

Second SUNDAY

of

Advent

December 6, 2020

John the Baptist
appeared in the
desert proclaiming
a baptism of
repentance for the
forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:4

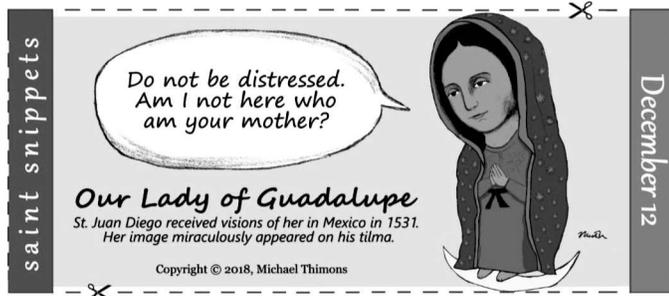
Feast of Faith

Watching for Christ's Coming

In the season of Advent, we look to the coming of Christ at the end of time, and we prepare ourselves to celebrate his first coming among us at Christmas. Remembrance of the past is combined with preparation for the future. Memory meets action.

In a certain sense, the Mass is an Advent prayer. At the Last Supper, Jesus did not tell his disciples, "Never forget what I did for you." Instead, he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." He calls us to remember by doing, to combine memory with action. In the celebration of the Eucharist, remembering and doing become one. Jesus is as present in our midst as he was in that upper room, breaking the bread and sharing the cup; but it is a new kind of presence, seen only with the eyes of faith. In the heavenly liturgy, there will be no need of sacraments, for there, "celebration is wholly communion and feast" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1136). Here, things are different. We have only glimpses and flashes of the beauty that is yet to be. And yet, in the liturgy, we truly participate in the heavenly liturgy. The Mass is our foretaste of the joys of heaven.

—Corinna Laughlin, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



God's Delay

In times of great difficulties scoffers taunt us, "Where is God? Why hasn't your Lord come to save you now?" And we of faith respond much in the same way as Peter did in today's second reading: the "delay" of the Lord's second coming is not any type of punishment or failure to keep the divine promise, but a loving sign of God's patience. God is giving everyone the chance to seek repentance.

God does not make life more difficult. Rather, God lessens our burdens as once before for the Jewish exiles returning home to Judea after captivity in Babylon. It was God who personally led them, making a "straight highway" for them across the desert.

We join with our ancestors of faith, who hoped that they might see God's Chosen One before them and who eventually realized that the Lord was also walking with them side by side.

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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Is 35:1-10; Ps 85:9ab, 10-14; Lk 5:17-26
Tuesday:	Gn 3:9-15, 20; Ps 98:1-4; Eph 1:3-6, 11-12; Lk 1:26-38
Wednesday:	Is 40:25-31; Ps 103:1-4, 8, 10; Mt 11:28-30
Thursday:	Is 41:13-20; Ps 145:1, 9, 10-13ab; Mt 11:11-15
Friday:	Is 48:17-19; Ps 1:1-4; Mt 11:16-19
Saturday:	Zec 2:14-17 or Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab; Jdt 13:18bcde, 19; Lk 1:26-38 or Lk 1:39-47, or any readings from the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary, nos. 707-712
Sunday:	Is 61:1-2a, 10-11; Lk 1:46-50, 53-54; 1 Thes 5:16-24; Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Second Sunday of Advent
Monday:	St. Ambrose; Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
Tuesday:	The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Wednesday:	St. Juan Diego
Thursday:	International Human Rights Day; Hanukkah begins at sunset
Friday:	St. Damasus I
Saturday:	Our Lady of Guadalupe



Today's Readings

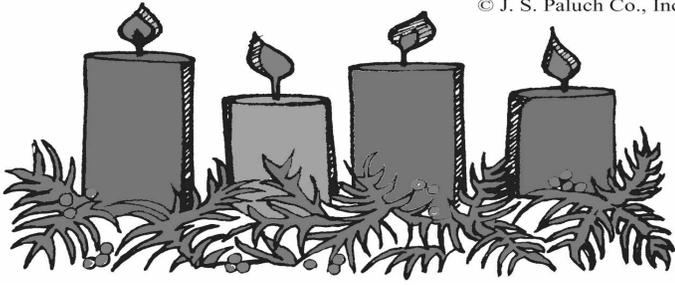
First Reading — The rugged land shall be made a plain; the rough country, a broad valley (Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11).

Psalm — Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation (Psalm 85).

Second Reading — Conduct yourselves in holiness, hastening the coming of the day of God (2 Peter 3:8-14).

Gospel — I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:1-8).

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**Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill
shall be made low.**

—Isaiah 40:4

Treasures From Our Tradition

“Outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace” is the often-memorized definition of sacrament, but through more than five decades of reform we have rediscovered the power of sacrament to bestow grace by reshaping our lives as individuals and communities. Not so long ago, most people were not attentive to the nature of sacrament as an act of the Church, a power that flows from the Body of Christ. Fifty years ago, we were inclined to see a sacrament as an encounter between Christ and an individual.

Today, we see that definition does not go far enough. God’s grace is not a trickle, but a gushing torrent washing over the whole Church. Like a photographer pulling back the camera for a broader picture, today we are not only interested in the person who is being baptized, reconciled, or anointed. We think about how celebrating a sacrament transforms a community. We think about the grace given by Christ to the community that baptizes or marries or ordains or confirms. Sacraments are for the good of the community. Even when it appears to be a private, hidden moment, as in individual confession, a sacrament is always for the sake of the whole body, always more than “meets the eye.”

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Second Sunday of Advent Prepare the Way of the Lord

Saint Peter shows us a characteristic of God that we normally do not think about. He tells us that for God, "a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day" (1 Peter 3:8). Somehow, God is not restricted by time as we are. Taken literally, that seems to violate the laws of physics. Of course, God made those laws, so if anyone can ignore them, God certainly could. More likely, because early Christians sometimes complained that Jesus' second coming had been delayed, Peter is trying to tell us that what seems like a long time to us is nothing to God.

Like the early Christians, we may wonder how long it will take for God to answer our prayers. We may be praying for someone who is looking for a job, a sick relative, an end to abortion, or world peace.

Some prayers just take time to be answered, especially if a large number of people need to change their hearts to make it happen. Some prayers require us to change, and we may not be ready.

What Peter means is that a thousand years is not too long for God if someone needs that long to repent. God is far more patient than we are. If someone had been fighting me for months or years, I would probably give up on them. But God can wait till we

are mature enough to face our sins and be sorry for them. In the same way, God has been "waiting" over two thousand years for us to preach the gospel to all nations. God has been waiting for millennia for people to give up war as a means for solving our problems. God has been waiting since the beginning of the human race for us to learn how to love our neighbor.

We might not be as patient as God but we can help. Saint Peter says that we are not just waiting for the Lord's return, we are hastening it. When we make a choice that is based on faith rather than selfishness, we make it a little easier for people to believe in God. Jesus is the light of the world; he asks us to let our light shine, so that people can see Jesus in us. May our light "prepare the way of the Lord" (Mark 1:3).

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repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:4

COMFORT

In 2020, we heard plenty of voices speaking out and sharing their opinions, but many of those words were not comforting or hope-filled. Sometimes, it was hard to know which expert or “instant expert” to listen to, and it is still difficult to hope as we struggle to regain our balance as a nation and as a Church. The Word of God offers us peace this day. All our readings remind us of a faithful God who always keeps the promises made. Isaiah prophesied about the end of Jerusalem’s time away from God, and the Psalm speaks of “seeing God’s kindness and hearing what God proclaims.” Second Peter explains that God’s timing may not be the same as ours, but good things await those who are alert. In the Gospel, John the Baptist reiterates and completes the prophecy of Isaiah by laying the groundwork and preparing the way for those who await the coming of the Messiah.

THE BEGINNING

With COVID-19, much time is spent wondering “where did it start?” or “who passed it on to whom?” Though science can tell us much there are many unanswered questions. Today’s Gospel is about as concrete as sacred scripture gets. We know this is the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, which was the first Gospel to be written down in about 70 AD. Unlike Luke and John, Mark does not begin with an infancy narrative of Jesus. He starts by proclaiming the prophecy of Isaiah. This section was written six hundred years before Christ, in another time of great upheaval, as the Israelites were displaced from their homeland during the Babylonian Exile. The first words of Isaiah 40 are “Comfort, comfort, my people.” John the Baptist starts by explaining he is the go-between, sent to “Prepare the way.”

DON’T SHOOT THE MESSENGER

While proclaiming the coming Christ is a thing of joy, John’s words are also harsh, reminding us to repent and prepare. People were threatened by them two thousand years ago, and some still are today. People can hear them and be turned off by “fire and brimstone,” and none of us like to be told what to do. But think about it. This year, we have all engaged in social distancing and endured hardships to protect our families and others.

Similarly, when you have company coming, you do house cleaning, meal prep, and lots of things to make the place ready for the arrival of your guests—necessary preparation. So we as individuals must make ourselves ready for the coming Christ to reside in us. This may mean repenting for sins, seeking the sacrament of penance, or taking time with a spiritual director. Perhaps it means carving out more times and places for Christ to be born in our hearts or taking on another spiritual practice. Maybe it means simply doing what the psalm asked and using our eyes and ears and mind and heart to seek Christ.

TODAY’S READINGS

Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11
Psalm 85:9–10, 11–12, 13–14
2 Peter 3:8–14
Mark 1:1–8

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Prayer of the Faithful

Salvation is near to those who seek the Lord. Let us therefore bring our prayers to our loving God, whose kindness is without end.

For Christians persecuted and at risk throughout the world, especially in Syria, Iran, and Asia, let us pray to the Lord.

For the world of peace that God proclaims to all people, especially in the hearts of cities torn apart by gangs and violence, let us pray to the Lord.

For those who are oppressed, political prisoners, falsely accused, and all who long for a better day in their lives, let us pray to the Lord.

For a peaceful conclusion to the 2020 presidential election as the electors gather this week, let us pray to the Lord.

For the safety of the men and women on the front lines in this continuing pandemic, for their families, and for all who place their lives in danger in service of others, let us pray to the Lord.

For all of us gathered here, as we persevere in waiting for the day of the Lord and work to hasten its coming, let us pray to the Lord.

For all those who are sick, for all who suffer from COVID-19, and for all who have died, especially N., N., and N., let us pray to the Lord.

For all the prayers that we hold in the silence of our hearts; for all our intentions spoken and unspoken, let us pray to the Lord.

**God of tender mercy,
hear these our prayers
and give us the grace to prepare well
for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
into our hearts and at the end of time,
for he is Lord for ever and ever.**

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CATHOLIC CORNER

In his arms he gathers the lambs.
Isaiah 40 : 11



"GOD WITH US"

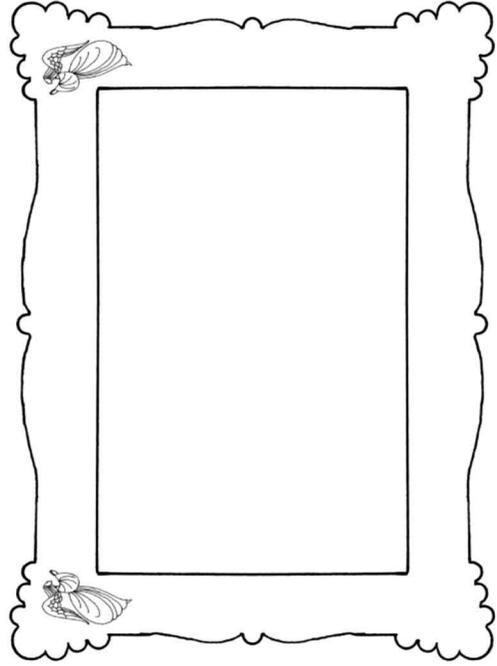
Isaiah the prophet gives us another description that helps us know something about the birth of the Messiah. Read this verse and think about what Isaiah is telling us.

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign,
the (young woman) shall be with child, and bear a son,
and shall name him Immanuel.*

(Isaiah 7:14)

When the Messiah comes into this world as a child, says Isaiah, he will need a very special mother. People wondered who that mother would be. We know that God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth to tell this young woman she would become the mother of God. Do you know the name of that woman? The angel told her the baby would be named Jesus. The name Immanuel means "God with us."

Draw a picture of the angel and the mother of Jesus.
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