

1. Read — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:

2. Meditate — Now begin to reflect on the verses and ask God what it means and how he wants to speak to you through the passage. **God what are you saying to me through this?**

3. Pray — Respond from your heart to what God has been saying to you. **What do you want me to know?** Write down your prayer to him or record whatever he says to you.

4. Contemplate — Be quiet before the Lord enjoying His presence.
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**How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?**

[10] Hardon, Modern Catholic Dictionary pg. 257  
[11] Hardon, Modern Catholic Dictionary pg. 257  
[12] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1 21.1  
[13] Matthew 12:32  
[14] Roman Catholic Daily Missal; 1962; The Most Necessary Prayers  
[15] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1 21.1  
[16] R. A. Knox, Sermon on Christmas  
[17] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1 21.2

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# Quick Connect

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**What is God saying to you through this passage?** Page 4

## **Gospel Reading – Luke 1:29-45 – Roman Missal**

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

## **Spiritual Reading – Office of Readings – 4th Sunday of Advent**

From a treatise against the heresy of Noetus by Saint Hippolytus, priest  
*The manifestation of the hidden mystery*

There is only one God, brethren, and we learn about him only from sacred Scripture. It is therefore our duty to become acquainted with what Scripture proclaims and to investigate its teachings thoroughly. We should believe them in the sense that the Father wills, thinking of the Son in the way the Father wills, and accepting the teaching he wills to give us with regard to the Holy Spirit. Sacred Scripture is God's gift to us and it should be understood in the way that he intends: we should not do violence to it by interpreting it according to our own preconceived ideas. God was all alone and nothing existed but himself when he determined to create the world. He thought of it, willed it, spoke the word and so made it. It came into being instantaneously, exactly as he had willed. It is enough then for us to be aware of a single fact: nothing is coeternal with God. Apart from God there was simply nothing else. Yet although he was alone, he was manifold because he lacked neither reason, wisdom, power, nor counsel. All things were in him and he himself was all. At a moment of his own choosing and in a manner determined by himself, God manifested his Word, and through him he made the whole universe. When the Word was hidden within God himself he was invisible to the created world, but God made him visible. First God gave utterance to his voice, engendering light from light, and then he sent his own mind into the world as its Lord. Visible before to God alone and not to the world, God made him visible so that the world could be saved by seeing him. This mind that entered our world was made known as the Son of God. All things came into being through him; but he alone is begotten by the Father. The Son gave us the law and the prophets, and he filled the prophets with the Holy Spirit to compel them to speak out. Inspired by the Father's power, they were to proclaim the Father's pur-

pose and his will. So the Word was made manifest, as Saint John declares when, summing up all the sayings of the prophets, he announces that this is the Word through whom the whole universe was made. He says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through him all things came into being; not one thing was created without him.* And further on he adds: *The world was made through him, and yet the world did not know him. He entered his own creation, and his own did not receive him.*

**Hope – Lesson and Discussion** *“Blessed are you who believed”*

As we come to the close of Advent, we wait in grateful joy for the coming of the Lord. With Mary, we are united by a great hope for our salvation through her Son. “From the stable at Bethlehem to the moment of his ascension into Heaven, Jesus Christ proclaims a message of hope. Jesus himself is our only hope. He is the firm pledge that we will attain to the marvelous future we have been promised. We look towards the cave at Bethlehem in watchful hope, understanding that it is only in his company that we can boldly approach God the Father.”[1]

**What is hope?** “The theological virtue by which we desire and expect from God both eternal life and the grace we need to attain it.”[2] Hope also, “responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men’s activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.”[3]

**Who do we put our hope in?** We are to put our hope in Jesus Christ. “Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus’ preaching in the proclamation of the beatitudes. The beatitudes raise our hope toward heaven as the new Promised Land; they trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus. But through the merits of Jesus Christ and of his Passion, God keeps us in the ‘hope that does not disappoint.’ Hope is the ‘sure and steadfast anchor of the soul...that enters...where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.”[4]

Like the dry ground that awaits the dew fall, all of humanity awaits Jesus, the Eternal Word that descends like the dew fall. This Sunday’s Entrance Antiphon says, “Drop down dew from above, you heaven, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened and bring forth a Savior.”[5] In the Second Eucharistic Prayer the priest prays makes reference to this scripture, “You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness. Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”[6] Our hope is in the Lord, who is physically present in the Eucharist. Jesus will be with us in eternal communion with heaven, but until then is temporally with us in the Most Blessed Sacrament. If we do not practice this temporal communion with Jesus, how can we have eternal communion with Him? This is why Jesus says, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.”[7] Just as mortal sin keeps us from temporal communion in the Eucharist, mortal sin keeps us from eternal communion – Heaven. We must repent and keep our hope in Christ, for “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more.”[8] God’s grace is stronger than our sins.

**Where do we obtain hope?** One receives the virtue of hope “... at baptism together with sanctifying grace and having the possession of God as its primary object.”[9]

**How does hope benefit us?** “It belongs to the will and makes a person desire eternal life, which is the heavenly vision of God, and gives one the confidence of receiving the grace necessary to reach heaven.”[10] “Hope is also a weapon that protects us in the struggle of salvation: ‘Let us...put on the breastplate of faith and charity, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.’ It affords us joy even under trial: ‘Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation.’”

**Is hope necessary for salvation?** Yes. “The virtue of hope is necessary for salvation. Acts of hope are also necessary for salvation and are commanded by God for all who have come to the use of reason.”[11] It is one of the three theological virtues along with faith and charity, which are all to believe in and to use.

**What is the opposite of hope?** The opposite of hope is despair, a lack of faith in God. “The ones who become discouraged are not those who undergo difficulties and feel pain. It is those, rather, who do not aspire to sanctity and eternal life, those who despair of ever reaching them...”[12] Despair is one of the sins against the Holy Spirit.

**What are the other sins against the Holy Spirit?** Jesus says in Matthew’s gospel, “And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”[13] In addition to despair, the sins against the Holy Spirit include Presumption upon God’s mercy — Impugning known truth – Envy of another’s spiritual good – Obstinacy in sin – Final impenitence.[14] Most of these sins are permanent by nature. For example, obstinacy in sin and final impenitence is a firm decision to not choose God. Presumption upon God’s mercy and despair is a declaration that either we are or are not saved. We are either presuming that we are saved or in despair and believe that God’s mercy is not enough for us. When we despair, we are looking at the Cross and saying to Jesus, “Your Grace is not greater than my sin!” To impugn or cause doubt is a direct offense against Jesus Christ who is Truth. To envy, or be saddened by others’ goodness or holiness, is a direct offense against God, the source of all Good.

**Why do people lose hope and despair?** There is no singular answer for this question because there are many reasons a person may fall into the sin of despair. “The attitude of the former is shaped by a lack of faith, by comfort seeking, lukewarmness and an excessive attachment to earthly goods, which they consider to be the only good things worth having.”[15] One common modern reason for despair is the sin of materialism. R. A. Knox once wrote, “In proportion as the world grows weary of its Christian hope, the alternative is materialism, of a type with which we are already familiar – that and nothing else.”[16] “Our Lord himself points out to us that the principal objects of Christian hope are not the good things of this life which moth and rust consume, and which thieves can break in and steal, but the treasures of the incorruptible heritage and, above all, the supreme happiness of the eternal possession of God.”[17] We only have to think of all the presents we have received over the years or hope to receive in the future. How many of us still have *all* the gifts we received from every year we have lived? Almost all have been dismissed. We must remember our hope is never in something man-made or material, but in Jesus Christ alone.

The great paradox of the forth Sunday of Advent is that in the midst of hope for material goods (Christmas presents), which leaves man empty, a lasting happiness, Jesus Christ is offered. Hope is Jesus Christ is real and lasting.

[1] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1 21.2

[2] Catechism of the Catholic Church Glossary, 882

[3] CCC 1818 [4] CCC 1820 [5] Isaiah 45:8

[6] The Order of the Mass [7] John 6:54 [8] Romans 5:20

[9] Hardon, Modern Catholic Dictionary pg. 257