithfully to the end.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I faithfully prepare the way for Jesus, even in the face of hardships and opposition?

### **Sunday, 15th December, 3rd Sunday of Advent.**

#### **Zephaniah 3:14-18, Philippians 4:4-7, Luke 3:10-18**

*When all the people asked John, 'What must we do, then?' he answered, 'Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none, and anyone with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors, too, who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than the appointed rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!' A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to wonder whether John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' And he proclaimed the good news to the people with many other exhortations too.*

#### What must I do?

*"When all the people asked John, 'What must we do, then?'" (The gospel). As we celebrate Gaudete Sunday, we can ask Jesus the same question, "What must I do?". The answer is to give and share what we have with others, especially with those who are in need. This is the true spirit of Advent-Christmas. The commercial world encourages us to buy amazing gifts and decorate our homes to celebrate the festive joy. While*

there is nothing wrong with buying gifts and decorating our homes, we must not forget the importance of being generous to those in need. Whether through acts of kindness, spending time with someone we love or donations, we can make a difference in the lives of others. It is important to share our joy not just with close friends and family, but to touch the hearts of those who may be struggling.

One valuable gift we can share is our faith in God, who is the source of our peace and love. By our words and actions, we can invite others into a deeper relationship with God and experience His presence in their lives.

### **Reflective question:**

What is one thing I can share with someone today?

### **Monday, 16th December, 3rd Week of Advent.**

#### **Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17, Matthew 21:23-27**

*Jesus had gone into the Temple and was teaching, when the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him and said, 'What authority have you for acting like this? And who gave you this authority?' In reply Jesus said to them, 'And I will ask you a question, just one; if you tell me the answer to it, then I will tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism: what was its origin, heavenly or human?' And they argued this way among themselves, 'If we say heavenly, he will retort to us, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?"; but if we say human, we have the people to fear, for they all hold that John was a prophet.' So their reply to Jesus was, 'We do not know.' And he retorted to them, 'Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this.'*

#### Jesus' authority

Today's gospel speaks of authority. Many of us, even those serving in the church, perceive authority as power, status, and dominance. What about Jesus? As we reflect on His life, it is evident that He used His authority not as a means to dominate but as a powerful tool for service. His authority was rooted in humility and love. Through His words and actions, He showed a deep commitment to meeting the needs of those around Him and uplifting them to live better lives.

The challenge for us is to follow Jesus in how we exercise our authority as parents, grandparents, employers, godparents, and individuals in



positions within the parish. Let us use it to serve and love others for their growth and betterment.

### **Reflective question:**

What needs to change in me to live with authority like Jesus did?

### **Tuesday, 17th December, 3rd Week of Advent.**

#### **Genesis 49:1-2, 8-10, Matthew 1:1-17**

*Roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers, Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse; and Jesse fathered King David. David fathered Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon fathered Rehoboam, Rehoboam fathered Abijah, Abijah fathered Asa, Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat fathered Joram, Joram fathered Uzziah, Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered Ahaz, Ahaz fathered Hezekiah, Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh fathered Amon, Amon fathered Josiah; and Josiah fathered Jechoniah and his brothers. Then the deportation to Babylon took place. After the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, Abiud fathered Eliakim, Eliakim fathered Azor, Azor fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Achim, Achim fathered Eliud, Eliud fathered Eleazar, Eleazar fathered Matthan, Matthan fathered Jacob; and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ. The sum of generations is therefore: fourteen from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Babylonian deportation; and fourteen from the Babylonian deportation to Christ.*

#### The genealogy of Jesus

Today's gospel passage presents the genealogy of Jesus, a list of names that many of us overlook or skip entirely. At first glance, this gospel passage makes little sense and is somewhat disconnected from our lives. Today, let us prayerfully reflect on the names, realising how God works in the lives of each person in Jesus' family history and continues to work in our lives. In Jesus' genealogy, there are various good and bad people.

Some individuals are involved in irregular marriages, some participate in criminal activities, and some display volatile behaviour. The good news is that even amidst their struggles and imperfections, God was able to work through them. From these people, Christ was born.

Today, let us look at our own family tree. Many of us have both sinners and saints in our family lineage, and it is okay. This Advent, let us give thanks to God for each member of our family. Even though our relationships with some family members can be challenging, we believe that God continues to draw straight lines with crooked ones.

### **Reflective question:**

Is there someone in my family whom I need to pray for and reach out to during this Advent season?

### **Wednesday, 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.*

#### Joseph's trust

In the gospel passage today, we see that Joseph's world turned upside-down when he discovered Mary, his betrothed, was pregnant and knew that the baby was not his. He was a good man who wanted to avoid publicly divorcing Mary, as that could lead to her being charged with adultery and stoned to death. So, he chose to end the engagement privately. Burdened by the situation, Joseph fell asleep. In his dream, he

heard God inviting him to take Mary as his wife and that she would give birth to a child who would bring salvation to all people. When Joseph woke up, he did as God told him to. Despite not seeing the whole picture or understanding the situation, he responded to God without hesitation. By saying "Yes" to God, Joseph revealed the depth of His unwavering trust in Him.

Today, God invites us to willingly get up, like Joseph, and take action based on our understanding of what He wants from us. We ask for the grace to trust unwaveringly and align our lives with God's purpose.

**Reflective question:**

What does it mean to trust God at this point in my life?

**Thursday, 19th December, 3rd Week of Advent.**

**Judge 13:2-7, 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.'*

### The gift of silence

As we become busy with Christmas preparations, let us not forget to embrace silence and make room for God to speak to our hearts. When angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his elderly wife would bear a son, he was filled with uncertainty and disbelief. The angel then told him, "*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*". It might seem like Zechariah was punished for his disbelief. However, silence was a gift given to Zechariah to help him perceive God's actions in his life. Indeed, those months of silence allowed him to listen to God and contemplate his loving presence.

Today, let us value the gift of silence. In this stillness within, may we quiet our thoughts and open our hearts, allowing ourselves to fully listen and connect with God's presence, learning to trust that He acts in and through us for our good.

### **Reflective question:**

Do I appreciate silence as a way to create space for God?

### **Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> December, 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent.**

#### **Isaiah 7:10-14, Luke 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.*

### Do not be afraid

As we prayerfully read the gospel passage, let us stay with these words of the angel Gabriel to Mary, "*Mary, do not be afraid*". This was the inner conflict of Mary as she struggled to grasp God's message. After the angel left her and after saying "Yes" to God's plan for her, she most likely clung to the comforting words, "*Mary, do not be afraid*". This was because there were many unknowns that God did not clarify for her. How should she break the news to her parents and Joseph? What steps should she take next? What might the villagers say? Despite her uncertainty, Mary held onto the words, "*Mary, do not be afraid*," and walked into the unknown with faith.

When we feel afraid due to the uncertainty of the future, let us remember the angel Gabriel's words to Mary, as they are also meant for us: "*Do not be afraid*." These words provide us with the comfort, peace, and strength we need. Fear cannot paralyse us because we trust that God is always with us. He is the one who can empower us to live more trustfully, more courageously, more joyfully.

### **Reflective question:**

What fear is keeping me from trusting God more?

**Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.'*

### Joy

*"The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult you with joy over you, he will renew you by his love..."* (Alternative 1<sup>st</sup> Reading). God rejoices over us. This is the reality we truly need to believe in. Often, we do not believe that we bring joy to God. We tend to listen to our inner critic's voices that tell us, *"You are such a failure. You should have been there for your family..."*, and we allow these negative voices to define us. Today, let us focus on God's presence, who loves us unconditionally as His beloved children. In this love, we find comfort, knowing that we are more than our flaws and shortcomings. God delights in us, celebrating our unique selves and the potential we possess.

*"... blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled"* (The gospel). Instead of shaming Mary for carrying a child out of wedlock, Elizabeth told her that she was blessed and happy because she believed in God's word. Elizabeth celebrated Mary. Today, let us rejoice in those around us, for they too are loved and precious to God.

### **Reflective questions:**

Do I believe that I am the joy of God? Why?

**Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent.**

**Micah 5:1-4, Hebrews 10:5-10, 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.'*

### Smallness

*"You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born for me the one who is to rule over Israel..."* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). As we stand at the threshold of Christmas, we pause amidst the hustle and bustle of the world around us and make time and space for prayer, allowing God to speak to us about humility. In the 1<sup>st</sup> reading, God chose a small town called Bethlehem, not a big city, to be the place where Christ would be born. The society we live in places a strong emphasis on grandiosity, while God values simplicity and humility. Let us learn to embrace littleness in our ordinary lives: a smile to someone in the elevator, a message to a friend, etc. In the simple acts and words of love, God comes.

In the gospel, we witness the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth—one younger and one older. In the male-dominated Jewish society of that time, women were often deemed insignificant. However, God chose these two simple women to play important roles in His plan of salvation. Today, we, as ordinary as we are, are chosen by God to be instruments to bring His presence to the world. Let us allow God to act in us and through us, allowing Him to do the unexpected.

### **Reflective question:**

What is God's message for me today?

### **Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 4<sup>th</sup> 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.*

### John

In today's gospel, the family members and neighbours gathered in the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah to celebrate the birth of their son. Traditionally, children were named after their parents or other family members. Thus, those present with Elizabeth and Zechariah assumed that the baby boy would be named after his father. They were shocked when the parents announced that the baby's name would be John, which means "*the Lord has shown favour*". Indeed, God was starting something new through John. He would be the one who would prepare the way for Jesus and lead others to Him.

Each of us has a purpose. Like John, God wants us to point Jesus out to others through our words and actions. We are here on earth to serve as reflections of His faithful and unconditional love, guiding others to forge a friendship with Jesus. In this season of feasting, let us feast on God's love for us, so that we can be faithful to God's purpose for our lives.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I become the person God wants me to be?

### **Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> December, 4<sup>th</sup> Week of Advent.**

#### **2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16, Luke 1:67-79**

*John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited his people, he has set them free, and he has established for us a saving power in the House of his servant David, just as he proclaimed, by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times, that he would save us*



*from our enemies and from the hands of all those who hate us, and show faithful love to our ancestors, and so keep in mind his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant us, free from fear, to be delivered from the hands of our enemies, to serve him in holiness and uprightness in his presence, all our days. And you, little child, you shall be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for him, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the faithful love of our God in which the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.'*

### A song of praise

Zechariah's joyful song of praise celebrates God's faithfulness and His unwavering commitment to His promises. He reflects on the birth of his son, realising that God has remembered His promises and is now actively working in the world. Zechariah's song resonates deeply with us, inviting us to join in joyful praise. Just as he did, we are encouraged to celebrate a God who remains steadfast and unwavering in His faithfulness toward us.

God is far from indifferent or distant; instead, He is a loving presence who actively engages with us and resides within our hearts. His involvement is not confined to ancient stories or distant pasts; rather, He is here with us in the present moment, guiding and inspiring us in our daily lives. As we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas, let us take a moment to reflect on the many ways God has patiently shown us His faithful love in the past. In this way, we can remain grounded in the present, enjoying His presence and looking to the future with joyful hope.

### **Reflective question:**

What is my song of praise that I can offer to God?

### **Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> 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.*

### Light in darkness

“...*light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it*” (The gospel). On this Christmas day, let us take time for silence and listen to God as He tells us the true meaning of Christmas. God does not desire to be a distant, detached observer, watching the intricate drama of human life unfold from a distance. Rather, He chooses to draw near, stepping into the shadows and challenges we face. In this intimate presence, He sits beside us, sharing our burdens and joys as Emmanuel—God with us, offering comfort and companionship in our darkest moments. This is the joyful message of Christmas. In times of darkness, we can rely on Jesus as our Light, shining with a steady, constant, and faithful presence. Thus, we find reasons enough to hope, to have courage, to embrace peace.

With Jesus, who is the source of light, present in us, we are called to be a light in the darkness. This means stepping out of our comfort zones to love others, standing up against injustices, helping marginalised members of society, and praying for those in need. Through our small and big acts of love, we become beacons of light in the darkness today.

**Reflective question:**

How can I celebrate Christmas as God wants me to?

**Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> 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."*

From birth to death

*"As they were stoning him, Stephen said in invocation, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and said aloud, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them"..."* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). Amidst our celebrations filled with presents and good food, the Church celebrates the Feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr, who was stoned to death because of his faith in Jesus. The invitation today is to look beyond simply admiring baby Jesus in the crib. Instead, we are called to step out of the crib and bear witness to Jesus, like St. Stephen.

St. Stephen followed Jesus' example by showing mercy and forgiving those who hurt him. Similarly, living a life of love—extending that love even to those who may not like us—is an effective way to witness to Jesus. As we gather to celebrate the joyous season of Christmas, let us open our hearts to love, especially towards those who have hurt us. By embodying kindness and forgiveness, we reflect Christ's love and create a beacon of hope for others. In doing so, we lead them to experience His presence for themselves.

**Reflective question:**

How can I actively witness to Jesus today?

## **Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> 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.*

### Beloved

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. John the evangelist, who is described as “*the one whom Jesus loved*”. At first glance, it may appear that Jesus showed favouritism toward certain disciples. Yet, it is important to recognize that Jesus held a deep love for all of his disciples, calling each one his friend (John 15:15). What truly distinguishes John from the rest is the depth of his response to Jesus’ love. His steadfast love for Jesus was evident as he stood by the cross, while the other disciples deserted Him. In today’s gospel, his love for Christ compelled him to run swiftly to the tomb, and once again, it was love that opened his eyes to see the empty tomb as a symbol of hope.

We are the disciples whom Jesus loves. Let us respond to His love by giving ourselves to Him and following Him faithfully to the end.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I respond to the love that Jesus has for me?

## **Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> 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.*

### Trust

In today's gospel, Joseph had a dream in which God told him to get up and escape to Egypt because Herod wanted to kill baby Jesus. Joseph did not hesitate. Instead, he quickly got up and left for Egypt that very night. What made Joseph so quick to do what God told him? The answer is trust. Joseph's quick response to God's word shows his complete trust in Him. He knew that God was with them, protecting and guiding them for their good.

*“Even through Joseph's fears, God's will, his history and his plan were at work. Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture.” (Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*). Let us follow the example of St. Joseph and have a heart that fully trusts in God, who never abandons us.*

### **Reflective question:**

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

### **Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> December, The Holy Family.**

**1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28, 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24, Luke 2:41-52**

*Every year the parents of Jesus used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was somewhere in the party, and it was only after a day's journey that they went to look for him among their relations and*

*acquaintances. When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere. It happened that, three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.' He replied, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he meant. He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people.*

### Family

Today, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. It is important to recognize that this is not the feast of a perfect family, where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus lived in a happily-ever-after world. It is a celebration—a feast of love—shining brightly even in the midst of suffering, uncertainty and tension. In today's Gospel, we learn about Jesus as a preteen who stayed behind in the Temple without His parents knowing. When they eventually found Him, Mary asked, "*My child, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been worried sick, searching for you?*" This highlights their struggle to understand Jesus and His actions. Despite their confusion, Mary and Joseph chose to remain faithful to Him and continued to love Him.

In our family, we learn what love truly means. In moments of tension and misunderstanding, we are continually invited to embrace love, allowing it to guide our hearts and unite us through life's challenges. It is in these moments that we learn to navigate our differences and deepen our connections, reminding us that love is a choice we can make every day.

### **Reflective question:**

What is the significance of this feast for me?

### **Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> December, 6<sup>th</sup> 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.*

### Faithful love

In today's gospel, we are introduced to Anna, an elderly prophetess who faithfully served God and dedicated her life to prayer. When Mary and Joseph entered the Temple, Anna's faithful love for God opened her eyes to recognise Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. She praised God and spoke of the child to everyone waiting for Jerusalem's deliverance. In fact, she became the first messenger to proclaim the Good News about Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, sharing her joyous discovery with others and spreading hope and light to those around her. Anna's life of prayer led her to become a witness to Christ.

Today, we are called to be faithful and prayerful disciples. Let us learn from Anna, embracing the qualities of being contemplative and prayerful people. We should also strive to be active witnesses of God's presence and His work through our words and actions toward those around us.

### **Reflective question:**

How can Anna, the elderly prophetess, inspire me to live my discipleship?

### **Friday, 31st December, Seventh day within the Octave of Christmas.**

#### **1 John 2:18-21, 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.*

### Jesus, our companion

As we stand on the brink of a new year, many of us take a moment to pause and reflect on the past twelve months. We contemplate the joyful memories that warmed our hearts, the challenges that tested our resilience, the losses that brought sorrow, and the regrets that weighed us down. It is a time to embrace our experiences with gratitude, cherishing the lessons learned along the way, while nurturing a sense of hope for the future that lies ahead. Today's gospel offers us a comforting reminder: Jesus, the Word made flesh, is by our side as we bid farewell to 2024. With His presence guiding us, we step into 2025 filled with the courage to embrace whatever the year may bring.

*"The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone...".* During our darkest and most challenging moments, Jesus is our guiding light. Thus, we are not afraid to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new year. With Jesus by our side, we can embrace any uncertainty with unwavering peace and boundless joy.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I step into the New Year with Jesus?



