# 2017 Advent Reflections

We prepare for His coming

Daily reflections for Advent written by members of the U.S. Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians)



ear Friends in Christ,

Time is flying and a new liturgical year is upon us again.

Advent is the time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of God's Incarnation. On behalf of the staff at the Vocation Office for the Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians), I would like to offer you and your loved ones my sincere wishes for a blessed and Spirit-filled Season of Preparation and Anticipation.

As has been the practice of the Vocation Office, I offer you this Advent reflection booklet. I hope that it helps you to refresh your hope and faith, strengthening your focus on the coming of Christ. The reflections are done by members of our community in the US Province.

My wish is that these reflections will inspire you to make this Season of Expectation and Preparation more meaningful. May they serve as stepping stones for you to know Jesus better, to know that His unconditional and unbounded Love is reaching out to you. Some of our writers offer reflection questions or a task for the season. These may be challenging, but they call us all to be more faithful to our call.

To our prospective candidates — anyone discerning a vocation — my hope is that these reflections will cause you to ask of yourself: "What about ME? What am I going to do?" How can you express your joy and your love of Jesus and others in a new and more effective way? May these reflections, these challenges, and suggested practices move you to action.

Again, may this season of Advent be Spirit-filled and a time of blessing. May the anticipation of God's Incarnation of our Lord Jesus help you to know how much you are loved, and may you be effective instruments in the sharing of this love to the ends of the world.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Quang Nguyen, SCJ Vocation Director

#### **December 3 - 1st Sunday of Advent**

Is 63: 16b-17, 64:2-7, Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; 1Cor 1:3-9; Mk 13:33-37

s we begin Advent, we light one candle in the midst of all the darkness in our lives and in the world. This candle symbolizes our longing, our desire, and our hope. We want to be renewed in our understanding that Jesus came to save us from our sin and death. We want to experience Jesus coming to us now, in our everyday lives, to help us live our lives with meaning and purpose. And we want to prepare for his coming to meet us at the end of our lives on this earth.

Today's Gospel, on this first Sunday of Advent, emphasizes the need for watchfulness. The Son of Man will come without warning; only the Father knows the exact hour. The disciples must not be caught unprepared when this time comes.

Today's Gospel reminds us that Advent is about more than our preparation for the Church's celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas. Advent is also about preparing ourselves for Christ's return in glory at the end of time. Like the disciples and the faithful in Mark's community, we must also stay alert and watchful. Our faithfulness to God, through the good times as well as the difficult times, shows us to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man.

So, we begin with our longing, our desire and our hope.

#### **Practice:**

I can slow down. I can breathe more deeply. I can begin to trust that this will be a blessed time. Then, when I can let myself be who I am, and hear the Scriptures, I can begin to quietly pray, "Come, Lord, Jesus. "Come into my life. I long for you and I believe you love me. Come and fill me with peace and the love only you can give. Come, Lord, Jesus, come into my heart, into my family, into my struggles. Come and heal me, and give me joy."

Fr. Edward Kilianski, SCJ Provincial Superior, US Province

# December 4 - Monday of the 1st Week of Advent

A c c scribes it:

dvent is a time for reawakening, for opening ourselves to be challenged, which allows room for transformation. As Megan McKenna (*Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*; Orbis: 1998) de-

"The readings of Advent are intended to tear us out of our ruts, out of the usual pattern of our days, out of the narrow confines of our history. They are meant to startle us, awaken us to almost infinite possibilities, and claim our souls for the work of recreation, restoration, and deep transformation."

The key to living and fully experiencing Advent is **hope**, which allows us to look at the signs of change and conversion in the everyday moments of life. The centurion, a symbol of oppression and an enemy of the Jewish people, comes to Jesus, a Jew, and humbly asks that he would heal his servant. His words echo in our prayer of response to the invitation to live in communion with the Lord in the Eucharist, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

How do these words challenge me during this season of Advent to live more authentically our "Ecce venio?" How can I look beyond the narrow confines of my history to see in one person or event in my life today the hope of transformation in myself and in others?

Fr. James Walters, SCI

# **December 5 - Tuesday of the 1st Week of Advent**

oday's reading from Isaiah offers us a vision for what the messiah looks like. This vision turns the world upside down: lambs will offer hospitality to wolves, calves and lions will walk together, cows and bears will be neighbors, lions will become ruminants, and babies will play with cobras. This is certainly not the normal order of things, and if we can count on anything, the one God is sending will definitely change the way the world works.

This reading from Isaiah will also sound vaguely familiar to many. It lists six qualities of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and fear of the Lord. At Confirmation, we call these qualities the "Gifts of the Holy Spirit." (We divide fear of the Lord into two gifts: Reverence and Fear of the Lord, or as I translate the latter to make sense to teens: Wonder and Awe. The reading does say that Fear of the Lord is the Messiah's delight, so it is perhaps fitting that we have found two gifts within that one quality of the Spirit). Advent is a time to prepare for the Messiah's second coming as well as to remember the Nativity, so this serves as a reminder of own calling to follow in the Messiah's footsteps. Gifts are meant to be given away, and so too with those that the Spirit offers us: we are to give them away to others.

Enter the Gospel. Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit, and gives praise that the Spirit is revealed to the childlike. He seems to identify himself as childlike, which suggests we are called to do likewise. Isaiah offers further light on what this childlike quality is: the gifts of the Spirit are offered to one who does not judge nor make decisions based on appearance and hearsay.

If anything would turn our world upside down, it would be offering the blessings that God has given to us to others, not based upon hearsay or appearances, but upon our own relationship with them. As Pope Francis reminds us, and as Fr. Dehon has always exhorted: we must spend time with the poor, with those in need, with those different than we are. In a society that is growing more polarized and segmented: we are promised that this is one way to turn the distance between us, and our society, upside down.

Br. Duane Lemke, SCJ

# December 6 - Wednesday of the 1st Week of Advent

n this Advent season we hear Isaiah speak for the Lord, "the Lord of hosts will provide *for all peoples* a feast of rich food and choice wines... destroy the veil that veils all peoples... the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces."

A promise that challenges us to renew our faith in what the Lord can do for us and not "by the sweat of our brow." The Lord lifts every reproach lest we look back on our tainted past.

The Lord destroys the enmity among nations. All peoples, not only the elect, are to enjoy God's favor.

The mercy and the compassion of the Lord breaks through in this passage from Isaiah. The Psalm response for these readings points to where we shall enjoy this feast of choice vittles, in the *house of the Lord*. And the gospel reading moves us to the "house" on the mountainside to the Lord's own creation/house. In this house we hear Jesus' being moved with compassion lest the crowd faint on the way from hunger after three days with him. For those who hunger, all food is rich food. We often feel uneasy to receive from another; more likely we feel more comfortable giving to others. This is Advent, a time to prepare ourselves to receive graciously, humbly. The readings urge us to receive all as coming from God's own self, Jesus did this.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

Where do I see the veil that veils all peoples in our culture, or the veil that covers the people in my life and me? What is the rich food and choice wine that I enjoy besides the celebration of the Eucharist?

Fr. Ralph Intranuovo, SCI

# **December 7 - Thursday of the 1st Week of Advent**

e live in an age where immediate communication of ideas and images is prevalent, but what does this say about us? Some bury themselves in an electronic device waiting for the next ping or ringtone to define the moment. Some clamor to read every thought or word from others even if they come forth in the early hours of the morning on Twitter. Then there are the modern day Luddites eschewing these forms of background noise. Where do you fit on this spectrum?

We celebrate the Memorial of St. Ambrose today. The reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians implores us to preach the riches of Christ to bring to light the mystery (of God). These are bold challenges that call us to use our words and ideas carefully. If we hope to undertake these challenges, it behooves us to know the riches of Christ and to ponder the mystery of God in our individual lives.

The season of Advent surrounds us with its attendant clamor of sounds, sights and aromas. These are everyone, just like the ubiquitous din of pings and ringtones bombarding our senses. Advent is also the season for discovery and anticipation as we prepare for the dynamic mystery of Christmas. If we dare, we can use these precious moments to ponder and unveil the riches of Christ and the mystery of God. Best of all, this can happen if we use thumbs worn to nubs or if we remain distant from the cloud. All we need is to take the time to observe, experience, and discover. Are you ready?

#### **Reflections:**

St. Ambrose is a renowned orator, teacher and doctor of the church. Throughout the ages, multiple quotes have been attributed to him (including "When you are in Rome, live in the Rome lifestyle. When you live elsewhere, live as they live elsewhere"). Here are two more for us to consider today:

"In some cases, silence is dangerous" and, "No one heals himself by wounding another."

When is it time for you and/or I to be quiet? When do you and/or I need to speak out boldly? What are the consequences of being silent or speaking out?

Br. Frank Presto, SCI

# December 8 - Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Patronal Feast Day of the United States)

oday's celebration is confusing. The Immaculate Conception refers to the conception of Mary by her parents, Anne and Joachim – their names in tradition. The doctrine affirms that Mary, from the first moment of her conception by the singular grace of God, and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, was preserved immune from original sin.

Okay. But then, the Church chooses for today's Gospel Luke's Annunciation passage. And thus, we hear Mary's fiat to the conception of Jesus within her womb. Remember now, this is Advent and we are anticipating Christmas, the birth of the Savior. Confusing! True, the Doctrine states that Mary's Immaculate Conception provides the environment in which she is able to say "yes" to the conception of Jesus at the Angel Gabriel's annunciation. Yet, it remains confusing to many of the faithful.

Whether one finds this celebration confusing or not, in truth God will do whatever God needs to do, to bring us to the fullness of our life's unfolding. Even if God needs to be born a human and die an excruciating death for this unfolding to occur. Once again, in this Advent Season, let us each, as did Mary, embrace the environment of our life. No, not an Immaculate Conception. Ours is a conception and subsequent unfolding under the watchful eye of a God who will do whatever to bring our journey to its fulfillment. Whatever! Amazing! Confusing!

Fr. James Brackin, SCJ

# December 9 - Saturday of the 1st Week of Advent

n the first reading, Isaiah 30:20, God gives to the people of Israel two very specific promises. The first promise is to give bread to people in need and water for their thirst. The second promise is that the people will see the true Teacher of Israel. These images are deeply rooted in the tradition of Israel. God lead the people through the desert, providing food and water as they traveled. God provided prophets to teach the people how to live out the covenant that was given to them. But, as Isaiah states, this was to get the people ready, ready for something greater. God was going to give them bread, water, and instruction directly.

The prophet's words are fulfilled in Matthew 9, today's gospel. Matthew tells us that Jesus was teaching in the synagogues. Jesus was helping people understand God's love for them and calling them to respond to God's love by loving one another. Jesus, God's very Son, is teaching the people how to be the people that God is calling them to be.

We know that God goes even further in Jesus. Jesus is the source of living water which we encounter in Baptism. Jesus is the Bread of Life, the Sacrament of the Eucharist that is food for our journey to service of God and neighbor, the food that brings us to eternal life. During Advent, we as a Church are getting ready. We are getting ready for the Birth of Christ, we are preparing for God to be incarnate in our own lives.

Throughout Advent God prepares each of us for the arrival of Christ in our life. The promise made in Isaiah is for us today. God wants to feed us, to bring us to the waters of eternal life, and to teach us the way of peace and justice. Our response is found in Matthew 9 – like the disciples we have been sent out to proclaim the good news.

#### **Question for reflection:**

What good news am I being prepared to proclaim this Advent season?

Fr. David Szatkowski, SCJ

# December 10 - 2nd Sunday of Advent

n today's readings we hear the advice of both Isaiah and John the Baptist, "prepare the way of the Lord." However, what are we preparing? Didn't Jesus already arrive over 2,000 years ago? Yes, but while Jesus has already arrived "out there," he has not yet been fully received in the hearts of many. So how do we prepare ourselves to receive the Lord into our very center – our heart?

By incarnation, Jesus does not merely secure our salvation for us; he himself leads us to that salvation. But because God hasn't been fully received in our hearts, perhaps the path that leads to God in some of us needs some repair, and it is still "under construction." As we hear the invitation from the Prophet Isaiah and John the Baptist in this second week of Advent, is it not the time and opportunity for us to reflect to see if there are obstacles in our path and wonder if road construction or reform is necessary? What obstacles might we encounter that must be removed? We might have to overcome deep-seated resentment, persistent faultfinding, unwillingness to forgive, dishonesty in our dealings with others, or a bullying attitude. We might be ruled by pride, or lust, or an insatiable desire to possess.

In addition, since our heart might not be fully open to receive our Savior, is it possible that we are "blind" to the goodness visible all around us? It has left us with eyes and hearts unprepared and unable to recognize or welcome God who is dwelling here in our midst, where he has always been, showing himself to each of us in diversity and subtle ways. As a result, we are very content to belong to groups that set up obstacles such as unfair housing policies, employment disparity, economic injustice, racial and ethnic biases. These are what Isaiah and John the Baptist call us to repair.

What are we doing to repair these roads?

Fr. Quang Nguyen, SCJ

#### December 11 - Monday of the 2nd Week of Advent

Isiah 35:1-10 – Joy of the Redeemed

n a few more days God will break into our world through the Baby Jesus and call believers to come away to Jesus' side and wonder of this gift of Salvation, if we can. This reflection emphasizes "if we can" because not all are prepared to receive him. Isaiah 35:8 contains "the Way to Holiness." The entire passage does well in explaining this "way," a highway for those who are redeemed by God. Being redeemed by God requires obedience to God's commandment and to the journey. A commentary points out that God will remove all obstacles for God's chosen people. Thus, they will receive the blessings of the Kingdom. Be patient.

#### **Prayer:**

We ask God to help us come away from the business of this world and the trappings of sin so that we can receive these blessings. Thus, as those who are thinking of a vocation to religious life, may God grant us the inspiration to help others find their way through "the Way to Holiness." Amen.

Br. Long Nguyen, SCI

#### December 12 - Tuesday of the 1st Week of Advent

haven't enjoyed an Advent of quiet anticipation in many years. The demands of ministry are multiplied in the four weeks prior to Christmas... it isn't only the added reconciliation services, extra meetings of various "holiday" committees or personal things like card writing or stolen time to purchase gifts. In the midst of all the lights, music and celebrating are the many people who are plunged into memories of Advent and Christmas past welling up in their hearts. It is their cry for consolation which is often overwhelming.

So many suffer in nursing homes remembering how "it used to be." They wait to be delivered from days dragging them along without activities and people of their former lives.

In the state mental hospital, yes, Christmas music is playing and trees all shiny and bright replace a tattered chair in the corner, but folks look out the windows wondering how did I end up here and when will I be released?

People in ordinary circumstances sometimes experience the blues as cloudy days crowd the calendar and all the hype just doesn't fulfill them; they too long for some other salvation.

These are the people needing attention, calling at midnight in tears to share their depression. Sadly, it is some of these who during the season of Advent and Christmas, while all the music and glitter whirls around them, decide they cannot go on.

Advent with all its beautiful themes of peace and contemplation can frequently feel like a split personality.

The first reading from Isaiah today proclaims: "Comfort, give comfort to my people", the beauty of these words embraces us but they also remind me of the many who wait for a word of encouragement, the attention of a visit and all the patience I can muster. God grant me an extra dose of that virtue during this month!

We are reminded in the gospel today of the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine and goes in search of the stray. Advent often demands we leave behind the premature celebrating of Christmas and tend to the stray.

I wonder too, about the stray in me, that one percent perhaps forgotten or intentionally buried which needs salvation, that "lost sheep" that pines for the comfort of the Good Shepherd.

#### December 13 - Wednesday of the 2nd Week of Advent

"They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength," Isaiah 40

ope is so necessary for living life more fully. It seems to me that these times of ours test our hope in so many significant ways. Natural disasters seem to be so frequent. Tensions between nations seem to be escalating. Climate change and diseases appear to be adding to the picture. How do we continue to hope?

Hope may not change disastrous realities around us, but it does change us. People with hope bring light into the darkness. Small thoughtfulness and kindness should not be dismissed.

Years ago, in writing a poem I stated that "the color of life is different shades of hope". I try to be aware of bring some shade of hope into the lives of others.

It has also been my experience that the living Lord, and my hope in Him, continually renew my strength!

Fr. Paul Kelly, SCI

#### December 14 - Thursday of the 2nd Week of Advent

Feast of St. John of the Cross, Cor. 2:1-10a and Lk. 14:25-33

e have a choice of readings for today and I have chosen to share a reflection on the readings suggested for the Mass honoring the saint of the day: St. John of the Cross. He was a master of the spiritual life and the readings connected with the celebration of his feast help us hone in on significant mysteries in our spiritual life.

The first reading proclaims that the Christ that Paul preaches is one who is not one who comes in power, but as our crucified Savior — so different from what we hear is valued in the world around us. The gospel picks up on that theme and declares that anyone who wants to be a follower of Jesus must hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters — which really means that Jesus is to be the center of our life and the love we have for them is to be an expression of the love we have for Jesus. Furthermore, followers of Jesus must take up their cross and come after Jesus.

During Advent as we prepare to celebrate the feast of the birth of Jesus, we are called to remember that this innocent child came into the world to give His life in being faithful to the mission He had received from His Father, namely to show us what a loving God we have. We ask for the grace to remember that we continue this mission of Jesus and as fidelity to this mission cost Jesus, it will cost us. There is a price, but "eye has not seen and ear has not heard" nor could we ever imagine "what God has prepared for those who love him" and show it by their faithfulness to loving as Jesus did.

During this Advent season we ask God for the grace we need to be faithful followers of Jesus and to show it by taking some time each day to get to know Him and not just know about Him. And we ask for the grace to show our love for Him by reaching out lovingly to others, especially those who are going through things that make it difficult for them to believe in God's love for them. May God's love for them touch them through us.

Fr. John Czyzynski, SCJ

# **December 15 - Friday of the 2nd Week of Advent**

hapter 11 of Matthew's gospel is familiar to all SCJs. It ends with the invitation to come to Jesus who is meek and humble of heart. It is a chapter where Jesus praises the efforts of John the Baptist and is critical of the present generation on several levels.

Advent is a time for John the Baptist, who is commissioned to usher in the Lord's presence. Like SCJs, John is called to cooperate in the mission of Jesus by aiding the work of redemption in the world. He collaborates with the Lord by preparing level ground for the Day of God.

Advent is that time in which we become more committed to God's plan and respond to it with our heart and energies. Jesus was critical of his generation's desire for an easy fix and cheap entertainment. Bringing about the Kingdom is not a spectator sport. We do not have the luxury of sitting back and watching things happen. To do so is to weaken and hinder the Lord's work. Advent calls us to full participation in redemption. As we welcome the Spirit this season we find ourselves responding to the love of God in every day. We take on the yoke of Jesus that releases grace and energy to accomplish This Day of God.

Fr. Byron Haaland, SCJ

#### **December 16 - Saturday of the 2nd Week of Advent**

Let me see your Face Lord!

ur Psalm response for today says "Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved."
During my time in formation with the Priests of the Sacred Heart and my academic formation at Catholic Theological Union, I have had the amazing experience of learning how to see the face of God in every person I encounter daily. It has not always been easy. However it is really beautiful when we allow ourselves to open our eyes to the face of God. It is not that the face of God is hidden from us, it is that many times we are not capable of seeing that what is in front of us may be the presence of God.

My first experience in learning to see the face of God in others was during my ministry at the soup kitchen in Hyde Park in Chicago. My ministry was to help cook breakfast and lunch for homeless people that came there for the meals. The first weeks were very challenging for me because many times some people seemed demanding. As I served them, some rejected the portion I had just given them and instead said they wanted the one next to it. And some people did not say "Thank you" or even "Hello".

I really felt bad because I was doing my ministry with love and then I was experiencing what, to my point of view, was disrespect and a lack of gratitude. But when I spoke with my spiritual director, he told me to open my heart and my eyes to see the face of God in all of the people that I served, to see the face of God in those who were hungry, to see the face of God in those who felt alone and did not have a home to go to, to see the face of God despite their attitude. And that meant stepping out of my privileged status and humbling myself to their needs.

After I opened my heart and my eyes I was able to truly enjoy my service to others. I prepared the food thinking that they deserved the best and served the soup with joy because in each person I saw the face of a loving God, one who gave his life for us on the cross and who every year during this Advent season reveals his face as a baby incarnated in the Blessed Virgin Mary while bringing the joy and hope of His second coming.

It is not easy to see the face of God in those who have hurt us or those who in our eyes act wrongly. During this time of Advent when we celebrate the birth of Jesus we also learn that it is a time to prepare ourselves for his second coming.

As we enter Advent let us ask God to allow us to see His face in everyone we encounter. Let us lift up our voices, let us open our hearts, and let us sing together "Let us see your face Lord!"

Frater Juan Carlos Castañeda Rojas, SCJ

#### **December 17 - 3rd Sunday of Advent**

raditionally, this Sunday is called "Gaudate Sunday" (or in English, "Rejoicing Sunday"). The cause for our rejoicing is obvious, we are near to the celebration of the birth of Jesus. In fact, we are just over one week away. The readings echo the themes of rejoicing and preparation for the presence of the Christ.

The Gospel presents us with John's account of the ministry of John the Baptist. The Gospel reminds us that John's role was to "make straight the way of the Lord." This is not only the mission of the Baptist, it is our work as Christians as well. Like John, we are called to make straight the way of the Lord, we are called to announce that the Kingdom of God is at hand. This nearness of the Kingdom of God is our cause of rejoicing. The Kingdom of God is also what we rejoice in announcing.

So how do we share our rejoicing with the world? What is the good news we are to announce? Isaiah answers these questions. We are to proclaim glad tidings to the poor, healing the broken-hearted, liberty to captives and prisoners, to announce favor and vindication. Salvation and justice are indeed at hand. The promises of Isaiah, brought to completion in Christ, are a promises to all humanity to be made new in Christ. We can truly call this Sunday one in which to rejoice because the presence of God has been brought near to us in the person of Jesus.

# **Questions for reflection:**

To whom have I announced the good news of Jesus and the Kingdom of God?

How have I shared my joy with the poor, the marginalized, those who live in fear?

Fr. David Szatkowski, SCJ

# December 18 - Monday of the 3rd Week of Advent

Jer. 25:5-8, Mt. 1:18-24

he Prophet Jeremiah tells of the blessings that God is going to accomplish with and for His chosen people – the Israelites. Not only is He bringing them back from the lands of Egypt but from all over the world where they have been scattered. God will make a great future for them if only they stay true to him and his teachings – He will be their God and they will be his people – forever. And from them a Savior will come to bring peace and joy to the whole world. What still has to be done by the people of this world and in our own hearts and selves to make this promised Kingdom of God come so that all might turn to God with their whole hearts, minds and souls?

The Gospel of Matthew recounts the actions of God in the lives of Mary and Joseph which leads to the birth of our Emmanuel: "God is with us". How different it might have been if either of these people had been afraid of doing what was announced to them by the Angels. Mary says with complete confidence, "Let it happen as you will". She answered with a complete giving and openness of herself no matter what might come of it. And Joseph, hearing of Mary's pregnancy, could have broken the marriage contract and had her put away to save him embarrassment, but he hears the words of the Angel. He did what he was chosen to do; he became the willing protector of Mary and the Holy Child. How willing are we to do what God wants us to do – to be what God is leading us to be – no matter what others think of us or the difficulties that we might face in all that we are to accomplish?

How is this Advent going to be different from other Advents in the past? What will each of us choose to do to look directly into our own hearts and souls to make a change to the future? What can each of us do to make peace come to all people and to defuse hate, anger, and prejudice?

Fr. Charles Wonch, SCI

#### **December 19 - Tuesday of the 3rd Week of Advent**

n a few days we will celebrate the great mystery of God's love for us which is revealed in the Incarnation of his only begotten Son.

The most important word God has ever spoken to the men and women of all times, is the Word that was with God from the beginning, the Word that became flesh for us and for our salvation, the Word that has name which is above all other names – Jesus Christ, our Savior.

The Gospel tells us how God in his wisdom prepared his people for the imminent coming of his Son. On the verge of the old times – times of prophecies, expectations and hope, and the new time – time of accomplishment, joy and incarnated love, we have the angel's announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. According to the angel's word, "He will be great in the sight of the Lord". Of what will consist his greatness? Again, the answer for this question we find in today's Gospel. "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go to prepare a people fit for the Lord".

John the Baptist was faithful to his mission until death. His faithfulness to God's Law draws him to martyrdom. In the spirit and power of Elijah, he denounced the hypocrisy and abuse of power by the "great" of his time. Because of his faithfulness to his mission, dedication to the cause of the coming of God's kingdom, courage and intransigence in defending the holiness of God, and priority of his Law over humanity's corruption, John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded. Humanly speaking, his mission led him to a tragic end. Yet, Jesus himself gave testimony to his greatness. "I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John" (Luke 7: 28).

Throughout history God continues to call us to open our hearts to his saving love. He speaks to us in the sanctuary of our conscience, and he still continues to send to us those who are his "voice" inviting us to discover the beauty and the dignity of being his sons and daughters. Let the words of Pope Leo the Great help us to continue with love our Advent journey toward the light and joy of the Lord's Day: "Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God's kingdom".

# December 20 - Wednesday of the 3rd Week of Advent

haz and the people of his time are described as "wearying God". They wearied God with their infidelities, their insensitivity to the needs of the poor and ignoring their call to justice that was central to the Law. They simply did not let God interfere much with their lives.

The prophet Isaiah was sent to Ahaz to correct him and called him to return to prayer to ask God for a sign. Ahaz refuses to ask feigning humility of which he has none since he is the midst of plan to rely not on God but on the army of Assyria to keep Israel safe.

Through the prophet God declares that he will give them a sign whether they want one or not. "The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall name him Immanuel (because God is with us).

This prophecy grew a life of its own as people waited for a ruler who would be faithful and reliant on God alone; a ruler who would reflect God's mercy and love, who would be a sign that is it is true that God is indeed with us.

In the Advent of time enters Mary. Her heart is clean and she is a faithful daughter of Israel. In Ahaz's time he and the people would not open the door. This time a woman betrothed to a man name Joseph, of the house of David, will open the door wide, so that God can enter the world in our flesh. Unlike Ahaz, Mary is a true servant of the Lord and she responds, "I am the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word."

God is always coming, always seeing entrance into the world. So now the announcement is put to us. Are we open to the Word? Will we become the servants of God now? Will we echo with Mary, Leo John Dehon, and all those who were faithful to God's Call, our own "ECCE ANCILLA" that is "I am the maidservant of the Lord let it be done to me according to your word?" In the words of Meister Eckhart, "We are all meant to be mothers of God... for God is always needing to be born!" To respond to God's invitation let us all pray: "Let the Lord enter he is the King of Glory."

Fr. Robert Tucker, SCJ

#### December 21 - Thursday of the 3rd Week of Advent

n Thursday of the Third Week of Advent, the Church recalls the Visitation of Mary, the Mother of God, to her cousin, Elizabeth, an event which we celebrate as a feast day on May 31st of each year. It is also an event we recall whenever we pray the second decade of the joyful mysteries of the rosary. It is an encounter between two women who are both pregnant with child. Mary, the younger of the two, travels from her hometown, Nazareth, in Galilee South to an unnamed town in the hill country of Judah, most probably near Jerusalem, since Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah, was a priest there and needed to live close to the temple.

We notice that the first thing Mary does when she enters Elizabeth's house is to greet her. It seems so ordinary, so simple of a gesture, and yet, it was the starting point for a chain of events affecting not only the two cousins themselves and their two unborn children but all humankind as well. Elizabeth tells of the joy of her child leaping in her womb saying, "how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me," and praises Mary for believing that what God promised would be fulfilled in her. Elizabeth, in calling Mary "the mother of my Lord" is the first person in Luke's Gospel to call Jesus "Lord," Kyrios, in Greek, the most frequently used title for Jesus by the evangelist: 97 times.

There is much to ponder and reflect upon in the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. What struck me is how it all started with Mary's greeting. How often it is, if we reflect upon it, that important things happen in our lives when we take the time to extend or return a simple greeting to someone. In the Prado, the Museum of Art in Madrid, Spain, there is a painting of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth by Raphael completed in 1517, just three years before his death, showing Mary and Elizabeth extending their hands to one another in a handshake reminding viewers of the importance of this gesture.

Fr. Mark Fortner, SCI

# December 22 - Friday of the 3rd Week of Advent

hen the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her that she is to give birth to the Messiah, she must have been in shock and had all of kinds of questions appear in her mind. The Angel tells her not to be afraid, that she will conceive and bear a son and his name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his Kingdom will not end.

The Angel tells her that her cousin Elizabeth is also with child. Mary's mind goes directly to her cousin Elizabeth. One would think that she would first tell the news to her parents and friends. However, this humble lady goes straight to Elizabeth who shouts her joy and gives Mary a blessing. Mary then proclaims her Magnificat, the wonderful things that God has done for her. She rejoices in the greatness and goodness of God, His Mercy, His Mighty Deeds, His Love for the humble.

When the time came for Jesus to be born, she and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. Finding no room when she needed to give birth, they found a stable and Jesus was laid in the manger. Soon they had to flee to Egypt because King Herod sought to kill her child. How difficult this must have been for the Holy Family that the son of the Most High would have to go through this. When the King died, they returned to Nazareth. The years past and at the age of 30, Jesus began his public ministry. As time went on, Mary heard talk that Jesus was attracting many people to His Message as well as others who were against him and sought to have him in prison, and others who wanted him dead. How difficult this must have been for her to live in fear for her son and to know and see how much he suffered. How could this happen when the Angel told her that he would be great and the Lord would give him the throne of his Ancestor, David. Nevertheless, her faith was so strong and she never gave up hope.

During this time of Advent, let us go to Mary and ask her to help us to grow in Faith, Hope and Love.

"Oh Mary conceived without sin pray for us to have recourse to thee."

Fr. Johnny Klingler, SCJ

# December 23 - Saturday of the 3rd Week of Advent

s I read and pondered these readings, my mind and heart began to swirl. Thinking about the reality that the first reading was written four to five hundred years before the second reading was experienced shows the great plan and patience of our loving God. Inspiring the writer of Malachi to present the idea of the Messenger and indicating to Elijah that messenger of the Covenant... getting us in today's world to see a further connection with the words in Luke's Gospel indicating the new Covenant, Jesus being introduced by John the Baptist.

We are truly works in progress. Our own mind and heart continue to experience this announcement of our salvation and call to live a life of love and service. To announce to those who have not heard, or simply cannot understand that they are a part of the continued mystery of God coming to save them, to love them and to hold them near.

#### **Application:**

Spend some time today searching out the Word of God in you. Try to realize that you are a work in progress, no matter what age you are, and respond with an Action of Faith. Don't just say that you believe, but ponder your plan for showing that you do.

"Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek."

Br. Raymond Kozuch, SCJ

#### December 24 - 4th Sunday of Advent

oday we recap the beginning of the Incarnation, and tomorrow on Christmas, we celebrate its fulfillment in the Birth of Jesus — a very short Advent.

How many fear flying or letting another drive because we like control! Yet our Gospel shows us Mary, willing to let God's Spirit come upon her and fill her and leave her bearing a baby. Her "Fiat," her "May it be done to me according to your word," is the ultimate in letting another, letting God, have control in life. Among us who follow Father Leo Dehon, this is the beginning of our core spirit, welcoming the Spirit into our hearts. In doing this, Mary becomes the mother of Jesus, the Son of the Most High.

Like any new mother, how deep must be her loving response to welcoming her baby Jesus into her body, into her life. This will naturally be our response also, if we reflect a moment on the fact that when we welcome God's Spirit we receive Jesus living within us, and we love Him. This moment begins a new life for the Son of God, for now Jesus is flesh, and is Emmanuel, God among us. Jesus begins His mission on earth by loving Mary and loving His Father and the Spirit who brings Him here. In this moment He gives His all, saying, "Ecce Venio," "Here I am, O God, ready to do your will." How much easier it may be for us to live this more active way of relating to God. We think we are in control, loving God back, along with Jesus.

This moment begins a new life for Mary as she nurtures this baby for nine months within her, and then begins many years of caring for Him, and cooperating with Him in His learning; in His relating and loving; in His praying; in His working in the shop with His father; in His branching out to preach and teach, to heal and to feed, to raise the dead; in His suffering rejection and pain; in His dying and rising; in His departure; and in His sending the Spirit again to begin the cycle all over again in so many. Mary is the ultimate helper and cooperator in Jesus' work of redemption in the midst of the world. And so can we be, in a natural expression of our love.

Our new definition of reparation, #23 in our Constitutions, sums this up and calls us as Christians to live it. In this new celebration of the Incarnation today, and of the Birth tomorrow, we have a great opportunity

to begin again our life in the Spirit with Mary and with Jesus. We are thankful for this.

When and how do I let others, let God enter my life and have some control?

When and how do I respond to Christ's love for me?

When and how do I join Christ in loving God, and others?

When and how do I join Christ in His redemptive, reparative work in the world?

During this last rush before Christmas, be mindful in each thing you do for another that you do it with Christ as a way of loving.

James J. Schroeder, SCJ



God of kindness,
you so loved the world that you sent Jesus, your Son,
to become one of us.
In response to your love,
we offer you our lives:
our energies, our needs, our intentions.
Receive our offering;
enable us to unite it with your Word made flesh.

During these days full of grace,
inspire us with an active hope:
a hope that finds flesh in our daily lives,
a hope that heals and unites,
a hope that welcomes your Word in everyone we meet.

So, when creation reaches its destiny, at the coming of Jesus, may we go out to join our hearts with his into one great prayer of thanksgiving and praise to you, our loving God.

Amen.

Prayer from *This Day of God*Community Prayer Book of the Priests of the Sacred Heart



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