

Lectio Divina

SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

“What page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?” ~Saint Benedict, from the *Rule of Saint Benedict* (73:3)

The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“O Father, in your Truth (that is to say, in your Son, humbled, needy and homeless) you have humbled me. He was humbled in the womb of the Virgin, needy in the manger of the sheep, and homeless on the wood of the Cross. Nothing so humbles the proud sinner as the humility of Jesus Christ’s humanity.” +SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA

Monday, December 16 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 21:23-27 When Jesus had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” Jesus said to them in reply, “I shall ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I shall tell you by what authority I do these things. Where was John’s baptism from? Was it of heavenly or of human origin?” They discussed this among themselves and said, “If we say ‘Of heavenly origin,’ he will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we fear the crowd, for they all regard John as a prophet.” So they said to Jesus in reply, “We do not know.” He himself said to them, “Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Meditation: Have you ever noticed why the religious leaders opposed Jesus and rejected his claim to divine authority? Their view of religion did not match with God's word because their hearts were set on personal gain rather than truth and submission to God's plan and design for their lives. They openly questioned Jesus to discredit his claim to be the Messiah; they never questioned to learn, only to tear down. Jesus, who saw through their ongoing traps, poses a question to them and makes their answer a condition for his answer. Did they accept the work of John the Baptist as divine or human? If they accepted John's work as divine, they would be compelled to accept Jesus as the Messiah. They dodged the question because they were unwilling to face the truth. They did not accept John the Baptist and they would not accept Jesus as their Messiah.

Prayer: Incline a merciful ear to our cry, we pray, O Lord, and, casting light on the darkness of our hearts, visit us with the grace of your Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: A serious question to ask yourself today: Are you willing to take a stand for the truth, even when it may cost you? Or do you look for the safe way out through compromise, political correctness, or simply selling yourself out? Jesus told his disciples that “the truth would make them free” (ref. John 8:32). Why were the religious leaders opposed to Jesus' and evasive with the truth? Did they fear the praise of their friends and neighbors more than the praise of God for those who stand up to his truth? The coming of God's kingdom or reign on the earth will inevitably produce conflict – a conflict of allegiance to God's will or my will, God's way of love and justice or the world's way of playing fair, God's standard of absolute moral truth or truth relative to what I want to believe is good and useful for the time being. There is much joy and freedom to be experienced by living our lives according to God's way, God's truth. Do you know the joy and freedom of living according to God's truth? If not, what is diverting your attention and your path in life? What is holding you back?

Tuesday, December 17 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:1-17 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the

father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen generations.

Meditation: Genealogies are very important. Why? They show us our roots and help us to understand our heritage. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus traces his lineage from Abraham, the father of God's chosen people, through the line of David, King of Israel. Jesus the Messiah is the direct descent of Abraham and David, and the rightful heir to David's throne. God in his mercy fulfilled his promises to Abraham and to David that he would send a Savior and a King to rule over the house of Israel and to deliver them from their enemies. We see God promise fulfilled in David (ref. Genesis 49:10).

Prayer: O God, Creator and Redeemer of human nature, who willed that your Word should take flesh in an ever-virgin womb, look with favor on our prayers, that your Only Begotten Son, having taken to himself our humanity, may be pleased to grant us a share in his divinity. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: This Gospel is not simply a long list of difficult-to-pronounce names of people most have never heard of. Rather it is a blessing, a foreshadowing of God's fulfillment in raising up his anointed King, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He is the hope not only for the people of the Old Covenant but for all nations as well. He is the Savior of the world who redeems us from slavery to sin and Satan and makes us citizens of the kingdom of God. In him we receive adoption into a royal priesthood and holy nation as sons and daughters of the living God (ref. 1 Peter 1:9). Do you recognize your spiritual genealogy and do you accept God as your Father and Jesus as the sovereign King and Lord of your life? In this Season of Advent, as we prepare our hearts and minds, let us reflect on God's plan for our salvation, and how this genealogy is revealing to us about God's plan at work, leading up to the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, December 18 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

Meditation: Mary had to face an enormous challenge to her faith and trust in God and to the faith of her family and Joseph, the man she chose to marry. She was asked to assume a tremendous responsibility. It had never been heard of before that a child could be born without a natural father. Mary was asked to accept this miraculous exception to the laws of nature. That required faith and trust in God and in his promises. Second, Mary was not yet married. Pregnancy outside of wedlock was not tolerated in those days. Mary was only espoused to Joseph, and such an engagement had to last for a whole year. She was asked to assume a great risk. She could have been rejected by Joseph, by her family, by all her own people. Mary knew that Joseph and her family would not understand without revelation from God. She nonetheless believed and trusted in God's promises.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that we, who are weighed down from of old by slavery beneath the yoke of sin, may be set free by the newness of the long-awaited Nativity of your Only Begotten Son. O

God, Creator and Redeemer of human nature, who willed that your Word should take flesh in an ever-virgin womb, look with favor on our prayers, that your Only Begotten Son, having taken to himself our humanity, may be pleased to grant us a share in his divinity. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, did not wish to embarrass or punish his espoused wife, Mary when he discovered that she was pregnant. To all appearances she had broken their solemn pledge to be faithful and chaste to one another. Joseph, no doubt took this troubling matter to God in prayer. He was not hasty to judge or to react with hurt and anger. God rewarded him not only with guidance and consolation, but with the divine assurance that he had indeed called Joseph to be the husband of Mary and to assume a mission that would require the utmost faith, confidence, and trust in Almighty God. Joseph believed in the divine message to take Mary as his wife and to accept the child in her womb as the promised Messiah. Like Mary, Joseph is a model of faith for us. He is a faithful witness and servant of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Are you ready to believe in the promises of God, even when faced with perplexing circumstances and what seems like insurmountable problems?

Thursday, December 19 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Luke 5:1-25 In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years. Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord." Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time." Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute. Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home. After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, "So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others."

Meditation: Zechariah was a godly man who was tuned to God's voice. He was born into a priestly family and it was his privilege to be chosen to enter the inner court of the temple to offer sacrifice to God. Luke records that the people wondered at Zechariah's delay and were amazed that he was speechless when he withdrew from the inner sanctuary. They rightly perceived that he had a special encounter with God. God's angelic messenger greeted Zechariah with a blessing beyond his expectations. "Your prayer is heard! You will have a son! And his mission will be great for all of Israel. " Now that seemed like a lot for Zechariah to take in all at once. Could God really do a miracle for his barren wife, Elizabeth? The angel somewhat wisely put Zechariah in his place before God's mighty action. He became speechless until the day the infant was dedicated to the Lord and given the name, John. When God draws us into his presence, he wants us to be still and quiet before him so we can listen as he speaks to our hearts and reveals his mind to us.

Prayer: O God, who through the child-bearing of the holy Virgin graciously revealed the radiance of your glory to the world, grant, we pray, that we may venerate with integrity of faith the mystery of so wondrous an Incarnation and always celebrate it with due reverence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: In the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist, the angel explains to Zechariah the role his son is to play in preparing the way for the Messiah. John will be great in the sight of God. He will

live as a Nazarite (ref. Numbers 6) – a person set apart for the Lord. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even within his mother's womb. And he shall be sent to the people of God, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers and children to God and one another, by turning the "disobedient to the wisdom of the just." The name John means "the Lord is gracious". When God acts to save us he graciously fills us with his Holy Spirit and makes our faith "alive" to his promises. Do you pray that "the hearts of parents and children may be turned to God and one another?" If not, start!

Friday, December 20 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:26-38 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation: In a great leap of faith and trust in the angel Gabriel's message, Mary says without hesitation: "Yes!"... "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be to me according to your word." For us Christians, the moment of that "Yes" is a turning point in the history of the world. As it is also even for those who do not know Christ or who refuse to believe in his divine origin. It is the moment of the Incarnation, when the Word became flesh and began to live among us as one of us. The world would never be the same. In a way, this is a more important moment than Christmas, but it is understandable that we should tend to celebrate more the visible presence of God in Jesus at Bethlehem. Mary had yet to learn what that "Yes" involved but it was made unconditionally and it was never withdrawn. Through a life joy and celebration, and of trials and tribulations, challenges, fears and anxieties – of which we can know only a fraction – right up to those terrible moments as she stood beneath the Cross and saw her only Son die in agony and shame as a public criminal, Mary never once withdrew that "Yes" she gave to God through the angel Gabriel. Mary is truly a loving and faithful child of God – how do each of us compare in this regard? When life's challenges befall us, do we grow closer to God? Do we shake our fist at God? Do we turn our backs and run away from him? Mary, yet again, serves as a wonderful role model for us to live our lives as children of God.

Prayer: O God, eternal majesty, whose ineffable Word the immaculate Virgin received through the message of an Angel and so became the dwelling-place of divinity, filled with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant, we pray, that by her example we may in humility hold fast to your will. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: There is a crystal-clear message in today's gospel. Each of us have been called in our own special way to give birth to Jesus in our lives and in our own environment in which we live, work and interact with one another. We too have been called to say "Yes" – an unconditional and resounding "Yes" to following Jesus. In this last week of Advent, just days before Christmas, now is the time for us to renew that pledge with Mary's help and example. Make it happen!

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