

ADVENT CHRISTMAS GRACE

Daily Gospel Reflections



by the Daughters of St. Paul

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Advent Christmas grace : daily gospel reflections / [compiled] by the Daughters of St. Paul.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-8198-0841-7 (pbk.) -- ISBN 0-8198-0841-5 (pbk.)

1. Bible. Gospels--Devotional literature. 2. Advent--Prayers and devotions. 3. Christmas--Prayers and devotions. 4. Epiphany--Prayers and devotions. 5. Catholic Church--Prayers and devotions. 6. Catholic Church. Lectionary for Mass (U.S.) I. Daughters of St. Paul.

BS2555.54.A38 2015

242'.332--dc23

2015017387

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms* © 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Cover design by Rosana Usselman

Cover photo by Mary Emmanuel Alves, FSP

Interior photos: p. 4, Jack Hazut/jhm@isrealimage.com; p. 82, Mary Emmanuel Alves, FSP

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

“P” and PAULINE are registered trademarks of the Daughters of St. Paul.

Copyright © 2015, Daughters of St. Paul

Published by Pauline Books & Media, 50 Saint Paul's Avenue, Boston, MA 02130-3491

Printed in the U.S.A.

www.pauline.org

Pauline Books & Media is the publishing house of the Daughters of St. Paul, an international congregation of women religious serving the Church with the communications media.

I 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

19 18 17 16 15

Contents



How to Use This Book	1
Liturgical Calendar	3
First Week of Advent	6
December 8 — Immaculate Conception	24
Second Week of Advent	26
Third Week of Advent	44
Sunday of the Fourth Week of Advent	60
December 17 to December 24	
December 17	66
December 18	68
December 19	70
December 20	72
December 21	74
December 22	76
December 23	78
December 24 — Mass in the Morning	80
December 25 — Christmas Midnight Mass	84
The Octave of Christmas	
December 26 — Saint Stephen	86

December 27 — Saint John the Evangelist	88
December 28 — Holy Innocents	90
December 29	92
December 30	94
December 31	96
Holy Family — Sunday in the Octave of Christmas	98
January 1 — Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God	104
Before Epiphany	
January 2 — before Epiphany	106
January 3 — if before Epiphany	108
January 4 — if before Epiphany	110
January 5 — if before Epiphany	112
January 6 — if before Epiphany	114
January 7 — if before Epiphany	116
Epiphany	118
After Epiphany	
Monday after Epiphany — or January 7	120
Tuesday after Epiphany — or January 8	122
Wednesday after Epiphany — or January 9	124
Thursday after Epiphany — or January 10	126
Friday after Epiphany — or January 11	128
Saturday after Epiphany — or January 12	130
Baptism of the Lord	132
List of Contributors	138

How to Use This Book



Come, Lord Jesus!

Advent is the short and appealing liturgical season that helps us prepare for Christmas. Its spirit of expectation and eager waiting evokes in our hearts a desire for Christ's coming in grace. In this book, members of the Daughters of St. Paul share their reflections on the Gospel readings for the Advent and Christmas seasons, which concludes with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Our Founder, Blessed James Alberione, encouraged everyone to "take delight in the Gospel." In the liturgy, the Church presents passages from the Gospel for us to ponder and pray over, encouraging us to look into our hearts and the heart of the God who comes.

These pages are based on *Lectio Divina* (holy reading), which is a way of praying with Scripture. Many methods of doing this have developed since the time of early monasticism. Here, the sisters use a simple framework that allows the Word of God to make room in our minds and hearts

The first step, *Lectio* (reading), is to read the day's Gospel passage from a missal or Bible. Read it a few times slowly, perhaps especially noticing the phrase or verse that is listed under the *Meditatio* section.

Next, the *Meditatio* (meditation) expands the meaning of a phrase from the passage and explores what it is saying to us

today—what God asks of us, or challenges us with, or offers to us. After reading the meditation, take as much time as you wish to reflect on it.

The *Oratio* (prayer) can help you talk to God about what has arisen in your heart, so that the time of prayer becomes a conversation, not just a time to think. God has spoken in the Scripture. We hear the invitation in our meditation, but now a response is called for. Our response is not just to say, “Yes, I want to do as you are asking me,” but also to say, “Help me do it, Lord!”

The short line under *Contemplatio* (contemplation) is a way of extending this time of prayer into life. You can silently repeat the line throughout the day to help deepen the intimacy with the Lord that you experienced in prayer.

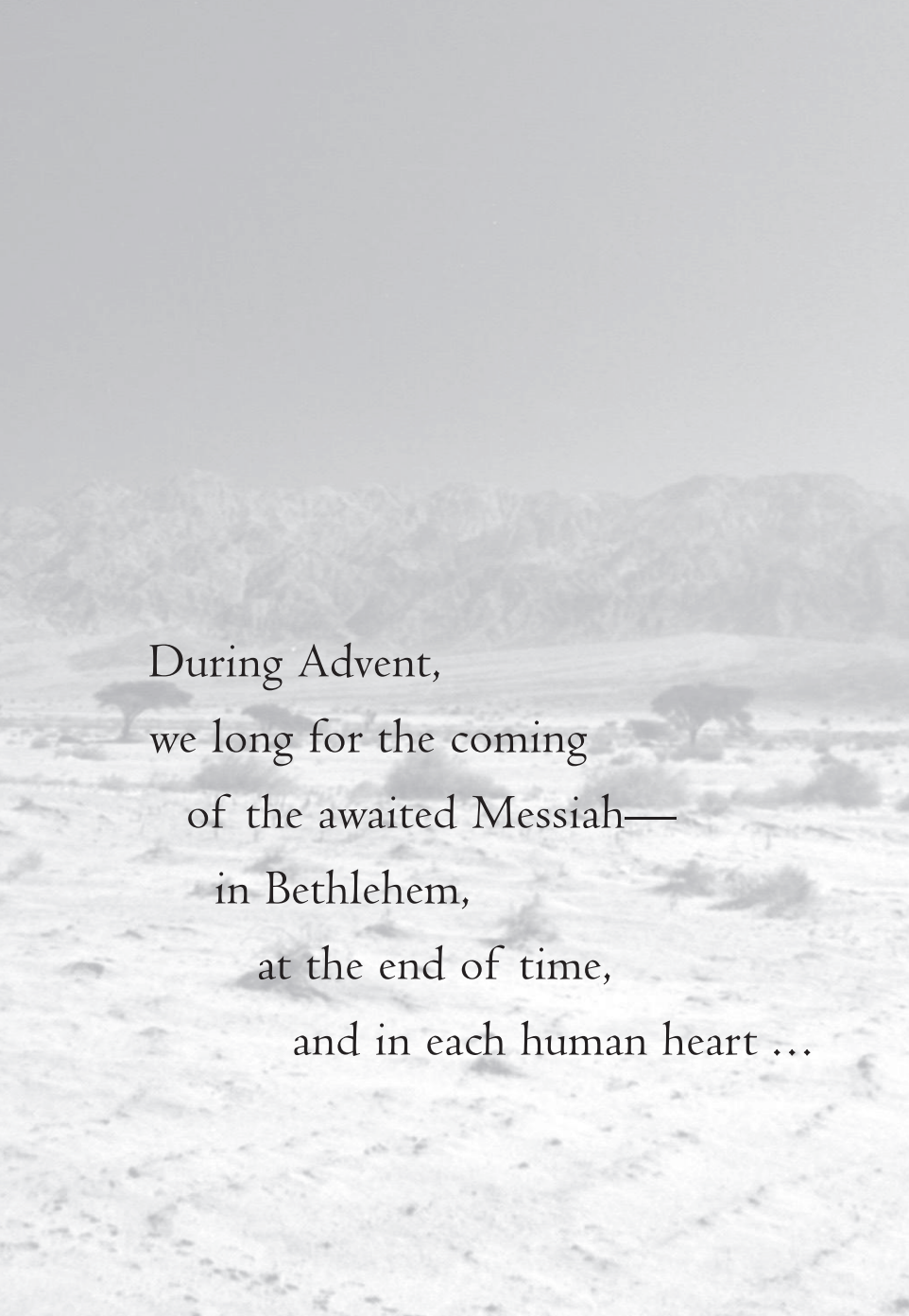
May your Advent and Christmas be grace-filled and abundantly blessed!

Liturgical Calendar



Note to the reader: Advent begins four Sundays before December 25. The first Sunday of Advent begins the Church's liturgical year. The readings are assigned for the weekdays of Advent by week and day (e.g., Tuesday of the Second Week). A special series of readings begins on December 17. The Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle (A, B, or C) as indicated in the chart below. Before Epiphany, the weekday readings are assigned by date, beginning on January 2. In the United States and Canada, Epiphany is celebrated on the Sunday between January 2 and January 8. After Epiphany, the readings are assigned by day of the week (eg. Monday after Epiphany). However in places where Epiphany is still celebrated on January 6, the readings for the days after it are given by date (eg. January 7 through 12).

YEAR	CYCLE
2016	Cycle C
2017	Cycle A
2018	Cycle B
2019	Cycle C
2020	Cycle A
2021	Cycle B
2022	Cycle C
2023	Cycle A



During Advent,
we long for the coming
of the awaited Messiah—
in Bethlehem,
at the end of time,
and in each human heart ...



Sunday of the First Week of Advent — A



Lectio

Matthew 24:37–44

Meditatio

“... *your Lord* ...”

This startling reading from Matthew certainly gets our attention. It alerts us that this first day of Advent ushers us into an entirely new season. The liturgy warns: Pay attention! Stay awake! When they least expect it, chaotic events upset people’s lives, with dire consequences: “one will be taken, and one will be left.” But what can it mean? Jesus exhorts us again and again: Stay awake! Be prepared! You do not know the hour! The warnings may alarm us, but they are meant to prepare us for the coming of Christ.

References to Noah and the flood unsettle me. Had I been there, would I have believed Noah? If I had been among the women grinding at the mill, would I have been taken or left? Then Jesus speaks of a burglar, noting that the owner of a house would prevent a robbery if he knew when it would happen. What do all these references have to do with me? Chapter 24 is about the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus. Jesus is coming again! That is why we must stay awake.

This Gospel reminds me of the wise and foolish virgins with their oil lamps. They all fall asleep. That somehow makes me feel better. When I am really sleepy I can hardly keep my eyes open! But some virgins are better prepared than the others. Although all the virgins fall asleep, the wise virgins had anticipated a long wait and had brought extra oil. And they are ready with their lighted lamps to welcome the bridegroom when he finally arrives.

Today's text includes a subtle word that makes this reading much more personal and offers us hope: "For you do not know on which day your Lord will come." *Your* Lord. You are my Lord, Jesus, our Lord. You are no stranger, no uncaring, unfamiliar master. You are my Lord and my God. I too want to be present, Jesus, waiting for you: awake and ready anytime you want to approach me.

Oratio

Jesus, it is no thief or burglar who is breaking in; it is you. You study the fortress I've built around myself, scanning my ramparts for that one fatal flaw. Be that thief in the night and come! Burgle me, Lord! Break through the walls. You are my Lord and my Savior and desire only my good. I want nothing between us, nothing to separate us, especially the defenses I have built up over the years. Jesus, break through them and allow me to really know you.

Contemplatio

Jesus, you are my Lord and my Savior.

Sunday of the First Week of Advent — B



Lectio

Mark 13:33–37

Meditatio

“Watch!”

Today Advent begins with the repeated cry: “Watch!” This word appears four times in today’s Gospel. Jesus doesn’t simply say, “Wait for me to come.” Rather, he wants us to actively anticipate his return, to prepare everything to celebrate his arrival!

Perhaps we find ourselves torn between two responses to this command of the Lord. Perhaps lately we have been indifferent toward spiritual realities, worn down by the endless activities and worries that fill our hearts and haunt our thoughts. Jesus’ “Watch!” gently nudges us from our tired sleep and rekindles our enthusiasm in our walk with the Lord. On the other hand, with fewer than thirty “shopping days ’til Christmas,” we may dread the endless check-out lines, traffic snarls, unpredictable weather, and preparations for Christmas parties and gifts. Jesus’ invitation to “Watch!” reassures us: he asks only for a childlike excitement about his love for us that gives our lives meaning.

Advent is a time to check our spiritual eyesight. To what degree are we watching and waiting? Do we have 20/20 vision? How excited are we?

To prepare for Christmas you may make lists, schedules, menus, and plans. Today, take a moment to write down some concrete spiritual plans as you watch for the coming of the Lord. Advent is a time for envisioning change. What is your image of a deeply Christ-filled life? Choose two concrete changes in your life that would make you excited and give more meaning to your following of the Lord. Get your vision down to a concrete plan by answering the five basic questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why?

Each Advent morning, watch for the Lord by rereading your plan, preparing for the day ahead. Watch for just one day at a time; Jesus will come not only upon his return at the end of time, but he will also come today ... not just once, but many times. If you watch you will be surprised at how often he is here!

Oratio

Jesus, Advent is such a lovely time. I'm getting excited that this year it could be different for me. Help me keep the excitement of a child in the midst of the hustle and bustle. Give me the eyes to see you every time you walk into my life. Amen.

Contemplatio

Jesus, I am watching!

Sunday of the First Week of Advent — C



Lectio

Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

Meditatio

*“But when these signs begin to happen,
stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”*

A few radio stations began playing Christmas music weeks ago. The malls and department stores are decked out for the holiday gift season. Lights twinkle in the trees around town. And here we are starting Advent with one of the classic “hellfire and brimstone” texts. Christians! Sometimes we’re a contrary bunch.

Contrary indeed. In the midst of dire warnings about signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and an exhortation to avoid carousing and drunkenness, Jesus interjects a new, unexpected note: “... stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

The end of the world as we know it is coming—but if Jesus is to be believed, it is not a doom and gloom event. He reminds us that we are looking forward to a time of redemption and salvation in its full expression. This gives us the confidence to stand and look to the future with joyful expectation.

Today we begin Advent, the liturgical time of waiting. In a certain sense, we always live in advent expectation. Christ has come, and yet we also claim that Christ will come again. The kingdom of God is in our midst, and yet we pray each day: “Thy Kingdom come.” Theologians speak of the time of “already and the not yet.”

Our redemption is at hand. It is already here. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He died on Calvary, and, most significantly, he rose again at Easter. In this sense, the redemption is an accomplished fact. Viewed from another perspective, however, the redemption is being worked out in our daily thoughts, choices, words, and actions. In this sense, too, our redemption is at hand. It is lived out in the here-and-now moments of life.

Christmas is coming. The signs are everywhere. Christ is coming. Are the signs evident in our lives?

Oratio

Lord, sometimes I am annoyed and at other times I am amused at the contrast between the prayerful unfolding of Advent’s great themes and the gauntlet of December rituals expected in society. Help me to keep my focus on the signs of your coming. You come in gentle, hidden ways. Don’t let me miss you when you come in the disguise of people I may be tempted to ignore: the poor, the weak, the suffering, the person who annoys or insults me. . .

Contemplatio

Christ has come. Christ will come again.

Monday of the First Week of Advent



Lectio

Matthew 8:5–11

Meditatio

“I will come . . .”

In the movie *August Rush*, the eleven-year-old orphan Evan Taylor hopes to be reunited with his birth parents, whom he has never known. His parents, Lyla and Louis, fall in love but are separated. Lyla has a child, but her father gives the child up for adoption without Lyla’s knowledge. With the vision possible only to the human heart, Evan clings to the hope he will one day be reunited with his parents. Evan can be for us an icon of Advent hope. He longs to know he is not alone, to know that he is loved.

During Advent, we also long for the coming of the awaited Messiah—in Bethlehem, at the end of time, and in each human heart, including our own. Like Evan, we also cry out: “Come!”

Similarly, the centurion in today’s Gospel pleads with Jesus to heal a sick servant. The centurion trusts Jesus so much that he believes Jesus’ word has power to bring relief and healing. Situations of pain or paralysis in our own lives

can open us up to cry out for healing. This desire prompts us to reach out to those we trust: a spouse, a close friend or relative, a parent, mentor, spiritual guide, God. Sometimes a simple word or gesture from someone significant reassures us that we are not alone. How powerful are the words: “I’ll be right there,” or, “I am with you.”

Ponder for a moment the first three words of Jesus’ response to the centurion’s request: “I will come . . .” Every time we call out to him, our loving God says the same thing: “I will come.” Jesus manifests his desire to come and be with us not just at certain moments, but all the time. Just as Evan Taylor’s hopeful expectation for reunion is finally fulfilled, our longing for God’s presence will also be fulfilled. The Lord reassures us: “I am with you always . . .” (Mt 28:20).

Oratio

Lord, come anew into this heart made by you, hungry for you. Come into my heart, my mind, my life, my entire being, body and soul. Heal what is broken in me; give life to what is paralyzed within me. I believe you can do all things, and that you want to come and heal. Like the centurion, who asked for healing for his servant, I also ask you to bless and heal those for whom I pray today, especially for: (*pause to mention names*).

Come, Emmanuel, God with us.

Contemplatio

“Come, O Lord. Do not delay.”