

Lectio Divina

SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

“What page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?” ~Saint Benedict, from the *Rule of Saint Benedict* (73:3)

“At Christmas we celebrate the coming of God into the world. We look especially at His birth at Bethlehem and we see how that birth reveals to us the infinite mercy of God. But at the same moment we return to the very beginning of all. The generation of the Word in the bosom of the Father is also present to us, and we go forward to the end of all when, having come again into the world at the Last Judgement, and taken all things to Himself, and made all things new, we ourselves will share, by glory, in His divine and eternal sonship and hear the voice of the Father saying to us, in Him: “This day I have begotten thee.” ~EXCERPTED FROM “SEASONS OF CELEBRATION” BY FR. THOMAS MERTON

**Monday, December 21 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Advent
Saint Peter Canisius, Priest and Doctor of the Church**

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:39-45 Mary set out in those days 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, “Most 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.”

Meditation: How does Mary respond to the word of God delivered by the angel Gabriel? Does she post the occasion on Facebook and wait for a “*what should I do?*” response from her “friends?” Does she post the occasion on her blog or send a shotgun text message or e-mail blast out to everyone asking “*what should I do?*” Does she take a selfie with the angel, post it on Instagram and say “*look who came to visit me!*” Did she contact her attorney and ask to have a contract drawn up outlining specific responsibilities of both parties, perhaps including a *force majeure* clause? Does she consult with her accountant to see if there are any financial liabilities she may not be aware of? No, not at all, as Mary was a true woman of faith who had a deep understanding of sacred scripture and of God. With great simplicity, love, faith and humility, and without pause or hesitation, and being a hearer of the Word, she immediately responds with great faith and trust in God’s messenger – the angel Gabriel – and in God himself. Mary’s prompt response of “yes” to the divine message is a model of faith for all of us as believers and as people of faith. Mary believed God’s promises even when they seemed impossible. She was full of grace because she trusted that what God said was true and would be fulfilled. She was willing and eager to do God’s will, even if it seemed difficult or costly. Mary is the “mother of God” because God becomes incarnate when he takes on flesh in her womb. Jesus, whom the Father sent from heaven, is true God and true man.

Prayer: O God, who for the defense of the Catholic faith made the Priest Saint Peter Canisius strong in virtue and in learning, grant, through his intercession, that those who seek the truth may joyfully find you, their God, and that your faithful people may persevere in confession you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The new era of salvation begins with Mary’s “yes” and the miraculous conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. This child to be born is conceived by the gracious action of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, who finds favor with God (Luke 1:28). As Eve was the mother of all humanity doomed to sin, now Mary becomes the mother of the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (Romans 5:12-21). This child to be conceived in her womb is the fulfillment of all God’s promises. He will be “great” and “Son of the Most High” and “King” and his name shall be called “Jesus” (Luke 1:31-32), which means “the Lord saves.” “He will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The angel repeats to Mary, the

daughter of the house of David, the promise made to King David: "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (2 Samuel 7:12-16, Isaiah 9:6-7, Luke 1:32-33).

Tuesday, December 22 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:46-56 Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever." Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months and then returned to her home.

Meditation: The Gospel of Luke reveals the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in Mary's life. When Elizabeth and Mary greeted one another they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with a joyful anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promise to give a Savior. John the Baptist, even before the birth of the Messiah, pointed to his coming and leapt for joy in the womb of his mother as the Holy Spirit revealed to him the presence of the King to be born. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to enable us to know and experience the indwelling presence of God and the power of his kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the way in which God reigns within each of us. Mary accepted her mission with uncompromising faith and obedience. She acted with unwavering trust and faith because she believed that God would fulfill the word he had spoken. Her great hymn of praise echoes the song of Hannah (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10) and proclaims the favor of the Lord: *God exalts the lowly and he fills the hungry with good things.* Hannah like Mary had been without child and God in a marvelous way gave her a son, named Samuel, whom she dedicated at an early age to the service of the Lord (1 Samuel 1:24ff.) Mary, too, would lose her son to a servant ministry that would take him to the cross. Christmas is a time for renewing our faith and hope in God and in his promises and for deepening our love for God and for neighbor.

Prayer: O God, who, seeing the human race fallen into death, willed to redeem it by the coming of your Only Begotten Son, grant, we pray, that those who confess his Incarnation with humble fervor may merit his company as their Redeemer. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Do you seek the Lord Jesus and the power of his Holy Spirit so that you may be renewed in faith, hope, and love? Those who seek the Lord and hunger for his Word will never be disappointed. For the Lord himself will fill them with the fruits of his peace, joy, love and righteousness. We see God's boundless love manifested in the promise of a Redeemer. As the events leading to the birth of our Savior unfold we see all the prophecies, promises and prayers of the Old Testament being fulfilled because "God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son" (John 3:16).

Wednesday, December 23 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Advent **Saint John of Kanty, Priest**

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:57-66 When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name." So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be? For surely the hand of the Lord was with him."

Meditation: We can see that Elizabeth is firm in her faith and determined to see that God be glorified through this child. The name "John" means "the Lord is gracious." In the birth of John the Baptist and in the birth of Jesus the Messiah we see the grace and favor of God breaking forth into a world broken by sin, corruption, and death - a world lost without hope. The Old Testament prophets foretold the return of the prophet Elijah (Malachi 3:1, and 4:5) who would announce the coming of the Messiah - the Savior and Ruler of the earth. John the Baptist fulfills the role of Elijah (Matthew 11:13-14). His miraculous birth

shows the mercy and favor of God in preparing his people for the coming of its Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. When God acts to save us he graciously fills us with his Holy Spirit and makes our faith come alive to his promises. When we respond to his word with trust the Lord fills us with the joy of the Holy Spirit and renews our hope and gratitude for the mercy and gift of new life and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that by the example of the Priest Saint John of Kanty we may advance in knowledge of holy things and by showing compassion to all, may gain forgiveness in Your sight. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Saint Ephrem of Syria had this to say about the parallels between John the Baptist and Jesus: "The elderly Elizabeth gave birth to the last of the prophets, and Mary, a young girl, to the Lord of the angels. The daughter of Aaron gave birth to the voice in the desert (Isaiah 63:9), but the daughter of David to the strong God of the earth. The barren one gave birth to him who remits sins, but the Virgin gave birth to him who takes them away (John 1:29). Elizabeth gave birth to him who reconciled people through repentance, but Mary gave birth to him who purified the lands of uncleanness. The elder one lit a lamp in the house of Jacob, his father, for this lamp itself was John (John 5:35), while the younger one lit the Sun of Justice (Malachi 4:2) for all the nations. The angel announced to Zechariah, so that the slain one would proclaim the crucified one and that the hated one would proclaim the envied one. He who was to baptize with water would proclaim him who would baptize with fire and with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). The light, which was not obscure, would proclaim the Sun of Justice. The one filled with the Spirit would proclaim concerning him who gives the Spirit. The priest calling with the trumpet would proclaim concerning the one who is to come at the sound of the trumpet at the end. The voice would proclaim concerning the Word, and the one who saw the dove would proclaim concerning him upon whom the dove rested, like the lightning before the thunder" (excerpted from *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, 1.31).

Thursday, December 24 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Advent Christmas Eve Day – Gospel of the Last Day in Advent

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:67-69 Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied, saying: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty Savior, born of the house of his servant David. Through his prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hand of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life. You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Mediation: The Holy Spirit gave Zechariah a vision for his own son as a prophet and forerunner who would prepare the way for the Messiah. Every devout Jew longed for the day when the Messiah would come. Now Zechariah knows beyond a doubt that that day is very near. Like Zechariah, the Holy Spirit wants to give us vision, joy, and confidence in the knowledge of God's merciful love, protection, and care which he offers us through his Son Jesus Christ. Like the Baptist, we too are called to prepare the way that leads to Christ. Life is a journey and we are either moving towards the Lord or away from the Lord. The Lord comes to visit us each day with his life-giving Word and Spirit. Those who hunger for the Word of the Lord will never be disappointed. He will draw them to himself and show them his love and mercy.

Prayer: Come quickly, we pray, Lord Jesus, and do not delay, that those who trust in your compassion may find solace and relief in your coming. Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: When John was circumcised on the eighth day according to the Jewish rite, his father Zechariah was "filled with the Holy Spirit" and with great joy. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he spoke out a prophetic word and hymn of blessing for the work of redemption which God was about to accomplish in Christ. He foresaw the fulfillment of God's promise to David and his descendants that David's dynasty would endure forever through the coming of the Messianic King (2 Samuel 7:16). This King would establish peace and security for his people. We often think of peace as the absence of trouble. The peace which the Messiah brings cancels the debt of sin and restores our broken relationship with God.

Friday, December 25 Solemnity of Christmas ~ The Birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:1-14 (*Revised Standard Version translation*) In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

Meditation: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would descend from David and be born in David's city, Bethlehem (Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-2; Micah 5:2-4). Saint Ambrose, the fourth century Bishop of Milan, in his commentary on this passage from Luke explains why Christ became a humble child for our sake. "He was a baby and a child, so that you may be a perfect human. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, so that you may be freed from the snares of death. He was in a manger, so that you may be in the altar. He was on earth that you may be in the stars. He had no other place in the inn, so that you may have many mansions in the heavens. He, being rich, became poor for your sakes, that through his poverty you might be rich. Therefore his poverty is our inheritance, and the Lord's weakness is our virtue. He chose to lack for himself, that he may abound for all. The sobs of that appalling infancy cleanse me, those tears wash away my sins. Therefore, Lord Jesus, I owe more to your sufferings because I was redeemed than I do to works for which I was created... You see that he is in swaddling clothes. You do not see that he is in heaven. You hear the cries of an infant, but you do not hear the lowing of an ox recognizing its Master, for the ox knows his Owner and the donkey his Master's crib" (*Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*).

Prayer: Grant we pray, almighty God, that as we are bathed in the new radiance of Your incarnate Word, the light of faith, which illumines our minds, may also shine through in our deed. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever, Amen.

Contemplation: I've always preferred the RSV translation when it comes to this wonderful and most beautiful Gospel. In the quiet of your home, with the glow of your Christmas tree illuminating your nativity scene, join with the angelic choirs of heaven and glorify God, giving him thanks for the gift of his Son who became our Savior and Redeemer. Blessings for a Merry Christmas!

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011;
some reflections inspired by *Biblical Meditations for Advent and the Christmas Season* by Carroll Stuhlmueller;
information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of Catholic Culture.

frlumpe:2020

