



ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

December 2017

**When they saw the star
they rejoiced.**

Matthew 2:10

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December 2017

Editors:

Lalith Perera
Louis Benedict
Gerard Davey

Co-ordinator:

Felicia Adhietty

Contributors to this Issue:

Anusha Dias	Lalith Perera
Ayomi Jansz	Louis Benedict
Charmaine Peiris	Marie Navamani
Christy Akkarawatta	Mercia Perera
Darshi Egodawatte De Silva	Muriel Obiris
Duthika Perera	Natasha Adhietty
Gerard Victoria	Nidarshi Fernando
Geetha Fernando	Richie Fernando
Himaya Perera	Rushika Pieris
Inuk Jayasuriya	Sajee Jayasuriya
Jeevaka Perera	Shehana Jayatunga
Jayanath Perera	Scalina Ratwatte
Jeya Chelliah	Sunimalee Fernando
Juliana Francis	Thamalie Perera
Kamala Fernando	Vinette Perera
Kauchi Gunasinghe	Yogini Yogarasa

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“To Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom.”

Daniel 7:14

Daniel 7: 2-14

Psalm Dn 3: 75-81

Luke 21: 29-33

The prophet Daniel is given a vision by God of four beasts. In the interpretation given later in the chapter we are told that these four beasts represent four empires. One factor that all these empires have in common is their origin. All four “came out of the sea” (Daniel 7:3). The sea represents this world. God was telling Daniel that, as horrible and terrifying as they seemed, they were still only ‘earthly’ kingdoms and therefore were limited in power. “Dominion was taken away from the other animals”(verse 12)

As the prophet continues watching, he sees “One like the Son of Man”(verse 13). This individual is none other than the Lord Jesus (Mark 14:62, Matt 25:31-32). Unlike the earthly empires that came out of the sea, the Son of Man comes “with the clouds of Heaven.. All people and Nations of every language shall serve Him.” (verse 14)

There are so many terrible things happening in the world today. Media bombards us with news of catastrophic events and threats. It is hard not to worry and lose hope. Today, the Lord God wants us to know that, everything that is causing all these calamities is of earthly origin. Their power is limited.

But our Savior, He hails from Heaven. And those who belong to and live in His kingdom have no cause to fear. For “His dominion is and everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom shall never be destroyed.” However hopeless the situation may seem, we shall not be overcome. The court is seated and the books are opened before “The Ancient of days”. Let us live our lives on earth with eternity as our goal. Oh that you and I will be counted worthy to be a part of His everlasting Kingdom.

Surely, the Angel of the Lord is around me.

I have no cause to fear, my God will not forsake me.

I am His child, no enemy can touch me.

I will not die but live, to tell what He has done.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank you that you are in control of everything going on around us. Amen.

All the kingdoms shall serve him and be subject to him.

Daniel 7:27

Dan 7: 15-27

Psalm Dan 3: 82-87

Luke 21: 34-36

Today is the last day in the liturgical period before we start preparing ourselves in great expectation for the coming of the Prince of Peace. It is also a time to take stock of our lives. Are we ready to celebrate this beautiful experience of Christ being born in our hearts again?

In the first reading from the book of Daniel we see the interpretation of Daniels fearful dreams. He is petrified at the havoc Satan will create in this world– but the holy ones of God will triumph in the end. Today we see a world already in the clutches of the fearful grip of the evil one. But the cross has already triumphed. We need to seek the truth which will set us free and be liberated from our weaknesses and addictions. Jesus our savior has made the supreme sacrifice on the cross and broken the great barrier between good and evil. We need to open our hearts to receive him and stand firm in his love. We need to live in the world but live out of it. Pope Francis says, 'Dear friends the world needs saints and we are called to holiness without exception. Don't be afraid'

In St. Luke's Gospel proclamation the Lord gives us a warning again. Do not be caught up in the filthy wiles of the world. Drunkenness, debauchery and worldly cares, which will catch us off guard when the day of the Lord comes upon us. It is like a trap or a snare which will consume us. Watch and pray he says that you may escape the judgment on the day which will conclude human history when the Lord Jesus comes. The destruction of Satan and evil will be complete as the Truth reigns above all

Saint John Paul 11 echoes the Lord Jesus's words 'do not be afraid.' Through his life Saint John Pall 11 shows us that these are not mere words. He speaks these four words into action through loss and grief. He lived these four words sowing seeds of tolerance into soil infused by hate and war. These four words thrived despite his life being threatened. Through each trial through each moment Saint John Paul 11 walked a path higher than trepidation and self-dependence – his life not paralyzed by fear but lived in trust. Through his example and those of many saints we have which enrich the church beyond words we can move forward and trust in Gods unconditional unailing love.

Prayer: Abba Father, open our hearts to receive your love and through the intercession of our Blessed Mother may we be strengthened. Amen

**Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if
there is room for the Lord Jesus**

Ish 63: 16-17, 19;
64: 2-7
Ps 80: 2-3, 15-16,
18-19
1 Cor 1: 3-9
Mark 13: 33-37

Today the Church celebrates the beginning of the Advent Season—the season of the Lord Jesus' coming. This time is given to us as a preparation for His arrival. Just as Lent is a time of preparation for the passion of Christ, Advent is a time to prepare for the birth of Christ. Without preparation, this season becomes like any other time. Christmas may come and go and not affect us.

The Church makes it a season of preparation so the birth of our Saviour does not come and go through our lives without making a difference within us. It is a time for hope and a time for change. When we make this time meaningful and spend time in His presence, He will change us from the inside out.

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, we see he now pleads with God to remember that He is their Father. It is a cry to God to take action on their behalf. Isaiah knew God intimately and refers to Him as Father. Isaiah 63:16 says, "You are our Father... You, Lord are our Father." However, the people of that time had forgotten God and had given into sin. Isaiah sees the addictive power of sin. He has proclaimed God's Word to the people and watched them turn away. The results of walking away from God are shown in verse 19, "We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, like those who were not called by Your name." There was no difference between God's people and the people of the world. Isaiah knew the only hope for the people was God's power, mercy and love. Isaiah is interceding for the people because he knows God is their only hope.

This reading from Isaiah reminds us that God is our only hope. Luke 1:37 says "For nothing is impossible with God." If we have an addiction or bad habit that we would like to give up, the Lord is calling us to come to Him and be changed. If we are overwhelmed with the problems of life and worn down by heavy burdens the Lord is calling us to come to Him (Matthew 11:28). If we have fallen away from God and do not feel His presence in our lives, He is calling us to make a change. He can take all our burdens, addictions, problems and failures and transform us.

The second reading from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians tells us what we have to look forward to during this Advent season as we prepare ourselves for His coming. Verses 5-7 says, "For in him you

have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.” The Lord promises that in this time, as we sit in prayer day after day, waiting to hear the voice of the Lord, He will give us the faith we need to believe in the Son of God and will bestow upon us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is through these gifts that we will come closer to God and really understand the reason He sent His Son into the world. God is faithful and when we do our part God will do His.

In the Gospel proclamation from St. Mark, the Lord Jesus warns us to keep watch for the moment when the Lord will come. Verses 35-36 tell us, “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.” He is asking us to prepare ourselves for Christmas and not allow this time of Advent to go to waste.

What will happen to us when we prepare ourselves for the birth of our Saviour? When we set aside a time of prayer each day to sit in the presence of God our Spirits will be awakened. We will begin to hear God and see God in everything. When our Spirits are awakened we will first hear Him speak to us. This can happen through a wordless revelation from God. A light comes on within us and things become crystal clear. We can also receive this revelation from a verse in the scriptures or a word of knowledge from God. Once we have heard God speak on a daily basis we will come into an intimacy with the Lord. By His grace we will experience the love of God. We will realise we are truly loved by God. When we are loved by God deep inside we will be able to minister to those who do not love us. Next we will find union with God. In union the Lord will carry our lives. When we must do something, we will not have to worry because we know that the Lord will carry it for us. In union our focus is not on ourselves, but on the Lord’s power and ability. Recently, I listened to a retreat conducted by Lalith Thaththa on hearing the voice of the Lord. He challenged the listeners to pray continuously for one month without asking for anything, but instead just to sit at the feet of the Lord and worship Him. I decided then and there that I wanted to take up this challenge to be closer to the Lord. Today, our Saviour and redeemer is extending this same challenge to all of us. When we do this we will find that the Lord will meet our every need and take care of us.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the strength to prepare myself spiritually for the birth of Christ. Lord, come alive in me and share with me the secrets of Your heart. Amen.

Before you were born I set you apart**-Jeremiah 1:5**

Jer 1: 4-9

Psalm 17: 1-9

1Cor 1: 3-9

Mark 16: 15-20

Today the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka observes a day of solemnity of mission lands. It is to remember St. Francis Xavier, who other than St. Paul, is considered to have won more souls for Christ. b This missionary lived to minister to others and bring them into a relationship with the Holy Trinity. Today's readings surround the theme of God's mission for our lives.

The first reading from Prophet Jeremiah says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Just as the Lord told Jeremiah, He tells each of us the same thing – we were all called by God for a mission before we were even born. Before God created us, He had set aside a mission for each of us. He created us with this mission in mind. Today, He is calling each of us to seek His mind and find out what God has called us to do.

In the second reading St. Paul tells us that in Christ we have all the tools we need to become His missionary. He has bestowed upon us all kinds of speech and knowledge so that we may be able to bear witness to Christ. When we are on mission for the Lord He will take care of us and give us every spiritual gift needed to fulfil His mission. God is faithful and therefore we can always trust that He will make sure we victorious right to the end.

On mission we remember the 3 pillars. Firstly, God uses human power. God needs people to fulfil His mission on earth. God can fulfil His plans without us, but He has chosen to work through people. In the Bible this fact is proven repeatedly through people such as Abraham, Moses, Gideon, the Blessed Mother, St. Paul, etc. Secondly, human beings need God. We cannot fulfil the mission God has for us by our own strength. We think that we must serve God with our own talents, skills and will power. The Lord says that we need His power because what He wants us to do is impossible. We learn slowly that the only way things can happen is by God getting involved in the situation. Thirdly, God works when people work. If we want the power of God in our lives, then all we have to do is offer ourselves up to God. He will fulfil His mission through us by His strength and power.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for choosing me to fulfil Your mission on earth. Lord, I pray for the wisdom and strength to complete my mission. Amen.

**“The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea”.**

Isaiah 11:9

Ish 11: 1-10

Psalm 72: 1-2,7-8,

12-13, 17

Luke 10: 21-24

In the beginning God said “Let us make man in our own image and likeness and let him rule over the creatures that move along the ground and all over the earth (Genesis 7:26)

As we read the creation story, we know that God gave all authority on earth to man. All animals were in perfect union with one another as God was with man. But we know that the fall of man into sin changed everything upside down. Till that moment like the prophet Isaiah said he wolf will living with the lamb, the leopard with the goat, the Lion was eating straw like the Ox.

When man fell, his original nature fell too and since he had been given all authority over all of creation the original nature of creation also fell.

As I was pondering on this, I asked myself how much damage one wrong bite did to all of creation. In other words Eve biting that apple changed the bites of all that is on this earth. The Lion was created by God to eat straw and not meat. But we are unable to believe it that way. But the prophet Isaiah reminds us that when the Son of Man comes in His Father’s glory to judge the heavens and the earth and when He reins on earth all things will reverse to their original nature which the human mind cannot fathom. He goes on to say “The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”.

One sin cost the entire world a huge price. Therefore every time when we are driven by circumstances to sin we should remind ourselves that our sin will mess not only our lives but the lives of others and everything that is around us. Today’s Gospel proclamation tells us that the Lord Jesus called His disciples fortunate. “Blessed are eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see, and to hear what you hear but did not hear (Luke 10:23-24) Yes the disciples of Jesus were fortunate to see all what they saw, but we who are living 2017 years after Jesus Christ are more fortunate to see millions of miracles and hear of the mighty and great things that the Lord has done through the church fathers and saints. We are blessed!

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray to give us the grace to seek your face in everything that we do and turn away from sinful occasions. Amen.

**“He gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples,
who in turn gave them to the crowds”**

Matthew 15: 36

Isaiah 25: 6-10

Psalm 23: 1-6

Matthew 15: 29-37

The promise of God to His people was fulfilled as prophesied on a mountain. God's love was spoken of by the prophet and acted out by God Himself. God would feed His people with rich food and wine and would wipe away the tears of His people and the veil that covers the eyes of His people would be taken away.

The Psalmist proclaims his ownership to his shepherd by singing the first verses of the Psalm with the words, 'the Lord is my shepherd'. God owns the whole world and the prophet say His people would experience the feast and the comfort of God.

Let us pause awhile and think of certain situations that cannot be reversed. What kind of lives do they face after their suffering and humiliation? Think of a nation let down by the rulers, an ethnic group massacred by another, women who are victims of domestic violence, husbands and wives who were cheated by their spouse, children who were left orphans by their parents, rape victims, abandoned old parents, families who are in great financial situations, people in hunger and thirst, the rejected and outcasts; where can they turn to? What can they do? How can their situations be reversed and their lives be made happy? Our God offers an answer to these life stories through people who respond to His will. But the choice is ours. Whoever comes under the ownership of God has the great privilege of feasting on the mountain and to be cared for by a loving shepherd. The Lord is 'my' shepherd and prophet said 'God's people'. Therefore, let us make a conscious decision to be under the ownership of God and surrender our lives to God.

On a mountain the Lord Jesus healed many people who were physically sick and their lives were restored by Him feeding them temporarily with bread and fish. Our Lord fed the whole world with rich food and choice wine on Mount Golgotha according to the prophecy with His Body and Blood. There is no substitute or comparison to that food. Whoever turns to the Lord Jesus and makes Him their shepherd becomes His people and He becomes their shepherd.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant us grace to experience Jesus in a deeper way like St. Nicholas did. May we too say as St. Nicholas said, "The giver of every good and perfect gift has called upon us to mimic His giving, by grace, through faith, and this is not of ourselves". Amen

God is on our side

Isaiah 26: 1-6

Ps 118: 1 & 8-9, 19-

21, 25-27

Mt 7:21, 24-27

In today's psalm the writer speaks of his troubles which are very applicable to Christ: many hated him without a reason; the Lord himself chastened him sorely, bruised him, and put him to grief, that by his stripes we might be healed. God is sometimes the strength of his people, when he is not their song; they have spiritual supports, though they want spiritual pleasures. Whether the

believer traces back his comfort to the eternal goodness and mercy of God, or if he looks forward to the blessing available to him, he will find plentiful cause for joy and praise. Every answer to our prayers is confirmation that the Lord is on our side; and then we need not fear what man can do to us; we should meticulously do our duty and trust in him alone to accept and bless us.

The Gospel proclamation today reminds us of what true discipleship means. People frequently confess that they have not said their morning and evening prayers or that they have not been to Mass. Perhaps they should recollect the words of today's Gospel: "It is not those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord', who will enter the kingdom of heaven..."

On the other hand, those of us who always do say our morning and evening prayers and never miss a Mass also need to remember them. Something more is required than just being a pray-er. What is required is that we "do the will of the Father". What is that will? It is that we are filled with the spirit of the Kingdom and work to make that Kingdom a reality in our day to day lives. It includes constant outreach beyond ourselves. We need to go to God by finding him alive in the world around us and helping others to be aware of that loving presence as well. We will not do that by devoutly calling on God's name while overlooking the needs of our brothers and sisters. To do that is to build our house on sand. It does not mean prayer is not important. We cannot effectively do God's work unless we spend time listening to and giving inner responses to his Word in times of undisturbed quietness. But our prayer is only genuine when it becomes the spur for us to go out and bring something of God's love and kindness into our world.

Prayer: Abba Father, teach us to be firm with our prayers and to build our foundations on rock. We pray especially during this season of advent that you show us the way to become your true disciples. Amen.

Mary said, ".....Let it be done to me as you have said."

Luke 1:38

Genesis 3:9-15, 20

Ps 98: 1,2,4

Eph 1:3-6, 11-12

Luke 1: 26-38

Today, the Church celebrates the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, God freely chose Mary from all eternity to be the Mother of His Son. To carry out her mission, she herself was immaculately conceived. She was born in a state of grace and after Adam's sin only Mary was born without sin. God created man in His own image with loving kindness and called them to enter into a loving and serving relationship with God, with each other and with the entire creation. God also blessed them with the gift of free will. But when tempted by the devil they failed to trust God and chose to disobey God and sin entered the world. In today's first reading, Adam who had fallen tries to hide from God.

In contrast to this action of disobedience by our first parents, in today's Gospel proclamation, Mary says 'Yes' to the call of God. She was a virgin, betrothed to a man named Joseph. When the angel said told her that she was going to conceive and bear a son and he would be called the Son of the most high, she would have faced many fears and doubts. But with childlike simplicity and humility, trusting God, she said 'Yes' to the calling of God. Thus the Fathers of the Church saw in Mary, the new Eve that unties the knot bound by the first woman. The knot of disobedience tied by Eve, the mother of all the living (Gen.3,20), was untied by the obedience of Mary.

God needed a woman to fulfill the salvific plan that He had for humanity. The moment the Blessed Mother said 'Yes' to the calling of God, it was no longer her strength or power. The Holy Spirit came upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her. The impossible became possible in her life. Just as the Blessed Mother was called to be the mother of the Son of God and the Lord Jesus was called to sacrifice His life on the cross in obedience to God, we who are baptised have a calling from God. It is not to live a life following our own desires and looking after ourselves that will end up in misery. Ephesians 1:4 says that God chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. Our first calling is to our family. As spouses to love and raise each other to holiness and as parents to raise saints in this world.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank and praise you for all you have done in our lives, for your love and faithfulness. Amen.

“When He saw the crowds He was moved with pity

Mathew 9:36

Isaiah 30: 19-21,
23-26
Psalm 147: 1-6
Mt 9: 35-10, 10:1,
5, 6-8

In today's Gospel, the Lord Jesus gives us a new vision. This new pair of eyes is called compassion or pity. This enabled the Lord Jesus to see the potential that every person has to enter into the fathers' kingdom. The Lord Jesus saw them as the harvest which is ready to be gathered. He has given us these same new eyes to see our families, our loved ones and colleagues in a new way.

How do we see the people in our family who are not going to church or for mass, who are not reading the bible, who are not talking about the Lord and who are rejecting us or our attempts to bring them to the Lord? Do we see them like sheep without a shepherd? Do we have love, compassion and pity on them when they act, react or reject us? The Lord Jesus tells us to first ask the master of the harvest for assistance, to turn to him before we approach others. He will anoint and empower us with the gifts and tools to draw them to the kingdom by healing every kind of sickness, bringing the dead to life and driving out unclean spirits. Our calling is to first go to our homes, our families, our offices, our communities and once they are accomplished to the world.

As prophet Isaiah mentions to us today in the first reading, God hears us when we call and He answers. The new sight we receive makes us take our eyes off our own cries and woes as we start to see the needs of others and are moved to compassion. He also wants us to understand that to receive this new sight we must accept our suffering, our trials and problems from the hands of our God. When we give positive responses to our own issues and reach out to those God has placed in to our lives, the good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed. An abundance of love, peace and joy will be tangibly present wherever we go. Then others will witness to the presence of the Lord in our lives. As the psalmist says today God will not only rebuild your Jerusalem, but will also bring back everyone who has once rejected the Lord, by healing the brokenhearted and binding up every wound. On this feast day of St. Juan Diego we remember the true image of Mother Mary of Guadalupe, under whose protection we must be brought closer to the heart of the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, heal our broken hearts and bind our wounds so that we may constantly see through Your eyes and testify to Your mighty power. Amen!

“I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with The Holy Spirit.”

Mark 1:8

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11

Psalm 85: 9-14

2 Peter 3: 8-14

Mark 1: 1-8

On this second Sunday of Advent, the Church makes us aware of the comfort and the assurance offered to us by our God. We light the purple candle today at the beginning of Holy Mass to represent the hope of Christ, our Saviour coming to the world.

In the First Reading, God gives humanity an assurance of a new era, where peace, equality and freedom prevail. God further affirms that His glory will be revealed to all people, not just to a chosen few, as in the Old Testament. These words of assurance were given to a people in captivity, in exile. As we hear these words, our Good Shepherd reminds us too, that though we are captive to our brokenness and sinful nature and our foolish ways of the world, He is going to do something new in our hearts and our lives, through the “voice” of the One who calls us to Him. He calls us today to “come as we are” to Him, and as we heed His call, and open our hearts to Him, He will level the mountains of pride and arrogance and raise the valleys of our inherent weakness and repeated failures.

As we receive His forgiveness and turn from stubbornness to obedience, what is promised in today’s Psalm will be our inheritance, namely love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace. St. Peter explains at times we may feel that God is slow to act or answer our prayer; the reason being, He wants us to come in repentance to Him.

Today’s Gospel proclamation sums up the whole lesson of the day. God, our Father, planned the salvation of humanity from the moment human beings fell into the sin of believing that they could live without God. He also sent so many prophets, inviting humanity back into His loving care. The last of these prophets was St John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Messiah. His message and baptism of repentance were so powerful that it challenged and drew the whole Judean countryside and all in Jerusalem. As powerful as his ministry was, St John the Baptist knew who he was and whose visit he was to announce. He knew that however much he exhorted the people to let go of their sinful ways and live according to the will of God, they were not able to do so, by their own strength. So he revealed the ultimate good news, that the One who was going to come after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit (cf Mark 1:8).

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the icing of the cake offered by God to us, when we think of the magnanimous love of our God. Not only did God create us, and this beautiful universe for us to live in comfortably, He would not be outdone even by our own sin and rejection of Him. He sent His own Son to leave the heavenly glory and become a human. He became the son of an unassuming relatively poor couple, a friend to the broken, downtrodden and wounded people and revealed to them that God is our Father. The Lord Jesus revealed the love of the Father through His teaching, giving people a second chance through forgiveness of sin, healing of physical and internal sickness, deliverance from evil oppression and feeding the hungry (meeting the needs, material and spiritual). After all those acts of love and mercy, the Father asked the Son to become the “lamb who takes away the sin of the world” by giving up His life on a cross after undergoing unspeakable suffering, which the Lord Jesus fulfilled perfectly, teaching us by example that there is another way to live, saying “not my will but Yours, Lord”. God showed us that His plans and ways are always far better than our limited ways by raising the Son from death to be the glorified Risen Lord, alive and victorious, who ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He descended into the hell of our lives, His Hands holding us from beneath, where we are fallen. Yet at the same time He is seated above the whole universe, thus being above our enemies, our natural circumstances and disasters, and our past mistakes and failures, giving us the assurance that He will turn every curse into a blessing. The Father and the Son are constantly discussing about us, about divine plans for each of us. Knowing very well that we are not able to fulfill His will and allow His plans to be realised in our lives, the Risen Christ comes into our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit to live inside us, so that His beautiful plan will become real in our lives.

This is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit which our Lord Jesus came to give us, so that we have a counselor with us forever, not just in this life but also when we face death and have to appear before the Heavenly Throne to give an account of our earthly life to God, who then will be our judge. He will be with us for all eternity. All we have to do is to choose to have Him come and open our hearts to Him in absolute surrender. Then the words of Lord Jesus in Matthew 4:17 will come true in us; “the Kingdom of God has come near”. We live in a world that is crying out for love, starving for compassion and forgiveness. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the answer to our struggles, sin and addictions and the secret of intimacy with God.!

Prayer: Abba Father, You are the Father of Creation, unfold Your sovereign plan we pray. O God, release Your anointing upon us. Let Your Glory fall. Amen.

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

- Luke 5:20

Ish 35: 1-10

Psalm 85: 9-14

Luke 5: 17-26

Isaiah speaks of the joy of the people who know God. He says in verse 1, "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom." When those who know God go through a trial their problem becomes the gateway to a deeper journey with God. Verse 6 says, "Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert." They know how to sit at the feet of the Lord and turn their desert into streams of living waters. They find God in the midst of their trials and hold on to Him. The Lord is teaching us that this simple act of holding on to God through thick or thin will take us on the road to holiness. Verse 10 says "Those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." At the end of their trials the people who hold on to God will always see the hand of God rescue them. They know that it was only the Lord who saved them and they rejoice and praise Him.

The Gospel proclamation is about the healing of a paralyzed man. While the first reading speaks of holding on to God to turn our curses into blessings, the Gospel reading teaches us that this faith we have in God's providence and goodness can overflow to others and bring the Lord into their lives.

The paralyzed man's friends would have heard of the miracles the Lord Jesus had done. Their faith would have been aroused each time they heard of a miracle that took place. The height of their faith in God was when they decided to lower their friend through a hole in the roof to get their friend near the Lord. They were crazy enough to do anything to get a healing for their friend. Through this act they were holding on to God in this trial. Just as the prophet Isaiah says in the first reading, the desert the paralyzed man was living in was turned into streams of living water when his friends brought him to the Lord Jesus. Today the Lord is asking us to hold on to Him through every trial and tribulation. When we do this we also become a witness of God's grace to others.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to be able to hold on to You through the desert in life. Lord, I pray that I will never let go of Your presence. Amen.

In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that
any of these little ones should perish. **Matthew 18:14**

Isaiah 40: 1-11
Ps 96: 1-3, 10-13
Matthew 18: 12-14

In this time of Advent, the Church is preparing us for the birth of Jesus in our hearts. Today's readings center on the theme of hope in salvation and the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for their creation. In today's first reading the Lord is speaking through the prophet Isaiah and comforting His people. The Jews had been waiting hundreds of years for God to send down an answer to their problems in Jerusalem. They would have read this passage from Isaiah many times. Each time they were oppressed by the Roman soldiers and had their livelihood taken away from them they would have read this passage and sought comfort, solace and strength knowing their God would one day rescue them from despair and end their time of misery.

Today the Lord is speaking to us as well. God is promising us a day when our inner peace will be restored and our fear will be taken away. The Lord tells us in verse 11, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." The Lord will take care of us like a shepherd takes care of His flock. He will carry those of us who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and give us rest. He will keep us close to His heart and lead us on the right path.

The Gospel reading from St. Matthew continues this analogy of God taking care of us like a shepherd takes care of His flock. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep to find one that has strayed away. The Lord is saying one is equal to a hundred. God calls us by name and says 'I take time away from the ninety-nine and come in searching of YOU because I LOVE YOU.' No matter what we do or how far we stray, the Lord will come in search of us. When we realize this, we become lost in His heart and fall in love with the Lord. This is the intimacy the Lord calls us to- to experience the depth of His love for us. This is what our journey with the Lord is all about. Each day we walk with God He will reveal a part of His love for us that we never knew. Today, if you find yourself unable to connect with God or that your prayer life is dry, the Lord is coming in search of you. All you have to do is sit at His feet and wait for Him to show you how much he loves you.

Prayer: *Abba Father, thank You for loving me. I confess that sometimes it is difficult to hold on You, but I will rest knowing that You are my shepherd. Amen.*

**“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11: 28**

Isaiah 40: 25-31

Ps 103: 1-4, 8-10

Matt 11:28-30

The Lord Jesus says, “Come as you are, I love you.” This love is ready to carry our burdens. This love is ready to give us rest. This love is ready to be an immense strength and power to us. But the question is how many of us are ready to accept that love? How many of us are ready to believe in that love? Many are lost in a world that seeks fulfillment through human relationships and protection through human power. Today, many of us have forgotten the God, who gave water and food in the desert, who showed the way through a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire and who protected them from the enemies by parting the Red Sea.

In the first reading Isaiah says, “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Is.40,29-31)

This is the life that is promised to the ones who depend and hope on the Almighty God. It is in vain many of us have failed to enjoy this life. The reason being we are used to a life style that entirely depends on one’s strength and knowledge. In the Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” There is rest for us who are burdened and weary of life. That rest is not in the world. That rest is in our Lord Jesus who is alive. Who believes in His love? Who gives the truth of their hearts? Whoever surrenders their lives to Him, will be able to enjoy this rest.

Psalms 103: 3-4 says, that He forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases, He redeems our life from the pit and crowns us with love and compassion. The promises of God are certain. Therefore let us turn to Him, as we are. Let us accept His love. In that love let us enter into a deep relationship with the Lord Jesus who is alive in us and among us and hope in this blessed life. In all circumstances, each moment of our lives, let us praise and thank God.

Prayer: Abba Father, You who are compassionate and gracious have mercy on us. You, who do not accuse us and are of great kindness, bless us. Amen.

Lord, help me to long for and strive for the inexpressible joy of heaven.

Isaiah 41: 13-20

Ps 145: 1-13

Matt 11: 11-15

In today's Gospel proclamation, our Lord pays St. John the Baptist the highest of compliments: "Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist." And Christ reveals why: He is the last of the prophets, the one who brings the age of the law and the prophets to a close. He is Elijah, the one sent before the promised Messiah to prepare the way for him.

Then comes an unexpected reversal: "Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Do not Christ's words awaken in our hearts an ardent longing for heaven? What else could matter in life but to arrive there, where the least of us will be greater than the greatest one on this earth?

How much do we really desire to reach our final goal? Do we not have to confess that we often say to God, "Lord, please bring me to heaven—but not yet!"? St. Cyprian reflects on this phenomenon in one of his homilies: "How unreasonable it is to pray that God's will be done, and then not promptly obey it when he calls us from this world! Instead we struggle and resist like self-willed slaves and are brought into the Lord's presence with sorrow and lamentation, not freely consenting to our departure, but constrained by necessity. And yet we expect to be rewarded with heavenly honors by him to whom we come against our will!"

A true longing for heaven is necessary, because it is not easy to arrive there. To ascend the heights of holiness we need to follow in the footsteps of St. John the Baptist, dying to our earthly tendencies. Am I prepared to renounce what often seems most intimately a part of me? Can I beg the Lord for humility? that I may wait for my turn to speak and to be at peace when others outshine me; that I may listen with a spirit of objectivity rather than an 'I know it all' attitude and most of all, that I may believe in your revelations, hope in Your word and love you more than myself. Lord Jesus, make this my prayer. Lord, You are showing us that heaven is for those who are strong in dying to themselves and living for You alone. Today, when we experience something painful or difficult, let us offer up the unpleasantness to God, knowing it is nothing in comparison to the reward of heaven.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I believe in Your presence here with me as I humbly kneel before you to do You homage and praise You. Amen*

If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.” Isaiah 48:18

Isaiah 48: 17-19

Psalm 1: 1-6

Matt 11: 16-19

We like to receive blessings from God. Therefore some do nine novenas and ask for blessings. Some do thirteen holy hours and seek blessings. Yet, at the end of it we remain restless. All these prayer methods are good. But today’s first reading presents an effective way of receiving God’s blessings. “If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.”

The Lord explains, what we have to do, to receive, His blessings continuously. He is asking us to listen to His commands and obey them. Abraham’s life is the great example of this. God gives a promise to Abraham. “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.” As it is said in the Scriptures the promise was fulfilled. But Abraham also had to do something. He had to do what God asked. He did not logically think how he was going to leave his country, his father’s home. He did not think what others would say. He listened to the voice of God. Then blessings flowed into his life. God asks the same from us.

God is our Saviour. He is the one who saves us from where we are. He acts for our betterment. He teaches us what we do not know and reveals to us how we should live. For years we lived another way. We have got used to living our lives looking around, looking at what others do and looking at television dramas. We have got used to living with hatred in our hearts. Stealing, cheating, lies and illicit affairs have become the order of life. Finally, when we do not receive blessings from God, we blame God.

The Lord presents to us a beautiful way of life. It is explained through the bible. When we follow it, blessings come upon our lives like a flowing river. God can turn the world’s curses into blessings. In today’s Gospel, men accuse the Lord Jesus saying, He is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners”. But without listening to any of it, He always obeyed the will of the Father for which He was crucified. But the Father grants Him an eternal resurrected life. Let us decide to live according to the will of God. What is God expecting from me this Christmas?

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to be obedient to you. Amen.

“Blessed are those who saw you, and those who have been adorned in love; for we also shall surely live.” Sirach 48:11

Sir 48: 1-4, 9-11

Psalm 80: 2-3, 15-19

Matt 17: 9, 10-13

Today, in the first reading and the Gospel proclamation, we are reminded of the Prophet Elijah. He is introduced as a fire and his words like a burning torch. We are familiar how in a time when the people of Israel were turning to false gods and the people were under oppression, God sent him to speak the word of God and perform miracles to draw people back to him. God blessed him to experience the glory of God thus making him one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament.

Further into the Gospel we are drawn to a conversation that takes place soon after the transfiguration. The three disciples walk down the mountain with our Lord Jesus and are astonished at seeing Prophet Elijah there. The Lord confirms that Elijah was to come, and infact he already has. Our Lord teaches us a valuable lesson. The people of Israel together with the teachers were expecting Prophet Elijah but did not see nor recognise him in John the Baptist as he was not in the image they expected. The same spirit of God that was resting on Prophet Elijah was on John the Baptist. But the people who eagerly waited to see him did not recognize him. The Lord Jesus goes on to say that those same people will treat Him, the Son of Man the same way as they did with John the Baptist as they could not recognize Him, because the image of the Messiah they had, did not match with that of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Lord lovingly teaches us today that we make the same mistake when we fail to see our own family, co-workers, neighbours, friends speaking in the same Spirit as Prophet Elijah or the Lord Jesus Himself. We fail to recognize the Lord in them and we refuse to listen to them. We fail to see that they have been called by God and appointed as forerunners like John the Baptist for us to turn away from our ways and to draw us to the Lord Jesus. Instead we persecute the people who have been placed before us to show us the way. Sometimes, it is we who are called to be the forerunner to others and we ourselves experience persecution from our own loved ones. Finally and most importantly we fail to recognize the Lord in the poor, the beggar at the traffic light, and the destitute or the person beside us.

Prayer: Abba Father, in this season of love, forgive me for failing to see you in others and help me be a shining light that gives direction to the path that they should walk. Amen

Strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.

Hebrews 12:11

Is 61: 1-2, 10-11
Lk 1: 46-50, 53-54
1 Thes 5: 16-24
John 1: 6-8, 19-28

In the Gospel proclamation today we meet St. John the Baptist. He was ministering at Bethany beyond the Jordan. Although the exact location of this place is subject to debate, it is safe to assume that it was some distance from the seat of worship, Jerusalem. Yet, it was able to arouse the curiosity of the Priests, Sadducees, and Pharisees who typically operated out of Jerusalem. This only implies that John had a highly successful and popular ministry (if it was otherwise they would not have taken any notice of it). It seems that they are trying to fit St. John the Baptist into a box. After all, St. John was the Son of a priest of the Temple of Jerusalem, and he could have easily succeeded his father. Yet, he chooses to do something unorthodox. In the Gospel of St. Luke we see the narrative of the blessed Mother visiting Elizabeth, and St. John leaping for joy at the encounter. My take is that he was baptised in the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb and it was the Holy Spirit who was leading him, and hence the unorthodox ministry and the favour of God on his ministry. Often, as we are led by the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves in uncharted territory.

What was St. John doing? He was preparing the way. He knew that the Lord was coming, and his role was to make it easier for the Lord to come. There are events such as the Four Steps Retreats, Prayer Meetings and special events like the National Day of St. Joseph Vas, where life changing encounters with the Lord occur, just like the coming of the saviour St. John the Baptist was anticipating. When we fast and intercede for events such as these, we too are participate in the "preparing the way" ministry of St. John.

In today's first reading we see Isaiah prophesying in the first person. So it seems that the words originally applied to Isaiah. St. Luke portrays our Lord Jesus as the fulfilment of this prophesy. I think the prophesy declares the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of anyone baptised in the Holy Spirit. So the reading shines a light on the ministry of St. John the Baptist. We see the secret behind the effectiveness of his ministry, and hence a clue as to what we must do.

The first reading is of two parts. First it describes the effect of the anointing of the Holy Spirit on those who are ministered to. In the second, we see the workings of the Holy Spirit in the life of the one

who is ministering. Today let's look at the second part.

The ones led by the Spirit are blessed with the gift of joy. Why? Because they experience the saving power of God. When they are confronted with problems, difficulties, and impossible situations, they are seen as miracle opportunities rather than obstacles. Hence joy even when things are not going according to plan. Not only does this apply to problems and situations we are confronted with, this even applies to our addictions and weaknesses that pull us down. The diadem of the bridegroom and the jewels of the bride are testimonies of how God rescued them when they were down with nothing to hope for.

There is another thing that the Holy Spirit does. This does not appear magically, but little by little, just like how a plant grows – As though nothing is happening at first glance, but over time, when you look back, a change has taken place. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. The Lord is cultivating Holiness before the nations. The nations are those who neither believe nor accept the ways of the Lord. It is in our interaction with them that righteousness and praise spring forth.

One of my persistent temptations has been to think that the qualities that the Holy Spirit is supposed to bring into my life, have to be cultivated by me. I do try hard. Alas, this results in disappointment in failure, and pride and arrogance in success. I am in a no-win situation. I remember Lalith Thaththa preaching that God's plan and purpose for us is not according to what we can accomplish through our capabilities and strengths, but rather, according to His strength and His capabilities. The plan for the Blessed Mother was for her to give birth to a child without knowing a man. Something humanly impossible, and undoubtedly beyond her capability. So it is with us. The Holy Spirit must overshadow us, and although it is not possible for us, nothing is impossible for God.

Then what is our job? The second reading provides an insight into this. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. For this is the will of God for us. For the one who calls us to his plan and purpose is faithful, and he will complete the project that he started in our lives when He called us.

Prayer: Abba Father, all our lives we believed that we can come up only by our own effort. We bring this attitude to our spiritual life, which is inadequate to fulfill your desire for us. Save us from the temptation of self effort, and teach us the secrets of seeking your face and being led by your Spirit. Amen

Jer 23: 5-8

Psalms 72: 1-2, 12-13,
18-19

Mt 1: 18-25

“Praise be to the Lord God.. who alone does marvellous deeds. Praise be to His glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with His glory” So cries out the Psalmist in the book of Psalms, declaring the joy of creation at the birth of their Saviour. It has been over two thousand years since this birth took place but even now the atmosphere appears to change as Christmas draws near. The whole earth seems to shift in its mood as all creation is filled with an inexplicable joy.

But we get so bogged down with the busyness of Christmas, the materialistic aspect that we humans have given to this day that often the joy of Christmas simply passes us by. We lose this incredible joy in the stress of what we have made this day to be.

Today's readings give us a good reminder about what Christmas. Jeremiah reminds us that this day is about our eternal King, the One who 'will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land'. The psalmist states that this King is the One who will deliver the needy, help the afflicted, take pity on the weak and save the needy from death. The King, in other words, who is the answer to every need of this world.

The world we live in today is increasingly confusing. Values and morals seem to have no place in society while justice seems to be non-existent. We wonder about our future, we worry about the generations to come. And we let ourselves be lost in this confusion, in this rat race that we have created for ourselves. But Christmas is a good time to go back to our roots. To go back to the Word of God and realise that the answers we look for are already provided in the truth of the existence and reality of Jesus Christ. That the justice we look for, the solutions to our problems, the healing to our brokenness is already present in the presence of our King. So as we prepare for this Christmas season, let us make it a point to not get lost in the hustle and bustle of Christmas. Let us truly take time to reflect on the gift that we are given in the birth of Jesus, in the love of God. Let our focus be on Him, the reason for this season and let our energy go into glorifying His eternal Name.

Prayer: *Abba Father, give me the grace this season to truly seek more of you. To seek You as the King and ruler of my little world. Amen*

Expect the unexpected from God

Jdg 13: 2-7, 24-25

Psalm 71: 3-6, 16-17

Luke 1: 5-25

The Gospel proclamation tells us about how Angel Gabriel visits Zechariah the father of John the Baptist. When Zechariah saw the Angel he was deeply troubled and fear took hold of him. But the Angel tells him not to be afraid and assures him that his prayers have been heard by the Lord. The Angel Gabriel also goes on to say how great his son would turn out to be and what he should not consume and how he will be filled by the Holy Spirit. But as we know, Zachariah doubted all that the Angel told him. That is when the Angel made him dumb till what he had spoken off came to pass.

In this Gospel proclamation there is something significant that we should take some time to ponder on. An angel appeared specially to Zachariah in the holy temple of God, but Zachariah could not believe the words that were spoken to him.

If an Angel appeared to me, I would gladly and blindly believe whatever he says. The Angel mentioned here is the Angel Gabriel, one of the few Angels who stands before God. He was not any ordinary Angel but a superior one.

I am assuming that the reason why Zachariah did not believe the angel was that he was not convinced that God would answer his prayers. This does not mean that God answers all prayers but he will answer prayers that are related to building His kingdom on earth. The second reason is he was not ready to believe that God would consider him important and send an Angel to give him the message. It was an overload for him. In other words this was too much for him to believe.

We should not forget that he was a man of prayer and it is said that he was upright in the eyes of God, and lived a blameless life. He expected God to answer his prayers in an ordinary manner and measure.

As I ponder on this, I ask myself, to what extent am I convinced that God will listen to the cry of my heart. Do I have the slightest doubt that God will answer my prayers when I pray to him. And will He answer my prayers in a distinctive way that my mind cannot fathom. Let us remember that our God is a creative God and he does things in ways we cannot even dream of.

Prayer: *Abba Father, We pray to give us the grace to believe your promises and wait upon your timing and ways in our life. Amen*

“the virgin shall be with child and bear son, and shall name him Immanuel”

Isaiah 7: 14

Isaiah 7: 10-14

Psalm 24: 1-6

Luke 1: 26-38

God is love. Nothing is impossible for God. Everything is possible for Him except forcing Himself into the lives of human beings and he cannot be forced stop loving them. The fullness of His promise made at the most vulnerable moment of the world came into completion. God was reminded of His awesome promise once more.

According to the Jewish culture it was nothing new for a ‘virgin’ to give birth to a child, because every young woman who got married was a virgin. The uniqueness of today’s scriptural passage is that ‘a virgin’s child’ is named by God and it’s a sign; a sign that has never taken place before. The sign would be deep as the nether world or high as the sky. There was no comparison to the sign.

When the whole world was busy with their business, God was minding His business too. Over the generations God prepared a nation to send His only Begotten Son to this world. Prophets were sent from time to time and prophecies were given too. When the fullness of the time came, God sent His messenger to a woman who was chosen by God Himself, once again planned according to His WILL.

This young virgin who had never been united with her husband before was to go into her husband’s house over shadowed by the power of the Holy Spirit with her full consent. Every other virgin in the history gave birth to a child with human intervention. But according to the sign God gave the Israelites - higher than the sky and deeper than the nether world - was that a virgin giving birth to a child without human intervention.

The Annunciation of the Birth of Christ goes parallel with the announcement of Zachariah about the birth of John the Baptist. Something unique we need to identify in these events is how the plan of God works? Ahaz was a king; high and mighty, Zachariah was a Priest; a prominent figure of the day. But the Virgin from Nazareth was an insignificant person. In both other instances two prominent persons wearied God. In other words they could not trust God while a young virgin woman in the small town of Nazareth prostrated her whole life at the feet of God trusting Him fully.

Prayer: Abba Father, there’s nothing worth more than living a surrendered life at your feet. Cause me to surrender to your Will oh God! Amen.

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” Luke 1:45

Song 2: 8-14/Zep 3:

14-18

Ps 33: 2-3, 11-12,

20-21

Luke 1: 39-45

As we are in the season of advent and nearing Christmas, I am sure you would experience so much joy, peace and love in your heart as I do. The season of Advent is a season of hope. To be in line with this season of hope, today's first reading is taken from the Song of Solomon which speaks about Springtime Rhapsody. The book could be viewed as a celebration of sexual love between a man and a woman while for Jewish and Christian interpreters of previous centuries, however, the Song described the mutual love of God and Israel or Christ and the Church. The Song celebrates faithful human love. For that reason alone, it could be argued, the Song deserves a place in Scripture. In a culture which is saturated with sexual images but greatly lacks prominent examples of lifelong faithful love, this text celebrates love between a man and a woman that is marked by mutuality and fidelity. Both understand their love to be “in agreement with the goodness of God’s creation.”

Today's Gospel proclamation speaks about our Blessed Mother visiting Elizabeth. Two women who moved by the Spirit, raise their voices in praise of God. After the Angel appeared to the Blessed virgin and incarnation of the Son of God, the Blessed Mother departs to see her cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant in her later age. First and foremost this shows the Blessed Virgin's humility. She was carrying the Son of God in her womb but yet pays a visit to her cousin. We read in St. Luke's Gospel “when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit: (Luke 1:41). Here we see Blessed Mother was truly filled with the Holy Spirit as she spoke a word, the child in her cousin's womb moved. We are called to grow to that level to be filled with the Holy spirit as we speak a word so that lives are touched and transformed. St. Peter Canisius whose feast the church celebrates today was one of the most important figures in the Catholic Reformation in Germany. We read that writing about St. Peter Canisius in 1897, Pope Leo XIII noted similarities between the late 19th century and the saint's own lifetime, “a period when the spirit of revolution and looseness of doctrine resulted in a great loss of faith and decline in morals.” St. Peter Canisius became known for his strong support for the Catholic faith during the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

Prayer: *Abba Father, fill me with Your Holy Spirit so that I will learn to walk in humility and in submission to you, Amen!*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked upon his lowly servant. Luke 1: 46

1 Sam 1:24-28

Psalm 1 Sam 2: 1,4-8

Luke 1:46-56

As we draw nearer to the celebration of the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ's birth on this earth taking the very image of His own creation, we see in this passage today; two ladies holding onto God's promises and how God remains faithful in their lives.

In today's Gospel proclamation, we see the continuation of the story of the Visitation. We see how Mary visits Elizabeth and how the baby inside her womb leaps for joy in front of the Ark of the Covenant; Mary as the Ark of God's New Covenant. As we study this situation, Mary is favored highly by God and chosen for a great purpose. But she does not let that get into her head rather in her humility she goes all the way to meet Elizabeth and remains with her for three months helping her. Are we humble enough when we see God working in our lives, in and through situations? Or do we manipulate His blessings to be something that we deserve?

We see the "Magnificat" hymn in today's Gospel, this means 'magnifies' in Latin. Mary praises God and His covenantal faithfulness with great humility. We see this hymn of praise in a situation where Elizabeth praises Mary as 'the Mother of my Lord'. But Mary diverts these praises of Elizabeth towards God. What is it that we can learn from this situation? As we go through this journey there may come moments where people may praise us for the deeds God has done in our lives. Are we humble enough to realize God's hand and His plan in that situation or do we get lost in that moment of praise from a human being and forget the mighty God, our creator who has been working in us? Let us deeply ponder about this today.

Hannah in the first reading is faithful to God as God fulfills His promise to her by giving her a Son. She remains faithful to the Lord as she knows how God has been faithful to her. This fragrance of God's faithfulness can only be known by an intimate relationship with God. If we are unable to give such a response as we see in both women in the readings today, it may be because we have not yet come to know His faithfulness and grace. Let us make a decision today to carry the Lord every moment and be aware of His presence.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I want to base all my hope on you alone. You can do all things; bring to birth in my soul your presence. Make my heart gentle and humble as the Blessed Mother and help me to seek your infinite mercy. Amen.*

“Now I am sending my messenger ahead of me to clear the way”.

Malachi 3:1

Mal 3: 14, 23-24

Ps 25: 4-5, 8-9, 10&14

Luke 1:57-66

In this Advent season, we are reminded of the preparation for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first reading today speaks of the sending of the messenger of God to clear the way in preparation of that great day. The teaching in this is that the nation was in need of purification at that time. The people of God needed refining. There was no priest worthy of presenting an offering to God. The typical modal of a priest in the days of Malachi was to walk with God in peace and uprightness and turned others away from sin.

Today, many thousand years after, we still need the refining and purification in the societies we live in. The time of Advent is an ideal platform for all Christians to sincerely seek the Lord and prepare the hearts to accept the birth of our Christ Lord Jesus. Our guide to prepare hearts given from the Scripture itself is to turn away from sin and reconciliation with others. This is why we popularly say that Christmas is a season of love and sharing.

The Gospel proclamation speaks of the birth of John the Baptist. The one who comes to pave the way as prophesied in the first reading. The voice in the wilderness! A miracle took place in the house of Zechariah at the birth of John the Baptist. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist who was made mute was able to speak once again. The scripture tells us that a “holy fear” came on the neighborhood and throughout Judea as people heard of the miracle. Therefore, how much more of a “holy fear” must we feel as we await the miracle birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ?

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint John of Kanty. He was a serious man, and humble, but known to all the poor of Kraków for his kindness. His goods and his money were always at their disposal. He kept only the money and clothes absolutely needed to support himself. He slept little, ate sparingly, and took no meat. When he was warned to look after his health, he was quick to point out that, for all their austerity, the fathers of the desert lived remarkably long lives. He was quite famous for his quotes and one such is; Fight all error, but do it with good humour, patience, kindness and love. Harshness will damage your own soul and spoil the best cause.

Prayer: *Abba Father, fill us with your love so that we can truly repent and reconcile. Amen!*

**“Your house and your Kingdom shall endure forever before me;
your throne shall stand firm forever” 2 Samuel 7:16**

2Sam 7: 1-5, 8-12,
14, 16
Ps 89: 2-5, 27, 29
Rom 16: 25-27
Luke 1: 26-38

He was not a man to walk away from neither a threat nor unfinished business. He had defeated nations and had established Israel. God had given him rest from his enemies. Yet, his heart was not at peace; how could he live in a house of cedar while the ark of God was in a tent? He wanted to build a more beautiful house to accommodate the Ark of the Covenant. For more than 200 years, the Ark of the Covenant had been kept in a tent, moving from one place to another with the people. David would have built the most exquisite temple for God. The temple in the heart of Jerusalem, not only would have ensured pure Jewish worship, but also the continued loyalty of the twelve tribes. In every sense, it was the perfect religious and political solution for Israel.

The Lord is teaching us a strong lesson today through the first reading. Sometimes, our hearts might be restless for the things that the Lord has not planned for us. King David was the most powerful king ever to rule the kingdom of Israel at that time and there was nothing that he could not achieve. But he had to be humbled by the Lord to hear though Prophet Nathan that his dream was not meant to be realised during his life time. Can we imagine what would have gone on in the mind of King David?

There is yet another lesson that we are shown. It is easy for us to readily agree with those in power when they have set their mind in one direction. This is what happened to Prophet Nathan. When King David shared his desire to build the temple with the Prophet, there was no discernment or seeking the will of God and he readily agreed with the King. He said “Go, do whatever you have in mind, the Lord is with you” Isn’t this typical of all of us when people have big dreams we encourage them to chase behind the big dreams forgetting that the Lord may have a completely different plan for them. The duty of the Prophet was to guide the person to seek the will of God. It is the same calling that we are called to do today. Be a guiding light to others and not be part of the general popular worldly opinions.

This reminds me of the teachings few weeks ago on the calling of every parent which is to make a saint out of their children. This father when his elder son was just 10 years old, dreamt that he would become a doctor, lawyer, engineer etc as that was the dream of most

parents at that time. It did not take long for him to realise that his son was heading towards a completely different journey which made him realize the true calling he had as a parent. This was to lead him to be a saint. The journey was hard and arduous but the Lord was faithful in bringing his son into a deep journey and making him a full time preacher, touching hearts and changing lives.

So we see further into the first reading how God speaks to King David through Prophet Nathan "Should you build me a house to dwell in?" Instead, God had a counter offer; a different plan; to build a house for David by establishing his family on the throne. For four centuries the line of David ruled Israel continuously, until the Babylonians conquered Judah. This prompted Israel to look for the fulfilment of God's promise through a Messiah, a descendant of David to save them.

In today's Gospel proclamation we find the God who refused a temple in Jerusalem seeking the consent of a young, insignificant virgin to be the dwelling place for His son till He was born. The greatest story of obedience and humility of mankind is told in the story of the nativity.

On the one hand we see the young maiden Mary, innocent and holy, living a life of purity being visited by the Angel Gabriel bearing 'good news' of the world that the Messiah is to be born through her. What was to be the good news of the world may not have been so for young Mary for she knew she would be humiliated beyond imagination. According to Jewish customs she would be stoned to death, yet, she had the strength and the grace to discern the correct inner response. What is the mystery that enabled Mary to offer such strength and inner yield to a situation that was beyond her ability to accept or bear? It was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the very strength of the Messiah living inside her. For Mary, unlike King David or Prophet Nathan, there was no false understanding of the will of God in her life. She already had the favour of God upon her life to fulfill the promise God made to King David that the Messiah would be born into the lineage of the King. So we see the humility and obedience in her bringing forth the Saviour of the World.

On the other hand, we see the humility and obedience of the Lord Jesus Himself. The Lord is with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the heavenly kingdom. He is the author of the Universe and King of all Kings. More powerful than the most powerful King that Israel ever had and yet, the Lord Jesus says yes to the will of the Father and leaves His heavenly throne to come down to earth for us.

Prayer: Abba Father, on this joyous day help us to deeply reflect on the love you have had for human kind through our Lord Jesus who came down to save us. Amen

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the
Messiah, the Lord.

Luke 2:11

Isaiah 52: 7-10

Psalm 98: 1-6

Heb 1: 1-6

John 1: 1-18

Christmas is such a rich experience that the church provides 4 different sets of readings for the masses said at different times on Christmas day. In this reflection, we will visit the 4 different Gospel readings.

During the day time mass, the church takes the beautiful prologue to the Gospel of St. John, where St. John seems to provide a beautiful reflection on what the coming of Our Lord Jesus meant to him.

St. John introduces Our Lord Jesus as “the Word”, a revelation from God. His entire life was a revelation. They looked at Him and saw how God thought, how God felt, what God’s attitudes were. Yet, St. John says that not everyone recognised this, even though they were the people of God, even though they knew the scriptures, even though they worshipped at the temple, and practiced the law to the best of their ability. St. John gives us the key to those who recognised Him as the Word. They who believed, became more than men. Why did they have to believe? The natural state of people is darkness and hence we cannot see God through our natural ability to perceive reality; By seeing, understanding and rationalising. By believing, the truth of the spiritual realm breaks into the physical realm. In the Christmas narrative, we see the Holy Family using this key in the difficult circumstances they faced.

The Gospel proclamation for the Vigil Mass uses St. Mathew’s narration of the nativity (Mt 1:18-25). During the annunciation, the Blessed Mother prays “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to your word.” Usually, I seek the will of the Lord when I make important decisions. Whether to take a new job or not. Whether to select this person that I like as my partner. At the back of my mind I think that when I do the will of the Lord, the Lord handles the things that are beyond my control, so that my foot will not slip. As for the Blessed Mother, when she surrendered to the Lord, everything seemed to go wrong. St. Mathew tells us, that even when things seemed to be out of control, prophesy was being fulfilled. We learn that although we feel that God is out of control, he has not stepped down from the throne.

It must have destroyed the Blessed Mother to see what it did to a good

man like St. Joseph, when he learnt that she was with child. But as Elizabeth revealed, the Blessed Mother is the one “who believed that the Lord will accomplish all what He said”. The Lord does intervene with the visit of an Angel, but not before St. Joseph had decided to divorce her (and it seemed that God was not doing anything). From the point where St. Joseph chooses to obey the Lord, it is St. Joseph who receives the leading on what should be done, and not the Blessed Mother. The Blessed Mother gives us a tip on what we must do when it seems that God is not doing anything, and St. Joseph gives a tip on what the God ordained role of a father of a family should be.

The Gospel reading for midnight mass is taken from LK 2:1-14. Here we see the decree of Augustus Caesar disrupting the life of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. Haven't we seen this repeated over and over again? A person in power takes a decision, and our lives are disrupted. Yet, we see how God uses those decisions as stepping stones to fulfil prophesy (his plans). He cannot be defeated, no matter how powerful and cunning men are.

In Bethlehem as the Holy Family went from Inn to Inn looking for lodging, I am sure the Blessed Mother must have prayed for God to intervene. It seemed that God was not answering her prayer. Haven't we all been here at one time or the other? But God had greater plans. Had the child been born in an inn as they hoped, the child would never have been accessible to the Shepherds. The Shepherds were God's elect to whom it was revealed by an Army of Angels that their Saviour was born in the Royal City of David. Circumstances and logical reasoning would never have made them look for the savior in a stable. If He is to be found, He must be revealed.

The Gospel reading taken at the mass at dawn speaks of what happened when the Shepherds visited the manger (LK 2:15-20). Had the Shepherds remained in the field after the revelation was made, they would not have seen the Glory of God. Taking action based on a revelation gives us the grace to see the Glory of God.

The reading continues to say that the Blessed Mother reflected on all that the Shepherds shared. She must have realized, that although things seemed chaotic, disappointing and out of control, the Lord had never stepped down from the throne. She was so right to trust him.

Prayer: Abba father, this Christmas, reveal Jesus to me just like how you revealed Him to the Shepherds. Grant me the faith to see your glory in circumstances where it seems that you have forgotten me. Amen

“ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Luke 19:10

Acts 6: 8-10, 7: 54-59

Ps 31: 34, 6-8, 16-17

Matt 10: 17-22

As we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus, we are reminded of the mission of His birth. St. Stephen along with seven others is chosen by the apostles for his great faith and presence of the Holy Spirit. The first chapters of Acts tell us of St. Stephen and his great work of Charity. He used God's love, wisdom and the presence of the Holy Spirit to overcome many obstacles to serve the Lord and God's people by softening their hearts, encouraging generosity and bringing God's healing presence to them. He had such a personal and close relationship with God that when he looked up heavens opened and he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! This enraged everyone raising the same claims against him as they did to the Lord Jesus. They stoned him to death at which point he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." His death was similar to that of Our Lord Jesus Christ who prayed on the cross "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Luke 23:46

It is the first time we find mention of the name Saul, a pleased spectator of this tragedy who later, changed from a persecutor into the firebrand preacher Paul.

It is probable that David penned this psalm when he was persecuted by Saul; it sings of God's faithfulness, mercy and love in which we should place our complete trust and depend on at all times. It is by this grace that we are redeemed, safe and have God's favour upon our lives even amidst persecution.

In the Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus speaks to us, as He did to His disciples to raise them to be His Apostles. The Lord Jesus warns us about the suffering and persecution we will have to face in serving God and people. This may come from those who are close to us and those who are far. He also promises us of His faithfulness when we choose to trust and depend on Him. He will guide, lead and speak through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. He will be with us and save us at the end. So He commissions us, like St. Stephen, What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31. Therefore we must commit ourselves daily to be sanctified through prayer and continuous surrender.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we believe that you are granting us the grace to stay close and connected to you so that we may continue to share your love with the world around us. Amen*

Wednesday 27th December St. John, Apostle & Evangelist

We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete

1 John 1:4

1 John 1: 14

Ps 97: 1-2, 5-6, 11-12

John 20: 1, 2&8

The Bible teaches us that in the beginning the earth was formless, empty and darkness was over the surface of the sea. It was a mess. When the word of life paved the way for the new creation, the once formless, empty and dark surface was transformed into a fruitful place - a paradise.

Over the years, from generation to generation, we have missed out the theme – the word of life which gives us life., which transforms everything and which completes our joy. We were searching for it everywhere. We are searching for it in everything. In every desire and through every crisis, we are searching for it. In fact we are desperate. All the time, our spirit is crying out, searching for the one who gives life – one who completes our joy. Our spirit is searching for the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the word of life. Intentionally or unintentionally, whether we accept it or not we are searching for him.

Today's Gospel proclamation says that on the first day of the week, after the death of Jesus, Mary of Magdala, Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved ran to the tomb. They were searching for the Lord. They were searching for their master. Mary of Magdala explained what her naked eyes saw. She described what could have possibly happened. The other disciple whom Jesus loved ran faster than Peter but did not enter the tomb first. He allowed Peter in. What Peter saw inside the tomb was more logical. Then, the disciple who had run first to the tomb with more curiosity, the one whom Jesus loved went inside. He saw everything Mary of Magdala and Peter had seen. But John 20: 8 says "he saw and believed". Even though he took it more spiritually than the other two, the Bible tells us that "for as yet they did not understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead, the disciples went back to their homes". They somehow had missed the most important theme – Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. We carry the same misconception. We too may have missed out on the most important theme in our lives. Our struggle, crisis, bitterness, resentment, restlessness may be indicating that we have missed out the word of life within us. Today, the Lord is waiting for us to be transformed by the word of life.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I open my heart to you in faith and I believe that you have risen from the dead. You have the word of life that will heal me and transform me into a new creation. Thank you Jesus! Praise the Lord! Amen*

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1John 1:9

1 John 1:5-2:2

Psalms 124: 2-8

Matt 2: 13-18

I remember when I came for the first time to St. Peter's 12 years ago. I, full of sin and my ego was virtually forced by a Priest and an Aunt of mine. The topic was what is sin and how the Lord forgives. It was hard to believe. But when I came for the third time, during the Adoration I was full of tears and remorseful for what I had done. Over the next few months I started admitting my sins and what I had done. Through a lot of turmoil, life began to change. I lost a close relationship, I had to leave the company I had built and was going through a bitter custody battle. I did not have to force myself to come out of these situations. I got help and took the first steps and the Lord paved the way for me to become clean and white as snow. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. Were not these words active, live and true? What about now are we sinless? No, we are not because from our unconscious mind comes things which are hidden and we do not know why we carry them. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. But as the word says if we persevere by admitting our sins by coming and sitting at His feet he will purify us.

During the course of our journey in Christ we will come across many situations which we find hard to go through. Most of us go through these phases from time to time? I was attacked and ridiculed in our company saying that there was no business. The partners were fearful of what was to happen. But I had confidence in the Lord that the business was going to thrive. The Lord proved right and the business turnover grew three times more when compared to last year. When Herod had his plans to destruct the course of Lord's plan it was not successful because St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother heard the voice of the Lord in their crisis and acted on it. The Lord did his part.

Then Herod started destroying all the children below two years, but could not destroy the Lord's plan. Today we celebrate the Feast of The Holy Innocents, Martyrs. They are a perfect example that the biggest blessings in life come our way when we have to go through problems that have no solution. If we hear the Lord's voice and act on it blessings will manifest in their time.

Prayer: *Abba Father, help us to hear your voice in the deepest struggles of our life and act on it. In Jesus name we pray. Amen*

Give us faith like our Blessed Mother's

1 John 2: 3-11

Psalm 96: 1-6

Luke 2: 22-35

In today's Gospel proclamation, we hear the story of how when the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Father.

In the temple was Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. Moved by the Holy Spirit, Simeon went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus, Simeon took the child in his arms and praised God, saying: "Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations."

Simeon blessed the parents and said to Mary: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

During the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, many were the swords that pierced our blessed mother's soul. Tragically even today many non-Catholic churches reject Mary and in so doing pierce her soul. When baby Jesus was born in a cattle shed the Blessed Mother would have wondered why God did not provide her the basic privacy or facilities. Then there was the attempt by Herod to kill the child with Joseph and Mary taking the child and going to Egypt as refugees. Later in life our Blessed Mother was known to have been perplexed and disturbed when the child Jesus was lost when they went to the temple. The Blessed Mother and St Joseph went back and found him in the temple and the Lord Jesus told Mary "Did you not know that I must do my Father's business?" Again we see how her appeal was first rejected by the Lord at the wedding feast in Cana. Finally when our Blessed Mother stood at the foot of the cross she would have wondered what this was all about but her faith was strong and she believed that God could take this calamity and turn it into a blessing. Indeed it happened through the suffering and crucifixion of the Lord, the door was opened for our salvation.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us trusting and deep faith as our Blessed Mother had. Give us the grace and power to carry any cross and follow the Lord. Amen.

The world passes away but His word remains

1 John 2: 12-17

Psalms 96: 7-10

Luke 2: 36-40

Today we are asked many questions which probe whether we are engrossed in this world or free from its entanglements.

The freer we are, the clearer will we hear the voice of God. Though a few verses have been taken from the passage from 1 John, when prayed with, they will reveal our real state of life.

The readings assume that as believers we are in this state...

1. We have already received the forgiveness of our sins.
2. We know Him who is from the beginning.
3. We have overcome the evil one.
4. We already know the Father
5. We know Him who is from the beginning
6. We are strong and the word of God lives in us who through it we have overcome the evil one.

Can we mark true or false to this list of statements. If we find ourselves floundering then we know we have a long way to go. In short, we are asked not to be in love with the world and three specific things

a. The craving of the flesh b. the greed of eyes c. people boasting of their superiority. Today, we have people boasting of their anointing which is actually just the grace of God on broken and restored souls.

Then we are told that all these are things of the world will pass away. The only thing that will remain is the will of God.

When we find these truths, we will find peace and freedom. Till then we will be striving for the wrong things even in spiritual places. Our heroine Ann, the daughter of Phanuel was a prophetess in the Temple. She able to hear the voice of God because she had set her heart on worshipping the Lord and spend her time in prayer and fasting. When we choose to connect with the Lord we will begin to have clarity.

Prayer: Abba Father, forgive me for I have been deeply in love with the world and the ways of the world. Today I submit to your will. Amen

Becoming one family in God

Gen 15: 1-6, 21: 1-3,

Ps 105: 1-9

Heb 11: 8, 11-12, 17-19

Luke 2: 22-40

When I think of a family I am reminded of the beautiful movie which was etched deeply in my being. It is called 'It's a Wonderful Life'. It is about a hardworking father and husband named Geroge Bailey who has made sacrifices all his life but reached a point where all is lost and he prefers to commit suicide. It is then that due to prayers an angel is sent from Heaven to show him the role

he has played in life and the many ways in which he has influenced the lives of others.

When we think of the Holy Family of St. Joseph, Mother Mary and the Lord Jesus we see that each had a role to play. Each person received a leading from the Father in heaven through angels. The leading they received could have caused them to clash but instead in reality it brought harmony and a common vision to the family. They would have had difficulty at times trying to understand the motives of the other and the plan God had in the suffering of each other. But God's grace prevailed and we have a beautiful family to emulate.

Abram while he was still learning the ways of God was given a strengthening word which said, 'Do not be afraid, I am your shield, your reward will be very great. Let us take a moment to pray this beautiful promise. On the last day of the year, as we look forward to the next one and the rapidly advancing days and years, we put our hope in the Lord. The Lord calls us by name and asks us not to be afraid. As parents with so many responsibilities, as mothers with growing children, as young couples on the verge of marriage, as seniors wondering about the future.... the Lord declares, 'Do not be afraid, I am your shield and your great reward.'

Abram was carrying deep fears of the future and his posterity but the Father invited him to step outside and look up at the stars. We are invited to step out of the darkness of fear and anxiety and look up to our loving heavenly Father who has awesome plans for us. One reflection said that Abraham trusted God's promises and found peace. This is the truth because the great reward we get in trusting is not wealth and power but the presence of the Lord Jesus who is the Lord of peace. Ultimately we want peace and happiness.

In the letters to the Hebrews the actions of Abraham and Sarah to are

attributed their unflinching faith. Abraham parted for the new country without knowing where he was going. Sarah trusted God for a child and Abraham offered up Isaac with total trust in God.

He was ready to be misunderstood by his only Son to be right and obedient in the eyes of God. How do we respond to God's demands? We long to be accepted by family to the extent that we let down and even forget God.

The Holy Family also lived in obedience and offered up the sacrifice as directed in the Jewish law. By obeying the direction from God they received prophecies and revelations from Simeon and Anna. God waits to open His heart to us as long as we go to Him in surrender and obedience. The messages can leave us bewildered and confused but over time we begin to see the reality of them.

In these times, because we can, we try our best to control the parameters through which we are live. Young couples are deciding not to have children since they want to fulfil their dreams and aspirations. Or even if they have children they want to know everything beforehand and have control of the future. It implies that we have all the answers. But the reality is that we cannot understand life and God's ways.

A key ingredient to a successful family is prayer and individual or personal prayer. No matter what our state in life is we are called to a life of prayer. In moments of prayer we receive God's wisdom and direction. Prayer brings a pause to our busy lives. We always consider a pause in our busy schedules as a waste of time. But that pause can mean life or death to so many of us. That moment of pausing before the throne of Heaven brings us an immense download of wisdom and peace.

We receive direction that we would never have received from the world. We are aware that there is the visible world and the invisible world. We strive so hard to make the visible world complete and beautiful but internally we are broken and defeated. In moments of prayer, invisible bonds are established; seeds of love, forgiveness and hope are sowed. People are moved to work for us, souls in purgatory are rescued, erroneous decisions of suicide and harm are avoided and above all we receive the greatest reward which is the presence of God. We are comforted through difficulty as the psalmist says, The Lord remembers His covenant forever. As the Lord remembers His covenant we begin to remember our near and dear. We expand our horizons and love and live as God wants. Wish you a Happy New Year!

Prayer: Abba Father make us one as you Jesus and the Spirit are one. Amen!

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