

Fourth Week of Advent



Our God Is near at hand

O holy Child of Bethlehem, you radiate the light that overcomes darkness and illuminate the path to our salvation. As you hasten to be born into our broken world, help us turn fully to you and increase our longing for your presence. Fill us with hope for your birth and grant us patience and peace, Lord Jesus, who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, December 24, 2023

Attend to God's time

Today's readings: 2 Samuel 7:1–14, 16; Psalm 89:2–5, 27, 29; Romans 16:25–27; Luke 1:26–38. This year we dwell in the last week of Advent for only hours. Today's Scriptures put an exclamation mark on all the prophetic promises we recalled with the "O" Antiphons. As foretold in the Old Testament, and echoed in the words of the angel Gabriel, the savior will come through the line of King David and thus his house and kingdom shall endure forever.

For most households, these abbreviated final hours of Advent will be consumed with hurried preparations for Christmas. Even so, attend to God's time. Remember to light the fourth candle on the Advent wreath, adorn the household nativity scene, and listen to your Advent playlist once more while cleaning, baking, or traveling. Our Advent texts, songs, and traditions are ripe with promise. Christ is coming. A savior will be born. The light will overcome the darkness. God's faithfulness will endure forever.

Today we turn the page from hopeful waiting to joyful fulfillment. Breathe in the miracle of God's love. Exhale a prayer of gratitude for all that is to come.

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Nativity of Our Lord



Glory to God in the highest!

Generous God, you are the gracious giver of all gifts. On this holy Christmas Day come into our lives. Give us the riches of your poverty, show us the power of your weakness, and teach us the joy of your humility. Bless our homes and hearts as we celebrate the birth of your Son and join the angels in singing your praises now and forever. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

December 24 - 25, 2023

House of Bread

Today's readings: Christmas eve: Isaiah 9:1–6; Isaiah 62:1–5; Psalm 89 & 96; Acts 13:16–17, 22–25; Titus 2:11–14; Matthew 1:1–25; Luke 2:1–20

Christmas day: Isaiah 62:11–12 & 52:7–10; Psalm 97 & 98; Titus 3:4–7; Hebrews 1:1–6; John 1:1–18.

On the Nativity of the Lord, we prepare ourselves to hear with fresh ears the story of Mary giving birth in a stable and making a feeding trough into a bed for our Savior. The story of Jesus' birth proclaims that great things happen in the humblest of places. The name of the unremarkable town that hosted this miracle is *Bethlehem*. In Hebrew, *Bethlehem* means "house of bread." What perfect symmetry that the One who will become our bread of life began human existence in the house of bread.

The account of the nativity also presents a marginalized group of people as the first to hear the Good News. Not only did the shepherds go "in haste" (Luke 2:16) to see the messiah, but with joy in their hearts, they proclaimed what they saw and heard. May we be open to hearing the Good News in unexpected ways and from unexpected people. With Mary, we acknowledge the "greatness of the Lord," who fills the hungry "with good things" and sends the rich "away empty" (Luke 1:47–53).



This Week at Home

Monday, December 25

Christ Is born

Christmas Day is often filled with activity and goes by in the blink of an eye. Remember to pause and open your heart wide to Christ, who seeks a home there. Allow the light of a candle, the Christ figurine in your nativity scene, the circle of evergreen on your holiday wreath, and the shining eyes of children and the elderly to kindle your joy in the incarnation. *Today's readings: Isaiah 62:11–12; Psalm 97:1, 6, 11–12; Titus 3:4–7; Luke 2:15–20.*

Tuesday, December 26

Stephen, deacon and first martyr

Today we honor Stephen, the first Christian to die a martyr for his faith in Jesus. A deacon in the early Church, Stephen served the needs of widows and the poor. His eloquent preaching drew many to Christianity as well as the violent attention of those opposing the memory of Jesus. Advent proclaimed that God reaches into our time to lead us to the light of everlasting life. We commemorate Stephen and other martyrs this week for their utmost faithfulness to Christ and passing into the eternal life of heaven. *Today's readings: Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59; Psalm 31:3–4, 6, 8, 16–17; Matthew 10:17–22.*

Wednesday, December 27

John, apostle and evangelist

Remembered as the beloved disciple, John gave the Church a gospel, three epistles to the Christian community, and possibly the book of Revelation. Stories recall that he lived a long life and in his later years, when he no longer had the stamina to preach, he routinely offered the most succinct homily, “My little children, love one another.” With these pithy words, he relayed the most essential message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Today's readings: 1 John 1:1–4; Psalm 97:1–2, 5–6, 11–12; John 20:1–8.*

Thursday, December 28

The Holy Innocents, martyrs

Today's scriptures return us to the events following the nativity of our Lord. Deeply threatened by the possible birth of the long-awaited messiah, King Herod ordered the murder of all boys under the age of two in Bethlehem and the surrounding region. This unimaginable scourge of innocent children has repeated itself over and over through the centuries and is a powerful reminder of our responsibility to protect life at every stage. *Today's readings: 1 John 1:5–2:2; Psalm 124: 2–5, 7–8; Matthew 2:13–18.*

Friday, December 29

The presentation in the temple

Ever faithful to their Jewish traditions, Joseph and Mary brought the child Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to be consecrated to God. Two holy elders, Simeon and Anna, recognized Jesus as the messiah. Their prophetic words proclaimed that all that had been foretold in the Scriptures would be manifest in the life of this tiny child. Joseph and Mary were amazed and returned home to raise Jesus in the faith of Judaism. *Today's readings: 1 John 2:3–11; Psalm 96:1–3, 5–6; Luke 2:22–35.*

Saturday, December 30

Christmas continues... relish the days of Christmas

While the secular world charges ahead, the Church invites us to linger in the Christmas season. Together we savor the miraculous early moments of Jesus' life and the stunning reception he received from shepherds, kings, and holy elders alike. His parents courageously protected him and immediately began to pass on their faith and honor their religious tradition. Resist packing away the religious imagery just yet. Instead, keep the nativity scene prominent, light Christmas candles, and ponder along with Mary the unexpected graces poured upon us. *Today's readings: 1 John 2:12–17; Psalm 96:7–10; Luke 2:36–40.*