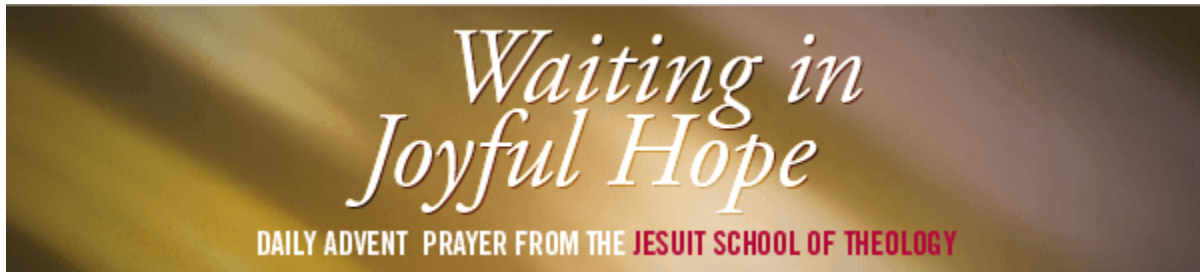


## Welcome Letter from the Dean



Dear *Waiting in Joyful Hope* Subscribers,

**Welcome to *Waiting in Joyful Hope*! This is the Jesuit School of Theology's online daily prayer and retreat experience for Advent.**

In each of the Advent days to follow, you will receive an email with the text of the Gospel reading of that day together with a reflection on it. The reflections are written by the students, faculty, staff, board members, and alumni of the Jesuit School of Theology or other members of the Santa Clara University community. May these beautiful reflections deepen your experience of Advent and Christmas.

Consider these daily emails as an invitation to a retreat experience. Find some quiet in your day to review the readings and the accompanying reflection. Let the reflection inspire your own praying and thinking. Ultimately, Advent is a time to grow in our knowledge of God's love for us in Christ and in our response to this love in our daily choices.

At JST, we pay attention to the situation of our world and our communities as we study and minister to others. If the Spirit moves you, bring the very ordinary routines of daily life into your own prayerful reflections by asking yourself, *What is God trying to teach me at this moment?*

We take this path through Advent in supportive companionship. First of all, the Lord walks with each of us, relating to us uniquely and offering us divine friendship. Moreover, we make this retreat together, thousands of people in the wider Santa Clara community united virtually through a common desire to grow in faith, hope, and love. You might wish to reach out to one or more friends to share your experiences and invite them to join you on this journey ([share this link](#)). Or, you might journal about what you are experiencing and learning.

St. Ignatius of Loyola taught that generosity is the most important spiritual disposition for our prayer life. Generosity is a largeness of heart that is open to God's creativity in our lives. Signing up for this online retreat underscores the generosity of spirit and time that you now offer to God and to those on this pilgrim journey with us. God's abundant blessings for the pilgrimage ahead!

In our Lord,

Joseph G. Mueller, S.J.

Dean

Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

## **First Sunday of Advent - Nov 28**

Gospel: **Lk 21:25-28, 34-36**

Jesus said to his disciples:

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars,  
and on earth nations will be in dismay,  
perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

People will die of fright  
in anticipation of what is coming upon the world,  
for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man  
coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

But when these signs begin to happen,  
stand erect and raise your heads  
because your redemption is at hand.

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy  
from carousing and drunkenness  
and the anxieties of daily life,  
and that day catch you by surprise like a trap.

For that day will assault everyone  
who lives on the face of the earth.

Be vigilant at all times  
and pray that you have the strength  
to escape the tribulations that are imminent  
and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Reflection:

Today’s Gospel starts us off in Advent with a bang! Christ’s arrival in glory will shake the whole world, bringing dismay to the nations. How will we find the strength to lift our heads at that hour in expectation that our salvation will come in the midst of such a mess? Jesus tells us to stay alert by praying that God keep us from collapsing in the general destruction of this unjust and damaged world and that the Lord allow us to stand erect with the Son of God, who puts an end to a universe built on sin and suffering. Our alert prayer needs to come from a desire to join in the risen Jesus’ work of renewing the whole world system, turning it into a never-ending kingdom of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace. But we find ourselves instead addicted to a sleepy drunkenness of soul, because we daily drink up cares and concerns that lock us into maintenance of a

landscape of habits, customs, and institutions seemingly as natural and strong as the mountains and the sea round about us. This landscape forms us into people and societies tragically limited in our willingness to respect and to love each other. Our Lord is promising us that these habits, customs, and institutions will be shaken to their roots and wrecked. God gives us Advent, then, to dry us out, to rouse us from our hung-over torpor, so we can pray with mental clarity for the renewal that we and our world need. When hitting bottom with our wounded world finally wakes us up, we can then lift our heads to see the Son of Man holding out his hand, beckoning us to share in his reconstruction of our persons and of the whole of creation. Is today not the day to reach for Christ's outstretched hand?

Prayer:

God of love, rouse us from our sleep during this season of Advent so that in the midst of all the events that shake our world, we might raise our heads and see your salvation near at hand.

*Joe Mueller, S.J., is dean of the Jesuit School of Theology.*

## Monday of the First Week of Advent - Nov 29

### Gospel: **Mt 8:5-11**

When Jesus entered Capernaum,  
a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying,  
“Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.”  
He said to him, “I will come and cure him.”  
The centurion said in reply,  
“Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof;  
only say the word and my servant will be healed.  
For I too am a man subject to authority,  
with soldiers subject to me.  
And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes;  
and to another, ‘Come here,’ and he comes;  
and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”  
When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him,  
“Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.  
I say to you, many will come from the east and the west,  
and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob  
at the banquet in the Kingdom of heaven.”

### Reflection:

In my encounters with the Nigerian Army, I learned that the life of soldiers and military officers revolve around orders. When a senior ranking officer orders a thing, their subordinates must obey. There is *no option* before a command, soldiers simply *obey the last order*. Faith for the military lies in absolute obedience. The centurion in today’s Gospel reminds me of this pattern of living. He describes the sufferings of his servant and expects Jesus to just ‘say the word.’ We do not know of an earlier encounter between himself and Jesus. Perhaps, after listening to hearsay about Jesus, this centurion comes to acknowledge Jesus’ supreme power over sicknesses and believes that just a word from this Nazarene is enough to restore his servant’s well-being. In response, Jesus exclaims, “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.” God is not moved by our eloquent description of suffering, but by our faith in God’s omnipotence.

In our world today, lots of sicknesses abound. Covid is not yet history. We visit the hospital for body check-ups, diagnosis, treatment, and healing to help us live healthily and perhaps even live longer. But we need health insurance and maybe an appointment to access such services. However, there is a doctor that gives holistic healing, a healing that impacts our body and soul. Healing that leads us to eternal life. He is Dr. Jesus Christ. Unlike the other services you need to pay for, God’s healing comes to us free of charge. No payment! No Insurance! Just faith! God cares about us so much that God deigns to come to us during this period of Advent. As we await God in prayers, may we be open to

and accept the graces that God presents to us by having faith and believing in God to grant all-around healing.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, please strengthen our faith in you. Help us to see you more in the different stages and challenges of life, so that we may partake of your divine healing, graces, and blessings. Amen.

*Fortunatus Nnadi is a lay student in the first year of the Master of Divinity program at JST.*

## Feast of Saint Andrew, Apostle - Nov 30

### Gospel: **Mt 4:18-22**

As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

### Reflection:

Here we are on the Feast of St. Andrew, who, along with his brother, Peter, is featured in today's Gospel. There they are, going about their work, and along comes Jesus and invites them to follow Him. And WHAM! They drop everything and immediately follow Him, as do James and John! This is the classic picture of discipleship.

But maybe discipleship is not quite so sudden. The *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, for example, suggests that this passage likely summarizes the action of a longer time period: "in reality, there may have been some chance for a psychological growth in attraction." (Compare this story to John's version of Andrew's more gradual calling in John 1:35-51, <https://bible.oremus.org/>.)

Well, that's a comfort, because, for most of us, discipleship involves ongoing choices and growing clarity. Among the many voices coming at us, how do we know which is the call of Jesus? And which of the alternatives open to us is the one that will render us His true followers? Certainly, Ignatian practices, such as the examen, discernment and spiritual direction, can be of great help as we come to greater understanding of what *our* call to discipleship will entail. Yet one thing is clear: discipleship will invite us out of our comfort zones. For the disciples, their families and their trade became relativized. And then there is poor Zebedee standing dumbfounded on the shore, wondering what happened to his sons!

For us today, then, what practices might we engage to help us hear the call of Jesus in the nitty-gritty of our lives? And, once we hear that call, how generously do we respond?

### Prayer:

Gracious God, as we enter this Advent season, give us the grace to hear the call of Jesus in the midst of our busy, holiday-oriented lives. And, even more, we ask for the grace to generously respond when we hear that call.

*Bruce Lescher is Senior Lecturer Emeritus at SCU's Jesuit School of Theology.*



## Wednesday of the First Week of Advent - Dec 1

Gospel: **Mt 15:29-37**

At that time:

Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee,  
went up on the mountain, and sat down there.  
Great crowds came to him,  
having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute,  
and many others.  
They placed them at his feet, and he cured them.  
The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking,  
the deformed made whole,  
the lame walking,  
and the blind able to see,  
and they glorified the God of Israel.

Jesus summoned his disciples and said,  
“My heart is moved with pity for the crowd,  
for they have been with me now for three days  
and have nothing to eat.  
I do not want to send them away hungry,  
for fear they may collapse on the way.”  
The disciples said to him,  
“Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place  
to satisfy such a crowd?”  
Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?”  
“Seven,” they replied, “and a few fish.”  
He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground.  
Then he took the seven loaves and the fish,  
gave thanks, broke the loaves,  
and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds.  
They all ate and were satisfied.  
They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full.

Reflection:

Today’s Gospel reading brings to my mind and heart, Paul Simon’s poignant 1970 song, “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” and St. Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogues*, where God tells her to “look at the bridge of my only begotten Son.”

St. Catherine was admired by St. Ignatius for her gifts of “finding God in all things,” and mystic, imaginative spirituality. Like the ancient Hebrews and Jesus, they both use ordinary events and images from life to express spiritual truths.

The bridge, made of and by God Himself, is also a roadway that Jesus helps us across, if we walk with him.

Jesus who stoops from Heaven and lays Himself down, is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

Jesus is the Bridge, the Road, the Way, over troubled waters, through dark valleys, up hills and mountains.

Jesus is our Bridge in today’s uncertain, distressing, wearying times, with so much suffering.

Jesus often goes up to the mountains. This time, while seated, he invited the people to approach him, reached down, out to them, creating a bridge between Heaven and Earth. He healed, fed, comforted, offered blessings of compassion, mercy, joy and love to the people, gave them hope beyond their dreams.

Then Jesus fed the crowd. He *gave thanks* before breaking the loaves and fishes, a preview of what is to come: the Eucharist, and later, the Messianic Banquet, where “God will wipe away the tears from all faces.”

Jesus gave us the Eucharist as a Bridge between Heaven and Earth: a bridge made up of the Body of Christ, which includes all of us, broken, imperfect as we are, in our humanity, in union with him, fully divine, fully human.

When our broken parts of this bridge are healed, God’s Love flows in and through us more fully to others.

Prayer:

Jesus, our Bridge, we are suffering in a global pandemic. I feel our brokenness and my own, acutely. I trust in you to help me heal my brokenness, so my Christ Light of Love shines bright! You are who I wait for, my hope, comfort, joy and peace. Maranatha!

*Hermit Angela (Angie) Del Greco, OblSB, received an M-Div from JSTB (2004). She is a canonical hermit in the Diocese of St. Cloud, MN (canon 603, Eremitic Life outside of the Religious Institutes) and Benedictine Oblate affiliated with Saint John’s Abbey. She lives a life of prayer and solitude.*

## Thursday of the First Week of Advent - Dec 2

Gospel: **Mt 7:21, 24-27**

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’  
will enter the Kingdom of heaven,  
but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them  
will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

The rain fell, the floods came,  
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.

But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.

And everyone who listens to these words of mine  
but does not act on them

will be like a fool who built his house on sand.

The rain fell, the floods came,  
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.

And it collapsed and was completely ruined.”

Reflection:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” Upon first listen, Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel haunt me, as I call upon God by name several times throughout the day. ‘Lord, help me get through this difficult meeting.’ ‘Holy Spirit, where are you leading me next?’ ‘Jesus, thank you for my friendship with that person, he/she is so special to me.’

Are my invocations of the Lord’s name in vain? I don’t think so. Today’s Gospel seems to be a reminder that following Jesus- discipleship- is less about pious platitudes and more about concrete action. Matthew places this passage at the end of the lengthy Sermon on the Mount, which contains several recommendations about how we are to live in holiness. Jesus’ recommendations are very practical: how to fast, how to pray, how to give alms, how to treat your enemies, and more.

Unfortunately for Matthew’s Jewish-Christian audience, while these recommendations were concrete, their houses were not. Heavy winds and rains would have been disastrous for the dried clay that was used for buildings in the Judean desert. Surviving the seasonal wear-and-tear of the elements would require something far sturdier: rock.

For most of us Christians who earnestly desire to follow Jesus and to do God’s will, our lives too have some wear-and-tear. Some face loneliness and isolation, which has been magnified in this pandemic. Others are living paycheck to paycheck, while the bills pile

up. Still others may be facing challenging family situations, with someone near who can be difficult to love.

Whatever force seems to be blowing and beating upon us these days, we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus is our rock, the foundation of our faith. He knows how hard life can be: he lived it. And yet, he boldly insists on calling us to holiness. This call is certainly not easy, but Jesus reminds us that it is ultimately worth it.

What does doing God's will entail, concretely, for me today? When we call upon the Lord's name, may we remember to ask for the graces we need to live out this day as God's disciples.

Prayer:

Lord, you search me and you know me. You know well the winds, the rains, and the floods that I face each day. And still you call me to follow in the footsteps of your beloved Son. Send forth your Spirit this day to shower me with graces, that I may help you to renew the face of your beautiful Earth.

*Dan Dixon, S.J. is a Jesuit scholastic and second-year Master of Divinity student at JST.*

## **Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier, Priest - Dec 3**

Gospel: **Mt 9:27-31**

As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying out,  
“Son of David, have pity on us!”  
When he entered the house,  
the blind men approached him and Jesus said to them,  
“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.  
Jesus warned them sternly,  
“See that no one knows about this.”  
But they went out and spread word of him through all that land.

Reflection:

In this gospel, Jesus highlights the blind men’s goodness. He enters their house and gazes at them as they beg for “mercy.” He asks them a question that, at first glance, might seem harsh. After all, he is Jesus; why waste time with the difficult questions of asking them about their faith before healing them? I don’t see this as Jesus the interrogator but rather the Jesus that always points us back to our inherent wholeness. Once he does, freedom. He does not then say to them; I saved you. He says, in effect, your goodness did. “According to your faith let it be done.” He doesn’t stop there, but like a great and humble friend, he deflects. “See that no one knows of this.” Again, pointing them back to themselves to their grace. Jesus is the perfect mirror that helps us see ourselves as we are, perfect. Jesus always points us back to ourselves to our goodness and the freedom in our own hearts.

Prayer:

Jesus, may I see myself today as you do. Perfect in every way. No matter what.

*Peter Schafer is a second-year lay M-Div student at the Jesuit School of Theology and is currently engaged in his ministerial placement at Homeboy Industries.*

## Saturday of the First Week of Advent - Dec 4

Gospel: **Mt 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6-8**

Jesus went around to all the towns and villages,  
teaching in their synagogues,  
proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom,  
and curing every disease and illness.

At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them  
because they were troubled and abandoned,  
like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples,  
“The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few;  
so ask the master of the harvest  
to send out laborers for his harvest.”

Then he summoned his Twelve disciples  
and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out  
and to cure every disease and every illness.

Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus,  
“Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.  
As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.’  
Cure the sick, raise the dead,  
cleanse lepers, drive out demons.  
Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.”

Reflection:

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.” Imagine being a follower of Jesus going from town to town, village to village, and in each place, more and more people arrive seeking help. They are in need of healing, not just from physical illness but also the psychological healing of being “harassed and helpless.” As a disciple I might feel all sorts of conflicting emotions around this experience. Maybe overwhelmed by the numbers. Maybe helpless at my own finite ability to help so many people. Maybe I notice a few people who I can talk to and help. And turning to Jesus I notice the way he looks at the approaching crowd and the emotions his eyes express. Is it sadness? Hope? Commitment? Something else?

Some people who have been healed choose to follow Jesus in his journey. Others continue their daily life, but with gratitude for the way they have been renewed by this man from Nazareth.

During this time of Advent we join the disciples with Jesus. We are invited to consider the ways in which we have seen the kingdom of God becoming present in our lives - the ways in which we have experienced healing, mercy, and love in our lives. Jesus invites us all to announce the coming of the kingdom by continuing his mission, by being instruments of healing, mercy and love to others.

Prayer:

Jesus, as you look on me and my community with compassion and share with us your healing love, please also grant each one of us the grace to preach in word and action your Good News into the world.

*Mike Tedone, SJ, is a member of the US West Province of the Society of Jesus and a first year MDiv student at JST.*

## Second Sunday of Advent - Dec 5

Gospel: **Lk 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,  
when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,  
and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee,  
and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region  
of Ituraea and Trachonitis,  
and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,  
during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,  
the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.  
John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan,  
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,  
as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight his paths.

Every valley shall be filled

and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

The winding roads shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth,

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Reflection:

In reflecting on today’s gospel, two images came to my mind. The first is that of Lombard Street, near Fishermen's Wharf in San Francisco, billed as the crookedest street in the world. The other is that of Interstate 5 in California’s San Joaquin Valley which, for many people, is the straightest street in the world. Having driven on both roads, I find it much easier to get from one point to another on I-5 than on Lombard Street.

The paths of our lives are similar. Too often, there are obstructions in those paths that hinder us from being more loving, more giving, more open, more like Christ. Instead of smoothing and straightening these paths, we build curves into our highways, adding potholes and speedbumps, and get nowhere fast. These obstacles make it more difficult to get closer to God and one another, and for God to come to us. Thus, we unconsciously hinder God's righteousness from becoming more of a reality in our world. In one sense, we need more I-5’s in our spiritual lives, rather than being comfortable with Lombard Streets!



But how do we “clear a straight path” for the Lord today? What are the mountains and valleys of our lives that need to be evened out? I'm sure we can think of a few if we pause to try. As one example, some of us may be putting a hairpin turn in our spiritual lives by restricting quality time for reflection and prayer. Today's gospel reminds us that the word of God came to John the Baptist when he was in the desert, and perhaps we may need to find a spiritual desert space more often to attune ourselves better to God's word, perhaps through a daily Ignatian Examen!

Especially over the next three weeks of our Advent preparation for Christmas, let us respond to the invitation of John, to prepare a straight path for Christ as he, once again, tries to enter a world that needs to accept and share God's love so very much.

Prayer:

God of love and source of life, you guide us and meet us along the often-winding and rugged pathways of our lives. Strengthen us in our efforts to smooth those highways made rough by human weakness. Keep us alert to your guidance. Bring to perfection the good you have begun in us. And help us eagerly welcome the one whose day draws near: your Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

*Dennis C. Smolarski, S.J., SCU BS '69, M.Div., STM '79 teaches in SCU's Department of Mathematics and Computer Science*

## Monday of the Second Week of Advent - Dec 6

Gospel: **Lk 5:17-26**

One day as Jesus was teaching,  
Pharisees and teachers of the law,  
who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem,  
were sitting there,  
and the power of the Lord was with him for healing.  
And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed;  
they were trying to bring him in and set him in his presence.  
But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd,  
they went up on the roof  
and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles  
into the middle in front of Jesus.  
When Jesus saw their faith, he said,  
"As for you, your sins are forgiven."

Then the scribes and Pharisees began to ask themselves,  
"Who is this who speaks blasphemies?  
Who but God alone can forgive sins?"  
Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them in reply,  
"What are you thinking in your hearts?  
Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,'  
or to say, 'Rise and walk'?  
But that you may know  
that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—  
he said to the one who was paralyzed,  
"I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home."

He stood up immediately before them,  
picked up what he had been lying on,  
and went home, glorifying God.  
Then astonishment seized them all and they glorified God,  
and, struck with awe, they said,  
"We have seen incredible things today."

Reflection:

God's promises of release, safety and ease in today's readings washed over me as I savored them on this dark December day. The passage from Isaiah speaks of a future security when joy and gladness will replace the fear in our hearts. The psalm refrain assures us: "Our God will come to save us!" Then in Luke, we witness how Jesus healed the paralyzed man that very day - as soon as his friends lowered him through the roof.

Returning from the Covid separation since the summer, we keep reciting the litany of woes that cripple us: lost loved ones; health threats; ineffective governments; competing, even clashing social values; supply chain shortages; and our daily lives being completely refashioned. We are yoked by our own sins and shortcomings; we are held in bondage by the accumulation of our collective sins. The darkening days of early winter express our interior darkness where distress, anxiety and losses quench the deep gladness that God wants for our lives.

The readings challenge us to look to God for hope. I am awed by the relentlessness of friends who carry their lame companion onto the roof to get to Jesus. Then I notice how Jesus responds immediately. The reading portrays a Gospel-world, a beloved community, where our healing and joy are paramount. I remind myself that we are not powerless in the darkness that seems overwhelming in these times. We practice hope in dark times both by leaning on Jesus' healing touch and by working to heal one another. God wants our hearts to be joyful and our voices raised in delight. God's promised holy way in Isaiah becomes our way when we walk in justice and peace.

**Prayer:**

God of Hope and Healing, we depend upon your love always. Lift the yokes of our captivity whatever they may be. Give us joy to light our darkness. Lead us to heal one another as we place our trust in you. Amen

*Alison M. Benders serves as Vice President for Mission and Ministry at Santa Clara University.*

## Memorial of Saint Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church - Dec 7

### Gospel: **Mt 18:12-14**

Jesus said to his disciples:

“What is your opinion?

If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray,  
will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills  
and go in search of the stray?

And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it  
than over the ninety-nine that did not stray.

In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father  
that one of these little ones be lost.”

### Reflection:

*“... does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?”*

From my encounters with the shepherding community, it seldom happens that a sheep goes missing. Even if it does, the lost sheep is left for dead. Logically speaking, it is better to be happy with the ninety-nine sheep than to worry over the one who is lost with no hope of finding it... unless you are the missing sheep.

Imagine yourself getting lost in the wilderness, not knowing how far you have strayed, with no hope of getting back by yourself. As the day gives way to the darkness, you fear that the power of the night will devour you. You regret being lost and wish you were in the company of the shepherd who treated you kindly and nursed your bruise.

Lo and behold, the shepherd you strayed away from has come looking for you. He calls you by your name, and upon hearing his call, all your fear abates. There is comfort in his voice and relief in his touch as he lifts you and carries you home.

Oftentimes, under inexplicable circumstances, we get lost in the turmoil of our life. The feeling of loneliness creeps, and our confused mind gives way to fear. During this time, we ought to remind ourselves that we have a shepherd who is on the lookout for us. He will come searching for you no matter how far you have strayed. Call out to him, be still and listen to his voice, for he is coming; he is coming to save you. He comes, comes, ever comes.

### Prayer:

O Shepherd of my life, draw me close to you. Lead me on the path you have chosen for me; call out to me in the silence of my heart, for your voice is my comfort. When I get lost, come to me and rescue me for in you alone, I trust.

*Velenson is a Jesuit in formation and currently in the second year of MDiv program at JST.*

## **Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Dec 8**

Gospel: **Lk 1:26-38**

The angel Gabriel was sent from God  
to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,  
to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph,  
of the house of David,  
and the virgin's name was Mary.  
And coming to her, he said,  
"Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."  
But she was greatly troubled at what was said  
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.  
Then the angel said to her,  
"Do not be afraid, Mary,  
for you have found favor with God.  
Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,  
and you shall name him Jesus.  
He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,  
and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,  
and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever,  
and of his Kingdom there will be no end."  
But Mary said to the angel,  
"How can this be,  
since I have no relations with a man?"  
And the angel said to her in reply,  
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.  
Therefore the child to be born  
will be called holy, the Son of God.  
And behold, Elizabeth, your relative,  
has also conceived a son in her old age,  
and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;  
for nothing will be impossible for God."  
Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.  
May it be done to me according to your word."  
Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection:

"You see before you the Lord's servant."

Mary's words to the angel Gabriel conclude a dialogue that nearly defies comprehension. In the opening of the conversation, Mary is like us. The angel greets Mary with the invitation to rejoice because the Lord is with her, and says that Mary "has found God's

favor.” Instead of rejoicing, Mary is disturbed. Like Mary, we may be so surprised by the appearance of the supernatural that we miss the content of the greeting: the good news that the Lord is with us.

But as the dialogue goes on, the specialness of Mary is revealed. The angel speaks of wondrous things. A baby who will be the Son of the Most High, who will receive the throne of the ancestor David, who will rule over the House of Jacob, whose reign will last forever. Mary’s reply is to question how she will conceive such a son. And the angel’s answer is still too wondrous to comprehend — the angel tells Mary, “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.” This answer describes the transcendent, the impossible, the mysterious. Hearing these words, Mary must have had little rational idea of what the angel could mean. But Mary’s answer comes from deep within her. It is a statement of identity: “You see before you the Lord’s servant.”

In the feast of the Immaculate Conception, we contemplate God’s plan for Mary’s unique identity, an identity given to her from the time of her own conception. In all of our lives, God speaks to us of God’s nature. Sometimes the holy so exceed our expectations that we can hardly comprehend what we meet. In this advent season, let us not be afraid to respond to mystery by naming our own identities as children of God, blessed by baptism to enter into holiness.

Prayer:

“Make me your servant, God, let me participate in your holy reign.”

*Cecily Gray is a second-year Master of Divinity student at JST.*

## Thursday of the Second Week of Advent - Dec 9

### Gospel: Mt 11:11-15

Jesus said to the crowds:

“Amen, I say to you,  
among those born of women  
there has been none greater than John the Baptist;  
yet the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he.  
From the days of John the Baptist until now,  
the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence,  
and the violent are taking it by force.  
All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John.  
And if you are willing to accept it,  
he is Elijah, the one who is to come.  
Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

### Reflection:

Northern California has been living through what seems like an interminable drought. The earth is faded and cracked; the grasses have withered into expanses of dry kindling for the wildfires to ravage our land every season.

Today’s Gospel confronts us with the startling phrase, “the violent are taking (the Kingdom) by force.” Sometimes the Greek word *biazatai* can be translated as “suffering violence,” but sometimes it can be translated as “pressing forward,” as in, eagerly pressing forward in hope of the Kingdom.

During the fire season in 2020, there was one particularly alarming day in September when the smoke so obscured the sun that the day appeared as night. It was already 9:00 in the morning, and the world was bathed in inky darkness.

I remember driving my daughter to preschool. Normally chatty, she sat quiet and dazed as she gazed out of the window into ‘blackness’. As I drove, my eyes strained in front of me, my body thrumming with fear and longing, pressing forward and silently crying out for the new creation to break through and save us all.

### Prayer:

God, we long for you. Help us to catch even the smallest glimpses of you in our day, as we wait eagerly for your coming through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Lynn Tang Lee is a first-year Master of Theological Studies lay student at JST.*

## **Friday of the Second Week of Advent - Dec 10**

### **Gospel: Mt 11:16-19**

Jesus said to the crowds:

“To what shall I compare this generation?

It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another,

‘We played the flute for you, but you did not dance,  
we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.’

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said,

‘He is possessed by a demon.’

The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said,

‘Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard,  
a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’

But wisdom is vindicated by her works.”

### **Reflection:**

It must be difficult being God. All of us, all 7.7 billion of us, want God to meet our expectations. If God’s messengers are too demanding, we don’t like it. If God’s messengers accompany us too readily, we find other reasons not to like it. Not surprisingly we find ourselves uncomfortable with God’s flexibility. This seems so common that we even make proverbs about it. Yes, there is some truth to it: singing a dirge or playing a dance tune let’s us call our reality what we want, lets us put God where we feel in control. But God may have other plans.

God is the kind of God who wishes to meet us where we are and, given the great variety of who we are, God tries many things. Because every single one of us reflects some aspect of who God is and how God acts on our behalf, longing for God means that we commit ourselves to expanding our own vision. We pray to recognize God in all things: Sometimes God walks with us and sometimes God asks us to change. The trick is to recognize God as God in those times that God comes to us: dancing, mourning, listening, learning, encouraging, correcting, but always loving. Rather than changing God, we need to let God change us.

### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, open our eyes to see you; open our minds to recognize you; open our hearts to embrace you. Give us only your love and your grace, the grace to know you as you reshape our world and us. Give us the grace to recognize that our desire to change you can become our desire to let you change us.

*Paul Soukup, S.J., teaches in the Communication Department at Santa Clara University.*



## **Saturday of the Second Week of Advent - Dec 11**

### **Gospel: Mt 17:9a, 10-13**

As they were coming down from the mountain,  
the disciples asked Jesus,  
“Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”  
He said in reply, “Elijah will indeed come and restore all things;  
but I tell you that Elijah has already come,  
and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased.  
So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands.”  
Then the disciples understood  
that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

### **Reflection:**

Peter, James and John must have been confused and a bit overwhelmed. They had just witnessed Jesus’ Transfiguration. Jesus gives them strict instructions as they come down the mountain, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the son of Man has been raised from the dead.” Then the disciples try to resort to some ground of certainty, some reasoning they understand. They refer to the law saying Elijah must come first, before the Son of Man. Jesus agreed with them, but then delivered another stunner: Elijah has already come, but people didn’t recognize him and used him for their own purposes. Finally, Jesus predicts that the Son of Man will also suffer at the hands of people in the same way. The disciples understood Jesus as referencing John the Baptist – not realizing they were living and breathing alongside the true Son of Man.

Did the disciples wonder, “When had they seen the coming of Elijah?” “Had they missed it?” “Would they miss the Son of Man in their midst?” When would they realize that Jesus was the Son of Man? I share some of their confusion and distraction. It’s comforting at times to think of the Kingdom of God as something that will be given to us in the future – a reign of peace and justice that is obvious to all of us. It’s harder to be aware of and begin to understand the Kingdom of God currently in our midst. This is especially so when we see our students dying too young, our globe threatened by climate change and so much hate, anger and injustice in the world.

### **Prayer:**

O, Merciful God, show us your Kingdom daily. Help us to see You in the people and circumstances around us. Help us each to be a part of bringing Your Kingdom to others, guided and strengthened by Your Spirit of Wisdom, Patience and Goodness.

*Lisa Kloppenberg serves as Acting President of Santa Clara University. She formerly served as Provost and Dean of the Law School.*

## Third Sunday of Advent - Dec 12

### Gospel: Lk 3:10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist,  
“What should we do?”  
He said to them in reply,  
“Whoever has two cloaks  
should share with the person who has none.  
And whoever has food should do likewise.”  
Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him,  
“Teacher, what should we do?”  
He answered them,  
“Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.”  
Soldiers also asked him,  
“And what is it that we should do?”  
He told them,  
“Do not practice extortion,  
do not falsely accuse anyone,  
and be satisfied with your wages.”

Now the people were filled with expectation,  
and all were asking in their hearts  
whether John might be the Christ.  
John answered them all, saying,  
“I am baptizing you with water,  
but one mightier than I is coming.  
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.  
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.  
His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor  
and to gather the wheat into his barn,  
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”  
Exhorting them in many other ways,  
he preached good news to the people.

### Reflection:

“What then should we do?” As we journey closer to the nativity of the Christ Child, this question should be at the top of our minds. What should we do to prepare for the coming of the Messiah? In light of this question, John the Baptist’s words warrant deeper reflection during this holy season of Advent: “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” In other words, be *generous*. In our abundance, we are called to share with those who lack.

While many of us may not have the financial means to donate money or other material goods to those less fortunate, how might we still be generous toward others? If we take a moment to reflect on the blessings in our life, I am sure each of us can think of something. Can we share our *time* with a friend or family member? Might we share our *joy* with those who could use a smile? What about our gift of *friendship*? Whatever gifts God has blessed us with—material or immaterial—it is our duty to share those gifts with the people around us. There is no better time than Advent to do this!

As we reflect on our God-given gifts we wish to share with others, we also foster an attitude of gratitude. “Be satisfied with your wages,” John the Baptist tells the soldiers. How often are we satisfied with the blessings we have in our life? In our consumer culture, it is so easy to want more and more—more food, more clothes, more luxuries, and so on. Taking just a couple of minutes a day to thank God for what we do have can go a long way. As we wait in hopeful expectation for the coming of he whose sandals the Baptizer was unworthy to untie, may generosity and gratitude fill our hearts.

**Prayer:**

Loving God, we ask that you fill us with a generous spirit this Advent, fostering within us an attitude of gratitude and a greater willingness to share our blessings with others. In this season of Advent, help us to “proclaim the good news to the people,” for the Messiah is coming. As John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of the Christ Child, help us to prepare the way for Christ to enter the hearts of those around us.

*Jarett Bilash is a second-year Master of Arts in Theology lay student at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology.*

## Memorial of Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr - Dec 13

Gospel: **Mt 21:23-27**

When Jesus had come into the temple area,  
the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him  
as he was teaching and said,  
“By what authority are you doing these things?  
And who gave you this authority?”  
Jesus said to them in reply,  
“I shall ask you one question, and if you answer it for me,  
then I shall tell you by what authority I do these things.  
Where was John’s baptism from?  
Was it of heavenly or of human origin?”  
They discussed this among themselves and said,  
“If we say ‘Of heavenly origin,’ he will say to us,  
‘Then why did you not believe him?’  
But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we fear the crowd,  
for they all regard John as a prophet.”  
So they said to Jesus in reply, “We do not know.”  
He himself said to them,  
“Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Reflection:

In Advent, we look forward to God appearing in this world – in our world – as one of us. In Jesus, God chooses to ‘pitch God’s tent’ among us, in the messiness and the beauty of our lives. As I read today’s passage from Matthew, the question of ‘authority’ resonates strongly with me. Reflecting on the chief priests’ question to Jesus, I can’t help but wonder how much authority they permitted God to have in their lives. Did they give God the freedom to show up in their lives in any way God desired, or did they try to constrain and contain God within certain prescribed boxes? As we draw near to the moment of the Incarnation breaking into our world this Christmas, I ask myself if I allow God to break into my life in whatever way God desires. Or, do I only permit God – that is, do I only choose to see God – in certain spaces? ...in certain people? ...in certain ways of thinking? This Advent, how can I become more aware of God’s lavish love pouring forth in extraordinary and ordinary moments of my life? What authority do I give God to pour love into this world *through me*?

Prayer:

God of infinite possibility, help us recognize you in all the varied ways you make yourself manifest in this world. When we become blind to your love, open our eyes to witness the power of your Incarnation in each moment, in each breath, in each person.

Help us unclench our fists and relinquish to you the authority to guide our hearts and to direct our words, so that we may pour out your love into your world.

*Annie Hayes is a first-year Master of Divinity student at JST.*

## **Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church - Dec 14**

Gospel: **Mt 21:28-32**

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people:

“What is your opinion?

A man had two sons.

He came to the first and said,

‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’

The son said in reply, ‘I will not,’

but afterwards he changed his mind and went.

The man came to the other son and gave the same order.

He said in reply, ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go.

Which of the two did his father’s will?”

They answered, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “Amen, I say to you,

tax collectors and prostitutes

are entering the Kingdom of God before you.

When John came to you in the way of righteousness,

you did not believe him;

but tax collectors and prostitutes did.

Yet even when you saw that,

you did not later change your minds and believe him.”

Reflection:

Just imagine, Jesus is asking me for my opinion. ‘What do I think?’ The short parable of the Two Sons emphasizes that deeds are more important than words. How many times have I been asked to do something and have refused outright but at other times, said no, but eventually got around to doing the job?

This parable is about doing the will of God. The question, “What is God's will for my life?” is one that Christians often ask. It is a question I keep asking myself as a way of keeping my prayer and motives Godward as opposed to being self-centered. I find myself challenged to ensure that my prayer reaches out and embraces and does not exclude those I may not have a particular liking or interest toward. Who are the tax collectors and sinners of my day? How open am I towards this group of people?

Today’s Gospel also presents me with choices. I can do as I am asked or I can refuse as the parable highlights but still remain open to different possibilities or choices. It seems somewhat surprising and even risky to trust my feelings of knowing and doing what is right.

In Ignatius's rules for the discernment of spirits, his first piece of advice is to ascertain the orientation of your life: Am I straying from the right path, or am I trying to live a decent Christian life? If I am trying to live a decent Christian life, then knowing God's Will through prayer becomes an experience of doing what God expects of me and not just empty words.

Prayer:

Merciful and Loving God, open my mind and my heart to know what you are asking of me. May I want for myself what you want for me. May knowing your will for me help me to move beyond myself to people and places so I may know you more intimately, love you more intensely and follow you more closely. Amen!

*John Pickering is a second-year lay student at JST in the STL Programme.*

## Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent - Dec 15

Gospel: **Lk 7:18b-23**

At that time,  
John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask,  
“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”  
When the men came to the Lord, they said,  
“John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask,  
‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?’”  
At that time Jesus cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits;  
he also granted sight to many who were blind.  
And Jesus said to them in reply,  
“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard:  
the blind regain their sight,  
the lame walk,  
lepers are cleansed,  
the deaf hear, the dead are raised,  
the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.  
And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

Reflection:

This Gospel reminds us of the most immediate question for the people who first encountered Jesus: what is his relationship to Yahweh, the Living God? Steeped as they were in Jewish identity and practice, of course they recognized quickly that Jesus was exercising the kind of creative, healing, death-defying power that belonged to Yahweh.

Both John and Jesus were reformers, but reformation as a return to their roots, a return to deep faithfulness to Yahweh. Both John and Jesus seemed to be saying, “Have you forgotten what “the Shema” actually means? ‘Hear, O Israel the Lord is our God, the Lord alone!’

Not these silly Roman “gods” that saturate our Roman controlled landscape!”

We are at the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry and he has already cured the Centurion’s child and raised the widow’s son from death. *Jesus is on the move*. And when John’s disciples describe Jesus’ actions to him, John upgrades the question that is on their minds: “Are you the one who is to come or have we to wait for someone else?” Viewed from Ignatius’ practice of imagining the scene, one might reply to John, “Asked and answered; what more do you need to know?”

As he often does, Jesus deflects from responding with words. “Look to my deeds for your answer,” he says. And so John and the disciples have their answer. “Yes,” Jesus says with his deeds. “I am intimately connected with God, our Living Father.”



This reading reminds us that Advent prepares us for both the deeply personal, individual arrival of a child to one human family: Mary and Joseph's son and for the fantastic, cosmic action of God, the Holy One coming into our midst in Jesus, the one who declares the Good News by healing the broken and raising the dead. Jesus' discloses the presence of the Living God.

Prayer:

Creator God, O Living One, already in our midst and yet to come: Open our hearts to the Spirit that Jesus breathes on us. His life blew like a fresh, strong wind that turns soft fires into blazes. Set our hearts ablaze as we move toward the Christmas Feast; help us bring that fire to our own work for the sake of the Good News. Amen

*Sally Vance-Trembath, Ph. D is a Senior Lecturer in Catholic Systematic Theology at Santa Clara University*

## Thursday of the Third Week in Advent - Dec 16

### Gospel: Lk 7:24-30

When the messengers of John the Baptist had left,  
Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John.  
“What did you go out to the desert to see a reed swayed by the wind?  
Then what did you go out to see?  
Someone dressed in fine garments?  
Those who dress luxuriously and live sumptuously  
are found in royal palaces.  
Then what did you go out to see?  
A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.  
This is the one about whom Scripture says:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
he will prepare your way before you.

I tell you,  
among those born of women, no one is greater than John;  
yet the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.”  
(All the people who listened, including the tax collectors,  
who were baptized with the baptism of John,  
acknowledged the righteousness of God;  
but the Pharisees and scholars of the law,  
who were not baptized by him,  
rejected the plan of God for themselves.)

### Reflection:

The followers of John did not go out into the wilderness to take in the wonders of nature or to gawk at a beautiful, rich celebrity. There were other venues and opportunities for that. Instead, they came looking for forgiveness and guidance. They must have all felt that something in their life wasn't right; they were dissatisfied; they felt that something needed to change, but weren't sure what or how. Perhaps they felt that their relationship with God had been disrupted or that they weren't living up to their potential to love others. Some may have felt lost or broken.

When we pray, what are we looking for? What is our intention? Are we looking for comfort? Are we looking for guidance? Are we willing to hear a challenging prophetic message; one that dares us to make a difficult change? Are we, like Ignatius, looking to give back to God our entire selves? Remember that John's brash call to change was paired with acceptance (in the form of forgiveness). Change may seem scary (or

impossible) without first being able to acknowledge the gratuitous way we are loved by God.

What do you hope to see or hear when you go out to the wilderness to meet God in prayer? What does God “hope” to see from you?

Prayer:

Lord, help me to seek what you want me to find. Instill in me Your pure intention in prayer, an alert and humble and patient heart to receive Your Word, and courage to begin the change you invite.

*Wakiza Gámez is a first-year Master of Theological Studies student at JST.*

## **Friday of the Third Week of Advent - Dec 17**

Gospel: **Mt 1:1-17**

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,  
the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham became the father of Isaac,  
Isaac the father of Jacob,  
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.  
Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah,  
whose mother was Tamar.  
Perez became the father of Hezron,  
Hezron the father of Ram,  
Ram the father of Amminadab.  
Amminadab became the father of Nahshon,  
Nahshon the father of Salmon,  
Salmon the father of Boaz,  
whose mother was Rahab.  
Boaz became the father of Obed,  
whose mother was Ruth.  
Obed became the father of Jesse,  
Jesse the father of David the king.

David became the father of Solomon,  
whose mother had been the wife of Uriah.  
Solomon became the father of Rehoboam,  
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,  
Abijah the father of Asaph.  
Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat,  
Jehoshaphat the father of Joram,  
Joram the father of Uzziah.  
Uzziah became the father of Jotham,  
Jotham the father of Ahaz,  
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah.  
Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh,  
Manasseh the father of Amos,  
Amos the father of Josiah.  
Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers  
at the time of the Babylonian exile.

After the Babylonian exile,  
Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel,  
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

Zerubbabel the father of Abiud.  
Abiud became the father of Eliakim,  
Eliakim the father of Azor,  
Azor the father of Zadok.  
Zadok became the father of Achim,  
Achim the father of Eliud,  
Eliud the father of Eleazar.  
Eleazar became the father of Matthan,  
Matthan the father of Jacob,  
Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.  
Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.

Thus the total number of generations  
from Abraham to David  
is fourteen generations;  
from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations;  
from the Babylonian exile to the Christ,  
fourteen generations.

#### Reflection:

Readers may be familiar with genealogy websites that support their subscribers in tracing family trees and finding relatives. Such websites hold the promise of learning about one's ancestry and making familial connections across time and space.

Today's gospel reading depicts the genealogy of Jesus spanning fourteen generations. This genealogical prelude to Matthew's gospel tells of the unique promise that is Jesus: "the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1.1). We are reminded of Jesus' humanity through the recitation of his long lineage. Jesus the Messiah is born as one of us. The God who shares the human experience, in all of its joys and sorrows, is with us, now and always.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we join a long line of pilgrims who have walked before us on this earthly journey. Perhaps you might take a moment to pause and consider those who have walked before you? Is there someone in your family tree, or a saint or holy person, who has inspired you? Can you recall encountering someone who has shared God's love with you and for whom you are grateful?

#### Prayer:

Loving God, as we prepare to celebrate the gift of the incarnation this Christmas, we pray that you continue to lead us and show us the way, as we strive to build your kingdom of justice and peace. Guide us by your light and your loving presence. Amen.

*Deborah Ross is Lecturer and Director of Ministerial Formation at the Jesuit School of Theology.*

## Saturday of the Third Week of Advent - Dec 18

### Gospel: **Mt 1:18-25**

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.  
When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,  
but before they lived together,  
she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.  
Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,  
yet unwilling to expose her to shame,  
decided to divorce her quietly.  
Such was his intention when, behold,  
the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,  
“Joseph, son of David,  
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.  
For it is through the Holy Spirit  
that this child has been conceived in her.  
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,  
because he will save his people from their sins.”  
All this took place to fulfill  
what the Lord had said through the prophet:

Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,

which means “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke,  
he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him  
and took his wife into his home.  
He had no relations with her until she bore a son,  
and he named him Jesus.

### Reflection:

*When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him...*

Over the past couple of years, I’ve begun to notice a curious pattern in my dreams. Right at the point when I detect I’m venturing down an unpleasant pathway, I experience a moment of lucidity when my mind suggests, “It’s only a dream. You can simply wake up now.” This strikes me as some sort of reflex mechanism for regaining control of these situations. And so I’m led to wonder about when it might have occurred to Joseph that his dream wasn’t merely a figment of his imagination, but a realistic course of action.

I've been hearing a lot about dreams lately, whether in spiritual direction or casual conversation with friends. When I shared with one of those friends that I had been reflecting on the dream of Joseph, they quickly dismissed their own as the workings of a crazy subconscious, with no similarity whatsoever with a biblical apparition. Perhaps you might beg to differ. Perhaps our dreams during these lingering pandemic days offer desperately needed creative spaces where our restless rational minds can cede control to our deeper feelings, fears, and desires. Perhaps God doesn't want us rushing to wake up. What if we, like Joseph, were to embrace our dream-states as gratuitous opportunities to watch the complexities of our lives surface and interact in new and revelatory ways?

In *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, Pope Francis challenges us to follow Joseph's course. "This is a moment to dream big," Francis muses, "to rethink our priorities – what we value, what we want, what we seek – and to commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of.... The crisis has called forth in some a new courage and compassion."

Prayer:

Gracious God, even amidst the bustle of this holiday season, help us dream about our dilemmas and guide us to embrace complex courses of action to hope-filled futures.

*James Ferus, S.J. recently received M.Div. and S.T.L. degrees from JST and now serves at Regis High School in New York.*



## **Fourth Sunday of Advent - Dec 19**

Gospel: **Lk 1:39-45**

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

Reflection:

Whenever I hear this Gospel story of the Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth, I think of a stunning stained glass window I saw in Taize, France, in the sanctuary where hundreds were singing the beautiful Taize chants. The window is a brilliant azure and crimson tableau: two women in a joyous embrace, their pregnant bellies touching, and—as if in an X-ray—two babies inside their bellies, jumping with delight, reaching out to almost touch each other.

There is John the Baptist, the six-month-old fetus Elizabeth carries, meeting Our Lord, Mary's miraculous baby, for the first time, even before they are born. There is Mary hugging Elizabeth, the two mothers-to-be sharing the comfort and deep feminine wisdom women of every generation give each other. We women know that to bear a child means great joy but also great suffering—possibly even violence and death, cutting short a son's life.

This meeting of two expectant mothers is much more than a chat about the challenges of pregnancy or about babies kicking and moving around in their mothers' wombs, although that may have been part of their intimate sharing. Indeed this is a Holy-Spirit-filled encounter between two women who are pregnant by divine intervention—a young virgin

and her elderly cousin, two women whose lives have just been forever changed and whose social status has been transformed by God.

Until the Angel Gabriel appeared Mary had been a lowly girl from a forgotten town; now she is the woman whom all future generations will call Blessed. Elizabeth had been a woman scorned and shamed for being barren; now she too will be the bearer of a miraculous child. Elizabeth cries out in affirmation of her young kin: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

As we await the coming of Our Lord what does this tableau teach us? Can we have faith like Our Lady? Can we be as patient as Elizabeth? How open are we to everyday miracles and the ways God is acting in our lives, often through unexpected people?

Prayer:

Lord in this Advent season free us from being self-absorbed and self-centered. Fill us with the eagerness and generosity of Mary’s heart. Give us Elizabeth’s wisdom to see your blessings hidden in plain sight. May we go out in loving service to others and feel your Love welling up within us and all those we meet on our journey.

*Betsy Bliss, who earned a Masters of Theological Studies degree from JST in 2000, is an executive director of JP Morgan where she specializes in sustainable investing.*

## **Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent - Dec 20**

Gospel: **Lk 1:26-38**

In the sixth month,  
the angel Gabriel was sent from God  
to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,  
to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph,  
of the house of David,  
and the virgin's name was Mary.  
And coming to her, he said,  
"Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."  
But she was greatly troubled at what was said  
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.  
Then the angel said to her,  
"Do not be afraid, Mary,  
for you have found favor with God.  
Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,  
and you shall name him Jesus.  
He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,  
and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,  
and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever,  
and of his Kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel,  
"How can this be,  
since I have no relations with a man?"  
And the angel said to her in reply,  
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.  
Therefore the child to be born  
will be called holy, the Son of God.  
And behold, Elizabeth, your relative,  
has also conceived a son in her old age,  
and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;  
for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.  
May it be done to me according to your word."  
Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection:

In my office hangs, "the Feast of the Visitation," a Vietnamese rendering of the Gospel story of two implausibly pregnant women. Mary enters the threshold of a simple hut,

beaming. Elizabeth leans forward in profile. The two reach for one another in an effusive greeting. I received the image as a gift from Visitation Sisters in Hue, Vietnam—host companions during a time when I was privileged to teach English one summer as a JST student.

This year, my partner and I learned we were pregnant, something we had become resigned about despite such deep desire. When a doctor, not an angel, delivered me the unexpected news, I found myself shocked—like Mary, (*“How can this be...”*), but for reasons more akin to Elizabeth’s. I mentally enumerated the risk factors (weight, age, the years of fertility struggles). And then I stopped... for there’s God’s calculus.

***“Do not be afraid... for nothing will be impossible for God.”***

That startling news was the biggest miracle for our family. Beyond the precious gift of our child, one of the unsuspecting graces of our pregnancy was how it prompted us to visit in ways we had not for months due to the pandemic. We reconnected with those from whom we’d been isolated for far too long. Light shone in our family’s darkness. Sharing such good news of this sweet child brought such joy to so many people around the world.

Like the nuns who hosted me in Vietnam years ago, Mary and Elizabeth remind me to come together and marvel at the ways our God is incarnate in our lives. Not only in the grace of a long hoped-for pregnancy, but in so many other ways, whether small or shocking, mundane or miraculous. As we visit and share our good news, we can discover Divine grace at work in sacred community.

Prayer:

Loving Christ Child, shock us with the joy you bring, a joy beyond our ability to fathom. Wake us up, dwell in us, and give us the courage to visit and share Your Good News.

*Julia Claire Landry Santos is an alumna of JST (M.Div. ‘06) and the Associate Director of Campus Ministry at Santa Clara.*

## Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent - Dec 21

Gospel: **Lk 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."

Reflection:

"Mary travels in haste to the hill country to seek refuge with her cousin, Elizabeth. Mary finds herself in a precarious situation: pregnant but without a husband, she risks ridicule and condemnation from her neighbors. Elizabeth's old-age pregnancy, however, could be confirmation of the Spirit of God at work in their lives, and being in her cousin's presence will offer consolation and protection. In fact the atmosphere in this encounter of Mary and Elizabeth, even of the as-yet-unborn cousins, John and Jesus, is one of joy. "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled," says Elizabeth.

But the risk of embracing and nurturing God's life-giving Word, of giving it flesh and blood in the world, of bringing it to fruition until the reign of God becomes a reality, remains. It is the fate of the prophet that Jesus speak about in the Gospels, the Cost of Discipleship that Dietrich Bonhoeffer explored from a NAZI prison cell in Berlin while awaiting execution.

Matthias Gruenewald's artistic masterpiece, the Isenheim Altarpiece, symbolically depicts a worn and haggard John the Baptist pointing with crooked finger to the crucified savior hanging on the cross. On the left, opposite John, Mary is swooning in grief as she sees her son. The sword predicted by Simeon has not failed to pierce her heart.

We are all baptized into the prophetic ministry of Christ. But so often the risk of exercising that role can dissuade me from speaking the truth, of bringing light into a dark world, can give me pause from hearing the word of God...and actually doing it! Bearing the Word in our lives can make existence precarious. This Advent season is the opportunity to walk into the shadows with hope and joy.

Prayer:

Gracious, life-giving God, for You darkness is light, weakness is strength. Let your Spirit nurture the Word that has been planted in our hearts, uproot the fear that stands in the way of walking in the footsteps of Christ.

*George Griener is Professor Emeritus of JST.*

## Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent - Dec 22

Gospel: **Lk 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.

Reflection:

Mary’s song is a celebration of her own God-given goodness and its reflection of God’s very goodness. She rejoices in the Lord who lifts up her and our lowliness, transforms the world, and extends to her and us the name “blessed” for all generations.

When Mary praises God for scattering the proud and bringing down the powerful, I think of the powerful vices and doubts God scatters from my soul and brings out of my body. When Mary thanks God for lifting up the lowly, I remember that God lifts me up regardless of how I feel about myself. When she announces that God has “filled the hungry with good things,” I must think of the Eucharist. It sustains me in my hunger for God and transforms me. I think of Christ coming into our lives and beings, celebrated especially at Christmas but in truth at every Mass, so that our souls magnify the Lord all the more.

During Advent, a time of heightened awareness of the still-to-come fullness of our faith, let us remain with Mary and Elizabeth and joyously wait in expectation for the coming of Christ into our lives. Let us ponder with Mary what greater goodness we are still yet to receive in heaven. And when Christ comes, let us happily be lifted up by God's mercy.

Prayer:

Mary my mother and sister, I join my voice to yours in your song of praise and make your words my own prayer. Lord, let my soul magnify you. Grant me your mercy, both for my strengths and for my weaknesses. God, I embrace your goodness and rejoice with Mary, Elizabeth, and the whole communion of saints in anticipation of your transformative coming.

*Alexandria Bishop is a first-year M.T.S. student at JST.*



## Thursday of the Fourth Week of Advent - Dec 23

Gospel: **Lk 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.”

Reflection:

*They rejoiced with her.*

A friend of mine recently started a new romantic relationship that, according to her, has been going really great. Clear communication, deep intimacy, and healthy boundaries — just to name a few of the qualities she is describing in the relationship. And the relationship has been going so well that my friend can't help but share her joy with her friends! But something challenging has come up a few times when she has been sharing that joy. One friend warned her, “Oh honey, that's sweet and all, but you're still in the honeymoon phase. It will get real very soon.” Another friend lamented, “Ugh, I wish *my* relationship had some of that.” Talk about killing the vibe!

These two conversations were on my heart when I prayed with today's gospel, which is probably why the line “and they rejoiced with her” made me pause. It made me wonder, “Hmm, do I *authentically* rejoice with people? Am I able to take delight in someone else's joy even if I have my own ‘stuff’ going on?” Of course, the invitation here is not to

fake it just so we don't spoil the mood of the room. I don't think anyone wants that. Rather, the invitation is to a deeper *communion*, a communion that takes "love your neighbor as yourself" to mean that one's neighbor *is* oneself. Or, as Jesus liked to put it, *that they may all be one* (John 17:21).

Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives in today's gospel offer us a lovely example of what it means to rejoice with one another, of what it means to be in communion. But in order for them to show up for Elizabeth like this, they must have first done the inner work necessary to free themselves from the obstacles that get in the way of communion. So, as Christmas approaches tomorrow afternoon, perhaps we could each just take a few moments out of our day and take a tender look at our own 'stuff' before we gather together with the people we love. Let's pray that by doing this we might then be able to create more spaciousness in us so that we can be more present to the Presence.

Prayer:

Joyful God, the nature of Reality Itself teaches us that there is a time and place for everything. As Christmas approaches, please remind us that this is the time and place to rejoice, that this is the time and place to show up for one another—just as you always show up for us.

*Tony Cortese is the Program Director for Ignatian Spirituality at SCU's Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education.*

## **Friday of the Fourth Week of Advent - Dec 24**

Gospel: **Lk 1:67-79**

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.”

Reflection:

In today’s Gospel, Zechariah’s prophetic canticle graces us with a triumphant song of praise to God in thanksgiving for God’s salvation. As a testament to the grace-filled transformation he has undergone, Zechariah gives thanks for God’s “tender mercy” with the tender heart of a joyful, expectant father.

In the context of this first chapter of Luke’s Gospel, Zechariah’s canticle booms with a resounding cheer of victory. After his disbelief in the angel Gabriel’s prophecy about the forthcoming birth of his son, Zechariah (whose name means “God remembers” in Hebrew) had fallen mute. The crowd around Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, expected the parents to name the child after his father or a family member as was custom, but following Mary’s Magnificat, Elizabeth opts to honor God’s grace by naming their son

John, from the Hebrew for “graced by God” or “God has been gracious.” When Zechariah agrees to the name, “God remembers” becomes “graced by God,” and Zechariah can speak again. He uses his renewed gift of speech to praise God and then prepare the way for his child who will prepare the way for the Lord. Thus, Zechariah’s canticle reads as both a fervent testimony of God’s mercy and a grace-filled prophecy of even more amazing grace to come. Zechariah praises God not only for the blessing of his son in his old age, nor only because God gave him back his voice; he praises God for who God is. “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel...”

Zechariah’s infectious joy inspires us to rejoice with him today! Let us focus on the reason for this season: the One who bestows blessings and not just the blessings or gifts themselves. After all the busyness of this holiday season, “by the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high is breaking upon us.” Like Zechariah, let us rejoice and trust in our God whose grace is greater than we even know. Our Christmas miracle might just be realizing that the miracle we have been waiting for all along is this very life we are already living! *Hallelujah!*

**Prayer:**

Grace me, O God, with a joyful heart and the tender innocence of a child so that I, too, may be a blessing for others during this holy season.

*Albert Douglas Honegan is a JST alumnus (M.A.B.L. '20) and JST-affiliated doctoral student at the Graduate Theological Union.*

## The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) - Dec 25

Gospel: **Lk 2:15-20**

When the angels went away from them to heaven,  
the shepherds said to one another,  
“Let us go, then, to Bethlehem  
to see this thing that has taken place,  
which the Lord has made known to us.”  
So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph,  
and the infant lying in the manger.  
When they saw this,  
they made known the message  
that had been told them about this child.  
All who heard it were amazed  
by what had been told them by the shepherds.  
And Mary kept all these things,  
reflecting on them in her heart.  
Then the shepherds returned,  
glorifying and praising God  
for all they had heard and seen,  
just as it had been told to them.

Reflection:

### The Starry Night

When I visit the Museum of Modern Art in New York, I make a beeline for my favorite piece in the collection: Vincent van Gogh’s *The Starry Night*. The crowd around the painting never surprises me. It is one of the most reproduced and recognizable works of art in the world.

I often wonder what makes this painting— conceived by the artist near the end of his life, when he was a patient in a mental hospital— such a masterpiece? Born of spiritual darkness, van Gogh created a roiling celestial landscape over a small village scene. Yet in a way I never understand, eternal heavens and fragile earth meet and meld powerfully, but tenderly.

Scripture reveals that with the birth of Christ, God brought Heaven down to meet the earth. How was God’s entrance into human time announced? Luke writes of starry signs and angelic appearances that help to direct the attention of king and shepherd alike. But the encounter itself is personal: eager strangers meet a family in a barn with a baby in a

feeding trough. What a lot for a tired mother who has just delivered that child to pray with in her heart!

Through Advent, we have been invited to look into darkness and wait with joyful hope for the light that will return. That light is here! In van Gogh's painting, heaven and earth collide and erupt in movement, color and hope. Christ came into the world in Bethlehem. Joyful shepherds encountered the baby Jesus and went to tell about it. Let us go and do the same!

Prayer:

May the words of the Psalmist ring true for us as well: "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope!" (Psalm 130:5). Dear God, help us to remain faithful in our waiting. Help us always to serve and live for you and to never to forget your great love for us. Help us grow in patience. Kindle in our hearts the joy of knowing we are not a people left alone. You are our Creator! Jesus is with us! The Spirit is alive! Alleluia!  
Merry Christmas!

*Joe Kraemer, SJ, is a transitional deacon of the Jesuits West Province completing his final year of MDiv studies at JST.*

## **Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph - Dec 26**

Gospel: **Lk 2:41-52**

Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,  
and when he was twelve years old,  
they went up according to festival custom.  
After they had completed its days, as they were returning,  
the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem,  
but his parents did not know it.  
Thinking that he was in the caravan,  
they journeyed for a day  
and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances,  
but not finding him,  
they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.  
After three days they found him in the temple,  
sitting in the midst of the teachers,  
listening to them and asking them questions,  
and all who heard him were astounded  
at his understanding and his answers.  
When his parents saw him,  
they were astonished,  
and his mother said to him,  
"Son, why have you done this to us?  
Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety."  
And he said to them,  
"Why were you looking for me?  
Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"  
But they did not understand what he said to them.  
He went down with them and came to Nazareth,  
and was obedient to them;  
and his mother kept all these things in her heart.  
And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor  
before God and man.

Reflection:

Kids grow up so fast, don't they!? At least, that's the impression we have when the day after we celebrate the birth of our Lord, we're given a Gospel passage about Jesus at twelve years old getting lost for three days in the city of Jerusalem.

It feels strange to follow the celestial joy of Christmas with the acute horror of a missing child. Yet, as much as we might desire silent nights for all of eternity, life has a way of punching in and not holding back.

Joseph and Mary journeyed for a full day before they realized that Jesus was not with them in the caravan. Then, they spent three more days searching for him in the vast city of Jerusalem. Through anxiety and exhaustion, they searched the streets of a city not their own and cried out for their missing son. They must have prayed a prayer that ill-fated parents have addressed to God throughout the centuries: “Lord, help us find him. Lord, give us strength. Lord, protect him.”

When she finally does find her missing son in the temple, Mary seems to have felt a collision of emotions – the joy of finding him alive and safe, the frustration of discovering that he abandoned the caravan on purpose, the anxiety of what all of this might mean for his future.

Perhaps Mary and Joseph were also amazed and maybe even a little proud of their son. After all, he wasn't off in some First Century arcade. He was in the Temple, the dwelling place of God; the same God they had been praying to in their desperate search. This is their beloved son, safe and secure. I imagine they held him close in this moment, hoping that they would never experience something like this again, thanking God for hearing them in their distress.

Prayer:

Merciful God, look upon your people with compassion. Inspire us to seek out the lost and broken, the poor and lonely, the addicted, the sick, and the suffering, that all may know that they are temples of your Holy Spirit. Fill the world with your light and strengthen our resolve to seek out the lost.

*Louie Hotop is a JST alum and Jesuit priest ministering to migrants along the US-Mexico border.*



## Feast of Saint John, Apostle and evangelist - Dec 27

### Gospel: **Jn 20:1a and 2-8**

On the first day of the week,  
Mary Magdalene ran and went to Simon Peter  
and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them,  
“They have taken the Lord from the tomb,  
and we do not know where they put him.”  
So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb.  
They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter  
and arrived at the tomb first;  
he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in.  
When Simon Peter arrived after him,  
he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there,  
and the cloth that had covered his head,  
not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.  
Then the other disciple also went in,  
the one who had arrived at the tomb first,  
and he saw and believed.

### Reflection:

“Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.”

Recently, my dear cousin Angel passed away. Angel was more like a sister than a cousin and the pain of losing her is so deep my heart aches. Today’s Gospel reminds me to believe God’s love is in the painful and simple things in life.

Angel contracted COVID and after 73 days in the hospital and many complications, her heart stopped. When Angel’s husband called to break the news, I felt such desperation that I too wanted to run like the other disciple. I want to see for myself if it was true. It couldn’t be, after all, I prayed to God for her healing! I too arrived at the tomb but did not go in. I did not want to believe. I must be dreaming. But, as the family began to gather at her parent’s home, the truth slowly sank in.

There, at her parent’s home, on a makeshift altar, was a picture of my beautiful Angel looking back at me with a warm smile as if to say, “Aww, Gracie, don’t be sad. I’m ok. I’m with my brother.” Se, not ten months earlier her older brother passed away; she too was heartbroken.

I believe that in this fast-paced world of instant gratification, express delivery, self-service and “act now” lest you lose the opportunity, God is asking me, is asking us, to slow down and enjoy all God has given us, big or small. Angel was a simple person who enjoyed all the small things in life. Thrift shopping on a Saturday, a drive nowhere, spending time with family, our conversations on her way home from work, her plants, her marriage, most of all, giving to others. God’s love is found in the simplest of things, but we must slow down long enough to experience these simple pleasures. Today, take a moment to separate yourself from the burial cloths and see God’s love in the simple things in life.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, your love for us is so grand and yet, I miss it because I expect to experience it only in the grandness of life. Lord, help me see your love in the good and painful events in my life, in the simplest and daily routines of my life. Most of all, in giving of myself to others as you have done for us. This we pray in your most holy name. Amen.

*Graciela Garza, MTS, 2020, is the Director of Evangelization and Faith Formation for the Diocese of Stockton.*

## Feast of the Holy Innocents, martyrs - Dec 28

Gospel: **Mt 2:13-18**

When the magi had departed, behold,  
the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,  
“Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt,  
and stay there until I tell you.  
Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.”  
Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night  
and departed for Egypt.  
He stayed there until the death of Herod,  
that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled,  
Out of Egypt I called my son.

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi,  
he became furious.  
He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity  
two years old and under,  
in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi.  
Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet:

A voice was heard in Ramah,  
sobbing and loud lamentation;  
Rachel weeping for her children,  
and she would not be consoled,  
since they were no more.

Reflection:



Jesus began his life with his family seeking asylum in another country. In Uganda near the source of the Nile, a woman once told me: "Jesus made the whole Nile river holy by his presence on these banks as a migrant." Fleeing for his life.

We are always amazed at Christmastime that Christ came among us as a vulnerable babe. Usually it seems such a warm, sweet vulnerability. But soon after his birth, he was vulnerable to ferocious forces of evil, fleeing for his life. Those forces senselessly slaughtered the innocents in attempting to extinguish God's love made human. An ominous foreshadowing of his crucifixion.

"By his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5) refers not just to his passion. As an infant he began what he would do all his life on earth - going out to the margins to bring in the excluded - lepers, sinners, strangers, Samaritans. And being fiercely opposed precisely for his goodness.

I suggest reading the following poem slowly and prayerfully, perhaps multiple times. It was written at Christmastime in 1520 by the Jesuit St. Robert Southwell while imprisoned in the Tower of London, shortly before he was hung, drawn, and quartered for his faith in ...

### The Burning Babe

As I in hoary winter's night  
Stood shivering in the snow,  
Surprised I was with sudden heat  
Which made my heart to glow;  
And lifting up a fearful eye  
To view what fire was near,  
A pretty babe all burning bright  
Did in the air appear;  
Who, scorched with excessive heat,  
Such floods of tears did shed,  
As though His floods should quench  
His flames,  
Which with His tears were bred:  
'Alas!' quoth He, 'but newly born  
In fiery heats I fry,  
Yet none approach to warm their  
hearts

### Or feel my fire but I!

'My faultless breast the furnace is;  
The fuel, wounding thorns;  
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke;  
The ashes, shames and scorns;  
The fuel Justice layeth on,  
And Mercy blows the coals,  
The metal in this furnace wrought  
Are men's defiled souls:  
For which, as now on fire I am  
To work them to their good,  
So will I melt into a bath,  
To wash them in my blood.'  
With this He vanish'd out of sight  
And swiftly shrunk away,  
And straight I call'd unto mind  
That it was Christmas Day.

*Fr. Joseph Daoust, S.J. is a member of the Jesuit School of Theology Board, currently in ministry with the Lakota on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (SD).*

## The Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas - Dec 29

Gospel: **Lk 2:22-35**

When the days were completed for their purification  
according to the law of Moses,  
the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem  
to present him to the Lord,  
just as it is written in the law of the Lord,  
Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,  
and to offer the sacrifice of  
a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,  
in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon.  
This man was righteous and devout,  
awaiting the consolation of Israel,  
and the Holy Spirit was upon him.  
It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit  
that he should not see death  
before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.  
He came in the Spirit into the temple;  
and when the parents brought in the child Jesus  
to perform the custom of the law in regard to him,  
he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

“Lord, now let your servant go in peace;  
your word has been fulfilled:  
my own eyes have seen the salvation  
which you prepared in the sight of every people,  
a light to reveal you to the nations  
and the glory of your people Israel.”

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him;  
and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,  
“Behold, this child is destined  
for the fall and rise of many in Israel,  
and to be a sign that will be contradicted  
(and you yourself a sword will pierce)  
so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Reflection:

The Gospel reading for today reminds us that God hears our prayers, and God fulfills God's promises.

I remember prayers I made ten, twenty, thirty and more years ago. Prayers of gratitude and desire, prayers arising from dissatisfaction or pain, prayers for loved ones and people far away, prayers that stemmed from a deep longing for connection and meaning. So too, my parents had hopes and concerns for me, and likewise, their parents for them.

Underlying human life is this well of the human spirit in dialogue with God amid so many joys and pains.

If there is one thing that we know, it is that no care, no concern or worry or hope is too small for God. God cares for each and every one of us, and all of us, as tenderly as a parent watches the hands and the face of her newborn baby.

Today, Simeon witnesses, and takes up in his arms the tender and vulnerable fulfillment of his many years of watching and waiting as well as ages and ages of human longing. Each prayer, each horizon hoped for, is taken up in this child Jesus, who is God with us.

Sometimes, God acts obviously and apparently miraculously. But more often, God's answers come in the form of vulnerable new life which God has entrusted to us to nurture and love. When we recognize the answer to our prayer and our waiting in this vulnerable new life, we, like Simeon, are overcome with joy at God's provision and mercy, and stand in awe like Mary and Joseph.

Prayer:

Jesus, we thank you for caring about our needs and for giving us your Holy Spirit, who moves our hearts to turn to you even before we know we are doing so. Let us rest today in the tender memory of your ongoing presence in our hearts and our communities, in the infallibility of your memory, and in your beautiful provision for our life and salvation through your own birth into our world.

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## **The Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas - Dec 30**

Gospel: **Lk 2:36-40**

There was a prophetess, Anna,  
the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.  
She was advanced in years,  
having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage,  
and then as a widow until she was eighty-four.  
She never left the temple,  
but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.  
And coming forward at that very time,  
she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child  
to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions  
of the law of the Lord,  
they returned to Galilee,  
to their own town of Nazareth.  
The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;  
and the favor of God was upon him.

Reflection:

Today's reading is about the elderly prophet Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. Long widowed, she spent all her time at the temple, praying and fasting. She speaks to all around her of the child Jesus and prophesies his redemption of Jerusalem.

In the superficialities and materialistic values of our world today, it sometimes seems that the elderly are objectified as irrelevant and expendable, and that youth are objectified as physical specimens and vessels of overachievement. What is lost in these facile ways of treating people is the value of loving other human beings no matter what flaws they have or what mistakes they have made. These are difficult challenges for all of us.

This passage about Anna (Hebrew for "gracious one") evokes the many possibilities for grace and wisdom that proximity to elders among us can offer, whoever and wherever we are. To reach old age with the continuing capacity for grace and tenderness is of irreplaceable value in our world. Anna had been widowed for many decades when she met and saw in Jesus a path toward hope for the future. The love and support of elders can be communally nurturing in a way that goes beyond the care extended by parents toward our young. There is so much to love and embrace in our young people, and they



need us. This passage ends with: “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.”

Prayer:

God, extend your favor upon us. May we become strong and filled with wisdom like the child Jesus. May we cherish our elders and our young, for they represent the fullness of the gift of life.

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## The Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas - Dec 31

Gospel: **Jn 1:1-18**

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.  
All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.  
What came to be through him was life,  
and this life was the light of the human race;  
the light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it.

A man named John was sent from God.  
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
He was not the light,  
but came to testify to the light.  
The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world,  
and the world came to be through him,  
but the world did not know him.  
He came to what was his own,  
but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him  
he gave power to become children of God,  
to those who believe in his name,  
who were born not by natural generation  
nor by human choice nor by a man's decision  
but of God.

And the Word became flesh  
and made his dwelling among us,  
and we saw his glory,  
the glory as of the Father's only-begotten Son,  
full of grace and truth.

John testified to him and cried out, saying,  
“This was he of whom I said,  
‘The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me  
because he existed before me.’”  
From his fullness we have all received,  
grace in place of grace,  
because while the law was given through Moses,  
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.  
No one has ever seen God.  
The only-begotten Son, God, who is at the Father’s side,  
has revealed him.

Reflection:

Over the last two years, we have been living in a time where uncertainty is the norm. We are uncertain about so many of the details of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are uncertain if we will be able to be with our loved ones during the holidays. We are uncertain if the world will become recognizable again. Uncertainty and darkness seem to surround us. However, God’s love through Jesus in the scripture today tells us something different.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” In today’s readings, we are told that Jesus is the light. However, this is more than a description of our loving God. This is an example set for us, in order to show us that we have the power to overcome darkness in our world. It shows us that by finding God’s light in our world, through the things that bring us joy, we have the ability to prevail over uncertainty. It leads us to look for hope around us. This joy can be found anywhere: on a walk to see the sunset, a Christmas card from an old friend, or a hot cup of tea. These things remind us that although darkness exists, light and love are everywhere. Christ’s light gives us the opportunity to reject despair and search for goodness. This passage is a reminder to all of us during this Christmas season, that no matter what difficulties we face, when we embrace the light, darkness cannot overcome it.

Helpful thought: Today try and take time to look for joy, light, and love in the little things around you. Know that God is in those things and has brought those things to you!

Prayer:

Good God, recognizing that I am uncertain in so many places in my life, allow me to feel certain in your light. Give me the grace to see the goodness you have placed all around me. Allow it to transform my darkness into light, as Jesus does for the world.

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**The Octave Day of Christmas: Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God - Jan 1**

Gospel: **Lk 2:16-21**

The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.

When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child.

All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds.

And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Reflection:

When we love someone, we want to remember every little thing that they say or do: we hold onto a word, a phrase, or an image of the person. We remember their mannerisms, scents and touch, feeling that each detail of the person is valuable. Memories of love shape us and propel us forward. It is in reflecting on the past that gives hope for the future. The Christian faith is one long memory stretching back to Jesus. In today's gospel reading, we see Mary as the proto-church: "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." She was attentive to every moment with Jesus and treasured it. The moments Mary remembered are woven together with the memories of others in Scripture and the living memory of the Church. These moments are freely given to us to remember and to weave into the fabric of our lives. We remember with the rest of the church what God has done for us.

Memory was a capacity that Ignatius placed great emphasis on in the Spiritual Exercises. We see this in his prayer, the Suscipe: “Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my whole will.” In Ignatian fashion, memory is recognized as a divine gift and is to be returned back to the source. He also writes in discernment of spirits that when we are in desolation, to remember that consolation will return. I would add that remembering and being grateful for the consoling times gives hope. This helps us resist temptations to despair. Mary surely continued to reflect on events in her heart up to Christ’s Passion. I imagine that she held on to the events of the angel Gabriel, of the shepherds, of the prophecy of Simeon, finding Jesus in the temple, all of these events, as she looked upon her son hanging on the cross. These memories surely carried her through desolation to the moments of resurrection. May we do the same in remembering consolations and allowing those memories to bring us forward.

Prayer:

Loving God, give me the grace to remember all of the moments you have been with me. Foster in me gratitude for all of the gifts you have given to me in my life. Grant consolation in knowing that you are with me always and that I can always turn to you. You give in abundance, help me to remember this, and to rest in your love.

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