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ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

DECEMBER
2020

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be
on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace. **Isaiah 9:6**

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On Our Knees In His Hands

DECEMBER 2020

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Tuesday December 01

1st Week of Advent

With righteousness he will judge the needy. Isaiah 11:4

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 72:1-2,7-17

Luke 10:21-24

From Abraham to David the Israelites were looking for the Promised Land which they ultimately conquered. After David they hoped for a better king than him. The promises made to Solomon were not understood as the coming of the Messiah. They depended on books and the history of Israel as told and retold by their elders and followed the prescribed rituals and norms of religion.

But they had no direct experience of God and thus could not speak in His name. But God raised Isaiah who did have such a living experience (Isaiah 6).

In the turbulent history of Israel, God preserved a small insignificant people to take shape and a 'remnant' appears to take root. As a pyramid is reduced to a point so is this remnant till it became one man the Saviour – the shoot of Yahweh. Isaiah is the first to announce the Messiah. He will be greater than David or his successors. He will be Immanuel and the Spirit will dwell permanently in Him demonstrating his gifts.

Paradoxically, the image of the stump is used. A tree in full bloom meant happiness while a stump evokes catastrophe. The Messiah comes through poverty and suffering and will be persecuted from birth. But Isaiah predicts a period of a new creation with no hostility or fear and all beings will live harmoniously. To make this dream a reality, God chooses to use 'the remnant' a people dedicated to be His disciples, to search for his vision and dreams for a future. We see our Lord Jesus in the Gospel full of joy in the Spirit, speaking to His disciples – once described as a bunch of nobodies but in the eyes of God precious 'little ones'. What is revealed to them is but the mysterious power of the Gospel to transform people and to reveal the truth. Humble believers have everything if they have Jesus because everything has been given to Him by the Father. It is our Lord Jesus who reveals the Father to those who accept Him. This revelation is not achieved by human wisdom or knowledge but with a personal heart-to-heart encounter with our Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father may your Holy Spirit, melt us, mold us, fill us and use us to accomplish your will. Amen

Wednesday December 02

1st Week of Advent

Rejoice in the Lord, for He is near.

Isaiah 25: 6-10

Psalms 23: 1-6

Matthew 15: 29-37

As we enter the season of advent, preparing our hearts for Christmas, today's readings remind us to be glad and to rejoice in the Lord, for He has prepared a place for us in His salvific plan. We are not here by choice or by coincidence. It is the plan and will of God. (Jn. 1. 12-13 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were

born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.) We are called to walk on the road to eternity. Sometimes it is smooth and at other times it could be rough. The invitation is to walk with Him until we have reached our destination. He will guide us along the way as a shepherd leads the flock.

In the first reading prophet Isaiah prophesies about a feast where people could enjoy with rich food and choice wine; an event to be joyful of being liberated from the clutches of oppression, humiliation, of sin and darkness. We know that it was the birth of the Messiah. The Lord came among His own to lift up the shroud of blindness which was cast over the people, and to tear down the curtain which separated us from God but we were not aware of it until we were baptised in the Holy Spirit.

We too are no different until we receive that awareness which is a gift from the Holy Spirit. The Lord is inviting us to enter into that reality and to remain in that truth. As reflected in the psalm It is a moment where we realise that the Lord has prepared a table before us in the presence of our enemies. He anoints our heads with oil and our cups overflow. This is the challenge we face every day. We use the gift of the prayer tools to enter into the spirit and make it a habit to use them whenever we are challenged.

In the Gospel proclamation it is confirmed that the Lord is concerned about every detail of our lives. He is inviting us to come in surrender. He will turn our lives into a blessing. He invites us to walk by Faith.

Prayer: Abba Father, as you have created me, mold me through every situation I face, as I surrender them to you. Amen.

Jeremiah- 1:4-9

or Acts 17:22-28

Psalms 117:1-2

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 16:15-20

The prophet Isaiah wrote of Jerusalem, the Holy City, as a place that all nations will flock to. He wrote that it would be a place where people would visit to hear God's instruction and obtain His counsel. This city of Jerusalem was prophesied to be established as the highest mountain over every other mountain. It is paralleled to the life of the Lord Jesus, who

himself frequented Jerusalem on important occasions. It is no wonder that He kept in line with the prophecy of Isaiah and visited the Temple of Jerusalem, a place that was sacred to the people of that time. Little did the people know, however, that the real Temple of God was right in their midst. They failed to see the holiness of the Lord Jesus, they failed to see the instruction, wisdom and counsel that He had to offer, they failed to see how He, the Son of Man, would be lifted up high over every nation and tribe, when He was raised from the dead.

However, this is contrasted with the character in the Gospel Proclamation of today. We are introduced to a centurion, a man of authority who was no stranger to giving commands. Yet he, in all his humanness, had his eyes open to recognize the Lord Jesus for who He is – Messiah, Lord, Saviour and Healer. The centurion not only recognized the Lord, but he also acted. He did not keep that knowledge to himself, simply thinking he knew who the Lord Jesus was, but he reached out to the Lord. He made known his need and gave the truth of his heart. He did not hide the reality from the Lord, and so the Lord listened.

What is even more beautiful is that the Lord Jesus acknowledges this centurion's faith and even goes to say that nobody in Israel displays faith as much as this man! What might the people of those times have thought? They were the ones who frequented Jerusalem for every Feast, who prayed in the synagogue and offered sacrifices – yet it was this centurion who was acknowledged before God. Today we must be wary that we too do not get caught up in places of worship, in ritualistic practices and as a result, fail to recognize the Lord who is among us – mostly in our brothers and sisters.

Prayer: Abba Father, let my eyes never be closed to your presence. Amen.

Isaiah 29: 17-24

Psalm 27: 1, 4, 13-14

Matthew 9: 27-31

There is a blindness resulting from sickness which obscures vision and is remedied by the passage of time. There is also a blindness caused by following humans. From this we may know that when one is cured who has been blind from birth it is not a case of skill but of power. The Lord gave health, and he used no medicine, for the Lord healed those that no one else could cure

Isaiah told of a time when out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. This prophecy of blindness being cured is seen clearly in the scriptures.

In a little while a change we could never imagine happens. The lowly will find joy and the poor will find happiness. Why? Because of a Presence that even a blind man can sense, because it was a Presence, they had been waiting all their lives. 'Have pity on us!' The Lord Jesus took compassion on us that he could call us to himself, and not scare us away. He comes as someone gentle, someone humble. (Saint Ambrose) This is exactly how he comes into our lives today. We are engrossed with a world that has blinded us. The Lord is our light and our salvation as the psalmist proclaims.

Many years ago, I too was blinded with the world's standards of living life. It was a false sense of the need to achieve perfection in everything I did. But the Lord in his mercy and love had to penetrate my blindness and the foundations I had steadily built came crashing to the ground. I realised how blind I had been to the Lord's call to discipleship as I was busy building my own castles in the air in a material world, and clung to a goodness that emerged from self-righteousness and judgement, while I kept the Lord in a cage to be revered when I needed his consolation. He opened my eyes to the powerful truth that He is alive and his word is. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all other things will be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33) This word was an eye opener. Just as his spittle cleanses so does His word. Advent is a great season to prepare ourselves to welcome him into our lives. The word made flesh!

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank you for your unconditional love in our lives! Amen.

Saturday December 05

1st Week of Advent

When we fall at His feet, it all falls into place.

Isaiah 30: 19-21, 23-26

Psalms 147: 1-6

Matthew 9: 35-10: 1, 5-8

I will never forget December 5. It was the most blessed, most beautiful and most anointed day I have experienced in my life.

This was the day I said "I do" to my beautiful wife! We fully surrendered to the unfolding of the ceremony and the new step of life for us.

On our wedding day our main goal was for the presence of the almighty God to overflow and touch each person who did not know him. He was ever so faithful that the spirit moved so strongly, touched the lost sheep of Jesus the shepherd, and diverted them to him.

Our Lord Jesus looked at the crowds following him and referred to them as a field ripe for harvest. Many people are ready to give their lives to Christ if someone would show them how. Our Lord commands us to pray that people will respond to this need for workers. Often, when we pray for something, God answers our prayers by using us. Let us be prepared for God to work through us and to show others the way to him.

Our Lord Jesus called his 12 disciples. He did not draft them, force them, or ask them to volunteer; he chose them to serve him in a special way. Christ Jesus calls us today. He does not twist our arms or make us do something we do not want to do. We can choose to join him or remain behind. When Christ calls us to follow him, how do we respond?

Just like in today's Gospel proclamation both of us were called by the Lord to minister to the Lost sheep. We have discovered when we are obedient to the mission, he assigned us for, everything falls in line. As an example, when at mission if we are short or out of supplies at home, through someone He will supply what is required. These miracles are proof to us that he is Lord over our lives and when we fall at His feet, life falls into place..

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the desire and the grace to fulfill the mission you have called us to. Amen

Isaiah 40: 1-5,9-11

Psalm 85: 9- 14

2 Peter 3: 8-14

Mark 1: 1-8

Looking back on the year 2020, we may only remember the difficulties, barriers and problems we faced. We may only remember the time we spent in lockdown hiding from Covid-19 or hearing about the thousands of deaths around the world due to the virus. This year may have been difficult for us in many ways, but today the Lord is asking us to look ahead to the future with a hope rooted

in Him. Hope is a trust we have in the unfailing goodness of God even when we do not have an answer or a solution to what we face.

Bro Lalith Perera has taught us there are two legs to Christian hope. First, a divine encounter that continues every day. When we have this divine encounter with the Lord, we can hold on to it in times of trouble. This helps us to remember what God has done in our lives in the past and that He can do the same in our future. The second leg is to hold on to the promises of God as the foundation of our lives.

The greatest example of Christian hope is found in the Blessed Mother. When the Lord Jesus was crucified, everyone except the Blessed Mother apparently lost hope. She received the two ingredients necessary for hope. She had a divine encounter when Angel Gabriel came to tell her she would be the Mother of God. Secondly, she received and held on to the promises of God—"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33). When the Lord Jesus died, the Blessed Mother held on to hope in the Father when there was no reason to hope. Today, she implores us to do the same.

In today's First reading the Lord speaks through Prophet Isaiah saying, "Yes, the Sovereign Lord is coming in power. He will rule with a powerful arm. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes. He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young" (v. 10-11). The reward the Lord brings to us when we hold on to a divine encounter and His promises is His presence

and love filling our hearts. We will find peace amid the storm. St. Paul said a peace that passes understanding will guard our hearts and minds. God gives us an assurance that He will come to our aid and will make our struggle the foundation of the next thing He will do in our lives when we place our hope in Him.

In the Second reading St. Peter warns his readers to remember how short their lives are. He urges us to live a holy and spiritual life, awaiting the day of the Lord. Through the CRL, the Lord has given us many prayer tools to use to come into His presence. We can use the 5 Keys prayer tool to build our spiritual lives. In the first step we can praise God and be happy. Next, we are called to be gentle to others because the Lord is near us. In the third and fourth steps, we must refuse to be anxious and instead pray and intercede for God's intervention in our lives. Finally, we need to thank God for all He has done for us. St. Peter also speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. He says in verse 13, "But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness." When we live a holy and spiritual life, we are not only preparing ourselves for an eternity with God, but we are able to transform our surroundings into the new earth. When we have a connection with God we can draw down the power of God into our world and transform it to resemble the heavens. This is what God calls us to do this Advent. As we prepare for Christmas, we are called to transform the world we live in.

In today's Gospel proclamation we read about the ministry of John the Baptist. He is one example of a person who transformed the world around Him by His encounter with God. He had a relationship with God and in turn God called Him to be the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ. He participated in the ministry of the Lord Jesus by calling people to repent for their sins and baptising them. He was bringing people back to the Kingdom and preparing them to receive their Messiah. He was transforming the world into the new earth.

Today we are called to do the same. First, we must hope in the Lord through a divine encounter and hold on to the promises of God. As we hope in the Lord, we are called to live a life of holiness through a relationship with God. Through this relationship we can draw down the power of God and transform the world around us.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that through my encounter with You, I may be able to change over peoples lives and bring new meaning this Christmas. Amen.

Monday December 07

Memorial of St Ambrose, Bishop & Doctor of the Church

"Rise up and return to the path of holiness"

Isaiah 35: 1-10

Psalms 85: 9-14

Luke 5: 17-26

To a people writhing under the anguish of abandonment and captivity, Isaiah gives us a vision of God's greatness, power, and mercy. In contrast to a scene of desolation, here we see God's all-encompassing love. It is a time of exile. Jerusalem and Samaria have been destroyed, the temple profaned – it is a time of utter hopelessness. Yet Isaiah has the audacity to proclaim God's word

– which promises a time of glorious restoration. It is the Holy Spirit who has given Isaiah this courage, through his personal encounter with God, to enable him to encourage the Israelites in their darkest hour. Isaiah saw a vision of the future, where the glory and majesty of God will be experienced: a God who comes to save; a time when the blind will see, the dumb will speak, and the lame will walk; in short, the advent of the Messiah.

In the Gospel proclamation we see our Lord Jesus manifesting the role foretold about him. When our Lord saw the faith of the paralyzed man's friends, He was moved to minister to the sick man. Our Lord sees beyond the man's label of "paralytic", to the burden of guilt the man carried for his sin. At that time, people believed that sin and sickness were closely aligned, and the paralyzed man may have been frightened to approach the Lord Jesus. So our Lord addresses the more important healing, and forgives him. The Pharisees are scandalized. To them, Jesus' words are blasphemous. Hide-bound in their so-called righteousness and false concept of holiness, they are blind to the unconditional love and mercy of God. Our Lord's radical approach to sinners shocks them. They question our Lord's right to forgive, not recognizing that He was fulfilling His messianic role. So they chose to oppose him. Paralyzed by their pre-conceived ideas of holiness and Messianic behavior, the Pharisees could not move towards the loving arms of a forgiving God. Today, more than physical paralysis, we see around us people overcome by spiritual paralysis. Many are dispirited and discouraged, seeking solace and crying out for a savior. Others are confused. Let us lead them to the Saviour.

Prayer: Abba Father, may I be freed from my chains of fear and guilt and proclaim your love to all around me. Amen

Tuesday December 08

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners.”

Genesis 3: 9-15, 20

Psalms 98: 1-5

Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

Luke 1: 26-38

God's salvation plan is something that human beings will never be able to fathom to its full extent. There are revelations given by God to human beings in the history and His revelations will continue in the future too. The “word of God”, which is the Sacred Scripture and the “Sacred Tradition” are important ways through which God has revealed Himself and His salvation plan to

the human beings.

God who created the world by his “Word and Spirit” involved us in His salvation plan. How do we know that? That is the first reading today. The failure of the first human beings to remain in God in love and obedience had to be amended. Therefore God spoke of a “woman” and “her offspring”. This is interesting; why would a woman and ‘her’ child need to be involved in God's salvation plan?

Everything God created was pleasing to Him. But when ‘sin’ entered the human person's heart and contaminated life, a huge gap was made between the creator and His creation. Pure love and God's holiness of God which was in the hearts of human beings became impure. This was gap. We need to be mindful that humans were created in the image and likeness of God. Sin always tries to distort the image and grayscale the likeness of God in human beings. What was God's option?

Regarding the Immaculate Conception, Roman Catholic dogma asserts that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was preserved free from the effects of the sin of Adam (usually referred to as “original sin”) from the first instant of her conception. The scripture says that we are chosen even before the world was created; this is the truth about the life of the Blessed Mother. We are also called to this love relationship with God and in it to accomplish His will. Just as the Lord Jesus did, and we are called through the Lord Jesus. Are we ready to accept this? Have we been transformed to live in this reality? Let us make this revelation the foundation of our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, cause me to say “I'm your servant; let it be done according to your will in my life”. Amen.

Isaiah 40: 25-31

Psalms 103: 1-4, 8&10

Matthew 11:28-30

We are invited to rest! To rest in the love of our mighty creator. The God who created the entire universe still cares about every little detail of our lives! At times, we can only fathom the power of God through a worldly perspective.

But today if we feel burdened, overwhelmed, the Lord invites us through prophet Isaiah to reflect upon the greatness of our God. He who designed every minute detail of the universe is in complete control. His unfailing love is overshadowing us and yet He offers us the freedom to accept or reject His love!

In today's Gospel proclamation our Lord Jesus tenderly invites the weary and the over-burdened; "come to me... take my yolk... for my yolk is easy and my burden light". A yolk is a heavy wooden harness binding a pair of oxen together for ploughing or pulling heavy burden. Yolk refers to any challenge we face in life's journey while preserving integrity, as we know it may a huge challenge.

I want to live my life in response to God's love but alone and only with my efforts I am helpless and failing. "Lord, it is too burdensome for me" I cry out. Along with that there comes the hope that I will not fall under the weight of woes. I am not alone in pulling it. Our Lord Jesus wills to be my yokemate to pull the burden together with me. I may still be pulling, but am partnered with the mighty Lord Jesus who makes my yoke easy and my burden light.

God is "love unfailing- neither faint nor weary". Today's psalm is a wonderful testimony of whom God is- Love. He lifts us up from destruction, heals our ills and pardons our iniquities, things only love can do. What we need is to have the faith of a child, living in surrender to the all loving God.

Psalms 103:1-4 Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,

Prayer: Abba Father, today I come into your presence to you who makes my yoke easy and burden light. Amen.

Isaiah 41: 13-20

Psalm 145: 1&9, 10-13

Matthew 11: 11-15

God's special promise of help and comfort to His people is illustrated through today's first reading. He spoke to the Israelites through the Prophet Isaiah. God promises to make the barren desert fertile and He will cause springs to flow out from there.

In our lives today when we face a crisis we too are in a barren desert. When we face challenges and come to a stop in life, we become tired and cannot move further, we feel that we are in exile. But when we ponder on the word of God and on His powerful promises, we realise that there is nothing we need to do but allow God to take care of everything. He takes the burden on to His shoulders. The battle belongs to Him not to us. When we are in exile, God holds our hand. When we become dry in our journey, He makes streams of living water flow through us.

In today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus gives St. John the Baptist the highest of compliments: "Among those born of woman there has been none greater than John the Baptist." Our Lord Jesus revealed this because St. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets and the one who was sent before the promised Messiah to prepare the way for Him. And then He further says, "Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John." Don't these words awaken our hearts for a longing for heaven? What else could matter in life but to arrive there, where the least of us will be greater than the greatest one on this earth?

A true longing for heaven is important since it is not easy to arrive there. We need to take the example of St. John the Baptist, dying to our earthly desires. Am I prepared to give up the most wanted desires in my life? Can I be humble as St. John the Baptist was? Lord Jesus, You are showing us that eternal life in heaven is for those who are willing to die to themselves and to live for You alone. If we experience something painful or difficult today, let us offer up the unpleasantness to God, knowing it is nothing in comparison to the reward of heaven.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the strength to become humble as St. John the Baptist did and to die to ourselves. Amen.

Isaiah 48: 17-19

Psalm 1: 1-6

Matthew 11: 16-19

Today's psalm says, those who follow you Lord, will have the light of life while in the first reading, the Prophet Isaiah says, I Yahweh, your God, teach you what is best for you; I lead you in the way that you must go.

These are other Bible reflections come to mind when we analyse the victory of Joe Biden, a 78 year old veteran Catholic and veteran politician, in the United States Presidential election on Nov 3.

America's coloured people who were at one time oppressed like the Hebrews in Egypt, have shown great talents such as the composition of inspiring beautiful songs. One of them goes like this, "Gone are the days, when my heart was young and gay, gone are my friends from the cotton fields of yore, gone from this earth to a better land I know, I hear the gentle voices calling Old Black Joe."

America's coloured people who were cotton pickers for decades and were paid little or nothing, just as the Hebrews worked in the red dust to build bricks for the Pharaoh's palaces, played a key role on November 3 in picking Democratic party nominee Joe Biden, as the second Catholic President of the most powerful country in the world. The first was the famous John F Kennedy who was assassinated in Nov 1963. Another history making fact was that Mr Biden got more than 77 million votes, the highest since the legendary Franklin D Roosevelt polled in the 1930s. Another historic event was the election of Kamala Harris as the first female Vice President. Millions of women and girls who watched her victory speech live on Nov 7th would have remembered a famous song which says. "Climb every mountain, search every sea, follow every rainbow, till you find your dream." A dream that will need all the love you can give, every day of your life, for as long as you live. Mr Biden has pledged He would give priority to tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, which many independent analysts say the outgoing President Donald Trump underplayed. As a result more than 240,000 Americans died and more than one million were afflicted.

Prayer: Abba Father, bless America, the new Biden administration and the whole world. Amen.

Saturday December 12

2nd Week of Advent

O Daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God Judith 13:18

Revelation 11:19,

12:1-6,10

Jdt 13:18bode, 19f

Luke 1:39-47

In our readings today we focus on the blessedness and the favour that is lavished on our dearest Mama Mary. Sometimes in our charismatic journey as our focus is on meeting the Lord, we sideline this greatest of all women.

In our attempts to go to our Lord Jesus, to say heartfelt and personal prayers, to be filled with the Holy Spirit we lose our focus on our Blessed Mother because we don't know what place to give her. But the Bible is clear. She is the Queen of Heaven, the darling of God, clothed with the sun and the Holy and beloved Mother of Our Lord. We cannot go to Jesus ignoring the one He loves. She is the one who crushed the head of the serpent and out of her willingness, her humility and her surrender Jesus was birthed into this world to lead us into our ultimate victory.

My mother has always been very close to the Blessed Mother and we grew up surrounded in that environment. But as I got older and I started pursuing the heart of God, I almost misplaced my love for her as I was confused with her place in my life. And it is only after becoming a mother myself and struggling to fight my children's battles that the Blessed Mother came to the forefront again. Our Lord Jesus reminded me that it is she who crushed the head of the serpent and she will definitely help me crush the head of whatever bothers my children. The love of a mother is fierce; it is all-consuming and protective. And when Jesus handed us to her on the cross as her own children, she took us into that faithful and fierce motherly embrace.

We know how the Holy Spirit feels about the blessed Mother. It was the Holy Spirit that filled Elizabeth and caused her to declare 'you are the most blessed among women'. So let us in turn, join with the Holy Spirit and declare that the moment the Blessed Mother comes into our lives, our children, our families will be leaping for joy. We all need the love and guidance of this perfect mother.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank You for the gift of Mother Mary. I thank You for her nearness and her love. Holy Mary, Mother of God and mother of mine, always lead me to Jesus. Amen.

Sunday December 13

3rd Sunday of Advent

Joy to the world!

Isaiah 61: 1-2a, 10-11

Lk 1: 46-50, 53-54

1 Thes 5: 16-24

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

We are progressing fast through the season of Advent, preparing our hearts and minds to welcome the Saviour into our lives in a new way this Christmas. The one fact that runs through each Reading in today's liturgy is the specific calling each person receives from God our Father and the availability of His Grace and anointing to fulfil the mission on earth.

The First Reading is the prophecy about the Messiah Himself. It is given through prophet Isaiah. The Son of God who was to come to the world as the Saviour of the world, had a clear understanding and knowledge about His mission and He delighted in His Lord (The Father) for giving Him everything He needed to fulfil His mission. Then we come to the praise song of The Blessed Mother, having just received the news about Her own mission and calling. She too rejoices in the Perfect Goodness of God, who is mindful of every detail of Her life and also of all His people.

The Gospel proclamation outlines the mission statement of St John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Messiah. The wise and learned people struggled to understand his purpose, though they would have studied all the prophecies about the Messiah. Yet, St John the Baptist was clear about his own mission, as the voice of the one calling in the wilderness, to prepare the way for the Lord.

Our Lord Jesus, the Blessed Mother and John the Baptist who played vital and crucial roles in God's salvation plan seemed comfortable with their individual mission, because they seemed to have known what God had spoken over their lives. God's Word spoken through the prophets of the Old Testament had taken root in their hearts and had come alive in them. None of them had to strive in their own strength to accomplish their mission, hence we do not hear any of them complaining or fretting about their purpose or mission in life.

How about our own lives? Are we aware of the mission that has been entrusted to us? How familiar are we about the words God our Father has spoken over our lives? What is His will for our lives? When we try to answer these questions from our heart, we must admire the sad

fact that more often than not, our mission in life is worldly, revolving around money, power, luxury and status. Often we are no different to someone who does not know the Lord Jesus. We want our own will to be done in our lives though we repeatedly pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done". Our responses to life situations and crises are more or less the same as non-believers, and are nowhere close to the Commandment given by our Saviour, to love others as He has loved us. Our peace and joy often depend on the love and appreciation of others. Otherwise we become angry, reactive, sad and depressed, complaining about various situations and people who do not see eye to eye with us.

In today's Second Reading St. Paul speaks to us, Christians. We who are called to live an in-Christ experience, are instructed to do three things. We are to rejoice always, pray continually and give thanks to God in all circumstances. We are called to do so not sometimes or when things are going well for us, but always, continually and in all situations. In short our lives are to be one joyful experience, in prayer and thanksgiving. Is this humanly possible? Not unless we live "in-Christ"! We move from a life "with-Christ" to "in-Christ", through the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is when we accept God's unconditional love for us, giving the undiluted truth of our hearts to the Lord and receiving His forgiveness, and choosing to surrender our lives to the Lord. We begin this new in-Christ life at the Four Steps Retreat (or Life in the Spirit seminar), being filled with the Holy Spirit.

I like to share about the witness of a member of our prayer community. This sister's only daughter had left home, after a baseless misunderstanding, severing all ties with the parents. Her husband was a non-believer too. Initially she sought from the Lord, a miraculous return of the daughter. She walked into our prayer meeting while she was struggling in this crisis several years ago, expecting a miracle. Yet what happened was that she was filled with the Father's love and totally surrendered to His will and authority. She received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and started to grow in the Spirit. Even today her daughter is still estranged from the family but she is overflowing with the Joy of the Holy Spirit. By the way, the unthinkable is happening and her husband is accepting the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Let's pray for the Church to build up a people who live and believe the Word of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, let Thy Will be done in our lives and our world as it is in heaven. Amen.

Monday December 14

Memorial of St. John of the Cross, Priest & Doctor of the Church

Shunned by the world, loved by the Saviour

Numbers 24:2-7: 15-17

Ps 25: 4-9

Matthew 21: 23-27

In today's reading we see our Lord Jesus, judged and questioned by the Pharisees about His authority comes from. Jesus was a carpenter's son, he did not have any qualifications to preach or teach, he was no one in society. Yet he did miracles, people were amazed at the truth he spoke, lives were set free from bondage and sin. Today the church celebrates the life of another great saint, Saint John of the Cross, Born in 1542. He was a small-made friar who belonged to the Carmelite order. He was also called half a fryer due to his size, a result of childhood malnutrition. His father died when he was still young and his poor mother had to take care of him.

He along with Saint Theresa of Avila, saw great need for change in the Carmelite order of that time, Because he wanted to bring change, he was greatly persecuted in his own order by other friars who did not want see change. He was arrested and locked up in a tiny room in the monastery, which had no light and hardly any room to even move. He was given sparse food to eat, beaten at least once a week for 9 months until he managed to escape. They caught him again and exiled him to a small monastery where he was treated badly to get rid of him, soon the Lord took him up to heaven. In the midst of immense suffering he was able to write most of his great masterpieces like "Dark Night of the soul", "Ascent to Mount Carmel", which today have helped millions of Christians to understand suffering and God's love.

In 1726 he was canonized as a saint, named doctor of the church, and regarded as one of the greatest poets in the history of Spain. Rejected by this world he was accepted by God. Often we admire the rich, celebrities, sports stars and powerful people in society. We believe what they say, and quite often fall in to the same trap as they are in life, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" 1 Corinthians 3:19. Let us not to judge people by their outward appearance but humble ourselves to recognise the truth of God in every person, love and respect others, despite our differences and above all to lean on the Holy Bible as the only source of truth.

Prayer: Abba Father grant us grace not to judge others but to always seek the truth from your word and not from this world. Amen

Zephaniah 3: 1-2, 9-13

Psalm 34: 2-7, 17-19, 23

Matthew 21: 28-32

Words alone cease to mean anything when they are not put into practice and similarly, promises may prove to be empty when they fail to bear fruit. I can easily relate to many times when I have promised to pray for someone, but immersed with the cares of my own, simply forgot to do so or times when I have consoled a friend in a crisis with a lot of reassuring words, that I myself failed to rely later on in the same situation. It is my inability to be faithful, my forgetfulness and my preoccupation.

We see a similar situation unravel in today's Gospel proclamation. We see two sons responding to their father's request in different but with equal disrespect. They must have hurt the father a great deal with their senseless words and actions. The parable is in one way an eye opener to those of us who have said 'yes' to Abba Father's call, to follow Him, be his disciples and live a life pleasing in His sight. It is also an invitation for those of us who are hesitating to accept His ways and going in our own paths.

Our Lord is directing the same question that He asked the chief priests and elders that day, towards us today, 'Which of you do my Father's will?' Can we honestly say that we have done our part in fulfilling that call? Even if we have failed, the good news is that we can turn back, change our ways and walk His path once again, just like the first son. For it is the promise we hold on as we wait in joyful anticipation for His coming, a promise of the kingdom of God to the least of His children, who believe in His saving mercies, even after failing miserably. We have the assurance of a loving Father, who is patient in all His ways and waiting for our return.

Just like a little child caught doing something bad, we may throw tantrums, we may feel guilty, we may feel ashamed but there is no reason to stay sulking any longer, for as Zephaniah says in the first reading, our Lord is waiting to purify our lips and allow us to serve Him forever. When that day comes, we would not have to cover our faces in shame for neither preoccupation, nor selfishness, nor even the cares of this world will keep us away from fulfilling our Father's will.

Prayer: Abba Father grant that I may speak the words that I am not afraid to put into action, for the glory of Your Holy name. Amen

Isaiah 45: 6-8, 18, 21-25

Psalm 85: 9-14

Luke 7: 18-23

In the first reading Prophet Isaiah speaks of God's sovereignty. God our loving Father who created us declares as associated with the first commandment in the Decalogue, "I am the Lord thy God, there is no other God beside me" (Exodus 20:2-4). Thus our prime calling and duty is to give Him priority and the due place he deserves in our lives. How often have we failed or fallen short of

this duty? Have there been occasions where we have blindly turned for instant relief or may be hero worshiped people or places when we should be rendering our worship to God and God only? Do we realise the danger and the errors we can possibly make when money, power, prestige or any other factor overpower this freedom in our lives to worship God only? Thus when we do not take this word seriously we tend to compromise, bow down or worship other idols sometimes even without our knowledge. Wisely if we uproot such pressures and occasions in our life we could respond to our prime calling. Interestingly, even when we serve the Lord, in our communities and society we respect our elders and seniors, yet does that superiority or hierarchical structure make one more or less important? For we are all one in the Lord (John 17:21) and also gain equal status regardless of seniority or superiority. It is only God who should be given the prominent and rightful place in our lives over everything and everyone else. For God's attributes – truth, justice, righteousness, glory, victory and strength alone can be in Him only, thus let us render true and proper worship to Him alone.

In the Gospel proclamation, our Lord Jesus clearly affirms that he is the Messiah who is the expected anointed one of God. Hence we come across evidence in a world of sceptical theories relating even to the world of today, when the lame walk, lepers are made clean, deaf hear, dead raised and poor given the good news in the mighty name of Jesus. Yet, the hardened hearts opposing God's laws can easily be confronted in their own struggle. Yet, (John 3:16) reminds us that the Messiah came not to judge but to save. Hence it is a prudent choice we make simply to repent and return to Him trusting.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us hope in our hearts to return to your merciful love every moment of our lives. Amen

Genesis 49: 2, 8-10

Psalm 72: 2-4, 7-8, 17

Matthew 1: 1-17

Today starts the octave before Christmas, and is the time when we traditionally begin to celebrate for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel proclamation gives us the genealogy of the Lord Jesus. This is recorded all the way back to Abraham.

The genealogy of the Lord Jesus shows him as the descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and eventually King David; men to whom God gave mighty promises. Today's first reading shows us the prophesied blessings given to Judah by Jacob; as Jacob's last significant act as a patriarch and as the heir to Abraham and Isaac. The responsorial psalm is widely seen as a psalm written by King Solomon. This also contains promises of the prophesied heir of King David. The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled these promises and would eventually fulfill every messianic prophecy in Scripture. He is the promised Messiah; the descendant of Abraham and David, our Savior; who gave His life to redeem us from our sins.

Throughout scripture we are shown the promises of God, given people just like us. We see this prophesies being fulfilled in their lives, as they held onto them by faith, trusting in the word of God, beyond the circumstances that surrounded them. We see that these promises not only impacted their lives, but they had eternal ramifications for generations to come; changing the course of history itself.

God proclaims similar promises for our lives too. The greatest promise God gives us is that God himself comes to dwell in our hearts, we are adopted sons and daughters of the most High God, and we are welcomed into the majesty of the Holy Trinity. As we prepare for the birth of the Lord Jesus with all the trappings of Christmas, let us by faith prepare our hearts internally making room for the King of Kings to be born, and reign supreme in our hearts. God continues to proclaim promises over our lives. Are we ready to trust him, to receive the promises, and hold onto them by faith?

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for the promises over my life. Increase my faith, so that I may trust you above the circumstances that surround me. Amen

Friday December 18

3rd Week of Advent

A Father's faithfulness

Jeremiah 23: 5-8

Psalm 72: 1-2, 12-13,
18-19

Matthew 1: 18-25

The Holy Family has been a leading example of what exactly a family should be like. The modern world has taken over and given us examples that look glamorous but with many gaps.

Although the Holy Family lived in that time period, what that they said and did is relatable in ways that a typical modern day model family cannot replicate. As believers of God the Father, Jesus Christ our Saviour and the Holy Spirit, we are called to adopt the same values that Mother Mary, and St. Joseph had to ensure that God's will was done here on Earth just like in the heavenly realm.

Mother Mary and St. Joseph obeyed the Lord's requests. They listened, obeyed and remained faithful. Living in obedience to God our Father, opens a heavenly door that leads us to many treasures that are in store for us. We may not know what these treasures are, in fact these treasures are not ours to begin with, they are gifted to us by a loving Father. Our Heavenly Father knows what we need, knows what is good for us and will provide. All we have to do is ask in love and trust him so that his kingdom comes in our life and his will be done in our hearts, lives and families.

Let us let go of what we know or what we believe is right. Let go of the perceptions we have caged our faith in and obey the Father and allow him to let his glory shine through our lives. Let Him make us tools in his hands so that his grace will flow into this world.

I have taken many steps in obedience to the Lord, and he has always come through for me. I left my career for the calling of a housewife and from the day I obeyed our Lord Jesus Christ, and his will he has delivered my family and myself in more ways than I can explain; with peace that surpasses all understanding, with love that never ends and joy that always fills our heart in abundance.

Prayer: Abba Father, I belong to you completely and I choose to surrender myself and my family to you today so that your will may be done. Amen

Saturday December 19

3rd Week of Advent

"In you, Lord, I take refuge, let me never be put to shame" Ps 71: 1

Judges 13: 2-7, 24-25

Psalms 71: 3-6, 16-17

Luke 1: 5-25

The God of Israel is obsessed about His people. From time to time He raised up either a prophet judge or king to rule His people according to His commandments and statutes. The way was paved in and through these events for the entry of the promised Messiah.

The marvel of this Sovereign God is that He always chose the least qualified (according to the worldly way of understanding) and most rejected people for His great work. He sent His angel to a barren woman who had been humiliated for her entire life. This is the work of our God. We are comforted and consoled because if we are humiliated, rejected and are perceived as less qualified, God will choose us to be His powerful weapons in His Kingdom. When we are rejected, become persecuted and treated as less fortunate in this world and by our society we need to rejoice because that is when we will experience the miracles of God.

Samson was consecrated from his mother's womb for God's purpose. He was chosen to fight and defeat the Philistines. God could have chosen any other woman to be Samson's mother, but Samson's mother was chosen specially from God to reveal the power and the compassion of the God whom they worshiped and glorified.

John the Baptist's conception was a replica of Samson's conception. Though Zachariah and Elizabeth were respected by society, they had no children. The Jewish religious leaders treated barrenness as a curse from God. The angel of God was sent to the priest Zachariah with the good news. The highlight of the message was that the child would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. When comparing John the Baptist and Samson, we see that instructions were given to Samson's mother to guide the child. But in the case of John the Baptist, the angel declared the nature and the personality of the child. We need to identify the fulfillment of the promise of God. The purpose of the miracle of John the Baptist was to pave the way for the Messiah's missionary entry.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to recognise your hand on me and drive me to accomplish your Will. Amen

2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16

Psalm 89: 2-5, 27, 29

Romans 16: 25-27

Luke 1: 26-38

I have always been intrigued by David's ascension to the throne. The prophet Samuel comes and anoints him as King. After that Samuel returns home and David goes back to living his life as a shepherd boy, as though nothing ever happened. What initially brought David to the royal courts of Saul was the "evil spirit" that was vexing Saul.

The breakthrough for the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose came through the affliction of an evil spirit. We see that even though the plans of God may not take place at the pace we expect, no one, not even the powers of darkness can stand in His way. In fact, the obstacles become the means that God uses to fulfil His purpose. David's journey to the throne was arduous. Today's first reading alludes to this journey. We meet David today at a time when the promises of God made through Samuel have been fulfilled and the Lord has given him rest from his enemies.

In today's first reading we see David desiring to establish a house for God. However, instead of David establishing the house of God, what happens is that God establishes the house of David. It would not be like the royal house of Saul but will be a dynasty that would go beyond the lifetime of David. We can never outgive God.

For many generations after David, there was a King who was of his seed on the throne at Jerusalem. Despite them not being the most faithful of people, the promise made to David flowed from one generation to another. Like David, if we live for God's purpose, we will be passing something more than our genes to the generations that follow us. The blessing of God upon our lives will flow to our children and their children and their children's children.

In today's Gospel proclamation we meet the Blessed Mother at a time when the people of God seemed to have lost the way of life that God promised to David. The person who renovated and made the Temple a magnificent edifice was not a descendant of David, but Herod the great, who was an Edomite, not even a Jew. The one who was ruling over the Jews was not a descendant of David, but Caesar, who was a Gentile. The chief priest who was chosen had to be someone ac-

ceptable to the Romans. The Jews looked forward to the coming of a Messiah, who would restore the way of life God desired for them. They believed that he would be a powerful King like David, overthrow the Romans and re-establish proper temple worship.

In today's Gospel reading we see divine intervention in the obscure town of Nazareth, not in the Holy City of Jerusalem where all the action was taking place. God starts to fulfil his plan in secret, just like how it was with David. Just because we don't see God answering our heartcry, it does not mean He is not answering it. He is doing it in a place that is not visible to us. That is why we thank him even when there does not seem to be an apparent answer. The Angel Gabriel encounters the Blessed Mother and reiterates the promises made to David. Even if the circumstances of the Jews have changed, the promise remains valid. My circumstances do not change who God is.

The Angel reveals many things about the child to be born. That He will be Great, that He will sit on the throne of His father David, that His Kingdom will spread to the ends of the earth, that his reign will never end. As we look back at these promises it is clear that every one of them was fulfilled. Yet, during his life time it certainly did not seem that He would be the Messiah they hoped for. The promises seemed most unlikely when they brought down the body of Jesus and laid Him in a tomb. It seemed that everything was over. Yet the Gospel of Luke tells this about the Blessed Mother. "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." Luke 1:45. She believed when she had no reason to. Just as much as the Jews seemed to have lost the way of life God desired for them, we too believe that we have lost the way of life God intended for us. Our circumstances overwhelm us more often than not. Decisions made by people whom we have no control over rock our lives. We lose sight of God and what He is doing, and we end up leading defeated powerless lives, no different to those who do not believe that God exists. Advent is the time we wait on the promise. Advent is the time between the promise and the breakthrough.

The Blessed Mother teaches us how to work through our own Advents. She teaches us that the word of God is not just for knowledge, but to be believed and acted upon. She teaches us that not only knowing scripture but we, must hear the voice of the Lord personally and respond to him with love.

Prayer: Abba Father, too long have we lived defeated lives, no different from those who do not believe. We cry out "Lord I believe, help my unbelief" Amen

Song of Songs 2:8-14 or
Zep 3: 14-18
Psalm 33: 2-3, 11-12,
20-121
Luke 1: 39-45

In today's word we see what a faithful God we serve, a God we have. Throughout he has been constantly promising that the Messiah will come, come to save and find the lost. Yet it is the confirmation of his promise to weak sinful people like us.

He the Lord the creator of heaven and earth decides to send his only son to be a fragile human. In doing this he kept his promise which he made for generations. These attest that the Lord's plans stand steadfast forever and the purpose of his heart for all generations.

In today's word we see, how the Blessed Mother visits Elizabeth and her response is "How is it that the Mother of my Lord comes to me?" In and through this we understand the real heart the Lord has for us. Throughout we see that he comes looking for us. The Lord who is all able all capable, comes to save us. The Blessed Mother's experience yet again confirms it is the Lord who comes looking for us reaching out to us.

Usually people reach out to a king or visit a king. Nevertheless our Lord changes history and shows the love that he extends to his creation. Instead of creation reaching out to the king, the King decides to reach out to creation. This is the heart our god carries for us. For Him each one of us is important, he identifies us by name. He chose to leave the 99 sheep and come looking for one that is Lost. He re-defines our relationship which we have with him. He is a Father who is faithful to his creation, his children showing unconditional Love.

He is confirming to us today, that is does not matter how badly we have fallen or sinned. His love for us will always reach out to us. The amazing relationship we have with our creator is an intimate love relationship. What he desires the most is to reach out to us. He will all ways meet us in that secret place no matter how sinful we are because love for is unending.

Prayer: Abba Father, your steadfast love reaches to the Heavens and your mercy extends the skys. May I feel this love today. Amen.

1 Samuel 1: 24-28

1 Sm 2:1, 4-8

Luke 1: 46-56

We are in the 4th week of Advent, a season of Joy, Peace and Hope. In this week, the final purple candle is lit to remind us of prayer and penance in preparation for Christmas. We look forward to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus with Peace on Earth towards people of good will and in great anticipation.

In today's Gospel proclamation we read the Magnificat. It reveals the heart of Mother Mary towards God. Her soul and spirit magnifies the Lord, she exalts God in praise and thanksgiving. Let us also if possible take this moment to lift a thanksgiving prayer to God for what He has done for us and all that He is going to do for us. A striking characteristic of the Blessed Mother was her humility and reverential fear of God. In verse 48 she proclaims, God has looked with favour on those bowed down, echoing Hannah's song over Samuel's birth as given in the first reading. God is also praised for the salvation of the lowly and oppressed. Similar words are later spoken by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, when He preached "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3).

One of the Blessed Mother's greatest attributes was her generous and absolute "Yes" to God. Here was a humble young girl, who had her whole life laid out in front of her, suddenly disrupted by the plan and will of God. It would have been easier for her to say 'No' for at the time it looked she had much to lose. Even though she did n' know where the journey was going to take her or the price she would have to pay, against all odds, she gave her "YES" to God.

In preparation for Christmas I wish to examine my heart once again. Have I truly given my all to God? Are there places I have not fully surrendered or being generous with God? Have I given my absolute 'Yes' to God? I know most times I cannot but, yet He can through me, for He is the author and perfecter of my faith. The One who has promised is eternally faithful and He is my Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to be more like Mother Mary. Help me give my 'Yes' to You, not my will, but yours be done.' Amen

Malachi 3: 1-4, 23-24

Ps 25: 4-5, 8-10, 14

Luke 1: 57-66

Today's readings form a clear picture of what God's intentions are. If we look closely it is evident that God has extended an olive branch to people, with the intention of amending the relationship between God and the world. Prophet Malachi foretells the coming of John the Baptist, who is to prepare the way and sound the bells of the coming of Christ the Messiah. Why go through all

these, quite simply so that the children will return to their Heavenly Father. God chooses to fix what man has broken, initiating an eternal relationship which is an extension of love & forgiveness.

John the Baptist had an appointed mission, so did Jesus of Nazareth. This was to spread the Kingdom of God. What they received from God they let it flow out to heal the world and that is our mission as well. Often we are only concerned about receiving but not generous when it comes to giving. Giving not only means material things but sharing the same love & forgiveness that was extended to us. God expects us to give to our neighbor what he has given us. Christmas after Christmas how many relationships remain sour with family and friends? We can examine our hearts and see especially since it is that time of the year to love and forgive. Is there any relationship that can be amended? We can take the initiative to extend an olive branch and with it to partake in God's mission on earth. "To turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers". Mal 4:24.

In today's Gospel proclamation through Zechariah we can see evidence of what happens when we align with God's mission. Zechariah was able to speak only when he proclaimed what God had intended to happen. Similarly, when we align with God's mission that he has entrusted us with; breakthroughs happen and miracles take place. There will be rejoicing and God will be exalted through us and that is our call today. The same power that was upon John the Baptist is the same power that works in us and enables us to have a relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to take the same love that you have extended to me, to the world. Amen

2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8-12,
14, 16

Ps 89: 2-5, 27-29

Luke 1: 67-79

Today's first reading tells us about David's desire to build a temple as a home for the Ark of the Covenant. The prophet Nathan, however, following Divine revelation, reveals to him, that it is God's will that a permanent home will only be built by David's heir when his kingdom is made secure by God, a promise invoked in the psalm, to protect and preserve David's royal lineage.

The Gospel proclamation tells us that Zechariah, after being struck dumb as a sign of divine intervention in the conception of Elizabeth, regains his speech in the temple and prophesies the role of their son John as the way-maker for Jesus; revelations that were given to him only by reason of his faith.

The readings instruct us that rather than trying to take control over our lives, we should rely on God and His Plan for us. Even in doing good things, as David sought to do, we need to await Divine revelation and guidance on how to do that so as to conform with His Plan and Purpose.

Relinquishing control over our lives and relying on God's providence is the most difficult thing for us to do as it requires a mindset that abandons reliance on our human abilities and achievements, in favour of trust and faith in God. The readings show that only by completely surrendering our will to Divine Will, can we receive God's revelations of our mission and purpose in life, just as David, Zechariah (and his wife Elizabeth) did.

Of course, the greatest example is the Blessed Mother, in accepting her mission of bringing our Lord Jesus into our world and made our salvation possible. As we look forward to the celebration of the Nativity tomorrow, it is an appropriate time to reflect on the Blessed Mother's humble submission to Divine will and our own approach to faith, surrender and mission.

Prayer: Abba Father, I offer You my past and all the ways that I have failed to trust in You. I give You my weakness, my pride and my future. Amen.

Friday December 25

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

The true light that enlightens everyone

Isaiah 52: 7-10

Psalms 98: 1-6

Hebrews 1: 1-6

John 1: 1-18

Today, you may be reading this reflection after an online Mass or you might have got the opportunity to attend mass at your parish church. - but it feels like an entirely new experience. This Christmas Day feels so different. To some it may seem weird, to some cold, to some in isolation much more lonely and to some joyful.

However, let us take a walk with the shepherds and the Magi to visit the infant Jesus laid in his manger. The Shepherds were awakened from their sleep by angels singing in the Heavens while the Magi were roused in their study of the stars inspired that something was unfolding. They were led by a star to the abode of the Saviour.

Today what is the call in your heart? Can you hear the invitation of the Holy Spirit stirring your heart to rise up in celebration because something beautiful is unfolding and there is hope.

This invitation is echoed in the reading from Isaiah 52: 7-10 where though the people of Jerusalem are in captivity, the watchmen on the towers can see messengers of hope running towards them with good news. Though these messengers have run a long way and their feet must be dusty, to the people watching, even those feet are beautiful because they bring good news. St. John the Baptist would have also looked shoddy and unshaven with rough feet but he turned out to be a similar messenger bringing the good news of the arrival of the Saviour of the world.

It was the practice of ancient warriors to lift their sleeve and bare their arms before they used their swords. Isaiah shows God in the same light baring his arm and claiming victory for His people with the good news.

Who is this child in the manger? - The shepherds and magi were invited to gaze upon a tiny baby in the company of the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph and the animals. Who were they looking at?

John Chapter 1 tell us that He is the Word in the beginning with God. More importantly - All things were made through Him and without Him

nothing came to be. Whatever has come to be, found life in him; life which for human being was also light.

Let us repeat these words - whatever has come to be, found life in him - Nothing has been created without our Lord Jesus speaking them into being. Think of Joe Biden, think of our Cricket team. think of the whales, the Yala leopards, the reptiles - all of these came to life when our Lord Jesus spoke them into being.

In fact Christmas is a day when our eternal God chose to slip into life on this earth, choosing a still ancient time when modern life and comforts were a long way off. The word also says that the life that He brought was light in our darkness and that darkness could not overcome.

Our Lord's birth is our invitation to be born again with a new approach to life and faith.

He is my light, and darkness cannot overcome this light. He is greater than anything I might be facing. Nothing has come into being without my Jesus willing them or allowing them to be. My best friend, my worst enemy, my darkest sin, my deepest challenge are all subject to Him.

Secondly, to all who received Him, he empowers them to become children of God, for they believe in His name. Today is not only Jesus' birthday but it is also my day of adoption. My identity shifts from being a child of my earthly parents to that of a child of the Father. I am empowered and made new. I am called by a new name and given a heavenly mission. I am no longer born of flesh but born of God.

Thirdly, I can now experience not a God of law and anger but a God of the fullness of truth and loving kindness.

A few months ago in Cleveland Ohio, a person named Jeff Fusco contacted Covid-19 and was on his death-bed. His loved ones came to him and spoke words of release. Suddenly he found himself in the embrace of God. It was a moment of immense love. And then he was asked to return. He says he felt such a comfort and peace and now to him, nothing matters anymore than eternal life. When you see Baby Jesus today, remember he is offering you light in your darkness, a new identity and a world of deep love and comfort. Offer Him your life, fall at His feet, worship Him and you will be saved..

Prayer: Abba Father, today I want to be held in your arms of love that your light might shine in my darkness. Amen.

Saturday December 26

Feast of St. Stephen, the First Martyr

The Blood of the Martyrs- seed for the harvest

Acts 6:8-10; 7: 54-59

Ps 31: 3-4, 6&8, 16&17

Matthew 10: 17-22

In the Catholic Church, there is a traditional belief that the date of the recovery of the relics of St. Stephen was Dec. 26, 415. Hence we celebrate St. Stephen's feast the day after Christmas. Stephen, who was a deacon and the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death outside Jerusalem about two years after the death of Christ. Like the Lord, St. Stephen also asked the Lord to forgive

those who were stoning him, because they did not know what they were doing. We are often told that the Lord Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father but when St. Stephen was being stoned and asked for forgiveness, the Book of acts tells us that the Lord Jesus is seen standing at the right hand of God the Father. Indeed he was given a standing ovation to St. Stephen. The Church's long tradition of celebrating the memorial of St. Stephen the day after celebrating the Birth of Christ, does not serve to demote Christmas, but to continue & manifest more clearly an important comparison between the disciple and the master and elevates the true meaning of the Christmas celebration.

Tertullian, one of the early Church fathers of the second century declared that, "the blood of the martyrs is seed for the church." The seed Stephen sowed bore almost immediate fruit. I believe it was the witness of Stephen's martyrdom that opened the way for Christ into the life of St. Paul. Even as he held the coats and was consenting to Stephen's death he was witnessing in Stephen's face the risen life and love of Christ, and Paul's road to Damascus led past the very place where Stephen died.

In the First reading, Stephen was threatened by a mob it was a tense atmosphere and the enraged people were instigated to throw stones, St Stephen, a man filled with the power and spirit of God, however, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God. (Acts 7: 54-56). His reaction shows how he was not reacting to the situation of the mob attacking him, instead he was focused on God and we read He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God!.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace to be brave witnesses in our families, work places and Church, so that we may win others for your kingdom. Amen.

Sunday December 27

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

He remembers his covenant forever. (Psalm 105:8)

Genesis 15: 1-6, 21: 1-3

Sirach 3: 2-6, 12-14

Ps 105: 1-9

Heb 11: 8, 11-12, 17-19

Luke 2: 22-40

Many issues have begun to undermine the meaning of marriage and to question its purpose. Young people who save themselves for marriage are laughed at. A married man or a married woman who does not flirt with the opposite sex or “have a fling” is considered boring. The institution of marriage, be it Christian or non-Christian is facing a real threat like never before. Today is the feast

of the Holy Family. We look at the Holy Family as an answer to the challenges we face, and as a model for our own families.

St. Joseph, the head of the Holy Family is known as the Guardian of the virgins, Patron of the Universal Church and the terror of demons. Interestingly, for such a powerful figure, not a single word he had spoken is recorded in the Bible. In fact, the actions of St. Joseph to this day speak louder than words. We first read about him in the Bible, in the lineage of the Lord Jesus, that links him to the line of David then as the betrothed of the Blessed Mother. He changes his plans of a secret divorce, and accepts her in marriage in submission to the leading of God. Then we read about him fleeing to Egypt with his young family to protect the child Jesus from the violence of King Herod.

St Joseph played a vital part in God's plan for the Messiah to enter the world. He took on the responsibility of protecting the Blessed Mother and the child Jesus at a time when they were vulnerable and helpless. As he cooperated with the plan of God, he received divine assistance for his mission.

The Blessed Mother, who is known as the New Arc of the New Covenant, was raised as a temple virgin dedicated to God from birth. She was a young Jewish girl, probably a teenager, when the Angel told her that she was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. The news confused her but unlike any other teenage girl in her situation; she had the wisdom to submit to God's great plan completely. “I am the handmaid of God, let it be done unto me according to His word”. She placed herself in the hands of God and she was at complete peace.

She knew she would have to face St Joseph, her parents, her community, and she had no answers for them. All she knew and perfectly understood was that she is the handmaid of God, and He will fulfil His purpose through her life. God in turn moved heaven and earth and she too received divine assistance for her part of the mission.

Both St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother teach us what a Holy Family really is. It is a family that gives their lives, shifts their dreams and plans for the mission of God. Through the life of St. Joseph, we see that when the father is God-centred, his family comes under God's protection and leading. The Blessed Mother teaches us that when a mother puts God first in the decisions she makes every day, God fulfils His purpose in that family. St Joseph and the Blessed Mother show us that we become a Holy Family by living for the purpose of God in the day to day events of our lives by praying, seeking and doing God's will. An ordinary family becomes a Holy Family when they have the Lord Jesus as the center of their lives and their relationship with each other.

In today's Gospel proclamation we read about the Presentation of the Lord Jesus in the Temple. Simeon the Prophet acknowledges the child Jesus as the Messiah, the salvation of Israel. By this time, the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph already knew they were not raising an ordinary child. On the day of the Presentation in the Temple, they received a prophecy, which they probably did not expect. Simeon told the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." The Scriptures say nothing about how the Blessed Mother handled the prophecy that day. Instead, we see at the foot of the cross how she dealt with the sword that pierced her heart.

The Holy Family teaches us how to raise children. In fact, little is written about the life of the Lord Jesus' childhood. To me, it speaks volumes. Most probably He lived a quiet life, away from all the distractions, learning from His parents who were champions in living in the mission of God. We are called as parents to first of all live in the mission of God, and then teach our children in the day to day events to live for a purpose bigger than themselves.

Prayer: Abba Father, I bring my family before you. Give us the wisdom to live our lives and mission centred on you. Amen.

1 John 1:5-2:2

Psalms 124:2-8

Matthew 2:13-18

Today we remember the Holy Innocents. As we read in the gospel proclamation, a few days after the joyous occasion of the birth of the Savior, we are faced with the first clash of religion with politics in history; the innocent children are massacred. Herod thought that the Lord Jesus would be a threat to him and his kingdom. Many innocent children were killed due to the insecurity of lead-

ers. The result was mothers weeping, wailing and mourning for their children. This is not something new. We have heard this happen over and over again. Instead of Herod being the destroyer we find various leaders right through history taking over the role of the destroyer, creating havoc and leaving mothers to mourn. We as Christians are called to intercede for the innocents all around the world. Sometimes our prayers are focused only around our lives and our needs. Many of us fail to see the bigger picture, with multitudes not having faith to hold on and many more not having hope. Are we willing to pray for all those suffering around the world?

Though we see the suffering and the massacre of the innocents in today's Gospel proclamation, God also reveals the brighter side of this passage. We see St. Joseph being warned in a dream, asked to take the Holy Family and flee to Egypt. Here we see God's divine intervention in the life of his chosen. The Lord Jesus had a mission, the Blessed Mother and St Joseph were chosen to protect and raise Him. We can see how the angel kept appearing to St. Joseph in his dreams and guiding him throughout the way. Though Herod was a destroyer, St. Joseph was the chosen protector. We have been called by God. We are on a journey working towards God's chosen mission for us. When we become aware of this calling in our lives, we can be rest assured that God intervenes directly in our lives and protects us throughout our lives. The danger lies when we do not realize or heed the calling in our lives. This is when we cannot see God's hand at work in our lives. We become blind. Instead of the blessings and his grace we keep seeing misery over and over again. Are we ready to heed the God's calling in our lives today?

Prayer: Abba Father, today I believe that I am a chosen child and I am ready to do your will in my life. Amen

1 John 2: 3-11

Pslam 96: 1-6

Luke 2: 22-35

Many of us call ourselves Christians, but continue to live like pagans or children of perdition, for that is what we were before calling ourselves believers. God stirs in our hearts a longing for Him, but the forces of the world, our unspiritual nature and evil influences take us back into darkness. We fall for these believing in a delusion that they are normal.

There are many people who live by pride, avarice and the craving for power, and think they are virtuous simply because these sins in modern society bear the mark of respectability. The respectable sins are the most disgusting and destructive, for the Lord said that they make us like "whitened sepulchers, outside clean, inside full of dead men's bones".

God's love does not wait for us to find our way back to a Him, instead He sends His Son into the temple of our hearts. He comes down into the darkest part of our lives. The areas that are struggling to find illumination in our difficult familial relationships. It is there He pitches His dwelling place. He is presented in the Temple; the event we remember today.

In the Gospel proclamation we are told that the Jewish people were looking forward to God's visitation, to restore His rule. The birth of our Lord brings their hopes to bear fruit. Like Simeon we too must see the light of salvation that the Lord brings: as He enters the inner sanctuary of our hearts. The first reading says there is no point knowing the Lord intellectually. We need to allow Him to live in us, so that we could begin to live like Him. His Presence could transfer our souls from darkness to light; the darkness that is in camouflage in most of us, bringing sin and chaos. Sometimes we may think we are in the light, when in fact we may be in the realm of darkness. The reading suggests doing random checks. Do I hate, become vengeful, or judgmental of another, if so, it could reveal my immersion in darkness. Thankfully, we can surrender the truth of our hearts to the Light and have the darkness depart.

Prayer: Abba Father, reveal the still dark areas within me. May it be the beginning of making the darkness depart, through Christ the Lord. Amen

Wednesday December 30

Octave of Christmas

Those who do God's will live forever

1 John 2: 12-17

Psalms 96: 7-10

Luke 2: 36-40

God took care that our Saviour's nativity should be fully attested. To the testimony of the angels, the wise men, the shepherds, Simeon, here is added another. It is that of Anna, who is described here by her tribe and by her father. This prophetess spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. God said that Jerusalem is "the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there" (1 Kings 11:36). God's Name is forever linked to Jerusalem. It is "the city of the great King" (Ps. 48:2). This King is not just born of flesh but begotten by the power of Holy Spirit.

With one day to go in the year 2020 perhaps we all faced more challenges in 2020 than the total of all challenges we have faced in our lives prior to 2020. I believe many of us are happy it is coming to an end and hope 2021 to be a better year. Although many do not want to reflect on 2020, may I suggest that we reflect on it and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in doing a self-evaluation. Did we mature in our journey with the Lord in 2020. Just as we faced challenges during the year, we had many opportunities to grow in our spirituality, family bonding, charity and in many other areas. How did we respond to these opportunities? Have we been able to grow closer to the Lord and be able to make him the centre of our lives? Or did worry, anxiety, fear and sickness take precedence over making the Lord the number one in our lives?

We have just celebrated Christmas in an environment created by a global pandemic which is a different experience and feeling. While some are out of lockdown others are still in lockdown and feeling like we are not free. For many they are still living with no job, stress caused by financial hardships, anxiety caused by separation from loved ones...the list will go on. Today's Gospel proclamation tells us how St Joseph and the Blessed Mother helped our Lord Jesus to discern the Will of the Father against the craving of the flesh. Can we also be determined to follow the example of our Lord Jesus to mature ourselves and hear the voice of the Father.

Prayer: Abba Father, we humbly ask your grace to be able to discern Your will in our lives so that we may remain in you forever. Amen

1 John 2: 18-21

Psalms 96: 1-2, 11-13

John 1: 1-18

Looking at the year gone by we see that the global Covid 19 crippled almost everything!! What we perceived to be true and normal, financial and economic structures and systems, science and technology collapsed. We assumed these were our shield and way towards the future. Even our very breath/life itself was challenged. What I realised is the extent to which we rely on the world

instead of God. We never truly experience the truth - that Jesus who is God, became man, suffered and died for our sins and through His resurrection poured out the Holy Spirit upon us so that we could become children of God. It is time we realise that it is in Him that there is life!

The Catholic Church in its Catechism says "The word became flesh to make us "partakers of the divine nature, For this is why the word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man...The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in His divinity, assumed our nature, so that He, made man, might make men gods." During my early years, I resented my father. I attributed this to his addiction to drinking and smoking. While his addiction reduced with time my resentment remained the same or worse. He had become a better person but I had not! It is only in prayer that I realised that I was wounded within.

During a retreat at the Divine Retreat centre, in Kerala – my mother called home to speak to my father and said "I forgive you for everything, please forgive me for all the years of bitterness that I have carried" They both cried and professed their love for each other. Later in the room she explained to me how she was forced to marry my father. This is why she found it difficult to love him the way she should. I immediately realised my inner wound. My mother and father at that moment became like God to me. Even the deepest darkest situation or feeling when touched by the Holy Spirit transforms and transcends us to be partakers of God's divine nature. As we begin the New Year let us commit to spending more time in prayer and fellowship with God – It is the only way to truly experience the truth that sets us free.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant us the grace of prayer that we may truly experience being your children. Amen

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