

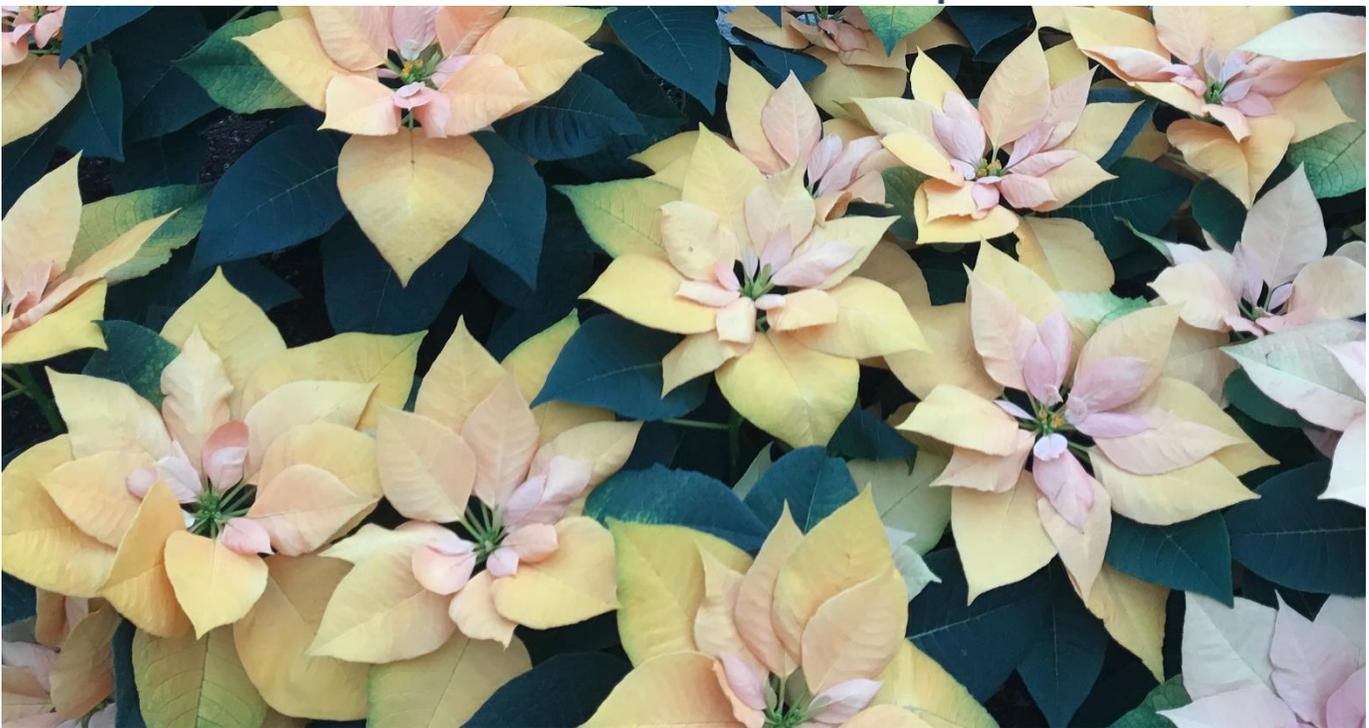
Friendship with God

Friendship with our spouse

In the Holy Spirit

MARRIAGE

IN CHRIST



Advent 2017



Advent/Christmas 2017



Advent 2017

Readings, Meditations, and Activities

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Introduction



Advent/Christmas 2017

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 2017 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.

First Sunday, December 3, 2017

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9;
Mark 13:33-37

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: Mark 13:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples,
“Beware, keep alert; for you do
not know when the time will
come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on
a journey, when he leaves home

and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work,
and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

³⁵ Therefore, keep awake -- for you do not know
when the master of the house will come, in the
evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at
dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he
comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to
all: Keep awake.”

Meditation

One of the great challenges that
we have is to be alert, to keep
awake, but what does that mean,
practically? At this time of the year we can be in
danger of getting swept away by the currents of
our contemporary consumer culture. Not too long
ago a major retailer was encouraging us to “win the
holidays” by giving more extravagant (hear
expensive) gifts than anyone else. For us as married
couples, “to keep awake” is a constant challenge.
This Advent hear it as a call to be intentional in our
daily prayer, our conversations and loving actions.
The Lord has left us in charge, not to be
conspicuous in our consumerism, but to become a
sign to the world that 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 2017

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?

Isaiah 64:4

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.

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.
- Address Christmas cards together.

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 at the end of the day, 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.

First week, Monday, December 4, 2017

Isaiah 2:1-5; 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: Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the

highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³ Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Meditation

Two things surprise a pilgrim on his or her first visit to Jerusalem. The first is how very small the whole country is. Second, the pilgrim notices that the hill that the Temple was built on is not the tallest hill in the vicinity. The Temple Mount is on Mount Zion, which is surrounded by other, taller hills. Guides say that the Scriptures call those surrounding hills the "daughters of Zion." But Isaiah sees a day when the hill upon which the Temple sits will be raised above her daughters. It is a dramatic image: a mountain growing, towering over the others. And it is equally as dramatic to

envision all the nations streaming to that fifty-mile-wide sliver of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Great empires have converged on that land for centuries, never peacefully. It is still a land that is torn by strife and bloodshed. But Isaiah sees a day when tanks will be converted to plows and guns will be turned into tools used to harvest an abundance of produce. It will be a day when there will be no more military academies or war colleges. It will be a day of great peace. The hope of Advent is for peace to spread from our homes to our nations to the world.



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 2017

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.
- Address Christmas cards together.

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 at the end of the day, 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 2017

First Week, Tuesday, December 5, 2017

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 2017

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?

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."

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.
- Address Christmas cards together.

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 at the end of the day, 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.

First Week, Wednesday, December 6, 2017
Isa 25:6-10a; Matthew 15:29-37

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 25:6-10

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. ⁹ It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. ¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

Meditation

I was standing in the back of the church next to my father's casket. The funeral was about to begin and I was struggling with my grief. A good friend came up and said that as we approached the table of the Lord, I should imagine that my father was on the other side of the same table. He was really there, but I could not see him. That was a great consolation. I know that someday the veil that obscures our vision will be lifted and we will see the truth that has always been there—we are at the same table. When that veil is lifted we will see what Isaiah saw: a great banquet with better food and wine than we can imagine. Many chairs will be crowded around the table; there will be no

empty places. God the Father will wipe the tears from the faces of all who have mourned. Death will be swallowed up and the great party will begin. Advent assures us that death is a bad idea and not the end of our story. The King is coming and he will defeat death!



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 2017

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.
- Address Christmas cards together.

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 at the end of the day, 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
15:37**

And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

First Week, Thursday, December 7, 2017

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 2017

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? What memories does it bring to mind?

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!**

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- 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.
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- Address Christmas cards together.

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 at the end of the day, 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 2017

First Week, Friday, December 8, 2017
Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Eph. 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38
(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

The Holy Spirit is "the Lord, the giver of life." He is the "Creator Spirit." He is the breath/wind that hovered over the chaotic void in Genesis (1:2). Here also, as at the beginning, the Spirit, creates "from nothing," that is, from the complete absence of human possibilities, without any need for assistance or support. Mary was a virgin and the birth of her male child defies any explanation of natural causes. "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And 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 called holy, the Son of God." This Advent allow yourselves to be caught up in the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation.

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 2017

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?

Ephesians
1:12

So that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

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.
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Protect your friendship in this busy season.

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- Sneak away for lunch, if your schedule permits.
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- Be careful not to take offense in this busy season.

First Week, Saturday, December 9, 2017

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 2017

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.
- Address Christmas cards together.

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 at the end of the day, 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.

Second Week, Sunday, December 10, 2017
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8

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: Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will

prepare your way; ³ the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" ⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with² the Holy Spirit."

Meditation

In the Roman world, a king's arrival in a town or region was preceded by a messenger loudly proclaiming the good news, "The king is coming!" It would be particularly good news for friends of the king, but disconcerting for those who were not in the king's favor. The persistent promise and the warning of Advent is the kingdom of heaven is near.

It is very hard for us in a cynical age like ours to hear talk about kings and kingdoms outside the context of politics. Politics is about power. Modern politics is about the power to control, to manipulate others, and to get one's own way. But that is not the power of the kingdom of heaven. Its power is the power of love, and love will defeat the wickedest of all enemies of mankind – sin and death. The power of the kingdom of heaven brings life, heals and reconciles our families, towns, and nations. It requires putting God first, above all others. 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 2017

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?

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.

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 or shopping.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse.
- Turn off your phone when you are having a meal with your spouse.
- 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.

Second Week, Monday, December 11, 2017

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 2017

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 or shopping.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse.
- Turn off your phone when you are having a meal with your spouse.
- 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."



Advent/Christmas 2017

Second Week, Tuesday, December 12, 2017

Zechariah 2:14-17; Luke 1:26-38

(Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe)

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.

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?

Zechariah
2:15

Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they shall be his people, and he will dwell among you, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. *NAB*

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 or shopping.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse.
- Turn off your phone when you are having a meal with your spouse.
- 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.

Second Week, Wednesday, December 13, 2017

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 **kind**, and my burden is light." (trans. modified by WCW).

Meditation

I know this is not the translation with which you are most familiar, and technically "easy" probably makes more sense when associated with "burden." On the other hand, there are many surprises in the Scripture. Matthew chose to translate the word Jesus used to describe his yoke with the Greek word *chrēstos*. The range of meaning for *chrēstos* includes kind, loving, merciful, morally good, upright, and of course, easy to bear. The surprise waiting for us this Advent is that when we are tired and burdened, we can come to Jesus and give him our troubles. He will carry them, and in exchange we will put on his yoke, which is to experience his kindness and lightness. The King is coming, I can hardly wait.

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.

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.

- My favorite Christmas photo of us or our family is the one where . . .

Be kind.

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

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse.
- Turn off your phone when you are having a meal with your spouse.
- 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.

Second Week, Thursday, December 14, 2017

Isaiah 41:13-20; Matthew 11:11-15

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 41:13-20

For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Do not fear, I will help you." ¹⁴ Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you insect Israel! I will help

you, says the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁵ Now, I will make of you a threshing sledge, sharp, new, and having teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff. ¹⁶ You shall winnow them and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. Then you shall rejoice in the LORD; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory. ¹⁷ When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. ¹⁸ I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. ¹⁹ I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together, ²⁰ so that all may see and know, all may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Meditation

The nation to which this prophecy had been addressed had been thoroughly humiliated

by their enemies for nearly two hundred years. Most recently, their temple had been destroyed, the temple treasures looted, their king killed, and

much of their population sent into exile. There they were given ruined cities in a foreign country to repopulate and produce fruit for their captors. A reversal of those fortunes would be nothing short of a miracle. What would it look like? It will look like nothing less than the defeat of their enemies and a complete transformation of creation itself. Jacob held the hand of the Lord. Jacob became mighty with the help of the Lord. Advent is the time when we anticipate that God will strengthen us. It is a time when we look forward to the arrival of our King. Our King will defeat our enemies and restore creation! He will hold our hand and take away our fear!



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 2017

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 was your favorite Advent tradition growing up?

Be kind.

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

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse.
- Turn off your phone when you are having a meal with your spouse.
- 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
11:11

Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Second Week, Friday, December 15, 2017

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 2017

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 traditions do we want to establish, continue or change?

Be kind.

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

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse.
- Turn off your phone when you are having a meal with your spouse.
- 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.

Second Week, Saturday, December 16, 2017
 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.

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 or shopping.

Practice good manners.

- Decide not to text someone else while you are talking to your spouse.
- Turn off your phone when you are having a meal with your spouse.
- 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.

Third Week, Sunday, December 17, 2017

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

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 61:1-2a, 10-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Meditation

Here we see that the "spirit of the Lord" rests upon the future Messiah. It is above all a gift of God for the person who is the Servant of the Lord. But it is not a gift for him to keep for himself. It is a gift that allows him to bring good news to the poor, to release captives, to bind up the broken hearted. In Nazareth Jesus Christ will proclaim that this passage is being fulfilled in him, in his life and in his mission. This Advent we are invited to participate in that mission of the Servant of the Lord. It is the same Spirit that came upon us at our baptism and that God graciously poured out on us as couples at

our wedding. We become his hands and feet. Today this word is fulfilled in our actions and lives. We are the ones through whom the Good News is proclaimed. Tell everyone that 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 2017

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?

John
1:23

John said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

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.
- Sing Christmas carols together.

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.
- Tell each other what the best part of the day was.

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.

Third Week, Monday, December 18, 2017

Jeremiah 23:5-8; Matthew 1:18-25

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: Matthew 1:18-25

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, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

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.

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?

Jeremiah
23:5

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

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.
- Sing Christmas carols together.

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.
- Tell each other what the best part of the day was.

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.

Third Week, Tuesday, December 19, 2017

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 – with 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.

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.

Third Week, Wednesday, December 20, 2017

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.

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

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."

Third Week, Thursday, December 21, 2017

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.

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.

- Is Jesus still at the center of our Christmas preparations?

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."

Third Week Friday, December 22, 2017

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

Have you ever wondered what it was like it for Mary to live in Nazareth? Jesus was her child, but he was also the incarnate son

of God. How do you come to terms with the thought, "You are the Mother of God! You are the highest of all creatures!"? What was that like? What did the neighbors think? Why wasn't their family the "talk of the whole town." Why didn't they brag about their remarkable child? Why no "My child is God" bumper stickers on their donkey? Mary's humility after the Incarnation is one of the

greatest miracles of divine grace. She remains humble, modest, as if nothing had happened in her life for which she could make any claims. From the beginning, Mary models what should be our own response to the incarnation. It should be awe and wonder – "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." We don't deserve it either, "for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servants."



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.

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.

- Are we still sane?

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."

Third Week, Saturday, December 23, 2017
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.

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 2017

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2017

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Romans 16:25-27;
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 ¹ 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." And the angel departed from her.

Meditation

This is the fourth time this Advent we have had a chance to reflect on this gospel story. On this Christmas Eve, let's reflect on the angel's words, "and you will name him, Jesus." The name means "Yahweh saves." More than that, it is now the name of the incarnate Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. God's most stunning gift to humanity. Let us sing with the earliest Christians one of the most ancient hymns of the early church:

"God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus the Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:9-11

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 2017

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.

Christmas morning, December 25, 2017
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. It 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

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Talk

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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."



Advent/Christmas 2017

Notes and Memories