

SAVIOUR



ADVENT & CHRISTMAS
DAILY REFLECTIONS 2018

CONTRIBUTORS

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FOREWORD

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

2–8 DECEMBER

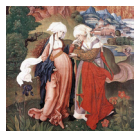
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2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

9–15 DECEMBER

X



3RD WEEK OF ADVENT

16–22 DECEMBER

X



4TH WEEK OF ADVENT

23–24 DECEMBER

X



CHRISTMAS

25–31 DECEMBER

X



THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

1–5 JANUARY

X



BAPTISM OF THE LORD

6–13 JANUARY

X



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
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This is a gift to

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S A V I O U R

May you know, love
and receive this Christmas
the greatest of all gifts
that our Saviour gave to you
—*himself*.

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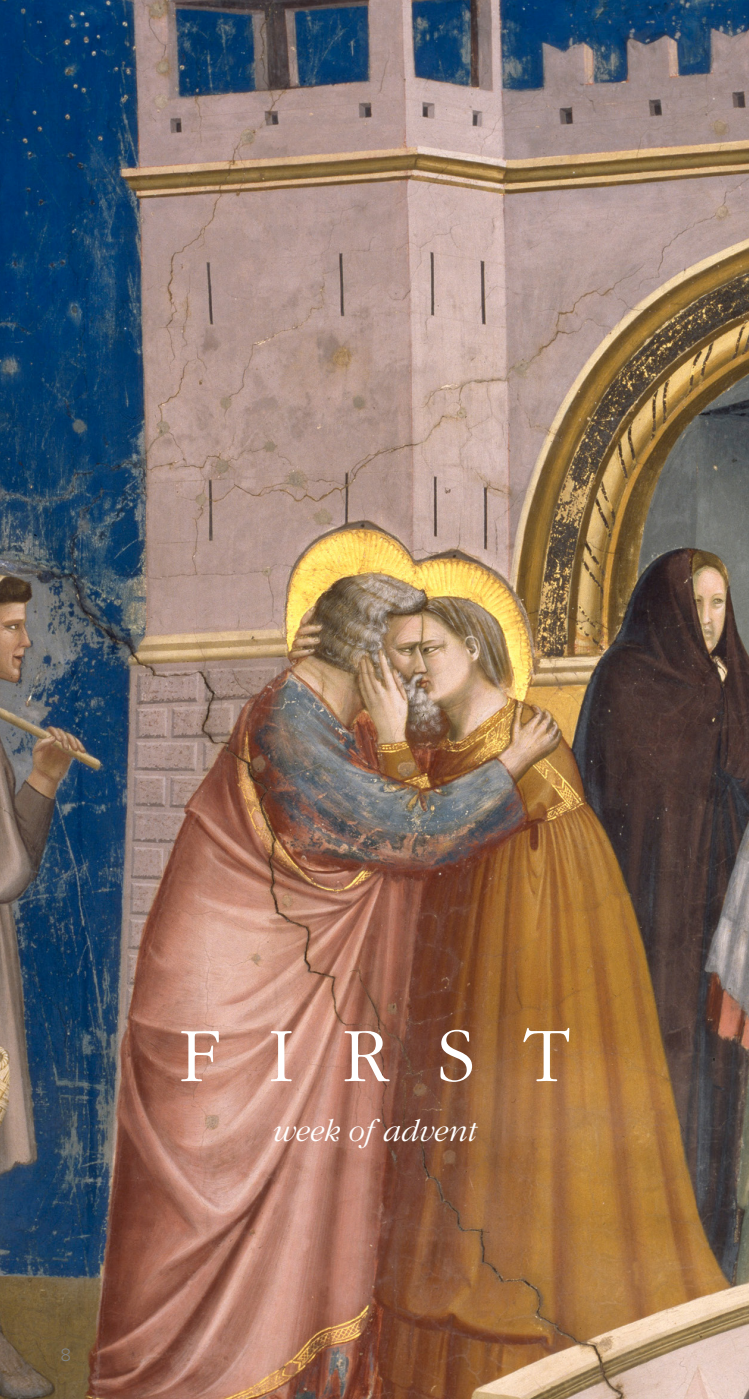
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F I R S T

week of advent



The Meeting between Joachim and Anne at the Golden Gate

GIOTTO DI BONDONE (1266–1337)

di Bondone, Giotto (1825–1905)

“The Meeting between Joachim and Anne at the Golden Gate”, c. 1303/10
Fresco. From the series with scenes from the lives of Mary and Christ.
Padua, Cappella degli Scrovegni. akg-images / Cameraphoto

Into this first week falls the solemn feast of Our Lady’s Immaculate Conception. It is fitting, for Mary’s birth signals the final stage of God’s preparation for our redemption. This is the woman predicted in the opening pages of the Book of Genesis, the Woman who would be the eternal enemy of the serpent.

Mary’s conception and birth are, of course, not recorded in Scripture. The artist, Giotto—no stranger to those who follow our Advent and Lenten reflections—is inspired by the Golden Legend, a medieval document filling-in the gaps of the Gospel accounts. This document, in turn, relies on earlier evidence, some of which may well be true. The names of Joachim and Anne come to us from a document dated about the Year 165. The writer tells us that Joachim and Anne were well on in years and that Mary’s birth was an answer to their prayers. Over their house in Jerusalem—Mary’s place of birth—St Helena, mother of Constantine, had a church built. It was restored by the Crusaders and is considered a perfect example of Crusader architecture.

God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, and from his descendants would come the promised Saviour. God is very patient. Even when his people kept forgetting his promise, God sent prophet after prophet to remind them of his love. Finally, he sent his own Son. The time was right when a creature existed who was ready to love God with her whole being—Mary. “I am the handmaid of the Lord,” (Luke 1:38) she told the angel.

Mary’s holiness is, of course, God’s gift. But, on the human level, Mary was prepared for her great role by her parents.

Joachim and Anne are the end-of-the-line of a whole series of generations of devout Jewish people who faithfully performed their religious duties and established an *atmosphere* for the coming of the Promised One. Anne means “grace”, and Joachim means “Yahweh prepares”.

Mary’s own life tells us something of the character of Joachim and Anne. Middle Eastern families are close-knit. Mary’s strong character in making momentous decisions, her continuous practise of prayer (evidenced by St Luke), her devotion to her relatives (indicated in her going in haste to help her aged and pregnant cousin, Elizabeth) can only reflect the values passed down to her by her parents.

One of the great Fathers of the Church, St John Damascene, salutes these saintly parents in these words: “Joachim and Anne, how blessed a couple! All creation is indebted to you. For at your hands the Creator was offered a gift excelling all other gifts: a chaste mother, who alone was worthy of him” (*Oratio* 6, in *Nativitatem B. Mariae* V).

God chose to enter the world through a family—his Mother’s family and the home of Mary and Joseph. It reminds parents and grandparents that they have a responsibility to set the tone for future generations. The life lived by the Church is a combination of Scripture and Tradition. “Tradition” comes from the Latin word “to pass on”. The Church’s faith is passed on mainly in the family. When this happens, the parish can truly be called “the family of families”.

Joachim and Anne have a message also for the younger generation. They remind the young that older people have a depth of experience, a greater perspective, a patience and an appreciation of life’s rhythms that must not be taken for granted. In the words of the Second Vatican Council: “The family is the foundation of society. In it, the various generations come together and help one another to grow wiser” (*Gaudium et spes*, 52).

MGR GRAHAM SCHMITZER

Do you believe I can do this? MATTHEW 9:28

Depending on who you ask, high or low expectations may be why we face disappointment in our lives. Perhaps our expectations are too low for someone we love which may lead them to mistreat us. Perhaps our expectations are too high for a situation and the reality can't possibly live up to our standard.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' question appears redundant—either he can heal or he can't. How does their faith impact that reality? This is the mystery of *expectant faith* which has taunted the Church for two millennia: Why does God seem to answer the prayers of some but not others? There's no accounting for it. No explaining it. You can try to rationalise it, but the only honest answer seems to be: We just don't know.

So, should we consign expectant faith to a “useless theology” pile? Today's readings would cry, “No!” Our Scriptures are saturated with the promises of God! But, if to us, God is just a vending machine who distributes goods and favours, if he doesn't deliver how and when we think he should, we are disappointed. But, his view of our lives is much more eternal, and prayer is meant to be relational, not transactional. He owes us *nothing* because, in Jesus, he has already given us *everything*. Let us then boldly approach God, ask him for all we need, but also, let him be God in his response.

Lord Jesus, please give me the faith I need to trust you. Amen.

MR PETER GILMORE

What description can I find for this generation?

MATTHEW 11:16

Every generation has an element of disappointment in the new generation, and it seemed to be no different in the time of Christ. It is fair to say that what each new generation lacks, there is always something new to offer. One thing we can take assurance of is the fact that the faith we share in Jesus Christ remains the same.

Today is the memorial of one of the doctors of the Church, St John of the Cross. He said, “What we need most in order to make progress is to be silent before this great God with our appetite and with our tongue, for the language he best hears is silent love.” It is truly a busy and noisy time as we prepare for Christmas—buying presents and preparing for gatherings and holidays. But, we need to stop and allow ourselves the time to sincerely focus on the meaning and importance of the solemnity we are about to celebrate.

With the Saviour’s birth, we are reminded that he was born in the silent stable at Bethlehem; he was buried in the silence of the sepulchre and speaks to us in the silence of prayer. Therefore, let us breathe and take in Christ as we prepare the manger of our heart to receive him this Christmas.

*Lord Jesus, give me the grace of silence and allow me to worthily celebrate the mystery of the Word made flesh.
Amen.*

FR RICHARD GREEN OSPPE

God-is-with-us.... The Lord is with you.

(ISAIAH 7:14, LUKE 1:28)

If we are honest, we sometimes doubt that God is truly with us. One reason we question God's loving presence is the experience of evil and suffering. The darkness we face prompts us to wonder whether God has forgotten us?

Let us not give in to despair! In a few days, we will celebrate the incarnation of the living God—Jesus has assumed human nature, while remaining fully divine. He who is, and was, and always will be, has become one with us in our humanity. He is like us in all things but sin (cf. Hebrews 4:15). He was a real baby who depended totally on Mary and Joseph for his every human need. He belonged to a real family, enjoyed real human friendships, endured hunger and thirst, grief and exhaustion. And like us, and with us, he suffered the cruelty of other humans.

Jesus Christ remains with us, most especially in the Eucharist. The same God, who appeared on earth as a baby, comes to us daily in the Eucharist—a daily Christmas arrival. He comes in the midst of our suffering into a world that often ignores him, assuring us, like Mary, that “the Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28).

Lord Jesus, each time I receive the Eucharist, may it be another micro-Christmas in which I welcome you as the Lord who is with me.

SR ANASTASIA REEVES OP

23 DECEMBER 2018

4th Sunday of Advent

Micah 5:1–4
Psalm 79(80):2–3,15–16,18–19
Hebrews 10:5–10
Luke 1:39–44

Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. HEBREWS 10:7

These are among the most important words in the Scriptures. They encapsulate the life and mission of Jesus sent to redeem and save us, and they encapsulate the life and mission of every Christian: to conform our human will to the divine will of God—from which everything else flows.

Echoing King David's words (cf. Psalm 40:6–8), the author of Hebrews explains how it is not our offerings and sacrifices—as good and necessary as these are to help deepen our interior life of prayer and holiness—that are most pleasing to God, but our desire to do God's will and our obedience in following it. This is also one of the hardest things for the Christian to do, but paradoxically, only in doing so do we find our true happiness and lasting peace.

It is also why, as today's Gospel reminds us, that Mary is blessed. She believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled. She conformed her will to his, even when she did not understand it, and therein, discovered true blessedness. Before she could conceive Jesus in flesh in her womb, she first had to conceive him in faith in her heart. We, too, must first believe in faith, even when we do not understand, before we can believe that Jesus, the man, is truly God—the only Saviour of the world.

Mary, our Mother, help us to believe as you did, that the promise made to us by the Lord will be fulfilled. Lord Jesus, open my eyes to see in you—the tiny, vulnerable Babe of Bethlehem—the true God and Saviour of the world who holds my life in your hands. Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. Amen.

FR CHRISTOPHER G SARKIS

Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him. MATTHEW 2:13

The beauty, fragility and innocence of a new born child calls to the very depth of our humanity, imploring us to respond with protection and love. An infant is intrinsically dependent on another for life and the response to care and nurture for one so vulnerable is seemingly innate. It is this extraordinary parental love that is often used as an analogy for the depth of love that God has for each one of us.

It is in such a context that that the actions of Herod are truly barbaric and inhumane—the antithesis of the actions of a God of love and compassion. He seeks to destroy life to preserve his perceived status, all because of the news that a saviour had been born and a new kingdom had been promised. Today we honour these victims of Herod's barbaric cruelty as the *Holy Innocents*—the first martyrs who were to suffer as a result of the coming of the Christ.

Jesus, the infant child, remains so vulnerable—a refugee on the road to Egypt, completely dependent on the love of his mother. The fullness of his life is yet to unfold. His years of ministry are yet to come as is his journey to Jerusalem and his death upon the cross, uniting us to a new covenant. Today, we hold especially in prayer all whose innocence has been lost at the hands of another.

Lord, we are in wonder and awe that this babe born to us on Christmas Day brings the promise of everlasting life. We pray that his lived presence among us today may bring a sense of peace and healing to all who have suffered through the tragic theft of their innocence. Amen.

MR KEN BRYANT

30 DECEMBER 2018

The Holy Family

1 Samuel 1:20–22,24–28

Psalm 127(128):1–5

Colossians 3:12–21

Luke 2:41–52

He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. LUKE 2:51

I love my family—their craziness, strengths, imperfections and all that family life entails. I am pretty sure, too, that each one of us would have a memory of being “lost” by our parents—being left behind in the church after Mass, forgotten to be picked up after footy training, wandering off from the campsite whilst on holiday. So, I welcome today’s Gospel reading with warmth and a certain humour knowing the Holy Family is as human as my family!

In saying that, these Gospel insights have a way of deeply drawing us into the life of Jesus, and today, I am left wondering what family life for Jesus was like? What shaped the man I know so intimately today? Jesus lived under the authority of Mary and Joseph, and I wonder what culture within his family life enabled him to grow in “wisdom, stature and favour” (Luke 2:52). The values by which a family lives, values which shape a culture of what is accepted and expected, can have a profound impact on each person. Here are some examples from my own sharing’s with others:

Love. Laugh. Pray.

Faith. Family. Friends.

Mess up. Fess up. Forgive.

Regardless of the state of life we live, we have a place of belonging in the Holy Family. Spend some time today in the company of the Holy Family. Maybe you sense an invitation to reflect on your unique place and the values through which you contribute to your “wider family”.

Jesus, by your incarnation and the grace of Baptism, we are made children of God. May this truth penetrate my life in a new way. Amen.

MISS TRISH MCCARTHY