

Fourth Sunday of Advent



How Can This Be?

O Most High,
you who sent beautiful and fearsome
Gabriel to Mary,
we rejoice in that moment.
Troubled, she pondered. How not to fear?
Yet she met his eyes with her question.
She listened: the Holy Spirit, the power of
the Most High,
the Son of God.
All this you prepared and proposed
to give us yourself.
We ask for her courage,
to receive you,
to meet your eyes, to ask, to ponder,
to be a faithful handmaid.
We ask this through the same Lord Jesus
Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Faithfulness and Kindness

Today's Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89: 2–3, 4–5, 27, 29; Romans 16:25–27; Luke 1:26–38. The connection between the First Reading and the Gospel today is hard to miss. In the First Reading, David is told of the heir that will come from him, and in the Gospel, Mary hears that her son will receive "the throne of his ancestor David." With that throne comes a kingdom. David is told that his kingdom will never end and Mary hears the same of her son's kingdom.

The attitude of the main characters in these stories, though, varies greatly. Mary, who is a model of discipleship, appears to rest in the Lord. She waits and listens for the Lord. When the angel Gabriel has delivered the message, her willingness to do God's will is apparent. King David, sure that he needs to do something for God, plans to build a house for the

Lord. Through Nathan, David hears that it is the Lord who has accomplished much for him and will continue to look after him. David need not establish a house for the Lord; the Lord will establish a house for David.

Should you look up the Second Reading in the Bible, you will find that it is a doxology concluding St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. Sometimes these doxologies are hard to understand out of context. It is best to read the doxology slowly. When read phrase by phrase, we see that St. Paul is telling the Church in Rome that God is their strength and should be glorified. The Church has come to understand this strength through the Good News that Paul has spread, Christ's proclamation, and the prophetic writings. With Christmas only days away, these readings help us consider how we listen for God and how our words and deeds glorify him.

This Week at Home

Monday, December 22, 2014

O Rex Gentium, O King of the nations

Both of today's readings tell of improbable births. In the First Reading from 1 Samuel, we hear of Hannah, who had been sterile, but upon praying to the Lord she bore Samuel. In the Gospel, Mary visits Elizabeth, who in old age bears a child. As Mary meets Elizabeth, she proclaims how God has come to her in her lowliness. In these days before Christmas, you might want to make Mary's prayer yours. Consider praying the *Magnificat* each evening before the family meal. Today's Readings: 1 Samuel 1:24–28; Psalm: 1 Samuel 2:1, 4–5, 6–7, 8abcd; Luke 1:46–56.

Tuesday, December 23, 2014

St. John Kanty, Priest

O Emmanuel, O Emmanuel

John of Kanty (1390–1473) was a humble priest who shared what he had with the poor. He was able to do so because he placed his trust in God. Today's Gospel portrays the trust that Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, had in God. After John the Baptist was born, Zechariah would not allow the baby to be named after him. The child's name would be John, the name given by the angel. Is our trust in the Lord evident to others? Today's Readings: Malachi 3:1–4, 23–24; Psalm 25:4–5ab, 8–9, 10 and 14; Luke 1:57–66.

Wednesday, December 24, 2014

Blessed Be the Lord!

Today's Gospel contains the Canticle of Zechariah. You have been encouraged to pray the words of the *Magnificat*, the Canticle of Mary, at the evening meal. In the Liturgy of the Hours, the Canticle of Zechariah (the *Benedictus*, Luke 1:67–79) is prayed during Morning Prayer. Consider adding this prayer to your daily prayers. People from around the world celebrate the Nativity of the Lord in various ways. What are the traditions that you cherish? Today's Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2–3, 4–5, 27 and 29; Luke 1:67–79.

Thursday, December 25, 2014

The Nativity of the Lord

Even though you have read and heard the story of Jesus's birth many times, try to take a few minutes alone today to reflect on verses 8–14 from today's Gospel. In these verses, heaven reaches out to the shepherds, penetrating their senses and emotions. The glory of the Lord shines before them, and they are fearful. The angels sing and they leave with haste to find the Savior. How do you allow the message to reach your senses? Today's Readings (Mass during the Night): Isaiah 9:1–6; Psalm 96:1–2, 2–3, 11–12, 13; Titus 2:11–14; Luke 2:1–14.

Friday, December 26, 2014

**Feast of St. Stephen,
the First Martyr**

Stephen died as Jesus did: falsely accused and condemned to death because he spoke the truth fearlessly. Do people in your community face discrimination for their beliefs? Pray for all who face discrimination for proclaiming their faith and belief in Jesus Christ, especially those who face a martyr's death. Can you recall the names of some modern-day martyrs? Today's Readings: Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59; Psalm 31:3cd–4, 6 and 8ab, 16bc and 17; Matthew 10:17–22.

Saturday, December 27, 2014

**Feast of St. John,
Apostle and Evangelist**

We might be surprised to read an account of the Resurrection just two days after Christmas. This reading clearly links the Incarnation with the Resurrection, a unity celebrated throughout Christmas Time. Considering the connection of Christmas to Easter may enrich our celebration. We may move beyond just celebrating the birth of an infant to rejoicing that God loved us enough to send his Son to die and rise for us. Today's Readings: 1 John 1:1–4; Psalm 97:1–2, 5–6, 11–12; John 20:1a, 2–8.