

Church of the Resurrection

Bryanston

Advent Daily Reflections

Longing for Light



Week Four

Longing for the Light of Love

Sunday 20 December

Scripture: *Luke 1: 26 - 38*

Reflection

The Whitney Houston song “one moment in time” is playing in the background while I write this reflection. There are moments in our lives that will always stand out for us, as well as those moments in history that we will always remember – like voting for the first time (*for me anyway*) on 27 April 1994 or the planes crashing into the Twin Towers on 9/11. Over and above all of these is the single most spectacular moment in the history of mankind; the moment of the Incarnation, when the Word was made Flesh. So great was this moment that we recall it three times every day in the prayer we know as the Angelus: the angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Spirit ... Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said ... And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us!

Today as we begin this last week of Advent we are reminded about the great event we have come to know as the Annunciation. Heaven came down to earth in the village of Nazareth, to a maiden betrothed to a man named Joseph.

A spectacular moment in such an unspectacular, simple, humble setting, place and person. We have to marvel at how God chooses to work. When the promised Child was born it was again a spectacular moment in time and yet in the simple, humble setting of a place where animals were housed. In addition, the announcement of this great event was made to shepherds in a field.

The great God of the universe and of all creation chooses the humble and the simple to do marvellous things! Should it be any different with us?

If our hearts are ready, in the right place, as was the case with Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, the shepherds, the fishermen of Galilee and so many others, then we are ready for God to do great things through us.

Mary, the maiden from Nazareth, was asked to bring the promised Saviour into the world. “Let it be done to me as you have said” was her simple consent to God. She believed as the angel had said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow.”

Today God looks to each of us, in the ordinariness of our lives to do something spectacular; to make Jesus real in our world. Do you believe this?

Practical Suggestion: How will you respond to God’s call to you this Christmas? Think of just one way in which you can make Jesus real and present in your life, your home and to others.

Prayer: Come Lord Jesus, Come into my life, Come and be born again in me, Come fill me with your love. Amen.

Monday 21 December

Scripture: *Luke 1:39-45*

Reflection

Today we read about the meeting between two women of incredible faith who were specially selected by God to be the mothers of two extraordinary children. God chose these two women very carefully because they, together with their husbands, would be responsible for instructing and sharing their faith with their sons.

What a wonderful example of service we have in Mary as she sets off on what must have been a long and tiring journey from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin and to be with her during the final few months of her pregnancy.

Elizabeth had a real encounter with the living presence of Jesus while He was in His mother's womb and we read that she was immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. She exclaimed how blessed Mary was as the one chosen to bring the Saviour into the world. She proclaimed those beautiful words which we are so familiar with; "Blessed are you amongst women and Blessed is the fruit of your womb, (*Jesus*)."

Zechariah and Elizabeth came from priestly families so John the Baptist would have been steeped in the knowledge of holy scripture which gave him the necessary wisdom and insight to herald the beginning of the ministry of the long-awaited Messiah.

Following the example of Zechariah and Elizabeth, those who are parents and grandparents are given the responsibility to share their faith with their children and grandchildren. Advent provides a perfect opportunity to explain to children the true meaning of the Christmas season.

Like Mary, we have also been chosen to bring Jesus into our world. We are called to step out of our comfort zone and go that extra mile to bring the light and love of Jesus to others who need to experience His presence in their lives.

Practical Suggestion

Christmas can be a lonely time for many people and while it may not be practical to visit people over this period, make a point of phoning a few friends and family members who will be alone over the Christmas season rather than just sending a WhatsApp or SMS.

Prayer

Father, thank you for choosing me to bring Your light and love to those in my family and my community. Give me the courage to share my faith with those I meet and to experience the joy of Jesus being reborn in me at Christmas. Amen

Tuesday 22 December

Scripture *Luke 1: 46-56*

Reflection

In this prayer of praise (*the Magnificat*) Mary gives glory to God for making fertile the womb of a virgin, enabling her to bear His Son. A thousand years before, Sarah sang a similar song of praise to God for blessing her barren womb and allowing her to bear a son to Abraham- our father in faith. (*1 Samuel 2: 1 - 10*)

Mary's entire inner person is actively engaged in giving this glory to God for the great things He has done which benefits her, Israel and the world.

If we fear offending God through disobedience, then nothing can scare us! Because she fully immersed herself in, He who is the source of all goodness, all generations will call her blessed. We do that right now in 2020.

God will tear down the proud and powerful and raise up the humble and obedient. He will punish the proud because in the imagination of their hearts they think they are greater than they really are and deprive God of the praise that is rightly His. They steal this praise from its rightful owner.

Mary witnessed this in her time and because she understood scripture to perfection, she was able to see the thread of the destruction of the proud throughout the ages. She expects God to continue to do this through His Son whom she will give birth to. She gives to each generation a powerful warning not to try and usurp what is due to God, not to try and hoard praise and honour.

Practical Suggestion

What is your song of praise? If you don't have one, listen to the hymn "To God be the glory, great things He has done" and then try to think of one, even if it is a single sentence. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, rid heart of pride and fill it and the hearts of all the faithful with humility and simplicity for only then can we experience true joy. Amen.

Wednesday 23 December

Scripture: *Luke 1: 57 - 66.* "*What will this child turn out to be?*"

Reflection

The coming of John the Baptist into the world signalled that the Messianic era would shortly begin. He was, after all, the one chosen by God to 'prepare the way for the Lord'. The circumstances of his conception, birth and naming are all

unique, and when the name 'John' was finally revealed, that caused all present to wonder about this child and 'what he would turn out to be?'

We know now that he was to be 'a witness to the light;' to the 'light' that was coming into the world, the 'light' that would drive back the darkness of misery, despair, and feelings of unworthiness or inequality, the 'light' that was Jesus!

In these final few days before we recall the advent of that 'light' into the world, let us also 'prepare the way for the Lord'. Let us pour 'love and light' into the world around us. How?

By doing something for someone else; making a phone call to someone you know who is alone at this time; by being willing to listen to someone who is grieving at this time; by making up a food parcel to give to some hungry person on the street. There are many ways to be the 'light', and none of them require money or wrapping paper – just love and goodwill!

Practical suggestion

Reflect on the times when you have not been a 'light' to others. Ask For forgiveness, and plan how you can be a light to someone in need in the next couple of days.

Prayer

Lord, you are the 'light' in our darkness. Help me to be a reflection of that light in some small way to those I meet, so that they experience the 'darkness' being driven back. Thank You for being my 'light'! Amen.

Thursday 24 December

Scripture: *Luke 1: 67 - 69*

Reflection

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas! Here we are on the eve of Christmas. It's a wonderful time as we anticipate the feast of the Saviour's birth. To assist our preparation the Church presents us with the song of Zechariah, recited every morning in the Church's morning prayer (Divine Office) and known as The Benedictus.

With the power of his speech restored, Zechariah gives praise to the God of Israel who has visited his people and redeemed them, raised up a mighty Saviour from the House of David. The gazing upon his own child he says "and you, little child, you shall be called a prophet of God the Most High. You shall go ahead of the Lord to prepare his ways before him." Zechariah foretells the coming of the Saviour and the role his son, John will play in preparing the world for the Saviour.

We have lived the past few weeks of Advent in Hope, Peace, Joy and Love and now we are ready for Christmas, the Saviour's birth. Our time of waiting has been short – in comparison for parents who await the birth of their child. Zechariah had lost the power of speech for the entire duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy. It was a long time for him to wait to have his speech restored, and it happens when he proclaims the name of his son "His name is John." Tomorrow we get to proclaim Jesus, name above all names!

The name of Jesus is sacred to us, his followers and we need to hold it up as sacred, as we would our own names – if not more so!

Practical Suggestion

Listen to the song "Jesus, name above all names" and sing as you listen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnPf4dxEpK0>

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I proclaim your Holy Name with love and devotion. Come and be born in my heart, come and live in me. Amen.

Friday 25 December **Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord**

Scripture: *John 1:1-18*

Reflection

Throughout the Sacred Scriptures, there is a consistent theme of light and darkness. This theme permeates through the Old and the New Testaments. Light is always meant to dispel darkness. From the very first chapter of the first book, Genesis, we come across the theme of light verses darkness: 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3). We are told that in the beginning there was nothing but darkness in the world. And God's first act brought about light into the darkened world. It was only after the creation of light that life began. The waters began to flow, different animals appeared, vegetation came shooting from the earth and humans came forth. It was through God's light that life became possible.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. It is with joyful confidence that these words from today's Gospel are fulfilled. Today, as we celebrate the birth of the Christ, we joyfully acknowledge light is synonymous with life. At Christmas we celebrate the greatest light, our Lord Jesus Christ. The light that pierces through a darkened world just like the opening chapter of Genesis. This light comes wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger.

In the infant Jesus we have the light of God which comes to dispel all darkness of the world. *God from God and light from light.* One can argue that light is the most

important force in all creation especially from book of Genesis. And John the Evangelist, reveals Jesus who comes as the powerful force of light which dispels darkness.

Light shows us the way, through this light we have our being. Without the light we cannot see. The Sacred Scriptures always reminds us that God is light and in him there is no darkness. The prophet Isaiah (9:2) reminds us, 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness; on them light has shone.' This is why we chose the Advent theme "Longing for Light."

This year, 2020, has been a different and unique experience for the world. The COVID pandemic has placed us in darkened places which we never knew existed. Many are living through a very dark night of human history. They don't know when will the dawn break. Because of this dark night of human history, we have longed for the Light of Hope, the Light of Peace, the Light of Joy, and the Light of love.

Our waiting is ended and our prayers are answered today. God gives us the light of the world in Jesus Christ his Son. In John 8:12, Jesus proclaims himself as, 'the light of the world.' Throughout the year it seemed as though the light of the world had been obscured. But today, we are joyfully reminded that the light still shines us. This is an *eternal* light. Christmas means that the light of God has dawned on us. Let us live in the Light of Christ!

Practical Suggestion

By the tender mercy of our God, the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace (*Luke 1:78-79*). We have been challenged in so many ways this year but the fact that you can still read this reflection means that there is at least one thing that you can be thankful for: the Presence of Jesus; God's great gift to us!

Prayer:

Almighty God and Father of light, your eternal Word leaped down from heaven in the silent watch of the night. Open my heart to receive his life and increase my vision with the rising of dawn, that my life may be filled with his glory and peace.

Amen.

CHRIST
THE SAVIOR
is BORN!

Saturday 26 December

Feast of St. Stephen the first martyr

Scripture: *Matthew 10: 17 -22*

Reflection

St. Stephen became the first Christian martyr on this day, 26 December, somewhere between 31 and 35. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen was chosen by the Apostles as one of the first seven deacons of the church in Jerusalem. He was later denounced as a blasphemer by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council in ancient Palestine, and stoned to death outside the gate of Jerusalem that now bears his name. Stephen's death is considered an example of the highest class of martyrdom, because he intentionally gave his life for Christ.

Celebrating this feast today is such a sharp contrast to yesterday's Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord. Our hearts and minds are still filled with the joy of the Saviour's birth, the baby lying in the manger, the angel visiting the shepherds and the proclamation of Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to all who enjoy his favour. Now we are thrust into the horrible reality of the consequence of Stephen's choice to follow Jesus and to minister in his Church.

Jesus had warned his followers of these consequences many of them would face in the immediate aftermath of his ministry – and down through the ages even in our own time today. It is the harsh reality of a world in which Jesus and his message is rejected.

The truth and reality is that it is not easy to be a true and authentic follower of Jesus. The Christian faith has been rejected by much of the western world, even in our own families, circle of friends and the communities in which we live.

Like Stephen, we choose to follow the way of Jesus and to clothe our lives in sincere compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, tolerance, humility, and forgiveness. Each of these is a challenge wherever we find ourselves. But this is what makes ordinary people like ourselves the real heroes of our faith, that we chose to persevere no matter what – as Stephen did.

Practical Suggestion

Read the Acts of the Apostles 6: 8 – 10 and 7: 54 – 59.

Prayer

Father, strengthen my little faith so that, like Stephen, I will always stand firm in faith and be a witness by everything I say and do. Amen.

These Daily Reflections for Advent 2020 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Veronica Donnelly, George Cominos, Irene Helsdon and Fr. Wandile Cagwe. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed Christmas.