



Guide for Prayer for the week of Dec. 18-24, 2005

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The Fourth Week of Advent

With the **Fourth Sunday of Advent** we are in the second part of Advent. Our focus is now on the story, as told to us by Luke and Matthew. It begins with the Annunciation and Mary's response: "Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.'"

Luke's Gospel is our guide this week. Monday we read the revelation to Zechariah. Tuesday is the Annunciation to Mary. Wednesday and Thursday are the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. Friday and Saturday are the naming of John by Zechariah. The scenes and canticles, or songs, that are part of the story are so well known to us that we can miss hearing them with an open heart.

The readings from the Old Testament are now here to support the gospels with the stories and prophecies that are fulfilled in these gospels.

On **Christmas Eve** we celebrate the **Vigil of Christmas**. The Gospel for this liturgy is the Genealogy in **Matthew's Gospel** (though any of the gospels for Christmas may be used at any of the Christmas liturgies).

The first celebration of **The Nativity of the Lord** is the **Mass at Midnight**. The first reading is from **Isaiah**: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." This powerful reading deserves a slow contemplation. The Gospel is from **Luke**: the journey to Bethlehem, the birth, the angels announce the birth to the shepherds. The second celebration of **The Nativity of the Lord** is the **Mass at Dawn**. The Gospel is from **Luke**: the shepherds visit the newborn child. "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." The third celebration of **The Nativity of the Lord** is the **Mass during the Day**. Here the Gospel is from the beginning of **John's Gospel**: "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

Daily Prayer This Week

Even though this may be a very busy week, with final Christmas preparations, or perhaps travel to visit family, it can be a contemplative week if we focus our desires each morning. No matter what our days hold, we can take a few minutes in the shower or while getting dressed to consciously ask for the grace to approach Christmas with faith and with a heart open to the graces offered us. "Lord, help me today to stay focused on your coming in the flesh to be with us. While I'm busy about this and that, I ask your help. Keep reminding me throughout this day about Mary's acceptance of your plan for her, about the poverty into which Jesus was born." We will use our own words to connect these stories of our Salvation with the concrete interactions and events of our upcoming day.

Then, throughout the day, we will be able to let familiar parts of the story sustain us this week. All of us can relate to Zechariah's hesitation. We can look for and notice the times when we are hesitant to place our trust in God and how little we have to say about faith. But, when Zechariah could say "His name is John (God is gracious)," Zechariah could speak again. As we rush from one place to another, we can pray, "Lord, I know you are gracious, even when I act like I doubt it. Let me place my trust in you." A number of helpful contemplations are available on the [Praying Advent](#) site.

Mary herself can be a wonderful guide for us this week, and we can be bold in asking her to show us the graces her Son wants to give us this week. The one who says "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" and "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord" can help us find words for our "yes" and for our giving praise to God this week.

It could be a great grace to pause before going to church, Christmas eve or Christmas morning, as individuals or for a brief prayer as a family, to ask for the grace to be touched by how he came in history for us and how he comes now among us still, to set us free.

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