

Friendship with God

Friendship with our spouse

In the Holy Spirit

MARRIAGE

IN CHRIST



Advent 2016



Advent/Christmas 2016



Advent 2016

Readings, Meditations, and Activities

All scripture quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.

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Advent/Christmas 2016

Introduction

God wants to transform marriages today. We experienced a new power and awareness of God's presence in our marriages during the Marriage in Christ seminar. The important elements of that seminar were (1) the structure and intimacy of praying together and (2) daily activities that were manageable and helped to develop and strengthen our friendship with God and our spouse. We offer these Pray, Talk, Act suggestions to help busy couples to stay connected during the hectic Advent season.

Pattern

All the scripture readings from the Catholic Lectionary for Advent 2016 are listed for each day. We have selected one of the daily readings for the couple to read together as part of their prayer. It is followed by the usual pattern of meditation, quiet reflection, discussion, and prayer. A line from one of the other Scripture readings for the day is included at the end of the day's activities. We have also listed the readings for each day of the week.

We offer busy couples several conversation starters for each week and suggest that you use them and the activities as "sanity breaks." In our house that usually happens when we sit together near the Christmas tree with only the lights of the tree on and hold each other quietly—a great time to share for a little while.

We have made many suggestions for activities for each week in the activities section. The list varies from week to week, but feel free to substitute your own family traditions at any point. Be creative and remember that these activities are designed to build friendship, deepen affection, and help you remain connected to each other.

A Note about Advent

The word "advent" means an arrival or a coming. It is the season when the Church celebrates the

"arrival" of the Messiah at His birth. It looks with longing to his coming at the end of the present age.

Reading through the Scriptures that the Church has selected for Advent is like listening to the punch line of a story that begins, "I have bad news and good news; which do you want first?" Most of the readings announce the good news, but the season is punctuated by other days when the readings give us the bad news. What we see is that the answer to both the good news and the bad news is the same: The King is coming!

That was bad news for Israel, who had forgotten their true vocation. The King was coming and he would not be happy. His arrival would coincide with stiff punishment for those who were oppressing the poor, worshiping false gods, keeping the good news to themselves, and in general, not keeping the covenant that their God had made with them. These passages function as a warning for us as well.

That the King is coming was very good news for Israel. They had been waiting for their long exile in Babylon to come to an end. It was true that they had returned to the land, but they were still subject to foreign powers, and they had not seen the glory of the Lord return to their temple. They were longing for the true King, the Messiah, to come. In him God would act. God would defeat their enemies, return to the Temple, and usher in the great and glorious day of the Lord. On that day the resurrection would occur and creation itself would be healed and transformed. There would be a new heaven and a new earth.

That the King is coming is very good news for us as well. The King is here. And, he is coming again in all of his glory and splendor—to set the world right, to defeat death, to restore creation.

Advent/Christmas 2016

First Sunday, November 27, 2016

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-42

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 24:37-42

For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving

in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Meditation

Do you remember the first time your parents went away for an overnight or a weekend and you had the house to yourself? What did you do? Were you ready for your parents' return? Did you have to scramble to clean the house, fix something that had broken in their absence? Did you have enough advance notice of their return? Or were you surprised? Do you remember the first time you went away and left your child/children home alone? Did you alert them that you were on your way home? Or did you surprise them? How did that go?

We know the Lord will return, but we do not know the day or the hour. He probably won't call when he is a couple of hours away. We will just have to keep his house in good shape. Advent is the time to ask if we are ready. Do we have our noses pressed

up against the window, filled with joy and excitement about his return? Or will we have to scramble to get things in order when we see him pull into the driveway? And what if we don't hear him coming?

The Lord has left us in charge of his house because he trusts us. We ought to keep the house in order because we love him. But if love doesn't motivate us, the thought of what might happen if we have made a mess is its own act of kindness.

During this season of Advent, we are reminded to be prepared and to stay awake. He has promised to return!



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is your most powerful memory of waiting for something or someone?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Plan and celebrate your Christmas and Advent traditions.

- Make an Advent wreath. It is traditional to use four candles, three purple or blue and one pink.
- Put up your Christmas tree together.
- Decorate your home for the season. It is a great way to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation.
- Set up a Christmas crèche.
- Sing your favorite Advent songs.

Be generous.

- Use Advent to do anonymous acts of kindness for friends and family.
- Run an errand for a friend or family member who needs help this season.
- Make a special Christmas treat for friends – consider including the recipe.

Protect your friendship in this busy season.

- Plan a “date night” or “morning coffee.”
- Sneak away for lunch, if your schedule permits.
- Turn off the house lights after the children are in bed and sit quietly and look at the lights on the Christmas tree with each other – you don’t really have to do anything else.
- Be careful not to take offense in this busy season.

Isaiah 2:4

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Advent/Christmas 2016

First week, Monday, November 28, 2016

Isaiah 4:2–6; Matthew 8:5–11

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 8:5-11

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him ⁶ and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." ⁷

And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." ⁸ The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

Meditation

When he was an old man Simeon prayed that he would see the salvation of Israel before he died.

Imagine his great joy when Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the Temple for his dedication. Simeon held the small child in his arms and saw the fulfillment of all of God's promises. In great gratitude he said, "Now you can dismiss your servant in peace, my eyes have seen your salvation, a light for the revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." Fast forward thirty years and a gentile soldier sees the light, but Israel does not have the same faith. Advent is the time when we pray for the king to arrive. Pray too, that

we have the faith to respond as the centurion did when the king appears!



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What should we do for the poor this season?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Plan and celebrate your Christmas and Advent traditions.

- Make an Advent wreath. It is traditional to use four candles, three purple or blue and one pink.
- Put up your Christmas tree together.
- Decorate your home for the season. It is a great way to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation.
- Set up a Christmas crèche.
- Sing your favorite Advent songs.

Be generous.

- Use Advent to do anonymous acts of kindness for friends and family.
- Run an errand for a friend or family member who needs help this season.
- Make a special Christmas treat for friends – consider including the recipe.

Protect your friendship in this busy season.

- Plan a “date night” or “morning coffee.”
- Sneak away for lunch, if your schedule permits.
- Turn off the house lights after the children are in bed and sit quietly and look at the lights on the Christmas tree with each other – you don’t really have to do anything else.
- Be careful not to take offense in this busy season.

Matthew
8:8

The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed."

Advent/Christmas 2016

First Week, Tuesday, November 29, 2016

Isaiah 11:1–10; Luke 10:21–24

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Isaiah 11:1–10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. ² The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and

understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. ⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Meditation

If you have ever tried to rid your backyard of buckthorn, you know how persistent that noxious tree

can be. I have cut it down and it still it comes back. I finally had to poison the stump. Isaiah saw a time when the tree of Jesse had been cut down, and the stump poisoned. But he said a shoot would grow back. The Babylonian emperor destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 587 B.C. He captured Judah's last king as he fled for his life. The Babylonian emperor killed the king's sons in front of him, plucked out his eyes, and then took him in chains into exile. Fifty years later some of the exiles returned to Judah. They rebuilt the Temple, but there was never again one from the "stump of Jesse" on the throne in Jerusalem. Had the poison finally eradicated the hope of Israel for a king from the line of David? Advent is the season when God answers a definitive NO! The promise has not ended. The King is coming! God's promise is stronger and more persistent even than death. But even better is the fact that God's promise includes turning buckthorn into vineyards that produce the best wine imaginable. It is a promise that one day all of creation will be healed and all the nations will dwell in peace.

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is your most powerful memory of God's presence in the Advent/Christmas season?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Plan and celebrate your Christmas and Advent traditions.

- Make an Advent wreath. It is traditional to use four candles, three purple or blue and one pink.
- Put up your Christmas tree together.
- Decorate your home for the season. It is a great way to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation.
- Set up a Christmas crèche.
- Sing your favorite Advent songs.

Be generous.

- Use Advent to do anonymous acts of kindness for friends and family.
- Run an errand for a friend or family member who needs help this season.
- Make a special Christmas treat for friends – consider including the recipe.

Protect your friendship in this busy season.

- Plan a "date night" or "morning coffee."
- Sneak away for lunch, if your schedule permits.
- Turn off the house lights after the children are in bed and sit quietly and look at the lights on the Christmas tree with each other – you don't really have to do anything else.
- Be careful not to take offense in this busy season.

Luke
10:23-24

"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

Advent/Christmas 2016

First Week, Wednesday, November 30, 2016
Romans 10:9-18; Matthew 4:18-22

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 4:18-22

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were

fishermen. ¹⁹ He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, ²² and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

Meditation

Peter and Andrew lived in Capernaum, a small fishing village at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. Their lives and

livelihood were deeply intertwined with the moods of the lake, it's storms and it's calm. Their work never ended. There were always nets to mend, the boat to repair, the fish to catch and clean. Hungry mouths depended on their skill and dedication. Their whole life, probably for several generations, would have hung on the success or failure of the fishermen and the danger or bounty of the big lake. However, life in a small village had its comforting rhythms and the security of friends and family. It was all they knew, probably all they really wanted.

Galilee was also home to much of the revolutionary discontent and anger in the land. It was a hotbed of

revolution! The hated tax collector's booth sat on the major road that ran just outside of town. It was a constant reminder of the oppression of foreign rulers and a corrupt Jewish king. Violent revolution added another dangerous element to their otherwise ordinary lives.

Then the true King walked by and called them to follow him. They dropped their nets, walked away from the comforting rhythms of a small village and the security of friends and family. They would become revolutionaries, but of a different kind. Advent is the season in which we hear the King call us. He has summoned us to join him. Will we leave the comforting rhythms and security of friends and family to join him?



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is your favorite Christmas tree memory?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Plan and celebrate your Christmas and Advent traditions.

- Make an Advent wreath. It is traditional to use four candles, three purple or blue and one pink.
- Put up your Christmas tree together.
- Decorate your home for the season. It is a great way to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation.
- Set up a Christmas crèche.
- Sing your favorite Advent songs.

Be generous.

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- Make a special Christmas treat for friends – consider including the recipe.

Protect your friendship in this busy season.

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- Sneak away for lunch, if your schedule permits.
- Turn off the house lights after the children are in bed and sit quietly and look at the lights on the Christmas tree with each other – you don’t really have to do anything else.
- Be careful not to take offense in this busy season.

Romans
10:9

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Advent/Christmas 2016

First Week, Thursday, December 1, 2016

Isaiah 26:1–6; Matthew 7:21, 24–27

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 7:21, 24–27

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²⁴ 'Everyone

then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!"

Meditation

We had rented the bobcat excavator for the whole day and finished the main project early. Since we had time left, my friend

hastily dug out an area for a fire pit. It was an afterthought and I didn't prepare well for what came next. We put the cement retaining blocks in place, but I was in a hurry. I set the foundation poorly and didn't put any fabric backing between blocks and the backfill. To make matters worse, we used the leftover sand as back fill. Over the next couple of years, the rains would wash the sand we had used as backfill through the little openings in the retaining wall. It was a mess. It wasn't many years later that I had to redo the whole retaining wall. This time I laid the foundation well, used the appropriate fabric backing and now have a sturdy

retaining wall. I was able to correct the mistake before the wall collapsed and caused harm or ruin. Advent is the time when we hear the King invite us to build or repair the foundation of our lives. The good news is that if you are reading this you have time to make the appropriate changes. The King is coming!



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is your favorite homemade Christmas gift or ornament?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Plan and celebrate your Christmas and Advent traditions.

- Make an Advent wreath. It is traditional to use four candles, three purple or blue and one pink.
- Put up your Christmas tree together.
- Decorate your home for the season. It is a great way to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation.
- Set up a Christmas crèche.
- Sing your favorite Advent songs.

Be generous.

- Use Advent to do anonymous acts of kindness for friends and family.
- Run an errand for a friend or family member who needs help this season.
- Make a special Christmas treat for friends – consider including the recipe.

Protect your friendship in this busy season.

- Plan a “date night” or “morning coffee.”
- Sneak away for lunch, if your schedule permits.
- Turn off the house lights after the children are in bed and sit quietly and look at the lights on the Christmas tree with each other – you don’t really have to do anything else.
- Be careful not to take offense in this busy season.

Isaiah
26:4

Trust in the LORD forever,
for in the LORD GOD you have an
everlasting rock.

Advent/Christmas 2016

First Week, Friday, December 2, 2016
Isaiah 29:17–24; Matthew 9:27–31

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 9:27–31

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" ²⁸ When he entered the house, the blind men came to

him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." ³⁰ And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, "See that no one knows of this." ³¹ But they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district.

Meditation

Imagine what would have happened if the two blind men had a Facebook page, a Twitter account, and text messaging!

That story would have gone viral. Actually, it did—at least, in the first-century version of "viral." It's a story that is too good to keep quiet.

But what about your ordinary everyday life? What kind of stories do you have? You most likely haven't been blind and had your sight restored, but where have you seen the Lord at work? Simple acts of kindness that you do for each other that make your marriage more attractive? How about what you learned about each other, in your most recent conversation? Did that lead you to love more? Did anyone notice how much you loved each other?

The loveliness of our relationship is one of the ways in which we spread the good news. In Christ and in the Holy Spirit we have been set free to resist the currents of our contemporary consumer culture. Ours is a story that is too good to keep quiet.

The Son of David is the long-awaited king. Advent is the time to spread the good news. The King is coming!



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is your favorite Christmas story/book/movie? What do you like about it?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Plan and celebrate your Christmas and Advent traditions.

- Make an Advent wreath. It is traditional to use four candles, three purple or blue and one pink.
- Put up your Christmas tree together.
- Decorate your home for the season. It is a great way to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation.
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Be generous.

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Protect your friendship in this busy season.

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- Be careful not to take offense in this busy season.

Isaiah
29:18

On that day, the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.

Advent/Christmas 2016

First Week, Saturday, December 3, 2016

Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26; Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6–8

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6–8

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out. "Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment."

Meditation

One rainy, cold day I was in the parking lot of a major building supply store. I was heading into the door marked "exit" because I knew from previous experience that I could get in that way. Besides, in addition to the cold rain, the single item I was looking for was nearer the "exit" door than the door marked "enter." I was hurrying past an obviously confused fellow shopper who had also parked nearer the "exit" than the "entrance." Rather timidly he said, "Can we get in that way?"

I said, "Sure." He slapped his forehead and said, "I'm such a sheep," and he followed me into the store—right through the "exit." I'm not claiming to be a good shepherd. If you need a cart, they are closer to the entrance, and that is a better way to get into the store. A silly example? Sure, but Jesus is right: people are hungry for good leadership, they are hungry to know Jesus and his Father. The harvest is plentiful and there are precious few laborers. Advent is the time when we can shout to the whole world that the King is here, the King is coming. We can sing songs about it, decorate our homes, and celebrate his birthday. We can lead the lost sheep of our world by doing quite the opposite of what the world would tell them. Christmas is about Christ, not Santa or having happy holidays! Can you hear the foreheads being slapped?

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

*May the Lord bless us, protect us
from all evil, and bring us to
everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How did you see the Holy Spirit at work this week?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Plan and celebrate your Christmas and Advent traditions.

- Make an Advent wreath. It is traditional to use four candles, three purple or blue and one pink.
- Put up your Christmas tree together.
- Decorate your home for the season. It is a great way to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation.
- Set up a Christmas crèche.
- Sing your favorite Advent songs.

Be generous.

- Use Advent to do anonymous acts of kindness for friends and family.
- Run an errand for a friend or family member who needs help this season.
- Make a special Christmas treat for friends – consider including the recipe.

Protect your friendship in this busy season.

- Plan a “date night” or “morning coffee.”
- Sneak away for lunch, if your schedule permits.
- Turn off the house lights after the children are in bed and sit quietly and look at the lights on the Christmas tree with each other – you don’t really have to do anything else.
- Be careful not to take offense in this busy season.

Isaiah
30:19

Truly, O people in Zion, inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall weep no more.



Advent/Christmas 2016

Second Week, Sunday, December 4, 2016
Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³ This is the one of whom

the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" ⁴ Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹ Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Meditation

The king is coming! The persistent promise and the warning of Advent. John's peculiar clothing and diet would have been the talk of twitter and all other forms of social media. He would have been "liked" by many, at least until they heard what he was really saying. "The king is coming with a winnowing fork and he will separate the wheat from the chaff and to burn the chaff and other refuse in an unquenchable fire." Who are the chaff? Who should have remained in Jerusalem to be punished? The answer was simple – those who thought they were going to be okay, simply because of their "correct" race, their "correct" religious practices and political views. The chaff and the vipers were those who refused to recognize that God was offering an opportunity to repent and return to him with their whole heart. The kingdom of heaven is near. The kingdom of heaven is about friendship with the king. Advent is the time when we can rework our priorities and put first things first.

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What does simplicity look like for us at Christmas?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Be kind.

- Be sure to say, “Good morning” and “Good night”!
- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Help your spouse with his/her chores.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse. It’s rude.
- Say “please” and “thank you.”

Be grateful.

- Let your spouse know how important he or she is to you.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.

Make time to be together.

- Go for a drive to look at Christmas lights with a thermos of hot cocoa.
- Listen to Christmas music while you catch up with each other.
- Take a ten-minute sanity break: sit and hold hands!
- Watch your favorite Christmas movie together.
- Do Christmas baking together.
- Help an elderly friend/relative send Christmas cards to their friends and family.

Isaiah
11:10

On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Second Week, Monday, December 5, 2016

Isaiah 35:1–10; Luke 5:17–26

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Isaiah 35:1–10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy

and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. ³ Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. ⁸ A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. ⁹ No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. ¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Meditation

From the top of Mount Carmel, the lush Jezreel Valley stretches out as far as the eye can see. It is beautiful and green. The valley

produces three crops per year. Carmel itself is covered with green trees. It is a majestic sight to behold. It and the valley below are full of life. The contrast between it and the Judean desert could not be starker. Imagine hundreds of miles of sand and wilderness. Next, imagine that wilderness bursting with crocus blossoms, lakes and streams abounding. Imagine the once barren land teeming with life. Creation itself will be transformed—but when? It will happen when the Lord, Israel's God, rescues his people. We will know that he has come to save us when the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dumb speak. That will be a day of everlasting joy and gladness. The claim of Advent is this: That day is upon us. God is rescuing his people. Rejoice and be glad.



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Share a favorite Christmas story about your mom and dad.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Be kind.

- Be sure to say, "Good morning" and "Good night"!
- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Help your spouse with his/her chores.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse. It's rude.
- Say "please" and "thank you."

Be grateful.

- Let your spouse know how important he or she is to you.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.

Make time to be together.

- Go for a drive to look at Christmas lights with a thermos of hot cocoa.
- Listen to Christmas music while you catch up with each other.
- Take a ten-minute sanity break: sit and hold hands!
- Watch your favorite Christmas movie together.
- Do Christmas baking together.
- Help an elderly friend/relative send Christmas cards to their friends and family.

Luke 5:20

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

Second Week, Tuesday, December 6, 2016

Isaiah 40:1–11; Matthew 18:12–14

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 18:12–14

What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in

search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Meditation

I used to wonder what kind of a shepherd would leave ninety-nine sheep and go looking for one. What were the chances that

if one sheep was dumb enough to wander away, the other ninety-nine were Rhodes Scholars and would stay put? Slim, I thought. Of course the answer is that the shepherd would have left them in the care of his cousin. He would have gone after the one that was lost because that one sheep represented a significant portion of his extended family's possessions and he was not looking forward to explaining to his uncle that he had lost his sheep. So going home with fewer sheep was not really an option. One can also imagine that the shepherd was debating whether it was better to find part of the sheep—the part that a lion had left behind—or to find the whole, hundred-pound, smelly beast that he would have to tie around his neck and carry all the way back (remember that this was not the brightest one in the flock). But

even though finding this sheep cost the shepherd an enormous amount of trouble and pain, his first reaction was to rejoice. The good news in this story is that our Father in heaven is willing to go to any lengths to rescue his lost sheep. For Jesus' audience, the "lost sheep" were the poor, the deformed, the sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, and all those who were excluded from full participation in the life of Israel. There is a warning in this story as well. Those were exactly the people Jesus had come to save, and the leaders of Judah were willing to let them die in the wilderness. Advent is the time when we hear of the great compassion of our God, who is searching for the lost sheep. We should hear the warning as well. The good news is to be shared.

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is causing stress today? How can I help?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Be kind.

- Be sure to say, “Good morning” and “Good night”!
- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Help your spouse with his/her chores.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse. It’s rude.
- Say “please” and “thank you.”

Be grateful.

- Let your spouse know how important he or she is to you.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.

Make time to be together.

- Go for a drive to look at Christmas lights with a thermos of hot cocoa.
- Listen to Christmas music while you catch up with each other.
- Take a ten-minute sanity break: sit and hold hands!
- Watch your favorite Christmas movie together.
- Do Christmas baking together.
- Help an elderly friend/relative send Christmas cards to their friends and family.

Isaiah
40:11

Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
in his arms he gathers the lambs,
carrying them in his bosom, and
leading the ewes with care.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Second Week, Wednesday, December 7, 2016
Isaiah 40:25–31; Matthew 11:28–30

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 11:28–30

"Come to me, all you that are
weary and are carrying heavy
burdens, and I will give you rest.
²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and
learn from me; for I am gentle

and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your
souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is
light."

Meditation

My two-and-a-half-year-old
grandson was lying on his back
anchored to the ground by his
father's backpack, which was still strapped to his
tiny body. Like a turtle on its back, his legs and
arms were flailing away, but he was going
nowhere. He had indicated in no uncertain terms
that he wanted to carry his dad's "big boy"
backpack—not his own smaller version. So I helped
him put on the big boy backpack and watched him
slowly tip backwards until he ended up in his
current predicament. "Grandpa, need help" were
his next words. Advent is the time when we
acknowledge that we too are often lying on our
backs, strapped to a big boy backpack, with our
arms and legs flailing uselessly—and we finally say,
"Jesus, need help."



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that
came to mind in the reading or
the meditation. Share one idea
with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend,
tell the Lord out loud what is on
your mind and the people you
are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by
praying the Lord's Prayer
together.

Blessing

*May the Lord bless us, protect us
from all evil, and bring us to
everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- My favorite photo of us together is the one where . . .

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Be kind.

- Be sure to say, “Good morning” and “Good night”!
- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Help your spouse with his/her chores.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse. It’s rude.
- Say “please” and “thank you.”

Be grateful.

- Let your spouse know how important he or she is to you.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.

Make time to be together.

- Go for a drive to look at Christmas lights with a thermos of hot cocoa.
- Listen to Christmas music while you catch up with each other.
- Take a ten-minute sanity break: sit and hold hands!
- Watch your favorite Christmas movie together.
- Do Christmas baking together.
- Help an elderly friend/relative send Christmas cards to their friends and family.

Isaiah
40:31

Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.



Advent/Christmas 2016

Second Week, Thursday, December 8, 2016

Genesis 3:9-15; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 (**Catholic Feast of the Immaculate Conception**)

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation

What is Gabriel doing in her house?
Such strange words of greeting.
Favored one?

Would you consider it a favor?
A child out of wedlock,
poor Joseph, what will he think?

The wind of God, the Breath of God,
the Spirit of God, the *ruach elohim*,
hovered over tumultuous waters.

All creation from the
wild, watery, wasteland.
Good, good, very good.

The same Spirit hovers
over a young woman
favored by God for whom

nothing is impossible!
New creation from the
willing woman's womb.

Oh, Gabriel, tell Him
that the handmaid
of the Lord says, yes.

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that
came to mind in the reading or
the meditation. Share one idea
with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend,
tell the Lord out loud what is on
your mind and the people you
are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by
praying the Lord's Prayer
together.

Blessing

*May the Lord bless us, protect us
from all evil, and bring us to
everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How does our marriage invite others to love God more deeply?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Be kind.

- Be sure to say, “Good morning” and “Good night”!
- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Help your spouse with his/her chores.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse. It’s rude.
- Say “please” and “thank you.”

Be grateful.

- Let your spouse know how important he or she is to you.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.

Make time to be together.

- Go for a drive to look at Christmas lights with a thermos of hot cocoa.
- Listen to Christmas music while you catch up with each other.
- Take a ten-minute sanity break: sit and hold hands!
- Watch your favorite Christmas movie together.
- Do Christmas baking together.
- Help an elderly friend/relative send Christmas cards to their friends and family.

Ephesians
1:12

So that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Second Week, Friday, December 9, 2016

Isaiah 48:17–19; Matthew 11:16–19.

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Isaiah 48:17-19

Thus, says the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I, the LORD, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go. ¹⁸

If you would hearken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river, and your vindication like the waves of the sea; ¹⁹ Your descendants would be like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, their name never cut off or blotted out from my presence.

Translation NAB

Meditation

How many times have you heard or been tempted to say, “If you only would have listened . . .” or

“If you only would have done . . .” It does not matter how we would have finished those sentences, what is implied is the all too common and too human temptation to ignore good advice and endure the wholly avoidable disaster that follows. Sometimes it is our pride. Sometimes we are stubborn or convinced we know better – I guess that could be our pride too. Sometimes we are afraid and other times we have fallen for the consumer lie that we are number one. Whatever the case may be, here the Lord is offering us a chance to do the right thing before we have to fill in the consequences implied above. The King is coming. He brings with him, prosperity, vindication, descendants and immortality!

“If you only would . . .”



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What traditions do we want to establish, continue or change?

Act

"Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**"

Be kind.

- Be sure to say, "Good morning" and "Good night"!
- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Help your spouse with his/her chores.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse. It's rude.
- Say "please" and "thank you."

Be grateful.

- Let your spouse know how important he or she is to you.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.

Make time to be together.

- Go for a drive to look at Christmas lights with a thermos of hot cocoa.
- Listen to Christmas music while you catch up with each other.
- Take a ten-minute sanity break: sit and hold hands!
- Watch your favorite Christmas movie together.
- Do Christmas baking together.
- Help an elderly friend/relative send Christmas cards to their friends and family.

Matthew
11:19

Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Second Week, Saturday, December 10, 2016
Sirach 48:1–4, 9–11; Matthew 17:9a, 10–13

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 17:9–13

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." ¹⁰

And the disciples asked him, "Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" ¹¹ He replied, "Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; ¹² but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands." ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist."

Meditation

The road from the top of Mount Tabor is steep and filled with switchbacks. As Jesus and his disciples made their way down the hill, they would have come occasionally to vantage points, and the view of the valley stretching out below them would have been spectacular. But how could that view compete with the vision they had just seen? They had seen Jesus transfigured before them, with Moses and Elijah on either side of him. How did they make sense out of that? What did he mean "Don't tell anyone about it until after the Son of Man is raised from the dead"? He is going to die? They did not really have a category for rising from the dead, except for the hope that everyone would rise from the dead in the general resurrection at the end of this present evil age. Why would you tell people then? So many questions! They did,

however, understand that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist, who had been killed by Herod. John the Baptist was Elijah? That made Jesus the king who was to come. But the King is supposed to be victorious and defeat our enemies. What is this about suffering and dying? Advent is about the surprise of God's self-abasement. First the king came as a helpless child, then "Elijah" is killed; and the King will die." So many surprises!



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What bright spots did we have this week?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Be kind.

- Be sure to say, “Good morning” and “Good night”!
- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Help your spouse with his/her chores.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse. It’s rude.
- Say “please” and “thank you.”

Be grateful.

- Let your spouse know how important he or she is to you.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.

Make time to be together.

- Go for a drive to look at Christmas lights with a thermos of hot cocoa.
- Listen to Christmas music while you catch up with each other.
- Take a ten-minute sanity break: sit and hold hands!
- Watch your favorite Christmas movie together.
- Do Christmas baking together.
- Help an elderly friend/relative send Christmas cards to their friends and family.

Sirach
48:10

At the appointed time, it is written, you are destined to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Third Week, Sunday, December 11, 2016
Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" ⁴ Jesus answered

them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶ And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." ⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' ¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Meditation

This fits squarely into the category "I didn't see that coming." First, Jesus responds to

John's question by quoting from the prophet Isaiah. He didn't need the scroll to find what we know as chapter 35. He knew it by heart, he was living it and that is what he told John's disciples to

report back. In essence he said, "Let John know that God is at work. He is keeping his promises and he is doing it in and through me." Second, he turned to the crowd and challenged them. When you went to hear John, were you expecting some sort of dandy, dressed in finery, pretending to be royalty? Did you expect someone quaking like the reeds along the Jordan River? If you were, you were very wrong. He is the one who prepares the way for me, the true King. There is no one greater than him! Third, so great is my kingdom, that the lowest citizen in it, is greater than the greatest you have seen so far, even John.

I didn't see that coming, did you?



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try one of these conversation starters.

- What is your most powerful memory of God at work in your children's lives?
- What is your most powerful memory of God at work in your life as a child?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Have fun together.

- Listen to a Christmas audio book together.
- Listen to your favorite Christmas music.
- Plan your Christmas menu together.
- Go to a Christmas concert together or as a family.

Be prayerful.

- Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Learn part of a Psalm to say together.

Be grateful.

- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Say thank you!
- Thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Don't forget the poor and less fortunate.

Be positive.

- Compliment your spouse in front of the children.
- Honor your spouse for his/her good qualities.
- Express your love for who your spouse is, not just what he/she does.
- Help your spouse with a difficult task.

Isaiah
35:5-6

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the dumb will sing.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Third Week, Monday, December 12, 2016
Zechariah 2:14-17; Luke 1:26-38

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation

This event at Nazareth highlights a form of union with the living God which can only belong to a woman. It is the union of mother and son. Mary the Virgin of Nazareth truly becomes the Mother of God. She is not just the mother of his human nature, rather she is the mother of the whole person who is the second person of the Trinity. It is, of course, pure gift. It can only happen because the Holy Spirit came upon her in an act of new creation. But at the same time, it could not happen without Mary's free and full yes. Mary participates in the mystery of the Incarnation in a way that is hers alone. She becomes the Mother of God and at the foot of the cross, Jesus gives her to the Disciple and to us.



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Try one of these conversation starters.

- What is the biggest obstacle to entrusting your children to the Lord?
- What was the biggest obstacle to trusting the Lord when you were a child?

Have fun together.

- Listen to a Christmas audio book together.
- Listen to your favorite Christmas music.
- Plan your Christmas menu together.
- Go to a Christmas concert together or as a family.

Be prayerful.

- Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Learn part of a Psalm to say together.

Be grateful.

- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Say thank you!
- Thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Don't forget the poor and less fortunate.

Be positive.

- Compliment your spouse in front of the children.
- Honor your spouse for his/her good qualities.
- Express your love for who your spouse is, not just what he/she does.
- Help your spouse with a difficult task.

Zechariah
2:14

Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion!
See, I am coming to dwell among
you, says the LORD.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Third Week, Tuesday, December 13, 2016
Zephaniah 3:1–2, 9–13; Matthew 21:28–32

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 21:28–32

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ The father

went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

Meditation

Two sons and a father. It sounds familiar. One son rebels but repents and in the end, does the right thing. The other son pays lip service to his father, but in his heart, is the one who rebels against the father. Jesus painted pictures with his words that allowed his audience to find themselves as a character in the parable. They could see the ramifications of certain behaviors. It was clear the son who obeyed in the end was the one who received the reward and that the son who looked good on the surface, but was internally rebellious was going to lose all and be humiliated. Advent is a time when the King invites us to listen to the parable in a new way. We are presented with a

choice. The King is coming. Which of the sons would you like to be? Which one are you?



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What did you want to be when you grew up?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Have fun together.

- Listen to a Christmas audio book together.
- Listen to your favorite Christmas music.
- Plan your Christmas menu together.
- Go to a Christmas concert together or as a family.

Be prayerful.

- Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Learn part of a Psalm to say together.

Be grateful.

- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Say thank you!
- Thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Don't forget the poor and less fortunate.

Be positive.

- Compliment your spouse in front of the children.
- Honor your spouse for his/her good qualities.
- Express your love for who your spouse is, not just what he/she does.
- Help your spouse with a difficult task.

Zephaniah
3:11

On that day you shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Third Week, Wednesday, December 14, 2016

Isaiah 45:6c–8, 18, 21c–25; Luke 7:18b–23

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Luke 7:18–23

So John summoned two of his disciples¹⁹ and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"²⁰ When the men

had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'"²¹ Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind.²² And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.²³ And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

Meditation

Have you ever wished that Jesus would just answer a question? "Are you the one?" That seems

simple enough, don't you think? "Yes" or "no" would do. Here was his cousin John, sitting in one of Herod's prisons in grave danger for his life. He had risked everything. He had confronted the power structures in Jerusalem and Galilee. He had not claimed to be the messiah—although others less worthy than John had done so. He had pointed to Jesus. He had hoped with all the hope of Israel that Jesus would be the one. So "are you the one?"

Jesus' answer may seem cryptic to us, but it must have been crystal clear to John. It would have brought consolation and confirmation that he had

not wasted his life, that he had recognized God at work in the world. Remember the other day when John claimed to be the "voice of one crying in the wilderness"? Well, John would have known that a little earlier in that great scroll was the passage we know as Isaiah 35. John knew that just before the line Jesus quoted was this one: "Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! **Here is your God.** He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you" (Isaiah 35:4). If Jesus had simply said "yes," John would not have known what we now know, that Jesus was even more than "the one": he was God, here to save us. The season of Advent is full of surprises. God himself has come to save us in the person of Jesus.

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Try this conversation starter.

- What act of kindness did you witness this Advent? How did it affect you?

Have fun together.

- Listen to a Christmas audio book together.
- Listen to your favorite Christmas music.
- Plan your Christmas menu together.
- Go to a Christmas concert together or as a family.

Be prayerful.

- Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Learn part of a Psalm to say together.

Be grateful.

- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Say thank you!
- Thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Don't forget the poor and less fortunate.

Be positive.

- Compliment your spouse in front of the children.
- Honor your spouse for his/her good qualities.
- Express your love for who your spouse is, not just what he/she does.
- Help your spouse with a difficult task.

Isaiah 45:8

Let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also; I the LORD have created it.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Third Week, Thursday, December 15, 2016

Isaiah 54:1-10; Luke 7:24-30

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: (an excerpt) Isaiah 54:1-10

Sing, O barren one who did not bear; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married,

says the LORD. . . ⁴ Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. ⁶ For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God. ⁷ For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. ⁸ In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer. . . ¹⁰ For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

Meditation

Good news: The divorce rate is down. The bad news is that it is down in large part because couples are not getting married—they just live together. The even worse news is that those couples have a vastly higher breakup rate than

married couples. All of this news is, of course, really bad news for children. So it is hard for us to really understand “everlasting love” in an age of such impermanence. Isaiah tries to help us. He could not imagine mountains disappearing. Nor can he imagine God’s love ever disappearing. In our skeptical age we believe that mountains come and go. Geologists tell us that the Appalachian Mountains are “only” 450 million years old. That means they have only been around for a little less than one-quarter of the earth’s history. Imagine a timeline as long as football field. As you went from your goal line to the other end of the field, the Appalachians would be somewhere near the opponent’s 25-yard line. To imagine all of recorded human history in relationship to the age of the world, you have to measure a distance from the goal line that is about as long as the period at the end of this sentence is wide. I really can’t imagine the mountains being gone, can you? Nor can I imagine God’s love ever ending.

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord’s Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Try one of these conversation starters.

- What was the most meaningful gift you ever received?
- What was the most meaningful gift you ever gave?

Have fun together.

- Listen to a Christmas audio book together.
- Listen to your favorite Christmas music.
- Plan your Christmas menu together.
- Go to a Christmas concert together or as a family.

Be prayerful.

- Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Learn part of a Psalm to say together.

Be grateful.

- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Say thank you!
- Thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Don't forget the poor and less fortunate.

Be positive.

- Compliment your spouse in front of the children.
- Honor your spouse for his/her good qualities.
- Express your love for who your spouse is, not just what he/she does.
- Help your spouse with a difficult task.

Luke
7:27

This is the one about whom scripture says: 'Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, he will prepare your way before you.'

Advent/Christmas 2016

Third Week, Friday, December 16, 2016

Isaiah 56:1-3a, 6-8; John 5:33-36

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Isaiah 56:1-3a, 6-8

Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. ²

Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast,

who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil. ³ Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; ⁶ And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant— ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. ⁸ Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Meditation

We live in a world that is deeply troubled by bitter partisan politics, where countries are torn

apart by war, terrorism, and a refugee crisis of historic proportions. Tragically, it is how humanity has always behaved when we forget God and hate each other. However, Isaiah saw a time when God would act in a definitive way and heal the broken world. He saw a time when God would gather all people into one and his house would be a great sign of unity, a house of prayer for all people. He

acted in a definitive way in the Incarnation, the union of God and man. And now the Church, his body, is to be that great sign of peace and reconciliation, a sign of the union of God and man. Our marriages participate in the great mystery as well. A husband and wife living one life together point to the union of Christ and his Church, to the persons of the Trinity as one God.

Advent is the time when the Lord says to us that we are part of his great plan to rescue all of humanity. Our King calls us to deepen our unity with each other and with him. We can be intentional in our witness to the mystery of the incarnation. God gave us the Holy Spirit in our baptism and in a special way as a present on our wedding day.



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What book has had the greatest influence on your life?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Have fun together.

- Listen to a Christmas audio book together.
- Listen to your favorite Christmas music.
- Plan your Christmas menu together.
- Go to a Christmas concert together or as a family.

Be prayerful.

- Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Learn part of a Psalm to say together.

Be grateful.

- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Say thank you!
- Thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Don't forget the poor and less fortunate.

Be positive.

- Compliment your spouse in front of the children.
- Honor your spouse for his/her good qualities.
- Express your love for who your spouse is, not just what he/she does.
- Help your spouse with a difficult task.

John
5:36

The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Third Week, Saturday, December 17, 2016

Genesis 49:2, 8–10; Matthew 1:1–17

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Genesis 49:2, 8–10

Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father.
⁸ Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down

before you. ⁹ Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness—who dares rouse him up? ¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his.

Meditation

Lion of Judah

Child of Mary

Promise of Jacob

Child of Joseph

Ruler of nations

Child of God

Through whom all was made

God bows low

Word made flesh

God is with us

King lifted up

Love twice unexpected!



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Try this conversation starter.

- What is your favorite place to visit during the Christmas season?

Have fun together.

- Listen to a Christmas audio book together.
- Listen to your favorite Christmas music.
- Plan your Christmas menu together.
- Go to a Christmas concert together or as a family.

Be prayerful.

- Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Learn part of a Psalm to say together.

Be grateful.

- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Say thank you!
- Thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Don't forget the poor and less fortunate.

Be positive.

- Compliment your spouse in front of the children.
- Honor your spouse for his/her good qualities.
- Express your love for who your spouse is, not just what he/she does.
- Help your spouse with a difficult task.

Matthew
1:16

Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Fourth Week, Sunday, December 18, 2016
Isaiah 7:10-14; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the

Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.

Meditation

The controversy about Jesus' birth never really went away. Whispers and insinuations

followed Jesus his whole life. Remember the time in Nazareth, his home town? His old neighbors said, "This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary" (Mark 6:3). It would have been more common to call him "the son of Joseph." Then there was that nasty insinuation by the Pharisees that Jesus was illegitimate. Jesus had refuted their

claim that they were children of Abraham. In response, they said, "**We** are not illegitimate children." The implication is that Jesus was.

Joseph must have heard those rumors too. Nazareth was a very small town after all. Being the step-father of God's own son did not spare Joseph from hardship, struggles, death threats or ridicule. Being the step-father of God's own son did not spare him from the back breaking work of providing for his family, or spare him from difficult choices, or spare him from having to have deep trust in God every step of the way for his whole life. How often he must have had to cling to those words with all of his might, "Joseph, don't be afraid, I am with you." During this Advent, hear the angel of the Lord call your name, hear him say, "Don't be afraid, I am with you."

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What made you smile last week?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Make time to be together.

- Plan and shop for presents together. Take at least one sanity break for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.
- Wrap presents together. Christmas music and seasonal libations help!
- Sing Christmas carols while doing the dishes together.
- Deliver gifts together.

There are many ways to say "I love you."

- "I thought about you many times today and always with a smile."
- "I love you more each day."
- "I really enjoy just being with you."
- Kiss under the mistletoe!
- Help each other with last minute errands and chores.

Make time to laugh together.

- Read a funny story out loud to each other.
- Share your favorite comic from today's paper.
- No negative jokes.

Build relationships with other couples.

- Get together after a church service with another family.
- Celebrate the feast of the Incarnation with friends and family.
- Offer hospitality to someone who is alone this season.

Isaiah
7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Fourth Week, Monday, December 19, 2016

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a; Luke 1:5-25

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading:
(an excerpt)
Luke
1:8, 11-17

Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, . . . there appeared an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw

him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him.

¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Meditation

Zechariah's hair stood on end, adrenalin coursed through his body, his heart rate doubled, his

breathing increased, the color drained from his face as blood rushed to his limbs. Fight or flight? He was **not** alone in the holiest place in the whole world. He had never been there before, but he knew that no one else was permitted to be here. Only the fortuitous roll of the dice had granted him access to this sacred place. Now he was terrified by the presence of what? An angel? Then he heard

"Don't be afraid Zechariah, your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth will have a baby, a boy."

But how could this be. He was an old man, Elizabeth was an old woman. He knew how things worked. Angel or not, this was hard to believe. The angel said, "Look, I'm Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God himself and he sent me to you with good news. Since you need a sign that this is true, you will be mute until the child is born!" And he was.

Zechariah knew the story of Israel well enough to know that if his child had the spirit and power of Elijah, he would announce that at long last the Lord, the God of Israel was acting. His son would herald the long awaited Messiah. He also knew that his son would be in danger – that was the lot of prophets. We know that the King did come. We also know that he will come again at the end of the present evil age. And he will come in glory – surrounded by more than one angel. It is good news and a sobering challenge for us to be like John and "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Try this conversation starter.

- What is the best advice you have ever received?

Make time to be together.

- Plan and shop for presents together. Take at least one sanity break for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.
- Wrap presents together. Christmas music and seasonal libations help!
- Sing Christmas carols while doing the dishes together.
- Deliver gifts together.

There are many ways to say "I love you."

- "I thought about you many times today and always with a smile."
- "I love you more each day."
- "I really enjoy just being with you."
- Kiss under the mistletoe!
- Help each other with last minute errands and chores.

Make time to laugh together.

- Read a funny story out loud to each other.
- Share your favorite comic from today's paper.
- No negative jokes.

Build relationships with other couples.

- Get together after a church service with another family.
- Celebrate the feast of the Incarnation with friends and family.
- Offer hospitality to someone who is alone this season.

Judges
13:24

The woman bore a son, and named him Samson. The boy grew, and the LORD blessed him.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Fourth Week, Tuesday, December 20, 2016

Isaiah 7:10-14; Luke 1:26-38

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹² But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not

put the LORD to the test. ¹³ Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Meditation

The usher taking tickets was a perfect stranger, but he looked at me with a cynical grin and said, "Can I have that cross?" It was a

beautiful pewter cross that had been made in Thessalonica. I was wearing it because it was a gift from a friend; it came from a city that St. Paul had visited and it represented the radical change that had taken place in my life not more than a year before. I had gone from a hard partying football player to a college seminarian contemplating life as a Catholic priest. The usher knew that I was not likely to give him the cross, and he was mocking me as I was going in to watch the movie, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, a story of the life of St. Francis of Assisi. I had a terrifying thought, "Lord, do you want me to give that man my cross?"

I understood how King Ahaz must have felt. If I got a clear sign, then I would have to give up my beloved cross. Ahaz did not want a sign either,

because if he got a clear sign, he would have had to do something vastly more distasteful than giving away a piece of jewelry and infinitely more dangerous. He would have to do "nothing" in the face of two countries who wanted to kill him. His other choice was to appeal to a nation that would enslave him. Death, slavery or trust God. God encouraged him to ask for a sign. And I understood why he refused the sign and chose slavery. The Lord gave him a sign anyway. It was the sign of the birth of a child, whose symbolic name; "Immanuel" would be a constant reminder that Ahaz should have chosen to trust God. Advent is the season in which we celebrate the birth of a child whose name means exactly what it says, "God with us."

My sign was to watch Francis and Claire give away all that they had; to give it all away to be free to trust the Lord radically in all things. As I left the theater, I saw the usher at the door. I took off my cross and gave it to him.

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What things do you never tire of seeing, experiencing, or doing? E.g. watching a sunrise or sunset; enjoying a delicious meal; etc.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Make time to be together.

- Plan and shop for presents together. Take at least one sanity break for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.
- Wrap presents together. Christmas music and seasonal libations help!
- Sing Christmas carols while doing the dishes together.
- Deliver gifts together.

There are many ways to say "I love you."

- "I thought about you many times today and always with a smile."
- "I love you more each day."
- "I really enjoy just being with you."
- Kiss under the mistletoe!
- Help each other with last minute errands and chores.

Make time to laugh together.

- Read a funny story out loud to each other.
- Share your favorite comic from today's paper.
- No negative jokes.

Build relationships with other couples.

- Get together after a church service with another family.
- Celebrate the feast of the Incarnation with friends and family.
- Offer hospitality to someone who is alone this season.

Luke 1:38

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

Advent/Christmas 2016

Fourth Week, Wednesday, December 21, 2016
Song of Songs 2:8-14; Luke 1:39-45

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Song of Songs 2:8-14

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹ My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. ¹⁰ My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; ¹¹ for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. ¹² The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. ¹³ The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. ¹⁴ O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely

Meditation

Close your eyes and let the Song of Solomon take you to a beautiful valley in the spring time. Feel the warm sun on your face. Smell the fragrant blossoms, soak in the beauty of the flowers bursting in a rainbow of colors, hear the birds sing, the rustle of a gentle breeze in the trees, and water tripping down tiny waterfalls. Now see your beloved coming toward you. He or she has never been lovelier. Your heart bursts with joy. Come then my love, my fair one, come away with me. It is the Lord calling; it is your beloved calling. It is the promise in and of a small child full of possibilities; the promise of new life on

the other side of intense suffering. As Advent draws closer to the miracle of the Incarnation, the Scriptures invite us to imagine that day, the day in which we delight in the love of the child grown to a man – the love of our bridegroom.



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What else do we want to do to prepare our hearts for Christmas?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Make time to be together.

- Plan and shop for presents together. Take at least one sanity break for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.
- Wrap presents together. Christmas music and seasonal libations help!
- Sing Christmas carols while doing the dishes together.
- Deliver gifts together.

There are many ways to say "I love you."

- "I thought about you many times today and always with a smile."
- "I love you more each day."
- "I really enjoy just being with you."
- Kiss under the mistletoe!
- Help each other with last minute errands and chores.

Make time to laugh together.

- Read a funny story out loud to each other.
- Share your favorite comic from today's paper.
- No negative jokes.

Build relationships with other couples.

- Get together after a church service with another family.
- Celebrate the feast of the Incarnation with friends and family.
- Offer hospitality to someone who is alone this season.

Luke
1:41-42

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Advent/Christmas 2016

Fourth Week, Thursday, December 22, 2016

1 Samuel 1:24-28; Luke 1:46-56

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,"⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Meditation

Irony: 1) humor based on using words to suggest the opposite of their literal meaning; 2) something said or written that

uses humor based on words suggesting the opposite of their literal meaning; 3) incongruity between what actually happens and what might be expected to happen, especially when this disparity seems absurd or laughable.

Cosmic Irony: God has displayed his majesty and power

- He has shown strength with his arm;
- He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
- He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
- He has filled the hungry with good things, and
- He sent the rich away empty.

How? By becoming a helpless human infant, born to a poor, peasant family in a small insignificant village six miles from the capital – a village that is so far out of the power loop that it might as well be 100 miles away.

Advent is the time to laugh with great joy at the delicious irony of our God and his plan. The king is almost here!!

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Are we still sane?

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Make time to be together.

- Plan and shop for presents together. Take at least one sanity break for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.
- Wrap presents together. Christmas music and seasonal libations help!
- Sing Christmas carols while doing the dishes together.
- Deliver gifts together.

There are many ways to say "I love you."

- "I thought about you many times today and always with a smile."
- "I love you more each day."
- "I really enjoy just being with you."
- Kiss under the mistletoe!
- Help each other with last minute errands and chores.

Make time to laugh together.

- Read a funny story out loud to each other.
- Share your favorite comic from today's paper.
- No negative jokes.

Build relationships with other couples.

- Get together after a church service with another family.
- Celebrate the feast of the Incarnation with friends and family.
- Offer hospitality to someone who is alone this season.

1 Samuel
1:27-28

"For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. ²⁸Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD."

Advent/Christmas 2016

Fourth Week, Friday, December 23, 2016
Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Luke 1:57-66

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Luke 1:57-66

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father.⁶⁰ But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John."⁶¹ They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name."⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him.⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed.⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.⁶⁵ Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea.⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Meditation

You remember how afraid Zachariah was when the angel appeared to him? Well imagine a whole village being frightened.

Imagine the whole village, maybe a couple of hundred people, talking and whispering. Some were rejoicing with her, others were turning their heads away when Elizabeth walked by with her baby. What were they saying? An old barren woman has given birth to a baby boy; a mute husband speaks after writing "John" on a tablet –

not a family name at all. Rumors about angels in the temple, her cousin is pregnant but by whom? What does all this mean? If God is really at work, how will Herod respond? How will Caesar respond? What do we do with all of this? What a curious mix of fear and hope. We are so close now. Advent is coming to an end soon. Hope and fear of the Lord is a good mix. Hope and fear of Herod or Caesar is not hope at all.



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Try this conversation starter.

- What activity this season brought you the most joy?

Make time to be together.

- Plan and shop for presents together. Take at least one sanity break for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.
- Wrap presents together. Christmas music and seasonal libations help!
- Sing Christmas carols while doing the dishes together.
- Deliver gifts together.

There are many ways to say "I love you."

- "I thought about you many times today and always with a smile."
- "I love you more each day."
- "I really enjoy just being with you."
- Kiss under the mistletoe!
- Help each other with last minute errands and chores.

Make time to laugh together.

- Read a funny story out loud to each other.
- Share your favorite comic from today's paper.
- No negative jokes.

Build relationships with other couples.

- Get together after a church service with another family.
- Celebrate the feast of the Incarnation with friends and family.
- Offer hospitality to someone who is alone this season.

Malachi
3:2-3

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; ³ he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2016

2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Luke 1:67–79

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen*

Reading: Luke 1:67–79

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: ⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his

people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. ⁷² Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Meditation

The formerly mute Zechariah now sings. It is a song about the covenant faithfulness of God. God has remembered the

promises he made to Abraham. It is a song about the great day of the Lord that is at hand. First the babies are born. Then they grow up into young strong men. Cousins; one announces, the other

fulfills, the promises made nearly two thousand years earlier. It is a song that has been sung from the beginning and continues to echo through the ages to this very day. God acted, God is acting, God will act. He does not forget. He is never late. His arm is not too short to save. He is filled with compassion. He comes to forgive sins and end the long exile of his people. The good news of Christmas is that God himself has come to rescue his people. Tomorrow we celebrate the fact that the love of God is so real that it is a person. It is Jesus who is the Christ.



Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what is on your mind and the people you are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Try this conversation starter.

- What story about the Holy Spirit's work in your marriage this Christmas season do you want to tell?

Make time to be together.

- Plan and shop for presents together. Take at least one sanity break for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.
- Wrap presents together. Christmas music and seasonal libations help!
- Sing Christmas carols while doing the dishes together.
- Deliver gifts together.

There are many ways to say "I love you."

- "I thought about you many times today and always with a smile."
- "I love you more each day."
- "I really enjoy just being with you."
- Kiss under the mistletoe!
- Help each other with last minute errands and chores.

Make time to laugh together.

- Read a funny story out loud to each other.
- Share your favorite comic from today's paper.
- No negative jokes.

Build relationships with other couples.

- Get together after a church service with another family.
- Celebrate the feast of the Incarnation with friends and family.
- Offer hospitality to someone who is alone this season.

2 Samuel
7:12

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

Advent/Christmas 2016

Christmas morning, December 25, 2016
Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

Pray

*God, come to our assistance
Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit
**As it was in the beginning, is
now, and will be forever. Amen***

Reading: John 1:1-5, 14, 16, 18

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and
the Word was God. ² He was in
the beginning with God. ³ All
things came into being through

him, and without him not one thing came into
being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light
shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not
overcome it. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and
lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the
glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and
truth. ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is
God the only Son, who is close to the Father's
heart, who has made him known.

Meditation

This morning forget about Santa,
real or plastic, forget reindeers
and sleighs, forget about lists of

gifts and cards that you wanted to send, forget
about the all too real financial pressure that comes
with the "ideal" Christmas morning. Forget too, the
warm Hallmark card images of a mother all aglow
after an apparently effortless several day journey
by foot and donkey, and an equally effortless labor
and delivery. Forget the picture with the softly
back-lit and comfortable manger scene surrounded
by an attentive husband, neatly dressed shepherds,
cows, sheep, oxen – all ready for state fair judging.
It most certainly didn't look like that.

The real story is that the Creator of the whole
universe saw the plight of humanity and bared his

mighty arm to deliver us from our enemies. All of
the hopes of Israel and all of our hopes have been
fulfilled in the person of Jesus. In him we have seen
the glory of God.

This is God's answer to the world's problems. He
heard our cry and acted in power. See the "mighty
arm" of the Lord stretched out, bare and helpless,
in the manger, bruised, bloodied, and nailed to a
cross and know that here, surprisingly you are
seeing God's answer – the incarnation. The
incarnation is the clearest and most complete
manifestation of God in all his sovereign majestic
power, which is surprisingly, **love in person**. Listen
to the word made flesh, gaze upon the incarnate
glory, fill your mind with wisdom in person and
suddenly the language of adoration makes a whole
lot of sense. "O come let us adore him."

Quiet Reflection

Reflect on one or two ideas that
came to mind in the reading or
the meditation. Share one idea
with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions

As if you were talking to a friend,
tell the Lord out loud what is on
your mind and the people you
are concerned about.

Lord's Prayer

Conclude your intentions by
praying the Lord's Prayer
together.

Blessing

*May the Lord bless us, protect us
from all evil, and bring us to
everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer

God, make our hearts one. Amen.

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Talk

The more we know about each other, the more we love; the more we love, the more we want to know.

Act

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, in the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love that will become **habits of love!**

Try this conversation starter.

- Sit quietly with each other after you have finished your preparations and thank the Lord for each other and his great love for you.

Sing or say together

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight
For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King
And Peace to men on earth

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."



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Notes and Memories