

A Pilgrimage of Hope

St. Cronan Advent

Reflections from the St. Cronan Community

2026

Advent: A Pilgrimage of Hope

This Advent, let us embark together on a Pilgrimage of Hope. Each week, we will focus on this theme to make progress toward our Pilgrimage:

1. I am loved;
2. I am grounded in hope with our community;
3. I am anointed:
4. I am breaking through to serve with our community – Saying YES

First week of Advent: *Take time to do a personal pilgrimage – focus on myself: I am loved*

- Address your needs and gifts so that you can be free to help others
- Prepare for pilgrimage
- Reflect: What do you need to be open, compassionate, caring?

Second week of Advent: *Bring hope to others in community*
Ground yourself in hope

- Be grounded in hope as the Community of St. Cronan
- Bring hope to others in our community – prepare as community for the Pilgrimage
- Affirm and lift up hope in the community – address God's care for God's people that gives us hope
- Speak tenderly and compassionately in justice
- Reflect: How can I/we respond to the polarization in our country, our world at this time?

3rd Week of Advent: *Be anointed – God chooses us to serve others in Christ's love*
Affirm the call God gives each of us

- Commit to being sent forth to serve others through Christ in the church and the larger world
- Recognize our ministries – stand when your ministry is named
- Be anointed in celebration of the call each received in Baptism and Confirmation
- Reflect: How is each of us being called to serve at this time?

4th Sunday of Advent: *Break through to serve –pilgrimage with others*
Sending forth of ministers

- Say YES – to the Incarnation, to living the Eucharist, to service
- Reflect: How can our pilgrimage be a sign of Christ born among us?

First Sunday of Advent
November 29, 2026

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7 Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19
1 Corinthians 1:3-9 Mark 13:33-37

"Be watchful! Be alert! Our Advent pilgrimage begins with this warning. When we embark on a pilgrimage, we don't know who or what we will encounter. This is exciting. However, we may also feel a bit of apprehension. We might be changed. We likely will be changed. "You do not know when the time will come."



Advent is a season of expectation, of surprises. We enter into the dark time of the year, into winter. We hope for better times. For spring, the growing season. We examine our lives – who am I? Who do I hope to become? Whom do I meet along the way? How do they change me? How do I change them? The Advent pilgrimage is reflection time. How can I become more open, compassionate, and caring? What do I need at this time? What do I need to let go? How am I called to serve others? Can I let others minister to me?

We can let these questions shape us and deepen our Christian commitment. We can enter into a rich darkness knowing God is with us, shaping us as the potter works the clay. Our task this season is to be the clay that is open to God shaping us and to live in expectation. As Ugo Betti wrote, "To believe in God is to know there will be many wonderful surprises." Can anything be more surprising than finding God as a newborn baby in a stable?

What a pilgrimage!

—Lynne Schmidt, SSND

Monday of the First Week of Advent
November 30, 2026

Romans 10:9-18 Psalms 19:8-11 Matthew 4:18-12

These readings are a prescription for life.
The readings are about Faith, Laws & Teaching

FAITH :

Faith enriches all who call upon God for direction. We need faith to listen to the Word of God to be better persons.
Faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes from the word of Christ.

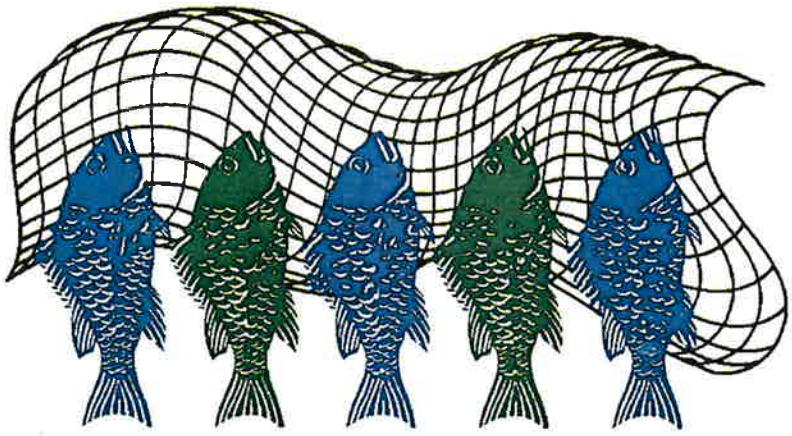
LAWS:

We need to follow the laws of God with this faith. The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul, right rejoicing in our hearts.
This is the direction for that faith.

TEACHING:

Christ says, I'll show you how to teach the faith to others...."Come after me, I will
make you fishers of men."
This is Christ calling us to teach others this faith and these righteous laws.
Christ called the Apostles first and we can follow the example of the Apostles who did follow Jesus to be fishers of men.

—Anna Forder



Tuesday of the First Week of Advent
December 1, 2026

Isaiah 11:1-10 Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17 Luke 10:21-24

Advent (from Latin *ad venire "to come"- arrival, appearance, emergence, birth*)

Today's readings begin with a genealogy lesson, taking us back to Jesus's roots, to Jesse, the father of David. Isaiah paints a wonderful picture of the One who will come. We are told that this family will produce the "bud", the One filled with wisdom, strength, understanding and "fear" (reverence or awe) of the Lord. He paints a picture of a savior who will rule with justice, favoring the poor and striking down those who are wicked, ruthless, unjust. Isaiah's poetry is at its best when he gives a litany of the resulting perfect world where everyone gets along (the wolf is the guest of the lamb, the calf and the young lion browse together with a little child to guide them, etc.). In today's contentious times, this passage holds out the possibility of true peace on earth.

The responsorial psalm seems to suggest that the path to this peace on earth is as simple as treating one another with justice. As in the first reading, the poor are singled out for special consideration. Only by helping them, by giving them the dignity and respect they deserve, can we have the fullness of peace.

Luke's short gospel acknowledges that understanding the concept of true peace lies with those who are "childlike". Our logical adult minds may bristle at this notion, because it is too simple, too naïve. Yet, Jesus leaves no room for doubt. He reminds the apostles that they, by understanding that peace on earth is possible through dignity and respect for all, are the "childlike" ones. They have been blessed to see and hear this truth. It is their mission to teach it to others.

How can these three passages help us begin our Advent Pilgrimage of Hope, especially the first week's instruction to focus on ourselves? I believe these readings are laying out instructions for us to prepare for and welcome God in our lives. By doing that, we are admitting that we are worthy of God's love. We are God's children. Like children (and adults), we make mistakes, we don't always do our best, we backslide. But as a loving parent, God accepts us with all our flaws. If God can love us, who are we to doubt that we deserve that love.

—Gina Heagney

Wednesday of the First Week of Advent
December 2, 2026

Isaiah 25:6-10a Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 Matthew 15:29-37

The readings for today's liturgy all speak of abundance. We have just celebrated Thanksgiving, when we enjoyed an abundance of food and drink. Most likely this celebration also included an abundance of time for family and friends to recall and give thanks for our many blessings.

In the first reading from Isaiah, we are on "the mountain of the Lord," enjoying God's gifts, from food and drink to salvation itself. The Responsorial Psalm—the Good Shepherd Psalm—reminds us that "we shall not want" and will "find rest by peaceful waters". In the Gospel, we are on the mountain again, this time with Jesus. Moved with compassion, he preaches, heals, and multiplies the loaves and fishes for the huge crowd, leaving an abundance of food with many baskets left over.

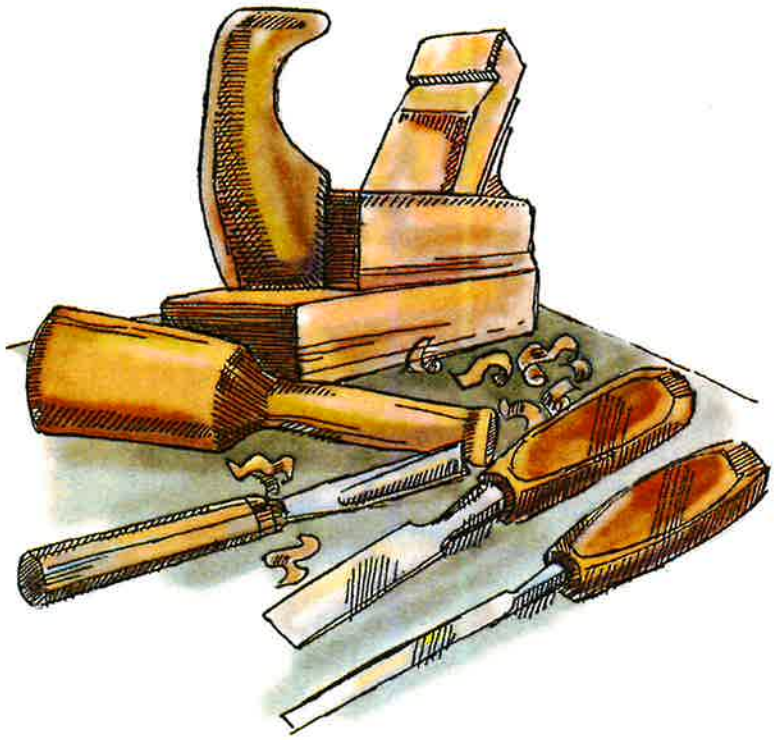


As we begin the Season of Advent, we probably find ourselves pulled in many directions preparing for Christmas and attending events connected with this holiday, and then the actual celebration of Christmas. Along with this, in our hearts we feel called to make time and space for reflection to prepare for Christ's coming Abundance is all around us in many ways and on many levels. May we allow this season to be a time of giving our hearts to God and others and living in a way that helps us focus on the meaning of the Incarnation and its call to us this Advent.

—Madonna O'Hara, OSU

Thursday of the First Week of Advent
Memorial of St. Francis Xavier, Priest
December 3, 2026

Isaiah 26:1-6 Psalm 118:1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a Matthew 7:21, 24-27



How have you built your house this year? When we're physically looking for a place to live, we consider various attributes of the surrounding area: is it built in a safe neighborhood, is it accessible to the things I want to do, is it going to be affected by natural disasters. When Jesus asks us to build a house, all he asks is for a strong foundation. But that strong foundation needs to be built on our love and care for God, others and ourselves. What are you doing this Advent to build your house? In this period of passionate longing, find ways to seek the Lord in the works that you do: serve the needy by working in a soup kitchen, clothe the naked by donating items to a local shelter, forgive the sinner by praying for those who have been incarcerated. But most of all, find ways to fill your cup and find a strong foundation for yourself in faith, hope, and love in order to make the most of this Advent season.

—Patrick J. Mooney

Friday of the First Week of Advent
December 4, 2026

Isaiah 29:17-24 Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14 Matthew 9:27-31

And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see.
Isaiah 29

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD in the land of the living.
Wait for the LORD with courage; be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.
Psalm 27

"Do you believe that I can do this?" "Yes, Lord," they said to him.
Then he touched their eyes and said, "Let it be done for you according to your faith."
And their eyes were opened.
Matthew 9

Sometimes when listening to the readings at Mass, I struggle to find a throughline linking one reading to another. And I know I'm not alone in this as the homily occasionally focuses on one reading over another, at times completely disregarding one of the texts.

However, the readings for today paint an entirely connected picture.

First, Isaiah illustrates the world God promises us, including a vision of the blind finding their sight. Next, in the recitation of the psalms we pray to see the bounty of the Lord. Although it is not here yet, we ask for God's help proceeding with stout and courageous hearts as we wait for Isaiah's world to come to fruition. Finally, we see blind men displaying those brave and trusting hearts with professions of trust in God, ultimately resulting in their sight being restored to them by Jesus.

Promise. Hope and Faith. Fulfillment.

Goodness, if only every prayer of petition we spoke to God was realized in such a tidy bow.

But then I remember that centuries passed between Isaiah and Matthew; it's not as if the very blind men who were healed by Jesus were the ones Isaiah addressed. But they did hear the psalms. And they did wait for the Lord with stouthearted courage. And ultimately, that promise was fulfilled in them.

Today, may we ask God to give us the same stouthearted courage of those blind men; to open our hearts to the waiting. May we rest in the hope and faith that even if we cannot see the workings of the Lord, the promise of God's kingdom will come to light.

— *Lisa Fister*

Saturday of the First Week of Advent
December 5, 2025

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26 Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6 Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6-8

Sometimes the connections of the readings at Mass are beyond my comprehension. It is not so today. They all have a distressing element, and all speak of the Way, the Good News.

In Isaiah, we hear, "When the Lord has given you the bread of suffering and the water of distress – He who is your teacher will hide no longer and you will see your teacher with your own eyes . . . you will hear these words, "This is the way, follow it." The Lord is feeding us with suffering and distress before the teacher shows the Way.

Psalm 147, of God healing the broken hearts and binding up the wounds of Israel in exile. Again, we start with suffering and end up with healed broken hearts and wounds.

The Gospel is a bit different. It begins with Jesus teaching Good News, curing disease and sickness, but then he feels sorry for the crowd and proceeds to send his apostles out on their mission.

I don't know if we need to suffer to find the Way? Is suffering a gift?

It looks as if Jesus was teaching the Good News but then needed help so he summons his band of misfit disciples and sends them out. He calls the Apostles which means "ones sent".

I found groups of misfit Apostles in my life. I hope we see the teacher with our own eyes and the teacher shows us the way. As I mature, I hope, I am just starting to know that the teachers are the poor and the young and the old. The teachers often speak more comfortably in languages I don't speak but they still can teach a great deal.

As one sent forth, I know I must speak out. I must speak with. I must not speak to. I must walk with those who suffer and those filled with joy. I must follow the way.
Father Carl Kabat, a member of Plow Shares, taught that the early Church called themselves people of the Way. Jesus tells us he is the Way … to our Heavenly Father. We sometimes worry that some of our loved ones are not attending church, but Carl taught that even those who don't know Jesus but follow the Way are true followers.

"The Way Between" is a fantasy novel by Rivera Sun. Arri Ara is the young heroine who learns about the Way Between from her mentor, an aging warrior. The Way Between is a path that neither uses violence nor does it timidly silently accept evil. In one memorable scene, Ari finds herself in a raging mountain river. At first, she fights the current but then goes with the flow of the river and follows the Way Between.

How do we stop fighting and go with the Way?

—Barry Buchek

Second Sunday of Advent
December 6, 2026

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11 Psalm 85: 9 – 13 2 Peter 3:8-14 Mark 1:1-8



I am struck with the message from these Scriptures, loud and clear – something new. Something new is coming. Prepare for something new. Completely new. Make way for something new. Listen!

There is shouting, there is tenderness. There is a burning up, a turning over. There is righteousness and peace.

There is comfort.

What was, was. And now, a turning over. There is hope over suffering. There is Good News!

My reflection feels very simplistic, but it is my truth right now. The same Good News.

Remembering. Returning. Resting.

I am remembering clearly my anxiety, my fear, my distress in the midst of everything going on in my community, my state, my country, my world, my family. Sadness, uncertainty, close to despair.

I am returning to the present. Returning to assurance in these scriptures, as I make choices in how I live today, as best I can. It's my active waiting.

I am resting in the promises given. The Good News of Jesus coming, of being held and fed, and the call to participate in creating a new reality on earth.
Simply Advent.

—Kelly Collins

Monday of the Second Week of Advent
Memorial of Saint Ambrose
December 7, 2026

Isaiah 35:1-10 Psalm 85:9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14 Luke 5:17-26

Today is the feast day of St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan and mentor to St. Augustine. He was born in Trier, Germany in 340. His father died when he was an infant and his family relocated to Italy. He served in public office and was so virtuous that he was eventually named the Bishop of Milan. Upon being named bishop, he donated all his earthly possessions to the church and the poor. He spent his life in study, prayer and dedication to the poor. He was tireless in prayer; peace and harmony were his priorities. He had the satisfaction of witnessing the conversion of St. Augustine, whom he baptized in 387. After a life of labor and prayer, St. Ambrose died in 397.

As an Italian, whose grandparents arrived from the city of Milan in the early 1900s, I am very devoted to St. Ambrose. As a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, I am very inspired by his devotion to the poor.

In the first reading, we are reminded to "be strong, fear not: the eyes of the blind will be open, the ears of the deaf will be cleared, the lame will leap and the dumb will sing!" This is truly a message of hope!

In the Psalm, we are told to listen for the word of God, who will proclaim peace in those who trust in him. Again, a message of hope!

Luke reports that "astonishment seized them all and they glorified God and were struck with awe and they said, 'We have seen incredible things!'" Luke is reminding us to glorify God and always watch for incredible things to happen in our lives!

All of these readings inspire us to be the bearers of hope for people in our community and to continue on our pilgrimage of hope, charity and justice. Let us be reminded that every day is an opportunity to reach out to others and enrich our lives through generosity, compassion and hope.

I would recommend a wonderful book, "Hunger for Hope", by Sr. Simone Campbell. Her message gives us the prescription to strive to be "holy" in the world today and provides readers with a spiritual path to give hope to others and to ourselves!

—Janice Calcaterra Shayne

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
December 8, 2026

Genesis 3:9-15, 20 Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12 Luke 1:26-38

God choose Mary at her conception to be the one human who would be holy enough to carry Jesus into this world. When the time came, Mary, a young adolescent, already had chosen to be God's handmaid who lived her life in obedience to her parents and her culture. She was betrothed to an older man, but a kind man, and she was ready to live her life in honor of God. Then she is told that God wants her to do even more - to be doubted by her betrothed and maybe even her parents when she becomes pregnant. She holds her head up and she weathers the possible scandal, trusting in God that things would work out.

How often do we say yes to God? Mary's "yes" changed her entire life. How often does God ask us to change ours? Sometimes, I want to say "yes, but" to God. "Yes, I will follow you, but I have all these other things I must do." My "yes" can be conditional.

As Pete Marrin reminds us, "As sharers of the Gospel Jesus preached and lived, we celebrate the grace and favor that made Mary innocent and that through Jesus flows to us by baptism. Our incorporation into the body of Christ makes us, the church, the extension of God's plan for redemption in our own time and place." (NCR, 2022)

This Advent, we are called to go on a pilgrimage as individuals and as a community, to bring God's love through Jesus to those we meet and support. God calls us always to follow Jesus, to listen to Mary's "yes", which might have been accompanied by trepidation, but was "yes" anyway. Look at how much more scripture we have – Mary's example and the entire life of Jesus – to guide us in saying "yes" to God. Mary is our totally human guide for relating to God. When God calls us on pilgrimage, can we follow Mary's example and say an unequivocal YES?

—Diane Gozdzialski



"The child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God."
Luke 1:35

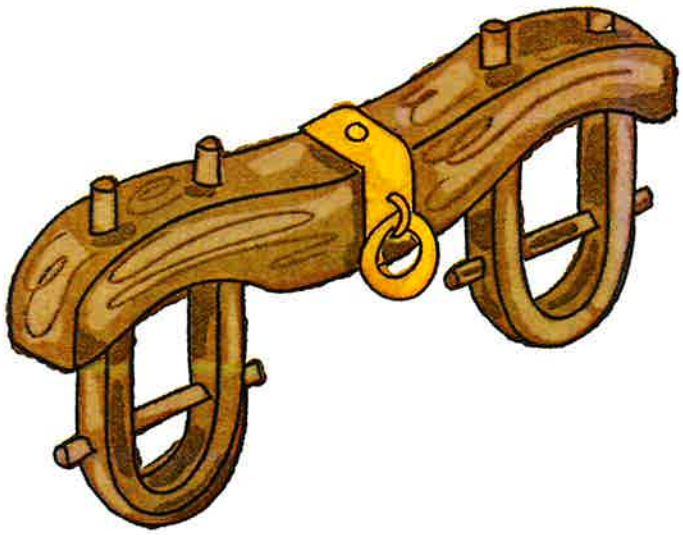
Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent
December 9, 2026

Isaiah 40:25-31 Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8 and 10 Matthew 11:28-30

"They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength,
they will soar as with eagles' wings;
They will run and not grow weary,
walk and not grow faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

As I'm contemplating today's readings, my mind is on the midterms. By the time we read this, we will know the outcome. The results may give us hope or they might give us cause for despair. Either way, we know that our work to promote justice in our community is never ending.



God does not promise this work will be easy. Today's readings remind us that we will "faint and grow weary", "stagger and fall". Jesus tells us to take up his "yoke". That sounds intimidating! And yet, they are filled with hope. Those who hope in the Lord will have renewed strength. God will give rest to the weary. God does not abandon us to toil away, but is eternally with us.

I see our St. Cronan community as part of this gift from God. Supporting each other when we're tired, lifting up those who are struggling. God is working through us to give each other strength to carry on. We are God's workers and God's gift to each other. Let us carry on!

—Laura Krueger

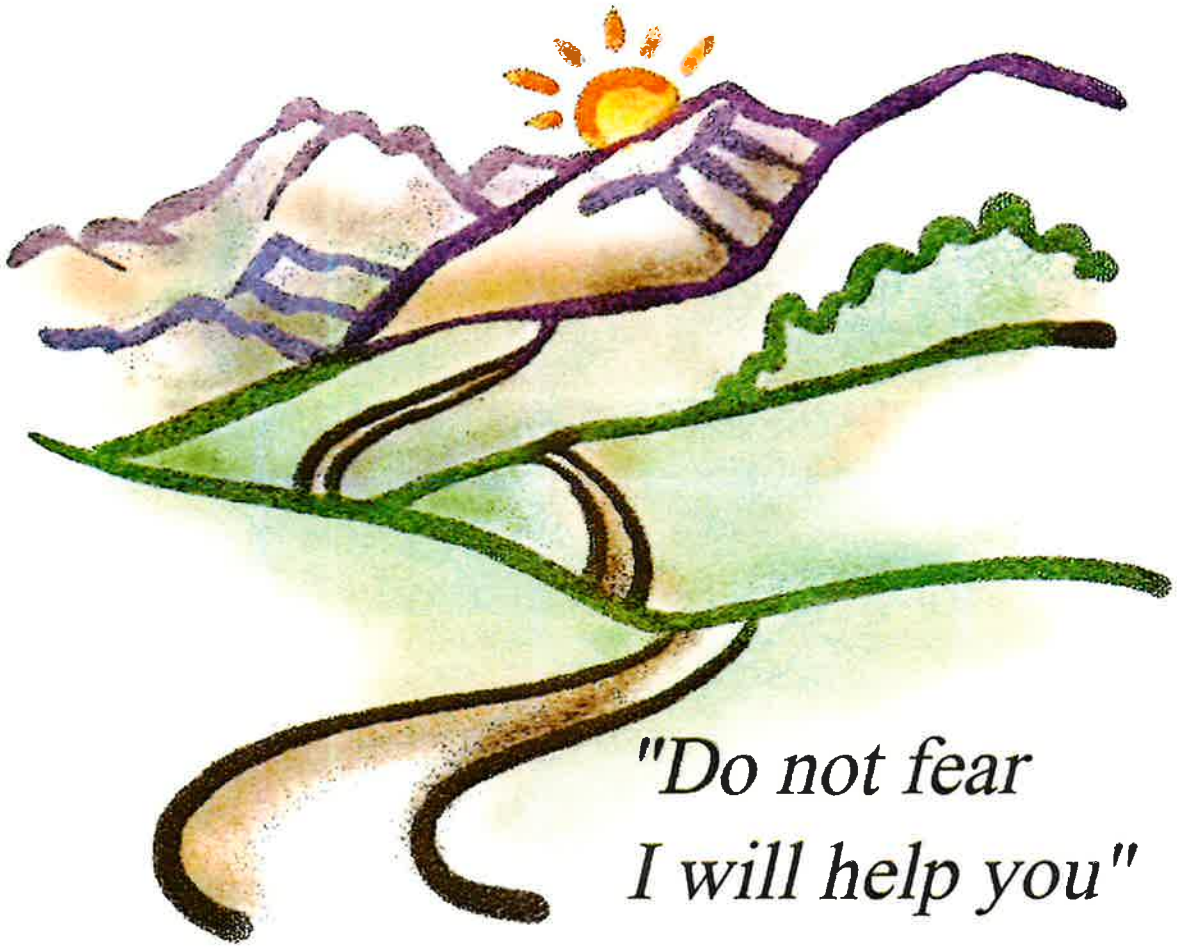
Thursday of the Second Week of Advent
December 10, 2026

Isaiah 41:13-20 Psalm 145:1, 9, 10-13 Matthew 11:11-15

As I am writing this, we will soon be waiting for election results. How much we need to hear, "Do not fear I will help you." We pray and sing with Marty Haugen's "Shepherd me O God, beyond our wants, beyond our fears…..". Every day there are both large and small incidents that challenge our peace, our dependence on our Creator. Over and over we need to open ourselves to those moments, those people, the prayers that bring us to care a little more deeply, to renew us in kindness and to give us the courage to keep working for peace.

John the Baptist did not avoid conflict. He stood for the One to Come and spoke the truth as he understood it in his time and place. We must do the same.

—Kathy Stock



Friday of the Second Week of Advent
December 11, 2026

Isaiah 48:17-19 Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6 Matthew 11:16-19

Today's reading from Isaiah challenges us with: "If you would harken to my commandments … your prosperity would be like a river." Psalm 1:1-4's challenge is: "Blessed the man who … delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night."

The Old Testament is like our first half of life, where boundaries are set to teach us the difference between what is right and wrong, good and evil. Laws are useful to keep us safe and grounded, which is needed to build a sense of morality.



But in today's Gospel from Matthew, Jesus flips this. He said that John the Baptist did not eat nor drink, and "they" said he was possessed. The Son of Man did eat and drink, and "they" called Him a glutton and drunkard.

Jesus is telling us to grow up in our second half of life. Things are not simply black or white. With maturity and wisdom, life moves into shades of gray. Jesus demands that we stop judging people … and stop judging ourselves. Following the law to fit into our culture is not what is asked of us. Striving for perfection is not our life's goal.

Instead, Jesus challenges us to love with our broken, imperfect hearts. We are asked to dive into the muddy waters of life to bring Christ's loving presence, compassion, dignity, and hope to all those we meet.

—Dennis Kempf

Saturday of the Second Week of Advent
Fest of Our Lady of Guadalupe
December 12, 2026

Zechariah 2:14-17 Judith 13:18bcde, 19 Luke 1:26-38

On December 9, 1531, an indigenous Aztec named Juan Diego was walking by Tepeyac Hill in Tenochtitlan when he heard music and saw a glowing vision of a young woman. The woman, speaking in Nahuatl and wearing a traditional indigenous pregnancy gown, revealed herself as the Mother of the true God. This was quite significant because the Aztecs worshipped female deities who governed all major aspects of life, nature, creation, fertility, and death.

The young Mary asked Juan Diego to tell the local archbishop, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, to build a shrine on that exact spot in Tenochtitlan (the Aztec capital) now Mexico City. However, when Juan Diego delivered the message, the archbishop did not believe him and asked for a supernatural sign to prove the lady's identity.

On December 12, Mary told Juan Diego to climb to the top of Tepeyac Hill and gather flowers, quite an odd request being wintertime. The flowers weren't just any flowers but an abundance of fresh, Castilian roses, native to Spain, coincidentally the archbishop's homeland!

When Diego opened his tilma before the archbishop the roses tumbled out, and an extraordinary, colorful image of Mary had miraculously imprinted itself onto the rough cactus-fiber fabric. The miracle convinced the archbishop to build the shrine. And, interestingly, the image incorporated rich Indigenous symbolism that deeply resonated with the Aztec people, thereby inspiring millions to embrace Christianity.

I love learning of this miracle played out on the sidelines of Spain's colonial conquest of Mexico, which occurred only a decade earlier by the armies of Hernán Cortes. All the might of imperialist Spain violently and mercilessly razing Tenochtitlan was contrasted with this simple act of an obedient peasant bringing his plain tilma filled with flowers to the archbishop.

Today's first reading from Zechariah is jubilant and precise in honoring this holy event:

"Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! See, I am coming to dwell among you, says the Lord.

Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, and they shall be God's people, and God will dwell among you, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you."

—Cathy Hartrich

Third Sunday of Advent – Gaudete Sunday
December 13, 2026

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11 Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 John 1:6-8, 19-28



In the Old Testament Isaiah informs us the Sovereign Lord has filled him with his spirit and sent him to bring good news to the poor, proclaiming that the Lord will save his people and defeat their enemies. Just as seeds sprout and grow, the Sovereign Lord will save his people.

In Thessalonians, were told to be joyful always and to pray at all times because this is what God wants from us. And may the God who gives us peace make us holy in every way and keep our whole being and spirit free from every fault. Christ will do it because he is faithful.

God sent John, his messenger, to tell the people about the light so that all should hear the message and believe. His message was that he was the voice of someone shouting in the desert and to make a straight path for the Lord to travel. John assured the Pharisees he was not the Messiah, was not Elijah nor the prophet, but rather he spoke for someone coming after him whose sandals he was not worthy to untie.

In Luke's gospel Mary praises the Lord and her soul is glad because God, her Savior, has done great things for her. He shows mercy to those who honor him and has kept the promise he made to our ancestors to come to the help of his servant, Israel.

—William E. Blow

Monday of the Third Week of Advent
Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church
December 14, 2026

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a Psalm 25:4-5ab, 6 and 7bc, 8-9 Matthew 21:23-27

After selecting these readings (without reading them ahead of time) I felt dread, because I didn't have the foggiest idea of how to approach this. But I kept praying for insight and some direction and here's where it led me.

Authority is a hard pill to swallow sometimes. We all have had to follow authority at some time in our lives. We hope that those in authority have our best interests at heart, but they don't always. In our current political climate, it is heartbreaking that only those who are wealthy and powerful are truly safe.

Growing up, I challenged and questioned my parents all the time, but knew when I had to "do what they said" even if I questioned why. When I worked in the business world, I followed my bosses' directions, even when I didn't think they were right. I wasn't that person who outwardly challenged authority. It wasn't until I came to St. Cronan that I began to see another way. But given who I was, I still didn't question the way that others might. I felt that God was calling me to speak out more with my actions and less with my words. I have always felt more comfortable being in the background helping others, than being present at protests. I have found my voice serving the poor and unhoused.

My hope is in those who stand up and make their voices heard, those who take action to make a difference, and those who know a truth from a lie when they hear it!

—Kathy Hunn



Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent
December 15, 2026

Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13 Psalm 34 Matthew 21: 28-32

The gospel for today, which is but a five-verse parable found only in Matthew, is one of those in which I find the most hope in this entire liturgical cycle. It's the one where the father with two sons tells each one separately to "go work in my vineyard today." The first says, almost before he hears the whole request, and perhaps angrily, that he will not go, but later rethinks his response and goes. The second gives the expected response, the one that saves his reputation, maintains his religious position, and fosters his pedigree as the owner's son, but is not accompanied by actions which match it: "Of course, Sir, I will go". We don't know if this is what he originally intended to do, or whether some whim attracted him away from his intentions, but we know that he did not go. We don't know whether his father discovered that his request was not met when he checked on the vineyard later in the day or whether he discovered the deception at all. We can probably guess that correctly, but we are only asked by Jesus which son obeyed his father, because that is the point Jesus is going to make, and the answer is obvious.

We also know that the first son, the people listening to Jesus tell this story, and we who read it, will discover what a joyful thing it is that we have a God of second chances. We have a God who allows us to repent (the root means "turn around") our regretted actions and make another choice, a God for whom a bad decision need not be a permanent one or establish our course. The first son learned the profoundly valuable lesson of what it means to be redeemed, to be found by a God of start-overs and compassion and carried home. So can we!

—Sister Chabanel Mathison, O.S.U.

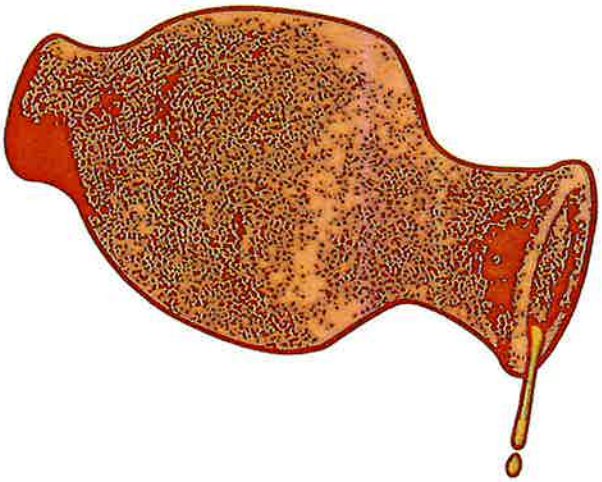


Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent
December 16, 2026

Isaiah 45:6c-8, 18,21c-25 Psalm 85:9ab, 10, 11-12, 13-14 Luke 7: 18b-23

A Pilgrimage of Hope: I am anointed

What if God is asking me not only to hope for a better world,
but to help make it possible?



As I reflect on these readings, I am reminded that Advent is not simply about waiting for Christ to come; it is about allowing Christ to change the way I live. Isaiah speaks of justice springing forth like new life, and the Psalm offers a beautiful vision of a world where kindness and truth meet, and justice and peace embrace. These are not just beautiful words to admire. They are a vision of the world God desires and an invitation to help bring that vision to life.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist asks Jesus if He is the one they have been waiting for. Jesus answers not with a title, but with signs of hope: the blind see, the suffering are healed, and the poor receive good news.

Where is God inviting me to bring hope? Whose burden can I help lighten? What is one step I can take to become a living sign of Christ's love? I want my faith to be visible not only in what I pray, but also in how I treat others.

Perhaps the most important part of our pilgrimage of hope is realizing that we do not walk alone. God calls each of us, and together we can become a community where kindness is practiced, justice is pursued, and no one is forgotten.

Amen

— Sr. Saima Kiran, SL

Thursday of the Third Week of Advent
December 17, 2026

Genesis 49:2, 8-10 Psalm 72:1-2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 17 Matthew 1:1-17

During Advent, I often reflect on the concept of traditions, how they are passed down through families and communities and continued long past the death of their originators. The Gospel today recalls fourteen generations between Abraham and Jesus. It is difficult for me to even begin to think about the traditions of my family members fourteen generations ago and how there could be some spark of their traditions in my heart that inspires how I go about my own life. Looking at this long line of names, I find myself wondering about all of their interpersonal relationships and how their traditions shifted and changed over time, especially when faced with hard times.

Change has always been hard for me. I love a routine and knowing what to expect each day. I find myself becoming dysregulated when faced with unexpected traffic or needing to change my carefully crafted plans. It can become particularly difficult when it comes to making adjustments to traditions, even if that change has the potential to bring positivity to my life and the lives of others.

I find that I am being encouraged to lean into the small changes in my life more and more these days, especially when considering how I can adjust my life to help others. I think of today's Responsorial Psalm as a call to action to make small changes in our traditions to be a part of creating a just and peaceful world. When I consider how I can adjust my actions to be the hands of God for others, it helps me to push through my discomfort.

Our world is moving and changing so incredibly quickly that, of course, our traditions will change with it. I feel it is our job now to approach these challenges and changes with a strong mind and an empathetic heart to bring forth justice and peace, especially when tensions feel high. I imagine how some individuals in "traditional red states" may have felt, being the first in their line to break with their family's tradition to vote for a different political candidate or a ballot measure that their family wasn't a huge fan of. I consider the bravery of middle and high school students who challenge authority, going against expectations and traditions to bring positive changes to their community. In my life, I look to these changes in tradition, brought forth by brave individuals, and look to empower myself to consider my traditions, the meanings behind them, and how I might lean into small adjustments to those traditions that will help bring a beautiful tomorrow to the world.

—Emily Donald

Friday of the Third Week of Advent
December 18, 2026

Jeremiah 23:5-8 Psalm 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19 Matthew 1:18-25

In his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, the writer C. S. Lewis tells of his early encounters with a feeling he calls *joy*. He describes *joy* as a longing—an intense ache for something or someplace beyond earthly comprehension. Even though joy is unfulfilled longing, it is still sweeter to Lewis than any other feeling because it's evidence of something desirable beyond comprehension, beyond our limited earthly experience. The longing is for something of inexpressible beauty yet is also deeply personal and relational. It's a feeling that promises both transcendence and a return to home. According to Lewis, joy's stab in our chests is heaven's call.

The passages today provide space to encounter Lewis's joy. Jeremiah prophesies of how the Israelites are promised to return from banishment to once again "live in their own land"—which we can understand as an allegory for the dwelling place of God.

God is with us. Christ journeys with us, leading us out of banishment, as we follow the longing of joy, heaven's call beckoning our hearts homeward to live in our "own land."

—Peter Forbes



Saturday of the Third Week of Advent
December 19, 2025

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a Psalm 71:3-4a, 5-6ab, 16-17 Luke 1:5-25

It is almost audacious, these days, to have a child.

We are all aware of the struggle, the pain, the suffering of humanity in the year 2026. The globe is warming, war rages in all hemispheres. Hatred, seemingly against the natural arc of time, is on the rise in our nation and abroad. Many couples of my generation, the young millennials, talk openly about the morality of bringing children into a world where there is so much suffering and struggle.

My wife, Lisa, and I always knew we would have kids. We have the blessing of a strong village. We have our families and friends, and good education and jobs. It was not hard to make the decision to have and raise kids.

But what a privilege it is to be able to discern whether you want to raise children! Not all are so blessed to be able to conceive and thus debate their decisions. The readings today tell of two such couples who, above all else, wished to bring a child into the world. It is only the amazing divine interference that allowed them to start a family.

This is the Advent season. The time of year when we anticipate the Incarnation, the birth of Christ. God faced the same decision so many couples face – dare I bring a child into a world so full of strife? I don't pretend to know God's mind, but I believe it was an easy choice. Humanity, with all its flaws, is worth betting on. God sent Jesus to us to prove that point. Jesus came to us fully human, to live, suffer, laugh, and love like everybody else. It is foundational to our salvation that God and Jesus chose to become human. What a story of hope!

I pray in gratitude for my family each day, and I pray for all who so recklessly hope that they can start a family of their own. It is the surest sign that we trust in God and believe in humanity.

Audacious indeed.

—James Fister

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2026

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29
Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38



"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38a)

In the Bible there are a number of women who conceived and gave birth in a way that is outside of the human norms. Some have asked God for the gift of children, others have been announced by a messenger or God directly. Sarah, being barren, gave birth to Isaac . Then Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, also barren, gave birth to Esau and Jacob. Rachel, Jacob's wife, was also barren, until God blessed her with a child. After praying to God, Hannah conceived and gave birth to Samuel. The angel of the Lord announced to Manoah's wife that she was going to have a son, Samson. And the angel announced to Zechariah that his wife, who was aged and barren would soon give birth to a son. All of these women hoped for and were thankful for their pregnancies. The most noted pregnancy in the bible, however, was that of a young girl who never asked for or wanted to be pregnant. She was asked by God to bear a child, the Messiah. Of course, this is Mary.

But what would have happened if Mary had said "No" to God's request to bear his son? Would God have moved on to another young woman who was in his favor? Was there another woman born without sin? Would it have taken a day or two, a month, year or even a thousand years? Would our world be completely different than it is today? Would Christianity be something different?

A "No" from Mary was never in the cards. I believe that God knew that this would all go according to his plan…after all, Mary was immaculately conceived, born without stain, in God's favor. Mary saw herself as a servant, specifically a servant of the Lord, and servants are not often able to deny their superiors anything.
So Mary gave her "Yes" to God, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." She submitted herself to God and to all humankind.
As Christmas nears, let's remember Mary's unconditional service.

—Mary Ward

Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent
December 21, 2026

Song of Songs 2:8-14 Psalm 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21 Luke 1:39-45

Let me see you,
Let me hear your voice,
For your voice is sweet,
And you are lovely.

For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears,
The infant in my womb leaped for joy.

The body knows. Our bodies feel, carry, remember, and communicate. Our bodies react instinctively, teaching us survival and pleasure, pain and joy, fear and trust. Knowledge comes to us through the body as we experience the world around us. The human body is the sacred vessel of the divine: the body of Mary, the incarnate body of Jesus, and the miraculous existence of each of our unique bodies, all made in God's image.

How strange that our Church has such a taxing history of disparaging the body or relegating it to the realm of sin. We have uplifted "purity" at the expense of joy and connection, particularly at the expense of women and the queer community. We have diminished the spiritual life to overblown asceticism, and peddled a rigid, controlling morality. Our leaders have perpetrated abuse and protected abusers. We are plagued by "isms" and phobias. We have not allowed the body to sing.

And yet! Our faith is incarnate. We believe in the Word made flesh through the body of a woman. We listen to the Song of Songs and find ourselves singing a new song: *We are beloved and beautiful!* God rejoices over us in gladness and renews us in love, singing joyfully as one sings at festivals. We feel the blessed leap of the Holy Spirit in that creative wisdom center within each of us that marks our common source and singular song.



Our bodies - whatever they look like and however we inhabit them - are *good*, and trustworthy. We are bearers of God's image, meant to be held with tenderness, celebrated, and shared in love.

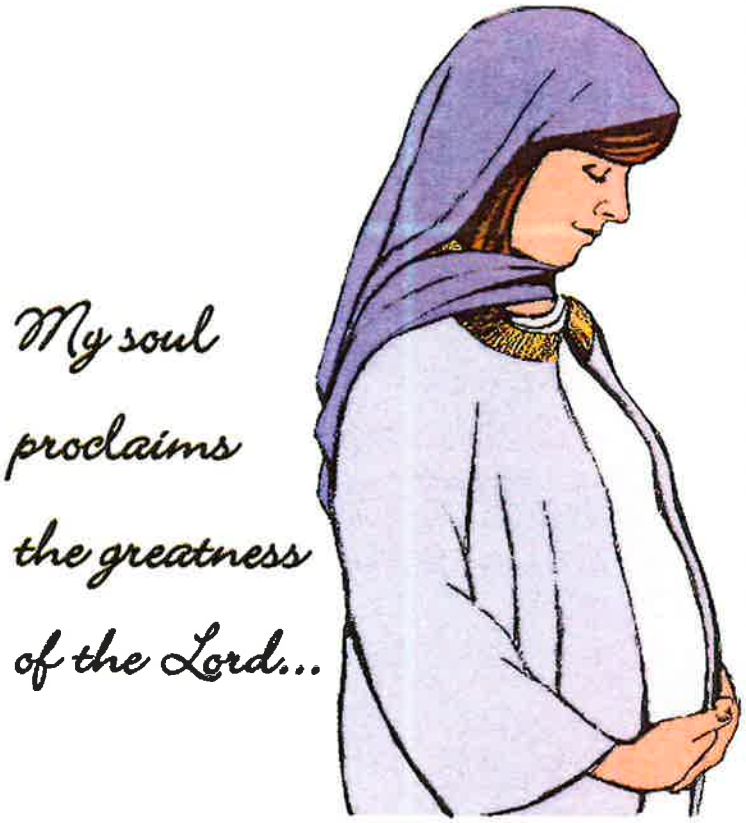
—Abbey Schumacher

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent
December 22, 2026

1 Samuel 1: 24-28 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8abcd Luke 1:46-56

In the Gospel, the famous Magnificat, Mary says to Elizabeth, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord." She rejoices in God, her savior. Those 2 lines, either read or sung, never fail to touch my heart. I think it's Mary's humility that stands out. Here she is, a young gal, unmarried, a nobody, who has found out she's pregnant — and the first words she speaks are to proclaim God's greatness. We don't know or hear her worrying…her anxiety, her what if's, her catastrophizing, which would be understandable… and very human. No! Because it is her soul that is speaking, loud and clear. The focus now, in this holy moment, is not on her, but on what God has chosen to do in her life, in the life of the world, in humanity. And then, she goes further and lists one by one, all the ways God's mercy undergirds God's saving actions in our human lives. "From generation to generation."

So, the question lately has been for me— when do I magnify God in my life? Magnify, in this passage, means to have a "fear" of the Lord, to have the ability to know, at least in our limited human comprehension, the true nature of God. As the young people would say, God's awesomeness. As I recovered from major surgery in August and September, I received God's mercy in many ways that I am still perceiving. Prior to the surgeries, I had a lot of fear / trepidation about how I was going to survive weeks without almost any physical movement — and, no pool, no gym, no bathing to relieve the pain my fibromyalgia usually exacerbates. Somehow, after the surgery, the anxiety that I expected to accompany me was lifted — onto the willing shoulders of those God placed in my life. My friends, family, and church community held me up through their cards, texts, meals, visits, rides to the doctor, grocery shopping, and dog walking. And the Holy Spirit quieted my soul. I spent many hours sitting on my front porch, something I have seldom done, observing the life of the neighborhood, even making new friends. I felt incredibly blessed and to this day will never forget the unexpected graces of the last 2 months. It just goes to show, as it says in Ephesians, (my paraphrase) "Glory be to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask for or imagine."



—Martha Stegmaier

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent
December 23, 2026

Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24 Psalm 25:4-5ab, 8-9, 10 and 14 Luke 1:57-66

The birth of Christ is near but first we are reminded of the birth of the one who was sent before Him to prepare us, John the Baptist. Elizabeth had waited many years and perhaps even given up the hope of being a mother. Elizabeth knew that this birth was divine provenance and that this child would have a significant role in the preparation for the birth of Christ.

The reading tells us that her child, John, was sent to turn the hearts of fathers and children. He would guide the humble to justice and teach the humble God's ways. This sounds like quite a daunting task for Elizabeth to embrace yet she accepts her role and the role of her soon-to-be-born child without question.

We are asked to prepare for the soon to come birth of Jesus with much less burden and yet it is a big ask. Perhaps the lesson that Elizabeth willingly accepted can assist each of us in taking the time and energy to be truly prepared for this Christmas.

The time is near. Prepare to rejoice.

—Carolyn Coyne



Thursday of the Fourth Week of Advent
December 24, 2026

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29 Luke 1:67-79

What is a pilgrimage? A journey, usually long and arduous, that consumes time and resources. A sign of devotion. A desire to move closer in alignment with the Divine. These readings are a reminder of the long spiritual journey that Biblical Israelites and Jewish people in the first century undertook, waiting for a savior. The readings remind us that God always fulfills their promises. God does not abandon. Saying yes to service (like David and Zechariah) means saying yes to God's plan for your life. Saying yes to trusting God, allows you not only to serve God but to serve those around you.

—Charlie Farrell



The Nativity of the Lord
December 25, 2026

Christmas Eve Matthew 1:1-25
Midnight Mass Luke 2:1-14
Mass at Dawn Luke 2:15-20
Mass during the Day John 1:1-18

Christmas is a feast that overflows liturgically from the Mass of the Vigil to Midnight Mass, to Masses at Dawn and during the Day. The feast is about God being with us—Emmanuel. This is a theme that also flows through scripture, both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures begin and end with this promise from God, "I am with you." And it is found numerous times throughout the Bible.

For the Vigil, Matthew presents us with the genealogy of Jesus, which lists, not his ancestry, but the unfolding of God's actions in salvation history. It speaks of the continuity of God's plan and how God is even revealed in the irregularities of life. The narrative ends with the proclamation, "They shall name him Emmanuel." *(continued)*





Thank you to all who submitted reflections for our Advent booklet this year.

At midnight, Luke assures us not to be afraid, a savior is born. This passage follows annunciation accounts which parallel stories from ancient times about the hero's birth. In this setting, we come to know that something exceptional is happening with this birth. We are told by angels, "Do not be afraid," as they announce this remarkable birth to shepherds. The Good News is told by God's messengers to those on the religious margins. The contrast is one of glory and in lowliness. Grandeur and humility. God is with us.

Luke's Gospel continues with the infancy narrative at the Mass of Dawn. The shepherds meet Jesus, the savior, Messiah and Lord as spoken of by the angels. They meet him as the "infant lying in the manger." They become the announcers of the good news, the message of peace given to them by the angels. A peace beyond the Pax Romana that characterizes their everyday lives.

The Mass during the Day assures us that God is with us from the beginning. It is written as a poem that incorporates images from Genesis and Wisdom literature to let us know that God has always been with us. From the beginning of time, before time and in time. "The Word became flesh" and pitched his tent among us. Becoming truly one of us in concrete, cosmic and mystical ways.

—Marge O'Gorman, FSM



We Invite You to Attend Our Christmas Services



Christmas Eve:

Carols begin at 8:30pm

Mass begins at 9pm

Christmas Day:

Masses at 8am and 10am

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