

Prayer for Living



The Word of God for Daily Prayer Year B

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verbum dei

Dedication

To my Verbum Dei Sisters in Singapore

PRAYER FOR LIVING: THE WORD OF GOD FOR DAILY PRAYER YEAR B
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Sunday, 3rd December, First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 63:16B-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!'

Stay awake!

As we start this season of Advent, let us remember the words of Jesus as He invites us to stay awake! We can be so busy with our planning and shopping for Christmas that we forget to be aware of the reason for our preparations. We must never lose sight of the big picture such that we fail to appreciate the important things during this season.

Christmas is the celebration of Christ's birth in Bethlehem as well as His birth in the Bethlehems of our homes and daily lives. Slow down, be still, be awake to Jesus' presence as He comes to us in the ordinariness of today. His presence brings hope and peace.

Let us not waste this Advent time with what to buy, where to shop, what to eat, but to prepare our hearts to be a place where Jesus can enter and live within.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I slow down, be still and be awake to Jesus' presence today?
- 2) What is Jesus' personal message for me this Advent?

Monday, 4th December

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.'

Humility, humility, humility and humility

In today's gospel, the humble faith of the Roman centurion amazed Jesus. He, who was a man of authority, was in touch with the suffering of his servant and was moved to seek help from Jesus, an itinerant preacher from Galilee. The humility of this Roman centurion is truly a model for us today.

As we enter this season of Advent, how can we learn from the Roman centurion's humility?

Humility is derived from the Latin word 'humus' or earth. Thus, the person, who is humble, has his/her feet constantly rooted on the ground and lives a life centred on God and others. In fact, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, when asked to list the four cardinal virtues, replied: "*Humility, humility, humility and humility.*" Humility is the key to open the door to the heart of God and others. It leads us to depend on God more and stirs us to put ourselves at the service of others.

Today, let us be humble enough to go to Jesus with humility and not to live through this day by just depending on our own power and strength.

"Humility is the way through which charity passes. If there is no humility, love remains blocked, it cannot go forward." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I put into practice this virtue of humility?

Tuesday, 5th December

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

Just at this time, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, Jesus 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, or 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.'

A simple heart I desire, Lord

In the world, the learned are admired and exalted. Yet, in the heart of Jesus, the 'unlearned' are the ones who deserve to be praised. Who are the 'unlearned'? They are the ones whose hearts are simple enough to recognise, respond faithfully to the voice of God and joyfully welcome him into their lives.

As we enter deeper into Advent and prepare ourselves to celebrate the mystery of Jesus' Incarnation, we need to de-clutter by eliminating all the spiritual clutter from our hearts so that we can possess hearts simple enough to welcome Jesus.

Let us be the 'unlearned', be simple in the way we approach Christmas this year. For many, this season of Christmas has, unfortunately, become a burden and not a blessing. This is because they are too busy: rushing for shopping, wrapping gifts, cooking and partying. As Christians, how are we preparing ourselves? Do we spend time to listen to God and seek what is pleasing to him? Do we allow God and not things to be the centre of our hearts? Can we stop controlling and let God be God to show us what life is, what Christmas is, etc?

Let us start today to be uncomplicated in our prayer. Let Jesus be the one to reveal himself to us as he wants to, and share with us all what he has in his heart.

Jesus, give me a simple heart that seeks you and welcomes you always. Help me not to think that I know how to celebrate Christmas, I know what is good for myself and my family...

Because I do not know, but you know. Please, Jesus, teach me, reveal to me your presence of love and show me how to live my life!

Wednesday, 6th December

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

Jesus reached the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and he went up into the hills. He sat there, 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, they might collapse on the way.' The disciples said to him, 'Where could we get enough bread in this deserted place to feed such a crowd?' Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves have you?' 'Seven' they said '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 he gave thanks and broke them and handed 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.

A child-like humility

Jesus looked at the crowd of hungry people, and His heart was moved with deep compassion for them. He could have gone to another place with His disciples. However, Jesus had child-like humility and knew that He could make a difference in these peoples' lives.

What about us today? Can we humble ourselves to be child-like and spend time with Jesus, knowing that His presence can make a difference in our lives? Are we too busy with rushing and planning that we forget that Jesus is all that we need? Can we also see that our smiles, our listening ear, our words of encouragement are little efforts in reaching out to someone in need? Can we humble ourselves and see that our actions and words can make a difference to someone today?

"In a gentle way, you can shake the world." (Mahatma Gandhi)

Today, let us imitate Jesus' child-like humility and shake the world with our compassion and love.

Question for reflection:

1) How is Jesus inviting me to live this day?

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!'

Jesus, my Rock!

What Jesus truly desires from his followers is an authentic following of Him and His teachings, by practicing and proclaiming what they believe. Jesus neither wants admirers nor fan clubs. He wants followers, disciples who dare to open their life and let him enter. He wants friends who dare to choose him as their only foundation.

Our Christian faith must be exemplified in our daily lives: in our interaction with our parents, siblings, children, friends, colleagues and other people. Only then, can faith be internalised and become part of our identity, our character, our nature.

But how can we act according to the words of God that we hear? There is no shortcut, except through continuous practice. In every decision that we make, let us spare a thought of what Jesus would do in the same situation. In every experience that we have, let us allow Christ to have a say in it. We need to start taking small steps in making the effort to live a more Christ-centred life.

Jesus invites us today to be Christians who are wise, not foolish. We are called to choose him as the foundation on which we build our lives.

Jesus, help me to tune in to the Father's will and to seek to carry it out. Help me to be faithful to the little things in life lived with You. In this time of Advent, give me the vision and hope that these little things are the basis of a rock-solid faith that You want to construct in me.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is Jesus the Rock on which I build my life?
- 2) Today, how can I follow Jesus in a more authentic way?

**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 favour! 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.

Chosen

Today, as we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception, we are not only celebrating God's choice of Mary but we are also rejoicing at being chosen. God chose us even before the world was made. He, out of love, chose us to be His.

Perhaps we are uncomfortable with this word, 'Chosen' because in this world, to be chosen means that others are rejected. However, when we are chosen by God, it does not mean the rejection of others, but rather, the inclusion of others. This is because when we truly live as the chosen ones of God, we will open our hearts to welcome others and bring them to realise that they too are loved by God and they too are chosen to be his. Like Mary, who was chosen, lived with joy and her love opens up to multitudes of

people so that they too can encounter the heart of God. We need to live like the chosen ones or else we will easily reject ourselves as 'no good', as 'lousy', as 'not wanted' as we tend to listen to the many negative voices within us that pull us away from God's love. Mother Mary is blessed because she believed and trusted in God.

Lord, help me to rejoice over your choice of me so that I can also see others as being chosen and so rejoice over the lives of each person today.

Saturday, 9th December

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. 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 are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who was also his betrayer. 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.'

Count on me to be your labourer, Lord!

What do we see when we look at the crowds? Are there obstacles preventing us from reaching our destination quickly? Do we see numerous people moving around? Or do we see people who struggle, who suffer, who need meaning in life or a sense of direction?

Jesus looks at every one with the heart of the Good Shepherd and wants us, as Christians, to do the same.

We know our origin: the love of God. We know our identity: children of God. We know our destination is God the Father. But so many people do not know that they have a loving Father who is God!

Jesus asks us to pray to the Father, not with external petitions, but to talk to him about it: 'Father, do you have many children that do not know you? Why don't you send more workers?'

The Father may say "Can I count on you? Many people come to me to ask me for things, but very few are interested in knowing my feelings, my desires, my will, and how I feel for the people. Can you help me? Can you be a shepherd among the so many sheep who don't know me, those who need my care?"

Lord, I understand that the workers are not 'others', but me. Count on me today!

Sunday, 10th December, Second 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 a way for the Lord

John the Baptist preached a Baptism of repentance to prepare the way for the Messiah to come. His message was to change our ways to be able to recognize the One who is THE Light, and receive his message of love.

The centre of our Christian life is not repentance, but Love. In order to receive God's love and be able to love with his quality of love, we need to

clear all obstacles from our hearts that block us from being loved and to love. We need to straighten the path of our pride and egoism till it becomes generosity; to take away all the stones of envy and resentment from our heart till we learn to love again. God wants to work in us with his grace so that we can enjoy his presence and his actions in us.

Yes, Advent is the time to hear the voice of the Spirit shouting in our hearts: "Prepare a way for the Lord!" It is time to collaborate with him and to be ready for the real celebration: The coming of Jesus, Emmanuel, into our life.

Let us receive Him by preparing ourselves well. Let us open our heart and mind to the mystery of his love, as we work harder on our wrong tendencies and inclinations, so that we may truly celebrate Christmas!

Come Lord Jesus, remove any obstacles in me that prevent you from feeling at home in my life!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I make the path straight for God to enter into my heart today?
- 2) In what way has this season of Advent drawn me closer to God?

Monday, 11th December

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

Jesus was teaching one day, and among the audience there were Pharisees and doctors of the Law who had come from every village in Galilee, from Judaea and from Jerusalem. And the Power of the Lord was behind his works of healing. Then some men appeared, carrying on a bed a paralysed man whom they were trying to bring in and lay down in front of him. But as the crowd made it impossible to find a way of getting him in, they went up on to the flat roof 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 can forgive sins but God alone?' 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'.

Faith-filled hearts

There were three types of audiences watching the drama unfolding before them. One was the Pharisees and doctors of the Law who were among the crowd, but kept to themselves and were cynical critics of Jesus. The other was the ordinary crowd whose openness to Jesus led them to witness the glorious manifestations of God. The last group was the four friends who longed for their friend's healing, and made all the effort they could to place their friend in front of Jesus.

As Christmas approaches, how would we go through Advent? Will we be cynical like the Pharisees and doctors of the Law? Or will we be receptive to the actions of God in the daily events of our lives, like the crowds who were amazed and filled with praise? Or will our hearts long to bring a loved one closer to Jesus this Advent, like the faith-filled friends who were determined to help their paralysed friend?

Advent is a time to slow down and have faith in Jesus' presence in our ordinary, daily life, so that our hearts can be filled with hope that we are never alone.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) At the moment, which group do I identify myself with: the Pharisees and doctors of the Law, the crowd or the friends?
- 2) As I start this new week, how can I live with Jesus?

Tuesday, 12th December, Our Lady of Guadalupe

Zachariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab, Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month 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, so highly favoured! 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. Listen! You are to conceive 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 forever and his reign will have no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?’ ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you’ the angel answered ‘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. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God ‘I am the handmaid of the Lord,’ said Mary ‘let what you have said be done to me.’ And the angel left her.

To Jesus through Mary

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe - we rejoice that God has chosen Mary as His faithful instrument to lead us to Jesus. The first missionaries who went to Mexico had a hard time spreading the Christian faith to the native Mexicans. The natives were sceptical with the religion, thus only a handful opened their hearts to welcome the Christian faith.

In 1531, Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego, a simple peasant. After miracles of roses, healing as well as the beautiful image of Mary on Juan Diego’s mantle, many came to believe in Jesus.

In today’s gospel, Mary said ‘Yes’ to God’s will, and willingly surrendered herself to dance to God’s tune. Till today, God has been using Mary as an instrument of faith for multitudes to believe in Jesus. We can emulate Mary and say ‘Yes’ to God so that people can know and love Jesus through us.

Today, let us also ask Mary to guide people who have hardened their hearts against God and the Church, so that they can come to believe once again.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Does Mary play an important role in my journey of faith?
- 2) Who are the people in my life who need me to be their instrument of faith?

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 to me

Are we exhausted because we are facing many demands from work and family? Are we perhaps feeling tired because we are too dependent on our own strength? Do we look at our efforts as something futile?

Let's listen to Jesus' gentle voice as He invites us to *"Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest."*

Remain in these words and let them bring comfort to us.

Jesus does not promise us rest from work. He knows that we have responsibilities to fulfil and work to be done. However, Jesus tells us that He will put His yoke upon us. What does this mean?

A yoke is a farming equipment that joins two animals together, so that they can distribute the workload equally and thus become more productive. A beautiful image to show us that Jesus wants to be our partner as we work and toil. We are not alone as we face the challenges of each day. As we walk by His side, we have Jesus to share the burden with us. With Him, the load is made lighter. Can we have more trust in Jesus and let Him be our partner?

"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress; I shall never be shaken." (Ps 62:1-2)

Today, we are called to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus and let Him give us the rest we need. With Jesus, we are never shaken!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I learn to experience the rest that Jesus desires for me?
- 2) What prevents me from sharing my burdens with Jesus?

Thursday, 14th December, St. John of the Cross
Isaiah 41:13-20, Matthew 11:11-15

Jesus spoke to the crowd: 'I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in

the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is. 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. If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen!

The power of humility

What does it mean to be great?

Today, Jesus invites us to look at John the Baptist and learn the meaning of greatness from him.

John the Baptist was great because he was humble. Humility is a word that has been misunderstood by many people. Humility does not imply becoming a constant doormat or a wimp. Christian humility is to be aware of one's calling and gifts, and to remember that they are from God, not from our own capabilities and strengths.

John the Baptist understood his calling to be the voice shouting in the desert to prepare the way for the Messiah to come. Many people flocked to him as he became popular, but he neither took the credit nor basked in the glory he received from the admiring crowd. Rather, his constant desire was to decrease in popularity, so that the One coming after him would increase in prominence.

From the life of John the Baptist, we can conclude that he shone for God, not for himself. Today, the world tells us that to be great means to shine and draw constant attention to ourselves. We thus work obsessively hard to achieve distinction and honour. There is no room for humility because it is solely for the losers.

In this quiet time of prayer, let us ask Jesus to show us the power of humility.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How would I define the word 'Humility'?
- 2) Do I resist this virtue of humility? Why?

Friday, 15th December

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

Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'What description 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 has been proved right by her actions.'

God of the dance

Jesus lived His life with freedom. He did not dance to the tune of people's expectations. Today, He extends His hands and gently invites us to dance to the tune that God has written for each of us.

In life, we sometimes write our own songs and expect God to dance to our tune. Thus, then bad things happen to us, we turn to God and ask Him, "Why, Lord? Why didn't you dance to my tune?" We conveniently make God our punching bag and blame Him for all the misfortunes and mistakes.

In the gospel passage, Jesus knew that the religious leaders had expected Him to fit into a mould which is their perception of the Messiah. However, Jesus did not conform to their expectations, but instead desired to do God's will alone.

Today, let us listen to the depths of our hearts, and attentively listen to the dancing tune that God has set for us. Let us trust that God knows us through and through. When we trust and surrender ourselves to Him, we dance with freedom and live with certainty.

"When I meditated on the word Guidance, I kept seeing "dance" at the end of the word. I remember reading that doing God's will is a lot like dancing. When two people try to lead, nothing feels right. The movement doesn't flow with the music, and everything is quite uncomfortable and jerky. When one person realises that, and lets the other lead, both bodies begin to flow with the music. One gives gentle cues, perhaps with a nudge to the back or by pressing lightly in one direction or another. It's as if two become one body, moving beautifully. The dance takes surrender, willingness, and attentiveness from one person and gentle guidance and skill from the other. My eyes drew

back to the word 'Guidance'. When I saw 'G': I thought of God, followed by 'u' and 'i'. 'God, 'u' and 'i' dance. God, you and I dance. As I lowered my head, I became willingly to trust that I would get guidance about my life. Once again, I became willingly to let God lead. May you abide in God, as God abides in you. Dance together with God, trusting God to lead and guide you through each season of your life." (Unknown)

Let the dance begin!

Saturday 16th December

Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11, Matthew 17:10-13

As they came down from the mountain the disciples put this question to him, 'Why do the scribes say then that Elijah has to come first?' 'True;' he replied 'Elijah is to come to see that everything is once more as it should be; 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.' The disciples understood then that he had been speaking of John the Baptist.

Your ways, Lord, not mine!

The ways of God are not the ways of man. We are always seeking for fame, for titles and glory. The more qualifications and worldly possessions a person has, the more we will look up and admire him/her. For God, material wealth, glory and power are not at all important. What is essential for Him is the heart of a person.

John the Baptist is the Elijah that the Jews have been waiting for. However, he did not come according to what the world expected. He was a lowly person who lived in the desert, wore camel skin and ate honey and locusts. However, the heart of John the Baptist was dedicated totally to God and he lived his life doing the will of his God.

In this time of Advent, let us not be distracted with all what the world has to offer us. Instead, let us search for the ways of God in our own lives and to see where he is leading us.

Lord, teach me to rejoice in your ways. Many times, I want to be great in the eyes of people and so I seek to prove myself and empower myself with riches

and power. John the Baptist is a simple person whose whole life is given to do your will. Help me to be like him!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I happy with my life right now? Why?
- 2) How can I be less distracted with the ways of the world and truly dedicate my life to live God's ways?

Sunday, 17th December, Third 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, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light. This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ'. 'Well then,' they asked 'are you Elijah?' 'I am not' he said. '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 John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord'. Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you - unknown to you - the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap'. This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

Witness to the Light

John the Baptist's primary role is to be a witness to the Light. This is also our primary role as we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas. We have also been given this mission to be a witness to Christ who is the Light. What is stopping us to be His Witness?

John the Baptist attracted a lot of people because of the way he lived and the message he spoke. Yet, he was not distracted by the praises and admiration of the people. He was rooted in his identity and mission. When the religious leaders sent their followers to ask him, 'Who are you?' John the Baptist confessed that he was not the Christ. He stated who he was by simply stating the fact that he was a voice of someone shouting in the desert. He

could have taken the opportunity to promote himself by giving a list of his achievements. He could impress the Jewish leaders and even gain more followers. However, John the Baptist knew that the One who was coming after him was greater than he. What humility! What passion!

Today, let us recognise that we are witnesses to the Light. Our role is to speak about the Light. Without us living this mission, people cannot hear, understand and accept the Good News. May our lives be witnesses to Jesus so that many people may come to know and love Him!

Monday, 18th December

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 a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when 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 the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, 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 and, though he had not had intercourse with her, she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.

Be still and listen!

As Christmas draws near, we are bombarded by many noises that make it hard to listen to God. It is essential to cultivate an interior silence, like St Joseph whose silence gave God the space to speak.

Can we be still internally so that God can speak and fill our hearts with His presence of Love? We need discipline to draw ourselves to a deeper silence, to be alone with God and to listen to the gentle voice of love. The more we cultivate interior silence, the more we realise that there are many other voices within us fighting for our attention. These inner voices distract us so much that we cannot wait to be busy again. Let us not be afraid of silence,

but instead have the inner determination to stay focused and pay attention to God.

“In the silence of the heart God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you. Then you will know that you are nothing. It is only when you realise your nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with Himself. Souls of prayer are souls of great silence. There is a very holy priest, who is also one of the best theologians in India right now. I know him very well, and I said to him, “Father, you talk all day about God. How close you must be to God!” And do you know what he said to me? He said, “I may be talking about God, but I may be talking very little to God.” And then he explained, “I may be rattling off so many words and may be saying many good things, but deep down I do not have the time to listen. But in the silence of the heart, God speaks.” (Mother Teresa)

Question for reflection:

1) Why is it hard for me to be still and let God speak to me?

Tuesday, 19th December

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 worthy in the sight of God, and scrupulously observed all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless: Elizabeth was barren and they were both getting on in years. Now it was the turn of Zechariah’s section to serve, and he was exercising his priestly office before God when it fell to him by lot, as the ritual custom was, to enter the Lord’s sanctuary and burn incense there. And at the hour of incense the whole congregation was 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, your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you must 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 sons of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the disobedient back to the wisdom that the

virtuous have, preparing for the Lord a people fit for him. Zechariah said to the angel, 'How can I be sure of 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. Listen! Since you have not believed 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 received 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. Sometime later his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept to herself. 'The Lord has done this for me' she said 'now that it has pleased him to take away the humiliation I suffered among men.'

Do not lose hope!

"Both were worthy in the sight of God, and scrupulously observed all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless."

Zechariah and Elizabeth walked faithfully with God and had deep faith in Him. However, they had a big problem: they were childless. In the Jewish culture, being childless was a sign of God's disfavour. Thus, even though they were worthy in God's eyes, the people around them saw them as sinners punished by God. Their constant prayer to God was to have the gift of a child. They turned to God with hope rather than despair.

When Zechariah was doing his priestly duty in the Temple, an angel of God appeared to him and told him that his wife would soon bear a son. Though Zechariah was a man of God, he doubted and stated a fact to the angel, *"I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years."* His human mind could not grasp what God could do.

In order for Zechariah to believe, God made him dumb until the day he would see His promise being fulfilled. When Zechariah came out of the Temple, he was no longer the same person. He understood with new awareness what God could do, even in situations that seemed humanly impossible. He rejoiced at a deeper trust that God has placed in his heart.

In moments when we are overwhelmed by our own problems, let us choose to partner hope, and not hopelessness. Hope that opens doors to God and

lets His presence of love flow in us and act through us. Hope in God builds our faith and makes us face the uncertainty of tomorrow with courage. The message for us today as we pray with the gospel passage is: Do not lose hope!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I turn to God in my problems and trust Him enough to walk in His ways?
- 2) How can I not lose hope in God?

Wednesday, 20th December
Isaiah 7:10-14, Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month 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, so highly favoured! 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. Listen! You are to conceive 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 am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered '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. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

I am the handmaid of the Lord

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord." Mary is one person who understood so much about what humility means. She understood that she is just a human, with her own set of limitations and weaknesses. Yet, she also understood very much that she is loved by God and she loved Him in return. This is the basis of her 'yes', for her whole life, in good times and bad. She rejoices and trusts in His love. When God asked her for help, her response, born of love, is a heartfelt 'yes', even amidst the confusion and ambiguity of

the message. Her relationship with her Creator is one built on mutual trust and love!

“There is one more truth that the Annunciation teaches us... the Almighty Father creates heaven and earth, the sun and all the stars; but when he really wants something done, he comes, the Omnipotent and Omniscient, to one of his poor, weak creatures — and he asks.” (Universalis)

In our own lives, in our own time and situation, day by day, God comes and knocks at our heart’s door, just like he did long ago with Mary. Today, let us sit with Mary and build our relationship with God based on trust and love so that when He asks us for help, we can say ‘yes’ like Mary.

Mary, help us to say ‘yes’ every time He asks, so that Jesus can also be born in people around us.

Thursday, 21st December

Song of Songs 2:8-14, Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth. Now 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? For 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.’

Love in action

“Mary set out and went as quickly as she could...”

Mary could have focussed on herself because of her situation but she simply set out quickly to be with Elizabeth, her cousin, who might be in need.

Mary’s action was an act of love. Do we set out and go as quickly as we can to people who are in need of our help?

“Prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions by giving

your time... We are all God's children so it is important to share His gifts. Do not worry about why problems exist in the world - just respond to people's needs... We feel what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean, but that ocean would be less without that drop." (Mother Teresa)

We might not be physically present with people all the time because of our busy schedule. However, we can be present in 'spirit' by praying for someone in need, having compassionate thoughts and kind feelings towards someone. Like Mary, we too can always be in a hurry to give love. As Christmas draws closer, let us focus less on buying presents and focus more on giving our presence.

Mary allowed love to rule and govern her movements, thoughts, words and decisions. She invites us to do the same today.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I share my presence with those who are in need?

Friday, 22nd December

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

Mary said: 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy - according to the promise he made to our ancestors - of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.' Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

Magnify God with Mary

Mary's invitation to us today is to rejoice in God and magnify God with her. Too often, we focus on the sorrowful and negative events in our life - a failed relationship, a sickness of a loved one, a hurtful past, etc. We feel ourselves paralysed by all the hardship and difficulties that we forget to count our blessings of each day.

We can rejoice and proclaim the greatness of the Lord, not because life is perfect, but because God always takes care of us, always stays close to us, always never fails us. His faithful love in our life is the greatest blessing that makes us joyful. Let us never take God's love for granted but to be grateful for His presence that loves us so perfectly.

"Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God's love encompasses us completely... He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken." (Dieter F. Uchtdorf)

When we count our blessings, we start to value and appreciate God, our faith, people around us, our possessions, etc, and not take the gifts we have for granted. Surely there will always be difficult situations in our lives, but we can either let these events spoil our day or remember to stay positive and remember all the good things in our lives. Negative situations may not change, but we definitely will!

Look at Mary - she was singing her song of praise to God, not because her life was favourable and care-free but because of her complete trust and faith in God. At that time, she was pregnant outside of marriage, and so she faced the possibility of rejection and even death for defying the law. Yet, she sang with all her courageous might as she remembered all the good things God had done for her. Let us join in and magnify God with her today!

Saturday, 23rd December

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 shown her so great a kindness, they shared her joy. Now 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.

God is gracious

The name, John, means *"The Lord is gracious"*. Indeed, God was gracious to Zechariah and Elizabeth, and gifted them with a son after years of barrenness. What wondrous joy they must have had to see their years of prayer being answered!

As we reflect on this passage, let us know that God is gracious to us, and He does answer our prayer in His own ways and in His own time. Look at Zechariah and Elizabeth, they longed for a son. God, however, gave them a son who had the special calling to be the forerunner of the Messiah. We might not know the timings when our prayers will be answered. God might not answer our prayers in ways that we desire.

God is faithful and He does not forget us. All we have to do is to trust that God is gracious and compassionate to us, and He can and will make the impossible to be possible. Believe in God and wait for Him to work in the same way He did for Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Question for reflection:

1) Have I experienced God's graciousness in my life? Can I identify those moments?

Sunday, 24th December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

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, so highly favoured! 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. Listen! You are to conceive 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 am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered '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. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

YES!

Mary is a simple village girl, with dreams of marrying and settling down with Joseph; a young girl with no ambition but to live a normal life like her mother, like those in the village. God entered into her life and called her to an extraordinary call and mission.

God chose her to be the Mother of his Son. Mary was faced with the choice to say 'Yes' or 'No'. The angel that God sent to proclaim the news to her knew that she was afraid. Thus, he said to her, 'Don't be afraid, Mary.' Most likely, Mary was afraid because of the consequence of her 'Yes'. It meant that she would face rejection from her family and her close-knit village community. Besides, she was concerned about the opinions of others and especially that of Joseph. Not forgetting the possibility of being stoned to death for pregnancy outside of marriage. Mary centred her fears on faith. She trusted that God would help her and be with her. Even though she was uncertain of the future, she said 'Yes' because of her strong faith.

Today, God calls us to His extraordinary mission of bringing his Son into the world through our words, our options, our actions, etc. Once again, like Mary, we are not programmed to say 'Yes'. God does not force us to do what He tells us. He gives us the freedom to respond to Him out of love, out of faith.

This week, as we draw closer and closer to Christmas, let us imitate Mary and give our 'Yes' to his call and mission. Let our 'Yes' not just be words but let our lives joyfully manifest our 'Yes' to God.

Monday, 25th December, The Nativity of the Lord
Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-6, John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life

in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. The Word was the true light that enlightens all men; and he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself. The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Live Christmas!

"It is easy to think Christmas, and it is easy to believe Christmas, but it is hard to LIVE Christmas." (Anonymous)

Christmas is not just to remember and celebrate a historical event that took place 2000 years ago. Christmas is a living reality which continues to happen and has an impact on our lives today. We are called to live Christmas today. How do we live Christmas? To live Christmas is to live our identity as children of God with joy, with freedom. We, who have opened our hearts to receive him, have been given the power to become children of God. This is who we are today and every single day of our lives.

As children of God, we live our days with God who is present, alive and active. Thus, we live in His presence with peace and joy. Even when we encounter moments of darkness, we know that we carry within our hearts the Light that will guide us through. This is the source of our Joy!

We have not been created to journey through life alone, but we have the Word made flesh who dwells among us and in us. Let us never forget to live Christmas every day! In the world, many people see God as absent, distant, indifferent. Thus, their lives are dominated by fears and uncertainties. God wants to share with these people His coming, His presence, but He needs us as His instruments to reach out to these people, so as to communicate the Good News of His presence of Love. Today, let us give the greatest gift, i.e. Jesus, to all those we meet!

Tuesday, 26th December, St. Stephen
Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59, Matthew 10:17-22

Jesus said to his apostles: 'Beware of men: they will hand you over to Sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the pagans. But when they hand you 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 the father his child; children will rise against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name; but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved.'

Standing firm to the end

Immediately after Christmas Day, we celebrate the Feast of the First Martyr. Why? We are still in the celebration mode of greeting each other 'Merry Christmas' and the air is ringing with Christmas carols, yet, the Church places this rather dreadful death of a young man as the feast to be celebrated during this festive time.

What has this feast got to do with Christmas? What has this feast got to do with us?

Jesus is our Prince of Peace who came to bring peace to this world that is full of violence and anger. Jesus lived His life revealing the heart of God who yearns for unity, harmony and love. In the end, Jesus Himself died a gruesome death on the cross for His message of Love.

St Stephen followed the footsteps of his Master. He did not retaliate with violence against him. Instead, he responded with forgiveness. His last words were, *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."* (Acts 7:60)

In the face of violence, anger, persecutions, misunderstandings, etc, can we follow the footsteps of St Stephen who chose to live the message of peace, love and forgiveness that Jesus his Master lived?

Today, let us choose to stand firmly for peace, forgiveness and love in the face of anger and violence. Let us also pray for our brothers and sisters in the world who face persecutions for their faith in Jesus.

Jesus, help me to follow St Stephen's footsteps! Help my efforts of love and peace to reach out and touch the hearts of those around me.

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 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 who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths 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 Beloved

St John's only mission in life concerns the proclamation of the Word of God, tirelessly through his exile until death. What was the cause of St John's passion and dedication?

In the gospel, after hearing the news of Jesus' resurrection, John was the first to arrive at the tomb, even before Peter, and he believed immediately that his beloved Master has truly risen. How John loved Jesus! And such a great love stemmed from the experience of being loved as much or if not greater by Jesus, by God Himself. No wonder John is called the Beloved disciple! The constant love of Christ urged him to share the same love with others.

When we allow ourselves to be loved by Jesus, we will spontaneously want others to know and experience the treasure we have.

"When we claim and constantly reclaim the truth of being the chosen ones, we soon discover within ourselves a deep desire to reveal to others their own 'chosenness'. Instead of making us feel that we are better, more precious or valuable than others, our awareness of being chosen opens our eyes to the 'chosenness' of others. That is the great joy of being chosen: the discovery that others are chosen as well. In the house of God there are many mansions. There is a place for everyone - a unique, special place. Once we deeply trust

that we ourselves are precious in God's eyes, we are able to recognize the preciousness of others and their unique places in God's heart." (Henri Nouwen)

This Christmas, let us allow ourselves to be loved by God and recognise that we are His beloveds. We are chosen by Jesus to be His friends, His disciples. Our deep experience of being God's beloved should lead us to love and serve others. Our joy in being Jesus' friends should make us have the passion to make others know that they too are chosen and loved by Jesus.

Thursday, 28th December, The Holy Innocents

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

After they 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 when he realised that he had been outwitted by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or under, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men. It was then that the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled: A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loudly lamenting: it was Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they were no more.

Herod, Joseph and the Wise men

Herod still exists in today's world in the form of senseless violence, addiction, indifference, war, poverty, etc. The 'Herod' of today continues to destroy innocent lives and bring misery to many people. We too can have 'Herod' in us when we 'kill' the divine life of Christ in us by our sins as well and when we 'kill' the Christ in others, as well.

In the same way that Herod lives, 'Joseph' and the 'three wise men' continue to live on as well. When there is care, protection, sacrifices and love, the 'Joseph' of today continues to bring God's hope into the world. When there is desire for truth and openness to be guided by love, the 'three wise men' continue to illuminate the long journey towards God.

Herod killed and annihilated while Joseph looked after and protected. The three wise men encountered and believed. Today, God invites us to choose love and life.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I diminish the 'Herod' in me?
- 2) Today, how can I imitate Joseph and the three wise men so that I can live my life for Christ?

Friday, 29th December

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

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord observing what stands 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 said 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 Israel's comforting 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 can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel'. As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected- and a sword will pierce your own soul too-so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare'.

My eyes have seen!

"The whole of life lies in the verb seeing." (Teilhard de Chardin)

Mary's and Joseph's lives were revolved around seeing God in their family life. They travelled to Jerusalem because they wanted to consecrate their first-born son to God, as written in the Mosaic Law.

Simeon, an old man lived his whole life seeing and watching for God's

Promised One. That day when Simeon set his eyes on the little baby, he saw something else. He saw beyond what everyone else saw, and knew that Jesus was the Salvation which God had prepared for all the nations to witness. He held Jesus in His arms and gave praise to God.

Do we live like Mary, Joseph and Simeon? Do we live seeing God's presence in the daily ordinary events of life, and rejoice that we have a God who is so close to us?

Life is beautiful when we see God in everything we do, in the people we encounter, in sufferings and joys, in failures and successes. Today, let us pay attention to God in our lives so that we become more thankful for all that we have and are.

Saturday, 30th December

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

There was a prophetess also, 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 by 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. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

A God-centred Christmas

Anna the prophetess was a person of God who “*never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer.*” She was never absent from God, but constantly lived in His sight. When she met baby Jesus, she knew Him as the one who would deliver Jerusalem and began to praise God. Anna, this simple prophetess, was God-centred. What about us?

As we are still in the Christmas mood of celebration, let us not forget what Christmas is all about. Real Christmas leads us to a deeper experience of God's love in the person of Jesus. It makes us live as God-centred Christians, and not self-centred people.

Most of us are lost in the busyness of each day by trying hard to cope with the demands of daily life that we have forgotten the simple meaning of Christmas. We live chasing power, pleasures, wealth, etc., but we fail to see that we are actually empty and tired within us.

Even though we might be absent from God, He stays close to us and desires to be our joy and peace. He wants us to meet Him and love Him. It is never too late to have a real Christmas today.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is my life God-centred?
- 2) How can I truly focus on Jesus today and let Him be my joy and peace?

Sunday, 31st December, Feast of the Holy Family

Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3, Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19, Luke 2:22-40

Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting 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 can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel'. As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected- and a sword will pierce your own soul too-so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare'. There was a prophetess also, 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 by 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. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

Open my eyes, Lord!

Simeon was a person of prayer and it was because of this deep relationship with God that his eyes were sharpened to recognize the true presence of Christ in the unexpected form of a little baby from a poor family that entered the temple on that one ordinary day. What joy Simeon experienced! Are we close enough to God that we can see Jesus in the most unlikely people whom we meet in our ordinary day?

Let us spend time with God the Father and listen to Him so that when Jesus approaches us in the ordinary events and unexpected people, we will have eyes of faith to recognise His presence!