



# IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

December 2016

**The mystery of the Holy Night, which happened two thousand years ago, must be lived as a spiritual event every day of our lives. The Word who found a dwelling in Mary's womb comes to knock on the heart of every person with singular intensity this Christmas.  
- Pope John Paul II**

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*December 2016*

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***“Not everyone who says Lord! Lord! will enter the Kingdom of Heaven”***

***Mathew 7:21***

Isaiah 26:1-6

Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27

Matthew 7:21, 24-27

In the Gospel reading today the Lord Jesus teaches us a fundamental truth. He gives us an insight to who will be eligible to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. His teaching also shows us clearly who will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who follow Christ externally by being in the forefront of church activities but have no true conversion of heart will have no place in heaven.

Many of us who strive to walk a deep journey with the Lord have now come to know and understand that our lives on earth are temporary. We have understood that our final destination is a life of millions of years in the arms of God the Father, the Lord Jesus our Saviour and King, the Holy Spirit our comforter and all the Angels and Saints. This is what we profess in the Creed as our ultimate goal.

The Gospel reading is clear on those who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It is those who do the will of the heavenly Father. Throughout the day the Holy Spirit can guide our thoughts, deeds and actions, if only we are constantly in communion with the Lord. This is why it is paramount for a serious follower of Christ to have a strong prayer life. It is through a prayer life that we are able to understand the will of God in daily decisions we make. The best example we have is the Little Flower St. Therese who dedicated her life to do the will of the heavenly Father in her daily chores-- in the little things of life.

According to the word today, a man who heeds the teachings of the Lord is akin to a wise person who built his house on a rock. In the first reading today Prophet Isaiah speaks of God as the everlasting Rock. Our lives on this earth should be built on this everlasting Rock that never shakes. It is only then that we will be able to go beyond the superficial religious life to a deeper spiritual life in which we will only desire to please God and live a life according to His will.

As we begin the season of Advent, as a preparation to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus into our hearts, homes and lives, let us make a fervent promise to ourselves to take every day as a precious gift from God the Father and desire to do His will in everything we do; whether it is a big decision or a mundane task.

***Prayer: Abba Father, fill us all with Your grace to have a deeper prayer life based on Your sure foundation, the everlasting Word. Amen.***

*"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

**Romans 8:31**

Isaiah 29:17-24

Psalms 27:1-4, 13-14

Matthew 9:27-31

Isaiah speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem. He speaks the precious promises of grace and mercy to the people that God will cut off their enemies and persecutors.

The Psalmist displays the courage and bravery of King David's faith, the calm spirit he had in communion with God, the benefit he experienced by it, his expectations from God and the encouragement he gives to others to hope in God. "The LORD is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?" We can gain this kind of confidence in God only through constant communion with Him. The more we dwell in the Lord, the more faith and grace we receive. If we realize that praising and worshipping God will be the blessedness of our eternity, then we ought to make it part of our daily life. When our one true desire is to be with the Lord, to seek Him, to fix our gaze upon Him and plan our affairs so that we have the freedom and opportunity to commune with God (Prov 18:1) then we will receive understanding and meaning of His divine providence and protection.

Christ is the fountain of light and life; so, by giving sight to the blind, He showed Himself to be the same that first commanded the light to shine out of darkness. These blind men knew and proclaimed that He is the Messiah. They could not see Him or His miracles but they understood the great things of God. Faith comes by hearing. They did not say, "Have mercy on me", but "Have mercy on us". We should concur in the prayer for each other. It seems like the Lord Jesus did not take notice of them. But he was trying their faith because He knew it was strong. We should continue in prayer and not falter. We should wait in faith even though the answer does not come immediately.

Let us start exercising faith by applying assurances of God's power and promises to our life. Though our faith is weak and others may question it our Lord Jesus knows our faith and the honesty of it pleases Him. As we see God's work in our lives, we are able to surrender everything to Him. "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (Col 3:2)

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I pray that my spirit's eyes be opened to You and I place my trust in You. Let my mind meditate upon Your Word, so that nothing removes me from receiving Your grace. Amen.*

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.”*

*Jeremiah 1:5*

Jeremiah 1:4-9,  
Psalm 117:1-2,  
1 Cor. 9:16-19, 22-23  
Mark 16:15-20

Today the Lord reminds us that even before we were born into this world, God knew us and had a plan for us. He had already written the chapters of our lives according to His will and His perfect plan (Jer 1:5). But do we actually believe in this truth? If we know that God, our Father, holds our future and He knows what lies ahead then we should be leading stress-free lives. But if we examine our hearts today we will find this is not true. Our lives are often filled with anxiety and worry about tomorrow. Today the Lord reminds us that we are here with a purpose that He had for us. However, to know this plan, our lives should be in submission to the Father's will. When we walk in total surrender to Him, we are living a life that is fulfilling the purpose God has for us. Instead, we are hesitant to carry out God's mission; worrying about our abilities, skills and talents.

When the Lord called prophet Jeremiah for His purpose and mission, he too doubted himself and worried about his abilities and talents. But the Lord says, “You don't need to rely on yourself. I'm not concerned about your skills and talents. All I need is your corporation with me to fulfill my mission on this earth. I want to use you as my instrument. This is why I sent you into this world.” Therefore, all we need to say is ‘yes’ to His calling. God does not call the equipped, He equips the called and He knows how to use us.

In today's Gospel reading we see the disciples' lack of faith. The very people who were with the Lord, saw His work and who knew who He was; lost their faith when He was crucified and buried. They forgot the promises the Lord gave and they just went back to their old routine work. We often do the same. Though we walk with the Lord, know who He is, His faithfulness and goodness; we fall into our own broken nature and move away from God when a crisis hits us.

The beautiful message in today's Gospel reading is that even though the Lord saw the disciples' lack of faith, He did not give up on them. He sent them out to proclaim the Good News. That is the love and mercy of God which surpasses all our imperfections and unfaithfulness. Today let us sit at the feet of God, repent for the times we failed to believe in Him and thank Him for calling us to carry out His mission.

***Prayer: Abba Father, we humbly come before You in repentance. Make us worthy to carry out Your mission here on earth. Amen.***

***For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea***

***Isaiah 11:9***

Isaiah 11: 1-10,

Pslam 72:1, 7-8,12-  
13,17,

Romans 15:4-10,

Matthew 3:1-12

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a branch will bear fruit.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,

the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—  
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord” (Is. 11:1-3)

Judah’s people were exiled to Babylon. They were crushed and broken, with no hope of a future and left with only memories of what life used to be. The prophet Isaiah speaks the promise of God to them; “a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from its roots a branch will bear fruit”.

Referring to Jesse as a stump is the only thing that seems right about it. Just like a tree stump, Jesse was not a man of great achievements of his own. He was a “nobody” until his son David became the King of Israel. God says the new ruler will come from an insignificant place, like a shoot hidden from the rest of the world. God promises a new ruler who would be just, righteous, faithful and upon whom the Spirit of God would rest.

“The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;  
and a little child will lead them...” (Is. 11:6)

God promises a new order, where there would be no enemies or superiors, the strongest will not exploit nor the weakest be restricted to their comfort zones or fears. God says, it will all start as a shoot from Jesse’s stump, which will grow into a new branch and bear fruit.

This prophecy was fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus. At the time of His birth, the Kingdom of David had been reduced to a memory. Even though the Lord Jesus is known as the Son of David, He had not come with pomp and pageantry associated with the era of King David. Instead, He came unseen, unrecognized and in the most unexpected manner. Like a shoot that comes up from a forgotten

tree stump. He had come just like King David, from an insignificant family, an insignificant place and left a legacy for generations to come.

In the Second reading from the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul says, "Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God". This is a tough one. Let alone accepting others, there are times that I cannot accept myself. What God is asking is impossible. Accepting others in my own way is not the same as accepting others the way that Christ accepts me. Even if I want to, the program that runs inside me will not let me do it. All I need is a little nudge in the right place for the program to start running. But the prophecy of Isaiah reminds me-- "the shoot that will come up from the stump..." The impossible will happen in the quiet, secret place of my heart. I may not be capable of doing what God is asking of me, but as I host His presence, He will do in me what I am not capable of. I take comfort in the prayer of St Paul; "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had" (Romans 15:5).

Today's Gospel reading speaks of the Baptism that the Lord Jesus baptises us with-- the baptism of the Holy Spirit and of Fire. When we are baptised in the Holy Spirit, He made the impossible happen in us. A new life, a new shoot and a new program will begin to come up inside us. The life of the Lord Jesus Himself will begin to manifest in us. Suddenly, those who had lived all their lives like wolves preying on the weak will no longer be a threat to those around them. Those who had lived like lambs, restricted by fears and their comfort zones, will suddenly find security to be around even those who could potentially destroy them. The reason for this phenomenal transformation is explained in the prophecy of Isaiah; "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

Those who come under the baptism of the Holy Spirit will receive a new reality. The old program by which they lived will become obsolete and replaced by the knowledge of the Lord. This knowledge would flood their minds and the shoot from the stump of Jesse will grow in us because the Lord Jesus comes to live in us through His Holy Spirit. Then we will be able to accomplish the impossible that the Lord calls us to do. It will not be by our strength but by His Holy Spirit.

***Prayer: Abba Father, I invite You to my ground zero today. I leave at Your feet my failures and my broken and self-centered nature that restricts me from living the life You had planned for me. Lord Jesus, breathe upon me and flood my mind. I pray that I may be filled with the knowledge of Your truths that I have been blinded to all these years. Amen.***

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven"

Luke 5:20

Isaiah 35:1-16,

Psalm 85:8-13,

Luke 5:17-26

The time of advent has come. Celebrations around us are underway, planning family dinners, picking our secret Santa and so much going on there is little or no time to think about what this season is all about. Is it a time to be merry and have fun? Yes, it is a time to rejoice but in what manner and for what reason? The reason being--to us a Saviour is born. He has come to save us from our sinful lives and past and from sickness and bondage. To us a Savior is given to heal and restore and that is why this season becomes special. What is the point of going through the season of advent and never changing but staying the same old person?

In the Gospel reading today the Lord Jesus looks at the faith of the men who brought the paralyzed man. The sentence though not directly, reveals to us that the faith these men put into action is beyond natural order. Looking at their faith He not only heals the paralyzed but also forgives their sins. Life goes on every year, addictions continue throughout the years, life seems lifeless and it looks like we are living only on the outside. Could this Christmas be any different? We have decided so many things for the season. But have we decided to move the heart of the Lord Jesus with our faith?

The Psalmist says that our God will come and save us. That is the promise and to be assured that our God will save us. There are certain things that these four men in the Gospel did. These were remarkable. They did not worry about what people may think. They believed that the Lord Jesus would heal the paralyzed man. They did not question the Lord Jesus when He said their sins were forgiven.

When we do the Four Steps, we come as we are and give the truth of our hearts accepting our sins. What if someone were to confront us about our sinful actions? How many of us would humbly accept them? Sometimes we cannot even accept them in front of God. Instead we give one excuse after another. These four men broke all those boundaries and reached out to the Lord Jesus, who was moved by their faith and forgave their sins. Today, let us move the heart of God, by forgetting what people think of us or what we project and accept that we need Him in our lives.

***Prayer :Abba Father, we realise we need You in our lives. We do not want to go through the season without Your restoration. Heal us and restore us we pray. Amen.***

***“So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost”***

***Matthew 18:14***

Isaiah 40:1-11,

Psalms 96:1-3, 10-13,

Matthew 18:12-14

During this time of advent, most of us would be preparing to celebrate the Saviour's birth. For the majority in this world, it would be the physical and external preparations of decorations, gifts and the like. Sadly, only a minority would be going through an internal preparation of their hearts.

This is the time that the Lord is going to fulfil the promise He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Isaiah prophesied that the Lord will wash away the sin of His people. That He would take care of them, like a shepherd tends to his flock. The Psalmist invites the whole of creation to rejoice, because the Messiah will be in our midst. The Gospel reading builds on this by the Lord Jesus telling His disciples the parable of the lost sheep.

God loves us so immensely and unconditionally that He comes after us. Even though He does not owe us anything, still He provides so much. He is the creator and we are His creation, but even if we reject Him, sin against Him or hurt Him, He never does the same to us. Because He is God, we should be going after Him; yet it is the other way around.

Let us call to mind the person we love the most in this world. Then let us remember an incident where this person hurt us. What did we feel at that time? In that moment could we still love that person? Could we hug that person and say “I love you”? If that person did not apologize later on or if we felt that person was not sorry about what he or she did, would we have been able to forgive this person? But the Lord does not treat us the way we may treat someone else. Right at that moment that we hurt the Lord; He loves us and forgives us.

Most times when someone hurts me, my immediate thought is that I will never allow myself to get hurt like that again. I will not be so foolish next time; I will not go out of my way or be under obligation to someone else. Then the Lord reminds me to think of what He would do in this position or situation. Would He respond the same way I do? Could I go after and love that person like the Divine Shepherd went after His lost sheep? This time is an opportunity that the Lord has provided me with to soften my hardened heart; to allow the Lord to be born in my heart.

***Prayer: Abba Father, prepare my heart to receive You. May I allow You to create Your manger in my heart this year. Amen.***

**Wednesday 7th December**     *Feast of St. Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor*  
"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"  
**Matthew 11:28**

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

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth" (vs.28). The cry of Isaiah the prophet is relevant today just as it was thousands of years ago when he shouted it out to an ignorant and suffering Israel.

In our human foolishness we convince ourselves that we are too little for God. In arrogance we think that we can deceive Him and that we can hide ourselves from His sight. Worse yet we wonder at the plans that He appears to unveil for our lives, wondering if things could not have been worked out better, justifying ourselves when we deliberately choose to go against His will in pursuit of our own. We judge our lives by our circumstances, determined that we cannot be helped because by nature we are weak or that our health is beyond healing or that our addictions go beyond salvation. But God reminds us that He never grows tired or weary, that He alone can give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak.

Often when I look back on my life I am amazed at how God has brought the most amazing blessings out of the worst circumstances. Out of some of the most apparently insignificant encounters, He has brought forth the most profound results. When I faced situations that I thought were insurmountable, God somehow brought me through those to an even better place than I could have imagined.

St. Ambrose did not have ambitions to be a Bishop. He was not ordained. He was a political figure elected as a Bishop on the uproar of a crowd. He tried to flee from the position but God had other plans. Not only is he now revered as one of the four great doctors of the church but he was also influential in introducing St. Augustine to the faith.

Today it doesn't matter where we are in life. It does not matter how tired or weak we may feel or how great the burden that is placed on our shoulders. It does not matter what resources we may or may not have. All we have to do is to remember the words of our Saviour Himself and cling on to His promise-- "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest". When we do this we will receive the rest of God that surpasses anything we are going through.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I come to You just as I am and surrender my life and plans to You, trusting that Your plans are better than mine. Amen.*

*"Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done according to thy word."*

*Luke 1:28*

Genesis 3:9-15, 20,

Psalm 98:1-4,

Eph 1:3-6 , 11-12,

Luke 1:26-38

Today the church celebrates the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The most Holy Virgin Mary in the first moment of her conception, by a unique gift of grace and privilege of the Almighty God was preserved free from the stain of original sin. God chose Mary to be 'a model of holiness'. At Mary's conception a new way of being human happens, and we are chosen and destined to share it. Adam and Eve were tricked by the serpents 'conception' and lost the grace to enjoy paradise. The 'yes' of Mary at the Annunciation is the completion of the Immaculate conception, which overcomes the disobedience at Eden and makes paradise a possibility once again for you and me.

Today the word of God clearly draws that picture in a profound way. In the book of Genesis the disobedience of our first parents won for us suffering in this world. Man was enslaved battling with good and evil within his own self. God in His loving mercy decided to send his only Son to die to this very flesh so that we will be saved and have eternal life.

In the second reading in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he explains the mind of God concerning us. We were chosen before the foundations of the world to be holy and without blemish. In love we were destined to be adopted as His own for the praise and glory of His grace. We were chosen and destined to share the same grace that Mother Mary experienced, the same connection with the Father through our Lord Jesus.

In the Gospel reading of St. Luke the Angel Gabriel at the moment of the Annunciation saluted her as 'full of grace' as he declared God's plan. For Mary to be able to give free assent of her faith to the announcement, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace. Mary's submission with total trust in the Father explains the intimacy and union she had with the God the Father. It was no wonder that she was called the 'Mother of God', entirely holy and free from all stain of sin, fashioned by the Holy Spirit into a new creature and adorned from the first moment of her conception with the splendor of an entirely unique holiness. She accepted in faith, as the Angel declared that her own Cousin Elizabeth although old in years was blessed with child, and that 'nothing was impossible to God.'

Her complete submission to the will of the Father and acceptance of the mission she was called upon to carry made her say, 'Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done according to thy word.'

In the mystery of the Immaculate Conception Mary is clearly the prototype of our divine life. She is the model to be emulated. Our Christian grace draws us directly to her. All our efforts and resolutions to grow in divine love, if made outside the immaculate heart of Mary are tainted with pride, vanity or selfishness. Ultimately we see this happening time and again in the world we live in. Even our spirituality is often tainted when we try to make this journey on our own. This is a great blessing that is missed by many who do not believe in this great truth.

The fact is that because of the consequences of original sin, these resolutions still imply a certain compromise with evil. This compromise is sometimes unacknowledged, subtle and hidden, but real. Hence the break with sin is not complete. We still have some mud on us. On the surface everything appeared splendid, pure and beautiful, but there was a hidden crack, something binding us to ourselves and to our pride.

It is for this very reason that our Lord Jesus on the cross gave her as the mother to a world that could not grasp this liberation without her intercession. The benefit or curse of free will is still with us and that sin within us often leads us astray in selecting the right path, the right decision, the propensity to lead us away from God still lies within us. We need this Blessed Mother who was untouched from the stain of sin to lead us to the cross where her Son gave his life for us, that we may experience total freedom.

Her love and concern for the sinful world we live in continues to be re-affirmed. She appeared to St. Bernadette in Lourdes and declared her identity as the Immaculate Conception. St. Bernadette an uneducated simple village girl never even knew the meaning of this state. But she was used to give the message to the rest of the world.

My brother my sister in my own life I too had a gap in my life when I felt I was too unworthy to approach the most Blessed Virgin due to the fact that she is holy. But the example of my own mother who fervently followed her intercession revealed to me a treasure I cannot explain. She is an integral part of our salvific experience. Today we are called upon to pray for her intercession for the salvation of all.

***Prayer: Abba Father, we thank You for the Blessed Mother and we pray for her powerful intercession in our lives that we may reach the perfection that makes us one with the Father and the Son. Amen.***

But the wisdom is vindicated by her works

Matthew 11:19

Isaiah 48:17-19,

Psalms 1:1-4,6,

Matthew 11:16-19

The unfathomable love of God continues to amaze us generation after generation. The messages or prophecies were given to the hopeless nation while they were still in exile. God spoke through the prophet and urged the people to hearken to the commandments and that they would be saved. The promises of God are not limited to one generation. The Messiah came and offered a one time sacrifice and granted us the gift of salvation, which flows from one generation to the next.

These unceasing promises will be applied to us only if we accept them and do what God tells us to do. If we are open to accept and receive them we will experience God's love. We are accustomed to the worldly vocabulary such as my luck or I was fortunate enough. But these are situations of God's love manifested to us in a tangible manner. In unknown ways we experience the love of God, imagine how beautiful life could be when we are open to the love of God.

We are often busy with the things that pass away. When we live in the world, we should have our gaze set upon the eternal glory. Nothing in the world will remain as is but everything changes. The Psalmist beautifully depicted this living in the Spirit experience to a tree planted near a stream of water. It would never wither. When we are connected to the Supreme Being and when our life on earth ends, our relationship with the Supreme Being will continue to eternity.

The parable the Lord Jesus shares in the Gospel reading shows the nature of the human heart. We are often not content or happy. We sit on the judge's seat most of the time. Passing judgment and losing the beautiful moments of life. The unfathomable wisdom of God, wisdom par excellence pointed out the problem of the human heart. We often do not accept our limitations, our lack of wisdom or our selfishness but continue to live in misery and regular complaints.

In God's goodness the Messiah is resurrected and living within us by the power of the Holy Spirit. This season let us make a conscious U-turn. We must go back to the heart of Lord Jesus Christ and be fulfilled with His Holy Spirit.

**Prayer: Abba Father, may Your Holy Spirit cause us to turn from the wisdom of the world and accept Your divine wisdom. Amen.**

“Elijah must come first to set everything as it has to be”

Matthew 17:11

Isaiah 48:1-4, 9-11,

Psalms 80:1-2, 14,  
15, 17, 18

Matthew 17: 10-13

In today's Gospel proclamation we see three of the Lord Jesus' closest companions seeking clarification from Him about a matter that puzzled them. A moment ago they had witnessed the greatest sight we could lay our eyes on-- the transfiguration of the Lord. They heard the very voice of the Almighty God declaring the intimate relationship He had with His son our Lord Jesus Christ. They witnessed the manifestation of the Lord's divine splendor accompanied by Moses and Prophet Elijah. This incident causes them to tremble with Holy fear and the question they raise comes from their knowledge of prophecies and remembering the teachings of the Scribes about the coming of Prophet Elijah before the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Elijah's reappearance was a common expectation in line with prophecies. In context, God promised to send Prophet Elijah to prepare Israel for the coming of the Day of the Lord. His mission was to restore family relationships and the tribes of Israel.

The Lord Jesus tells them that Elijah was sent to them before Him just as God promised. The Lord Himself identified John the Baptist as Elijah to come (Mat. 11:14). The scribes who taught people about the coming of Elijah through the Holy Scriptures did not identify him. The bold approach of John the Baptist made some listen to him and turn away from their sinful ways but the rest rebelled against him. The Lord Jesus prophesied that those very people would do the same to Him.

The promise of God is eternal for all people. Even today He sends us a Prophet Elijah or a John the Baptist, giving us more and more opportunities to turn from our sinful ways that are not pleasing to Him. These are the people filled with the Holy Spirit just as Elijah and John the Baptist. The infilling of the Holy Spirit is a precious gift given by God to lead and guide us on the correct path. Their mission is to bring as many people to the Lord by the spirit and power of God, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17-18).

Let us choose to listen to them and turn from our present ways of living and cry out to the Lord as in the Psalm for the revival and restoration as God is our only Hope of Salvation.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, make me a prophet today to pave the way for others to prepare their hearts to receive your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as we approach Christmas. Amen.*

**“Go back and report...the blind receive sight, the lame walk...and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor.” Matthew 11:4-6**

Isaiah 35:1-6,10

Ps.146:6-10

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11: 2-11

We are drawing closer to the celebration of the awesome miracle of God becoming man and living among us. Today, the Church invites us to go beyond the worldly excitement to a spiritual reality, that we are called to enter during this Advent.

In the First Reading, God speaks to us through the Prophet Isaiah. There is one condition that needs to be met for the Almighty God to enter into the lives of people and do the impossible or unimaginable. We are called to strengthen the feeble hands and steady the knees that give way; encourage the fearful and disheartened. Then, and only then will the miracle take place, bringing heaven down to the earth.

A few years ago I was given a living experience of this truth. My cousin brother was addicted to alcohol since his youth, destroying not only his education and future, but also his relationships and bringing great sorrow to those who loved him dearly. No amount of advice and admonitions did any good to him. His family was falling apart. The Lord challenged me one day in my prayer time with this question; “Can you meet the needs of his family? Then I will act.” That morning the Lord changed my heart of stone to a heart of flesh and created in me a totally different attitude on those who are fallen and weak. My arrogance was shattered. Since I obeyed the Lord and did what I was asked to do, not counting the cost of that task, a wonderful change has been happening in that family. Not only is my cousin being delivered of his addiction and is taken deeper in his faith journey, but his non-Christian wife is also being drawn into a beautiful relationship with the Living Christ and the children are growing in their faith.

This is the challenge we are posed with today. Are we ready to accept the responsibility of reaching out to others, going beyond our comfort zones, fulfilling their day-to-day needs, not counting the cost to our own talents, resources and our own wallets? Do we get a tear in our eye and a pull in our heart to lift another human being up from their fallen state?

If we heed the words of Isaiah, we will lay the foundation for a just society with adequate resources available to everyone. The supernatural power will then breakthrough into our own lives and our families as

well as those around us and those whom we serve and pray for.

The Psalmist re-affirms the supreme authority of the Almighty God, our Maker and Saviour, whose heart goes out to those who are bowed down and imprisoned. His faithfulness remains unchallenged forever.

In the Gospel Reading, the Lord reveals the signs of heaven invading the earth, the basis of Christmas. According to the Lord, the blind should see, the deaf should hear, the lame should walk, sick should be healed and the dead should be raised. Yet, does it happen amid us? If not, is there something missing? The Christianity era, which was limited to fulfilling rituals and religious obligations, is over. We are in an exciting time, when the Holy Spirit is blowing a fresh breath of air to our heart and mind, awakening our spirit to see, hear and know our God.

We are sent through the inner cleansing process to see the log in our own eye and have it removed by the Lord Jesus, as against a lifetime of peeping into the eyes of others, trying to remove the speck of sawdust in their eyes. Our priorities and values are being changed by the Holy Spirit, making us more aware of the billions of years we are to spend in the company of our Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit, more than the few decades we have in this life. We are called to change from a “with Christ” experience to an “in Christ” experience.

The Second Reading further elaborates this life in the Spirit that we are called to live. We are invited to reject the acts of the flesh and to desire the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Our calling is to keep in step with the Spirit, since we live by the Spirit (Gal 5:25). St. James exhorts God’s people to be patient, not to grumble against one another, simply because the final call belongs to the Lord.

The “Five Keys” based on Philippians 4:4-7 are invaluable to live life in the Spirit.

1. Rejoice always and Praise God, because He is in control.
2. Be gentle and kind to others, for the Lord is near.
3. Refuse to be anxious.
4. Instead, pray and intercede.
5. Give thanks.

Then the Peace of God that transcends all understanding will guard our hearts and minds.

***Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace to be reminded of Your ways of thinking and working. We pray for a fear of Your name and perseverance. Amen.***

Increase our faith

Luke 17:5

Rev 11:9, 12:1-6, 10

Judith.13:18-19

Luke 1:26-38

Today the church provides two separate sets of readings and gives us the option of picking one. I have chosen to reflect on the first reading from the book of Revelations, and the Annunciation Narration for the Gospel.

In the Gospel reading, it seems that God is acting below the radar. He sends an angel to an insignificant village and who speaks to a young girl, who in a male dominated society is a nobody. In the spiritual realm, things look confusing and hard to visualise or explain. Logic and intelligence, the main tool of navigation in the material realm seem to fail us in the spiritual realm. In the Gospel proclamation an angel, a spiritual being, communicates things from the spiritual realm to the Blessed Mother. The first request is humanly impossible, to conceive without knowing a man. When logic fails the Blessed Mother, the angel reveals, "the Holy Spirit will overshadow you – for nothing is impossible to God". I learn that the things of the spirit are understood or known only because God chooses to reveal them to us, not because we can logically deduce things. When the revelation is received, a disturbed heart comes to peace, even though the circumstances suggests panic stations. The angel goes on to give the Blessed Mother revelations about the plan or wish of God concerning her child to be born. He will be great says the angel, He will be called the Son of the Most High; the Lord will give Him the throne of his father David, He will rule over the house of Jacob and His kingdom will have no end.

During that time, the people yearned for a messiah, a King in the mould of David. One who is pleasing to God and because he has the favour of God, would renew the faith and bring peace and prosperity to his people. If it was me I would have immediately assumed that the child will be another earthly king like David, but stronger. As I observe how God fulfilled these promises, I learn that God's promises are true, but not necessarily my interpretation of them. This is because my interpretation is based on human intellect and knowledge.

I wonder how the Blessed Mother dealt with these promises at the foot of the cross. I suspect her prayer was along the lines of Don Moen's classic songs "I Will Sing" and "God Will Make a Way".

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, open my inner eyes so that I may see beyond human logic and hear Your voice that will still my heart. Amen.*

The helpless calls to him and he answers, he saves them from all their troubles

Ps 34:6-7

Zep 3:1-2, 9-13

Ps 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 23

Matthew 21:28-32

Today's first reading reminds us of the rebellious Israelites. Even though they had heard the great things the Lord had done during their forefather's lifetime to bring them out of Egypt they still did not believe in the Lord's greatness and continued to live sinful lives. The reading goes on to say how the Lord purified the lips of the people who turn to Him in their brokenness (Zep 34:13). The remnant of Israel will do no wrong, they will speak no lies nor will deceit be found in their mouths, they will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid.

When I look at my own life, I used to enjoy life in a sinful manner. Even though I was from a good Catholic family and went to a good Catholic school, I too did not believe that God could fulfill the happiness I was seeking from the world. The Sunday mass used to be just another routine. There were days when I received the body of Christ and soon after ran out to have a smoke.

Even though we are not faithful to the Lord He is always faithful to us by intervening in our lives. I had to face a major crisis at office and everywhere I looked for help I had no hope. Finally I turned to the Lord as my last resort and by His unconditional love for me, He ushered me out of the crisis and gave a new meaning to my life. The helpless calls to Him and He answers, He saves them from all their troubles (Ps 34:6-7). From that day onward my life has not been the same.

The Gospel proclamation talks about the parable of the two sons. One says no to the father but secretly gets the work done while the other says yes to the father but does not obey him. Sometimes we respond to our parents or any other family member when they request us to get something done at home. Do we respond positively? We hardly get it done since the appreciation that we get from them does not mean much to us. But whenever we are around people who are not our family members we get things done even though we are not requested to do so. This is to receive recognition and favor from people. In my life I have done this many times. The Lord is reminding us that it is pointless living as a hypocrite to gain earthly glory which will last a hand full of years and miss eternal life forever.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, we pray that You will give us the grace to seek Your face in everything that we do and to remember that You are always present. Amen.*

**"To me every knee shall bend; by me every tongue shall swear"**

**Is 45:23**

Isaiah 45:6-8, 18,  
21-25

Psalms 85:9-14

Luke 7:18-23

In hopelessness, the Israelites heard the blissful word from God. In a foreign land when their identity was dimming, they received the Messianic prophecy. The living God of Israel promised them the Messiah. The Good News is that in our hopelessness this same Messiah is among us and within us. In moments of despair, trouble and destruction the Messiah will be alive in us.

Unfathomable peace envelopes us when the Messiah comes into our hearts. The Psalmist explained the effects of the presence of the Messiah in our lives. When we hearken to the Word of God, supernatural life is our companion.

John the Baptist had a quarry. Who is this Messiah? John the Baptist received a direct revelation from God regarding the Messiah. He boldly proclaimed, pointing to the Lord Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world". But now there is a doubt. Is it because his understanding of the Messiah was limited? If it is so, it is a sad and dangerous place to be. Losing sight of the Messiah as He is could be an unfortunate place to be.

We have the tendency to limit ourselves to the outward miracles of the Messiah. Yet, we are not to be blamed. That was the answer from Lord Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist. What we have forgotten is the internal transformation of the person who was healed. Blind gained sight, deaf heard, lame walked and lepers were healed. All these were outward signs that the Kingdom of God had been established in the hearts of these people.

Could we ignore God after receiving a great healing? If the miracle is truly authentic, the internal transformation is guaranteed. Though the signs are outward, the actual miracle is internal. Our lives would be transformed to the extent that we will be prepared to love the ones who hate us and forgive unconditionally.

The feast of the great mystic and Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross is an authentic example for the Kingdom of God being established in our hearts. He was living in this Kingdom. The times of persecution were blessed moments in his life because he was fully open to the internal Kingdom of God.

***Prayer: Abba Father, help us not to get stuck in outward glory but to enjoy the internal glory which is the ultimate reality in life. Amen.***

I must decrease and the Lord Jesus must increase

Isaiah 54:1-10

Ps.30:2,4-6,11-13

Luke 7:24-30

As we prepare for Christmas, the Lord Jesus Christ in today's Gospel proclamation focuses on the life, lifestyle and the powerful prophetic role of John the Baptist. We need to take some important lessons from it. The Lord Jesus says of John the Baptist-- "whom did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed

in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John."

The Gospel proclamation tells us that John the Baptist, a cousin of the Lord, lived in the wilderness preaching essentially a prophetic message of repentance and restitution. He lived in a simple and humble way wearing a simple garment, while his meal often was a mixture of locusts and honey. When the people came to Him for baptism in the Jordan he told them, "If you have two coats, give one away to the poor. Do the same with your food." Tax men and soldiers also came to be baptized and said, "Teacher, what should we do?" To the tax man he told him to collect only what is required by law. To the soldiers he said not to be shakedown or blackmail (Luke 3:11-14). The interest of the people was building. They were beginning to wonder, "Could this John be the Messiah?"

But John intervened: "I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I am a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He is going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He will place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he will put out with the trash to be burned (Luke 3:15-17). Elsewhere in the Gospel, John was told by his disciples that most of his followers were leaving him and going to the Lord Jesus. John replied, "That is how it should be for I must decrease and He must increase" (John 3:30). We need to be gradually liberated from the 'I' factor, the ego or the desire for personal gain or glory otherwise we are not on a journey with the Lord.

**Prayer: Abba Father, may I say with sincerity "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I that live but Christ lives in me". Amen**

## Witness to God with your life

Isaiah 56:1-3, 6-8

Psalm 67:2-3, 5,7-8

John 5:33-36

In our society so many people have not heard the Good News of the Gospel. They have little or no idea that there is a Redeemer who has come so that we will not have to bear the weight of our sin all by ourselves, that there is a Saviour who saves us from our guilt and shame, that there is a friend who will never leave us to face life alone and a Lover who will pursue us even when we reject and ignore Him. No one would be able to resist or refuse such a God. The Lord God says in Hosea 4:6 "My people perish for lack of knowledge". If only they knew about Him.

In the Gospel proclamation we are told of the power of the testimony of St. John the Baptist. The Lord refers to him as "the greatest of all who are born of women" (Matt 11:11). He preached about the coming of the Messiah and that all people should repent and prepare their hearts to welcome Him. Many believed and were baptised. The Lord likens him to a lamp that burns and gives light. But the effects of his testimony were short lived. The Lord Jesus tells us in John 5:36 that He has a testimony about Himself that is much weightier than that of the Baptist. That is the "works that He was doing". These works testified louder that the Lord was the Messiah sent by the Father.

We also testify to the amazing things that the Lord does for us by telling others about them. Let us remember that as important and wonderful as that testimony is, there is a testimony that offers greater proof of Christ our Lord. That is, as mentioned in verse 36, to do the works that God the Father send us to do. John 1:6-8 says the Baptist was sent by God as a witness to testify concerning the light, which is Christ Jesus. This is the same reason you and I have been sent by God. To live lives that witness to Christ.

This can be compared to the moon that reflects the light of the sun. The moon has no light of its own, just like we have no goodness apart from the Lord. Just as the moon mirrors the light of the sun and lights up a dark night, by reflecting the light of the Lord, by staying connected and surrendered to Him, we can shine a little light on the lives of the people we encounter. Our actions demonstrate the power and love of the Lord. Our actions witness louder than our words ever will.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I pray for the grace to live a life pleasing to You. That I may reflect Your mercy and love to others and draw them closer to You. Amen.*

**“He governs His people with justice”****Ps.72:2**

Gen 49: 1-2 , 8-10,

Psalm 72:1-4 ,7-  
8,17,

Matthew 1:1-17

In the first reading Jacob calls his sons to give them a blessing. Yet, it is not the same for each. Judah's tribe will dominate the others. We see this happening, for from this tribe emerges David, the most powerful King of the Jews. This lineage would also give birth to the universal Saviour of all creation. The coming of a Saviour was known by God even before creation. It is all part of His plan of salvation, in the process of governing and ruling.

The Lord is the image of the invisible God who blossomed from the race of Israel. There are forty two names in the list of generations, arranged in three series of fourteen names. A symbolic number of numerical value to the Jews. In the Lord's genealogy, some had a good reputation, others not so. Four names included were of women, who were generally not given much importance by the Jews. Rehab was a foreign prostitute. There were also some foreigners who were not looked up to by the Jews. Bethsheba too is featured, the one who shared David's sin of adultery and probably murder.

God comes through sinners to save sinners. He is eager to possess the human race. He penetrates into matter and all creation, to perpetuate His work of cosmic salvation. The Lord's incarnation is the fruit of many centuries of history, marked by suffering and sin; also by hope and grace. There does not exist anything that has not His attention, for nothing could exist without Him. He loves the worst sinner but not the sin. The infilling of His Spirit brings an awakening of human senses and reasoning. In Christ humanity is being systematically changed, to become perfect just as the One who is at work within, is perfect.

Nobody could connect to the Father except through Christ. The Father dispenses wisdom to each according to one's capacity, need and desire, through His Son.

We can await His coming to manifest His rule to govern us completely until we see the emergence of His kingdom born through human toil and suffering. Thus shall come perfection through imperfection. Then would we awake to the dawning of the glorious coming of Christ to prove His governance.

**Prayer: Abba Father, open my spiritual eyes to see the affects of Your governance so that I may co-operate with You. Amen.**

You also are among those Gentiles who are called  
to belong to Jesus Christ

**Rom 1:7**

Isaiah 7:10-14,

Psalms 24:1-6,

Romans 1: 1-7,

Matthew 1:18-24

Today's first reading begins with the words "Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz". These words imply that we have jumped into the middle of a bigger story.

2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28 provide the historical context of the reading. The people of God were divided among two kingdoms, Judah and Israel. Ahaz the King of Judah ruled from Jerusalem and Pekah the King of Israel ruled from Samaria. At a certain time, the King of Aram formed a coalition with the King of Israel and attacked Judah. When King Ahaz received news that their armies were at his doorstep, he was overcome by fear. The Lord instructs Isaiah to meet Ahaz and tell him not to fear because the Lord will make sure that the armies will not be able to defeat Judah.

The books of Kings and Chronicles tell us that King Ahaz did not walk in the ways of the Lord and was a worshiper of foreign gods. So, when Isaiah tells him not to be afraid, he is unable to trust God. It is at this point we enter the narrative of today's first reading.

The Lord in his mercy tells Ahaz to ask for a sign that will enable him to believe. Ahaz refuses to test God. However, the Lord at His own initiative tells Ahaz that he will give him a sign. The sign is a virgin conceiving and giving birth to a Son named Immanuel. The purpose of the sign is to help him believe.

Even though Ahaz did not walk in the ways of the Lord, God comes to him in his hour of need for the sake of David, and for the sake of the special calling the people of Judah had. This gives me hope. If I want God's intervention in the lives of my children and their children's children, I must walk with Him like David did, worshipping and waiting on Him to fulfil His promises. If I am called by God for a special purpose, when trouble comes, and I am unable to trust in Him and His plan, God comes to help me believe. He comes in an unlikely way (virgin conceiving), and blesses me with his presence and closeness (Immanuel – God is with us).

Today's Gospel proclamation introduces us to another person in crisis, St. Joseph. He must have felt terribly betrayed and probably at the lowest point of his life. The reading tells us that unlike Ahaz, St. Joseph was right with God. He abides by the law. Yet unlike the

Pharisees and the lawmakers we constantly meet in the Gospels, St. Joseph had a compassionate heart. He did not want the blessed Mother to be shamed in public or stoned to death. This implies that at some level he knew the heart of God. Furthermore, the Angel refers to Joseph as “Son of David”. I think that the Angel was referring to the worshipping and God fearing nature of David within St. Joseph, rather than genetics.

It is my opinion that St. Joseph did not know how to hear the voice of God like the prophets did. However, like God did for Ahaz, He proactively intervenes in an unexpected way and speaks to St. Joseph, speaking to him in a dream. This dream was not like any other dream. It had a profound impact on him. After that dream he no longer acted like a betrayed man, but instead, he acted like a determined man who had been given a mission and purpose. Unlike Ahaz, upon hearing the voice of the Lord, St. Joseph abandons his own plans and starts cooperating with God’s plan.

Scripture tells us that Ahaz ignored the voice of the Lord and went to the King of Assyria for help. He thereafter had to live as a vassal to the King of Assyria, losing his freedom to act as a sovereign king, the role he was called for. St. Joseph on the other hand continued to hear the voice of the Lord and experienced the leading and protection from God. This gave him the ability to be one step ahead of his enemies such as King Herod, who was immensely more powerful, influential and resourceful. St. Joseph experienced the protection that Ahaz lost.

The Gospel proclamation tells us that all this happened to fulfil Isaiah’s prophesy. These words speak to me. Sometimes the very thing that I consider a disaster and a curse is the vehicle of a mighty plan of God. I may not perceive it as His plan at that time, but when I wait upon Him and I yield to His leading, I will hear His voice, I will have peace and I will become a witness to His supernatural intervention in my life.

Today’s second reading from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans tell us, “you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ”. Beyond genetics, through faith, you and I inherit the disposition and call that Ahaz and St. Joseph received. Like Ahaz, I can choose to stick to my own ways, or like St. Joseph, yield and experience His favour upon my life and a purpose bigger than what I could ever imagine. Today the Lord is asking us to make a choice. To choose Him and we will be guided through the ups and downs of our lives.

***Prayer: Abba father, give me the grace to walk in a relationship with You, abandoning my own myopic ways to walk in faithfulness to you. Amen.***

**“Rescue me from the power of the wicked”****Ps.71:4**

Judges 13:1-7, 24-25

Ps.71:3-6, 16-17

Luke 1:5-25

The results the Israelites faced for offending the Lord was an overwhelming power of evil and wickedness over their lives. In this case it was the dreaded Philistines who terrorised them for forty years. God does not abandon His people. The Lord chooses a barren woman to bear a son. Barrenness was considered a curse and a disgrace, but not for God. The inadequacies of people are no big deal for God in working His plan of salvation. Samson is born. He was consecrated to God and was gifted with superhuman strength. He is stirred by the Lord's Spirit to begin the deliverance of Israel to overcome the power of evil.

God is about to send His only Son to deal with the curse of sin that causes so much evil and wickedness. Sin is to turn away from God to serve other gods, such as power, wealth and self glorification. Yet, God does not abandon His people. The Lord has to announce and prepare His people for their salvation-- God Himself coming down to be with the people to overcome evil.

The Lord chooses another barren woman of old age to bear a son. 'He brings to being what does not exist' (Rom.5:17). A dead womb is brought to life and John the Baptist is born. Nothing is impossible for God. John too is consecrated to God. He is a prophet to announce God's arrival. He proclaims forgiveness of sin because of the tender mercy of God (Luke 1:76-78). He calls people to avail the salvation of the Lord. God is reluctant to abandon His people to the power of evil.

Many mothers as did my own, consecrated their children to the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus. Each morning my mother would wake me up to go to school, before which she said the prayer of consecration over me. That is probably why I am in this Journey with the Lord. He held me while I traversed the valleys of self-indulgence, self-abuse and self-destruction. Yet, like the in the parable of the prodigal son, He waited for me, never abandoned me or deserted me, though my sins made me neurotic. He came and brought me to my senses and drove the demons away. Our Lord is great and merciful. Await His constant coming into your life. It is much better than what this world offers. I know, for I have been there.

***Prayer: Abba Father, open my spiritual eyes to seek thy deliverance for eyes to see the flesh imprisoned and destroyed. Amen.***

**'Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee'****Luke 1:28**

Isaiah 7:10-14,  
Psalm 24:1-6  
Luke 1:26 – 28

Hail Mary – Through angel Gabriel God greets Mary, a girl from the village Nazareth. Mary was probably an early adolescent when she heard the greeting. We are able to greet Mary in the same way and to exult in the same joy in Mary that God had for her.

Full of Grace – the Lord is with thee. These two phrases are related. The reason Mary is full of grace is because the Lord is with her. The grace with which Mary is filled is the very life of God who is the source of all grace. Because she is full of grace, Mary is completely devoted to God who has come to dwell in her and whom she is about to bring into the world.

One young son shared his experience. "When I was small my parents separated. My mother went abroad and I was brought up my grandparents. Though I was born Catholic I did not have an environment of faith. I did not know how to pray. I grew up looking at the world and adapted my life according to worldly ways. Soon I fell into a huge pit of debts and I had to pledge my grandparent's house. The most miserable day of my life was the day that it was said my grandparents' house would be forfeited and they would be chased out. I wanted to end my life by crashing my bike on to another speeding vehicle. But that day there were no such vehicles on the road. On my way I passed a Church and dedicated to pray to our Lady of Lourdes and was instantly drawn into the Church. I sat near the grotto, crying and telling Mother Mary my intentions. Within seconds, suddenly I received a telephone call. It was an aunt of mine. She told me that she had heard about what had happened and that she said she would redeem the property and I could settle it to later. Again I fell at the feet of Mother Mary and cried for joy. Mother Mary lead me to Lord Jesus. My aunt lead me to a praise and worship service. Today I have settled all my debts, built a house and have brought a vehicle and I am self employed. My biggest joy is to serve the Lord Jesus with the Community.

Under Mother Mary's guidance, under her kindness and protection, nothing is to be feared; nothing is hopeless.

***Prayer: Abba Father, I pray to the blessed mother -- Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee, blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Amen.***

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield in him our hearts  
rejoice for we trust in his holy name **Psalm 33:20-21**

Song 2:8-14

Ps 33:2-3, 11, 20-21

Luke 1:39-45

The first reading talks about the dialog between a young couple who are deeply in love. This reminds us about newly married couples and the manner they communicate with one another. The two always keep in touch via text or call throughout the day. They know every single detail of each other and the things they did during the course of the day. While years pass by the communication

between the two lessens and all the loving and romantic words exchanged among them die off compared to the initial stage of their married life. This is the same situation with God and the relationship we have with Him. When we face a crisis we come to the Lord with a broken heart and we surrender our brokenness at His feet. He binds our wounds and solves our problems. We feel loved and secure in His arms. After our problem is solved our communication with the Lord reduces since we do not have any major crisis to take to Him. Finally we stop having a relationship with the Lord like before. We think we can do without Him and tend to forget how the Lord saved us from the crisis. I used to be a person like this until I got hit hard with a much bigger crisis the second time and had to turn to the Lord once again without a choice.

The Psalmist says the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purpose of His heart for all generations (Ps 33:11). The Psalm reminds us about the great plan God had for Moses to save the Israelite's from slavery. To do this the Lord had to mold him. The Lord sends him to the palace of Pharaoh as a child where he grew up to become a skillful commander of the Egyptian army. Moses' bad temper led him to kill the Egyptian but the Lord was able to use that opportunity and guide him out of Egypt and made him look after the flock of his father in law. Looking after a flock is not an easy job. Moses needed patience and self-control. Through this God was able to mold Moses so that he would become the vital weapon God needed to save His people.

If we are facing difficulties in our own life we should always remember the great characters in the Bible and how God molded them. We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield in Him our hearts rejoice for we trust in His holy name (Ps 33:20-21).

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, we pray as we read Your word You will give us the grace to respond to the plan You have for us just as the great men and women of God did as mentioned in the word of God. Amen.*

*Give back to God*

1 Sam 1:24-28,

1 Sam 2:1,4-8,

Luke 1:46-56

In the readings from today we find two thankful women. Both of them were desperate for answers and both of them approached God for a solution. When their prayers were answered both gave unbridled thanks to God and were quick to attribute their blessing to God's goodness and generosity.

Hannah and the Blessed Mother turned to God in their affliction. Whom do we go to in our confusion and pain? Do we trust God enough to listen to us? Women are generally looked down upon as being weak and second to men in spirituality but the reality is that at most spiritual programmes it is the women who make their presence felt and who go all out to draw their families to worship the Lord.

When we receive a blessing from God we grab the gift and withdraw into a corner like a dog with new found bone. In Hannah's case, as a practical woman, once she weaned the child, she was quick to bring him into the temple or God's presence and offer the gift back to God. So often the gift we receive from God can become our destruction as we cling to it. Let us take the chance to offer our God given gifts back into the Lord's hands. Let us offer our children to God, He knows best. When we do this, the gift becomes a blessing to us and a blessing to the world. The Blessed Mother was able to look beyond the humiliation of having a child without a father and see the blessing of the Lord's life even before He was born.

Even before the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit the two women were gifted with prophecy and praise. The community and world around them saw infants in their hands, but they could see the prophets and the Saviour in their arms.

In a world where we are so adverse to voicing our praise to God, we have two women who use words like-- "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour". Hannah declares, "My heart exults in Yahweh, in my God is my strength". Hannah echoes what the Father wants to tell us today, "Ask of me, and I shall give you the nations as your birthright, the whole wide world as your possession."

***Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace to bring back to you the gifts you have blessed us with. Thank you and praise you for all we have received. Amen***

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”

Luke 1:52

Malachi 3:1-4 ,  
4:5-6

Psalm 25: 4-5, 8-10  
, 14

Luke 1: 57-66

As we are just a few days before stepping into the day of the celebration of Christmas, the Church takes us through the journey of the birth of John the Baptist. The first reading from Malachi gives us a foretaste of the powerful Prophetic mission which God had called John the Baptist into, to prepare the way for the Messiah. Just as the mission of the Lord was prophesied, anticipated and promised by God, the very life and mission of John the Baptist was significant and special in scripture. We are made aware that the mission of John the Baptist was to simply be a messenger to invite people to repent from their sinful ways of living and return to encounter the Lord Jesus. In Luke 1:7, the Gospel reveals that Zachariah and Elizabeth, who were both very old and childless because they were not able to conceive, still journeyed closely with the Lord in their hearts despite their crisis. According to the tradition at that time, barrenness was seen as a curse and punishment from God. The thought of childlessness meant that you had no hope for the future, and the end of the existence of your entire generation. Still, against all odds, they chose to walk in righteousness in the sight of God, observing all commands and decrees blamelessly (Luke 1:6).

Today, as we are journeying through this season of Christmas, what are the odds that we are confronted with and are robbing us of our peace and joy? Whatever it may be, today, God is making His sovereign choice in the same way to visit you with His Word, to make the impossible possible, and restore true love, joy and peace which is firmly rooted in Christ. St. Paul says, “What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For He says, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion’. It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s Mercy (Romans 9: 14 – 16).

No matter how dim things may appear to be on the surface, God is working deeply within our hearts today. The great miracle of this deep and intimate love, joy and peace which comes from God is that as we hold on to them, they keep spreading and are shared among all whom we encounter (Luke 1:58).

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, may my heart, home and family carry the message of true love, joy and peace among everyone we encounter in this season of Christmas. Amen.*

**“For you said, ‘My love is established forever; my loyalty will stand as long as the heavens’”**  
**Psalm 89:2**

2 Samuel 7:1–6, 8–12, 16

Psalm 89:1–4, 26, 28

Luke 1:67–79

‘A man after my own heart’ is the definition God gave to King David. Often we become conscious of God in stormy situations. But King David was aware of God and God’s wellbeing at a time that God had calmed the storms around him. This is a unique feature we see in a human being. God’s dealings are perfect and high above than ours.

The concern of King David of building a house for God must have certainly moved the heart of God. Yet, God reminds all of us that He takes the initiative to build us. Our understanding of our service to God is actually an immature perspective.

God is faithful to His word and promises. For years what God has been preparing by choosing a nation for Him and promising that they are His people and that He is their God is moving towards the peak. The promised Messiah is about to come. The shoot that would sprout from the bloodline of David and the reign which would never come to an end was about to take HIS dwelling on earth God created. What an awesome promise that we could live in.

The Canticle of Zechariah says it all. The promises which were given through the years of the nation of Israel were coming to the culmination. The promise given to Zechariah inside of the Holy of Holies came to pass when Zechariah sang this praise song to God. Elizabeth who was called barren bore a son and the child was born. Zechariah held the child in his hands and spoke about the greater promise of God.

Messiah of God, shoot of David, the King who would reign forever and the one who would be born of God and of the Virgin and whose way would be paved by the son of Zechariah (John the Baptist); our Lord Jesus Christ entered the world. God we thank you for this amazing promise.

God refused to allow King David to build a brick home for Him, rather God wanted a man after His own heart to prepare the heart for His dwelling. This doesn’t mean that we don’t need buildings as churches. We certainly need church buildings. King Solomon eventually built the house for God (Jerusalem Temple). Importantly we need our hearts to be the dwelling place for God. This Christmas eve, ask our Lord to make our hearts like the heart of King David.

***Prayer: Abba Father, cause me to heed your presence and live in the Holy Spirit until this earthen vessel turns to dust. Amen.***

**Happy Birthday Jesus**

Isaiah 9:2-7,  
Psalm 96: 1-3 ,  
11-13,  
Titus 2:11-14,  
Luke 2:1-14

Christmas is one birthday when we light candles instead of blowing them out. It is a day when the people walking in darkness begin to see a great light.

Do people walk in darkness? During these few days of ministry we have seen and witnessed a few lives of people living in darkness. Literally speaking, we have met young people confined to their rooms for years on end, stuck to their computers and while their parents live in utter fear of them. The darkness does not have to be a literal darkness, it also refers to bondages, depression and oppression.

Christmas is a celebration of our salvation. It was the night when a human face was put on the gift of salvation. A new way of living was introduced to the world. It became possible for people to be lifted out of lives of gloom and bondage and be set free into a life of freedom and power. Our Lord accepted the mission of the Father to come into the world with humility and simplicity and give His life for us. Our Lord's arrival made it possible for the Holy Spirit to be gifted to the world in all its brilliance. The gift of Salvation is also the Baptism of the Holy Spirit which begins a transformation in our lives.

Christmas also presents us with an amazing array of challenges. A beautiful crib and docile animals are the start to a way of living that most of us cannot conform to without the Holy Spirit. O Holy night, was a night when the world's ideas of a kingdom, power, leadership and authority were dashed. For so long we lived in darkness with our ideas of holiness, purity, leadership, teaching, living and being an example. Our Lord Jesus' arrival changed it all.

Christmas presents us with a crisis. It gifts us with a way of life which most of us agree is so outstanding and yet we just cannot live by. But our Lord loves us and accepts us as we are. Can we forgive to the extent the Lord Jesus forgave when for all the good ministry work He did, He was ultimately crucified? Imagine dealing with your closest bunch of friends whose lives you were instrumental in saving and changing and yet they abandon you to your fate. Do we have such words of comfort, love and wisdom to offer when faced with a person caught in adultery? We bad mouth people at the flip of a hat. We explain their motives and explain their lives as though we are

their creator.

To celebrate Christmas is to celebrate the life of Christ. We take the chance to shine the torch on a life we can now see in completeness. We see a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and we witness a Saviour stripped on the cross. We see a king born in poverty and die in stark surrender. He came with nothing and He leaves with nothing. We came with nothing and then begins our stacking up. Even though we are so convinced that we will take nothing and we teach people about it, we are busy doing otherwise.

Most people's basic need is to build a house of their own and here is the creator of the world living the life of a vagrant. We feel so proud the day we own our home and open the door to guests. The Lord Jesus does not even entertain this concern. He sincerely believes He has a home and that is His Father's Kingdom. Did he commission a few paintings so that future generations would remember who He was? He left one signature in the mud but that was trampled upon by the crowds. He did not care to write an epitaph for his tombstone. How could he be not so bothered about His future legacy? His family line would disappear. He would never see a grandchild, leave alone his own child.

For all the good work we do, the hours of proclaiming God's word and singing praises we expect good, well-earned gifts and yet the Lord Jesus accepted crucifixion for the three powerful years of ministry. Did he change clothes for every new appearance He made? As His popularity grew He should have been carried from place to place and given a horse to enter Jerusalem and not a donkey. Rose petals should have been showered on him and not the waving of palm leaves.

How did He prepare His sermons? He was constantly in touch with the Father. He was always alert to the bidding of the Father and the promptings of the Spirit. Was He a voracious reader, did he read other people's insights, rephrase them and present them as His own or did He gather all His insights from hours of conversation with the Father alone.

While Christmas can bring us a crisis, it also presents us with a cure. The gift of Salvation is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we begin to see life in a new perspective. We shift dramatically from the 'with Christ' experience to the 'In Christ' experience and are transformed by the love of the Heavenly Father.

***Prayer: Abba Father, light of the world step into my darkness, open my eyes and let me see as Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ sees. Amen.***

Leave it to God, for He has a greater plan

Acts 6:8-10, 7:  
57-59,

Psalms 31:3-7,  
15-16,

Matthew 10:7-22

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. His life is an example of God's great plan for our lives in the midst of the sorrows and joys of life. He had an intimate relationship with the Lord and was filled with His wisdom and anointing. His relationship with God was real and that is why he could accept even persecution and death, because he knew God had a greater plan for his life. He was a young man who loved God and in return for his faith he received a stoning. At first glance it seems unfair that God would not do anything. But the plan of God was greater than saving St. Stephen from death. When St. Stephen was being stoned his cloak was placed at the feet of a man named Saul. Saul witnessed St. Stephen's entire stoning and saw how he responded. This was God's first step to stirring the heart of Saul. Out of this terrible incident God is bringing about something greater for all people for generations to come. St. Stephen was filled with the wisdom of God and therefore he knew God would not let his death be in vain. He accepted persecution and entered eternity joyously.

In the same way, when we face challenges do we trust God with the solution to bring about something greater? Psalm 73 tells us that sometimes good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. This confuses me. When I have done something wrong, I know that I deserve a punishment. But when I have done good and have received negativity I wonder what kind of justice God gives. I experienced a little of this at work. I was working on a project and I expected appreciation and a pat on the back for my hard work, but instead I received criticism. I did not have an answer. In prayer I wanted to deal with it with the Lord. Psalm 73 came to my mind. The Psalmist answers this by explaining that God has a far better plan than temporary appreciation. Our rewards for our good deeds are not on earth but in eternity. Our reward for trusting God will be to share in the glory of the Lord for all of eternity. St. Stephen knew this and gave his life for the greater plan of God. He only wanted to share in the glory of God. I realised I should set my mind above and receive the criticism without hatred, for God has a greater plan.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I pray that my gaze will be lifted from myself to look to the heavens. That I may trust You in every hardship in life and find my reward in heaven. Amen.*

**“Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name”****Psalm 97:12**

Isaiah 11:1-10

Ps.72:1-2,7-8,12-13,17

Luke 10:21-24

Today we celebrate the feast of St. John. The readings are taken from the personal experiences and reflections of St. John. St. John was one of the twelve apostles who were chosen by the Lord Jesus Christ. He was with the Lord throughout His ministry. He had been a witness to the miracles the Lord Jesus performed. He heard the words that were preached by the Lord and he was one amongst those who have seen the Risen Christ and touched him, so as to have full proof of His resurrection. Our Lord Jesus Christ, this Divine Person, the Word of life, the Word of God, appeared in human nature, that He might be the Author and Giver of eternal life to the people, through the redemption of His blood, and the baptism of His Holy Spirit. It is only through the Lord Jesus we will have eternal life. St. John shifts our focus to eternal life where we will be with our Father and with His Son Jesus Christ in whom we find the fullness of joy. John says that our purpose is to live the eternal life. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, who have tasted the goodness of the Lord will not focus on scanty possessions of the world, but they will find the fullness of joy and happiness in communion with God. This is all-sufficient.

As we reflect on today's Gospel proclamation we can see that it was Mary Magdalene who went to look for the Lord Jesus in the tomb first, though all the disciples who spent time with the Lord Jesus in His ministry strayed back. But Mary Magdalene, who was a sinner, was touched, loved, healed and forgiven by the Lord Jesus. She had experienced Jesus' love, mercy and forgiveness in full. Therefore, out of that love, she went to look for Jesus and Jesus appeared to her first. It was the same experience in my life when I encountered Christ. His love surpassed all kind of human love I could have ever received. Because of that love I started looking up to Him and five years later, today, I have no words to say how blessed my life is. This I found in Christ. In the same way, today let us look for the Lord Jesus if we have lost Him in our lives. The Lord is waiting for us turn to Him so that He can come and dwell in our hearts because He is more than willing to heal us of our sadness, loneliness, pain, heartache and suffering and to bless us with His everlasting joy.

**Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to let go of what I want and to follow you whole heartedly so that I will be prepared to share my eternity with you. Amen.**

“Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth”.

**Psalm 124:8**

1 John 1:5–2:2

Psalm 124: 2-5, 7-8

Matthew 2:13-18

It was a day unimaginable; hundreds of male children under the age of two were slaughtered by the order of the king. The day was told ahead of time by Prophet Jeremiah; “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” Yet today we celebrate their deaths; the feast of the Holy

Innocents, martyrs.

We have been reflecting why good things happen to bad people and why bad things happen to good people. The children slaughtered that day were not just good, they were innocent. The question is, why did God allow this massacre? If He sent an angel to St. Joseph with instructions to protect the Lord Jesus, why did He allow the rest of the children to be executed? I recall the words of Psalm 73; “When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny”. Unless we enter the sanctuary of God, we will waste time being bitter, resentful and caught up in only what we understand.

The world view of the church in celebrating their deaths as the feast of the Holy Innocents makes perfect sense only when we look at the massacre in Bethlehem that day at the feet of the Lord. Their deaths were not wasted; they fulfilled a divine plan of God. They gave their lives for the Lord Jesus who had come to die for all people. The Lord Himself says “for those who want to save their lives will lose it, but those who lose their lives for me will find it”. This is a truth we proclaim every time we celebrate the feast of a martyr.

Unlike the early church that was built on the blood of martyrs, we run away from pain, suffering and sacrifice. Today the Lord is reminding us the purpose of our lives; we may be as helpless as a two year old but what is important is to have His world-view. Death will come to all of us, pain and suffering are part of human life. If we enter the Sanctuary of God in the heart of our struggle, we will receive the divine perspective. Then, just like the saints we too can march to our death singing, rather than drag ourselves through life cursing everyone who does not share our world-view.

**Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to enter Your sanctuary. In Your presence everything comes to light. Set my heart on fire to live and die for You . Amen.**

**Living as God expects us to live**

1 John 2:3-11,

Psalm 96:1-3, 5-6,

Luke 2:22-35

The Psalmist sings out his praises to God, overwhelmed by all that God has done. As we reflect on God's majesty and His goodness to us, we cannot help telling others about Him. Witnessing comes naturally when our hearts are full of appreciation for what He has done. God has chosen to use us to tell of His glorious deeds.

The first reading says, can we really publish His goodness if there is no goodness in us? The main commandment He gave us, is to love one another as He loved us. But are we really following His commandments or enjoying His blessings without striving to do what He commanded us to do? How do we love an unseen God if we can't love the God in the brother and sister we see every day? Do we do as Christ says and live as He did?

Today's Gospel proclamation on the presentation of the Lord Jesus as a child in the temple, gives us perfect examples of living as God expects us to. Mother Mary could have not followed the laws set, as she is the Mother of God and the Lord Jesus is the Messiah. She could have found excuses to do away with the tradition. Yet, she humbled herself and did as God commanded. The Lord Jesus was not born above the law, instead He fulfilled it perfectly.

Simeon was a righteous and devout man and his reward was the Holy Spirit with him. He was given a revelation that he would not die until he saw the face of the Messiah. This promise came to pass. The holy parents were amazed when this old man took their baby into his arms and spoke such stunning words. He foretold that the Lord Jesus was a gift from God and he recognised the Lord as the Messiah, who would be a light to the entire world. This was the second time Mother Mary was greeted with a prophecy about Her Son and she believed in the words She heard and lived a life worthy of Her calling, doing as God commanded.

As we are in the season of celebrating the nativity of our Lord and His presentation in the temple, let us reflect on the light, the truth and the way He led us to walk. Let us allow the Lord Jesus lead us to His kingdom principals where He could use us to work in and through us. ***Prayer: Abba Father, as your Holy Family offered You in the temple, we ask You to give us the strength to offer our lives to live according to Your teachings and follow You wholeheartedly. Amen.***

**“Put on love, that is, the bond of perfection”****Col. 3:14**

Sirach 3: 2-6, 12-14

Psalm 96:7-10

Colossians 3:10-21

Matthew 2:13-18 or

Luke 2: 36-40

If you had asked me many years ago, who I thought was the ideal family, I would have pointed my finger further away from my own. Many a times I had wondered why my family could not be different. A family that would readily accept me for who I am, be more understanding, and open minded and a family that would behave appropriately in front of my friends. Most of us go through this phase. At some point in our lives we have wished that God had chosen a better mother, father or a sibling for us.

As we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family let us take a moment to reflect on the life of the Lord Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Joseph. There is no doubt that St. Joseph dreamt of a beautiful life with the woman of his dreams. One can only imagine how he felt when Mother Mary told him that she was already pregnant. He may have pictured a dreamy future with his new bride - this dream however was short lived.

Mother Mary on the other hand would have had her own idea of a beautiful family. She would have had so many aspirations about her son. That He would one day grow to be a man, bringing her honor and respect.

The same could be said of our Lord Jesus. Taking care of his parents and attending to their needs in their old age would have been some of the priorities on His list. But we know none of their dreams came true. God had a totally different plan.

We can learn the meaning and mystery of this beautiful feast and apply it to our own family life. During this beautiful season, take a moment to look at those around you. Surely they may not be ideal, but they are God's gift you. Let us choose to respond to them with grace – develop our eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to accept them and love them beneath the surface of the daily life. The path to holiness is found in living our ordinary family life with the Lord Jesus at the center of it all. Today, the Lord is calling us to love our family as Christ loves us. This means to love without conditions, accept goodness and faults and forgiving their wrong doings.

***Prayer: Abba Father, Thank You for my family. Thank You for blessing me with each and every member. Guide me to love them deeply with Christ-like love. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.***

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

1 John 2:18-21,  
Psalm 96:1-2, 11-13,  
John 1: 1-18

As our year draws to a close, today's scripture brings us back to the beginning of all time. As we stand on the threshold of another year we take time to recall the greatest event of all. God has entered our world. Not for a day's visit but has made it His permanent dwelling place.

Lord, let me set aside sometime today to reflect back on how Your light of You has impacted on my life during the past year. Let me be grateful and give thanks for all I have received from You directly and through the gift of other people. Lord You know what a hard year this has been for me, I have overcome every situation as a blessing and hung on Your word. "Be still and know that I AM GOD". If not for my journey in the CRL I could never have dealt with all these issues that came one after the other. We often say it is hard to pray because we cannot imagine God, but God knows this problem and painted a perfect self portrait in the Lord Jesus. Now we know what God thinks about us and how much God loves us. I make a new year resolution that in the year ahead that I will give quality to time to get into know the Lord Jesus better. The Lord Jesus brings God fully into our world; He lives among us in our country, our city and our neighborhood. His love and His light radiate everywhere.

As we bid good bye to this year and step into the new year, I would like to share with you a prayer given to us by Lalith Thaththa. This has taken me through every single day.

*Prayer : Lord Jesus, I come before You, I want to know you, I want to hear your voice. Lord Jesus teach me Your ways. Lord I am used to listening to myself, the center of my reality is within myself. Lord I discern within my own broken understanding, I think that reality is what I am convinced of and I am caught up in the prison of my own little world. Lord, give me the grace to reach beyond myself, not to take myself seriously, not to think that I am the ultimate center of the universe but to hold even my deepest opinions lightly within my heart knowing that Your ways are greater and bigger than my own. All the time listening, ready to change, open to a new revelation and a new understanding that I never had before. Lord, give me that openness, my security is not my knowledge nor my understanding, but my security is Your love in my heart and Your presence within me. Knowing that even if the best things that I understand change, it does not matter because You are there living inside of me and leading me by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

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