Creator of the Stars of Night

Creator of the stars of night,
   Your people's everlasting Light,
O Christ, Redeemer of us all,
   We pray you hear us when we call.
In Sorrow that the ancient curse,
   should doom to death a universe,
You came, O Savior, to set free,
   your own in glorious liberty.
Come, Sun and Savior, to embrace,
   Our gloomy world, its weary race,
As groom to bride, as bride to groom,
   The wedding chamber, Mary's womb.
At your great name, O Jesus, now,
   All knees must bend, all hearts must bow;
All things on earth, with one accord,
   Like those in heav'n, shall call you Lord.
Come in your holy might, we pray,
   Redeem us for eternal day;
Defend us while we dwell below,
   From all assaults of our dread foe.

- Advent evening hymn from the 8th century
A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew:

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us."

– Matthew 1:18-23

Guidance from St. Ignatius: Discovering Emmanuel, God with us, day by day

What do I dwell upon through the course of each day? To what am I giving my attention, my life, my concern, my thought, my energy? Where is my heart throughout each day? What are the emotions I most commonly experience? What am I dwelling on?

To make more deliberate choices about how we spend our energies and our lives, we want to stop once or twice each day to re-orient our awareness, our consciousness, our focus. We do this by asking two simple questions: What has happened so far today for which I am already grateful? And, what has happened so far today for which I could have been grateful, or should have been grateful, but I missed it entirely or let go of it too quickly?

By asking the first question, we “re-train” our awareness to notice and hold onto experiences of goodness. This is important because our awareness has been trained to be much more attentive to those things which are imperfect or undone. To the extent that this is true for us, we are not experiencing the goodness that is already part of our lives.

The second question allows us to go back through our day and sift through it all with a finer sieve, in order to find the gold we had missed the first time through. It is crucial to remember that we are not searching for that which was perfect, but rather for that which was good. Often we can discover moments of goodness even in the midst of some of the most challenging experiences of the day. “I apologized to someone this morning, and it went pretty well.” That’s worth being grateful for! “My teenager told me about something that happened at school, and spoke an entire paragraph.” That, too, is worthy of gratitude!

We want to be as concrete and specific as we can when we answer these questions. We sift through the ordinary things that make up our days: our conversations and interactions with others, the things we have done, the matters we have mulled over, the feelings we have had. The goal of our reflection is to recognize and savor the moments of goodness that are part of our everyday lives.

By reclaiming our awareness of the very concrete and particular experiences of goodness each day, we reclaim our sense of the presence of God in all the moments of our lives. We come to know more deeply the truth that God walks with us, shepherds us and abides with us, and is intimately involved in our daily lives — all of which are expressions of God’s love.
And close the path to misery.
Make safe the way that leads on high.
And open wide our heavenly home!

And come, Thou Key of David; come,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night.

Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Our Day-spring, come and cheer.

O come, Thou Root of Jesse; free.
And give them victory over the grave.
From depths of hell Thy people save,
Thine own from Satan's tyranny.

And come, O come, Great Lord of might;
Who ordrest all things mystically,
Until the Son of God appear.
That mourns in lonely exile here.

And ransom captive Israel.
O come, O come, Emmanuel,
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel!

Rejoice! Rejoice! O Israel.
And be Thyself our King of peace.
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease.

In one the hearts of all mankind,
Desire of nations, bind.

All people on Thy mercy call.
Before Thee rulers silent fall.

An ensign of Thy people be;
O come, Thou Root of Jesse, tree.

In cloud and majesty and awe.
In ancient times once gave the law.

Who to Thy tribes on Sinim's height
Who, to Thy people, came and save.

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And teach us in her ways to go.
To us the path of knowledge show,
Who address all things mystically.

Until the Son of God appear.
That mourns in lonely exile here.

And ransom captive Israel.
O come, O come, Emmanuel,
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel!