

“Then the angel said to her, ' Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.'Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.'”

Luke 1:30-31, 38

Third Week of Advent: Dec. 16 - 22, 2012

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The Third Week of Advent

Sunday of the Third Week of Advent begins with **the Prophet Zephaniah's** announcement of liberation and God's presence among the people after decades of their own infidelity. In **Luke's Gospel** John the Baptist is the focus of the expectation in the people who come to him asking what to do. He exhorts them to integrity and charity and announces the one who is to come: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

On Monday we reach the last eight days of Advent and the focus of the weekday readings returns to the gospels with stories from Jesus' family in the time before he was born. In **Matthew's** genealogy, we see the ancestors of Jesus. Joseph decides to divorce the pregnant Mary until an angel appears to him in a dream, saying, “It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” The rest of the week we have nearly all of the first chapter of **Luke's gospel**. Elizabeth and Zechariah, struggling with their inability to have a child, are told they will have a child named John who will be filled with the Holy Spirit. When Zechariah doubts, he is struck speechless. Thursday's gospel is the beloved story from Luke's gospel of the Annunciation with Mary's humble response, “May it be done to me according to your word.” Mary sets out to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. “When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb” and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary's response to Elizabeth: “My soul proclaims the greatness

Daily Prayer This Week

The third week of Advent this year is especially full because it is essentially the last week of Advent. In these familiar readings is an invitation to us to ask again for help, perhaps especially in dealing with our fears. In many of this week's gospels an angel, a messenger from God, reassures these holy but very human members of Jesus' family over and over: “Do not be afraid.”

Fear can stop us from asking God for the very help we need in our lives. In the midst of what our culture tells us should be a picture-perfect holiday season, we can step back and get in touch with our fears and ask God to help us deal with the relationships we are afraid of, the family tensions that make us apprehensive and the stress that can take us out of the spirit of Advent reflection.

If we pause for just a minute, we can feel in our hearts that Jesus is saying gently to us each day: “Do not be afraid.” These very busy days can still be a time for us to focus our desires, perhaps each morning at the side of our bed, while in the shower or while going about our daily errands. We can ask God to remind us again that what we are doing in our daily lives is touched by the sacred because God is present in even the most mundane tasks.

“Lord, let me place my trust in you. I get so independent and think I need to fix everything myself. Let me remember not to be afraid of so much and to ask you for the

of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior for he has looked upon his lowly servant...From this day all generations will call me blessed.”

The **Fourth Sunday of Advent** begins a brief, two-day final week of Advent. The reading from Micah reminds us that from the seemingly unimportant town of Bethlehem, “from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” **Luke's gospel** offers again the story of Mary's going to visit her cousin. Elizabeth understands immediately Mary's situation and praises God saying, “How does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.”

healing that my heart needs so badly.

Give me the patience this week to deal with the relationships in my life that need mending and the forgiveness that I can give others and that I need so badly myself. Be with me through the darkness so that I can see the light that you bring to us and the joy with which you want to fill our hearts.”

We are moving toward the end of our Advent journey. Even if we don't feel like we have “started” on Advent yet, we can begin today. We are being invited: “Do not be afraid!”

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