

ADVENT

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Written by Bishop Robert Llanos

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PREFACE

Most of us are familiar with the Advent wreath as part of the Advent decorations in our parish Churches. Not many of us are aware however that this devotion began as a home-based family devotion that continued for many centuries until the secular Christmas Season pushed it into relative obscurity in the home.

It is for this reason that the Advent wreaths entered the Church building as part of its Advent liturgical decorations, but its liturgical place is in the home where the family gathers around to pray and prepare for the birth of Christ and the Christmas season.

We believe that when it is properly celebrated the Advent season is a rich treasure for the human soul. One finds in this liturgical season an opportunity to discover the profound significance of Christ's first coming through a reverent reading of scriptures and an increased understanding of the tradition that preceded that first coming. As we seek to experience the mystery of Christ's first coming we are overcome by the realization that His coming was the fulfillment of a promised love that is still being fulfilled today and that will find its conclusion at the end of time. One who is in receipt of a promised love is always hopeful and joyful because what they hope for brings life. In Christ Jesus that promised love is certain and effective.

In a world that compromised its glorious nature through sin and pride the Son of God had to come and live and die so that his life and death might bring back what sinful man had thrown away. It is this generous love that greets us in the first coming of Christ. It is a love that, if we wait patiently, strengthens us and gives us the courage to love God and one another. What makes our Advent a time of waiting with a Hope that is Joyful in the certainty of that exchange. When Jesus takes on human flesh it means his death will become every man's life.

What more reason do we need then to open our hearts and minds throughout this Advent Season? It is with prayer and reflection, and hearts and souls overcome with love that we remember how he came, how he comes now, and long for his time to come again.

INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT

A Brief History

The word ‘Advent’ means “coming” and Christians celebrate the Season of Advent as a time of preparation in anticipation of celebrating Christ’s birth at Christmas. The development of this Advent season finds its origins in the Jewish custom of celebrating the New Year in the spring. Early Christians followed this Jewish custom but over a couple of centuries eventually developed rites and traditions for Christmas and the New Year as a mid-winter celebration.

Mid-winter is a time of the winter solstice when the sun is at its lowest ebb and the period of daylight at its shortest. In Northern cultures this is the time when people yearn for the sun to return to its brightness and warmth as a sign of the promised spring and the new life that it brings.

It was not until about the fourth or fifth century A.D. that Christmas was established as a religious festival that indicated the beginning of the Church’s year. In the year 529 A.D. Emperor Justinian declared December 25th a public holiday. Then in 567 A.D. the Council of Tours established the season of Advent as a time of fasting preceding Christmas Day. This Council also proclaimed the twelve days of Christmas to Epiphany as a sacred season with fasting being maintained by those to be received into the Church on the day of

Epiphany. By the end of the sixth century however Epiphany was no longer a focus for the conferring of Baptism and the rites of Christian Initiation and Christmas had become the focus of the time of preparation. It was during the time of Pope Gregory the Great that this period of Advent was determined as four weeks and it has remained so ever since.

The essential form and structure of the Roman Advent was completed by the eighth century. Although the Roman Advent was heavily influenced by the spirit of the Gallican (France) Advent with its markedly penitential character, the Roman Advent retained its message of joyful hope but some of its ceremonial expressions of joy were suppressed. The result was that the regulations concerning the observance

of the season were markedly Lenten in character. The Roman Advent always had a call to repentance and penance but in a more positive sense of conversion and renewal of life. The ambiguity about the penitential discipline versus a period of joyful hope ended with Vatican II where the General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar declared

Advent to be a season of joyful and spiritual expression (No. 39) and “this is no longer to be considered a penitential season” (commentary to text). Since Vatican II then, we are left in no doubt that Advent is a season of joyful hope and not a time of penance. With a Hope that is joyful we look towards the season of Christmas.

The Advent Wreath

It is believed that the Advent wreath originated in eastern Germany during the sixteenth century, when what was a pagan ritual was Christianized and became popular with both Catholics and Lutherans. In pre-Christian times the sun-worshipping tribes of northern Europe appeased the sun-god at the darkest time of the year to ensure his return. They did this by taking a cartwheel wound with evergreens and decorated with lamps and offered it to the deity. It is this ritual wreath that made its way into people’s homes as the Christianized Advent wreath and which spread rapidly throughout Europe and the world.

Debbie Trafton O’Neal in her book ‘The Advent Wreath’ explains that the original Christian wreath consisted of a circle of wire which represented the unending love of God. The evergreens adorning the wreath symbolized the hope of eternal life that God’s people share. The four candles set in the wreath represented the four weeks until Christmas Day as well as the centuries spent awaiting the coming of the Messiah. The lighting of an additional candle each week in Advent celebrated the growing anticipation for the light that came into the world when Jesus was

born. The basic construct of the wreath is maintained to this present day although there have been traditionally some cultural variations.

The use of colour in Church tradition appears in the twelfth century when the colour of purple was assigned to both Advent and Lent. In Advent the colour of purple suggests royalty because we await a King. Traditionally four candles are used in the Advent wreath representing the four Sundays of Advent. Purple candles are used for the first, second and fourth Sundays and a pink or rose coloured candle on the third Sunday represents joy.

Vincent Ryan, OSB in the book ‘Celebrating the Season of Advent’ suggests that in the ritual of lighting an additional candle each week in the Advent wreath we express the hope and longing of the people of the Old Testament for a redeemer. We also give expression to the gradual realization of God’s promises through the prophets and finally John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. The wreath itself is a symbol of victory and glory, and in the fullness of time, the birth of Christ and the glory of his coming.

The Meaning of Advent

In its earliest form Advent was essentially a preparation for Christmas and it focused on the liturgical celebration of Christ's birth. From the beginning of the seventh century however Advent was understood, also and especially, as a time of waiting and expectancy for the return of Christ in glory. W. O' Shea in his study on Advent in the New Catholic Encyclopedia as related by Vincent Ryan, OSB states that "The mystery of Christ's coming is something indivisible. His appearance on earth and the parousia are two aspects of a single redemptive coming which is not yet completed: he who came will come again, and he has told us to watch and wait.

We are reminded however by Harold A. Buetow, PhD, JD in his book 'God still Speaks: Listen' that this coming of Christ is also experienced in the present. In what I consider to be the best interpretation of Christ's 'comings' in Advent, Buetow says these 'comings are in history, mystery, and majesty'. Historically we look at scripture which enlightens us about his first coming into the world born of Mary, His preaching and public ministry and His Death and Resurrection. His coming in Mystery is experienced in the present through His Spirit, His Word, the Sacraments, and one another. Finally we await his second coming in Majesty when He comes again in all his glory.

In Advent then we are reminded that throughout our lives we must reflect on Jesus' incarnation i.e. how Jesus came, what He taught, what He did and how He left us His Spirit and the life of the Church. These ought to instruct our lives and how we live now God's commandments of love so that healed, converted, transformed and forgiven we will be ready to "greet Him when He comes again" (Roman Sacramentary) in His second coming in glory. It is for this reason that Advent is such an important season in the Church and one which, when properly celebrated, gives so much depth to our Christmas Solemnity. This is because it interprets the meaning of Christ's Incarnation for the whole of our lives and helps us prepare for his continuous coming adequately.

In the reflections and prayers that follow, the focus would be on how God prepared a people for Jesus' first coming in the hope that it would help us receive him now in the present and transform us for His future coming in glory. It is because his coming now in mystery links his first coming with his second coming that the following reflections deal with aspects of our conversion now. For this reason we use scripture texts from the Old and New Testament that prepared a people for Christ's first coming.

GUIDELINES

TO PRAYER & REFLECTIONS

The candles are lit in the following order:

1 ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT	PURPLE
2 ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT	PURPLE
3 RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT	PINK
4 TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT	PURPLE

As you pray the daily prayers you light only those candles that have been lit on the preceding Sundays, e.g. After the 2nd Sunday of Advent you will be lighting both the candle from the 1st Sunday and the 2nd Sunday of Advent, etc.

A suggested time to light the candle(s) and pray is in the evening time when you gather the family around the wreath and spend just 5 – 10 minutes in prayer. Anytime is suitable however according to family schedules as long as it is done everyday of Advent.

Suggested Prayer format:

- Light candle(s) first
- Read the scripture text provided for the day and the accompanying reflection.
- Reflect for a short while on the scripture text and written reflection.
- Read the prayer for the respective day only e.g. Sunday of the 1st week of Advent etc with the response provided. Then follow this up with spontaneous prayer from family members, if so desired.
- Conclude with One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

N.B. A text of the Magnificat is provided in the Appendix.

DAILY REFLECTIONS TO THE 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
(This Page is printed in a Full Colour Purple)

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

God said, “Let us make man in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth”,

**God created man in the image of himself,
in the image of God he created him,
male and female he created them.**

God blessed them saying to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it.”

Gen I: 26-28

We see in the story of creation that God created humankind in the image of himself and to do so he created them male and female. Then to complete his work of creation he told them to ‘be fruitful’ and ‘multiply’. How does this image God? Well, the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (CCC, N.221). This means essentially that the image of the Godhead is the image of a love relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. This suggests that humankind is most perfectly like God, and therefore fully human, when he is in a loving relationship with God and others. More than this, when a community of persons living in a love relationship are in unity with each other and with God then God is sacramentally present (family and Church). How instructive it is then that the first and second commandments of the Old and New Testaments are – You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And, you must love your neighbour as yourself.

On this first Sunday of Advent let us reflect on whether or not our whole lives are governed by these two commandments of love. What, more than anything else, determines the choices we make everyday? What is the motivation for our decisions made regarding ourselves, our families and our communities? Is it real love that drives us or is it something else like pride, vanity, selfishness, fear, greed, resentment, and so on.

Reflect for a short while and then continue with the following:

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, as we remember and prepare for your Son’s coming teach us how to love again through forgiveness and reconciliation.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your love.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat (*See Appendix I*)

MONDAY OF 1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

“But of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, “You must not eat it, nor touch it, under pain of death.” Then the serpent said, “...God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”.

Gen. 3:3-6

It appears to me that all temptations in life are exactly the temptation written about in Genesis 3. In our temptation to sin it's always a matter of God's will versus our will and because we want to be gods of our own lives our eyes are opened to evil and blinded towards God's loving will for us. The freedom to choose, or freewill, is the most important aspect of God's love for us, his creatures. Yet it is this very aspect of our creature hood that we use to reject his love and choose sin. It was not the tree in the middle of the garden that had the power to bring about the original sin, it was Adam's and Eve's attitude towards God and the tree that brought about the sin. It was something within their hearts, God's loving voice versus their rebellious voice. It is the same with us today and everyday. We must now come to a place once again in our lives where God's loving voice

triumphs over any other voice. So gracious is God's love for us that even though he knew the fragility of the human spirit he still made a covenant with us that would mean eventually the offering of his own son on the cross. That is love.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, give us the courage to face the truth of our sinfulness and to name our sin so that we may be reconciled to you and each other as we anticipate and prepare to celebrate the coming of your Son.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your mercy.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

TUESDAY OF 1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

Yahweh said to Abram 'Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you'. So Abram went as Yahweh told him.

Gen. 12:1-4

The call of Abraham is the call of every baptized Christian in this life because it is the call of faith. The faith of our baptism invites us to make a journey to a place we do not know, by a route that is yet undetermined, with someone we cannot see and is not yet fully known because he is mystery, he is God. We are called by our baptism to let go of the familiar, what we can see and determine, and that which we have power over and surrender trustingly to God. Only when we do this will we understand that the journey is not to a place but a person, and this journey is the means through which our relationship with God is established, matured and perfected. The journey itself is what prepares and enables us to receive what is promised, that is, the love of God made manifest

in Christ Jesus our Lord. The obedience of faith is the one important criteria on this journey because we cannot depend on feelings or sentiment.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Loving Father give us all the strength and sustenance that we need for the journey. When we grow weary or impatient with our waiting remind us of your faithful love and your unseen presence.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your trust in the Father.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

WEDNESDAY OF 1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

Yahweh appeared to Abram and said “I will establish my Covenant between myself and you, and your descendants after you...to be your God and the God of your descendants after you, ...and I will be your God.”

Gen. 17:1-8

In this scripture passage from Genesis we see that Yahweh's love for his creation moves him to become personally involved in our salvation. Our salvation will require God's direct intervention. And this intervention will take the form of a Covenant with a whole nation, through one man Abraham and his faith in God. The emphasis here moves from the Salvation of one soul to the salvation of many, that is, a whole people. This new covenant means a commitment on the part of God that ensures our salvation because he will uphold this covenant by his strength. ‘...and I will be your God’ is a definitive statement that invites us to be faithful because he is a faithful God. When we hear the Father's promise of faithfulness today we must reflect on the level of our faithfulness to God and to each other

in our relationships. Like the people of Israel, how often do we abandon the terms of this covenant, experienced through the exercise of love, by turning to false idols, the most popular of which is myself?

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Faithful God forgive us for losing sight of your love and your will so often. Keep us mindful of your loving presence to us so that our choices will reflect the Covenant you have made with us.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your faithfulness.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

THURSDAY OF 1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

That day, Yahweh rescued Israel from the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. Israel witnessed the great act that Yahweh had performed against the Egyptians, and the people venerated Yahweh, they put their faith in Yahweh and in Moses, his servant.

Ex. 14:30-31

There is a saying, ‘every river has two banks’, which means that there are two sides to the same story or the same river could be seen from two different perspectives. In the crossing of the Red Sea the Hebrews encountered the first bank of the Red Sea as an apparently insurmountable obstacle in their path to freedom from slavery. However, when Yahweh acted on their behalf through his servant Moses, and the people of Israel reached the safety of the other shore, they experienced the Red Sea as the instrument of Yahweh that saved them and destroyed the might of the pursuing enemy. The crossing of the Red Sea in the Old Testament is the image of the crossing from death to life in the water of Baptism in the New Testament. The obstacles in our path to freedom from the bondage of sin and

slavery can also appear insurmountable but with heartfelt prayer and trust in God these apparent obstacles may be the very things that God uses to lead us to healing and freedom. We have only to trust and to believe.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

All-powerful God remind us every day of your unimaginable strength and your power to save us. Lead us safely to the other side especially when we are tempted to lose faith.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your deliverance.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

FRIDAY OF 1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

Yahweh said, 'Come, anoint him, for this is the one.' At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him where he stood with his brothers; and the spirit of Yahweh seized on David and stayed with him from that day on.

1 Sam 16:12-13

David's anointing as God's chosen King for the people of Israel surprised everyone including David himself. Yet Yahweh chose David because he was to pre-figure the Shepherd King whose birthday we anticipate during Advent. God's choice is often not what would be our choice because God sees what we do not see and knows what we do not know. Wouldn't it be very liberating to trust that we too have been called and anointed for a purpose and that that purpose is often revealed to us in the most unexpected ways and circumstances. We have only to trust in the wisdom of God and the person or persons he sends into

our lives, like Samuel the prophet, to help us along the way.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

God of Wisdom help us to trust your choices in our lives and to let go of our need to control everything as if we had the knowledge to do so.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your Wisdom.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

SATURDAY OF 1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

Yahweh said to David, “Yahweh will make you great; Yahweh will make you a House. And when your days are ended..., I will preserve the offspring of your body after you and make his sovereignty secure. I will be a father to him and he a son to me; ...Yet I will not withdraw my favour from him, ...Your house and your sovereignty will always stand secure before me and your throne be established forever.”

2 Sam. 7:11-16

When God builds something it is likely that he builds it with eternity in mind even though, as in any construction, there is a lot of building up and breaking down in the process to completing the final structure. What's more, the completed structure itself may have been made to accommodate continuous change and transformation whilst never losing its meaning and purpose. This is even more so if Christ, who is God, is the cornerstone of that building. In this passage from 2 Sam. 7 God instructs us that the building of his Kingdom here on earth is his doing, but it requires our cooperation because St. Paul tells us that we, through baptism, are part of that building. God begins with building the House of Israel through David his servant but that House will include all nations at

the coming of Jesus Christ. Remember then that God favours you as part of his Kingdom and your glory is assured in Christ Jesus who comes.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Heavenly Father remind us always of our inheritance through Christ Jesus your Son. Keep us mindful that there is always cause for rejoicing because your promises will be fulfilled if we co-operate with you.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your zeal for the Father's House.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse,
a scion thrusts from its roots:
on him the spirit of Yahweh rests,
a spirit of wisdom and insight,
a spirit of counsel and power,
a spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh.
Integrity is the loincloth around his waist,
Faithfulness the belt about his hips.

Is. 11:1-2, 5

Have you ever tried to watch a plant or tree grow by staring at it for hours on end? It could be quite frustrating because it appears as though nothing is happening in the moment. But it is growing because experience and science tell us so. We may become quite impatient for its fruit but no amount of impatience will make it grow any faster. Man cooperates with God at work in nature by pruning and weeding to ensure that the plant or tree gets what it needs to grow and flower. We do all this in the hope that the promised potential in the plant or tree to bring forth fruit or flower will be realized. We trust that below the surface, where we cannot see, the roots of that plant or tree are hard at work.

In this passage from Is.11 the prophet reassures the people of Judah that inspite of man's efforts to carve out his own destiny with wars and political intrigue God's power is at work establishing his Kingdom here on

earth. The tree had already been planted and Israel's future was assured for those who put their faith and trust in God. The fruit of that tree would be the one on whom the spirit of Yahweh rests. We too must believe that for those who have faith the future is assured, in terms of the individual, the nation, and the world.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Lord of all creation as we journey through this advent season keep us mindful of your glorious power at work in all of us as you seek to establish your Kingdom fully here on earth.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your glorious power.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

MONDAY OF 2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

I, Yahweh have called you to serve the cause of right; I have taken you by the hand and formed you; I have appointed you as covenant of the people and light of the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon. My name is Yahweh, I will not yield my glory to another nor my honour to idols.

Is. 42:6-8

I have always been amused by signs advertising genuine parts for engines or vehicles of a particular brand. Who will want to buy a part for an engine or vehicle that is not the genuine thing? Yet, apparently, there is a large market for such items because they are usually cheaper and more easily available. The truth is that these parts look the same, feel the same, but are not the same as the real thing. They work only for a while and then fail. On the face of it they promise things they cannot fulfill.

In this passage from Is.42 Yahweh God is saying the same thing, 'I am the genuine thing and I will not yield my glory and honour to those idols and fake gods out there'. 'You will know that I am the real thing because of the nature of my servant hood. The one who is promised will be my beloved and chosen one and you will know he is the real thing because he will open the eyes of the blind and set those who are in

bondage or the darkness of the dungeon free'. We ourselves choose the idols and fake gods out there because they demand less of us and indeed offer us an easy form of servanthood that does not demand too much sacrifice. Remember however that they cannot deliver what they promise but only disillusionment and disappointment.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Heavenly Father give me a discerning spirit and a heart of goodwill so that I will not be misled and tempted to worship false gods in this life. Father, help me to glorify you and honour you in the choices I make.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus in your glory.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

TUESDAY OF 2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

“...this is what Yahweh asks of you:
only this, to act justly,
to love tenderly
And to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8

It is said that when faced with one's own death one of the natural responses is to bargain with life or God. We say to ourselves that maybe if we did this differently that won't happen or we promise God any number of good deeds if only he would spare our lives. Interestingly enough we did this as children and now even as adults. That is, when asked to be generous we would give away two pieces of chocolate and keep four for ourselves so as not to appear selfish to ourselves and others. In other words, anything not to have to die to ourselves and live for the sake of loving others. That is what's happening here in this passage from the prophet Micah. Rather than political and spiritual leaders and merchants changing their sinful lives they offer animal sacrifices and say prayers. They mistake good for evil and evil for good. Rather than a change of heart and living righteously they offer sacrifices that have no relation

to God. So Yahweh God through his prophet Micah reminds us all of what God truly wants, and that is us. He wants us to live our relationship with him with an integrity that demands our dying to self and giving away the whole chocolate, except maybe one block, oops! There we go again.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Gracious Father help us to make the sacrifices in this life that really matter. Teach us how to put others first by acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly with you.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus in your humanity and teach us how to live with integrity.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

WEDNESDAY OF 2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

The word of Yahweh was addressed to me saying,
“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
Before you came to birth I consecrated you;
I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

Jer. 1:4-5

Has it ever occurred to you that you are a word uttered by God? When one stops to think that God is Truth then the notion that you are a truth uttered by God is a powerful thought. I think it's very liberating and affirming to know that Wisdom, Truth, Light and Goodness knew me even before I was formed in the womb. To be known is one of the deepest desires of the human soul but the soul needs to know it is known. Yahweh God in this reading from the prophet Jeremiah reveals this truth to the people he is making his own and preparing for the coming of his Son. He was giving the people of Israel, and giving all of us, an identity worthy of a people who would receive his son into the world. This is because it was through Jesus, the Eternal Word, that we were created and brought into the world. There is more to this however, because Yahweh says that before we came to birth we were 'consecrated' (made sacred) and called by our lives to be a prophetic sign that would lead others (nations) to God. It can never be said then that someone,

anyone, had no value or is worthless because then we would be saying God uttered a lie or falsehood, and that is not possible. As we journey through Advent let us be reminded how important it is to prophetically witness to others their importance and value, from the unborn child to the most disabled or challenged person. Only then would we understand the significance of welcoming Christ into the world.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Eternal Father too often in our lives we have spoken words that hurt, disrespect, destroy, betray and deceive others. Help us to speak the truth now in our lives so that we would reverence the lives of others and our own lives.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with in your truth.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be,
and the Magnificat.

THURSDAY OF 2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

Then Yahweh put his hand and touched my mouth and said to me: “There! I am putting my words into your mouth. Look, today I am setting you over nations and over Kingdoms, to tear up and to knock down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Jer. 1:9-10

Replacing the old with the new can sometimes be quite overwhelming and even traumatic for some people and in some situations. This is particularly true if what we are seeking to replace is an old habit or a well entrenched tradition. The more radical and complete the change we are seeking is the more difficult and painful the exchange. This is because there must be almost no sign of the presence of the old in order for the new thing to take hold and thrive. There usually has to be a tearing up, a knocking down and a full destruction of the old and this is painful and difficult. But, it is also necessary. Life is about growth and growth is about change, about replacing the old with the new. Yahweh God in Jer.1:9-10 is telling the people of Israel that building the Kingdom of God and a living temple fit for his worship means that there will have to be a radical conversion and turning away from sin.

For the grace of Jesus’ incarnation to take full effect in our lives we must remove those things that are an obstacle to that grace. With Yahweh’s help we must get rid of sin and darkness and choose to do good. This is what will welcome Christ who makes all things new.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

All powerful God come with your mercy and help us to repent of our sinfulness. Give us a new desire for you and a willingness to rid our lives of everything unspiritual so that our souls may welcome you always.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and make all things new.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

FRIDAY OF 2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

Then he said, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel...” So prophecy. Say to them, “The Lord Yahweh says this: I am now going to open your graves; I mean to raise you from your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel...And I shall put my spirit in you, and you will live...”

Ezk.37:11-14

When sin came into the world it brought death not only to the body but especially to the soul. One can only imagine that the spiritual stench of a dead soul is far more compelling a horror than that of a dead body. Yet God says to us in Ezk.37 that he would put his Spirit in us so that our souls may live. He would do this even though they may be rotting away with the death that comes from sin. How wonderful and profound is this love that God has for us which causes him to come after us even when as an individual or a people we have been reduced to dry bones! Must we not then do the same for others? We must therefore not think of anyone as irredeemable no matter the extent of their sinfulness or darkness. As St. Paul says, ‘we were darkness once but now

we are light’. Wherever we go if there is darkness or death there, our only responsibility is to bring light and life to that place or situation. Is that not what God has done for us?

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Compassionate and faithful God do not let us be numbered among the dead but restore us to eternal life in your Son Jesus Christ who comes to bring us life.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

SATURDAY OF 2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

Oh! Do not abandon us forever, for the sake of your name; do not repudiate your covenant, do not withdraw your favour from us, for the sake of Abraham, your friend, of Isaac your servant, and of Israel your holy one, to whom you promised descendants as countless as the stars of heaven and as the grains of sand on the seashore.

Dan. 3:34-36

People usually feel abandoned only after waiting a while to see if things would change for the better or that the beloved would return. This may be followed by a strong feeling of being alone in the world and that no one else could feel what you feel. Not only that but the return to normalcy, if it does happen, seems to take forever. One of the ways we might want to respond to such an experience is to remember, whilst we wait, God's faithfulness in the past. When we cannot recall a situation of our own we can recall the stories of others where God displayed his faithfulness and power because he never leaves us alone even if it feels that way. The scriptures offer us a rich source of such stories and it may be wise when we feel alone and abandoned to fill our minds with these stories as Daniel did in his time.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Father in heaven the coming of your Son Jesus into the world is a constant reminder to us that you will never leave us alone. Help us to welcome him into our hearts today so that we will courageously face the problems of our times.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your gift of courage.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

“He is the living God, he endures forever,
his sovereignty will never be destroyed and
his Kingship never end.
He saves, sets free, and works signs and wonders
in the heavens and on earth;
he has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.”

Dan. 6:26

One evening I was watching T.V. on the Animal Planet Channel and a documentary was on about lions that eat humans called man-eaters. It was revealed in this documentary that a lioness when hunting prey, including humans, will zero in on one person both visually and through scent. Its intent and focus is to kill that person and it will run past any number of other persons in the way until it reaches that one person it has singled out for attack. In 1 Peter 5:8-9 scripture says, “Be calm but vigilant, because your enemy the devil is prowling round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat. Stand up to him, strong in faith.” Daniel is in the lion’s den because of his holiness and goodness. A lie has been told about him and the king deceived into putting him to death. But what is Daniel’s response? He goes into the lions den to face the enemy only with his faith in the living God and the lions do not touch him but are tamed by his presence. This story is a lesson to the people of Israel that Yahweh God is a God who saves with immense power those who put their faith and hope in him and who live righteously.

We too must recognize that the devil has zeroed in on each baptized soul, marked with Christ, and will stop at nothing until we are destroyed and our salvation lost. But salvation cannot be lost except by our own choice, so the devil, a

hungry lion, approaches us through deception, guile, falsehood, lies and especially half-truths. Therefore as 1 Peter 5 states we must be ‘calm but vigilant’, not thinking to ourselves that Satan does not exist whilst all the time following his lead. Rather let us put our faith and trust in the one who comes to save us not eat us.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you are the living God who endures forever. When we are in our weakest moments and temptations seem overwhelming remind us of your strength and love that is but a simple prayer away.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and defend us against the enemy.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be,
and the Magnificat.

MONDAY OF 3RD WEEK OF ADVENT

“As I watched the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples and nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.”

Dan. 7:13-14

As Yahweh God formed a people for himself, a people to receive his Son, the one who was to come into the world, he had to form in their minds an imagination that would allow them to know Him. Of course this was within the limits with which a finite mind could know an infinite God. Daniel 7:13-14 is one such occasion where Yahweh God makes it known that the one who will come in to the world, ‘one like a human being’, was in fact a revelation of himself, one who will come from his heavenly presence. Not only that but the one who will come is himself the awesome God who has been given a dominion, glory and kingship that would never end. When we think that this is what we are waiting on in the coming of Christ at Christmas, our hearts should be filled with praise, worship, adoration, love and thanksgiving to almighty God for so wonderful an exchange of love. Should not our imagination be prepared to welcome Christ with all our mind, minds so

easily distracted by the events of a secular Christmas Season all around us?

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Loving and eternal Father anoint our thoughts at this time of year so that more than ever we may be able to love you with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our minds, and welcome your Son with a reverent joy.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your gift of peace.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

TUESDAY OF 3RD WEEK OF ADVENT

For if he had not expected the fallen to rise again it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead, whereas if he had in view the splendid recompense reserved for those who make a pious end, the thought was holy and devout. This was why he had this atonement sacrifice offered for the dead, so that they might be released from their sin.

2 Maccabees 12: 44-45

Such is the extent of God's love for us that even when it is over, it not over. If God wills it, not even death can stop us from having one more chance at heaven's glory. In 2 Macabees we are encouraged by the knowledge that through the sacrifice of those who are alive, others who have died may still be purified and released from their sin. Even before the coming of Christ then, the scriptures reveal the power of His resurrection and its victory over death. The text in 2 Maccabees is a precursor to the ultimate atonement sacrifice Jesus would make on the cross, the power of which would release all souls in purgatory. When next you are planning for the future remember that that future includes the possibility of purgatory before heaven, therefore

plan accordingly and thank God for the coming of his son Jesus.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Father, how great is your love and mercy that you would ask each of us to share in your work of releasing loved ones in purgatory. Remind us that this is the extent to which our love should go if we are to love like you.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with the keys to heaven.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

WEDNESDAY OF 3RD WEEK OF ADVENT

Look, by reason of his power God is supreme, what teacher can be compared with him? Who has ever told him what course to take, or dared to say to him, 'You have done wrong'? Turn your mind rather to praising his works,...

Job 36:22-24

The book of Job deals with that all important, unavoidable experience called suffering which to the very end of the book remains a mystery. Who can know the mind of God?, the psalmist asks. The One who came into the world himself endured many kinds of suffering and those who were close around him suffered likewise. The wonder of it is that in spite of the many hardships they endured, Jesus, his apostles, and his disciples, spent most of their suffering time healing others and freeing them from their sufferings. The One who makes all things new and whose word brought creation into being, himself suffered the limitations of being human in a sinful world, and taught us in his own body that suffering does not have the final word. The Church fathers teach us that it is sin that brought suffering and death into the world and it has become part of the nature of all things created. The Church fathers also teach us that suffering had to be brought to an end with death so that death might bring back what life had thrown away through sin. This is why Jesus had to come into the world, so that his death becomes every man's life.

It is grace that transfigures life, suffering and death so that men and women may once again live as a new creation in Christ. It is no wonder then that we await with joyful anticipation the one who came and is to come again. As St. Paul says, "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, in your great mercy, teach us how to accept unavoidable suffering as an opportunity for your transforming grace to take root in our lives and bring about the salvation of the world and the restoration of creation.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and strengthen us in our suffering even as your fill us with your peace.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

THURSDAY OF 3RD WEEK OF ADVENT

I give thanks to your name for your love
and faithfulness;
Your promise is even greater than your fame.
The day I called for help, you heard me
and you increased my strength.

Psalm 138:2-3

A heart that is filled with gratitude for what it has received, no matter how little, is a heart that will always have plenty to share. The heart that spends most of its time thinking about what it has not received is a heart that will not be grateful and therefore have little or nothing to share. Only if we stop everyday to thank God for everything we have received, especially his love and faithfulness to us, will we ourselves have love and faithfulness to share with others. The same could be said of everything else in life e.g., mercy, compassion, relationships, work, material things and so on. In some mysterious way, gratitude seems to multiply what we have received and make it more than enough to share around.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Eternal Father, in this Advent Season, give us hearts that are genuinely grateful for everything, good and bad, that we have experienced this year, since you use them both to draw us closer to you.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and teach us how to give thanks to the Father.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

FRIDAY OF 3RD WEEK OF ADVENT

‘wherever you go, I will go, wherever you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Wherever you die, I will die and there I will be buried. May Yahweh do this thing to me and more also, if even death shall come between us!’

Ruth 1:16-17

This scripture passage from the book of Ruth is a passage that celebrates the love of friendship. Friendship is like the ocean, you can experience it in many different ways. You can experience it at various depths and approach it from different perspectives but in every instance you would be participating in the same ocean. God chose friendship as an important relationship through which he will reveal himself to us. This may be because the two pillars upon which a genuine friendship stands are fidelity and charity (Agape love). Jesus chose twelve apostles as his personal friends with whom he intended to live and share a life of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. It was his friendship with them that made them important witnesses to his life, death and resurrection.

They would have had to say, like Ruth, “wherever you go, I will go, wherever you live, I will live.” We too must see friendships as opportunity for dying to self and learning how to love through grace.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Gracious Father bless our efforts at friendship and make them fruitful in teaching us how to love.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with your gift of friendship.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

DECEMBER 17TH

The Lord himself, therefore, will give you a sign.
It is this: the maiden is with child
And will soon give birth to a son whom she
will call Immanuel.

Is. 7:14

Signs are important things but we must be able to read the language of the sign in order for it to benefit us. The importance of this statement becomes self-evident if you have an urgent need to use the washroom in a public place in a foreign country. Even more important, however would be a sign, that if correctly read, would lead one to the fullness of life, eternal life. This is precisely what we are invited to in this passage from Isaiah 7:14. We are instructed that when the virgin (note, **virgin**) is with child that that child is special and it will mean God is in our midst. Not only that, but God in our midst as a human person would mean that he shares in our humanity and we can therefore share in his divinity. But we must read the signs and respond to them wholeheartedly, without hesitation, lest we lose direction. Mary may have looked on the outside to be just a pregnant woman. Worse than that, a pregnant woman in questionable circumstances but she was in fact carrying around in her body the Son of God, Jesus our

Saviour. We might want to consider now how God comes to us everyday, sometimes in difficult circumstances or familiar faces and surroundings and we do not recognize him, we fail to see the signs. More immediately, whilst we prepare to celebrate his first coming at Christmas are we sensitive to His coming to us today in each other?

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Glorious Father help us to open our minds and hearts to receive Jesus today in our lives even as we await his glorious coming at the end.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and share with us your divine life.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be,
and the Magnificat.

DECEMBER 18TH

‘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 to save his people from their sins.’

Mt. 1:20-22

Joseph is being asked in this scripture passage from Mt.1 to not be afraid about taking Mary home as his wife. On a deeper level however, he is being asked to take salvation home because of his love for God. What Mary carries in her body is the Saviour of the world, ‘the one to save his people from their sins’. As we prepare for the birth of Christ at Christmas, we too are being asked to take salvation home, in order to make possible his coming into our lives in the mysterious way he came into theirs. Bringing salvation home is a risky business because we don’t know how other family members would receive it or respond to it. It is likely to demand changes in us as a family, especially how we relate to one another, and that might disturb our comfort zones. There may be things we did behind closed doors in the privacy of our lives which we won’t be able to do any more because the Saviour would be with us.

Changes would have to be made and that is upsetting or downright frightening in some instances. Nevertheless the only way we can welcome Christ into our home this Christmas or any Christmas is by our willingness to bring salvation home.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Merciful Father help us to accept the generous gift of your Son this Christmas by our willingness to change those things in our lives that need changing.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and bring us your salvation.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

DECEMBER 19TH

“Zachariah, do not be afraid, your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear a son and you must name him John.....Even from his mother’s womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit... With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to turn the hearts of fathers towards their children..., preparing for the Lord a people fit for him.”

Lk. 1:13-17

Throughout history Yahweh God has used prophets to direct people and to teach them his ways. This was how he formed a nation and a people he called his own. Yahweh God used the prophet’s voice as his primary tool for calling a people to himself and directing them along the path of his will. But that was not all, the power of the prophet’s voice came from the way he or she lived the prophet’s life. Key to the success of the prophet was the people’s willingness to accept the prophet and his or her message. The validity of the prophet’s message was that it came from the Holy Spirit who anointed the prophet. Because Jesus said that he would be with us always to the end of time, we must believe that he speaks to us still, through his chosen ones. Like the prophets of old, they may not be the ones we choose to listen to or be the ones to declare themselves as God’s voice, but the ones we don’t easily pay attention to or quickly reject as unimportant.

In our times, it may be the voice we have grown familiar with and does not get our attention but which has something important to say, something we need to hear.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Father of Wisdom give us a discerning heart so that we will never fail to listen when you speak to us through one another.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and give us your Spirit.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

DECEMBER 20TH

The angel Gabriel was sent by God...He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'... '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...' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.'

Lk. 1:26-38

It is amazing what God can accomplish in us when we are obedient and compliant with his will. This is even truer when our free will is in union with the will of God through contemplating his glorious presence. Then our obedience and free submission to God's will becomes, literally, the chariot or vehicle upon which God is borne or carried into the world by us. Mary understood this and was clear about one thing, and that is that everything must be done according to God's word and therefore God's will, "let what you have said to be done to me." For Mary then, obeying God's word and living by it was what made it possible for her to carry the Son of God in her womb. Jesus was conceived and carried by obedience to God's word more than by Mary herself. And Mary's obedience was the offering of her free will up to God as a fragrant offering of her love for Him.

As we approach the celebration of Christ's birth we must ask ourselves how will we carry him or welcome him into our lives if not by total obedience to his will and his word.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Glorious Father we thank you for sharing your Son with us so that we may live fully the life you have given us. Help us to welcome him into our lives through our obedience to you.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and teach us that obedience is an essential characteristic of love.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

DECEMBER 21ST

Mary set out and went...into Zachariah'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... Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

Lk. 1:39-45

A womb is meant to be a fruitful place because it is there that God's command at the beginning of creation, "Be fruitful and multiply" is fully realised. It is fruitful because above all it is the place where life begins and where persons begin to communicate with God, and each other the love that has conceived them. At least, that is how it should be but this is often not the case. Rather, the cry that comes forth from the womb now is too often a cry of desperation, a cry of abandonment, a cry of fear or a cry of hopelessness. When the cry of the child is no longer a cry of joy or a cry to be comforted, then the world has lost its sense of reason and humankind has become suspicious of its own nature. If this is true then we must remember the conversation between John and Jesus in their mothers' wombs and how the Spirit taught them to speak and to leap with joy. And how their mothers and fathers learnt to hope again and expect with great joy God's promises to be fulfilled.

We must listen again to the voice of the child lest we forget how blessed we truly are and what it means to be human.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Loving Father have mercy on our world and on each of us who have taken for granted the gift of life, and who have sought to make the womb a place of death rather than a place of life. May the children once again leap with joy in their mothers' wombs at the sound of your voice as you speak love to them through their mothers and fathers.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus with the joy of your humanity.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

DECEMBER 22ND

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 had 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 for ever.’

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

Lk. 1:46-56

Mary's soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and her spirit exults in God because he has looked on her with favour, not for her own sake, but for the sake of the nation of Israel. What a glorious heart Mary must have that she experiences her blessing and vocation not as hers, but one that belongs to the people of Israel according to God's promises. By virtue of our baptism we are the new Israel and Mary's song is sung for us now. Let us celebrate with joyful hope the coming of the Son of God, by allowing our hearts to become all inclusive, wanting everyone to experience and to know the love that God has for them in the birth of his Son.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Heavenly Father we thank you for the gift of the blessed Virgin Mary and the wonder of her motherly love for us all. Help us to follow her example and contemplate your saving power at work in all of our lives through the love of your Son, Jesus.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and bless our families and our world with your Light.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be,
and the Magnificat.

DECEMBER 23RD

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 those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts.

Lk. 1:63-66

What do you treasure most in your life? It is true to say that the things we treasure most in this life either leave us dumb-struck and silent or cause us to cry out with joy and expectation. One way or the other we would not be neutral in our response nor mild in our reaction. This is essentially because the treasured person or thing finds its home deep in our hearts and we all know that heart business is serious business. If we have not done it before, or for a long time, let us take this coming Christmas to heart. How might we do this? Well we could begin by opening our minds and hearts to Jesus with a love that burns more fiercely, than ever before. It is possible that when this happens our hearts will expand even more and we would want to bring into this fire of love burning so fiercely, our husband or wife, our children, our parents and grandparents, our grandchildren, the family pet, the neighbours, the village, the town or city,

those around us who are poor or challenged in some way, the outcast, the prisoner, the nation...;well you get the idea, don't you?

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Eternal Father as we await the celebration of the birth of your Son, Jesus, teach us how to be quiet in our hearts at this time. Even though we may be in the midst of the noise of the season, help us to contemplate the depths of your fatherly love for us in the coming of your Son.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus into our hearts and make them pure with your goodness and your love.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

DECEMBER 24TH

The song of Zechariah

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
he has come to his people and set them free.
He has raised up for us a mighty saviour,
Born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old
that he would save from our enemies,
from the hands of all who hate us.
He promised to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hand of our enemies,
free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous in his sight,
all the days of our life.

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most
High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
by forgiving them their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow
of death,
and to guide our feet on the road of peace.

Lk.1:67-69

Light comes with dawn and the darkness of night is dispelled. What often helps us to make it through the darkness and the night is the certainty of dawn and the promise of light. For this to happen dawn must be faithful to its promise to return, and light faithful to accompanying the dawn. Fidelity to our

promises then makes a whole lot possible that may not be otherwise possible. It is true, isn't it? Commitment, and fidelity to that commitment, is what makes it possible for others to risk, to have courage, to weather the storm, to trust, and to hope. We have no right then, not living up to our promises and our commitments if we want to love as God has commanded

us. Even if it means we have to die to be faithful, that is what the one who is to come into the world did, that is what Jesus did. When we celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas, and look forward to his coming again, we are celebrating fidelity with love.

REFLECTION

Prayer:

Eternal and loving Father we thank you once again for the gift of your Son, Jesus, may His coming into the world transform us into a people filled with faith, hope and love.

Response:

Come Lord Jesus and fill us with the light of your presence.

One Our Father, One Hail Mary, One Glory Be, and the Magnificat.

CONCLUSION

‘Flowers are appearing on the earth.
The season of glad songs has come,
the cooing of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The fig tree is forming its first figs
and the blossoming vines give out their fragrance.
Come then, my beloved,
my lovely one, come.’

‘My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock,
in the coverts of the cliff,
show me your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet
and your face is lovely.’

Song of Songs 2:12-14

Let the fire of Hope, God has placed in your heart, lead you to Him, now as the star of Bethlehem led the wisemen to the manger. May you find there in the face of Christ comfort, peace, joy and the assurance of a promised love that will never end.

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APPENDIX 1

The Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my saviour;
for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant,
and from this day all generations will call me blessed.

The Almighty has done great things for me:
holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and has sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.