

## Sunday, Dec 06, 2020

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### Begin at the end

Beginnings are really the Act II of endings. That's why we hear so much Apocalypse in the early Advent readings. Something has to give way for the new thing to arrive. In order to move into the new house, you have to leave the old one. That goes for the life of the world to come, as well. So when John the Baptist summons us to prepare the Lord's way, he simultaneously obliges us to repent our former way. Consider what obstacles need to "pass away" to "make straight" the path of the Christ child's arrival into your heart.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8 (5). "The heavens will pass away with a mighty roar, and the Earth and everything done on it will be found out."

## Monday, Dec 07, 2020

MEMORIAL OF AMBROSE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

### To the moon and beyond

You think you're busy? Ambrose, one of the four first doctors of the church, challenged emperors and combated heresies. He converted Saint Augustine and championed celibacy. He was a prolific theologian and contributed to the music of the church. He was so admired he was made a bishop by popular acclaim. Ambrose did a lot of different things—who of us could keep up?—but he had one vision that we can all get behind: that the church rise "like a growing moon" above fleeting worldliness.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 35:1-10; Luke 5:17-26 (181). "We have seen incredible things today."

## Tuesday, Dec 08, 2020

SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (PATRONAL FEAST DAY OF THE USA)

### Original grace

The Immaculate Conception is so key to Catholic consciousness, it's hard to believe it hasn't been around forever. The teaching—that Mary was born without original sin—was in fact opposed by scholarly saints like Anselm, Aquinas, Bernard, and Bonaventure. They insisted that, because sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, Mary would need salvation as much as the rest of us. But the Council of Trent concluded that Mary had been spared, and popular piety began to revere her Immaculate Conception. The significance? Perhaps, as theologian Elizabeth Johnson eloquently points out, it's that "grace is more original than sin."

TODAY'S READINGS: Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 (689). "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."

## Wednesday, Dec 09, 2020

MEMORIAL OF JUAN DIEGO CUAUHTLATZIN

### Celebrate the messenger of love

Born in 1474 near modern-day Mexico City, Saint Juan Diego was named Cuauhtlatzintzin (Talking Eagle) and according to tradition lived among his Chichimeca people until the conquest of Mexico in 1521. At the age of 50, Juan Diego was baptized by Franciscan missionaries and began attending daily Mass. While he walked to Mass on December 9, 1531, the Blessed Mother appeared to him with a special request. So begins the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose feast we celebrate in three days. Today, we honor Juan Diego, the first indigenous saint of the Americas, canonized in 2002, who spent the rest of his life as a

prayerful hermit tending the first shrine built to Guadalupe. On this Advent day, we pray for the grace to imitate his humility, trust, and faithfulness.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 40:25-31; Matthew 11:28-30 (183). "They that hope in the LORD will . . . soar as with eagles' wings."

## Thursday, Dec 10, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY

### Walk the simple but elusive path to peace

As Christians await the Prince of Peace, today the world celebrates this year's Nobel Peace Prize awardee—the U.N. World Food Program—for their heroic efforts in war-torn lands in the midst of the pandemic. Human beings are prone to conflict, but the craving for peace and reconciliation runs deep across cultures and faiths. The perennial question is how to achieve it. Here's a simple but profound answer that has been put forth by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development for decades: "If you want peace, work for justice." Ask yourself what step toward justice you can take today.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 41:13-20; Matthew 11:11-15 (184). "Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist."

## Friday, Dec 11, 2020

MEMORIAL OF DAMASUS I, POPE

### Stormy weather

If we think we've got it tough—juggling the gift list, social schedule, family feuds, and ailing bank account—consider Damasus. He embodied the truism that faith is more a compass than an insurance policy. When he was elected pope, another faction chose someone else. What followed were violent battles, scandals, accusations, heresies, and troubled relations with the Eastern Church. While we might sing carols about the Prince of Peace, the hard reality of human life has, since the Incarnation, also involved moments of hurricane-force wind. Today, let's welcome whatever problem we're reluctant to engage, knowing it might be our teacher.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 48:17-19; Matthew 11:16-19 (185). "If you would hearken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river."

## Saturday, Dec 12, 2020

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

### Celebrate the feast!

The apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Mexico City's Tepeyac Hill in 1531 was a game changer. Images of the Virgin had typically carried a distinctly European flavor. The Virgin of Guadalupe, however, had indigenous features. She would become the first *Mestiza* image, for a people who comprise the racially and culturally diverse population of modern-day Mexico. Under her spiritual care and influence, a variety of peoples could unite at least in spirituality. For Mexican Americans, and Latinos everywhere, *la Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* is among the biggest religious celebrations of the year. Join the *fiesta*.

TODAY'S READINGS: Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab; Luke 1:26-38 or Luke 1:39-47 (690A). "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord."

*Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time*



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## Sunday, Dec 13, 2020

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### Discern the spirit

Often we get an intuition, a burning in the heart that feels motivating. It may tell us to speak up or shut up; to reach out or keep our hands off a situation; to admit we need help or to stop leaning on others. Do we obey the prompt, or ignore it? The problem with following what may be a divine nudge is that we can't always discern the Holy Spirit from a lesser kind.

Discernment involves prayer, familiarity with scripture, consultation with faithful others, and sometimes spiritual direction. Above all, it needs to be practiced. Befriend the Spirit!

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28 (8). *"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances."*

## Monday, Dec 14, 2020

MEMORIAL OF JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

### Be a light in the darkness

We have so many options in our modern world that it's easy to walk away from any organization or community that we struggle with and simply join ones that are more agreeable to us. But what if we stayed and worked to make them better instead? Saint John of the Cross did exactly that and reformed his Carmelite order, despite imprisonment for his efforts. When you feel disillusioned with institutions you love, be guided by John's writing—considered among the greatest in all of Spanish literature—about darkness leading to the light.

TODAY'S READINGS: Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a; Matthew 21:23-27 (187). *"By what authority are you doing these things?"*

## Tuesday, Dec 15, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY

### The darkness before dawn

Two days ago we celebrated Gaudete Sunday with refrains of rejoicing. Two days from now, we'll begin to pray the O Antiphons—seven days to laud the fast-approaching Messiah. What to make of this in-between time, when scripture shows Jesus chiding religious leaders and Old Testament prophets preach fire and brimstone? "The day in which we now find ourselves is still night," wrote Saint Augustine. But the promise of salvation is sure. "Keep your attention closely fixed on it, as you would on a lamp shining in a dark place until the first streaks of dawn appear."

TODAY'S READINGS: Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13; Matthew 21:28-32 (188). *"Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God."*

## Wednesday, Dec 16, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY

### Usher in a renewed Advent

This Advent season is so different from any other in our lifetimes, and the holidays may not allow for worship in person with our faith communities or celebrations with beloved families. For many of us, this brings sadness to these Advent days as we mourn the loss of familiar rituals. The poetic words of theologian, educator, and civil rights leader Howard Thurman remind us that the work of Christmas is to "find the lost, heal the broken, feed the hungry . . . rebuild the nations and bring peace among others." Let us pray for the grace to overcome any disappointment we feel and focus on feeding the hungry, having compassion for the broken,

and rebuilding the relationships around us. In such practices, we will find Advent hope and peace.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 45:6b-8, 18, 21c-25; Luke 7:18b-23 (189). *"The poor have the good news proclaimed to them."*

## Thursday, Dec 17, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O WISDOM)

### Heavenly sounds

Today is the first of the O Antiphons, an Advent tradition from the seventh century whereby for a week the church's evening prayer salutes the coming Messiah by different names each evening. Tonight monasteries, parishes, and ordinary Christians will sing or recite "O Sapientia" (Wisdom). Reading about the loveliness of this prayer is no substitute for hearing it. Let the ethereal sound of this ancient tradition uplift your prayer today. Here is "O Sapientia" sung by Dominican friars in Oxford, England.

TODAY'S READINGS: Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Matthew 1:1-17 (193). *"Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations."*

## Friday, Dec 18, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O SACRED LORD)

### A call to rescue and restore

The calamities that piled up in 2020 point surely to the longing of today's O Antiphon. A wave of global pandemic, quarantine, massive unemployment, fires, floods, and protest for racial justice crests, resonating with the yearning for freedom. More than ever, we yearn for the Leader who will restore justice and rescue us with mighty power. And at a time when more people are exiled from their homes than ever before in human history, we commemorate Migrants Day with a plaintive call: *Come, Lord Jesus to our human mess. We need you as we have throughout the centuries.*

TODAY'S READINGS: Jeremiah 23:5-8; Matthew 1:18-25 (194). *"O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free."*

## Saturday, Dec 19, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O FLOWER OF JESSE'S STEM)

### Creation is full of surprises

The image of "Jesse's Stem" in today's O Antiphon comes from the Book of Isaiah. Using the image of a tree much like we use a family tree to trace our lineage, Isaiah traces the lineage of the kings of Judah forward from Jesse, the father of King David, to the hoped-for Christ, the new king who might restore the monarchy to its former greatness. But like the birth of John the Baptist, the actual coming of the Christ would be a surprise, a new revelation of a heavenly Kingdom. Reflect on the various ways God has surprised you in your life.

TODAY'S READINGS: Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a; Luke 1:5-25 (195). *"O Flower of Jesse's stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples."*

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## Sunday, Dec 20, 2020

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (O KEY OF DAVID)

### Unlocking every door

Those who have been incarcerated know exactly what it means to face a locked door. So do folks who have been institutionalized with mental illness. But even those of us who have not been behind a literal door may find ourselves living under a sentence of fear, bitterness, depression, or unforgiveness. We may be locked out of relationships that are important to us because of resentment or past actions. Poverty is often a prison that keeps opportunity and hope out, while also fostering despair within. O Jesus, Key of David, unlock every door that keeps us from experiencing your freedom!

TODAY'S READINGS: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38 (11). *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."*

## Monday, Dec 21, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O RADIANT DAWN)

### Just before dawn

They say it's darkest just before the dawn, and today we've reached that moment on the darkest day of what has been a very dark year. Our hope in the worst of circumstances reaches a crescendo in today's O Antiphon: "O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death." We've reached the edge of a dramatic precipice in our waiting. Have faith and get ready—daybreak is coming.

TODAY'S READINGS: Song of Songs 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18a; Luke 1:39-45 (197). *"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."*

## Tuesday, Dec 22, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O KING OF ALL NATIONS)

### The unexpected king is arriving

Today's O Antiphon heralds the Messiah's long-expected arrival as king. But clearly Jesus is not a typical king—because God's kingdom is not a typical earthly kingdom. Jesus will later proclaim, through the Beatitudes, that the kingdom of God is the inverse of what we humans expect. "Blessed are the meek," he insists—and the poor, the persecuted, and those who mourn. In fact, according to Saint Matthew's version of the Final Judgment, Jesus will be the king wielding harsh judgment against all who've neglected the "least of these." How will you serve our expected-but-unexpected king today?

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 Samuel 1:24-28; Luke 1:46-56 (198). *"He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly."*

## Wednesday, Dec 23, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O EMMANUEL)

### Do not doubt—God is with us

As we the church celebrate Evening Prayer—whether in monasteries or in our own homes, the domestic church—tonight we pray or sing the seventh and final O Antiphon of Advent with these words: "O Emmanuel, our king and giver of law, come to save us, Lord our God." The name *Emmanuel* means God-with-us. As the season of Advent longing comes to a close, in a world that is in need of God's compassionate and saving presence, let us pray tonight for eyes to see and hearts to embrace the presence

of God-with-us in the events and conversations of these holy holidays. Indeed, O come, O come Emmanuel.

TODAY'S READINGS: Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Luke 1:57-66 (199).

*"What, then, will this child be?"*

## Thursday, Dec 24, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY

### More than a song and dance

For many Catholics of Mexican heritage, today is the final celebration of Las Posadas, nine days of reenacting Mary and Joseph's search for *posada*, shelter. Each day the ritual is the same: Participants knock on doors, sing songs begging for shelter, while hosts respond with songs denying shelter, and finally end with the glorious moment when the door is opened wide and the Holy Family is given shelter for the night. The repetition drives home the desperation of the most famous migrant family and migrants of all times and places, including our own. Can you take some action in support of migrants and refugees this Christmas season?

TODAY'S READINGS: Morning: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Luke 1:67-79 (200). *"Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!"*

## Friday, Dec 25, 2020

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

### The Light shines upon us!

Today as we gaze upon a tiny infant born in difficult circumstances, we are also gazing upon a powerful love that has transformed the world—and us. Fragility and strength, new life and enduring love—these are not mutually exclusive. In the Incarnation, we encounter a God who has loved us since before the creation of the world and who longs to draw close and bring us life. This life is not to be "spiritualized" but to be incarnate in our whole life, including our places of pain and challenge. Saint Athanasius writes, "For the Lord touched all parts of creation, and freed and undeceived them all from every deceit." What is the freedom that God has begun to unfold within you?

TODAY'S READINGS: Vigil: Isaiah 62:1-5; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Matthew 1:1-25 (13); Night: Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 (14); Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18 (16). *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shone."*

## Saturday, Dec 26, 2020

FEAST OF STEPHEN, FIRST MARTYR

### Don't cloak your compassion

Even the greatest among us have their darkest moment. The great Saint Paul had such a moment before his conversion, when he looked on approvingly and guarded the cloaks of those who stoned the church's first martyr, the young and courageous deacon Stephen. Saul of Tarsus, as Paul was known before his conversion, no doubt was convinced that righteousness called for such a cruel and harsh death sentence. Be on guard for misguided righteousness wherever it rears its head, especially when that head is on your own shoulders. It rarely leads to compassion or mercy, God's signposts. Saint Stephen, pray for us.

TODAY'S READINGS: Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Matthew 10:17-22 (696). *"Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people. . . . They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him."*

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## Sunday, Dec 27, 2020

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

### The measure of success

Fruitfulness is a sign that we're doing something right. Plant a seed, water it, give it light, and it brings forth a shoot. Neglect it, and get nothing. We measure success in terms of fruitfulness: schooling completed, jobs held, relationships that endure, children raised, financial security, years lived, virtues practiced. God blessed Abram with wealth and years, but to that old man, the only true measure of success was a child. By what standard do you evaluate your life's worth? What's required for you to say in the end: "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace"?

TODAY'S READINGS: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:22-40; or Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3; Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2:22-40 (17). "But Abram said, 'O Lord GOD, what good will your gifts be, if I keep on being childless?'"

## Monday, Dec 28, 2020

FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS

### Suffer little children

On the heels of the joyful celebration of the birth of our Savior, we remember the Holy Innocents—all the baby boys who were murdered by Herod in his attempt to kill the child Jesus. Remember too all those innocents who die today at the hands of their governments and who are victims of institutional and structural violence. About the Holy Innocents, Matthew quotes Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children . . ." Console today's mourning mothers by fighting for children's rights and protections.

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 1:5—2:2; Matthew 2:13-18 (698). "My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin."

## Tuesday, Dec 29, 2020

FIFTH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD; MEMORIAL OF THOMAS BECKET, BISHOP, MARTYR

### Choosing right vs. might

Thomas Becket found himself having to choose between an earthly king and Christ the King. The cleric Thomas befriended England's Henry II—leading Henry to appoint him chancellor. Later, when Henry spotted a chance to wield power over church affairs, he named his friend the archbishop of Canterbury. But Thomas would not go along with Henry's plans. Repercussions followed, and in 1170 Thomas was brutally murdered—in Canterbury Cathedral—by the king's men. Though perhaps with less dramatic outcomes, standing up for your convictions may cost you, too. Are you willing to pay the price?

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 2:3-11; Luke 2:22-35 (202). "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many."

## Wednesday, Dec 30, 2020

SIXTH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

### The party never ends

On this sixth day of the Octave, the Christmas celebration continues. Or it can—even if the culture around us has moved on. Especially in pandemic days, you may feel challenged to find hope and joy in the promise that God is with us. So celebrate by sharing that Divine Love, however you feel able to. Bake and share cookies, make a call to someone you may have overlooked this busy season, write a note of gratitude to someone who

challenges you, or contribute to an organization that cares for mothers and children in this season of the Holy Family. Take time in prayer to recollect and give thanks for any awareness of God's presence in recent days. *Loving God, help me remember that Christmas is not a day but rather a season that invites me to see you at work in my life every day.*

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 2:12-17; Luke 2:36-40 (203). "And coming forward at that very time, [Anna] gave thanks to God and spoke about the child."

## Thursday, Dec 31, 2020

SEVENTH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

### The light still shines

We might well ring out a difficult year with the words of today's psalmist: "Let the heavens be glad and the Earth rejoice!" Rejoicing implies an expectation of better things to come, placing us firmly within the Christian virtue of hope. Christians are hopeful for many reasons, starting with the fact that Jesus's death led to resurrection. The church teaches, too, that hope lies in building the kingdom of God on Earth, "as it is in heaven." Lift up your hopes for 2021 to God, and be ready to work for them with God's grace.

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 2:18-21; John 1:1-18 (204). "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

## Friday, Jan 01, 2021

WORLD DAY OF PEACE; OCTAVE DAY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD; SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

### Renew the face of the Earth

We have longed for the year 2020 to be over, to move away from the pandemics that have wounded us collectively and individually. With 2021 on the calendar now, it feels like maybe, just maybe we can start anew at some point. Given the chance, we, along with all of creation, have the capacity to renew, that is, to be "new again"—not only each year but each moment. An essential ingredient to renewal is peace. The church calls us to follow Christ the Way of Peace, as Pope Benedict said on this day in 2007, "with hearts full of hope, notwithstanding the dangers and difficulties that surround us." Let us pray for *and choose* peace for ourselves and for the world in all that we renew this year.

TODAY'S READINGS: Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21 (18). "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

## Saturday, Jan 02, 2021

MEMORIAL OF BASIL THE GREAT AND GREGORY NAZIANZEN, BISHOPS, DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

### Spiritual friendship lasts for ages

Spiritual friendship is one of the greatest gifts of life in a faith community. Basil and Gregory, fourth-century patriarchs of the Eastern Church, had such a friendship and spurred each other on to great accomplishments and service in their spiritual lives. We all need community and spiritual support as we work through the mysteries of our own personal lives and the challenges presented by a suffering world. Who can you count on for support and encouragement in these hard times? Do your resolutions for this new year include cultivation of spiritual community and friendships?

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 2:22-28; John 1:19-28 (205). "All the ends of the Earth have seen the salvation by our God."

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