

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.

"I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since 'no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord' (Pope Paul VI, Gaudete in Domino). The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: 'Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.' How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another 'seventy times seven' (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!" +POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II, THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL, 3

Monday, December 23 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Advent Saint John of Kanty, Priest

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:57-66 When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name." So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be? For surely the hand of the Lord was with him."

Meditation: Not much has changed when it comes to naming newborns. The relatives of Zechariah and Elizabeth quibble over what to name their newborn child – many do the same thing in our own time! There is a major difference, though, with regard to this child – this child has been named from above! And Elizabeth is firm in her faith and determined to see that God be glorified through this child. The name "John" means "the Lord is gracious." In the birth of John and in the birth of Jesus the Messiah we see the grace of God breaking forth into a world broken by sin and death and without hope. John's miraculous birth shows the mercy and favor of God in preparing his people for the coming of its Lord and Savior, Christ the Savior, the Son of God.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that by the example of the Priest Saint John of Kanty we may advance in knowledge of holy things and by showing compassion to all, may gain forgiveness in your sight. 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: When God acts to save us, he graciously fills us with his Holy Spirit and makes our faith "alive" to his promises. The question always comes down to this, though: Do you make your life an offering to God, along with your family, and all that you possess? God wants to fill us with his glory all the days of our lives, from conception, to birth, through every moment of our earthly lives, until our death. As Advent draws to a close and we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord, Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, renew the offering of your life to God, and from your heart give him thanks for his mercy and favor towards you.

Tuesday, December 24 ~ Last Day in the Season Advent

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:67-69 Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied, saying: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty Savior, born of the house of his servant David. Through his prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hand of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life. You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Meditation: Like Zechariah, the Holy Spirit wants to give us vision, joy, and confidence in the knowledge of God's merciful love, protection, and care which he offers us through his Son Jesus Christ. Like John the Baptist, we too are called to prepare the way that leads to Christ. Life is a journey and we are either moving towards the Lord or away from the Lord. The Lord comes to visit us each day with his life-giving Word and Spirit. Those who hunger for the Lord will not be disappointed. He will draw them to himself and show them his love and mercy.

Prayer: Come quickly, we pray, Lord Jesus, and do not delay, that those who trust in your compassion may find solace and relief in your coming. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: John the Baptist was born shortly before Mary delivered her son, Jesus. When John was circumcised on the eighth day according to the Jewish rite, his father Zechariah was "filled with the Holy Spirit" and with great joy. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he spoke out a prophetic word and hymn of blessing for the work of redemption which God was about to accomplish in Christ. He foresaw the fulfillment of God's promise to David and his descendants that David's dynasty would endure forever through the coming of the Messianic King (2 Samuel 7:16). This King would establish peace and security for his people. We often think of peace as the absence of trouble. The peace which the Messiah brings cancels the debt of sin and restores our broken relationship with God. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, may each of us renew our relationship with Christ who was sent by God, out of love for us, to redeem us. If we, through our actions, have broken our relationship with God, now is the time to restore it. Begin with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, then the joy of celebrating the birth of He who leads us on our earthly journey along the one path to eternal life – the path of Christ.

Wednesday, December 25

Christmas Day ~ The Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:1-14 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.



And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Meditation: Following is an excerpt of a sermon from Pope St. Leo the Great: "Dearly beloved, today our Savior is born; let us rejoice. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of life. The fear of death has been swallowed up; life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness. No one is shut out from this joy; all share the same reason for rejoicing. Our Lord, victor over sin and death, finding no man free from sin, came to free us all. Let the saint rejoice as he sees the palm of victory at hand. Let the sinner be glad as he receives the offer of forgiveness. Let the pagan take courage as he is summoned to life. In the fullness of time, chosen in the unfathomable depths of God's wisdom, the Son of God took for himself our common humanity in order to reconcile it with its creator. He came to overthrow the devil, the origin of death, in that very nature by which he had overthrown mankind. And so at the birth of our Lord the angels sing in joy: Glory to God in the highest, and they proclaim peace to men of good will as they see the heavenly Jerusalem being built from all the nations of the world. When the angels on high are so exultant at this marvelous work of God's goodness, what joy should it not bring to the lowly hearts of men? Beloved, let us give thanks to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit, because in his great love for us he took pity on us, and when we were dead in our sins he brought us to life with Christ, so that in him we might be a new creation. Let us throw off our old nature and all its ways and, as we have come to birth in Christ, let us renounce the works of the flesh. Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God's kingdom. Through the sacrament of baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil, for your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ."

Prayer: O God, who gladden us year by year as we wait in hope for our redemption grant that, just as we joyfully welcome your Only Begotten Son as our Redeemer, we may also merit to face him confidently when he comes again as our Judge. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: On Christmas Day it remains only for us to find in the Gospel, as we find in all the words of the Holy Gospels, the answer as to what we should do in response to the gift that has been given to us, the song that has fallen on our ears from angelic voices. And the answer is there; the birth of this mystery - of love triumphant in the face of evil - is Christ as He came to life from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, and Christ, as we come to life in Him, through the Sacrament we share. Let us pray that our Christmas will be filled with the song of this life, and that our love will conquer all things contrary to Christ, so that we may follow the Son sent by God to redeem us, and do so with love and fidelity to the truths of Christ.

Thursday, December 26 ~ Second Day in the Octave of Christmas Saint Stephen, Martyr

Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:17-22 Jesus said to his disciples: "Beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved."

Meditation: "You will be hated by all on account of my name," Jesus says in today's gospel. A strange fate indeed for those whose lives are built on truth, love and peace. And yet it is a fate only too sadly confirmed down these many centuries to this very day. Jesus had said that all those who wished to follow him would have to take up their cross and go after him. The servant is no greater than his master. "Whoever loves his own life will lose it; whoever hates his own life in this world will keep it for life eternal. Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am" (John 12:25-26). Stephen clearly is a perfect model of such a Christian disciple.

Prayer: Grant, Lord, we pray, that we may imitate what we worship, and so learn to love even our enemies, for we celebrate the heavenly birthday of a man who know how to pray even for his persecutors. 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.

Contemplation: There are some today who say "religion divides." When we hear this, today's gospel should come to mind, because so routinely turn their back on God and on his Son, Jesus Christ. By their actions, they are the ones who actually cause division – not those who live their lives in faith of God or his Son Jesus Christ – because by their actions and their lifestyles they freely choose to not follow the laws of God and the teachings of Christ; in doing so they separate themselves from the way, the truth, and the life of Christ. The beauty of this situation, though, is that God always welcomes back those who have sinned, those who have strayed. God sent his Son into this world to teach us right from wrong, to shepherd and guide us, and to lead us on the path to eternal life. With a contrite heart through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can confess our sins, receive absolution, and get back in Christ's fold. What a great thing to do in the Christmas Season – and any time of the year, for that matter!

Friday, December 27 ~ Third Day in the Octave of Christmas Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist

Holy Gospel: John 20:1a, 2-8 On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.

Meditation: Today's Gospel describes the scene where Peter and the "beloved disciple" rush to the tomb of Jesus after being told by Mary Magdalene that the body is no longer there. Although the "beloved disciple" got there first, he deferred to Peter who went in first and saw the burial cloths. One of them – the piece that was wrapped around the face – was rolled up in a separate place. When the "beloved disciple" went in, "he saw and he believed" – in other words, he understood the significance of the cloth and he knew that his Lord had risen.

Prayer: O God, who through the blessed Apostle John have unlocked for us the secrets of your Word, grant, we pray, that we may grasp with proper understanding what he has so marvelously brought to our ears. 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: John in his first epistle testifies: What we have seen, heard, and touched we proclaim as the word of life which existed "from the beginning" (1 John 1:1-4). John bears witness to what has existed from all eternity. This "word of life" is Jesus the word incarnate, whose birth we just celebrated, but also Jesus as the word announced by the prophets and Jesus the word now preached throughout the Christian church for all ages to come. One thing is certain, if Jesus had not risen from the dead and appeared to his disciples, we would never have heard of him. Nothing else could have changed sad and despairing men and women into people radiant with joy and courage. The reality of the resurrection is the central fact of the Christian faith. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord gives us "eyes of faith" to know him and the power of his resurrection. The greatest joy we can have is to encounter the living Christ, sent by God into this world to save and redeem us, to teach us how to live our lives, to shepherd and guide us on the path that leads to eternal life. Get to know Christ personally as your Lord, Savior and Redeemer.

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