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A GUIDE FOR ADVENT



NOVEMBER 21, 2014

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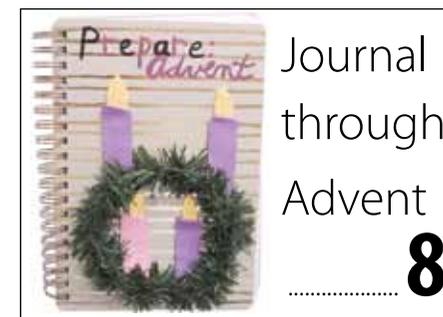
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"Worth the Wait" was produced by the staff of *The Observer*.
 Limited copies are available in bundles of 25 for \$5 plus postage
 and handling by calling 815/399-4300, ext. 383.

On the cover: One of the nativity sets displayed at St. Peter Parish
 in Geneva in 2010. This set belonged to the Collins family. (Observer
 photo by Sharon Boehlefeld)

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Welcome to Advent

Advent is a Time to Pause, to Prepare

BY FATHER JONATHAN BAKKELUND

Jesus cautions us so many times in the Gospel, woe to you Scribes and Pharisees you are like whitewashed tombs (Mt 23:27) or like a cup which appears clean on the outside but is truly dirty on the inside (Lk 11:39). Woe to you who lengthen your tassels and widen your phylacteries (Mt 23:5) you love titles and seats of honor in the synagogue or the marketplace but on the inside are spiritually rotting (Mt 23:6).

Boy, this can sure be a danger with the sacred Liturgy as well. It's at least conceivable that we could have beautiful music, all the smells and bells, costly vestments and lots of marble in the sanctuary, and at the same time, have little interior conversion.

Personally, I love Advent. It's my favorite liturgical season. Nature itself seems to slow down. It gets darker

earlier; the cool crisp air replaces the balmy breezes of summer. Life pauses.

In the church, we've got the Advent wreath, violet vestments, special hymns and songs for the season. We've got the Jesse tree and the Christ Candle, the empty manger tradition and St. Nicholas' Day. We have the great 'O Antiphons' leading up to Dec. 24, and, of course, the prayers of the Mass have a particular strength and beauty during Advent — they speak so solemnly about the Church's preparation for the coming of the Christ.

It's a joyful season, a season of hope, a season when people act differently toward one another. It's a time of preparation on all sorts of levels. There are presents to be purchased, presents to be wrapped, parties to attend, and peppermint mocha lattes to be drunk, there's plenty to do.

But, maybe Jesus would say to us ... woe to you priests and people who light the candles of your Advent wreath and fill shoes with candy, yet do little to truly prepare your hearts for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

This year, like never before, let's pause — spiritually pause — and prepare our hearts to be a worthy home for Emmanuel. We could be sure to have 10-20 minutes of silent prayer time. We could read Sacred Scripture slowly and prayerfully. We could meditate on the Mass readings before we come to Church. We could implement or continue family prayer — there are lots of ways to do it.

When we pause, when we spiritually prepare to welcome the longed-for Messiah, then the beautiful Advent traditions we observe as Catholics will do exactly what they're supposed to do.

— Father Bakkelund is Director of Divine Worship, Diocesan Master of Ceremonies and Parochial Vicar of St. Mary Parish in Huntley



Bless Your Advent Wreath

On the first Sunday of Advent, gather the family to bless your wreath with this prayer:

Adult: Our help is in the name of the Lord

All: Who made heaven and earth.

One of those present reads from Scripture, for example:

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah (9:1-2, 5-6)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.

You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, As they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as men make merry when dividing spoils.

For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests.

They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.

His dominion is vast and forever peaceful,

From David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he

confirms and sustains
By judgment and justice,
both now and forever.

A parent or other adult says the following prayer with hands joined.

Lord our God, we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ: he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us, he is the Savior of every nation.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath.

May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

May he come quickly and not delay.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.



(CNS photo/Lisa A. Johnston)

SPECIALIZING IN CATHOLIC PILGRIMAGES

Ancient Rome	Vatican City	Jerusalem
Fatima	Asissi	
Lourdes	Mt. Carmel	
Footsteps of the Saints	Jordan River	
Major Basilicas	Basilica of St. Francis	
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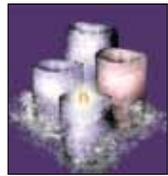
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1st Week

Skipping Advent Is Not a Good Idea

BY FATHER OSCAR CORTÉS

The feeling of Christmas is all around us even though we have four weeks more to anticipate it. I imagine that many of you will have taken advantage of Black Friday to buy Christmas gifts and that many of them are hidden at home waiting for Christmas Day.

Television commercials always seem to anticipate a holiday long before it comes: Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc. Just as soon as one holiday passes, the commercials are on to the next one. It seems that people do not have time enough to enjoy one event before thinking about the next one.

The same happens frequently with Advent. We run the risk of not enjoying it. If we ask people how many of them focus on Advent, probably the answer will be not very many. Everyone looks forward to Christmas (or rather I should say to Christmas gifts), but few enjoy and

live out Advent.

It seems that we prefer to celebrate Christmas without experiencing the anticipation of the Advent season. Too often we forget that Advent and Christmas are both part of the same mystery.

Brothers and sisters, let us not long for Christmas so much that we forget to live Advent to its fullest. Advent is a time of grace, a time to cultivate a peace-filled interior disposition, a time to collect and recollect. It is a time of anticipation, reconciliation and forgiveness. Let us take advantage of this sacred time to enjoy it and share it with our family and friends.

Trying to celebrate Christmas without Advent is like trying to get to the other side of the river without using the bridge. It's like living eternity without having experienced life on earth. It's like sharing in the resurrection of the spirit without experiencing death in the body. We need the first to fully enjoy the second.

This will be a true Christmas if we live Advent completely. Let us experience in our bodies and souls, the joy of each day in Advent — each day of anticipation and longing. Let us rejoice in every Advent symbol and sign. Let us use the bridge of confession to celebrate the joy of reconciliation.

Advent is our time of grace. If we take full advantage of it, we will experience Christmas as never before.

— Father Cortés is Parochial Administrator of St. Rita of Cascia Parish in Aurora

Find daily readings for Advent on page 23.

*Mankind is a great, an immense family
... This is proved by what we feel in our hearts at Christmas.*

—St. Pope John XXIII



Prayer Reflection — Week 1

The feast of St. Nicholas is celebrated on Dec. 6. Although St. Nicholas is the inspiration for the modern day Santa Claus, his gifts were much more important. For example, he provided money to a family so poor they could not provide the required dowries for their three daughters to be able to marry.

Take 10-15 minutes this week to picture the bishop St. Nicholas. Imagine his happy determination to use his inheritance and fill a small bag of gold for each of those girls who would otherwise likely have faced a life of prostitution and abject loneliness.

Imagine walking with him through the streets of his town on a quiet night, coming to the house and, in secret, tossing a bag through the open window. Consider his delight when the eldest daughter became engaged and was married.

Three times, he gave these gifts and three times could witness the hope of joy and security for those three girls. Take another few minutes to reflect on the needs of poor children in your area. Decide what you might give to an agency that gives them hope for the future.

Kid's Crafts

Every year during Advent we have shared a kid-tested craft. This year, we found so many we decided to "Pin" them instead.

Two of the crafts we loved were a St. Lucy crown and a salt clay Advent spiral. But these are only two of several that we chose to share on our Pinterest board, The Observer Advent and Christmas. (There are some recipes, too.)

If you decide to make them with your favorite kids (or if you do it yourself), please send us photos at observer@rockforddiocese.org. We'd love to share them with our readers.



St. Lucy Crown



Salt Clay Advent Spiral

Find crafts at www.pinterest.com/TheObserverRkfd/

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Journal through Advent



(Observer photo by Lynne Conner)

BY LYNNE CONNER
Observer Correspondent

Families across the diocese have the opportunity to embark on a faith journey in preparation for the upcoming Christmas season. The vehicle for this adventure is a simple journal — decorated or plain — that will serve to transport mom, dad, and kids, young and old alike to a deeper meaning of the Advent season.

Simply grab a notebook or journal, decorate it to your family's taste and enjoy the ride through Advent.

Keep in mind the age range of your family as you begin the journal. Young children may choose to express themselves through pictures and rough attempts at printing letters while older children could use this experience to practice cursive handwriting. No one is limited to any one type of expression. Keep this project fun and interesting so no one is tempted to ask, "Are we there yet?"

Simply grab a notebook or journal, decorate it to your family's taste and enjoy the ride through Advent.

Journaling tips

To get you started on your new family tradition, here are some journaling ideas and prompts:

- ❖ Use the daily Scripture readings as a springboard for entries. The United States Council of Catholic Bishops website (www.usccb.org/bible/readings) has a link to receive the daily readings by email. The website www.mycatholic.com/reflections not only provides daily readings, but also reflection questions on the readings.
- ❖ Read about saints whose feast days fall during the Advent season (St. Barbara, St. Nicholas, Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Lucy, St. Ambrose, or St. John of the Cross). How did the lives of these men and women prepare them for sainthood?

What do we do in our lives that prepare us to meet Jesus?

- The website www.catholic.org/saints features a monthly calendar of saints' feast days and their biographies.
- ❖ Find out about the history and background of the Advent wreath (www.catholiceducation.org) and answer the following questions in your journal: What signs or symbols of the Advent season remind you to focus on Jesus and why?
- ❖ Make and illustrate an acrostic poem from seasonal key words such as Advent, nativity or Christmas. (Google search "how to write an acrostic poem" or go to www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-an-acrostic-poem)

Keeping a journal through Advent is an easy project for families, classes or prayer groups

Perhaps the best part of journaling through Advent is that it can be used with a wide variety of groups such as home schooling families, Catholic school and religious education classes and adult faith formation groups.

Katie Sartino, a parishioner at St. Mary Oratory in Rockford and a home schooling mother of five, uses journaling as part of her curriculum and has seen many benefits.

"Journaling is an excellent way to make an important lesson be understood at a child's level. Instead of being tied down to 'filling in the correct answer' on worksheets, a child can express his or her understanding of the topic through basic artistic and written media," she said.

Sartino sees flexibility as another plus of journaling. "In the home school setting, I am always adapting

my lessons for a multi-aged learning environment. The beauty of having different ages learn together is the fact that they truly learn from each other," she said.

During Advent, Sartino recommends tailoring journal prompts to reflect not only a child's age but also his or her interests.

"The Advent season is one of the richest liturgical seasons we have," she said. "From the daily readings, to the lives of the saints, 'Holy Heroes' CDs and even Christmas songs and appropriate movies could all be used as a basis for Advent journaling. One of our family's favorite Advent activities is reading Christmas stories. Author Tomie dePaola has a series of Catholic children's books. He even has ones that focus on Advent saints."

Kathy Mannino, the junior high religion teacher at Holy Family School in Rockford, sees journaling during

Continued on page 10



Sartino

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Journal through Advent

From page 9
Advent as a powerful tool for helping her students ponder their faith.

“Journaling allows my students to take time to think about their own lives and relate those events to our faith,” Mannino said. “It offers a different perspective than a class discussion or group work because the students can freely share their own thoughts without trying to compare themselves to others.”



Mannino

During Advent, Mannino encourages her students to focus their journal entries on the Nativity scene. “One of the most powerful images for any person during this season is to imagine holding the Baby Jesus in your arms. Journaling after a guided meditation on our newborn Savior’s loving gift of Himself to us is very inspiring,” she said, “I challenge my students to try and understand what it would be like for Mary, Joseph and



(CNS photo/Nancy Phelan Wiechec)

The writing case, pen and inkwell used by St. Therese of Lisieux are seen with a facsimile of handwritten pages from the saint’s “Story of a Soul.” St. Therese is just one of many saints who spent time writing as a way of reflecting on God and His grace in their lives.

Jesus to be there in the stable with the animals.”

Adults can journal, too

Adults, as well, either individually or as a group can benefit from journaling through Advent. Though the season leading up to Christmas can be hectic with holiday preparations, journaling can be a source of stress relief and bring adults to a deeper spiritual meaning during this time of preparation.

“Journaling can tell you many things about yourself, some of which you might not want to know,” said Teresa Marotta, director of family life at St. Bridget Parish in Loves Park. “Yet God can speak to your heart in the most interesting ways.”

Whether written in pristine cursive script, drawn in crayon or hashed out in chicken scratch, the experience of journaling through Advent can offer families, students and adults a chance to learn about themselves, strengthen their Catholic faith and create lasting memories.

Journaling Prompts for Adults

- ❖ Which Advent saint do I most identify with and why?
- ❖ What are two spiritual goals that I can work on during Advent?
- ❖ How can I refocus my Advent journey on Jesus and not the commercial trappings of the season?
- ❖ How can I carry the season throughout the year?



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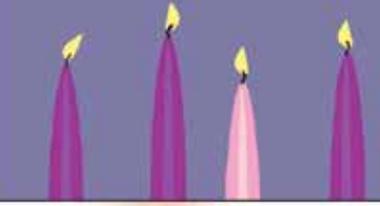


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Advent Calendar 2014

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
November 30 Set up an Advent wreath in your home. Light one of the violet candles marking the season's first week as you sing a verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."	December 1 Make Christmas gift lists that include "fair trade" items to support workers in developing countries and low-income communities in the United States. For ideas, visit www.crsfairtrade.org .	2 Church teaching on racism is clear; it is a sin. Yet as the headlines attest, it persists. Have an honest family discussion about racism and discuss ways to fight it in your community.	3 On this feast of the great evangelizer of Asia, St. Francis Xavier, read Matthew 28:16-20 and reflect on Jesus' instruction to the disciples to "make disciples of all nations."	4 St. John Damascene, priest and Doctor, defended the Church's understanding of the veneration of images. Mark his feast day by sharing and discussing your favorite religious images.	5 On this first Friday of Advent, start a Friday family tradition of praying a decade of the rosary before bedtime. Brush up on rosary prayers here: www.usccb.org/rosary .	6 Find and share an account of the life of St. Nicholas, the fourth century bishop who was the original "Santa Claus." Remember him today in prayer and by exchanging small gifts with your family.
7 Light the second violet candle on your Advent wreath, and on this day when many parishes hold a collection for retired religious, pray for all our retired religious brothers, sisters, and priests.	8 On this Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, attend Mass and recite the Hail Mary or another favorite Marian prayer before your evening meal.	9 St. Juan Diego welcomed Our Lady of Guadalupe and did her bidding. Remember him today by praying for immigrants and newcomers in your parish or community.	10 Pray today for the Church in Africa, which has almost tripled in size in the past 30 years despite challenges of debt, epidemics, severe poverty, and political unrest.	11 Pope Francis has called for a "Year of Consecrated Life" that began last month. Talk about what it means to consecrate one's life to God and pray for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.	12 Today is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Place roses near a home or parish statue of Mary and pray to her as Patroness of the Americas for the protection of religious liberty.	13 Today is the feast of St. Lucy, whose name means "light." Discuss ways your family can bring the light of Christ to others as agents of the New Evangelization in your community.
14 It's Gaudete (Rejoice) Sunday! Light the third (rose-colored) candle on your Advent wreath and read the Magnificat (Lk 1: 45-55), the Virgin Mary's great song of joy and praise.	15 Today, many Latin Americans begin Las Posadas - reenactments of the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem. Pray for all of the children who have migrated alone to the U.S. this year.	16 Have a family discussion about poverty in America. Pray for the poor in your community and learn how you can make a difference at www.povertyusa.org .	17 Put up and bless the family crèche. If you don't have one, search the web for ideas to make one. Remember to hide the baby Jesus figure until Christmas!	18 War and religious persecution continue to plague our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. Fast and pray today for lasting peace in the region.	19 Make choosing and setting up a Christmas tree a family ritual. Whether you choose a fresh or forever tree, in true Advent spirit, don't decorate and light it until Christmas Eve!	20 Have you been to Confession during this Advent? Take time to do so today and enjoy Christmas with a clean heart and a peaceful soul, courtesy of God's boundless mercy.
21 Light the final candle on your Advent wreath and take time amid the busyness of this season to rest and enjoy the blessings of home and the love of family.	22 Learn about the horrific crime of human trafficking that is on the rise even in the developed world. Pray for trafficking victims and an end to this crime against human dignity.	23 Read the Christmas story (Luke 2:1-14) and reflect on the gift of life. Pray that all may embrace a culture of life.	24 Christmas Eve is finally here! Light your Christmas tree as a symbol of Christ, Light of the World. Sing "Silent Night" and reflect on the simplicity and humility of Jesus' birth.	25 "For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord." Lk 2:11		

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(CNS photo/U.S. Postal Service)

A 2014 Christmas stamp issued by the U.S. Postal Service features a silhouette of the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt.

Advent Lecture Series Marks 15th Year

ROCKFORD—The popular Advent Bible Lecture Series will open its 15th season on Nov. 30. The three-part series features John McGrath, diocesan director of Faith Formation, who has selected “The Parables of Jesus” as his topic this year.



McGrath

Sessions will take place on the first three Sundays of Advent from 1 to 2:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall at Cathedral of St. Peter, 1243 N. Church St., here.

Talks are titled:
Nov. 30 — Why Did Jesus Tell

Parables;
Dec. 7 — Wisdom for Advent in Jesus’ Parables;
Dec. 14 — Living the Truth of Jesus’ Parables.
The annual series is jointly sponsored by the Rockford Deanery Council of Catholic Women and the Rockford Deanery Bible Fellowship for Men.

Cost for the series is \$10 or \$5 for an individual lecture. Reservations are appreciated. Send checks payable to RDCCW to Carol Cox, 12878 Vivian Ct., Rockton, IL 61072.

Info: 815/543-1178.

Honor Our Lady of Guadalupe

Parishes throughout the diocese pray a novena in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, generally beginning Dec. 3 and leading up to her feast day, Dec. 12.

But novenas can be said at home, too, as a meditative prayer or as a family Advent tradition. Here is a version of the novena from www.sancta.org.

On each of nine days, say the opening prayer and follow it with an Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

First day, Dec. 3

Dearest Lady of Guadalupe, fruitful Mother of holiness, teach me your ways of gentleness and strength. Hear my humble prayer offered with heartfelt confidence to beg this favor.....

Second day, Dec. 4

O Mary, conceived without sin, I come to your throne of grace to share the fervent devotion of your faithful Mexican children who call to you under the glorious Aztec title of Guadalupe. Obtain for me a lively faith to do your Son's holy will always: May His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Third day, Dec. 5

O Mary, whose Immaculate Heart was pierced by seven swords of grief, help me to walk valiantly amid the sharp thorns strewn across my pathway. Obtain for me the strength to be a true imitator of you. This I ask you, my dear Mother.

Fourth day, Dec. 6

Dearest Mother of Guadalupe, I beg you for a fortified will to imitate your divine Son's charity, to always seek the good of others in need. Grant me this, I humbly ask of you.

Fifth day, Dec. 7

O most holy Mother, I beg you to obtain for me pardon of all my sins, abundant graces to serve your Son more faithfully from now on, and lastly, the grace to praise Him with you forever in heaven.

Sixth day, Dec. 8

Mary, Mother of vocations, multiply priestly vocations and fill the earth with religious houses which will be light and warmth for the world, safety in stormy nights.



(Observer photo by Margarita Mendoza)

St. Joseph Parish in Elgin decorated the area behind the tabernacle with a large picture of St. Juan Diego's tilma (cape) and an elaborate backdrop of flowers for its 2013 celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Beg your Son to send us many priests and religious. This we ask of you, O Mother.

Seventh day, Dec. 9

O Lady of Guadalupe, we beg you that parents live a holy life and educate their children in a Christian manner; that children obey and follow the directions of their parents; that all members of the family pray and worship together. This we ask of you, O Mother.

Eighth day, Dec. 10

With my heart full of the most sincere veneration, I prostrate myself before you, O Mother, to ask you to obtain for me the grace to fulfill the duties of my state in life with faithfulness and constancy.

Ninth day, Dec. 11

O God, You have been pleased to bestow upon us unceasing favors by having placed us under the special protection of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. Grant us, your humble servants, who rejoice in honoring her today upon earth, the happiness of seeing her face to face in heaven.

Watch The Observer, El Observador and your parish bulletin for dates and locations of novenas and other celebrations in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December.



Second Week of Advent

Find Real Comfort in the Lord

BY FATHER RICHARD KRAMER

The Sunday Gospel's theme is "I send my messenger before you to prepare your way: a herald's voice in the desert, crying, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path.'"

Could that be *a path to our hearts and souls this Advent?*

The message unfolds so wonderfully in the next few days! Through the prophet Isaiah, God speaks "Comfort, give *comfort to your people, says your God.*" *Comfort* — as we are stressed by current events, the feelings of guilt from our sins, and the overarching sense of despair that today fills so many parts of our societal life!

We hear the story of the Lost Sheep and Jesus saying "It is no part of your heavenly Father's plan that a single one of these little ones shall ever come to grief." Then, Jesus's exhortation "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you."

Continuing this incredible theme of *comfort* we read "I am the Lord, your God. Who grasp your right hand; It is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'"

Prayer Reflection — Week 2

Two Marian feasts are celebrated this week: the Immaculate Conception on Dec. 8 (a Holy Day of Obligation) and Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12.



(Observer file photo)

This image of Mary, the Immaculate, hangs in the Diocesan Administration Center in Rockford.

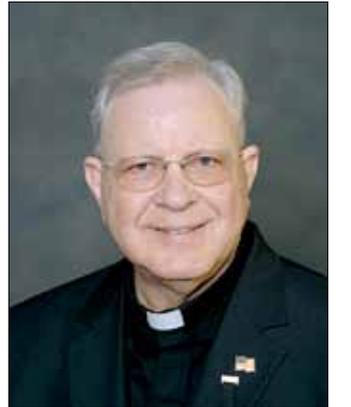
Mary, under the title Immaculate Conception is patron of both the Diocese of Rockford and the United States. All of the Americas — North, Central and South — are under the patronage of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

This is an excellent week to spend a bit of time considering the many ways our diocese and our country need God's guidance. Then, pray the rosary, the Memorare, or a Marian novena (see page 12), and specifically ask our Blessed Mother to pour out graces for our diocese and for our country.

Mary is a powerful intercessor and can provide much assistance.

A final prayer is given us by the psalmist, "Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face, and we shall be saved."

Thus, we need to look around to see the face of the Lord as He walks with us this week. He brings us a *real* sense of peace and comfort! We just may see that face in the Eucharist or hear that voice in the sacrament of penance. Be alert to the Lord!



(This same week we celebrate the special feasts of the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Guadalupe.... the Scriptures are appropriate to these feasts and do not follow our Scriptural theme for the Advent season.)

—Father Kramer is a retired priest of the Rockford Diocese.



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St. Francis Xavier

Spreading God's Word to the World

St. Francis is the official patron of foreign mission and of all works for the spreading of the faith. He was born in Spain and studied at the University of Paris and the College of St. Barbara. He met St. Ignatius Loyola and became one of the "band of seven" first Jesuits.

His first missionary expedition was to the East Indies. He had to begin by re-catechising the Christians living there who behaved scandalously. He then began teaching everyone, including children and slaves, and he deliberately lived in poverty among the people. He was said to have faced down raiders who were robbing, killing and enslaving people, holding them off alone, only a crucifix in hand.

Sustained by joy from God, St. Francis faced many hardships in India, in Malacca and eastern island communities. He then headed to Japan. He preached at

times in vain, and other times he gained many converts to the faith. He served for 11 years in the East, then fell ill as he tried to make arrangements to travel to China, a country closed to foreigners. He died on the shore of a desolate island, Sancian, a half-dozen miles off the coast of China, on Dec. 3, 1552. He was 46 years old. He was buried by the four people there — a Chinese youth, a Portuguese man and two slaves. His body was found to be incorrupt when it was moved to Goa at the end of the year and enshrined in the Church of the Good Jesus.

St. Francis Xavier was canonized in 1622 at the same time as St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Philip Neri and St. Isidore.

— Amanda Hudson



(CNS photo/ Crosiers)

Antiphons of Praise Ask the Lord to 'Come!'

When we reach the last days of Advent, you may wish to add these "O Antiphons" to your evening prayer, your prayer at table, or your bedtime prayer.

Dec. 17

O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!

Dec. 18

O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai: come to rescue us with your

mighty power!

Dec. 19

O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all his people: come to save us without delay!

Dec. 20

O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom: come and free the prisoners of darkness!

Dec. 21

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Continued on page 15



Third Week of Advent

Preparing the Path for Baby Jesus

BY FATHER JOHNSON LÓPEZ

Our Advent journey began a few weeks ago. So, only a few days separate us from Christmas! Do you know what to do with those remaining days of Advent? Sacred Scripture might give you light in this regard.

In the book of the prophet Isaiah (40:3) we read, "A voice proclaims: In the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!"

It is very simple. You need to prepare your spirit for Christmas. Let your hearth be a highway for welcoming baby Jesus. Christmas is all about welcoming Him, the king of kings.

With the Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we celebrate the mystery of the incarnation of God. It is God who becomes a human being so that we may know Him in person.

There is no better way for us to prepare than doing the things that please Jesus. In general as Catholics we do not improvise for these celebrations. As Church we already have a whole tradition of devotions for this special liturgical time; devotions that includes novenas,

Prayer Reflection — Week 3

The Gospel for the third Sunday of Advent tells us about St. John the Baptist. It says, "He was not the light, but came to testify to the light."

That is the job of every Christian: to testify, to provide witness about Jesus Christ to the world.

Bring that thought to prayer this week. Remember some of the times in your life when Jesus made a difference, helping you with His words, with His courage, with His protection and other graces.

Pray for opportunities to share some of your stories with others.

Antiphons of Praise Ask the Lord to 'Come!'

From page 14

Dec. 22

O King of all nations and keystone of the Church: come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!

Dec. 23

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law: come to save us, Lord our God!

—From "Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers"

rosaries and music.

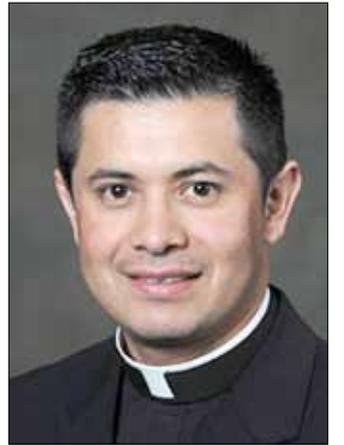
At the same time, we extend the opportunities for you to be part of the sacraments of confession and holy Eucharist.

The token of festivity is also noticed with our food. It is very common to host family gatherings during the cool afternoons of December and enjoy typical Christmas dishes.

I invite you to prepare yourself to welcome baby Jesus and that He may find a place in your heart.

Merry Christmas 2014!

— Father López is Parochial Vicar at St. Mary Parish in Woodstock



Check out some early editions of *The Observer* If you would like to sponsor 'A Special Year' contact *The Observer* at observer@rockforddiocese.org. Editions are available on-line from Nov. 1935 through 1947. More editions will be added in the near future. Check it out at <http://www.obs.stparchive.com/>

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Filipino Tradition Alive in Rockford Diocese



(Photo provided)

St. Margaret Mary Church in Algonquin is among many in the Rockford Diocese that will host Simbang Gabi novenas this Advent.

Members of both the Fox Valley Filipino American Catholic Ministry and the Greater Rockford Filipino American Association will gather together, with friends and family to begin this traditional Advent novena on Dec. 15 this year.

In the Philippines, Catholics still gather before dawn to pray for nine days, leading up to Christmas Eve. In the Rockford Diocese, the sessions have been moved to evenings.

Like the posada tradition of Mexico, the Simbang Gabi tradition is an adaptation of the Advent novena brought by Spanish missionaries.

Some gatherings include receptions and other activities.

In the Fox Valley

Dec. 15	7 p.m.	St. Margaret Mary, 111 Hubbard St., Algonquin
Dec. 16	7 p.m.	SS. Peter and Paul, 410 N. First St., Cary
Dec. 17	7 p.m.	St. Thomas The Apostle, 451 W. Terra Cotta Ave., Crystal Lake
Dec. 18	7 p.m.	St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, 1023 McHenry Ave., Crystal Lake
Dec. 19	4:30 p.m.	Christ the Teacher University Parish, 512 Normal Road, DeKalb
Dec. 19	7 p.m.	St. Catherine of Siena, 845 W. Main St., Dundee
Dec. 20	7p.m.	St. Mary, 10307 Dundee Road, Huntley
Dec. 21	7 p.m.	St. Thomas More, 215 Thomas More Dr., Elgin
Dec. 22	7 p.m.	St. Mary, 312 Lincoln Ave., Woodstock
Dec. 23	7 p.m.	St. John Neumann, 2900 East Main St., St. Charles

Sponsored by the Fox Valley Filipino American Catholic Ministry

In the Rockford area

Dec. 15	6:30 p.m.	Poor Clare Monastery, 2111 S. Main St., Rockford
Dec. 16	6:30 p.m.	St. Bernadette, 2400 Bell Ave., Rockford
Dec. 17	6:30 p.m.	St. James, 535 Caswell St., Belvidere
Dec. 18	6:30 p.m.	St. James, 428 N. Second St., Rockford
Dec. 19	6:30 p.m.	St. Patrick, 2505 School St., Rockford
Dec. 20	6:30 p.m.	St. Edward, 3004 11th St., Rockford
Dec. 21	6:30 p.m.	St. Rita, 6254 Valley Knoll Dr., Rockford
Dec. 22	6:30 p.m.	Holy Family, 4401 Highcrest Road, Rockford
Dec. 23	6:30 p.m.	St. Bridget, 600 Clifford Ave., Loves Park

Sponsored by the Greater Rockford Filipino American Association

Look for 'Posadas' Nine Days Before Christmas

In Mexico, nine days of posada processions begin on Dec. 16. Posada means "resting place," "lodging" or "inn." The processions re-enact Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and their attempt to find a place to stay.

The nine days represent Mary's nine months of pregnancy. In the sixteenth century, St. Ignatius of Loyola began a novena (nine consecutive days) of Christmas prayers. In 1580, St. John of the Cross made a religious pageant out of the novena, and Spanish missionaries brought the tradition of the posada to Mexico.

Participants divide into two groups: pilgrims and innkeepers. Songs asking for shelter are met by the innkeepers turning them away, until finally they are welcomed. A party follows — in Mexico, with food, fireworks and the breaking of a piñata.

Several schools and parishes in the Rockford Diocese hold posada processions.

Youngsters portray Joseph and Mary in a "posada." Several will take place in the Rockford Diocese this Advent. Watch The Observer, El Observador and your parish bulletin for additional celebrations.



(CNS/Karen Callaway, Catholic New World)

Posada Locations and Times

Aurora

Sacred Heart, 771 Fulton St. Dec. 15-23, 6 p.m. Mass, 7 p.m. gathering, Simard Hall

St. Rita of Cascia, 750 W. Old Indian Trail. Dec. 20, 7 p.m.

St. Nicholas, 308 High St. Dec. 16-23, 6:30 Mass 7 p.m. posadas

Carpentersville

St. Monica, 90 N. Kennedy Dr. Dec. 16-19, 22-23, 6:30 p.m.; Dec. 20-22, 6 p.m. Mass and rosary

DeKalb

St. Mary, 329 Pine St. Dec. 16-23, posadas in parish cafeteria

McHenry

Church of Holy Apostles, 5211 W. Bull Valley Road. Dec. 20-23, 6 p.m.

Rochelle

St. Patrick, 244 Kelley Dr. Dec. 15-23, 6 p.m.

St. Charles

St. Patrick, 400 Cedar St. Dec. 16-17, 19, 22, 5:30 p.m. Mass; Dec. 18, 23 6 p.m. Mass; Dec. 20, 4 p.m. posada rosary; Dec. 21, 5 p.m. Mass

Sterling

St. Mary, 509 Avenue B. Dec. 16-23, 6 p.m. in parish center



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Fourth Week of Advent

The Long Journey to Bethlehem

BY MSGR. THOMAS MONAHAN

It won't be long now.

"I'm getting tired, Joseph," Mary said. "Yes," he answered. "We've come a long way, but it won't be long. We'll be in Bethlehem tomorrow."

"You know, Mary, I've been wondering. What will our baby look like?"

"Well," Mary said, "We know he will be a boy, a Jewish boy. The angel promised me that I would bear a son, and he would be a descendent of the great King David."

Joseph said, "And since David was a strong and brave king, and also very handsome, your baby will be beautiful."

"And another thing," Joseph said. "That name we

were both told to call him."

"Jesus. Not an uncommon name, like Joshua and Jesse. But your child might be the one who really saves his people from their sins. What do you think that means, Mary?"

"It scares me to think about that, Joseph. It sounds so dangerous, as though my child was destined to confront the evil of the whole world and destroy its power. As I told my cousin, that is something only God can do. God rips the powerful, rich kings from their



Bless Your Nativity

All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All respond (R/): Who made heaven and earth.



(Observer photo by Sharon Boehlefeld)

The Diocesan Administration Center in Rockford displays this nativity set, surrounded by Christmas trees, in the main entrance. Our Catholic custom of displaying nativity sets comes from St. Francis of Assisi, who made a manger scene for Christmas Eve in 1223.

One of those present reads a text of Scripture, for example, Luke 2:1 (lines 1-8) or Isaiah 7:10 (lines 10-15, the birth of Emmanuel).

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

R/. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The leader prays with hands joined:

*God of every nation and people,
from the very beginning of creation
you have made manifest your love:
when our need for a Savior was great
you sent your son to be born of the Virgin Mary.
To our lives he brings joy and peace,
justice, mercy, and love.*

*Lord,
bless all who look upon this manger;
may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus,
and raise our thoughts to him,
who is God-with-us and Savior of all,
and who lives and reigns forever and ever.*

R/. Amen.

—Both blessings from "Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers"

Is Nearly Over for the Parents-to-Be

thrones and lifts up the lowly."

Joseph said, "Your son must be called to do something only God can do. He must be really something great. And he has been promised that His victory will be complete. His kingdom will never end!"

"You and I will welcome Him," Mary said, "but I wonder how ready the world is to welcome Him. He might have to do something absolutely marvelous to move people to change their lives around and receive His Father's mercy. He'll have to give proof that God loves sinners, that He gives His own Son for them."

"We'd better get some sleep, Mary," Joseph said. "We have a lot on our minds, indeed. We have been chosen to take part in an event that will affect the whole world, forever."

Prayer Reflection — Week 4

This is a wonderful week to read Chapter 2 of the Gospel of Luke.

Gently take in the words, stopping whenever you wish to picture a particular scene — of the nativity, of the shepherds, of Simeon and Anna, of the early life of Jesus within the care of Mary and Joseph.

Imagine yourself as an observer at those scenes and speak to Jesus, Mary and Joseph from your heart as you watch the scenes unfold.

Tracing the Beginning of Advent

The first record of the advent season is from the Fourth Canon of the Council of Saragosa in 380, according to Thomas J. Talley, author of "The Origins of the Liturgical Year." A December fast was called for in 567 and in 581 it was extended from the Feast of St. Martin (Nov. 11) to Christmas. This took the name of St. Martin's Lent.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, lectionaries provided for six Sundays in Advent.

But it was Gregory the Great, who died in 604, who fixed the season at four weeks and composed seasonal prayers and antiphons, according to the "Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism," edited by Richard P. McBrien.

Source: www.americancatholic.org/features/advent/faqs.asp

"I can hardly wait to see my baby," Mary said. "He will take His first breath of air. We'll hear the first sounds He will make. He'll be hungry. I'm ready to feed him. I can already feel Him. He is about ready to be born!"

Joseph said, "Get some rest, Mary, it won't be long now, and we will see what God's Son looks like, He, the savior of the world."

(This coming Thursday the Church will celebrate the birth of its Savior, Jesus Christ. Come and join in. Jesus will be there. He will look like bread and wine. Merry Christ-Mass!)

— Msgr. Monahan is a retired priest of the Rockford Diocese and a former editor of *The Observer*.

Find daily readings for Advent on page 23.

Wishing you a Blessed Advent and Christmas Season.

— Open House —
Sunday, December 7th, 2014
1:00pm – 3:00pm

Placement Exam – Class of 2019
Saturday, January 10th, 2015
8:00am

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Bless Your Christmas Tree

Many of us bless our Advent wreaths and say prayers weekly as we light a new candle, but fewer of us bless our trees. When everyone has gathered, open with a suitable song.

All make the sign of the cross as the leader (L) says:

L: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All respond (R/): Who made heaven and earth.

The leader makes the sign of the cross, and all reply "Amen."

The leader may greet those present in the following words:

L: Let us glorify Christ our light, who brings salvation and peace into our midst, now and forever.

R/. Amen.

In the following or similar words, the leader prepares those present for the blessing:

L: My brothers and sisters, amidst signs and wonders Christ Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea: his birth brings joy to our hearts and enlightenment to our minds. With this tree, decorated and adorned, may we welcome Christ among us; may its lights guide us to the perfect light.

Someone reads a text of Scripture, for example, Titus 3:4-7 or Ezekiel 17:22-24, and line 4: *I will plant a tender shoot on the mountain heights of Israel.*

L: The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

The intercessions are then said.

The leader says:

L: Let us ask God to send his blessing upon us and upon this sign of our faith in the Lord.

R/. Lord, give light to our hearts.

L: That this tree of lights may remind us of the tree of glory on which Christ accomplished our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

R/. Lord, give light to our hearts.

L: That the joy of Christmas may always be in our homes, let us pray to the Lord.

R/. Lord, give light to our hearts.

L: That the peace of Christ may dwell in our hearts and in the world, let us pray to the Lord.

R/. Lord, give light to our hearts.

After the intercessions the leader invites all present to say the Lord's Prayer. The leader says the prayer with hands joined:

Lord our God,
we praise you for the light of creation:
the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night.

We praise you for the light of Israel:
the Law, the prophets,
and the

wisdom of the Scriptures.

We praise you for Jesus Christ, your son:
He is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace,
who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree.
May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts.
May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen.

The lights of the tree are then illuminated. The leader concludes the rite by signing himself or herself with the sign of the cross and saying:

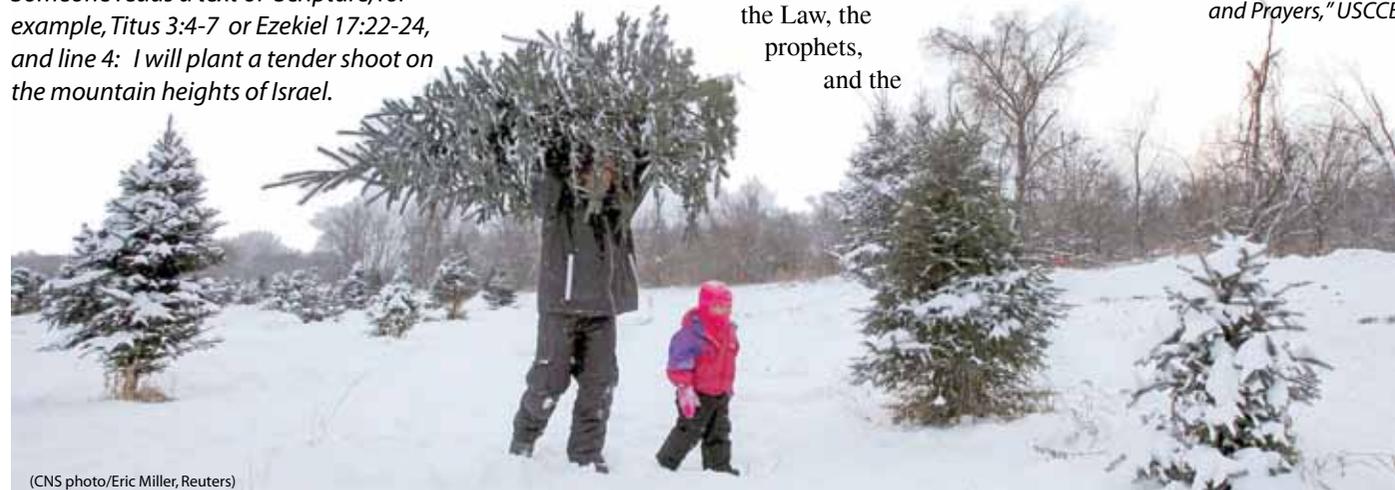
L: May the God of glory fill our hearts with peace and joy, now and forever.

R/. Amen.

The blessing concludes with a verse from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel":

O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

—From "Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers," USCCB



(CNS photo/Eric Miller, Reuters)



Read the Gospel and Color

Luke 2:1-14



©LPI

Shepherds find Baby Jesus in a manger.

Octave of Christmas

Live the Nativity All Through the Year

BY BISHOP DAVID MALLOY

It is often said that Christmas comes only once a year. But in our faith and prayer, that is not technically true. In fact, during the week after Christmas, the Octave of Christmas, every day is



(CNS/Bridgeman Art Library)

The Nativity is depicted in the illuminated letter "n" on a page from a 15th-century choir book. The feast of the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated Dec. 25.

Christmas. In the Church's prayer and Mass, we celebrate each day from Dec. 25 to Jan. 1 as a direct reflection of Christmas Day.

The Church's ageless wisdom helps us not to let go of this great feast too quickly. How easy it would be to get into that let-down feeling that Christmas is already over. People get too busy exchanging wrong-sized sweaters or noticing that the snow isn't as pretty after white Christmas. Instead, the Octave reminds us that Jesus' birth in Bethlehem changed the world and us. And it did so for all time.

The message of Christmas, that God so loved the world, is with us each and every day. The call to simplicity and spiritual poverty is a reminder that our final goal is eternal life with Jesus who was born for us in His own human weakness and lack of riches.

During this week, we are also reminded that the message of Jesus' presence plays out in the varied history of individuals and the world. We celebrate the death of St. Stephen, the Holy Family and the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, all in the light of Jesus' birth.

It is true that on the calendar, Christmas comes once a year. But in this week and throughout the year, we are always marked by the love of the Son of God born among us



Daily Readings for Advent and Christmas

First week

Nov. 30 — Is 63:16b-17, 19b, 64:2-7; Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; 1 Cor 1:3-9; Mk 13:33-37
 Dec. 1 — Is 2:1-5; Ps 122:1-9; Mt 8:5-11
 Dec. 2 — Is 11:1-10; Ps 72:7-8, 12-13, 17; Lk 10:21-24
 Dec. 3 — Is 25:6-10a; Ps 23:1-6; Mt 15:29-37
 Dec. 4 — Is 26:1-6; Ps 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a; Mt 7:21, 24-27
 Dec. 5 — Is 29:17-24; Ps 27, 1, 4, 13-14; Mt 9:27-31
 Dec. 6 — Is 30:19-21, 23-26; Ps 147:1-6; Mt 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8

Second week

Dec. 7 — Is 40:1-5, 9-11; Ps 85:9-14; 2 Pt 3:8-14; Mk 1:1-8
 Dec. 8 — *(Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Holy Day of Obligation)* Gn 3:9-15, 20; Ps 98:1-4; Eph 1:3-6, 11-12; Lk 1:26-38
 Dec. 9 — Is 40:1-11; Ps 96:1-3, 10ac, 11-13; Mt 18:12-14
 Dec. 10 — Is 40:25-31; Ps 103: 1-4, 8, 10; Mt 11:28-30
 Dec. 11 — Is 41:13-20; Ps 145:1, 9-13b; Mt 11:11-15
 Dec. 12 — Zec 2:14-17 (or Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab); Ps Jdt 13:18bc, 19; Lk 1:26-38 or Lk 1:39-47
 Dec. 13 — Sir 48:1-4, 9-11; Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; Mt 17:9a, 10-13

Third week

Dec. 14 — Is 61:1-2a, 10-11; (Ps) Lk 1:46-50, 53-54; 1 Thes 5:16-24; Jn 1:6-8, 19-28
 Dec. 15 — Nm 24:2-7, 15-17a; Ps 25:4-5ab, 6, 7bc, 8-9; Mt 21:23-27
 Dec. 16 — Zep 3:1-2, 9-13; Ps 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 19, 23; Mt 21:28-32
 Dec. 17 — Gn 49:2, 8-10; Ps 72:3-4, 7-8, 17; Mt 1:1-17
 Dec. 18 — Jer 23:5-8; Ps 72:1, 2, 12-13, 18-19; Mt 1:18-25
 Dec. 19 — Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a; Ps 71:3-4a, 5-6b, 16-17; Lk 1:5-25
 Dec. 20 — Is 7:10-14; Ps 24:1-4b, 5-6; Lk 1:26-38

Fourth week

Dec. 21 — 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29; Rom 16:25-27; Lk 1:26-38
 Dec. 22 — 1 Sm 1:24-28; (Ps) Sm 2:1, 4-7, 8a-d; Lk 1:46-56
 Dec. 23 — Mal 3:1-4, 23-24; Ps 25:4-5b, 8-10, 14; Lk 1:57-66
 Dec. 24 — Morning: 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29; Lk 1:67-79; Christmas Vigil: Is 62:1-5; Ps 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Mt 1:1-25

Christmas

Dec. 25 — *(Holy Day of Obligation)* Night: Is 9:1-6; Ps 96:1-3, 11-13; Ti 2:11-14; Lk 2:1-14; Dawn: Is 62:11-12; Ps 97:1, 6, 11-12; Ti 3:4-7; Lk 2:15-20; Day: Is 52:7-10; Ps 98:1-6; Heb 1:1-6; Jn 1:1-18

The grace which was revealed in our world is Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, true man and true God. He has entered our history; he has shared our journey.

— Pope Francis

Octave of Christmas

Dec. 26 — Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Ps 31:3cd-4, 6-8b, 16bc, 17; Mt 10:17-22
 Dec. 27 — 1 Jn 1:1-4; Ps 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12; Jn 20:2-8
 Dec. 28 — Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Ps 128:1-5; Col 3:12-21; Lk 2:22-40
 Dec. 29 — 1 Jn 2:3-11; Ps 96:1-3, 5b-6; Lk 2:22-35
 Dec. 30 — 1 Jn 2:12-17; Ps 96:7-10; Lk 2:36-40
 Dec. 31 — 1 Jn 2:18-21; Ps 96:1-2, 11-13; Jn 1:1-18
 Jan. 1 — *(Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, Holy Day of Obligation)* Nm 6:22-27; Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8; Gal 4:4-7; Lk 2:16-21

Sign up for daily Advent reflections from Father Robert Barron at <http://adventreflections.com>.

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