“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).  
Matthew 1: 23

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On Our Knees In His Hands

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Prayer: Abba Father, we want to be watchful. Give us the courage to humbly stand before you each day as we wait to welcome you when you return in glory. Amen
Today marks the beginning of the season of Advent, a time of waiting that is often overlooked by the lay faithful of our time. Advent is a season of hope and expectation, for in a few weeks, we will joyously recall the night God our Saviour entered our broken world. To prepare for this occasion, we are invited to prayerfully partake in the season of Advent.

The prophet Jeremiah received a revelation about the Lord’s coming and that revelation is recorded in today’s first reading. The promise of God which was made to the Israelites of old was to be fulfilled by one person, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. The Israelites did not live to see the fulfillment of that promise, but that never hindered their faith. They knew without a shadow of doubt that one day, their Messiah would come, one day their suffering would end and one day restoration would take place.

In my own life, I see how easily I give up hope when things do not go according to plan. All it takes is a deviation from my own ideals for me to question God and to ask Him where His hand is in my life. I am ashamed to admit I do not have the ironclad faith of the Israelites. I believe when it suits me, however, as soon as life throws a punch in my direction, I switch to blaming and questioning God.

Doubt is a regular problem in most people’s lives, and thus, most of us can relate to the reality of it. Doubt arises when we have to wait for longer than we anticipated. The Psalmist had discovered one secret to overcome doubt and anxiety. He asked the Lord to teach him His paths and make known His ways.

Do we ask God to reveal His plans to us, or do we tell God our plans and ask Him to shower His blessings upon them? If it is the latter, it is time we learn from the Psalmist of today and start asking the Lord for His ways, for it is said in the word of God, “My ways are not your ways, neither are your thoughts My thoughts.” God’s ways are always higher and if we yield to His plans, we will prosper.

When we look at the second reading, we see St. Paul pray for the people of Thessalonica, asking that they abound in love for one another and for all. Doing so will strengthen their hearts to be blameless and holy before...
God. Today, many of us strive for holiness through external means – we donate to charitable institutions, we attend Sunday mass, we even try to limit our addictions and vices.

However, St. Paul gives us a simple insight to holiness that we have missed while attempting to attain it through other means. All holiness requires is love – love for those around us and love for all. It need not matter who the people are, it need not matter their social status or background. All that is required from us is nonjudgmental, unbiased love. St. John reminds us that we love because God first loved us. We cannot love others if we do not allow God to love us first; nor can we have God love us and keep that love for ourselves. Love is an outflow and its primary function is to spread over this lawless, hurting world.

For love to spread, we need to be the vessels and carriers of love. The Lord Jesus is the best example of being such a vessel. He lived a life of love and sacrifice, always willing to lay down His life for the ones He loved. It is this that we must reflect on, in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

In this season of waiting let us allow the Lord to speak to our hearts and guide us in His way of love. It was love for the world that prompted God to come in human form, it was love for the world that gave Him the strength to die on a cross in humiliation and shame, it was out of love for me that He raised Himself up from the dead, to give me hope.

In today’s gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus speaks of the second coming. He says there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars – everything will be majestic and powerful and the heavens themselves will shake at the coming of the Saviour. It is a stark contrast to when God became man, for His coming was not triumphant but almost unnoticed – a seemingly ordinary baby born in a cattle shed, with nobody but the animals to keep him company.

As we enter the season of Advent today, let us use this time wisely, to make room in our hearts for the Lord Jesus to be reborn. Let us use each day as an opportunity to abound in love, so that when the time comes for our stay on this earth to cease, we can be assured of our place with God our Father.

Prayer: Abba Father, through your Holy Spirit, prepare my mind, body and soul that I may receive you in my life in the days to come. Amen.
Monday 3rd December  

Go out to the whole world and proclaim His Good news  

Mark 16:15

Today’s readings seem to apply directly to St. Francis, the saint of the day and are a wakeup call to every Christian.

St. Francis left his comfort zone and a passionate zeal to spread the Good News propelled him to go to the ends of the earth. India, China and the Indies were places where he converted thousands of people. He learnt the language and cultural attitudes of the people and preached accordingly. He said, “I let them enter by their own door - but I see to it that they come out by mine.”

In Jeremiah 1: 4 the words “Before you were born...” apply to you and me as well.(Eph 1:4) Jeremiah resisted the call as he feared he was not equipped for such a task. But he heard the immortal words that prophets before him had heard, “Do not be afraid - for I am with you.” For the monumental task of challenging the Israelites, he did not need to depend on his own strength but on the infinite resources of an Almighty God.

St. Paul in his letter reiterates this fact that it is not the sower of the seed nor the one who waters it, who is responsible for its growth - but God himself who is responsible. (In the CRL are constantly reminded of this irrefutable fact by Lalith Thatha.) St. Paul says that as long as a community lives in strife and jealousy allowing the flesh to dominate, the word of God cannot take root. Dying to self by acting against our natural impulses enables the word to bear fruit in us.

The Gospel challenge seems truly daunting for us. But it is an indisputable fact that when God created us, He had a purpose (Eph1:4) As Christians baptised to be priests, prophets, and kings, we are expected to be the yeast and salt in our communities so that the kingdom will be manifested through us. We are expected to witness in Jerusalem ie our home, in Judea ie our work place and in Samaria - among our enemies. When we foster an earnest desire to build His kingdom, depend on the name above all names, stand up for justice in our own land, we cannot fail to live up to His expectations. We need to take His commission seriously and step out of our comfort zone of depending on rituals to see us through. Let us invite the Holy Spirit to lead us to do His will and we will be able to fulfill the lives purpose.

Prayer: Abba Father, you have chosen us as your Son’s disciples. Lead us to fulfil your will in us. Amen
Tuesday 4th December

St. John of Damascus

Out of every hopeless situation will emerge something great if we hold on to God’s promise.

The first reading begins with the prophet Isaiah saying “A shoot will come up from Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit. (Isaiah 11:1). We know that after King David no one from his family line emerged as faithful and righteous as He lived for the next 600 years till the birth of Jesus Christ. David is described as a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14). For 600 years the family tree of David was cut off from God’s anointing due to the sin of Solomon and the generations that followed him. But out of this dead stump emerges someone greater than David. The author rather than mentioning David’s name, mentions his father Jesse, he says, from this stump, from the humbled line of Jesse came the Lord Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to David.

Jesse was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth. What distinguishes Ruth is that she was not a Jew by birth and yet she became related to the Lord Jesus. Jesse was the father of David. This is to indicate that the Lord too did not come in Royalty like David but came as a humble and simple child born in a cattle shed. The promise God made to David was this, “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me your throne will be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:16).

As Christians we need to assure ourselves that out of every hopeless situation will emerge something great if we hold on to God’s promise. The Israelites held on to the promise of God that the Messiah would emerge from the line of David and as they waited patiently they saw God’s promise unfold. If we hold onto the promise of God with worldly motives we will become blind to the fulfillment of God’s promise. This is what happened to the Jews who did not believe in Jesus Christ being the true Messiah. Their expectation of the Messiah was worldly and therefore they are still waiting upon God to send the Messiah even after 2600 years. In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus Christ tells His disciples “Blessed are the 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 it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it (Lk 10:23-24). We are a generation that has the Bible, sermons, and spiritual music. Hence let us advance in spirituality and grow in the love of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray that you give us the grace to hold on to your promises during trouble times and focus on things above. Amen
Wednesday 5th December  

“Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the his disciples”  Matthew 15:36

Today’s first reading speaks about an abundance of blessings of our heavenly Father. The riches of God will be on free display on a mountain and freely accessible to His people. God fulfils the basic human need on this mountain. For a human being the safest place is the womb. The womb is where the baby is well secured, well fed and well loved. Basically every need of a child (while in the womb), may it be physical, psychological, mental and spiritual is taken care of by the mother and the father. The allegorical reference is to the mountain which provides such conditions, where people’s needs are met and their security is provided.

This is our cry; “Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!” If God had not taken this step to move towards us where would we have been ended up? Not that we were simply saved but we were given the places of princes and princesses, to be precise even beyond that we were made heirs of the Kingdom of God. That is why the Scripture says that we were given rich food and choice wines. Where God dwells, there is an abundance of everything. We human beings are more focused on the material realities; therefore for our better understanding Scripture speaks about God’s richness and blessings in the material sense.

The Gospel proclamation speaks of another mountain which the Lord Jesus climbed. The same blessings were showered down on the people who followed Christ Jesus to this mountain. They were healed of different types of ailments and their lives become wholesome. This abundance was showered on the mountain where people met with Christ Jesus. The greatest and the supreme miracle occurred on Mt. Golgotha where the Paschal mystery took place. On this mount Christ Jesus cried “It is accomplished.” That is the miracle of the Holy Eucharist. Christ Jesus climbed the mountain where He offered His life for the whole world to make this world wholesome. The richness of this greatest self oblation on Golgotha is similar to the experience of comfort, warmth and the security a child experiences in the womb. May we experience this comfort today.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for the abundant blessings of Christ Jesus whom you have given us to fill ourselves until we overflow. May the Eucharist become the reality to the entire world. Amen.
Thursday 6th December

 dorty’s first reading, Isaiah breaks into our deep longing to enter into the strong city of our God. Questioning minds want to know: Who may enter there? What is it like? Where can we find this city? Each of us has various reasons to be worn out. Disorder and injustice in our world annoys us mightily. Deep in our spirit, we whimper and seek relief. Sometimes, the pressure seems relentless. The particulars of our distress may vary from the ancients, but we share with them a longing for protection, for a refuge, where we can get away from this distress and find peace.

Though humans often seek after peace and security, many are clueless about the path to reach it. The lofty city that Isaiah mentions looks pretty good from a distance. This is the city that men and women build for themselves. We cast aside the wisdom of the ages and seek to recreate our own world where we can do what pleases us. Driven by desire, we keep climbing and fool ourselves into thinking they we are in control not only of ourselves but of our world. But this sense of security and appearance of triumph is short-lived. Desire does not lead to peace and security, only to more desire and discontentment.

What really lasts? Even though we often speak about “time passing by quickly” and “things changing,” most of us like to think there are some things that are solid and can be counted on. The Lord Jesus’ words’ produce contrasting images of houses, houses which are different not because of the material from which they have been built, colour or height but the material on which they are built: one on rock, the other on sand. We imagine that both at first seem to do well, to sit firmly, to be solid. But as time goes by, along comes rain, floods and winds. Only the house built on rock survives. Those who enter the Kingdom of heaven are the ones who do the will of the Father. They are the ones who do not only listen to the words of Jesus, but also act on them. In these early Advent days we are challenged by the prayers and scriptures with the truth of “time going by quickly” and “things changing.” But they request us to make the investment of our lives with the things that last, that are solid that can be counted on: the words of Jesus, not only listened to, but also acted upon.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for always being the rock on whom we can stand firmly. Help us to know you more during this season of advent. Amen.
Blindness is the state of being unable to see. A lack of perception, awareness, or judgment; blindness is ignorance. Those of us who are able to see with our eyes cannot imagine the challenges that are faced by those who are visually impaired. As terrible as physical blindness is, there is another sort of blindness that the Lord came to heal. It is more prevalent and more dangerous in the world. And that is spiritual blindness.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 St. Paul talks about this blindness. “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

We have a countless number of people in the world today that mock at and ridicule the message of Salvation and go on living life as they choose. The god of this age, Satan, tries his utmost to prevent us from seeing the “light of the Gospel.” Seeing this light would mean that we would not be able to continue to live in his darkness. He would lose his influence over our lives. Therefore, his main aim is to make us and keep us blind. So he introduces sin into our lives.

What sin does is it concentrates our attention on one thing that is not God’s will for us. It makes us oblivious to the many legitimate things in life that God wants us to enjoy. For example, the whole Garden of Eden was Adam’s and Eve’s to enjoy. Yet, sin so blinded them that the only tree they could see was the one God had forbidden them to eat from.

Today, Satan has blinded our eyes and offered us a counterfeit happiness and “so called” freedom in a lifestyle of clubbing, drinking, smoking, taking drugs, pornography and premarital or extramarital sex. We assume that money is the source of happiness. For some of us our focus is on buying clothes or watching movies. What then is the answer? 2 Corinthians 3:16 says that “Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” When all the lies Satan has fed us fails to deliver and we hit rock bottom. When we turn to the Lord for help, He heals our spiritual blindness to see that it is only in the Lord Jesus that we can find a full and abundant life.

Prayer: Abba Father, heal us of our spiritual blindness that our hearts may open to your love and power. Amen
Today the first reading and the Gospel proclamation give us a comparison of the old Eve and the New Eve, the Blessed Mother.

The first reading speaks of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. It also speaks of their realisation of their nakedness and the hiding from God in the face of committing grave sin. We were created to live a life of fullness and without sin. We were created to be holy and without sin as the second reading from the book of Ephesians shows us. “God chose us, in Christ, before the creation of the world, to be holy and without sin” (Ephesians 1:4)

Such perfect creation was darkened by the act of disobedience by Eve and then Adam. Evil came into the world by this disobedience. The all loving and all knowing God had already set in place the salvation plan when He told the serpent “I will make your enemies, you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head and you will strike His heel” (Genesis 3:19)

Today’s Gospel proclamation fulfills this promise of God in the beginning. A sinless virgin in a world full of sinful people is chosen and set apart to play her part in the salvation of all mankind. The angel Gabriel appears with the message from God to the Blessed Mother, the new Eve and the new Mother of all the living that she is to bear the Son of God and bring forth the Messiah who will break the bonds of sin created by the disobedience of Adam and Eve..

The obedience to God by the Blessed Mother in the wake of a potential scandalous family situation brings forth the Messiah to the world who goes to the cross bearing our sins of the past, present and the future. Therefore today, let us rejoice for this beautiful fruit of obedience through which we have been given forgiveness of our sins and a path to eternal salvation. In our own lives, we are called daily to reflect on our calling by the Lord and give inner responses in obedience. We are all born with a purpose which is to do the will of God. Our best role models are the Lord Jesus and the Blessed Mother who are ready to assist us.

Prayer: Abba Father, gift us with a heart of obedience today to do your will. Amen!
Joy! The one thing all humans look for! Almost everything that we tend to engage in, seem to be to find joy. We study and work hard day and night, to find joy in and through financial stability. We get into relationships to find joy in life. The media promise that luxuries, i.e. a vehicle, a weekend away at a beach resort etc would bring us joy. We spend a lot of money, time and energy to possess joy. Yet joy seems to be the one thing that is hardest to find in life. When one door seems to open to bring joy into our life, often it seems like another door shuts it out. On this second Sunday of Advent, the Church speaks to us about this same topic- Joy! Today’s liturgy makes it sound like joy being the natural possession of those who belong to Christ.

In the First Reading, Prophet Baruch asks Jerusalem to take off her clothes of mourning and distress and put on the splendour of God’s glory. It is a good moment for us too, to probe our hearts, if we too are wearing garments of mourning and distress, while calling ourselves people of God. God wants us to depend solely on His righteousness and His faithfulness. He is the Father who promises that He will bring His children, sold to slavery, back, in royal splendour, from the corners of the earth. This is a promise relevant even today, that our God rejoices in our freedom and joy. No matter what mess we have gotten ourselves into, God will free us and restore us to be His beloved son or daughter. He will change any situation to make our path easy to walk on. Today’s First Reading is full of promises for anyone who wishes to take a chance on God.

The Gospel proclamation, re-affirms God’s promise given through Prophet Baruch. This promise is not for a few chosen people, but for the whole of humanity. “And all people will see God’s salvation.” (Luke 3:6).Advent is the season when we specially reflect on God becoming man and entering human history to save humankind from the bondages of sin and death. The Messiah is capable of filling in every valley, flattening hills and mountains, straightening the crooked roads, and making the rough ways smooth. Where are these valleys and mountains, crooked roads and rough ways? They are in our lives, in our hearts and minds. We are told that however broken and messed up we may be, the Saviour is willing to restore us. The Lord Jesus fulfilled that promise by sacrificing His life for us on the

While He was with His disciples, the Lord Jesus gave them the formula for eternal joy when He said, “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:10-11). Even so, knowing that we cannot keep His commands and hence remain in His love and receive His joy, He promised to send the Joy-giver to be with us forever -“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.” (John 14:16-17). The Holy Spirit fills us with joy, as St Paul states, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal 5:22-23). Therefore it is not hard to understand that if we are filled with the Holy Spirit and if the Spirit is given His due place in our lives, He will fill us with His Joy.

How familiar are we with the Holy Spirit, the Third member of the Holy Trinity, God on earth in this post-resurrection era? The Holy Spirit is the advocate, counsellor, and the companion who has come to live in us through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Yet for many Catholics, this is just an intellectual concept. I myself was such a person who prayed to the Holy Spirit for wisdom when I had to face exams. The Holy Spirit had little or no part to play in my daily life until nine years ago, when by the Grace of God I attended the Four Steps Retreat and received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thus began a new journey to a whole new way of life. My problems and struggles did not change but gradually I began to recognise the unexplained joy and peace in my heart even at the worst times. I started to feel rested even after a long day’s work, enjoying the presence of the comforter, I am still very much, a “work in progress” as I still lose this joy when I ignore or forget the Joy-giver and give the first place of my life to anything or anyone else. Praying in the Four Steps is a very simple and effective way of renewing this union with The Holy Spirit each morning before starting the day and also any time I fall back losing my peace and joy.

In today’s first reading we are reminded of a great vision of “Hope and Rejoicing.” It was given by God to his people in Judah through his servant prophet Isaiah who lived in the year 700 BC. It invites us to reflect on this advent season not only as God’s coming into our midst as Christ but also our coming home to be created anew. Prophet Isaiah speaks of a present and a future full of hope of God’s coming and deliverance to his people who are in the wilderness within the complexity of earthly life of slavery and redemption, failure and faith as he says “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution, he will come to save you” (Is 35:4). He gives the assurance of great rejoicing and joyful celebration. The wilderness will be turned to dry earth and to weak human body as God’s arrival transforms every in-ability to ability where the blind will see, deaf will hear, lame will walk, mute will speak and weak made strong. The wilderness which was the place of wandering will be a raised road where God’s redeemed will walk with no fear as they will walk the Holy Way and enter Zion with singing.

In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus heals the paralytic and meets the four men of faith who lowered him from the roof. As the Lord looks up at the faces of four believing men and the long-suffering paralytic before him, He chooses to forgive the paralytic’s sins immediately “When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “As for you your sins are forgiven” (Lk 5:20). By healing the paralytic, the Lord reveals to his audience that He has the power and authority to forgive sins and heal the sick.

I remember the many sermons I heard during the year of Mercy. They spoke directly about the unconditional love and mercy of the Heavenly Father. The Lord Jesus is also reminding and inviting us to persevere in faith like the four friends. They were rewarded by the Lord with the healing their friend. The Lord gave the paralytic a new life with hope and meaning while turning a lifelong curse into a blessing! Through today’s Gospel proclamation, I see prophet Isaiah’s vision of God being fulfilled, with God coming to live among his people and the joy of the redeemed being fulfilled.

Prayer: Abba Father, I come to you bringing my own emotional, spiritual and physical paralysis and I thank you for healing me and delivering me. Amen
Tuesday 11th December

The God of comfort and compassion that goes after the One!

Today’s readings reflect the nature of God, a God who is above all things compassionate, righteous and just. The Psalmist calls us to praise this God with a new song, as He is proclaimed King over the universe and we praise Him for His glory. Psalm 96:12 mentions “Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.” For all of heaven and earth will rejoice in His goodness, as He rules in righteousness and truth.

In Isaiah’s reading, we are given a commission to proclaim ‘Comfort’ to the lost and the hurting. We are called to be a voice of comfort, that carries the message of consolation to those around us. Years ago, when I was in the midst of struggles and had lost all hope, it was such a voice of comfort that first led me to the prayer meetings and the life transforming messages of hope and salvation. It was truly an unforgettable and joyful day as I encountered his Love & compassion and experienced a joy that’s unspeakable. It began with a simple message of comfort. In a similar way Isaiah is instructed by God to “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her, that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” We too are called to proclaim this message of hope and salvation to all.

In the Gospel proclamation, we reflect on the parable of the lost sheep. We encounter a shepherd who looked foolish in the eyes of the world, who left a good 99 sheep, merely to go looking for the one that was lost. His individual, patient and seeking love is reflective of the love of our Lord Jesus who considers the lost, as valuable as the rest.

The heart of God is compassionate and His message is comfort. Regardless of how lost we may feel, the God of comfort has come looking for us. Today, if we are in the midst of pain or struggle, we need to remember that we are being formed and prepared for God for a higher purpose and for His greater glory.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank you for your Love that constantly pursues us and lifts us from brokenness to victory. Father help me to always be a voice of comfort to those around me. Amen
Wednesday 12th December  Our Lady of Gaudalupe

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

Have you noticed that if we speak to ten people on any given day they will mention ten different heavy burdens that they are carrying? At times, the issue maybe even blown out of proportion and the person may be in so much worry and anxiety, probably over nothing. This is obvious in our day to day lives. I belong to a church group that has gathered to do intercessory prayer and it is heart breaking to see the numerous issues that people are saddled with and the prayers requested for a solution from God. It is either an illness, financial mess, broken relationship, depression or stress.

Today’s Gospel proclamation is the answer to all these problems. Why is it so hard for us to believe the word, claim it and be rid of our anxiety? There are many scriptures that assure us that the battle belongs to God and yet, routinely we keep worrying about our life and our loved ones.

The Gospel proclamation calls us all who are weary and heavy laden. Aren’t we all? Each morning we need to surrender our day with its good and the bad to the Lord. We who are part of the Community of the Risen Lord have been gifted with the Four step prayer to surrender our whole life to the Lord every morning and walk in peace and victory. But how many of us truly find solace in it in the face of a big trial. Our one prayer to God should be the grace to gaze at him in our trials. That’s when we are able to find rest in the midst of our storms.

In the first reading, Prophet Isaiah speaks of the mightiness of our God the only God who gives strength to the feeble and vigour to the weary. How blessed are we to know that if only we place all our hope in the Lord that we will run but not grow weary and we will walk and never tire. I could readily testify to this for I live a life full of activities which requires multi tasking in all areas of my life as a wife, mother, sibling, friend, and worker and above all committed to serve the Lord. The Lord is surely my strength and I do not grow weary by His grace. Not mentally nor physically. Today we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. His story is an inspiration to all of who are weary as was Juan Diego a poor peasant who became a saint through the miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to gaze at you daily and not on our trials and tasks, Amen!
Thursday 13th December

For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear; I will help you. Isaiah 41:13

In today’s First reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks powerful words; though we find our spirits parched, lost in the world and unable to satisfy our longings, in the Lord we will find our answer. In the Lord, our thirst is quenched. God promises to make the barren desert fertile and that He will cause springs to flow there. We must recall that in Christ’s crucifixion, when the body of Our Lord hung dead on the cross and the soldier drove the lance into His side, blood and water flowed forth. Water came forth from the desert.

Because He gave His life for us, we are united in one family in Christ. In His death and resurrection, we “see and know, observe and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this; the Holy One of Israel has created it.” We are called into one in Christ; through the waters of Baptism and the waters that flow from His side like springs in the desert.

Today, in the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus continues to preach to the crowds. He is speaking of John the Baptist. He tells the people that no one has been born who is greater than John. The Lord follows this statement by saying that the “least one” in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Who is the “least” in our world? In our neighborhood town, city or family, who is the “least” among us? Do we see these individuals or are they simply part of the background of our lives? It also may be more comfortable for us to see only what we want to see. It can be natural to try to block out what is painful or difficult. Throughout the Gospels, the Lord sees the lost and the “least” and He is attentive to them. The Lord Jesus also wants us to have eyes and a heart that we will see the “little ones,” the “least” who are in our lives. Do we look for them? Are we attentive to them? Do we truly see them and then do what we can to help them?

Today may we pray that we will have the eyes to notice the least of people. May we also have the grace to help or console them in whatever way we can? It may be as simple as greeting them or listening to them! Or it may be helping them in some small way. To us, these acts may seem to be insignificant. However to the “other,” it may be a great gift! Who will we notice today?

Prayer: Abba Father, I extol you, O my God and King and I will bless your name. You the Lord are good to all and compassionate towards all your works. Amen.
Friday 14th December  

Those who follow the Lord, will have the light of life

The Psalmist says in today’s Psalm, that those who delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on his law day and night are blessed. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season. (Psalm 1: 3) Again in the first reading God reminds the Israelites that He is their God and He teaches what is best for them, directs the way that they should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river. (Isaiah 48:18-19). God is our maker and Creator. He has a definite purpose for our earthly life that will give us freedom, love, peace and joy in this life and take us to eternal life. That purpose, plan, dream that God has for us of is written in His Word, the Holy Bible.

In the Old Testament God spoke to His people mainly through the prophets but they did not listen to them. They failed to follow the instructions of their God who took them out of slavery in Egypt despite God’s promise for a life of abundance. In today’s Gospel proclamation, God is speaking to His people through John the Baptist and His only Son the Lord Jesus Christ. But still the people do not want to listen. Why is it so hard for us to say, ‘yes’ to the will of God? The reality is saying ‘yes’ to the will of God is an immediate death experience and doing our will, gratifying our desires, gives us life and satisfaction. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus chose to say ‘no’ to his own will and ‘yes’ to the will of God, He had to die to Himself. He went through suffering, pain and ultimately died on a cross. But He was resurrected from death with a glorified body and is now seated at the right hand of God living forever.

St. John of the Cross was a priest, doctor, mystic, reformer and poet - saint of mystics. His life was a heroic effort to live up to his name ‘of the Cross’. “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” (Mark 8: 34b) is his story. Ordained a Carmelite priest in 1567 at age 25, he was misunderstood, persecuted and imprisoned in a dark, damp, narrow cell for months by his own order. It is in his dark cell that John’s spirit came to light and his greatest spiritual writings emerged. His life reveals that the cross leads to resurrection and from darkness to light.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the gift of prayer, we open our hearts to you and surrender our lives to you. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Amen.
The prophet Elijah was no ordinary man. In his time on earth, through the power of God, he performed unimaginable miracles and was someone from whom much could be learnt. The Lord used the prophet Elijah mightily, and displayed His power and majesty through his life.

It is no wonder that even at the time of the Lord Jesus, Elijah was still well known both amongst the teachers of the law and the ordinary lay people. In the Gospel proclamation of today, we witness the afterglow of the Transfiguration. Elijah and Moses have appeared to the Lord Jesus and spoken with him. When the disciples question the Lord as to why the teachers of the law say Elijah has to come first, before the Messiah can appear, the Lord gives them an intriguing answer. He says Elijah has already come but nobody has realised it.

How is this possible? Elijah was a prophet, much like the many prophets of old. All prophets had one main goal – to point the way to the Messiah. After the birth of the Lord, there was one man whose sole mission was to do so, and that man was John the Baptist. John lived his life simply to lead people to the Lord, and so he did as best he could. However, it was the blindness of the people that did not allow them to see that John the Baptist was sent as the Elijah of their time – and if they could not recognise John the Baptist, neither could they recognise the Messiah Himself! Instead, both John and the Lord Jesus were ridiculed to the point of death, both humiliated and brutally killed.

Are we also blinded like the teachers of the law? Are we living selfish lives? Worse than that, have we failed to hear God’s call to be an Elijah to someone else? As we examine our hearts today, let the words of the Psalmist ring in our ears – “Make your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved.” God manifested Himself to Elijah on Mount Horeb, John the Baptist encountered the Lord face to face in the River Jordan – every man or woman of God who experienced God also experienced salvation. Today if we want to be saved, let us repeat the Psalmist’s prayer at every waking moment, that we too may have the face of God shine upon us.

Prayer: Abba Father, let not the things of this world distract me from your face. Shine down upon me that I may be led by your light. Amen.
There is joy in the air! The Word of God harps on the matter; shouting from the mountains tops, asking people to rejoice. Wonderful promises are given in the first proclamation. Judgment against people is revoked and enemies are turned away. God has decided to live among His people, misfortunes and disaster will be removed from among people, therefore God’s people would never be disgraced or put to shame.

The source of joy is God. The one, who looks at His people, rejoices with shouts of joy. Therefore He invites everyone to rejoice and be glad. The judgments are removed, enemies turned away, misfortunes and disasters are taken away and people will not be disgraced or put to shame; how would all these things happen? When God pitched His tent among the people and when God took flesh to be human the negativity of the human race was turned into positivity and blessings.

We often choose to live in unfortunate situations. We miserably embrace the unhappy incidents in the past and carry hang-ups of the past to the present and future. Our decisions regarding the future are made out of the fearful experiences we have gone through in the past. Thus the present and the future are identical to our past; miserable, fearful and unhappy. We have the tendency to think and say that our lives will never be changed and we will always have the same negative results in life. This is not true! That thought is a big lie.

Christ Jesus is our Saviour, our Messiah. We could ask this question; what would Christ Jesus save us from? The answer is sin. It is correct. Not simply from our sin but also from the desire that is embedded within us and drives us to act on our sinful inclinations. That is why in the book of Isaiah it is said that “God indeed is my savior”. When the Lord Jesus becomes alive in us, our nature is completely reformed. Our miseries and negativities are turned into positivity and shouts of joy.

The best example is the second reading today. St. Paul continues to stress that we should rejoice always. When St. Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians he was imprisoned. In spite of being imprisoned, St. Paul continued to say that we should be kind to people and we should not be anxious about anything. He said that God is near to us. Under these circumstances he must have experienced the closeness
of God to him. We lose our peace and joy in the middle of a crisis. The negative impact of people around us comes to us as challenges that steal our joy and peace. St. Paul continues to urge the Philippians to live joyfully. But how can we do this? Do we not lose our peace and joy when people around us are nasty to us?

Inner responses are possible when we encounter the living Lord Jesus. There are two ways to live; to live with Christ or in Christ. When we are in Christ, the living presence of the Lord Jesus makes it possible for us to give inner responses, like St. Paul did. A complete transformation and beginning to live a virtuous lifestyle does not happen overnight. It is a lifestyle change that takes a lifetime. We cannot bring about this change within us but it is God who does it. We need to continue to surrender to God and give Him the ownership of our life to live in freedom. To experience the Salvation of God we should make God the owner of our lives.

In the Gospel proclamation John the Baptist revealed a secret that is valuable for us. The Messiah baptises us with the Holy Spirit. Crowds came to him from different walks of life. But everyone had the same question; what should we do? John explained to each of them according to each person’s context what they should do. The lifestyle of John the Baptist stirred the hearts of people. They wondered if he was the Messiah. The Jews were eagerly waiting for the Messiah and the word ‘repent’ rang a bell within them. This question revealed the expectation of the people. They were expecting the Messiah.

Human beings cannot be fulfilled by temporary gains. Temptations and desires may motivate us temporarily to gain happiness but that is not eternal. This game we play by accumulating material things only leads to distress. Our inner most needs will only be fulfilled by the love of God. These people who came to John the Baptist were well-to-do people in that society.

Therefore John taught them about sharing their surplus with the needy. Though the ordinary man/woman disliked the tax collectors there were rich people and soldiers who had their way in that society. They had their stash of material gains. But something attracted them to John the Baptist. What could it be? That inner most need for the Messiah and His love drew them to them Jordon May the Holy Spirit awaken our human spirit to know and experience God and lead us in our search for the Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, awaken my spirit to your Holy Spirit, so that I may share your love with others. Amen.
Monday 17th December

“The word blessing, is defined as God’s favour and protection. In the psalm today, King Solomon, in his wisdom, declares that all nations will be blessed through God. What a promise to carry in our hearts as we live in this world where there is so much disparity and despair, where the resources and riches of our earth and society are owned by such a tiny fraction and where so many live in abject poverty. Most of are used to living life with lack in it. We are used to living life where the lack of health, the lack of love, the lack of money is the normal. But the Psalmist states that through God, all the nations, every nation, every man, every woman, every child will be blessed. The favour of God will be upon everyone. The thought alone is overpowering – who can imagine a world where there is no lack? Where it is always full of joy, peace and abundance?

Yet this is the world that God has in mind for us. Not just in heaven – where it will be perfection – but I believe that this is what He has in plan for us, in our everyday life. God wants us to be blessed – to live our life under His protection and with His favour. It does not necessarily mean that we will have the newest clothes or drive the flashiest car or even never suffer from so much as a cold but I believe it means that the problems that we face, the sickness that we struggle with no longer have the authority to rob of us our joy. When I live under the protection and authority of God, He can release His power through my life so that not only am I changed but I become a channel through which the world around me is changed. I can make decisions not just for my own good but for the good of those around me. I am no longer governed by self interest and selfishness but my hand is freed to bless others and they in turn to bless their neighbour. God is love and life in abundance. And He has so much to offer us if only we are willing to listen and to obey. King Solomon asks God in the psalm today for His favour so he in turn can bless his people, so justice and prosperity will flourish in his land, so the oppressed will be set free. And I pray that we all will be given the grace to ask the same today, that we will turn from being so self-focused and keeping our resources, our love, our energy and our prayers to ourselves, will instead look to change the world and release the blessing of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, endow me with your justice and your righteousness today. Let Your favour be upon me so that I may partner with You to bring Your peace and justice to the world around me. Amen
Tuesday 18th December

3rd Week of Advent

"..and they will call Him Immanuel (God with us)."

Matthew 1: 3

We are just a week away from Christmas. We all are getting ready to celebrate the birth of Christ. Matthew 1:22 says, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet” where long ago prophet Jeremiah says when he declares about the Lord’s birth; this is the name by which he will be called: “The Lord Our Righteous Saviour.” (Jer 23:6).

But, have we ever thought what does the birth of Christ teach us? If we reflect on the birth of Christ it teaches us some beautiful lessons which we should ponder it in our hearts. First and foremost, when God makes plans, He does not consult us. It was His plan to send His Son to this earth to save us, but it was His decision to choose Mary and Joseph who were living in that small town of Nazareth to be the parents of Lord Jesus. He did not request them to be the parents. But it was up to Mary and Joseph to say ‘yes’ to His plan. God never forces us to agree with His plans. But if we say ‘yes’ to His plans and Will, then we know He works everything together for our good. Because He is our Abba, Father who always has the best for us.

Despite her fears, insecurities and confusions, Mary said; “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said.” On the other hand, when Joseph was contemplating divorce, an angel spoke to him in a dream about God’s plan to which He too said ‘Yes’. Because Mary and Joseph agreed with God’s plan, they are blessed to be the parents of our Lord Jesus Christ as God was able to fulfill His purpose through their lives. However, when the angel announced the birth of Christ to Mary, she did not understand anything. She could not even fathom how this is going to take place. So she asked the angel, “How will this be?” and the angel answered “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:34-35). Likewise, we may not understand everything when God calls us to be a part of His plan. We may not see the end result of God’s plan when He starts His works in us. But, let us use our faith. This Christmas let us pray to have a heart to say ‘yes’ to God so that we too will become and instrument for His plans through which we will be blessed abundantly.

Prayer: Abba Father, we entrust to You all of us, who have endured fear, uncertainty and humiliation at some point in our lives. Let us experience your tenderness, protection, freedom and peace in these situations. Amen.
On you I depend since birth; from my mother’s womb you are my strength; my hope in you never wavers.”  
Psalm 71: 6

The God of the impossible gave glimpses of revelations to the chosen people of God working mightily amongst them. The person who was chosen to start the liberation fight with the Philistines emerged from a womb that was once barren. He was consecrated even before his mother conceived him. A man of God who looked like an angel spoke to the mother of this child and gave her instructions regarding the child she was to have.

Similarly in the Gospel proclamation we come across another incident to the first reading today. Another couple, righteous in the eyes of God, found favour with God and they received a son too. There are common features in these two incidents while there is one major difference. Both the children were consecrated even before they were placed in their mother’s wombs. How do we know it? The messengers of God announced it. Samson’s mother was instructed while Zechariah too was instructed regarding the birth of John the Baptist. The Spirit of God first stirred Samson once he was born, in a place called Mahaneh-dan, which is between Zorah and Eshtaol (Judges 13:25). Not so with John the Baptist. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while he was in the mother’s womb (Lk1: 15). But both these boys were pre-destined to fulfill these missions in their lives.

What is the difference of the anointing of the Holy Spirit on these two important people? According to the Catholic Church teaching, there are three persons who were born without the original sin. Christ Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. The original sin of the John the Baptist was washed away with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, when the Blessed Virgin Mary visited Elizabeth in her sixth month of her pregnancy, immediately after her encounter with the angel Gabriel. John the Baptist who was in the womb of Elizabeth was anointed by the Holy Spirit because Christ Jesus was in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary when Elizabeth and Mary met. We too are chosen and called to a mission while we were still in our mother’s womb. But sometimes the world becomes more real to us and we waver from our true mission. That’s when we pause awhile, contemplate silently and become aware of our real mission in life.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant me your grace to accept my true identity as a child of God who have been chosen by you to fulfill your mission in my life. Amen.
Thursday 20th December 3rd Week of Advent

“I am the handmade of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said.” Luke 1:37

It is the season of Christmas. The whole world has been waiting for it. We all are busy with external preparation. Amidst all busy schedules and indeed exciting times, let us take a moment to reflect on our Blessed Mother on whom today’s gospel reflects. She is the role model for our faith. God is love and she understands this best. We, Catholic are blessed to know her because we have so much to learn from her life, grow and mature through it.

As today’s Gospel reading reveals, she was confused when the angel spoke to her about God’s plan. She was afraid, worried about the consequences she had to face in the society. Her future looked gloomy and hopeless. Therefore, she could have easily said no. But she rose above her fears, insecurities and worries and said ‘yes’ to God, trusting in Him. Her moment of surrendering her life to God’s will started there and the Word beautifully narrates her life through which we come to understand that she surrendered her entire life; every moment of her life into the hands of the Lord, saying “Thy will be done.”

Even when, at the most sacred moment in a woman’s life, She had to lie down in a stable to give birth, she said “Thy will be done.” Even when, in agony, she searched for her Son every street and found Him at the temple, and He asked “whey were you searching for me? Didn’t you know that I had to be in my Father’s house?” she said “Thy will be done,” Even at the end when He was persecuted and crucified, and after everyone had ran away, only She, another woman, and one of them stood at the foot of the cross, bearing the laughter of His enemies; she said; “Thy will be done.” When she held her Son’s dead body, it looked like everything was over and God wasn’t faithful to the promise He gave it to her. But still she said “Thy will be done.” When the Lord Jesus was buried in the tomb and when every person has lost hope and gone back to their own, old ways, she held onto the promises of God, waiting upon Him. Because she knew the One who promised her is faithful. We venerate her because she teaches us to stay in faith when everything looks dark. She teaches us to hold onto the promises of God and wait upon Him because He is a faithful God.

Prayer: Abba Father, thy will be done, my Lord. May my whole life be in total surrender to You, You alone my Lord. Amen!
Blessed is who she has believed that the Lord will fulfil his promises to her.

The Psalmist tells us that there are people who wait in hope for the Lord. The Lord is their help and protection. These people trust in the Lord in everything. Their hearts are rejoicing all the time. They are blessed. Also, there are people who work out many own plans and ways to find happiness and to become be blessed. They find answers in the world. They think money, power and fulfilling their own desires is the answer.

Let us look at our own hearts this morning. Especially in this season, what is the source of our joy? What is the source of our protection? From where does our help come from? Whom are we trusting? For what are we waiting? Let’s us be true to ourselves and pray like David “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Today’s Gospel reading gives us the answer. There is one very important thing in Christian life. Elizabeth said to Mary “Blessed is who has believed that the Lord will fulfil his promise to her”. The Blessed mother believed in her heart that God fulfils the promises he has given. She waited patiently in faith. When everything was turned upside down, she still held on to the promise. Like Elizabeth was encouraged by the visit of Blessed Mother, she is encouraging us to trust in the Lord even when things go out of control.

God answers our prayers immediately. He has already done what he has promised but sometimes there is a delay in the giving the gift. God’s timing is perfect. We may think he is late, but he’s never late. God’s delays are not denials. Blessings come when we believe that the Lord will fulfil his promises. In order to receive an answer from God, you should claim his promise and you’ve got to be willing to let God answer in his time. He will answer because he is trustworthy, He hears your prayers, and he will respond.

I can remember, I seriously prayed for my marriage about two years before I met the girl I married. After I met her, I happened to wait for another one and half years to receive the blessing of my parents. Though I the faced difficulties and had to wait the Lord Jesus did fulfil the promise He made much later.

Prayer: Abba Father, send your grace upon us this morning to hold on to the promises Father has given us. Amen!
“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit exults in God, my Saviour” Luke 1:46

Today’s Gospel proclamation is the magnificat or the ‘Song of Mary’ praising her God in the face of a predicament that we would never have been able to face if it had happened to any one of us today. It would have been a scandalous situation in the eyes of our family, friends and society specially if we come from a traditional good Catholic family.

Both the first reading and the Gospel proclamation today speak of the strength of two great women. In the first reading it is Hanna who patiently prayed for a child where God hears her cry and gives her the gift of a Child, Samuel. But Hannah now needs to fulfill her promise to God that the child will be dedicated to God and she keeps to her promise no matter how hard it was to let go of her precious child. This was the great reverence and love for God that Hannah displays in today’s reading. When she offers the child back to God she too goes on to worship God with a magnificat.

We see the Blessed Mother worshiping God with her magnificat similar to Hanna’s at the announcement of the salvation mystery. It is beautiful to note that the Blessed Mother knew the scripture well and drew strength from strong women such as Hannah.

What do these readings teach us today? Personally for me, it gives great comfort to note that a deep relationship with the Word has answers to all trials and tribulations that we face in life. The more you read the word and ponder as the Blessed Mother did, we will be equipped to face every trial that we will face as committed Christians. For, we know that we who chose the narrow path to follow Christ will always have trials and temptations for our own refinement and preparation for eternal life. In my own life, from a very early age I was exposed to many trials. When I look back in life I can clearly see how the deep rooted faith as a Catholic had given me so much strength to face all these trials with enormous faith. As a woman, I look to the Blessed Mother for her quiet strength and deep faith in God in every stage of her life. So, let us draw strength from these amazing women of God today in living our call in total obedience to God.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank and praise you for the amazing men and women raised before us who did Your will at all times. Give us the same grace to say yes to you always! Amen.
Liturgically it is the final preparations for the celebration of the birth of the Savior. The church proposes the Blessed Virgin Mary as the model for our reflection on this last Sunday before Christmas. We reflect and look to her because she was the one who believed that God’s promises would be fulfilled in her life. Imagine the amount of faith and trust that Mary would have had, in order to say Yes to God when Jesus’ birth was announced by Gabriel. Just a day before Christmas, we are reminded of what happened just after the Annunciation: how Mary responded to the Lord and visited her cousin Elizabeth in her hour of need.

First Reading

“You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah…” This line reminds us that God does not see as we humans do. What we consider to be small and insignificant can be used by God in order to do the greatest things. The word Beth-lehem in Hebrew actually means House of Bread. So it is not a coincidence but intentional that the Lord Jesus who would later call Himself as the Bread of Life should be born in ‘the House of Bread’. For those of us who are weak and insignificant, this reading is a herald of joy. There is great hope for us, we could become the greatest instruments in the hands of God, if we surrender ourselves as we are, without any pretense.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm is a beautiful cry rising from the hearts of believers. In almost each line of this Psalm, we are begging the Lord to come and visit us. We are pleading with the Lord, “let us see Your face, and we shall be saved.” The Church is intensifying her prayer in imploring the Lord to become Emmanuel: God with us. The Lord wanted to become human so that He could understand us more deeply, this is why He became Emmanuel, God who is with us not only in His divine nature but also as a human being; understanding and experiencing everything that we go through, except sin.

Second Reading

What does the Lord want from us? It is important to reflect on this question, every now and then. When we decide to follow the Lord,
we are invited to continuously hand over our whole selves to Him. He wants us to be completely surrendered to Him. Just as it is written in the letter to the Hebrews, we are invited to say, “Behold, I come to do Your will, O God.” Let us invite or renew our invitation to Jesus this Christmas, so that He can be the Lord of all aspects of my life: my finances, my family, my profession, my possessions, my everything.

Gospel

Mary visiting Elizabeth was prefigured in the Old Testament. Did you know that Mary has been given the title ‘Ark of the Covenant’? We pray it in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Church fathers have seen the parallels between the Ark of the Covenant and the Blessed Mother. In the Old Testament, the wooden chest containing the Ten Commandments and few other objects was called as the Ark of the Covenant containing the Divine Presence. In the New Testament, it is Mary’s womb containing the incarnate God that is seen as the Ark of the Covenant. When the Ark was brought to Jerusalem, King David asked how God’s ark can come to him. In today’s Gospel, Elizabeth re-echoes this by saying, “How can the Mother of my Lord come to me?” Since David was too afraid to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, it was temporarily stationed in the hill country for three months. In the same way, Mary remained in the hill country for three months in the house of Elizabeth. One more parallel is seen in David dancing before the Ark. In the Gospel, John the Baptist leaps and dances in joy while still in the womb of Elizabeth. Both David and John the Baptist recognize the presence of the Lord and rejoice in God’s awesome presence. How blessed we are to have the real presence of the Lord Jesus among us? As the Lord once said, many prophets and holy people longed to see what we see and never saw it. In the Holy Eucharist, the Lord Jesus has chosen to be eternally present among us in a very physical and tangible way. It is also said, He is present among us, is in the form of poor and suffering people. Whatever we do or fail to do, to the least in our society, we do it or fail to do it for Jesus.

As we prepare our hearts for the celebration of the Lord Jesus’ birth, let us make an effort to examine our hearts to repent of the times when we have failed to recognize God’s presence in the Holy Eucharist and also in the poor and suffering people. As we repent, let us give the deepest truths of our hearts and pray that He will open our inner eyes to recognize His presence in our midst. Let us hand over to Him our future and ask that He fill us with His Spirit to welcome Jesus into our lives in a new way this Christmas.

Prayer: Abba Father, I am your child. May everything in my life happen according to Your word. Amen.
Today’s readings set the stage for one of the greatest acts in history-- the birth of our Saviour. God came down from heaven to be born as an innocent, helpless baby. He held all the power in the universe and let it all go to be like one of us.

In the first readings from 2 Samuel the Lord promises to make King David’s house a dynasty of kings. He will raise up a king from among his descendents and his kingdom will be strong and last forever. This king is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord speaks to each of us through this reading as we prepare for His birth. To each of us who may be going through hardships or struggles, the Lord speaks to us from verse 16, “You house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever.” When we allow the Lord Jesus to be born in our hearts and gain control of our lives, we never have to feel defeated or worn out. He is alive today, tomorrow and forever. He will always sit on the throne and never be defeated.

I remember many years ago when one of the large prayer meetings of the CRL was cancelled, Lalith Thaththa went into prayer and the Lord showed him that He was still on the throne. No matter what happened to the pray meetings, His throne was secure forever. At that moment Lalith Thaththa knew there was nothing to be afraid of or worry about because no matter what happened God would still be God and nothing was out of His control. Today, God has restored the prayer meeting and begun many other meetings. God can never be defeated. In the same way, God is reminding us that He will never be defeated and will always sit on His throne. All he asks is that we hold on to Him in good times and bad. The Gospel proclamation speaks to us about our role in this Kingdom that will never die. Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit after the birth of his son. Luke 1:76-77 says, “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.” We too are called to prepare the way for others to receive the Lord into their lives-- to spread this never-ending Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for the gift of Your Son. Let us always remember that You are seated on the throne forever and therefore we never need to lose hope. Amen.
Tuesday 25th December

The Nativity of the Lord

Celebrate the birth of our Saviour! Celebrate our Salvation

As we begin this reflection on this beautiful day, we wish you a Blessed Christmas Day and season. The Psalmist declares, “All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God. Today is a celebration of the saving power that the Lord Jesus brings into our lives.

500 years before the birth of the Lord Jesus, Prophet Isaiah declared, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, who herald peace and happiness, who proclaim salvation and announce to Zion, “Your God is King.”

One such person who brought such good news is the writer of the Gospel of St. John. We are enlightened on the reality of our Lord Jesus. We are reminded that the Lord Jesus’ birth just did not happen on December 25th but the Lord existed from the beginning of the world. John 1: 1 onwards says, “In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God and the Word was God; he was in the beginning with God. We read it as, “In the beginning was the Lord Jesus, And the Lord Jesus was with God and the Lord Jesus was God: he was in the beginning with God. We are awed by the origins of the Lord and the fact that He has been there all along. “All things were made through him, and without him nothing came to be. My enemies, every invention, the world, various countries, natural wonders, beautiful waterfalls, successful people, differently-abled people, the animal and plant life, my pet dog - everything was made through our Lord Jesus. Though we see an innocent, docile, sweet glowing baby in a makeshift crib, we are gazing on the glory of God which is beyond our comprehension.

What does this little child do for us this Christmas and in our lives? There are certain truths that we need to meditate on, pray about and claim. He is the true light that enlightens everyone. This light of our Lord Jesus, shines in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it. If I have the Lord within me, I have the light of Christ and this light overcomes all the darkness I face. Nothing is impossible for my God and my Lord is able to overcome all darkness, no matter what it may be.
The Gospel proclamation declares that the world did not know him. In most cases, people cannot know of the Lord Jesus, just by being born into the world. Even though He has made everyone, we naturally do not know the Lord unless a person speaks to us or the Lord reveals himself to us in a miraculous way.

If we accept the Lord Jesus into our lives a wonderful thing happens - To all who receives Him, He empowers them to become children of God, for they believe in His name. The moment I accept and receive the Lord Jesus into my heart, no matter what my age may be I become a child of God. It is a beautiful revelation because parents tend to call their children ‘baby’ even if the children are well past their 50s. Similarly, the God of love calls us His children, every time we go back to him, even if we may be eighty plus.

We are not just called children of God, but we are empowered to become children of God. When we are empowered in such a way, we know within our hearts and are convicted that God is our own Father.

The beauty of the Lord Jesus is that he is the fulness of truth and loving kindness. On his birthday party, we do not have to take Him gifts but we have much to receive because St. John says - “From His fullness we all received grace upon grace.

Even if we are living a holy and pure life, it is the grace of God that has made us who we are and taken us to where we are. On the birthday of our Lord Jesus, we do not have to offer the Lord gifts like gold, frankincense or silver but coming to Him as we are, we can offer Him the brokenness of our lives. He does not want a show of false emotions but a revealing of the truth of our lives as we gaze on Him in the makeshift crib. At His feet we are invited to pour out the brokenness of our lives because as long as we are on the earth we will face crosses and be let down. Otherwise if everything is rosy, we will decide to be earth bound and choose to settle down focussed on earthly living. Our Lord Jesus was born to die. He came to give His life for us. He came to shed His life us. His life of sacrifice began in the simplicity of the cattle shed and continued throughout His life, till he gave up His life on the cross. Through his birth, the Lord has made known the love of the Heavenly Father to us and when we become God’s children, the Father and the Son make their home in our hearts.

Prayer: Abba Father, today I am no more an orphan but I am loved by your Son who is willing to pour out grace upon grace over my life. Amen
Today we celebrate the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr of the early church. The Bible does not mention him before Acts 6. In this chapter is an account of the choice of the first seven deacons of the Church. As the Apostles worked to continue the ministry of the Lord Jesus some widows were being neglected in their practical needs. The twelve Apostles decided to ordain seven deacons to oversee their care. The deacons extended the pastoral care, enabling the Apostles to focus on preaching. St. Stephen was one of these deacons. He was considered to be the archdeacon.

In the Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus explains what it means to be a disciple of Christ. He warns them of the persecution they will face because of their faith. They will be betrayed by their own flesh and blood and given up to death. However, He reassures them when the time comes for them to speak against their accusers the Holy Spirit will give them the words of wisdom. They need not fear because they will always have the help of the Holy Spirit with them.

The first reading focus’ on St. Stephen’s death. He is an example of what the Lord Jesus spoke about in the Gospel. He witnessed to the glory of Christ and the people were outraged. They argued with St. Stephen, but could not match his words because he was not speaking of his own accord but the Holy Spirit was speaking through him. The Lord Jesus said in the Gospel (Matthew 10:22), “You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” St. Stephen was hated by the people for his faith. But he stood firm in the Lord and was rewarded by God. In Acts 7:55-56 says, “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” He died seeing the Son of Man and the heavens opening for him to enter. This was his reward for his faithfulness to God.

St. Stephen teaches us to stand firm in our faith no matter what circumstance we may face. When we are faithful to God and witness to all that He has done in our lives we will one day be rewarded with the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to be a faithful witness to Your great glory. Lord, let my life be a testimony to You. Amen.
Thursday 27th December    St. John, Apostle & Evangelist

...he saw and believed.

In the reading, John the beloved disciple emphasizes in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and witnesses to the world that the person Jesus whom they saw and touched was the Word which was from the beginning.

Just as the Masters joy was to share this truth with the ones closest to him, we begin to see this same joy growing through his disciples to the world.

In the Gospel proclamation, we see clearly the difference between two types of believers who love the Lord. Mary loved Jesus to the extent of wanting to rise up early while it was still dark, to go and see the Master’s dead body. Mary’s need was an emotional/physical need. Thus, her physical eyes did not give her the correct vision. That is why she came to a worldly conclusion, that someone had stolen the body. On the other hand, when the disciples heard this news, both John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, and Peter raced to the tomb. John was in control of his feelings that is why he, though reaching the tomb first, he dropped back to let the leader to go in first.

St. John writes in his Gospel proclamation, when he saw the tomb empty and linen clothes left behind, he believed. We may wonder, about what he believed? He believed the word. The word which, His Master predicted his death and resurrection. Lk 24:7 The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again…”. His Word is Truth and is the Light to man. We have the beautiful testimony of a family in our community where every member saw the image of Christ Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and the whole family came to the faith. They were not from the Catholic faith or background but the love of the Lord and the circumstances they were facing brought them to the feet of the Lord Jesus and to an experience of His love.

Prayer: Abba Father, your Word is life, and light to us! Without dwelling on your Word, we would be in darkness. You died to give this truth to us. Give us the grace Lord to hold on to Your Word in everything we see and do, in order that we complete our Mission here on earth and return back to You. Amen
Friday 28th December

Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalm 124: 8

God is infinite goodness, purity and truth. The first reading invites us to be in fellowship with God. This is an invitation we must accept every moment of our lives. In my own experience, I face many situations in a single day, where I need to choose between convenience and truth. If I choose convenience, I may have to cover it up with a small lie, in my heart I know that if I choose my convenience and not God’s will, at that very moment I switch the side - from God’s side to the side of evil. The moment we switch to the side of evil, satan tries to take control of our thoughts and minds. To be in a dynamic mindset towards God may be impossible unless we believers live in the truth; loving as God loves and staying pure from sin as God is pure.

God is eager to show mercy to the contrite. This leads us to the importance of confession. We must examine our conscience and have sorrow for our sin. Sin can be a nagging problem in our lives. When we avoid confession satan can attack us with guilt and shame. Our solution is Jesus Christ our Saviour. We must follow Him in everything we do. We celebrated Christmas a couple of days back and remembered how Jesus became flesh and dwelt among His own creation that we may be saved and be brought back to the divine family. This redeeming work of Jesus embraces all times, places and people.

In the Gospel proclamation today, we are reminded of how Mary and Joseph were warned in a dream to leave to Egypt. Pope Francis said that some migrants are “surviving the Herods’ of today, who, to impose their power and increase their wealth, see no problem in shedding innocent blood.” He also said that God is present in “the unwelcomed visitor, often unrecognisable, who walks through our cities and our neighborhoods, who travels on our buses and knocks on our door.” That perception of God should develop into “new forms of relationship, in which none have to feel that there is no room for them on this Earth,” he said. We can also see the how young blood is shed unnecessarily because of a single persons ego. The Church considers the children from Bethlehem (Lk 2: 16-18) as the first Christian martyrs. Their feast is celebrated today.

Prayer: Abba Father, we entrust to You all of us, who have endured fear, uncertainty and humiliation at some point in our lives. Let us experience your tenderness, protection, freedom and peace in these situations. Amen.
Today’s readings point us to the ‘Light’ who is God and this light has come to the world to dispel all darkness and folly. The Psalmist sings joyously and praises God for His Good News of salvation and those who walk with God will be greatly blessed.

At the time when St. John wrote this letter, there was division in the Church. There were false teachers who were leading people astray. John sternly warns Christians to base their lives on the foundation of the Lord Jesus - hold firmly to their faith in Lord Jesus. John who walked and talked with the Lord, saw the miraculous healings, heard his teachings, watched Him die, met the Risen Lord and saw him ascend to Heaven, knew the Lord intimately. He urges believers to walk in God’s light by obeying His commandments and to have a close and intimate relationship with Jesus.

St. John explains what it means to say, “I know Him” - There is a vast difference between “knowing about God” and “knowing God”. The only way to build this close relationship is by opening one’s heart fully and surrendering one’s life to the Lord Jesus. Obeying God becomes so easy and effortless when the Lord begins to reveal himself to us.

St. John reminds us of the Old Testament commandment “to love your neighbour as yourself” but the Lord renews it by saying “Love your neighbour as I have loved you.” Until one experiences His unconditional love personally, loving one’s family or neighbours becomes self-effort.

In the Gospel proclamation, even though the Lord Jesus was God’s son, his family carried out ceremonies according to God’s law. Simeon who was a righteous and a devout man was blessed with the revelation that the Lord was a gift from God, that He was the Messiah and came as a light to the entire world. We as children of God, should carry this light into the world. In the end we will be able to say “Lord let your servant depart in peace for I have experienced and lived according to your will.”

Prayer: Abba Father, as I walk into another New Year, renew my mind and spirit so that I may walk in the Light of God. Amen
As we have come to an end of another year, it is a great time for us to reflect on and be thankful for everything that has enriched us in the past year. Throughout this whole year, we may have heard many sermons, participated in many Eucharist Celebrations, so many prayer meetings, read so many religious books/articles, etc. But how much has it changed us and made us realise the truth of our life? We are Children of God.

We become sons and daughters of God by the grace which is received by faith through the water and Spirit of Baptism. Through Baptism we are entitled to God’s love and protection, we are empowered to love others as the Lord Jesus did and encouraged to direct our hearts, hopes and prayers to the Father. Our dignity as children of God is not in name only; it is the result of truly sharing in his divine nature.

This understanding of being a Child of God is a gift we recieve from the Lord Jesus. This is one of the greatest gifts He gave us when He came to the earth. He showed us how we can address the Almighty God as our own Father. My memory goes back to one of the greatest teachings we received this year as the Family of CRL from ‘Transforming our lives into the Mind of Christ’ Retreat. Lalith Thaththa taught us how we can shift our mind set from the world to of Jesus Christ. What was Jesus’ awareness of Himself when He lived here on earth as a human being? He had self awareness that He is the Son of God, He has come from the Heart of God, He has a purpose to do God’s will and that He was going back to the Father. These were not just mere ideas to Him but rather the very truth of His heart which led Him to do the will of the Father in this earth. This brought forth Salvation to all human kind. Are not these the answers to our daily questions as well. We may always wonder Who we are, Where we come from, What is our purpose and Where we’re going? The Lord Jesus has already shown us the answers. We need to whole heartedly follow Him.

But why is it so hard to follow Jesus? Why is it so hard to be a disciple? The resistance comes from inside when we want to become true
disciples of the Lord. The Lord’s’ new teaching was to not even think of something bad. But the moment we try to control our thoughts, a storm of thoughts hit us. This is exactly why we need a Saviour. We cannot follow the Lord with our own strength. Jesus Christ gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit, to be with us always. He is our advocate, comforter and counsellor. If we open ourselves truly, He will reveal this truth into our hearts. As we step into a new year in a couple of days, let us try and do everything that leads us to ‘Put-on’ Jesus Christ: to put-on His self understanding as the Son of God.

This same self awareness of the Lord Jesus is seen in the Gospel today. We see the story of the Lord in the temple at the age of twelve. This story of His boyhood is recorded only in the Gospel of Luke. There are many things we can learn from this passage. Firstly, the yearly participation of Mary and Joseph highlights their faithfulness to God’s Law. Though they were parents of the Son of God, they did not let their ego come in between but rather followed the customs and rituals being obedient to the Father. Secondly, this incident would have been a great time of anxiety for Mary and Joseph. Any parent can relate to such a situation. We would be in despair if our child was not to be found. This situation invites us to have our complete hope in our Father alone. Can we continue to seek God in the darkest situations of our lives? Where no hope can be seen?

Thirdly, we see the Lord instructing them on their parental role: that it must be subordinate to the will of His Divine Father. His parents did have an important part to play in His mission, as indicated in the subsequent context, where the Lord submits himself to their leadership and honours them with the faithful obedience of a Son.

From the ancient times, the Christian Family has been called the domestic church. But in most instances, Family life gets lost in the concepts of “the world”. In actual fact, this is a blessing given by God to us: it is our mission to love each other with the same love Christ has bestowed on us. When the right choices are made in this Family life, we cooperate with Lord’s invitation to follow Him by exercising our human freedom; we choose to give ourselves away in love to one another. In doing so, we are gradually being transformed into an image, a living icon, of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Prayer: Abba Father, I will trust in you, for you are my Father, my God, my salvation. You are my kind, compassionate and merciful Father, and I am your child. I cast myself into your arms and seek your blessing. I put my trust in you; and so trusting, shall not be confounded. Amen.
Monday 31st December

St. Sylvester 1, Pope

Take me, break me & make me!

As we come to the end of 2018, New Year’s eve is an occasion where some people are tempted or ill-advised to indulge in luxury and somewhat vulgar extravagance. New Year’s Eve balls in 5 star hotels now cost about Rs 25,000/ for a person and that works out Rs 50,000 per couple. So many people enjoy this luxury though knowing that millions of people do not earn so much for a whole month.

As we end the year, St. John in his Gospel proclamation, tells us “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life,[a] and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” St. John the Evangelist is referring to Christ Jesus our living Saviour needs to be the model and the only model for our lives. Instead of busting up tens of thousands of rupees on New Year’s Eve balls, we need to become a people who have a deep desire to do God’s will and begin the New Year with midnight Mass. As we receive Holy Communion, we could tell the Lord as He did - “Take me, bless me, break me and give me to others.” After the Eucharist, where we surrender our will, our hearts and minds to God, we could reflect on some divine resolutions for the New Year.

For instance, we could ask the Lord for the power of the Holy Spirit, to be like the Lord Jesus and enter into a simple and humble lifestyle. This is known as ‘alpechthava’ in classical Sinhala. Our role model again is the Lord Jesus. After His baptism in the Jordon River, where he was filled with the Spirit, the Lord Jesus, left everything behind and began his mission of bringing God’s unconditional love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness to all people of all nations. Today’s Gospel proclamation tell us that those who receive this love and share it with others will have eternal life with God in Heaven.

Prayer: Abba Father, on this New Year’s eve, refill us with the power, the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to cooperate with you in building your kingdom of a just, peaceful and all inclusive society. Amen
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