

Archdiocese of Durban

Advent Daily Reflections

The Word was made Flesh



Week Three

**Joy through Communion,
Participation and Mission**

Sunday 12 December

Scripture: *Luke 3: 10 - 18*

Reflection: Gaudete – Joy! As we begin this Third Week of Advent, the week of Joy, we sense the nearness of Christmas and, like the people in today's Gospel, there is a feeling of expectancy among us. The child in us starts to count the number of sleeps to Christmas.

Those who went to John for baptism asked him, "What must we do?" They realised that following their baptism, their lives were to be changed, different to the way they were before. Theirs was a baptism of repentance which meant that change was necessary. John's instructions were clear: "share with the man who has none." "No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!"

Like Lent, Advent is a time for *metanoia* – a change of heart! We all carry baggage in our lives – some heavier than others. Our baggage impedes our progress and prevents us from making straight the way for the Lord. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge that we have all made mistakes, we've done stuff and made bad decisions, some little, some huge! But here we are today with the Saviour's birth just around the corner, still trying to do our best and still failing sometimes. When we realise our many imperfections and mistakes then we are more likely to accept the same in others. Let's be kind, forgiving and supportive of one another. This is the *metanoia* we all need this Christmas: changing our attitude towards others, being less demanding, less judgemental, more accepting and more forgiving. As we learn from the past, do better in the present, and have hope for tomorrow, we offer the same opportunity to others.

Christmas is characterised by gift giving and receiving because of God's great gift of his Son Jesus to us. It is our opportunity to imitate his generosity by being generous in our acceptance of the imperfections and failings of ourselves and others – especially those in our own families. In preparing for the Word to be made Flesh in us, and as we prepare with joyful hearts, allow kindness, gentleness, patience, goodness, tolerance and forgiveness to characterise these last days of Advent, and your celebration of the Saviour's birth.

Practical Suggestion: Think about those family members and others you have been hard on, critical and judgemental of. Now think about how you can be more accepting, tolerant, kind and patient with each of them.

Prayer: Change my heart O God that I may be truly renewed and transformed to be more accepting of the weaknesses and failings of others, just as you accept me, just as I am. Fill me with the joy which comes from living in peace and harmony with others. Amen.

Monday 13 December

Scripture: *Matthew 21 : 23 - 27*

Reflection

To put this reading into context, we need to understand that Jesus had entered Jerusalem riding on the back of a donkey amidst the cheers of "Hosanna" from the crowds lining the road. He then went into the temple and cleared out the traders and money changers. As a result the Chief Priests, Scribes and Pharisees were infuriated! Jesus was never popular with them and they were threatened by the crowds who responded to His teaching and healing power. They were not ready to surrender the control and power which they had over the people, and were definitely not going to allow someone to act without their authority and consent. Their very existence as religious leaders was being threatened!

They imposed heavy burdens on the people by their rigorous laws, rules, customs and traditions. By contrast, Jesus' message was one of love, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, healing and restoration.

They asked the question to trap Him but Jesus simply returned their question with a question. They were unable to answer Him because whatever answer they gave, would have incriminated them in some way and shown them up for what they actually were.

In Matthew 28: 18-20 Jesus tells His disciples that "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, yes to the end of the age."

Jesus the "Word made Flesh" has the authority from the Father, and in turn, gives us the authority to spread the Good News of the Gospel which he came to preach and teach. We aren't necessarily called to stand on the street corners and shout the message to passers-by but rather to share it in a quiet and unassuming way with those people whose lives Jesus wants us to touch.

Are we brave enough to claim that authority and to go out to share the Good News that Jesus is alive and lives in our hearts as He promised?

Practical Suggestion: As we prepare to welcome Jesus into our hearts this Christmas, think of someone who hasn't had access to these reflections and either email or drop off a copy off with them.

Prayer: Father, your Son Jesus promised to remain with us forever. Give me the courage to be a true disciple and share the joy I experience while waiting for Him to be reborn in my heart this Christmas. Amen

Tuesday 14 December

Scripture

Matthew 21: 28 - 32

Reflection

Saying 'yes' to God's will is not enough! What really counts is *doing* God's will. Jesus tells a parable about a man who had two sons who were asked to go and work in the vineyard. One refused to go, but later relented and went. The other agreed to but did not go.

The question is: 'which of the two did the will of his father?' This parable drives home the importance of *doing* the will of God in our lives. Many of us have good intentions but don't follow them up with actions. Today we learn that promises and good intentions are not enough. What counts is the action that follows these good intentions, that we actually carry out the will of God.

"Not everyone who calls me Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven want them to do" (Matthew 7:21) Doing the will of God opens the doors of heaven and while here on earth, it gives us true and everlasting joy

Moreover, both sons disobeyed their father, but one thought better and did as his father had instructed him. What sets the two sons apart is that one repented and acted and while the other did not. Last Sunday St. Luke introduced John the Baptist who went through the whole Jordan area proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

In the same way, Advent is an opportune time for repentance. In today's scripture the first son, after being disobedient towards his father, had a change of heart (he repented). Repentance opens us to God's love, grace, and mercy. Let us allow God to change our hearts so that when the Word is made Flesh, He can dwell in us.

Practical Suggestion

Make a special effort to go to confession before Christmas. Prior to going to confession, make an honest and sincere examination of conscience.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as I prepare for your coming, change my heart that I may only desire that which is pleasing to you. Help me to respect your will and give me the strength, joy, and perseverance to carry it out wholeheartedly. Amen.

Wednesday 15 December

Scripture: *Luke 7: 18b - 23*

Reflection

Do you find it odd that John the Baptist recognised Jesus as the Messiah when he Baptised him in the Jordan? (Jn 1:24) Despite this he sent his disciples to check on who Jesus really was! John was languishing in prison. Did he doubt his own mission? Was he questioning whether his ministry had been a waste? Was he questioning who Jesus really was? Reflect on your own faith. Do you sometimes doubt, question your mission on earth, and wonder who Jesus really was? Do you sometimes want proof? "Happy the man who does not lose faith in me." (Lk 7:23) Is this you?

Another view is that John did not lose faith but wanted his own disciples to see for themselves who Jesus really was. He wanted them to hear and witness the signs that Jesus performed which showed that he really was the Messiah, whose coming was foretold by the Prophets. Isaiah foretold that the saviour and deliverer would come in the Power of the Holy Spirit, to bring freedom to those oppressed by evil and sin. He would come with the Joyful news of new life and well-being – not just for Israel – but for all people.

Are you languishing in the prison of your own doubts and in-action? Are you hoping for a different Good News, or do you experience the Joy of the Gospel? The Joy that God loves us so much that he sent His only Son to become one of us, and then to suffer die and rise again defeating the slavery to sin and death once and for all.

Jesus' answer to John's disciples should uplift us all. Jesus did not just declare who he was, but rather, persuaded them by his actions and the Power of the Holy Spirit at work. Through the Gospels, we too can see and hear the signs and be Joyful in our faith that Jesus is the Word made Flesh, foretold by the Prophets.

Practical Suggestion

It's not too late to start! In our reflections during the first week of Advent, we were asked to start reading Luke's Gospel. If you haven't already started reading the Gospel every day, make a start today and read a chapter every day.

Prayer

Loving Father, help me in this Advent to continue to prepare my heart for you. Help me to hear your Good News and to see the power of the Holy Spirit at work in my life. May I joyfully follow you and never be offended by you and your Word. Amen.

Thursday, 16 December

Scripture: *Isaiah 54: 1 – 10*

“My love for you will never leave you, and my covenant of peace with you will never be shaken”

Reflection:

We have celebrated Gaudete Sunday when we lit the third candle on our Advent wreath that symbolizes JOY! Many people wore a visible article of pink clothing to indicate that they are participating in the symbolism of Gaudete Sunday, but the real question is, “Are we truly a joyful people? Is this what we demonstrate to others?” In honesty the real answer is probably ‘No.’ That is sad!

Until Jesus came into the world, the impression the Chosen People had of God was not a happy or joyful one! They saw Him as vengeful and ready to punish, and their unhappy experiences at the hands of others merely seemed to reinforce that view.

Through the prophet Isaiah today, God assures His people – and that includes us – that ‘His love will never leave them’ – no matter what they do or how irritated He might get! God says that His love is more stable and enduring than the mountains. If we truly believed Him, wouldn’t we have a bubble of peace and joy within us that would carry us through the difficult times? And Lord knows, we are surely experiencing difficult times at present! We need to engrave these words of God on our minds and in our hearts – and when the doubts begin, we should remember, ‘My love will never leave you.’ When we face a difficult situation, we should hear, ‘My love will never leave you.’ When we are ashamed at our failures, we should remember, ‘My love will never leave you!’ That is a cause for joy!

Practical suggestion

Make today a ‘happy day’. Do something that brings you happiness, and try to do something for someone else that will allow them to experience the unfailing love of God.

Prayer

Lord, increase my faith in Your unfailing love, and help me to try and love others in the same way. Amen.

Friday 17 December

Scripture *Matthew 1: 1 - 17*

Reflection

St. Matthew, writing mainly for Jewish readers, knows how important a person’s lineage is. He begins his Gospel with the genealogy of Jesus, and in doing so,

demonstrates irrefutably that he comes from the House of David, as the prophets had foretold. It is quite possible that for the vast majority of us Christians, it doesn't really make much difference. But for the first converts from Judaism to Christianity it was crucial.

From the time of Abraham, God had been preparing his Chosen People for the coming of the Saviour, his own Son, the Messiah, who would lead his people to salvation. Today we have the opportunity to look back on the History of Salvation. We look at where we have come from in our Christian journey, to where we are now, in the present, and to what lies ahead for us. This must surely give a sense of perspective to our journey in faith. God's great plan is at work in us, and has been from the moment of our birth, our Baptism and, in our adult lives, through the choice we made to follow Jesus.

We would do well today to look back on our own lives, at the years behind us and the many experiences that have brought us to this moment. What lies ahead? What do you see as your future? Many of us are Christians today because of our parents, their parents, and generations of Christians before them. Others may have made a personal choice to be a follower of Jesus. There are also those who have abandoned the Christian faith which was handed on to them. As a result and consequence, their children, and their children's children may never know Jesus.

Today is a moment of gratitude for us – gratitude to those who led us to faith and in faith. As the Word is made Flesh in us this Christmas, it is our opportunity to commit to allowing Jesus the Word to live in us, to guide our journey forward, and to be an instrument of faith for others.

Each day we pray the Lord's Prayer with its powerful words "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Mary said, "Let what you have said be done to me." (Luke 1:38) Joseph was willing to listen to the message he received from God, "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife for she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20) From Abraham to Joseph, each generation handed on the gift of faith so that the prophesies would be fulfilled. Then, in the fulness of time, the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us!

Practical Suggestion

Think about those who have led you to faith and guided your faith, especially in its infancy. If possible, thank them for the gift of faith you have received from them.

Prayer

Father I thank you for those who, throughout the ages, have embraced your call to faith and for those who have led me and others to faith. Strengthen my faith so that I may pay it forward and lead others to faith. Amen.

Saturday 18 December

Scripture: *Matthew 1: 18 - 34*

Reflection

Angels. Those highly intellectual spiritual beings who constantly praise and glorify God and who act as His messengers. Our catechism teaches us that we each have an assigned angel who has the capacity to protect and inform us. Do we believe this or do we think it belongs to the realm of fairy tales?

There is a hierarchy: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels and Angels. The last two are closest to us: the second last bring messages to the earth (Gabriel engaged Mary about bearing God's Son, Michael inspired St John to write the book of Revelations), and with the last category, are God's army. They never interfere with our free will and can see far beyond our mortal timeline.

We join them in the "Glory to God in the Highest" during Mass as we recall the choirs of angels heralding the birth of Christ above that stable. The lowly shepherds had the honour of hearing their beautiful song of utter praise. We join them in acknowledging that the Lord God of Hosts (being the angels) is also our God and that heaven and earth are full of His glory.

And the twist: After a cataclysmic battle in heaven, the Archangel Michael drove the rebellious Lucifer, one of the most powerful angels-who used free will to challenge God- out of heaven. God now sends His Son to deal with the disastrous consequences of the efforts of Lucifer, the devil, Satan through temptation. Sin and eternal death. What joy to the world!

Practical Suggestion

Renew our understanding of Angels and the vital role they can play in our relationship with God: if we permit and want them to. Acknowledge that they do battle with the devil when we engage them as part of our defence against temptation and offending God

Prayer

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. 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 Advent.