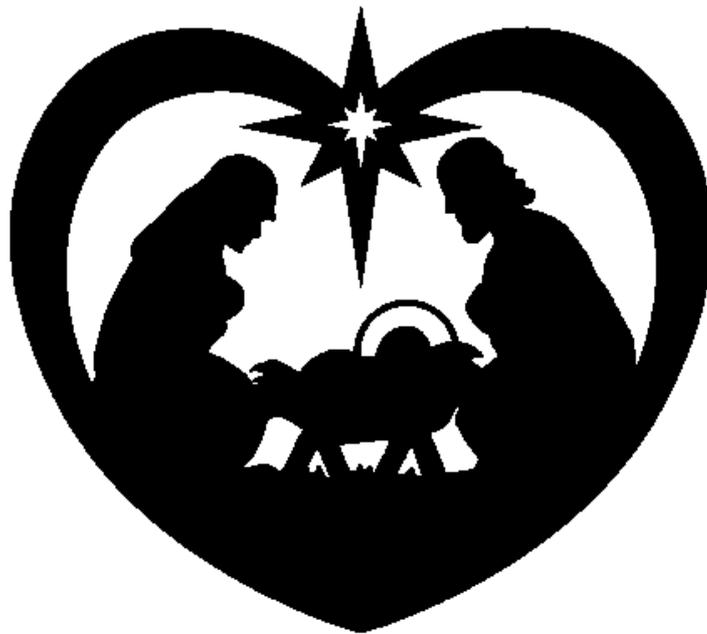


Archdiocese of Durban

Advent Daily Reflections

The Word was made Flesh



Week Four

**Love through Communion,
Participation and Mission**

Sunday 19 December

Scripture: *Luke 1: 39 - 44*

Reflection:

"Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord will be fulfilled." We live in a world of empty and broken promises and are reluctant to accept or believe any promises that are made to us. Mary believed that the promise made to her by the Lord, through the Archangel Gabriel, would be fulfilled, as did God's faithful people who listened to and heeded the voice of the prophets. God always fulfils his promises.

He promised that he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Do you believe this? Our whole-hearted preparation of the Solemnity of the Lord's Nativity is an indication that we do believe and accept his promise. This short season of Advent captures our entire life's preparation for the Lord's coming.

Elizabeth was exuberant in her joy at the visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. *"She gave a loud cry and said. 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?'"* What an extraordinary acclamation! She recognised the young woman from Nazareth as "the mother of my Lord." How could Elizabeth possibly have known? She knew because "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

This same Holy Spirit who filled Elizabeth has been given to us as well. With Elizabeth we are able to recognise and acknowledge Mary as the "mother of my Lord." We remember that the Archangel Gabriel had said to Mary "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow."

Today we encounter two great women of faith who were open to, and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. So near was the coming of the Saviour that the child in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy! Their encounter fills us with joy because, just as God's promises were fulfilled in both of them, so too is God's promise fulfilled in us! The Saviour's coming is very near. He comes to be born, not in that dirty, stinky stable in Bethlehem, but in the heart of each of us, hearts that have been made ready, eagerly awaiting his birth.

Practical Suggestion: What are your plans for this week ahead? Shopping? Cooking up a storm? Eating and drinking? Will you make time for prayer, quiet contemplation, enthusiastic and joyful hope, and be able to pray the prayer below in sincerity of heart?

Prayer: My heart is ready O God, my heart is ready for your promise to be fulfilled in me! Help me to be like Mary and Elizabeth, filled with faith and joyful hope and eager in the expectation of the Saviour's birth. Amen.

Monday 20 December

Scripture: *Luke 1: 26 - 38*

Reflection

Most people are intrigued by things magical and the mystical. They enjoy trying to solve a mystery, which is probably why books, movies and TV series featuring crime and detectives have such a strong appeal. Today's reading is full of the magical and the mystical, with a sprinkling of the mysterious: a being from the angelic realm, declaring a prophetic message and a pregnancy which defies scientific logic or explanation.

We are familiar with the scripture passages for this final week of Advent, most of which feature in the Nativity Plays usually staged at this time of the year. Today's scripture about the Annunciation tells us how it all began.

The angel addressed Mary with the words which are second nature to us as we pray the Hail Mary. This was the moment that the power of the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the potential existed for the Word to be made Flesh, and to live among us. Imagine every being in the universe was holding their breath as they watched this scene unfold.

Then we reach the most crucial part of the whole scenario. Up to this point everything hung in the balance until that marvellous moment where we read in Luke 1:38. "**Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.**" Mary said 'Yes' to God's call!!

Although the angel told her that the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon her, absolutely nothing would take place until she'd given her consent. It is exactly same for us today. God is waiting for our consent to be able to work the miraculous in our lives. The power of Holy Spirit, however, comes upon us as we invite Him to.

We can struggle through life with our own power or we can ask the Holy Spirit to empower us and to work in and through our lives. Just as Mary consented to bring the Saviour into the world, we too consent to be a bearer of Jesus in our world in this our time. Jesus is waiting to be born in our hearts again at Christmas. What will your response to God be?

Practical Suggestion: Pray at least one decade of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary every day during these final days of your spiritual preparation for Christmas.

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. I invite You into my life today and ask You to empower me so that I may experience God's incredible presence in my day-to-day life, and be a living example of His presence to all who I meet. Amen.

Tuesday 21 December

Scripture

Luke 1: 39 - 45

Reflection

Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Today we are meant to meditate on the second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary; the Visitation. This event involves two pregnant women, Mary (mother of Jesus) and Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist). Both mothers must have been very excited and anxious about the birth of their first child. For Mary, Elizabeth was a sign of fulfilled hope as declared by the angel Gabriel: *“Know this too, your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age herself conceived a son...for nothing is impossible with God.”*

While today's Gospel points out the obvious, Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth, there is more than what meets the eye. The passage speaks of God's Visitation to His people. That is why Elizabeth acknowledged both the presence of Mary and her Lord, Jesus Christ. This was a grace-filled event that reveals God's plan of salvation. That is why Elizabeth blesses Mary and the fruit of her womb: *“Of all women you are most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”*

According to Fr. Joseph Jacobi, today's Gospel is about God who visits His people. It is about God who embraces the lifeless and brings them new life, the God who comes to the hopeless and fills them with hope.

We are already on the fourth week of Advent. Soon we will be able to welcome Jesus who visits us again, as the Father's gift. At Christmas we celebrate the most extraordinary moment in history – God pitching a tent among us (God visiting his people). When God visited the home of Zachariah and Elizabeth, He renewed in their life the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love. This Christmas, God visits us just as he did with Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Practical Suggestion: Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice, open the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” – Revelation 3:20. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you in order that you may recognize God when He comes to you especially in so many unexpected ways each day.

Prayer: Almighty God, who, while the Blessed Virgin Mary was carrying your Son in her womb, inspired her to visit Elizabeth, grant us, we pray, that, faithful to the prompting of the Spirit, we may become aware of your constant presence in our lives. Amen.

Wednesday 22 December

Scripture: *1 Samuel 1: 24 - 28*

Reflection

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Mt 22:37) Just as, through her love of God, Hannah puts her faith and trust in Yahweh, so, should we love him and put our trust in Him that He will lead us in our mission to serve Him. In the first reading today, we hear of the love of a mother for her child and of her love for and her faith in God.

Like many of the more significant characters in the Old Testament, Samuel was the son of a woman who was barren and who had all but lost hope in ever having children. Other examples from the Sacred Scriptures of women who could not have children but were gifted a son by God in their older age were Sara (Gn 17:16-19), Rebekah (Gn 25:21-26), Rachel (Gn 29:31; 30:22-24), and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist (Lk 1:5-7). In ancient Israel, a woman giving birth late in life indicated that God played a special part in the birth of the child who was then destined for extraordinary service to God.

Reflect on your own experience, or the experience of the new moms in our parish. How much love does a mother have for her new-born baby? How much more love must she have for her child after believing that she would never have children?

God gave these women special gifts in the sons they bore, and each child had a special purpose or mission to fulfil in the story of salvation. Hannah demonstrates her faith and commitment to God by letting go of her son Samuel. She had longed for a child and loved him as only a mother can, but her love for God was even greater still.

God has a path for each of us – a God-given Purpose or Mission. Have you reflected on what your Purpose or Mission in life is in serving God? For those of us who are parents we should pray that we will have Hannah’s faith to entrust our children to God and then empower them to follow God’s path.

Practical Suggestion: What is your purpose or mission in service to God. Take time out to reflect on how you can best put your God-given talents to work in building the Kingdom of God on earth. Then **take action**. Use your talents.

Prayer: God, my Father, may I love You in all things and above all things. May I reach the joy which You have prepared for me in Heaven. Nothing is good that is against Your Will, and all that is good comes from Your Hand. Place in my heart a desire to please You and fill my mind with thoughts of Your Love, so that I may grow in Your Wisdom and enjoy Your Peace. AMEN.

A Prayer for Parents: O Heavenly Father, I entrust my children to your love and care. Be their God and Father; and mercifully supply whatever is lacking in me through my weakness or negligence. Strengthen them to overcome the corruptions of the world and deliver them from the snares of the enemy. Pour your grace into their hearts and strengthen and multiply in them the gifts of your Holy Spirit, that they may grow daily in grace, in love and in knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; and so, faithfully serve you. Amen.

Thursday 23 December

Scripture: *Luke 1: 57 - 66* "What will this child turn out to be?"

Reflection:

Four hundred years was an eternity for the Jewish people to be without a prophet – someone who was sent by God to bring His Word to the people. Not that that Word had always been welcomed – indeed, so often it was not, but the fact was that the people were accustomed over the centuries to having a prophet among them. And then, SILENCE! Silence that persisted for four centuries, until the people thought that God had abandoned them.

But NO! To Zechariah and Elizabeth is given the gift of a 'son' in their old age. Not just any son, but one who would have a very special role in life, for he was to be the 'messenger sent to prepare the way for the Lord'! And the couple were told to name him 'JOHN' – meaning 'gift from God'!

That name answers the question everyone was asking, 'What will this child turn out to be?' He would be a GIFT from God – He would break the silence of centuries, and proclaim what was needed in order to be ready to receive the Messiah. He would 'turn the hearts of the people back to God' – and he would prefix the coming of God's greatest gift – His only Son, Jesus!

Christmas is about recognizing the LOVE behind those gifts – the love that wants each of us to immerse ourselves in it, reflect it, and allow it to transform us into people who are also GIFT!

Practical suggestion

How about giving those you care about, one or more of these gifts: The gift of affection: smiles, hugs, pats on the back; the gift of listening: no interrupting, no distractions, just listen; the gift of a compliment: find something complimentary to say about the person; the gift of a prayer: pray for each person, and thank God for the gift that each one is!

Prayer

Lord, help me to appreciate all the gifts you have given me, and to give gifts that really come from my heart. Amen.

Friday 24 December

Scripture

Luke 1: 67 – 79

Reflection

Here we are – it's Christmas Eve. Our time of waiting and preparing is almost at its end. In a few hours we will be celebrating Christmas. What better than this to hear the song of Zechariah! We recite or sing this song every morning in the Morning Prayer of the Church. "Blessed be the God of Israel, for he has visited his people and redeemed them. He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour." This is what Zechariah proclaimed once his power of speech had returned at the naming of John the Baptist.

God is coming into our world to visit us his people and to redeem us! On this eve of Christmas we need to recapture within us the sense of joy and excitement we experienced as children! Something wonderful is about to happen. The promises are about to be fulfilled, Jesus will be born in the hearts and lives of all of us who believe.

With reverence and in joyful welcome we open wide the door of our heart in invitation. Unlike the inn in Bethlehem, there is room in the heart of each of us, ready and prepared through our prayer and reflection, our penance and conversion during the Advent Season.

He is a light to those who have lived in darkness and in the shadow of death and he will guide our feet in the way of peace. We celebrate Christmas because we need Jesus in our lives. We need him to give us faith, hope and trust in this time of a global pandemic. We need him to strengthen us in our weakness, to encourage our failing spirits, to lift us from the sadness and grief at the death of many we have known and loved. We need Jesus to make us enthusiastic about our faith and to stand erect, to hold our heads high for our salvation is near at hand. We need him to guide our steps into a new year. We need Jesus to help us to face whatever lies ahead of us. This is why he came. This is why he is Emmanuel, a name which means God-is-with us!

Practical Suggestion

Sit quietly for a few minutes and think about the extraordinary event of Christmas in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Think about Jesus being born in your heart and the hearts of all who believe tomorrow. Think about Jesus coming again in glory at the end of your life. He is the reason for our hope!

Prayer

Come Lord Jesus, come into my heart. Come Lord Jesus, come into my life. Come Lord Jesus, be born again in me. Amen.

Saturday 25 December **Solemnity of the Nativity of Jesus**

Scripture

John 1: 1 - 18

Reflection

Father Christmas has been. He has delivered gifts to all who sent him letters and he is hopeful that they will be enjoyed. He will receive no letter, SMS or WhatsApp thanking him as once the wrapping is torn off, he is quickly forgotten as is the build up to Christmas day. Many will only start relaxing after the day and after the frenetic activity that takes place when Christmas and the annual holidays fall at the same time (unlike in other parts of the world). Santa will rest as will his reindeer. They have faced many obstacles in getting presents down chimneys: some are small, others dirty, some on steep roof pitches and of course there is often snow, rain and sleet to complicate matters. He was stressed but joyful in having done what should make people happy.

Father God has been struggling for years to get people to communicate with Him and ask Him for things that will really make them happy. He has had many man made obstacles of disobedience and stubbornness of heart put in His way. He has delivered the gift of His own Son not in wrapping paper but in an unsavoury and unhygienic stable. He waits for people to thank Him with joy in their hearts and a sincere appreciation for His efforts. His task is not over. He cannot rest. He must continue to try and make sure everyone values and loves His Gift because they did not ask for it, and it will have a lasting impact now and into eternity. He hopes that people will use His gift every day to enrich their lives and the lives of others. He hopes they will not relax spiritually.

Santa gives us his presents. God gives us His Presence.

Practical Suggestion

No matter how your advent ended, Christmas is not the end of something but a beginning. God will be pleased for you to welcome Jesus on any day at any time. Continue your efforts to prepare for when He will hopefully welcome you.

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, help me to welcome Jesus into my life every day. Amen



These Daily Reflections for Advent 2021 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Veronica Donnelly, Fr. Wandile Cagwe, Mike Montocchio, Irene Helsdon and George Cominos. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed Christmas.