

# HE COMES IN LOVE

Advent and Christmas Reflections  
for College Students



DIOCESE OF CLEVELAND  
NEWMAN CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY  
2023



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HE  
COMES IN  
LOVE

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## 478 He Comes to Us as One Unknown

1 He comes to us as one un-known, a  
 2 He comes when souls in si-lence lie and  
 3 He comes to us in sound of seas, the  
 4 He comes in love as once he came by

breath un-seen, un-heard; as though with-in a  
 thoughts of day de-part; half-seen up-on the  
 o-cean's fume and foam; yet small and still up-  
 flesh and blood and birth; to bear with-in our

heart of stone, or shriv-eled seed in dark-ness sown, a  
 in-ward eye, a fall-ing star a-cross the sky of  
 on the breeze, a wind that stirs the tops of trees, a  
 mor-tal frame a life, a death, a sav-ing name, for

TEXT: Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926). ©1984 by Hope Publishing Company  
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 TUNE: Charles Hubert Hasting Parry [1888]

8.6.8.8.6.6.

REPTON



pulse of be - ing stirred, a pulse of be - ing stirred.  
 night with - in the heart, of night with - in the heart.  
 voice to call us home, a voice to call us home.  
 ev - 'ry child of earth, for ev - 'ry child of earth.

5 He comes in truth when faith is grown;  
 believed, obeyed, adored:  
 the Christ in all the scriptures shown,  
 as yet unseen, but not unknown,  
 our Savior and our Lord,  
 our Savior and our Lord.

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Scan here to listen to  
*He Comes to us as One Unknown*

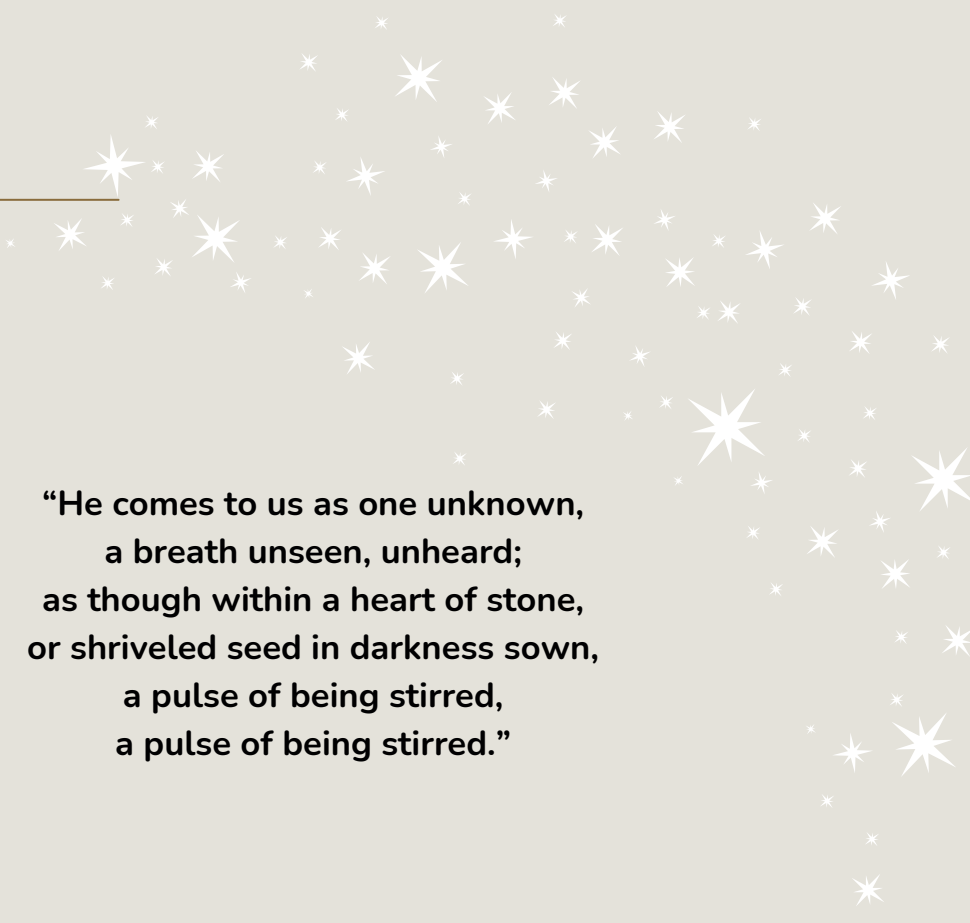


# FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 3 - December 9

**Joseph Alto, M.A.**

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry  
Newman Catholic Campus Minister  
at Cleveland State University



**“He comes to us as one unknown,  
a breath unseen, unheard;  
as though within a heart of stone,  
or shriveled seed in darkness sown,  
a pulse of being stirred,  
a pulse of being stirred.”**

# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 3, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19**

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9**

**Gospel: Mark 13:33-37**

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Happy Advent to all those reading this! As this is the first reflection you will read in this book, I want to fittingly quote the patron saint for all the campus ministries, St. John Henry Newman. Newman reminds us that “Advent is a time of waiting, it is a time of joy because the coming of Christ is not only a gift of grace and salvation, but it is also a time of commitment because it motivates us to live the present as a time of responsibility and vigilance.”[1] Some obvious follow up questions for any college student to have in response to Newman would be, “what exactly am I taking responsibility for?” or “what am I supposed to be vigilant about?” To speak for Newman, I think he would tell us moderns that it is our responsibility to pay proper attention and be vigilant in this endeavor by growing in consciousness when we fall short.


Proper, or right attention is a key component in the recipe of proper worship. It’s what makes it savorous. For an easy example, think about the legitimate complaint one has when you are at the dinner table with someone who is just constantly on their phone, not even looking up at you while you share thoughts. However, you may categorize your emotions, undergirding all that is a sense of frustration because the individual is simply not paying proper attention to you. Transferring this now in a relationship with God, not executing right attention also leaves that relationship empty. When I reflect upon recent moments where I have felt separation from the Father, I realize that it’s when I am being inattentive.

In today’s first reading from the prophet Isaiah, the narrator laments for why the Lord has allowed for hearts to grow hardened toward the Lord. When I finished reading Isaiah’s lamentations and putting into conversation with Newman’s sentiment, I couldn’t help but wonder about the lack of right attention to the Lord the narrator of this pericope probably had. We know that God’s expansive love is always with us, but feeling that love deep in our guts requires proper attention. In the second reading, Paul explains to those first century Corinthians that Christ has bestowed on each one of us infinite love and grace and that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift. Again, we are simply unable to manifest those gifts without the proper attention to ourselves in relationship to God.

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[1] John Henry Newman, Catholic Culture, Advent: November 27th - First Sunday of Advent (Trinity Communications November 27, 2022),

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/calendar/day.cfm?date=2022-11-27>



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Finally, in the Gospel reading Christ gives a powerful prognostication to his disciples. “Be watchful! Be alert!”[2] I imagine Jesus animatedly proclaimed. Christ warns that the Lord our God should not catch us asleep but be ready to receive. In this, Jesus is telling us to pay correct attention to ourselves and moreover, to our personal relationship with God. When we do this, we begin to worship correctly, and worship correctly leads to that constant, guttural feeling of God’s love for us.

As you prepare for a break, that collective sigh of relief and anticipation of the joy that will ensue, I compel you to pay proper attention. I think if you do, this Advent could be one you will not soon forget.

- Reflect on your personal/familial values. Based on what you value, to what should you be paying attention?
- What are some strategies you can employ to ensure that you pay proper attention to God throughout your day?
- Make a list of all the objects or actions that take up your attention, then create a list of behaviors that aid you in focusing on God.

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[2] Mark 13:33

# MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 4, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9**

**Gospel: Matthew 8:5-11**

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Maybe you will quarrel with a family member at Christmas dinner or an old friend from high school during the break because of some opposing social views. Nowadays, it appears that many people subscribe to a certain form of tribalism that allows us to lose focus on the first things. Really, we are people of God first and everything else comes second; our “tribe” is that of the kingdom. In today’s first reading, Isaiah states a similar message. Many nations want to climb the God’s Mountain to know God’s ways, some may even raise swords in their effort to out-climb other nations. The Lord warns us that we should not forget to whom we belong, namely him. Christ, in today’s Gospel is comforted by the faith of the centurion--one who keeps law and order of the Roman ways--and lauds the commander. The centurion, although a Roman citizen, knew his true allegiance was with God. He knew that his material tribe was secondary to his spiritual one.

So, what does this mean for us? Well, if you do find yourself in a situation this break--or in general--where a tenuous tribal battle of the wits may ensue, remember, we are all a people of God. Try to do more to represent that.

- What are some positive, peaceful ways in which you can exhibit, outwardly, that you are a Catholic?
- What are some premeditated talking points you can have in your arsenal for when you are put in a situation where your faith is questioned or put in a certain political box?

# TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 5, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17**

**Gospel: Luke 10:21-24**

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In today's first reading, a depiction of life when the savior comes is verbally illustrated,

"The wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;  
The calf and the young lion shall browse together,  
with a little child to guide them." [1]

Shifting this imagery from the symbolic to material would suggest that the Prophet is making the claim that we will exist in utopian peace; truly, a wolf mingling with a lamb carries strong symbolic significance. Jesus in Luke's Gospel tells his disciples that, "many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." [2] Was Jesus referring to Isaiah when he said this? Although the prophets surely know what life with the savior is like with acuity, as they are now in the Heavenly realm, we sit here, in truly the year of our Lord, 2023 with privilege. We get to experience a whole material and nonmaterial existence having seen and heard Christ. I think many of us lose this perspective, that many people centuries ago never had this opportunity. I often disagree with those who think we are living in a horrible time in history. I mainly have this take due to the privilege I just spoke about. As university students, you may have heard figureheads on your campus tell you to spark positive change with the privilege you have been given. I am telling you to do the same. Honor God by attentively understanding that others, both prophets and kings, have not had the opportunity you possess.

- What are concrete actions or steps you can take to further progress toward the Kingdom?
- How do you see Christ acting in the world today?

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[1] Isaiah 11:6

[2] Luke 10:24

# WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 6, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10a**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6**

**Gospel: Matthew 15:29-37**

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***Reflection by Diana Schoder, Cleveland State University, English Education, 2025***

God will provide for all people. These words can cause a variety of emotions in people. For some, it may be comfort. We are truly blessed to have a God who cares so deeply about each person as an individual and as one body. For others, it may be confusion. How can a God who provides for all allow people to go without, especially people who do not have a home or food to eat or money for a bus pass?

I struggled with these questions during my first days at Cleveland State and I still struggle with them to this day. Imagine walking to the dining hall every day, knowing you are going to eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner, while you pass people sitting on the street with nowhere to go who may not be eating at all. As God provides for me, how is God providing for these people?

In today's readings, Jesus feeds the crowd with seven loaves and a few fish, leaving seven baskets of leftovers. The Lord works through his disciples to provide for the crowd. So, I think the better question to ask is how can God work through one individual, or one Newman Center, or one Diocese to provide for these people?

God guides people to respond in different ways, just as God provides in different ways, and the answer is not universal. One thing we can do, even if we are running late for class or other responsibilities, is pray for those in need and for docility, when God prompts us to act.

- How has the Lord provided for you today?
- How has the Lord provided through you today?
- Where could the Lord be calling you to provide more for other people?



# THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 7, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 26:1-6**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118:1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a**

**Gospel: Matthew 7:21, 24-27**

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The readings today use the imagery of rocks, stones, walls, etc. It's no task to latch onto the symbolic significance of these mineral structures, but I'll go ahead and explain it in a more elementary way. In the fable, *The Three Little Pigs*, the reader visits three houses, each house is built using a different material: one made of straw, one of sticks, and one of bricks. The wolf, wanting to devour the pigs, demands entrance into their respective houses. The first two pigs, who built homes using straw and sticks, to save time and energy, get their homes destroyed by the wolf. They in turn flee to the third pig's home, the pig who built a home of bricks, even if it required more time and less leisure. The wolf is unable to blow the bricks down, the wolf loses, and the pigs celebrate.

Many of us are like the first two pigs; we build homes—spiritual homes--using feeble materials. They may look nice from the outside, and they may have been easy to build, allowing us to spend more time scrolling or watching ESPN for hours, but in the innermost chambers of our being, we know our home is not up-to-snuff. Prophets and Christ alike admonish us over this. When the figurative wolf, or storms come, when we endure those hard times when we begin to question our most intimate relationship, we need to be able to retreat to a house of stone.

- Is your spiritual home built of straw, sticks, or bricks? If straw or sticks, how did this happen?
- If bricks, what people, beliefs, actions, or behaviors serve as the “bricks” that have helped you build this home?

# SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

December 8, 2023

**First Reading: Genesis 3:9-15, 20**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4**

**Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12**

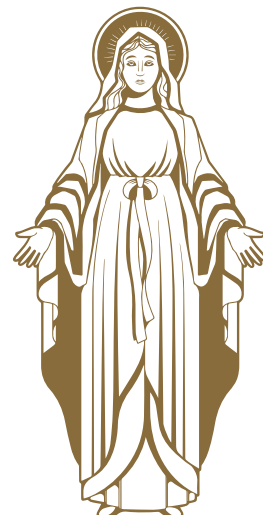
**Gospel: Luke 1:26-38**

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So much can and has already been said about the content of today's readings, which celebrates the Immaculate Conception of our most Blessed Mother, Mary. Trying to write a pithy reflection almost mentally paralyzes me. So, this is my message for today's readings, do something courageous and brave in the name of Christ today. The primordial man and woman, Adam and Eve did something courageous and brave—admitting to God that they fell short—these virtues are not usually attributed to them. It's obvious that Mary made the bravest and most courageous decision in human history. The adventure only begins when the courageous decision is made. The second reading reminds us that we are chosen with accuracy and certainty by God to be his. Making the courageous and brave decision to submit to him is what actualizes this relationship.

Say "yes" to God today. Today, not tomorrow, not next week, or when you get back to campus. Do something courageous and brave in the name of Christ today. Maybe it's going to confession, maybe it's just picking up your device to see when confession is scheduled. Maybe it's going to Mass today, maybe it's sitting and reflecting with God. Begin the journey and honor our Blessed Mother Mary by being courageous and brave.

- What is something you can do today to say "yes" to God?
- What is your relationship like with the Virgin Mary?



# SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 9, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6**

**Gospel: Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8**

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Today's readings deal with the lost being found, the sick being cured, and the unmotivated being possessed by the Spirit. I often wonder where I fall in the lost sheep-found sheep paradigm. Sometimes I feel like I am conscious that God has found me, but sometimes I still stray because I like the feeling of the chase. I like the feeling of being called back to God, again and again. Now, what I think this suggests is a certain amount of narcissism that I carry in my spirit. I don't think I am unique in this; I think many do this.

Jesus says that "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few." [1] I imagine how life would be if we became full-time laborers for Christ and not just part-time workers. Although the full-time laborer job may certainly not be easy, the benefits will be grazing in vast meadows. Jesus gives supernatural abilities to mortals—the disciples—to heal both the body and soul. I often wonder what qualities the 12 had that enabled them to defy our physical realm? The answer I always rest on is that they were figuratively and literally full-time laborers-in-Christ. It's not that we are totally ungodly slobs if we wander from God, but always come back. However, we need to be very conscious that this behavior does not afford us the special qualities that other mortal full-time laborers had and have. Go ahead and apply for the full-time job, it's yours! Commit yourself to it and the pay truly will be supernatural!

- Where do you fall on the lost sheep-found sheep paradigm and if it shifts, do you usually notice what makes it shift?
- Do you think that if fully committed to Christ, you too can have the ability and privilege to help heal souls?

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[1] Matthew 9:37



# SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 10 - December 16

**A.J. Hoy, M.T.S.**

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Newman Catholic Campus Minister  
at The College of Wooster

“He comes when souls in silence lie  
and thoughts of day depart;  
half-seen upon the inward eye,  
a falling star across the sky  
of night within the heart,  
of night within the heart.”



# SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 10, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14**

**Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-14**

**Gospel: Mark 1:1-8**

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Have you ever had a feeling so strong that something was going to happen? Maybe you anticipated being accepted to a program, getting that dream job, or winning a contest. I recall listening to my grandmother dreaming about what she might do with lottery winnings were she to defy all odds and win. Sometimes we can get ahead of ourselves, but there is something in this hope that we share. Chances are you've dreamed far beyond that which is certain to imagine better times ahead with joy and anticipation. If you have ever done this, then, at your core, you understand the fundamental meaning of Advent. Take a moment to recall the last time you anticipated something exciting so much so that you had to share it with someone. What all did it entail? What did it feel like to dream beyond what was certain? Today's readings center us in proclamation of some development or news.

In reading today's readings, I couldn't help but think of Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's song "Something's Coming" from their hit musical, *West Side Story*. In the song, the male lead, Tony, accompanied by frantic and moving instrumentation, expresses his feeling that great things, miracles even, will be coming his way. Knowing the plot, we know this to be his ill-fated romance with Maria. However, if we were to temporarily blot out our knowledge of the plot and sit with Tony in his song for a moment, we might encounter a new understanding of today's readings. Much like Tony, today we find John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, and general thorn in the side of the Jewish religious leaders of his time, preaching not of something but someone who is coming after him. John is anticipating the fruition of Isaiah's prophecy from our first reading: the ability to say to the world, "Here is your God!" [1] John knows that someone's coming "around the corner or whistlin' down the river." [2] Fulfilling Isaiah's role of the voice crying out in the wilderness, John is letting everyone know about this development he is anticipating.

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[1] Isaiah 40:9

[2] Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, "Something's Coming" from *West Side Story*, 1957



As Christians, we may think that we know the end of the story, that is, we know who John is anticipating and what amazing things Jesus will do. In fact, knowing Jesus makes it almost impossible to read through either today's first reading or Gospel without our minds jumping to think of his life and ministry. And while these are certainly worthwhile things for Christians to consider, maybe today we should try to make ourselves sit in the uncertainty of that which is coming. The reality of Advent is anticipation, not really for a child born in a barn, but for something that is already and not yet, the Kingdom of God.

This Advent, we share in our anticipation of something that is being built within us, in our relationships, and in our world, namely the promised time when Jesus will return to us and hopefully bring us into himself for good. Today, we may think we know more than John (or Tony), but in all reality we are standing in their same shoes. "Something's comin', don't know when but it's soon..."[1]

- Do I ever take time to dream about what could be possible? If so, what or who do those dreams involve?
- Do I find myself ever wanting to skip to the end or wanting to find certainty at any cost? If so, why do I do this?
- Is there any value in being able to sit still in expectation or anticipation?

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[1] Ibid.

# MONDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 11, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 35:1-10**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 85:9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14**

**Gospel: Luke 5:17-26**

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Courage.

Looking up at the ceiling of my friend's new apartment, I laid on a slowly deflating air mattress unable to sleep. I had just driven halfway across the country to go to grad school. My apartment wouldn't be available for another week and all my earthly possessions were in my car parked on the street three stories down. I may have asked myself, "what have you done?" at least fifty times that night. I was scared, not because I was in a new place, but because I had no idea what the next two years would bring. The unknown can be terrifying.

Today's readings give voice to our common doubts and anxieties. While Isaiah paints the picture of a coming reign of God that is marked by wonder and salvation, he acknowledges the fact that change and the unknowns that accompany it can be scary. He replies "to those whose hearts are frightened, Be strong, fear not!"[1] Our inability to see into the future with certainty is one of the reasons why each of us needs the virtue of courage. As a virtue, courage involves habits that allow us to do difficult things well. When we encounter new opportunities where we don't know the outcome, courage can help us take the first step.

Although Jesus identifies the operative virtue in today's Gospel as faith, I think there is also a fair amount of courage involved. Assuming that the paralyzed man and his friends believed that Jesus was who he said he was, imagine the courage it would take to approach Jesus to ask for a miracle. Uncertain of the outcome, they still did that which was difficult. Looking to the Kingdom of God, let us also employ habits of courage to take first steps this Advent.

- When was the last time that you thought about your future with uncertainty? How did it feel? What did you do?
- Do you think that telling people to be courageous actually helps them to become courageous?
- How does courage operate in your daily life? Have you summoned your habits of courage recently? What happened?

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[1] Isaiah 35:4



# FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

December 12, 2023

**First Reading: Zechariah 2:14-17**

**Responsorial Psalm: Judith 13:18bcde, 19**

**Gospel: Luke 1:26-38**



Faith.

Around September of last year, my wife and I found out that we were expecting twins. As we sat in the ultrasound room a spectrum of emotions flooded our minds, excitement, anxiety, joy, hope, fear, and so many questions. Although we weren't visited by an angel, like Mary in today's Gospel, there was not much that would have prepared us for this good (but life-altering) news.

The message of Gabriel that we find in today's Gospel serves to fulfill the prophesy of Zechariah that we hear proclaimed in our first reading today; namely, that God is coming to dwell among us. So great, we've stumbled onto another theme of Advent, right? Yes, but it may not be what you are thinking. God dwelling among us is immanent for Zechariah and fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus requires the habits of the virtue of faith.

As a virtue, faith can be tricky. We believe things that we cannot independently verify every day. Have you personally observed an atom? If you haven't, can you honestly say that you've verified that atoms are one of the core foundations of matter? No. Still, that doesn't stop us from operating under the faithful assumption that all matter is composed of atoms and compounds of atoms. This is one kind of faith, but not the faith of Zechariah or Mary. Their habits of faith are centered in faith's proper object (or end), namely God. Both figures firmly believe, beyond mere reason, what has been told to them, that God will dwell among us. If you are struggling with your faith this Advent, consider asking God to help you by giving you opportunities to be faithful. Growth in virtue requires practice.

- Have you ever struggled to believe something that others assent to? What was it? How do you feel now?
- Were you in Mary's shoes, do you know how you would have responded to Gabriel's message?
- What does a person filled with faith look like? Do they ever struggle or ask questions? Do they ever fall out of faith?

# MEMORIAL OF ST. LUCY, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

December 13, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 40:25-31**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8 and 10**

**Gospel: Matthew 11:28-30**



Hope.

Today we celebrate the life of an early church martyr, Lucy. Often depicted as holding her own eyes which were allegedly gouged out during her martyrdom, Lucy serves as a model for Christians of steadfast hope, even to the point of death. Although not much is known about her life, the stories that we have reflect her undying faith in God and hope in that which is to come. Today's first reading helps to center us on Lucy's hope. Still proclaiming a great kingdom to come, Isaiah reminds us that we must never tire of placing our hope in God.

As a virtue, hope is deeply dependent upon the virtue of faith. Whereas habits of faith enable us to believe in things beyond our own reasoning, habits of hope allow us to dream of the future that our faith implies. Honestly, hope is sometimes very difficult. Often when we hope, we are let down and our dreams are dashed. This experience is so ubiquitous that someone may have even warned you not to get your hopes up! Yet, the story of salvation history is one that cannot be possible without hope. As salvation history continues to unfold, we cannot be hopeless, because there is still more to come. This simply cannot be the end of the story.

Lucy is called a martyr because she died for her faith, but the word "martyr" doesn't necessarily mean death. It comes to us from the Greek for "witness". In her dying, Lucy witnessed to the hope that she had in God and God's coming reign. She knew that her death was not the end of the story and hoped for a future in and with God.

- Have you ever been disappointed by something or someone in which you had placed your hope? What did that feel like? Would you do it again?
- Are there any objects of your hope that you would be willing to sacrifice for? What are they?
- Do you ever fear placing your hope in someone or something? Why or why not?

# MEMORIAL OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

December 14, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 41:13-20**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:1 and 9, 10-11, 12-13ab**

**Gospel: Matthew 11:11-15**

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Humility.

Today, the church celebrates the life of St. John of the Cross, reformer and co-founder of the Discalced Carmelites. John of the Cross is honored as a Doctor of the Church, and as such, his writings are considered authentic teaching of the church. This title is reserved for select saints, making it quite rare. Yet, hold yourself back from thinking of John as ritzy or glamorous. The truth of the matter is that John's life and ministry was anything but opulent. Born in the middle of the 16th century in Fontiveros, Spain, John's life was surrounded by the slow fracturing of the church brought on by the Protestant Reformation.

But he founded a religious order, right? That must have been at least a little glamorous! John spent much of his life, like the central figure in today's gospel, John the Baptist, did, humbly searching. Born into an impoverished family, John of the Cross didn't have many opportunities. Although he was able to apprentice and receive education, John found himself working in a hospital tending to the poorest of the poor. Still searching, John joined the Carmelite order and was ordained a priest. Meanwhile, St. Theresa of Avila, co-founder of the Discalced Carmelites, was working on forming a community for religious women. She frequently prayed that God would send her a priest. Eventually, St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross met. Upon meeting John, who was a very short man, St. Teresa wrote that God had sent her "half of a priest". Humility marked John's life at every turn, even as he continued to search.

- Have you ever found yourself searching for something? What did that feel like?
- Have you ever found yourself humbled or needing to find some semblance of humility?
- What does humility look like? Does it mean complete self-denial or something more? How can humility impact your prayer this Advent?

# FRIDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 15, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 48:17-19**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6**

**Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19**

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Justice.

Often, when I am teaching ethics to undergraduates and we are discussing the concept of “virtue”, I find that my students struggle to understand virtues as “moral excellencies.” They regularly communicate that the idea of being morally excellent in any one sphere simply seems unattainable, let alone mastering a host of virtues. To be honest, their concerns are fair. Being virtuous is not easy and I don’t know anyone who has perfected their practice of any one of the virtues. However, when I encounter this with my students, I often ask, “Ok, but what does (x virtue) look like?” These answers come quickly. Once we know what all a virtue encompasses, it’s easy to think of people that we know who exhibit the habits that characterize the particular virtue.

Today’s readings center on the vindication that God will bring. While we often think of winning as a desirable end and scripture maintains that God will win in the end, God’s vindication may not look exactly like what we imagine it to be. Throughout scripture, God’s victory is marked by pervasive justice—everyone gets what they are due by virtue of their creation in the image and likeness of God. This eschatological victory, like attaining any virtue perfectly, seems far off. But what if we looked at God’s vindication in and through justice in a different light? What does final justice look like? What does it look like when people get those things that they are due just by virtue of their existence? It looks like hungry children being fed. It looks like marginalized people finding belonging and community. It looks like universal access for all people regardless of ability. It looks like authentic kinship. It looks like...the Kindom of God. As we further envision and call ourselves to action, we are engaging in God’s justice one small step at a time in the here and now.

- What does it look like when people get those things that they are due just by virtue of their existence?
- What are you doing to build the Kindom of God in the here and now? Who are you called to recognize as kin?

# SATURDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 16, 2023

**First Reading: Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:2ac and 3b, 15-16, 18-19**

**Gospel: Matthew 17:9a, 10-13**

Charity.

Today's readings center us where this week's readings began, on the figure of John the Baptist. Foretold in the prophecies of the Old Testament, John was to serve as a precursor to Jesus, paving the way for Jesus' public ministry. In reading the prophecies, one may imagine that John would be like an advance team, setting up meetings, documents, and deals for Jesus to come along and finish up. While John does somewhat prime the pump for Jesus' ministry in letting folks know that he would be coming, he also stirs up quite a bit of trouble with the local authorities, religious and civil. John, in service of the Gospel, put his own life in danger to run ahead of Jesus and his ministry. John died so that Jesus could minister effectively.

Our theme for this resource is "He Comes in Love". Although this title is meant to refer to Jesus, who is Love incarnate, it also applies to John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus and voice crying out in the wilderness. Throughout this week, we've seen John as one who was willing to give up everything in service of the Gospel. The theological term for this willingness to empty oneself is called *kenosis*. Unsurprisingly, there is a virtue associated with *kenosis*: the virtue of love (*caritas/agape*). In his willingness to put his whole life in service of the Gospel, John is an exemplar of the virtuous love that is perfectly displayed in Christ's passion and death. May John's self-emptying love inspire us this Advent to deepen our love for God who is love incarnate.

- Have you ever struggled to love someone? What is their name?
- For whom would you be willing to make sacrifices because of your love for them? What is holding you back from being willing to make more sacrifices for people that you love?





# THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 17 - December 23

**Steve Perry, M.A.**

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry  
Newman Catholic Campus Minister  
at Case Western Reserve University

“He comes to us in sound of seas,  
the ocean’s fume and foam;  
yet small and still upon the breeze,  
a wind that stirs the tops of trees,  
a voice to call us home,  
a voice to call us home.”



# THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Gaude Sunday | December 17, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-2A, 10-11**

**Responsorial Psalm: Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54**

**Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

**Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28**

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Today marks our turn into the latter half of Advent. In the midst of this period of waiting and anticipation, the Church proclaims that this Gaudete Sunday is a day to rejoice and to celebrate the glorious gift we receive at the end of this season. Indeed, our readings today are replete with this theme of rejoicing, including what I believe to be the greatest prayer of joy in all of Scripture, Mary's Magnificat.

There is so much that is striking about the Magnificat, but for me, what stands out most is the outward incongruence between the uncertainty in Mary's life and the unwavering confidence that underlies this great prayer. Two thousand years later, we know that the story ends with her divine Son's resurrection and her coronation as the Queen of Heaven. At the time, however, all Mary knew was that the Holy Spirit had given her a son who would take on the throne of David. If I were to place myself in Mary's shoes, I would certainly feel highly honored, but I would have a thousand questions. How am I supposed to raise him? What if he gets hurt? Is he going to lead us to war against Rome? What will this mean for my family?

Though these questions likely occurred to her, Mary does not dwell on the uncertain nor the demands this gift will place on her; rather, she focuses only on the glory of the gift itself and the love God showed by giving it. She does not say "the Mighty One has given me a great responsibility," but instead "the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."<sup>[1]</sup>

Friends, on Christmas Day we will receive, albeit in a different manner, the selfsame gift God gave to our Mother at the Annunciation: God's whole self. Like Mary, we know that saying "yes" to this gift will demand something of us – and we do not know fully what that is. When we experience uncertainty in our lives, let us look to Mary's great prayer as a model of how to respond to the God who gives us all of himself amid the unknown: with unfettered rejoicing. By doing so, may each of our souls likewise "magnify the Lord."<sup>[2]</sup>

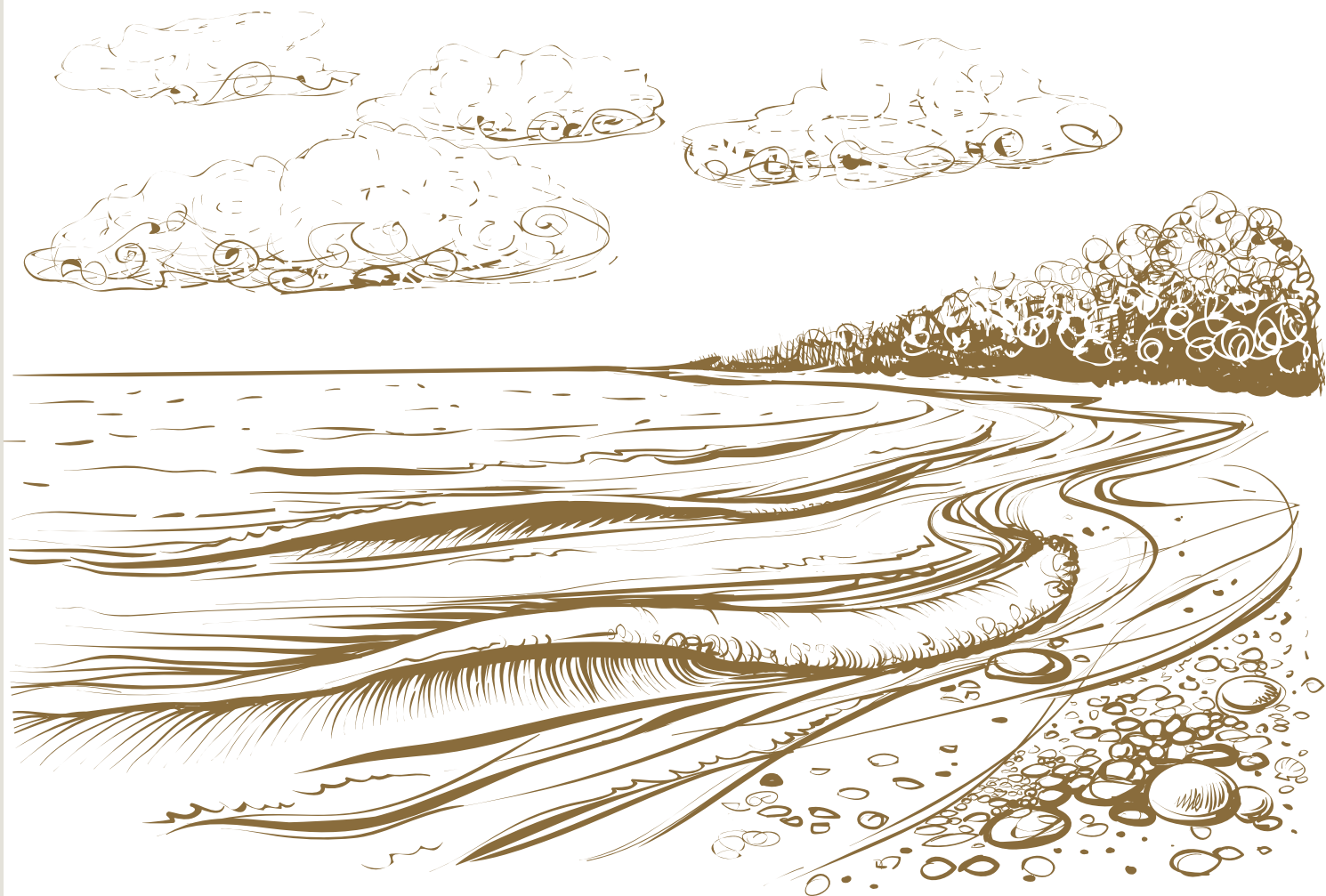
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<sup>[1]</sup> Luke 1:49

<sup>[2]</sup> Luke 1:46



- Where is there uncertainty in your life right now?
- What are some of the “great things” God has done for you throughout your life?
- How can you make the rest of Advent a time of rejoicing?



# MONDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 18, 2023

**First Reading: Jeremiah 23:5-8**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19**

**Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25**

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Have you ever felt stuck in a bad situation? Stuck with a bad roommate, a bad relationship, in family drama, or in a pattern of sin? The people of Israel – particularly in the last five or six centuries B.C. – are painfully familiar with that experience. They spent centuries trapped under the rule of the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans, never having a kingdom of their own and always being subject to an exacting authority.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks out of that experience in our first reading today, where he relays God's promise to Israel that he will raise up a king cast off the yoke of their rulers. The people thirsted for a king who would "do what was right and just"[1] for them, and God, knowing their need, promised them he would raise one up. Of course, we know that God fulfilled that promise to Israel in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Why is it, then, that you and I doubt God will raise us out of the situations in which we feel trapped?

One week from today, we will celebrate God's fulfillment of his promise to free Israel from their centuries of being "stuck." As we approach that day, may we all bring those parts of our lives where we likewise feel stuck to the Lord, confident that he will free us as well.

- Is there a situation or relationship in your life where you feel stuck right now?
- How can you call on the God who sets captives free to do the same for you?

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[1] Jeremiah 23:5

# TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 19, 2023

**First Reading: Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 71:3-4a, 5-6ab, 16-17**

**Gospel: Luke 1:5-25**

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Our readings today highlight two righteous women who spend much of their lives barren. Despite their singular commitment to living out the will of God, in the eyes of their people they were incapable of doing what it is most essential for women to do: bear children. To their culture, these two women were failures. You can imagine how despondent they must have felt. They gave their lives to God, yet, in the eyes of their faith community, they were cursed by God. It would not surprise me if both Manoah's wife and Elizabeth felt that their community was right, that they were indeed abandoned or forgotten by God. Despite this feeling, the reading makes it very clear that God had not for a moment forgotten either of these women; on the contrary, he had places of honor for them both in his plan for salvation.

If you've ever felt like a failure, remember these stories. What is true of these two women is true of you too. Despite any purported evidence to the contrary, God has created you for some definite purpose.[1] In your case, it may be – as it was for these two women – that after a time, God will bring about success in the very place you are trying to achieve it. Otherwise, God may eventually reveal that you are looking for achievement in the wrong place and show you where instead you will find true fulfillment. Either way, if others look down on you or you are tempted to look down on yourself, remember you have a God who believes in you, has gifted you, and has a place for you to use your gifts.

- When have you experienced failure in your life?
- Did that failure lead you to a new path, or did you remain on the same path and find success later?

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[1] Cf. John Henry Newman, "Meditation," March 7th, 1848.

# WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 20, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4ab, 5-6**

**Gospel: Luke 1:26-38**

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## ***Reflection by Brandon Moore, Case Western Reserve, Class of 2026***

When you pray, how often do you find yourself praying for the Lord to do something if it be His will? The emphasis on this prayer comes in the end, "If it be your will, Lord."

Ahaz is met with fear in the first reading as Rezin and Aram have plotted against him for his demise. However, the Lord reassures him that the plan for Ahaz is not demise and that standing true in his faith will lead him to safety. Often in life, we must face hardships, situations where the outcome is unclear and can be scary. We can take comfort in the knowledge that the Lord wills the best for us and for our relationship with him, so he will always be there for us in those times.

The Gospel builds upon the idea of trusting in the Lord as we see Mary follow his will.

Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel and informed of the conception of Jesus. While she does not initially understand, she accepts saying "May it be done to me according to your word." The

Lord is mighty, and He sets out a plan for each one of us. I once heard the quote, "We plan, God

laughs" and we can see that play out every day. Whether it be failing a test or something not going our way, it is all part of the bigger picture God has in store for us. God does not put us in situations that we cannot overcome with his help, and understanding this can be a source of great consolation.

- Can you think of a time where you experienced frustration and distress, but later came to understand why God allowed you to endure the situation? How can you use this for the next difficult time in your life?
- In what parts of your life do you currently struggle with frustration and anger? How can you allow the Lord to help you overcome this?

# THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 21, 2023

**First Reading: Song of Songs 2:8-14**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21**

**Gospel: Luke 1:39-45**

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In his 1960 book *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis reflects on four words the ancient Greeks had for distinct kinds of love, and where each kind of love fits in the life of a Christian. Lewis shares that the Greeks called brotherly love *phileo*, familial love *storge*, desirous love *eros*, and sacrificial love *agape*. Lewis, like centuries of theologians before him, contends that God's love for us is best described as *agape*, a love that does not seek its own interests[1], but seeks only to pour itself out[2] for the sake of the beloved.

While I agree that of the four ancient Greek words for love, *agape* comes closest to describing God's love, it still falls short. Nowhere is that made clearer than in the Song of Songs. The Church understands that this book of romantic poetry in which a lover passionately proclaims his affection for a beloved reflects God's own proclamation of affection to his people. In today's first reading, we hear in evocative language the enthusiasm with which the lover pursues his beloved, "springing across the mountains" and "leaping across the hills"[3] to summon her to ride off into the sunset with him. This passage depicts God not as a dispassionate lover, but rather as one who deeply desires the company and companionship of his beloved. In that way, the Song of Songs shows us a God whose love is not just *agape*, but also contains *eros* as well. To say this another way: yes, God's greatest desire is to share himself with us, but he also thirsts for us to share ourselves with him.

- Have you ever thought of God as desiring you? What difference does it make to see God's love in that way?
- Reread the first reading from Song of Songs, seeing yourself as the beloved and God as the Lover in the passage. What do you feel when you read the Lover's words to you?

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[1] 1 Corinthians 13:5

[2] Cf. Philippians 2:7

[3] Song of Song 2:8

# FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 22, 2023

**First Reading: 1 Samuel 1:24-28**

**Responsorial Psalm: 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8abcd**

**Gospel: Luke 1:46-56**

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Reflecting on today's first reading, I cannot help but recall how many times the Lord has granted me exactly what I had prayed for, and I simply moved forward without acknowledging his hand in bringing it about. In that way, I am not unlike one of the nine lepers Jesus healed on his way to Jerusalem who, upon realizing they were healed, went about their lives without returning to the Lord to give him thanks.[1]

In the book of Samuel, the prophet's mother Hannah does the opposite. Having prayed for years for God to grant her a son, she does not receive that answered prayer without gratitude. Even further, she does not cling to the gift as though it were only for her benefit that God gave her what she asked for. On the contrary, she expresses her gratitude for receiving the one thing she wanted most by returning that very thing to the God who provided it: she gives her son up to be a prophet for the Lord.

When God answers your prayers, how do you respond? Are you like me, often forgetting to give thanks at all? Do you express your gratitude to God and then move on with your life? Or, like Hannah, do you begin to imagine how the gift you have received from God can be returned as a gift to him?

- Think of a time God answered your prayer. How did you respond?
- What have you received from God that can be given back to God as a gift?

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[1]Luke 18:11-19

# SATURDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 23, 2023

**First Reading: Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25:4-5ab, 8-9, 10 and 14**

**Gospel: Luke 1:57-66**

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With two days to go until Christmas Day, we finish our walk through the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke with the story of the birth of John the Baptist. It is fitting that on the last weekday Mass before we celebrate the birth of God the Son, we reflect on the birth of the one who would “prepare the way”<sup>[1]</sup> for him.

One of the most convincing lines in all of Holy Scripture comes forth from the mouth of John the Baptist, who says pithily: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”<sup>[2]</sup> In this, John is saying that he, a prominent figure among first century Jews, must recede so that the true Lord can take his place in the eyes of Israel.

Friends, John’s journey of decreasing so that the Lord might increase is an image of the interior journey that we ought to take in advent and, indeed, throughout our Christian lives. During this season, we too are called to permit ourselves to decrease so that the life of the Lord might fill the empty spaces within us. My prayer for each of us is that, when we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity in just two days, the Lord will see every way in which we have endeavored to decrease over the last four weeks and that he will fill us to bursting with his own life, love, and compassion.

- What are ways in which you still need to decrease so that the Lord might increase in you?
- In what ways is this challenging? How can the Lord help you to accomplish it?

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[1] Malachi 3:1

[2] John 3:30





# FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

December 24

**John Szarwark**

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry  
Newman Catholic Campus Minister  
at The University of Akron

“He comes in love as once he came  
by flesh and blood and birth;  
to bear within our mortal frame  
a life, a death, a saving name,  
for every child of earth,  
for every child of earth.”



# FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 24, 2023

**First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 88-12, 14A, 16**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29**

**Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27**

**Gospel: Luke 1:26-38**

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This year is unique in that the Fourth Week of Advent is only one day: Christmas Eve. Fittingly, today's readings prepare our hearts and minds for the Feast we will celebrate tomorrow. Today's first reading gives an account of David's kingship and his concern for providing a permanent place of worship for the Ark of the Covenant. David desired to provide a reverent sacred home for the God of Our Fathers. Through Nathan, the Lord asks David that he not be separated from his chosen people, as David is by his house of cedar. Through David's interaction with Nathan, the Lord's requests to remain in the Tent of the Ark are honored, and the building of a permanent dwelling for God is deferred a generation.

In many instances Nathan is David's conscience. He allows David to stumble in his words and deeds, only to bring the King back to the realities he must face as the Lord's chosen ruler over Israel. Nathan comforts David in this Sunday's first reading by telling him that eventually the Lord will allow Israel to build a temple wherein he may reside, a place of reverence and respect for what the Lord has done for his people.

The Psalmist asks us to: "...sing the goodness of the Lord." [1] The liturgical calendar sort of places additional pressure on us this year with only one more day to prepare for the Lord's coming. But we will still spend an inordinate amount of time decorating, purchasing gifts, partying with friends and family. I would suggest that we use the time that remains this Advent to consider a less pressured path to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. That preparation can take many forms: Scriptural reading, Mass, Confession, praying the Rosary, or spending quiet time remembering family and friends, present and departed. All of these can be fitting ways to prepare for the Lord's arrival tomorrow.

In Romans, Paul reminds us that salvation comes through Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God's promise to his people. The promise that was kept secret is now revealed to us: that through the birth of God's only Son and in his gracious mercy we are truly saved. Paul proclaims exultant praise to the God who, in fulfilling the promises he made to David, brings about our salvation.

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[1] Psalm 89:1

Luke's gospel tells us the story of the Annunciation, which begins with the "angel Gabriel being sent to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a Virgin."<sup>[1]</sup> After asking few questions of the Angel, Mary readily accepts whatever God has in store for her. With this announcement, God gives Mary the opportunity to prepare for what is to come. This final Sunday of Advent likewise lets us be prepared to live and worship as our Lord expects.

- How might you make the best use of this final day of preparation for Christmas?
- What would be your response if Gabriel shared with you the tasks for which God intends to be performed by you in your daily life?
- What can we learn from how Mary responded?

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[1] Luke 1:26





# THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

December 25 - December 30

**Robert Koonce**

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry  
Newman Catholic Campus Minister  
at Oberlin College and Conservatory

“He comes in truth when faith is grown;  
believed, obeyed, adored:  
the Christ in all the scriptures shown,  
as yet unseen, but not unknown,  
our Savior and our Lord,  
our Savior and our Lord.”



# THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Mass During the Day | December 25, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 52:7-10**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98:1-6**

**Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1-6**

**Gospel: John 1:1-18**

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Imagine you are on a hike. The area is semi-arid, but full of life. Wide vistas, bursting desert colors, and deep canyons. But, as you go along, your water runs out and you get madly thirsty. Fortunately, you see a sign directing you to a bridge across the canyon that takes you to a rest area. What luck! When you get to the bridge, you go across only to find out that it's under repair and doesn't connect to the other side. You stop at the end of the bridge and while the view is great, you still need water. Your problem is not solved because a bridge that doesn't connect both sides is an overlook, not a bridge.

Desert hikes are not usually good Christmas reflections, but bridges offered to thirsty travelers are. Jesus enters the world, today, to make the overlook a finished bridge. His incarnation as both fully human and fully divine connects both sides of that divide and pulls them into intimate encounter. The early Church struggled to piece together the fully human/fully divine formula – even fought over it. A, perhaps, apocryphal tale is told where St. Nicholas (yes, that one) got into a fist fight at the Council of Nicaea to settle one such debate in 325.

We are thirsty travelers indeed. Original sin has disconnected us from intimacy with God and he has been on a rescue mission ever since. Here at Christmas, the rescue mission unfolds in a bold move as God slips into occupied territory under the cover of humility. This is not simply a historical event, though it does occur in history in a very specific place and at a very specific time. It's real. This is the hinge point on which the doors of eternal life are opened. Take note as to where the bridge makes landfall on our side, where this shattering of the barrier between divinity and humanity takes place. Not in the halls of power or the great centers of art and culture. But in a barn in the outskirts of the outskirts among a place and a people who were easily overlooked by the powerful and wealthy of the day.

Christmas compels us, draws us in, to a new center of gravity. The Nativity beckons us to move from the things of this world (power, pleasure, honor, wealth) to an intimate encounter of sacrificial love, reckless and beyond our imagination.

Today, take some time to reflect on an image of the Nativity scene. See in that humble baby born among the smells and mess of a barn, a love for you. Not some abstract love of the world, but a specific love aimed at you. Yes, you. God wants you to enter into the joy of eternal life, simply because he is in love. And, he longs to find a place to settle in your heart, no matter how messy it may seem to be. The bridge has been repaired – it remains only for us to walk across it.

- Christmas is a time of gift giving and receiving. In thinking back in the past year, do you feel that God has been generous to you? If so, in what ways, big and small?
- Are there people in your life with whom you need to build bridges – for example, giving or asking for forgiveness? What is keeping you from taking those first steps?



# FEAST OF SAINT STEPHEN, FIRST MARTYR

December 26, 2023

**First Reading: Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 31:3cd-4, 6 and 8ab, 16bc and 17**

**Gospel: Matthew 10:17-22**

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The Gospel reading today doesn't offer much in the way of comfort. Neither does the first reading. Here, only a day away from the beauty, charm, and joy of the birth of Jesus, we are confronted with St. Stephen's martyrdom in the first reading and a primer for persecution in the Gospel. But, the placement is important. The early Church theologian, Tertullian, is often credited with saying, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."<sup>[1]</sup>

Martyr is a Greek word that means "witness," and does not necessarily imply death. In a way, Tertullian is correct even in a broader sense – lives lived authentically rooted in the Gospel draw others to Christ. For being a Christian means being rooted in something deeper than the powers and wealth of the world. We are rooted in God's love for us. And, once we have tasted it, nothing else seems to have any flavor. This is why Jesus encourages us in the Gospel passage not to be worried about what we will say when pushed against the wall. If we are rooted in Him, then His words will come out, not ours.

So, take these days of Christmas as a chance to refill – to pray, to study scripture, and to partake of the sacraments. Yes, discipleship is hard and comes with sacrifices, but we have tasted divinity. What else can compare? And, even at St. Stephen's martyrdom, the Church's first, a seed was indeed planted at the feet of a man named Saul who was destined to give everything for Christ in giving Christ to everyone.

- Have you had the experience of enduring something difficult or challenging that when you look back on it you see how you grew through that experience?
- What do you think being an authentic disciple of the Lord looks like in our current culture?

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[1] Tertullian. Apologeticus, 50.13. Translation accessed 8/17/2023:  
<http://www.logoslibrary.org/tertullian/apology/50.html>



# FEAST OF SAINT JOHN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

December 27, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 1:1-4**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12**

**Gospel: John 20:1a and 2-8**

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Today's gospel passage fast forwards us from the Christmas season to the resurrection. While Jesus dropped many hints during his life that something like this was a distinct possibility, the whole community around him was simply not ready to process it. Even their descriptions of him during the resurrection are a little inconsistent. He was both physical and spiritual – he could eat a meal, but could enter a room through closed doors. His body seemed new and radiating, even unrecognizable at times, but his wounds were still tangible. They had a hard time pinning it down.

While their descriptions were contradictory, the one constant was their sheer joy. But, as St. John says in the first reading, “we are writing this so that our joy may be complete.”<sup>[1]</sup> Experiencing the resurrection directly was merely the first step – the true joy came from sharing the story.

Have you ever had an incredible experience, whether it was funny, surprising, or startling, that you had the rush over to someone and tell them about it? Notice in the Gospel reading, everyone is running. This was a common reaction among those who first experienced the resurrection. They ran to everyone else to tell them.

This Christmas season, at the other end of the Gospels from the resurrection, Jesus also breaks categories and expectations. But he is not some nihilist with a sledgehammer. Rather he stirs us from our complacency in accepting the world's desires for our lives – he knows we are made for more than enslavement to longings for power, honor, pleasure, and wealth. We are made for life with him, a true adventure and a real joy.

- Have you ever had an experience where you simply got lost in it? Making music, creating art, or in prayer? Is it even really possible to describe it in words?
- Do you find joy in the Gospel? If so, do you feel comfortable sharing that joy with others?

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[1] 1 John 1:4

# FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS

December 28, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 1:5—2:2**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 124:2-3, 4-5, 7cd-8**

**Gospel: Matthew 2:13-18**

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Today's gospel passage is a horrific drama: the magi's cunning, Joseph's dream, and Herod's fury. The killing of innocent children is a difficult image to ponder, especially in the joyous season of Christmas. Like Monday's readings that focused on St. Stephen's martyrdom, we are reminded of human cruelty right alongside the great hope of Jesus' birth.

John proclaims in the first reading that "God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all." [1] But, the world's horrors remain. Where is God when the innocents are tortured, assaulted, and killed? Where is all that light when we need it most? The cross is the answer we don't want to hear. Jesus is the one being tortured, assaulted, and killed. Jesus is the victim, the one forgotten and cast aside.

Herod is a clear example of what happens to the human heart when fear takes over. His vision is limited only to the extent of his own lust for power. He lacks density, rootedness, and perspective. The question for us, for me, in this story is what part of me is like Herod? What part of me wants the world's goods? What part of me is led by fear?

A baby was born among the poor and forgotten – a baby who bridges the divide between humanity and intimacy with God. A baby who became a man who carried my guilt, my anxiety, my fear and took them to the grave, leaving them there and offering hope and sacrificial love in return.

- Do you have examples in your life of times you made decisions based on fear? Do you also have times when you made decisions based on hope or a bold vision? How were the outcomes different?
- How have you seen God be present to you and others you know during difficult times? Or have you not experienced this? If not, how do you think you could grow in your relationship with the Lord?

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[1] 1 John 1:5

# THE FIFTH DAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

December 29, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 2:3-11**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 96:1-2a, 2b-3, 5b-6**

**Gospel: Luke 2:22-35**

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Simeon is an excellent role model for us. Yet, his biography is basically unknown. Did he have a trade? Was he ever married? Any children? We don't know. What we do know is that he was a man of holiness and patience, having been promised something extraordinary – he would not die until he saw the messiah. How old was he when he was first told that? I imagine that he was young and for decades he prayed and aged, waiting patiently.

Why is he a role model? He didn't accomplish anything. No big problems solved, no policy initiatives won, or new products invented. He simply watched, prayed, and waited. We have a tendency to want an audience for ourselves, don't we? The entire social media industry is kind of built on that. But, we are not called to be show Christians, performing discipleship for adoring audiences.

In college, I studied an interesting experiment in social psychology about a seminary where the students were asked to give a sermon on the Good Samaritan. They had a few minutes to prepare and then they had to walk across the grounds to a room where they were to deliver the sermon for a grade. The experimenters placed someone who acted hurt and homeless along their route. So intensely focused on this assignment, each student failed to notice the individual.

Simeon's patient watching and praying opened his eyes to see deeply. A person of prayer is a person who notices. And, God has a lot he wants to share. This Christmas, take some time to slow down and pray. Your patient stillness will allow God to speak even more clearly to you.

- Who are role models for you in life? Why are you drawn to them?
- How do you use social media? Do you take time to fast from its use and how does that affect your mood or self-image?

# THE SIXTH DAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

December 30, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 2:12-17**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 96:7-8a, 8b-9, 10**

**Gospel: Luke 2:36-40**

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Go change the world! That's frequently said to young people as a form of encouragement. But, it's also a burdensome demand. What if you don't do something amazing in life that substantially alters the trajectory of human affairs? Are you a failure?

Today's Gospel shares the story of Anna with us. She was no great achiever of world changing action. She had lived a long life, was married then widowed, and now spent her days in prayer and fasting in the temple. She was faithful to the point of being able to see deeply around her. Her eyes may have been aging, but her sight was penetrating. She noticed the extraordinary in something unremarkable and ordinary – a father and mother bringing their first born to the temple. A normal regular activity in the life of the temple. But she saw it clearly for what it was.

The world is filled with a lot of distraction and noise. It has always been this way. The first reading challenges us not to look for fulfillment in that noise, but not because the world is inherently evil. If we only listen to our own desires and ambitions, we will develop a blindness for deeper realities. Anna is an antidote for this – a vision of the density of the life of discipleship. We are not promised pleasure, honor, power, or wealth. No, we are promised something better; eternal life with a community of pure love, the Trinity. Let's not lose sight of that promise.

- What are your goals for your life? Do they tend towards results that increase pleasure, honor, power, or wealth? Do they include growth in the spiritual life?
- Do you find time to slow down intentionally in your life? If not, what's preventing you? If so, how does it affect your physical and mental health?





# SECOND WEEK OF CHRISTMAS

December 31 - January 6

**Joann Rymarczyk-Piotrkowski, D.Min.**  
Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry  
Interim Newman Catholic Campus Minister  
at Baldwin Wallace University



# FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

December 31, 2023

**First Reading: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5.**

**Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-17**

**Gospel: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36**

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As a whole, the readings for the Feast of the Holy Family offer us opportunities to reflect on our call to holiness. In the reading from the book of Sirach, we receive a bit of commentary on the fourth commandment, “honor your father and your mother.” When we do this, God promises us riches and long life. Our treatment of our family members should be a reflection of our relationship with the Lord.

St. Paul advises that we should put on love as Jesus did when he was born a human. St. Paul also advises that we remain thankful for our relationships—family and friends. We are called to be careful with each other, practicing the qualities of compassion, kindness, and forgiveness because in our holy family all members are respected, cherished, nurtured and supported, united through a bond of love.

Luke’s gospel shares the story known as “The Presentation in the Temple.” As a family Mary and Joseph come to the temple to observe the Jewish rites of purification that generally occur about forty days after the birth of a child. While there to observe their religious traditions they encounter Simeon and Anna.

The heart of the Presentation in the Temple is the Song of Simeon:

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word; for my eyes have seen salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to  
your people Israel.”[1]

Let’s imagine Simeon, an old man, who was promised by the Spirit that he would live to see the Messiah. He has now reached a very old age and he feels that it is time for him to move on from this world. He is beginning to wonder if this promise will be fulfilled before he departs this earth. Then one day while praying in the temple, a family walks in with their infant son. Somehow, Simeon knew this was The One! This baby is the Messiah he has been waiting for. So he approaches them and reaches out to the mother asking to hold her baby. She lets him hold the Baby Jesus. With Jesus in his arms, he turns his eyes to heaven and sings “My eyes have seen your salvation.”

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[1] Luke 2: 29-32, NRSV

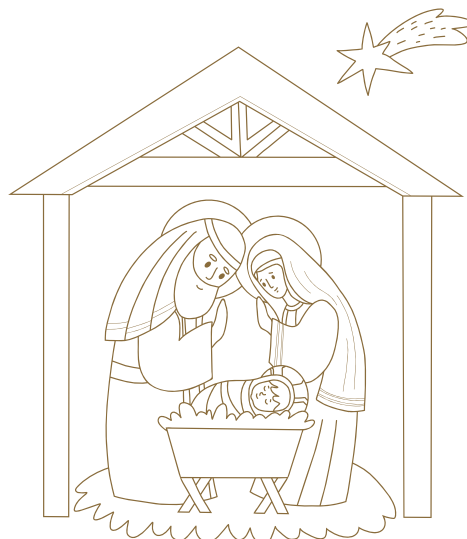


With this song, we realize that the infant Jesus, God's gift of salvation, has come to the world. Salvation does not begin when the adult Jesus begins his public ministry, nor does it begin on the cross; rather, Salvation begins the moment Jesus is born. Gary Neal Hanson tells us that, "In this little child, God is with us. The Holy God, the very Image of the Father has taken up human flesh, become truly human in the womb of Mary. Now human flesh, all humanity, begins the process of being restored to the image of God, renewed in the very likeness of God." [1] This is our call to holiness. The process is not complete in any of us, but it has begun for all of us. As we continue with the Christmas Season, let us remember to put on love and pursue our own call to holiness.

- The Christmas gifting is over, yet in your pursuit of holiness there are things you can do for others. Choose a person and name one thing that you can do out of love for them.
- In what ways have you been called to be careful with people in your life, practicing the qualities of compassion, kindness, forgiveness?

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[1] Hanson, Gary N, "The Presentation of Jesus—Luke 2: 22-40." Theology. It's Good For You (blog). 21 December, 2020, <https://garynealhansen.com/the-presentation-of-jesus-luke-222-40/> .



# SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

January 1, 2023

**First Reading: Numbers 6:22-27**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8**

**Second Reading: Galatians 4:4-7**

**Gospel: Luke 2:16-21**

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Happy New Year! Today we celebrate the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God. As many of us look to new beginnings, make resolutions and renew our hope for the future, the Church begins each New Year with this reminder, recited in the Nicene Creed, that Jesus was “incarnate of the Virgin Mary.”[1]

In the Book of Numbers we read a familiar blessing and a wonderful way to begin this New Year. Entrusted to Moses to bestow upon Aaron and his sons, this blessing changes the human understanding of God. Prior to this, ancient peoples believed one could see the face of God, but it could have fatal consequences. In this passage, God encourages people to expect to see the Face of God shining on them. Reflecting on this Solemnity, Pope Francis shared that, “These words of blessing will accompany our journey through the year opening up before us. They are words of strength, courage and hope. The message of hope contained in the blessing was fully realized in a woman, Mary, who was destined to become the Mother of God, and it was fulfilled in her before all creatures.”[2]

The Psalmist begs for this blessing and St. Paul teaches that salvation comes as an underserved gift from God. While we may not deserve it, the face of God shines on us. Luke’s gospel tells us that the angel instructed the shepherds, the first visitors of Jesus, to not be afraid. Through the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, we are reminded to not be afraid. We prepare ourselves for the new Year by asking Mary to help us to live like people who are renewed and ready, and to aid us in following her Son more closely.

- What is one way Mary can aid you in your quest to follow Christ more closely?
- Imagine God’s face shining on you. What is it about you that brings God delight?

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[1] Nicene Creed; Roman Catholic Church

[2] Pope Francis. (2015). Homily of Pope Francis. Retrieved from

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140101\\_omelia-giornata-mondiale-pace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140101_omelia-giornata-mondiale-pace.html)

# MEMORIAL OF SAINTS BASIL THE GREAT AND GREGORY NAZIANZEN, BISHOPS AND DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

January 2, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 2:22-28**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98:1, 2-3AB, 3CD-4**

**Gospel: John 1:19-28**

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Today's first reading from 1 John contrasts strongly to the readings we had yesterday. Yesterday the Lord's face was shining upon us. Our first reading today warns us about those who would convince us that Jesus is not the Christ. The consequence of such belief is to live outside the gaze of the Father. Perhaps this reading is used today because Saints Basil and Gregory were among the most devoted defenders of the faith in the fourth century. At the time that these saints lived, the Church was suffering from Arianism, a heresy that denied the divinity of Christ. Arianism has been equated to a "disease infecting the Church... it entered the bloodstream of the Body of Christ and weakened every limb and muscle, causing deep divisions among bishops and the faithful." [1]

The clear teaching from Saints Basil and Gregory helped the Church to heal and eradicate the heresy. Not always warmly welcomed, they suffered abuse and physical attacks. Today their writings are among the most insightful and convincing teachings of the early Church, particularly as they pertain to Christ's divinity.

Perhaps the two saints were inspired by today's Psalm that reads almost like a pep talk. We are encouraged to sing a new song because "All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God." [2] I can't help but wonder if Saints Basil and Gregory often felt like John the Baptist in today's gospel from John. Did they feel like voices crying out in the wilderness proclaiming the divinity of Christ in the age of Arianism? Perhaps we celebrate these two saints during the Christmas season as a reminder that the Baby Jesus we celebrated a little over a week ago is both human and divine.

- Where or when have you witnessed the saving power of God? How did you feel?
- What images are brought to mind when you consider Jesus as being both human and divine. Is this hard or easy for you? Why?

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[1] My Catholic Life. "Saints Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen." <https://mycatholic.life/saints/saints-of-the-liturgical-year/2-january-saints-basil-the-great-and-gregory-nazianzen-bishops-and-doctors-memorial>

[2] Psalm 98:1, 2-3AB, 3CD-4, NRSV

# WEDNESDAY CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

January 3, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 2:29-3:6**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98:1, 3CD-4, 5-6**

**Gospel: John 1: 29-34**

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## ***Reflection by Natalia Skonieczny, Baldwin Wallace University 2027, Business Administration***

There have been times when I have struggled to fit in with a group and felt excluded by people that I thought were my friends. While their actions made me feel hurt at the time, I came to realize that it was not worth being friends with them anyway. Their intentions and actions were not always for God, and surrounding myself with people who do not want to live their lives for God would not help me grow closer to God. If I surround myself with people who do not want to give their lives to God, then I would be living for the world and not for God. While no one is perfect, and everyone commits sins, it is important to be aware of one's actions and to lay one's life before the Lord because "he was revealed to take away sins." [1] Ask God for his forgiveness and compassion, and your relationship with Him will grow stronger as He becomes fully present in your life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus approached John the Baptist, who recognized Jesus immediately. John accepted his role of baptizing Jesus, as we should accept the roles God has given us. God has a purpose for each of us. To live fulfilling lives for God, we must accept Him into our lives and ask Him for forgiveness. As difficult as it can be to live for Christ with all the distractions of the world, we must find and recognize God's presence in our lives and live according to His Word.

- What can you do to live your life for God and allow His presence in your life?
- What in your life is limiting your relationship with God? Why? How can you change this?

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[1] 1 John: 3:5, NRSV

# MEMORIAL OF SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON, RELIGIOUS

January 4, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 3:7-10**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98:1,7-8, 9**

**Gospel: John 1:35-42**

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This seems to be the week for Feast Days and Memorials! There have been converts from Anglicanism who have had an impact on the Catholic Church, Englishmen like J.R.R. Tolkien, G.K. Chesterton, and, the Patron Saint of Seekers, John Henry Newman. Today we celebrate the Memorial of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. She is the first native-born citizen of the United States to be canonized a saint.

Today's first reading tells us that we receive from God whatever we ask. We are advised not to trust every spirit, but to test them to see whether they belong to God. In the gospel reading today, we hear about two disciples of John the Baptist who hear John declare, "Behold the Lamb of God," as Jesus walked by. Recognizing that Jesus was the Messiah, they began to follow Him.

As suggested in our first reading, Elizabeth followed her conscience in faith. While guided by religion, she did what her faith and her conscience dictated. When her family, friends and spiritual advisors tried to advise her against becoming a Catholic, Elizabeth told them that she thought all religions were pleasing to God and that she would be as safe in the Catholic Church as anywhere.[1]

Much like Andrew in our gospel story, Elizabeth Ann Seton chose to follow the Lord without knowing what would be the end result. When she made the decision to become Catholic she answered God's invitation to "come and see" the good things that could be done through her. One of those good things was starting a religious community with two other women who became the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. Her legacy includes care for the poor and education. She established the first free Catholic school in the nation.

- In what ways is God inviting you to "come and see" the good things God can do through you?
- Elizabeth followed her conscience in faith. In what ways are you following your conscience in faith?

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[1] Foley, Sr. Gertrude, "Reflection for the Feast of Elizabeth Ann Seton" Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill 04 January, 201,<https://scsh.org/reflection-for-the-feast-of-elizabeth-ann-seton-by-sister-gertrude-foley/>

# MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN NEUMANN, BISHOP

January 5, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 3:11-21**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 100:1b-2,3,4,5**

**Gospel: John 1:43-51**

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In this week where we have so many memorials, it is no surprise that the Gospel readings have been highlighting Jesus' call to the first disciples. In 1 John, like in the Gospel of John, the writer draws a sharp distinction between good and evil. Today's passage lays out a teaching about our relationships with each other. "Anyone who hates is a murderer; anyone who denies compassion to someone in need does not have the love of God within him... We should love not in work or speech but in deed and truth." [1]

Our readings today remind us that not one of us is perfect. That does not mean that we should not strive to do the right thing. It is ok to admit our failures daily and renew our efforts. St. John Neumann served as bishop of Philadelphia, founding the first Catholic diocesan school system in the United States. Born in Bohemia, he is the only male citizen of the United States to be canonized. He has been described this way, "A modest man, he was sure of his unworthiness to be bishop. He complained that he could not carry himself with the gravitas a bishop should have. Rather, he lived simply among the poor Catholics who flocked to America." [2]

Like us, St. John Neumann was called to do good works, and like us he suffered doubts, fears and misgivings. With him as an example, we can learn to set aside our anxieties and attend to the work God has given each of us. He reminds us that our own self-esteem is not as important as the love of God and our neighbors.

- Do you make it a practice to review your day, observing your shortcomings and asking God for assistance to do better the next day? If you would like to start this practice, here is some assistance: <https://bit.ly/examenprayercard>
- What doubts and fears can you bring to the Lord and ask for his assistance?

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[1] 1 John: 1:11-21, NRSV

[2] Bartsch, Ken, "Memorial of Saint John Neumann, Bishop." Daily Homilies, 05 January, 2012, <https://kenbartsch-homily.blogspot.com/2012/01/memorial-of-saint-john-neumann-bishop.html>

# SATURDAY CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

January 6, 2023

**First Reading: 1 John 5:5-13**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 147: 12-13, 14-15, 19-20**

**Gospel: Mark 1:7-11**

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That was quick! We are just two days away from “Ordinary Time” in the Church’s liturgical calendar. In just two weeks we have gone from the babe born in a manger to Jesus’ baptism by John, the turning point in his life where he is anointed by the spirit and begins his mission as Messiah.

The first reading today asks this question: “Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”[1] The writer goes on to affirm what happened in today’s gospel.

In the gospel, Mark recounts that Jesus asked to be baptized by John with water from the Jordan. As Jesus came out of the water, Mark says that the heavens were opened up and the Spirit descended upon Jesus! How very dramatic! However, it didn’t stop there. Mark tells us that a voice from heaven proclaimed that Jesus was His beloved Son.

We all yearn to be the beloved of someone. We have an instinctive need to love and be loved. When we remember this story of the Baptism of Jesus, we remember our own baptism. We join Jesus sacramentally with our own baptism. The Catechism of the Church tells us, “The Christian mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus to rise with Him, be reborn of water and the Spirit to become the Father’s beloved son and daughter.”[2]

- Who are the persons in your life that you love? And who love you?
- In what ways are you grateful for these relationships?

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[1] 1 John 5:5-13 NSRV

[2] Catholic Church. Catechism of the Catholic Church 2nd ed., (573). Our Sunday Visitor, 2000.





# THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

January 7

**A.J. Hoy, M.T.S.**

Associate Director of Newman Catholic Campus Ministry  
Newman Catholic Campus Minister  
at The College of Wooster



# THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

January 7, 2023

**First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13**

**Second Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6**

**Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12**

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*Oh Beautiful Star of Bethlehem  
Shining afar through shadows dim  
Giving the light for those who long have gone  
Guiding the wise men on their way  
Unto the place where Jesus lay  
Oh Beautiful Star of Bethlehem shine on.[1]*

Today we celebrate the end of Christmas. Although you may have already taken down your decorations, your gifts may have already found their way into your daily life, and you are likely preparing to return to campus for a new semester. As a church, we are still celebrating the wonder that is Jesus' incarnation.

There is a clever organization to the Christmas season that culminates today. Throughout this season, we have listened attentively to the Gospel which first tells us of a family awaiting and birthing a child, then of shepherds (likely Jews) who venture around the corner to meet this newborn, and finally today we are reminded of wise people from every nation making their way to greet Jesus. What is clever about this progression is that it slowly widens its scope, beginning with a family of three, expanding to the local community, and ending with the wisest of people from far reaching lands. The incarnation of our God is marked by the unity that it fosters.

If you've ever encountered the birth of a child, this fact may not be surprising. Many times, people are able to set aside those things that may otherwise divide them for the sake of welcoming a child. There is nothing quite like being in the presence of or even getting to hold a newborn baby. At once the world seems so small and unimportant because you are holding this new life in your hands. Today's feast focuses on the draw of Jesus well beyond the town of Bethlehem or even of Judea.

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[1] R. Fisher Boyce, Beautiful Star of Bethlehem, 1938



Today's Gospel recounts the story of wise people arriving to find Jesus after following "his star". While the birth of any child is certainly earth-shattering for many, especially new parents, Jesus' incarnation and birth is said to have had celestial implications too. It is often assumed that the wise people were astronomers, explaining why they took notice of a new star just above the horizon. A few years back there was an astronomy craze that associated the Star of Bethlehem with a celestial phenomenon that recurs every 500 years or so. News outlets reported of a predictable super bright object in the sky with the alignment of Saturn, Jupiter, and the Pisces constellation that supposedly recreated the famed Star of Bethlehem. While this may take the miraculous out of this Gospel reading for you, I'd like to suggest that this fact doesn't really matter.

What was the purpose of the star we read about in today's Gospel? It guided wise people to where they needed to go. Whether it was just a repeatable phenomenon, or a miraculous event brought on in response to God's incarnation doesn't really matter. The star in question served as a visible end, not the destination, but a goal worth striving toward. As we begin a new year full of possibilities, I invite you to consider first the ultimate end, that is unity with God. If you are ready and willing to strive toward that end, use today to start to set intermediate goals that will hopefully bring you closer to a life of holiness. Maybe this means that you set a goal to pray more often, or to visit with people that you would ordinarily ignore, or perhaps even to commit to kicking those habits that get in the way of your eventual unity with God. Whatever it is, today might be a good day to look for the stars in your life and start walking towards them—they might just lead you to Jesus.

- Do I make room in my community for people who I see as different? Am I open to the possibilities that come with realizing new and different ways of being?
- Where do I want to go this year? Who do I want to become?
- What stars are shining on my horizon? Are there any new opportunities for me to work/walk toward?

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