

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Leap with Joy

O Lord of Hosts,
you care for your Chosen People
like a Shepherd who cares for his flock.
Your love for us is so great
that through the Incarnation of your Son,
Jesus,

you saved us from sin and death,
so that we might have a share in the
heavenly Kingdom.

Through the power of your Holy Spirit,
grant us fervor to do your will
and, like Mary, humbly receive your love
and grace.

May this grace and the joy of Advent fill us
and move us to bless your wonderful deeds.
As we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth, and
await his glorious return,
open our hearts to receive your
Eternal Word,
and like John the Baptist, may we leap
with joy in your presence.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 20, 2015

Listen



Today's Readings: Micah 5:1–4a; Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19; Hebrews 10:5–10; Luke 1:39–45. The readings for today help us reflect on the Incarnation while providing insight into God's plan for salvation. A key theme this week is obedience, a word that comes from the Latin *oboedio* (to listen to). We learn in the Second Reading that Jesus' coming into the world completes the old sacrificial system. From the beginning, he was obedient to God's plan and offered himself as sacrifice. By doing his Father's will, Jesus sanctifies us, freeing us from death.

The obedience of Mary and Elizabeth stemmed from their faith. Both offered their bodies in cooperation with God's desire for salvation. Their offering teaches us that

discipleship requires surrender and trust. Today, many hear the word *obedience* in a negative light. Take some time this week to think about the ways you listen to the Word of God and act on it. In Baptism, you were given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in our daily activities, Christ is made present in our families, parishes, and communities. Because Christ is alive within us, we, like Mary and Elizabeth, participate in God's plan of salvation. We need to be vulnerable to God's will and listen to where we are called to be a loving presence.

As we approach Christmas, consider how "the child leaped in [Elizabeth's] womb" at the presence of Jesus. When have you leaped with joy at Christ's presence?



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, December 21, 2015

O Radiant Dawn

As the Nativity draws near, the tone of our final week of Advent is filled with increasing joy. Once again, we hear the story of the Visitation and of the unborn John the Baptist leaping for joy in the presence of our Lord. The First Reading lets us know that winter is past and Christ, the beloved, is near. I invite you to place yourself in the First Reading and imagine your response to Christ. *Today's Readings:* Song of Songs 2:8–14 or Zephaniah 3:14–18a; Psalm 33:2–3, 11–12, 20–21; Luke 1:39–45.

Tuesday, December 22, 2015

O King of All Nations

Today we encounter Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. These women sing the praises of God at the birth of their children. Listen carefully to the Responsorial Psalm today and notice its connection to the Magnificat in the Gospel reading. Both texts praise God's power to cast the rich aside and raise up the poor. Jesus, the King of All Nations, has conquered the enemy, so let us rejoice. Today, you may want to meditate on the rich imagery presented in the Gospel. *Today's Readings:* 1 Samuel 1:24–28; 1 Samuel 2:1, 4–5, 6–7, 8abcd; Luke 1:46–56.

Wednesday, December 23, 2015

O Emmanuel

In the First Reading, the prophet Malachi announces a messenger who will prepare the way for God's coming. The Gospel tells of the birth of John the Baptist, the one whose call to repent and prepare a way for the Lord began our Advent season. Have you listened to John's plea? Try to review your Advent journey tonight and be attentive to the rough ways in your life that still need to be straightened. Praise God for the good works already accomplished. *Today's Readings:* Malachi 3:1–4, 23–24; Psalm 25:4–5ab, 8–9, 10 and 14; Luke 1:57–66.

Thursday, December 24, 2015

Benedictus

On this final day of Advent, we hear Zechariah's response to John's birth. His canticle is sung every day at Morning Prayer. It blesses God for setting his people free. God has kept his promise and remembered his covenant. We are heirs to this promise, so let us sing of the Lord's goodness! Today is a perfect day to finalize your Christmas preparations by trimming the tree and putting up the crèche. *Today's Readings:* 2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2–3, 4–5, 27 and 29; Luke 1:67–79.

Friday, December 25, 2015

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

Today, with great joy in our hearts, we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ! The Word of God has scattered the darkness; Jesus comes to set us free. All creation sings with joy, for God has been faithful to his promises. Because of the Incarnation, we are able to encounter Christ in the flesh and human life is changed forever. Today, try to take some quiet time to consider the season, and to ponder all of God's gifts to you in your heart. How can you use these gifts to help others and to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God? *Today's Readings:* (Mass during the Day): Isaiah 52:7–10; Psalm 98:1, 2–3, 3–4, 5–6; Hebrews 1:1–6; John 1:1–18 or 1:1–5, 9–14.

Saturday, December 26, 2015

Feast of St. Stephen, the First Martyr

Stephen, the first martyr, teaches us that following Christ isn't easy. In the Gospel, Jesus warns the Church of the persecutions it will endure. As we celebrate the Incarnation, we need to reflect on our baptismal promise to faithfully follow Jesus even when it is difficult. Consider singing or reading the song "Good King Wenceslaus" today and reflecting on the text. *Today's Readings:* Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59; Psalm 31:3cd–4, 6 and 8ab, 16bc and 17; Matthew 10:17–22.

