



**CENTER FOR LEARNING**  
A DIVISION OF OCP

# **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS EDITION: SECOND QUARTER**

SEPT 25, 2023 10:00 AM PT



**THE  
LITURGY  
FORECAST**



**CENTER FOR  
LEARNING**  
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# PREPARATION MATERIALS



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# PREPARATION CONSIDERATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consult the documents, and the Ordo is your best friend. Use them!
2. Plan with a “seasonal” mindset.
3. Connect to Sunday and the parish experience, especially in Advent.
4. Think beyond Mass – Advent prayer service, Lessons and Carols, etc.
5. Don’t miss the opportunity for liturgical formation and catechesis.
6. Help families extend liturgical celebration and ritual into their homes.
7. Extend liturgical celebration and ritual into classrooms – Advent Wreath, etc.
8. Especially this time of year, don’t forget the Saints!
9. Less is more, repetition is good, and don’t neglect silence.
10. Incorporate styles and senses.
11. Do your best and ask for help.
- 12.
- 13.

## RESOURCES

Your parish, school chapel, or campus ministry office should have the following resources:

[General Instruction of the Roman Missal](#)

[Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar](#)

[The Lectionary for Masses with Children](#)

### *Helpful links*

[Liturgy.com planning resource](#)

[“Today’s Liturgy” music planner](#)

[Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions seasonal planning guides](#)

[Catholic High School Mass Planner and Checklist \(Archdiocese of Los Angeles\)](#)

# QUARTER LITURGICAL CALENDAR

## OVERVIEW

The Liturgical year changes with the First Sunday of Advent. Until December 3<sup>rd</sup>, we are in Year A of the Sunday Lectionary and Cycle I of the Weekday Lectionary. **Starting December 3<sup>rd</sup>, we are in Year B of the Sunday Lectionary and Cycle II of the Weekday Lectionary.** You can find the lectionary readings for the entire liturgical year on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website: [bible.usccb.org](http://bible.usccb.org).

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			11/1 <u>Solemnity of All Saints</u>	11/2 Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed	11/3 Friday in the 30 <sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/4 Memorial of Saint Charles Borromeo
11/5 <b>Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time</b>	11/6 Monday of the 31 <sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/7 Tuesday of the 31 <sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/8 Wednesday of the 31 <sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/9 <i>Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica</i>	11/10 Memorial of Saint Leo the Great	11/11 Memorial of Saint Martin of Tours
11/12 <b>Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time</b>	11/13 Memorial of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini	11/14 Tuesday of the 32 <sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/15 Wednesday of the 32 <sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/16 Thursday of the 32 <sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/17 Memorial of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary	11/18 Saturday of the 32 <sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time
11/19 <b>Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time</b>	11/20 Monday of the 33 <sup>rd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/21 Memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary	11/22 Memorial of Saint Cecilia	11/23 Thursday of the 34 <sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time Thanksgiving Day	11/24 Memorial of Saint Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions	11/25 Saturday of the 33 <sup>rd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time
11/26 <b>Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe</b>	11/27 Monday of the 34 <sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/28 Tuesday of the 34 <sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/29 Wednesday of the 34 <sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	11/30 <i>Feast of Saint Andrew</i>	December/1 Friday of the 34 <sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time	12/2 Saturday of the 34 <sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time
12/3 <b>First Sunday of Advent</b>	12/4 Monday of the First Week of Advent	12/5 Tuesday of the First Week of Advent	12/6 Wednesday of the First Week of Advent	12/7 Memorial of Saint Ambrose	12/8 <u>Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception</u>	12/9 Saturday of the First Week of Advent
12/10 <b>Second Sunday of Advent</b>	12/11 Monday of the Second Week of Advent	12/12 <i>Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe</i>	12/13 Memorial of Saint Lucy	12/14 Memorial of Saint John of the Cross	12/15 Friday of the Second Week of Advent	12/16 Saturday of the Second Week of Advent
12/17 <b>Third Sunday of Advent</b>	12/18 Monday of the Third Week of Advent	12/19 Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent	12/20 Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent	12/21 Thursday of the Third Week of Advent	12/22 Friday of the Third Week of Advent	12/23 Saturday of the Third Week of Advent
12/24 <b>Fourth Sunday of Advent</b>	12/25 <u>Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord</u>	12/26 <i>Feast of Saint Stephen</i>	12/27 <i>Feast of Saint John, the Apostle</i>	12/28 <i>Feast of the Holy Innocents</i>	12/29 The Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas	12/30 The Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas

12/31 <b>Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph</b>	January/1 <u>Solemnity of the Bl. Virgin Mary, Mother of God</u>	1/2 Memorial of Saints Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen	1/3 Christmas Weekday	1/4 Memorial of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton	1/5 Memorial of Saint John Neumann	1/6 Christmas Weekday
1/7 <b>Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord</b>	1/8 <i>Feast of the Baptism of the Lord</i>	1/9 Tuesday of the First Week of Ordinary Time	1/10 Wednesday of the First Week in Ordinary Time	1/11 Thursday of the First Week in Ordinary Time	1/12 Friday of the First Week in Ordinary Time	1/13 Saturday of the First Week in Ordinary Time

**Bold** = Sunday

underlined = Solemnity

*Italicized* = Feast

## OTHER DAYS OF PRAYER and OBSERVANCES

- November      Black Catholic History Month
- 11.19          World Day of the Poor
- 11.23          Thanksgiving Day
- 12.6            Optional Memorial of Saint Nicholas
- 1.1              World Day of Prayer for Peace

*Note that this calendar and list does not include all Optional Memorials, local or national civic holidays, or other observances or commemorations.*

# Seasonal bulletin

## Advent

“Advent has a twofold character, for it is a time of preparation for the Solemnities of Christmas, in which the First Coming of the Son of God to humanity is remembered, and likewise a time when, by remembrance of this, minds and hearts are led to look forward to Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. For these two reasons, Advent is a period of devout and expectant delight” (*Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar*, 39).

As we prepare for Advent and a new liturgical year, read the season’s Scriptures in the Lectionary and its prayers in the Roman Missal. Like Lent, Advent is a season of preparation, but the focus is not primarily on penance as it is in Lent. Instead, we are invited into a “period of devout and expectant delight” when we are called to be watchful and alert, when the prophet Isaiah offers words of comfort and glad tidings for the poor, and when a young Mary models discipleship in saying “I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

- ❑ A different Gospel acclamation and a seasonal response to the Prayer of the Faithful, such as “Come quickly, O God of glory” or “God of peace, hear our prayer,” could mark the change from Ordinary Time.
- ❑ Either of the first two forms of the Mystery of Faith (Memorial Acclamation) is a good choice for the season.
- ❑ The prayers for the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe are in the Proper of Saints section of the Roman Missal at December 8 and December 12 respectively.
- ❑ Because the Immaculate Conception is a solemnity, the Gloria is sung or said even though it falls in Advent, and the Profession of Faith is recited.
- ❑ The Lectionary (690A) offers several options for the readings for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, so make sure the priest, deacon, and lector know which readings will be used.
- ❑ Because the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a feast, the Gloria is sung or said even though it falls in Advent. The Profession of Faith is not recited.
- ❑ As a season of preparation, Advent is a fitting time to provide an opportunity for the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation).



- ❑ The US bishops' guidelines *Built of Living Stones* provides important principles for seasonal decorations (122–129), including advice that an Advent wreath should be “proportioned to the size of the space.”
- ❑ See the suggestions for Advent decorating in *To Crown the Year: Decorating the Church through the Seasons* (199–228, [ocp.org/10640](https://ocp.org/10640)).

**Prayer at Home:** *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, Revised Edition* ([ocp.org/20607](https://ocp.org/20607)) has prayers for the blessing of an Advent wreath (73–75), the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (163), the blessing of a Christmas tree (78–81), and the blessing of a Christmas crèche or manger scene (82–84).

**Classroom Prayer:** *Blessings and Prayers through the Year* (34–69; LTP) has a variety of Advent prayers including mealtime, welcoming the Gospel of a new liturgical year, blessing an Advent wreath, blessing a Jesse tree, and Las Posadas.

## Christmas

After the annual celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the Church has no more ancient custom than celebrating the memorial of the Nativity of the Lord and of his first manifestations, and this takes place in Christmas Time. Christmas Time runs from First Vespers (Evening Prayer I) of the Nativity of the Lord up to and including the Sunday after Epiphany or after January 6 (Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year 32–33).

Christmas is not a day but a season that runs from Christmas Eve through the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Begin your preparations by reading the season's Scriptures in the Lectionary and its prayers in the Roman Missal. The solemnities and feasts of this season celebrate the various ways in which the world first came to experience God in the person of Jesus Christ.

- ❑ The Book of Blessings (ch. 48) has a blessing of the manger or Nativity scene that may be celebrated during Mass.
- ❑ *Built of Living Stones* recommends that “plans for seasonal decorations should include other areas besides the sanctuary...The altar should remain clear and free-standing, not walled in by massive floral displays or the Christmas crib” (124).
- ❑ The Book of Blessings notes that the preferred location for the manger is outside the sanctuary in a place “suitable for prayer and ... easily accessible by the faithful” (1544).
- ❑ Though the Feast of the Holy Family falls on a Sunday and likely during a time when school is not in session, consider how you might use the readings, prayers, and themes from the feast to commemorate and celebrate all families as part of a prayer service.

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- ❑ To Crown the Year: Decorating the Church through the Seasons (234–264) offers ideas for decorating doorways, the entire worship space, and exterior areas for the Christmas season.
  - ❑ Consider how you can celebrate and commemorate your students' baptisms during the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

**Prayer at Home:** Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, Revised Edition (85–91) has prayers for the new year and for the blessing of homes on Epiphany (88–91).

**Classroom Prayer:** Blessings and Prayers through the Year (70–88) has a variety of prayers for the Christmas season including mealtime, blessing a stable, and an Epiphany journey with the Magi (con parranda).

# Q&A: ASK THE LITURGIST

Written by Dr. Glenn Byer

## A. What Is the Purpose of the Advent Wreath?

Begun as a home or monastic custom, it is a way to mark the passing of the weeks of Advent, usually with three purple candles and one pink candle (for Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent). It is to be placed somewhere near the Marian shrine, for Mary is our model of waiting for the Lord, or near the ambo, since we are waiting for the Word to be made flesh. It can also be somewhere in the area where the people sit or in the entrance to the church building. Although people seem to like it, remember that it is not an integral part of the liturgy. In fact, apart from the blessing on the First Sunday of Advent, there is essentially no reference to it in the liturgy of Advent. It remains a special focus of prayer in the domestic church, the home.

Supporting documentation: *Built of Living Stones* 128–29; *35 Years of the BCL Newsletter* 176

## B. What About All of These Special Feasts during the Advent Season?

Advent is filled with many feasts; Immaculate Conception, Saint Juan Diego, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Saint Nicholas, Saint Lucy, and even Saint Andrew and Saint Ambrose show up during Advent. The feasts around Our Lady and especially around the apparition in Mexico have taken on more and more importance in recent years. Being sensitive to the culture in which these feasts are so central is important, but these celebrations must never overshadow the destination of Advent, which is the Christmas feast.

Supporting documentation: *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 355 a and b, 376; *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* 67, 93–94; *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* 8, 39–42; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 103; *Built of Living Stones* 126, 130, 135–38, 156–57; *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* 147; *35 Years of the BCL Newsletter* 617, 691

## C. What About the Christmas Crèche?

This staple of Christmas decorating can cause a lot of grief. The crèche, or manger scene, is always a popular element, but it needs to be put somewhere where people can interact with it on a human level. The rite for its blessing calls for the placement of the crèche in the church where it is easily accessible by the faithful but not in the presbytery (sanctuary). The idea of creating a quiet place, almost a temporary shrine for it, would allow people to approach the image. Placing it in front of the altar can reduce the altar to a simple backdrop instead of the central focus of our faith and the celebration.

Supporting documentation: *Built of Living Stones* 124–25, 128; *35 Years of the BCL Newsletter* 1177; *Book of Blessings* 1544

## D. How About Christmas Trees?

The same problem can occur when Christmas trees, especially if they are heavy with tinsel and other decorations, are placed in the altar area. If they are used at all, trees

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must not overwhelm the space. In many places, fire regulations prohibit real trees, and these regulations should be followed. Churches are not immune to fire and, especially on Christmas when the building might be full to capacity, extra care needs to be taken. As for artificial trees, there is to be nothing fake in our liturgical celebrations, so they, too, should be avoided. Remember that Easter is the high point of the liturgical year. Having overly elaborate Christmas decor could prove challenging when Easter decor is being considered.

Supporting documentation: *Built of Living Stones* 128–29; *35 Years of the BCL Newsletter* 1177

### **E. Why can't we sing Christmas carols during Advent?**

It seems like the Church is so out of step, not singing them when they are on the radio, but then singing them after Christmas when we don't hear them anywhere else. But the need to wait, and the experience of singing them in a new way on the great feast of Christmas, are both good reasons not to jump the gun. We wait for the carols in the same way we wait for Jesus.

The lofty answer to this question and many like it is that the liturgical year is a counter-cultural force. When the world wants to anticipate Christmas and does not want to wait, the Church insists that we do just that. When people want to celebrate the Easter Vigil at the usual time of the Saturday evening Mass or want to celebrate it in the space of one hour, the Church insists on waiting until night falls and taking as long as it takes. To break it down a little further, liturgy does not look at time in the same way as we do in the rest of our lives. The liturgy celebrates the basic reality that all time belongs to God. We are called into existence and born into time, but it is God's choice. We live our lives in time, but how long that will be is God's choice.

So when we answer God's call to come to celebration, it is participation in that basic call to life that God constantly makes to us. Our response is to respond to God's call, to participate in whatever God has called us to do, whether it be the waiting of Advent, the joy of Christmas, or the challenge of Ordinary Time, and to use every season or celebration as a springboard to our mission in the world.

Supporting documentation: *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar* 39–42; *Ceremonial of Bishops* 235; *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 313

### **F. What are the "O" Antiphons?**

On December 17–24 a set of antiphons, all beginning with the word "O," is sung at evening prayer before the Gospel canticle known as the Magnificat. These "O" Antiphons are among the most beautiful compositions in all of Christian history and are the basis of the popular Advent hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." This set of antiphons is often used throughout Advent to help people understand the deeper meaning of the season. Christmas is the birth of the Key of David, the Root of Jesse, and so on. It is much more than a birthday party for a baby in a manger. These antiphons also form the text for the Gospel acclamations in the Lectionary for Mass on these days.

Supporting documentation: Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar 16b; Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass 94; General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours 147

### **G. What is Las Posadas?**

This event covers essentially the same period as the “O” Antiphons. For eight nights before Christmas, people wander in procession from home to home looking for a place that will take them in. On each night, a home has been chosen in advance to welcome the procession, and there is much feasting and singing. An image of the Christ child is left in the home until the next night, when the process repeats. Las Posadas (the inns) commemorates the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem and recalls how there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the inn. Las Posadas reminds us to make room—now!

Supporting documentation: Built of Living Stones 130–31

### **H. What should I do when the Fourth Sunday of Advent is December 24?**

This is one of the great challenges for those who prepare the liturgy. You will be finishing up the Sunday celebrations only hours before the start of Christmas. In such cases, you will also have only three weeks of Advent, which also makes it more difficult to enter into the spirit of waiting. For both of these reasons, you need to ensure that the link between Advent and Christmas is strong. Perhaps Advent decorations could be altered to become those for Christmas. The Advent wreath might change into the place where the Christmas crèche is placed. In everything, it is important to keep our focus on the essentials, as time is short, which is really the message of Advent anyway.

### **I. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having pageants at Christmas Eve Masses?**

There appears to be a trend toward introducing religious pageants dramatizing the birth of Christ at family or children’s Masses on Christmas Eve. Some cautions are needed here because it is possible that important liturgical values, and even requirements, can be sacrificed in the effort to make this popular Mass a setting for a children’s production.

It is a question of priorities. For example, should a pageant, including Gospel readings by children, sacred songs and movement of characters completely replace the assigned reading of the Gospel by a deacon or priest? Should the homily be omitted, with this omission justified on the grounds that the dramatization is sufficient or has taken all the available time? If we know the theology and power of preaching, we believe that no Mass should be without a homily, and certainly not on Christmas, a rare and crucial night for some people to be in touch with the Church.

Besides theory, there are the perils of practice: homemade scripts; inexperienced speakers who cannot be heard; intimidated actors in a big church; poor sightlines with Mary and Joseph unable to be seen. We have all heard people politely praise a show that was objectively awful just because they want to be kind. That type of tainted

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approval can creep in here. Who wants to be against children and the Christmas story on Christmas Eve?

There are positives, of course, about having a dramatization: the story lends itself to action; people remember better what they see than what they just hear; children are wonderful to watch; some people will come just to see their kids; the participants will remember this happily for years to come; dramas in church are certainly nothing new.

So a pageant has much to recommend it. But there are legitimate questions that must be considered: Should it be done at Mass? If so, at this Mass? If so, at what part of Mass? Perhaps it could take place before Mass begins. Or perhaps the children could enact the Gospel as it is read by the deacon or priest. Or maybe the pageant could precede the final blessing with the participants taking part in the recessional procession. Talented people on the local scene will be the ones to advise the pastor on such choices.

Priorities should not get reversed: Any dramatizations should fit into and enhance the Mass, not vice versa. People should hear the Gospel competently proclaimed and applied in a homily that encourages and challenges them and they should participate in a religious service that does not get overshadowed by a children's show. If we come to ooh and aah at lovely, talented children performing a play, we may be inspired to praise their Creator a few minutes later, or we may be tired of the larger event once the children's show is over.

You can detect our concern here. Perhaps it is misplaced, but there are questions to be considered before we slip into a new practice.

#### **J. How can we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph with such diversity in modern families?**

The challenges of celebrating this feast are real and need to be taken into consideration. Any undue emphasis on the perfect family should be avoided. At the same time, the family of Jesus, especially with Joseph, who was not the biological father, and with them being homeless in a strange place for the arrival of Jesus, and living in exile after his birth—all of this can create an atmosphere of celebration of whatever our family looks like.

#### **K. When does the Christmas season end?**

As with many things in liturgy, this is a question with more than one answer. For the most part, the season ends with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, celebrated this year on a Monday. Ordinary Time continues until Ash Wednesday. However, there is an older tradition that had Christmas lasting until February 2, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord or Candlemas, the day of blessing the candles. It is good to keep this forty-day period in mind and see the ties that link Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. We should not over-compartmentalize the liturgical year.

# School Mass Planner

<b>Celebration:</b> _____	<b>Date:</b> _____
Priest celebrant(s): _____	Assisting deacon: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Altar server(s): _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes Incense: <input type="checkbox"/> No

## INTRODUCTORY RITE

Gathering Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

Penitential Act: \_\_\_\_\_

[Glory to God:] \_\_\_\_\_

Processional cross carried by: \_\_\_\_\_

## LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsorial Psalm: \_\_\_\_\_

[Second Reading:] \_\_\_\_\_

Gospel Acclamation: \_\_\_\_\_

Gospel: \_\_\_\_\_

Universal Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_

Read by: \_\_\_\_\_

Sung/Read by: \_\_\_\_\_

Read by: \_\_\_\_\_

Sung/Read by: \_\_\_\_\_

- Proclaimed by priest  
 Proclaimed by deacon

Sung/Read by: \_\_\_\_\_

## LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Presentation Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

Eucharistic Acclamations: \_\_\_\_\_

Communion Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

Gift bearers: \_\_\_\_\_

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion: \_\_\_\_\_

## CONCLUDING RITE

Sending Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

### CHECKLIST

- |                                                                         |                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication with presider (and homilist)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice with readers                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication with sacristan                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice with gift bearers                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication with accompanist/musician(s)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice with altar server(s) <i>(if needed)</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worship aid/slides prepared <i>(if needed)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Copies of readings and Universal Prayer          |

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# SCHOOL PRAYER SERVICES

## CONSIDERATIONS

### *Structure and format*

The prayer service planner uses a structure drawn from the *Liturgy of the Hours*, the official daily prayer of the church. The general outline includes the following:

#### INTRODUCTORY RITE

Prayer usually begins with a gathering hymn or song, followed by an opening prayer. The wording of this prayer helps set the tone and focus for the prayer service. Additionally, you may wish to use a “Call to Worship,” a brief song or refrain that is repeated before the gathering hymn to focus our hearts and minds and ready ourselves to enter into prayer.

#### LITURGY OF THE WORD

One or two psalms are sung (or recited). These psalms are chosen because they suit the focus or time of the prayer service. A psalm prayer – or period of silence – follows each psalm. A reading from Scripture is offered, also chosen because of the focus of the prayer service. This could be a reading from the Old or New Testament, or a Gospel. If it is a Gospel reading, the Lenten Gospel Acclamation can be sung before it is proclaimed.

A reflection can be offered by a member of the school community, or a homily if a priest or deacon is presiding. Typically, the morning Canticle (*Benedictus*) follows this period of reflection. You may or may not choose to sing (or recite) it. Sometimes a song or hymn can be used to help support meditation and quiet prayer.

The Universal Prayer brings the needs of the Church, the world, the local community, and each of us. After the Universal Prayer, the Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father”) is prayed by all.

#### CONCLUDING RITE

Before our prayer ends, we pray a closing prayer and ask for God’s blessing. Like the opening prayer, the wording of the closing prayer should echo the focus of our prayer and serves to send us forth. If a priest or deacon is presiding, they may wish to offer a blessing. If not, a prayer of blessing is said or sung. Prayer usually ends with a sending hymn or song, but may also end in solemn silence, if appropriate.

This format of prayer is easily adapted to your needs: you can make it shorter or longer, add a prayer or ritual for a specific need, commemorate an important event or celebration, and so forth.

### *Selecting Scripture and psalms*

It is recommended that you select the reading from Scripture first, as the psalms, hymns, and prayers you choose should support the reading. Liturgical prayer creates the opportunity for dialogue between God and the community gathered in prayer, and this is made possible through the Word. Don’t start with that favorite song or poem, as tempting as it is to do so. Our goal is to hear God’s voice, so begin with God’s Word.



- **Brevity.** The reading should only be as long as it needs to be. Effective prayer is focused. Since Scripture is so very rich, it's important that the passage you select is focused, too. Beware, however, that in editing the reading you do not "editorialize" – that is, change the nature or message of the reading.
- **Context.** Use the richness of the season to help select the reading. Look to the readings of the day or the past/upcoming Sunday. Use a Concordance to find passages related to a relevant theme. You might also look for connections to your religion curriculum, as many lessons are structured around specific passages from Scripture.
- **The Lectionary.** It is recommended that you use Scripture from the Lectionary. These passages are usually of reasonable length already. Also, praying with these Scriptures allows for a deeper connection between your school prayer service and the liturgies of the parish.

After the Scripture reading has been selected, look for the psalms you will pray. Because of their personal nature, the psalms play an important role in opening a dialogue with God. While it is recommended that you pray two psalms, it is possible to use only one.

- **Theme-based psalms.** Each psalm has a certain tone or focus, like praise, joy, lament, mercy, and so forth. You can choose psalms that fit the focus of the prayer you are creating.
- **Appointed psalms.** Certain psalms are assigned to a time of year or a time of day. There are psalms commonly used during Ordinary Time (like Psalms 19, 27, 34, 95, 100, and 103). There are also psalms typically used during morning prayer (like Psalms 63 and 149). You might also look to include the appointed psalm for the past or upcoming Sunday.

As with the readings from Scripture, it is recommended that you use psalms from the Lectionary. This also helps to ensure that a musical setting of the psalms you select both exist and are available to you.

### *Creating a prayerful environment*

In planning your prayer service, don't forget all of the other steps necessary to creating a prayerful environment for everyone who will gather.

- **Worship aid or slides.** The goal of good liturgical prayer is the full, conscious, and active participation of the gathered community. A printed worship aid – or projection slides, if suitable – ensures that everyone has the texts and music needed to participate. A printed worship aid can be simple, with a simple outline of the prayer and numbers in the hymnal.
- **Hospitality.** Intentionally plan ways to make participants feel comfortable, welcomed, and invited. This is a great opportunity to involve students who might not be able to lead or read or might feel uncomfortable doing so.
- **Environment.** This is a particularly important concern if you will be praying somewhere other than a church or chapel like a gymnasium, gathering space, auditorium, classroom, etc. Give careful consideration to the way you will arrange the prayer space and how you will use clear signs and symbols. Simple, consistent decorations make all the difference in a non-liturgical prayer space. Use the symbols, textures, colors, and signs of Ordinary Time.

**RESOURCE:** [A Future with Hope: Praying with Youth Preparing for Confirmation \(Stachowski, Reichert\)](#) is a collection of eight full prayer services and scripts for praying with young people throughout the liturgical year.



# Prayer Service Planner

<b>Celebration:</b> _____ Presider/Leader: _____ Homilist/Speaker: _____	<b>Date:</b> _____
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## INTRODUCTORY RITE

[Call to  
Worship:] \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gathering  
Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

## LITURGY OF THE WORD

Psalm A: _____	Sung/Read by:
[Psalm B:] _____	Sung/Read by:
[Gospel Acclamation:] _____	Sung/Read by:
Reading [Gospel]: _____	Proclaimed by:
[Meditation Song:] _____	
Universal Prayer: _____	Read/Sung by:

## CONCLUDING RITE

[Sung  
Blessing:] \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sending  
Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>CHECKLIST</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication with presider/leader <input type="checkbox"/> Communication with homilist/speaker <input type="checkbox"/> Communication with accompanist/musician(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Plan to decorate prayer space completed <i>(if needed)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Presider script prepared <input type="checkbox"/> Worship aid/slides prepared <i>(if needed)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Practice with presider <input type="checkbox"/> Practice with reader(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Copy of presider script in place <input type="checkbox"/> Copies of readings and Universal Prayer in place
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# SAMPLE PRAYERS

## OVERVIEW

The following prayers are meant to be useful, either to use as they are, to edit and adapt them, or to use them as a starting point to write your own prayer.

Prayers like these might come in handy:

- as opening or closing prayers for a class or school prayer service,
- at the beginning or end of the school day,
- at the beginning or end of a staff meeting,
- to include in the class or school weekly newsletter, or
- for individual or personal prayer.

Each prayer comes from [\*Disciples in Prayer: A Resource for Faith Sharing, Year A \(OCP\)\*](#).

### ORDINARY TIME PRAYER A

God of wisdom and love,  
source of all good,  
    send your Spirit to teach us your truth  
    and guide our actions  
        in your way of peace.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
    who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
    God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

### ORDINARY TIME PRAYER B

Lord, be merciful to your people.  
Fill us with your gifts  
    and make us always eager to serve you  
    in faith, hope, and love.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
    who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
    God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

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## **ADVENT PRAYER A**

Father in heaven,  
our hearts desire the warmth of your love  
and our minds are searching for the light of your Word.  
Increase our longing for Christ our Savior  
and give us the strength to grow in love,  
that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence  
and welcoming the light of his truth.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.  
Amen.

## **ADVENT PRAYER B**

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay;  
give new courage to your people who trust in your love.  
By your coming,  
raise us to the joy of your kingdom,  
where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## **CHRISTMAS PRAYER**

Father, we are filled with new light  
by the coming of your Word among us.  
May the light of faith shine in our words and actions.  
Teach us to proclaim the birth of your Son Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

You can find prayers and prayer resources all over the place. The Liturgy of the Hours has appointed prayers for each day (morning, midday, evening) and the Roman Missal has Collect prayers for each day, as well. These could be easily used or adapted for a prayer service, classroom, meeting, or personal use.

# Preparation Guide: *Lector*

Helping to lead your classmates and teachers in prayer is an awesome responsibility! You will be using your gifts and talents in ways that help your school and parish community voice its hopes, dreams, worries, and thanks. So, it's important that you take some time to prepare for this role before you serve.

## Prayer

*Before going any further, spend a moment in prayer.*

O God, ever present in Word and Sacrament, guide me in my preparation to proclaim your Good News. Make me a channel of your wisdom and truth. Free me from every worry and anxiety. Help me to illuminate the Scripture in a way that draws all who hear it closer to you.

Amen.

## The details

*Keep track of essential information below. Make sure you know the answers to the following:*

When am I serving as lector? [date and event]

What reading will I be proclaiming?

Where can I find the text I will be proclaiming?

When is the rehearsal (if any) for this liturgy?

## Preparation checklist

*Use the questions below to study, practice, and focus yourself for this ministry.*

### STUDY

- Have I studied the reading thoroughly?
- Do I understand the context? Who is being spoken to? What other biblical events or stories occur around it?
- Do I understand the lesson that is meant to be conveyed? Could I explain this reading in my own words?

### PRACTICE

- Have I read the reading aloud several times?
- Have I practiced proclaiming it in front of people?
- Have I practiced difficult pronunciations?
- Have I asked if listeners are able to understand what I am trying to convey?

### PRAY

- Have I prayed in preparation for proclaiming this reading?
- How has Scripture formed me? Has it challenged me to think about things differently?
- How has the Scripture called me to act in my relationship with Christ and others?

## Pro tips

1. Know the roadmap. Look over the full script before prayer begins. Make sure you know when you need to go up and proclaim your reading (and know where you are supposed to stand!). Make sure you know if you need to have the copy of your reading or if one will be in place for you.
2. Speak loudly and clearly. You are proclaiming the Word of God! It is critical that everyone can hear and understand what you are saying. Even if they are familiar with the passage you are reading they will have the opportunity to hear it in new ways.
3. Use visible gestures to cue the assembly. If you are leading the psalm, make sure to look up at the assembly and raise your hands, indicating when it is time for them to speak the response.
4. Don't overlook body language! The way you stand up, the posture you take, the eye contact you use, and other ways you use your body signal confidence, reverence, and the importance of what the assembly is doing.

# Preparation Guide: *Music Minister*

Helping to lead your classmates and teachers in prayer is an awesome responsibility! You will be using your gifts and talents in ways that help your school and parish community voice its hopes, dreams, worries, and thanks. So, it's important that you take some time to prepare for this role before you serve.

## Prayer

*Before going any further, spend a moment in prayer.*

O God of mercy and grace,  
guide me in my preparation  
to lead your people in song.  
Work your grace through my hands and voice.  
May the songs we sing  
bring us closer to you and each other.  
Amen.

## The details

*Keep track of essential information below. Make sure you know the answers to the following:*

When am I serving as music minister? [date and event]

What song, hymn, and/or psalm will I be leading?

Where can I find the music I will be leading?

When is the rehearsal (if any) for this liturgy?

## Preparation checklist

*Use the questions below to study, practice, and focus yourself for this ministry.*

### STUDY

- Have I studied the songs, hymns, psalms, canticles, and responses thoroughly?
- Do I understand how the music fits in the context of the prayer? How do the songs, hymns, psalms, readings, and prayers interact?
- Do I understand the message that is meant to be conveyed?

- (If cantoring the psalm) Have I studied the psalm? Do I understand its context and origin?

### PRACTICE

- Have I rehearsed sufficiently on my own?
- Have I rehearsed with the other musicians?
- (If cantoring the psalm) Have I practiced the psalm in front of others?

### PRAY

- Have I prayed in preparation of leading this music for payer?
- How has this music formed me? What lines of text have spoken to me?
- Have these songs found a way into my prayer? What do I hope others will hear in these songs I am sharing?

## Pro tips

1. Know the roadmap. Make sure you have looked over the outline/order for the liturgy. Know the cues for when each song is supposed to begin and mark them in your score.
2. Practice, practice, practice. Make sure you have rehearsed well before the liturgy begins.
3. Sing clearly. The text of each song is of the utmost importance. Be sure everyone can understand what you are singing.
4. Use visible gestures to cue the assembly. Everyone will know when to sing if you indicate this with a simple movement of your hands. This is important for each song, but especially for the psalm.
5. Don't overlook body language! The way you stand up, the posture you take, the eye contact you use, and other ways you use your body signal confidence, reverence, and the importance of what the assembly is doing.





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# FORMATION MATERIALS

# Celebrating the Day of the Dead

## Miguel Arias



Miguel Arias (1971–2012) was editorial director for Liturgy Training Publications (LTP). He also served as a product Development Specialist at Loyola Press and was the author of OCP's devotional resource in Spanish, *Palabra, Vida y Fe*. He held a master's degree in pastoral studies from Catholic Theological Union and was a faculty member at Tepeyac Institute, the Cultural Institute of Leadership as well as the Hispanic Institute of Liturgy. Miguel passed away in 2012. He is survived by his wife and daughter.

Latin Americans are a very devout people; religion has always been a part of their history and identity.

Respect and veneration of the deceased are an important part of understanding the way of life in Latin American cultures. For example, the ancient Mexicans believed that the sun god was nourished through human sacrifice. Thus, offering human sacrifices was very important for the Aztecs. These sacrifices were a way of worshipping the sun god. From this perspective, it's possible to understand why they were such warriors and why fighting, aside from having military motives, had underlying religious intentions as well—namely, pleasing the sun god.

The arrival of Christianity confronted this profound religious experience with Christian values and Christian views of death. The Aztecs began to understand that there was no need for human sacrifice, but they also realized the value of Christian sacrifice, in terms of spirituality. They knew what it was like to make personal sacrifices, but now they also had this close encounter with Jesus Christ, who died and rose again. The idea of a god suffering made a great impression on these people, and they felt his presence very closely. We still see a great deal of this devotion to the suffering Christ, especially during the traditional Good Friday celebrations.

Perhaps hearing the account of the martyrs of the early Church had an impact on these growing Christian communities. The knowledge that in another time and place, their brothers had died because their love for God seemed to serve as motivation for embracing the faith that the missionaries were bringing.

The dead have always been a part of this community, as a cultural element or an aspect of their faith. The presence of the departed remains with us in a very distinct way.

## **The Day of the Dead Celebration in Mexico**

It is logical to assume that 200 years ago, Latin Americans did not celebrate Halloween, but they did in fact celebrate the Day of the Dead.

Although there was a religious celebration that had been introduced in the Church around the fourth century, there was also a popular celebration connected with the deceased and belief in the afterlife.

For example, in Michoacán, Mexico, they have a particular tradition that involves Day of the Dead altars, a pilgrimage by boat across Lake Pátzcuaro, and *la velada* (a type of party that is held in the evening at the tombs that includes food, flowers, music, altars, drinking, and prayer).

It is in practices such as these that we find Christian faith and cultural values co-mingling. They are brought together and mutually enrich one another.



Furthermore, “[t]his religion of the people is lived preferentially by the ‘poor and the simple,’ but it includes every social sector” (The Puebla Document 447, The Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate). Latin Americans are a people that combine their culture and history with their Christian inheritance without encountering any problems in doing so. Rather, this is an ideal foundation for expressing their faith in the eternal and their confidence in the resurrection of the dead. According to theologian Virgilio Elizondo (1935–2016), a person dies three times: the first death occurs upon their physical death; the second when they are buried in the earth; and the third when they are forgotten. Without a doubt, the Day of the Dead celebration is a clear demonstration of communion with those who have gone before us.

“The Puebla Document” refers to the wisdom in these traditions as “a Christian humanism that radically affirms the dignity of every person as a child of God, establishes a basic fraternity, teaches people to encounter nature and understand work, provides reasons for joy and humor even in the midst of a very hard life” (448).

When people migrate, they don’t leave their values behind; their values become an integral part of their migratory experience. Just as the Israelites sang of their longing for Jerusalem while in exile and built their synagogues as a place for coming together and reflecting on the writings of the law and the prophets, the Hispanic people have not renounced their history or their beautiful customs. On the contrary, these have served to reaffirm their faith in God, be it through public or private demonstrations, diverse cultural traditions, or the way in which they integrate themselves in their churches and make them their own with their saints, virgins, and feasts that are so much a part of their faith.

Therefore, among those of us who live in the United States, we find various expressions depending on the origin and source of our communities. Such expressions are rich in evangelization and culture, and combine with the local culture, which is in turn influenced by the presence of this new culture.

### Halloween and All Saints

The Day of the Dead celebration with the altar, food, and, of course, the eucharistic celebration, crosses paths with the cultural atmosphere of Halloween.

Our initial tendency might be to discount this holiday and say that it has no religious value because of all the consumerism surrounding it. Actually, Halloween has its roots in Ireland, where they held a Samhain festival that was a kind of harvest celebration held during the last days of October and the beginning of November. According to the Celts, on the night of October 31, the souls of the deceased roamed from home to home. In order to satisfy them, the living left food and candy outside their houses, and there we have the first example of today’s common practice of trick-or-treat.

When the Celts were conquered by the Romans in the first century AD, they were forced to celebrate the Roman god of the harvest, Pomona. Nevertheless, years later with the spreading of Christianity, this celebration became “Christianized,” and thus began the liturgical celebration of All Saints, followed by All Souls.

So, why do we call it Halloween? The reason for this is actually based on linguistics, not history. Linguistically, there was a period of the English language known as Old English (500–1100). Halloween was originally referred to as All Hallows Eve, which means the evening before All Hallows Day or All Saints Day, “hallow” being the Old English word for “saint.” It was later shortened to Halloween, which we now associate with giving and receiving candy and wearing costumes.

A conscious effort needs to be made to establish the connection between the secular holiday of Halloween and the liturgical holidays of All Saints and All Souls. This is important not only in order to salvage cultural values but also as a way of spreading our faith. From this perspective, popular expressions of Catholic faith, such as the Day of the Dead celebration, can serve as a means to share the Gospel and the Christian belief of death being a necessary step toward eternal life.

Praying for those who have gone before us to be with God remains for us to do as Christians, as a way of living out our faith. Celebrating the Day of the Dead is an opportunity to renew our faith in the resurrection and in the full realization that we are a pilgrim Church.

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# From Death into Life

## Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed

### Rory Cooney



Rory Cooney is a composer, liturgist and parish music director. After serving as director of liturgy and music at Saint Jerome Catholic Church in Phoenix, he is currently the parish music director at St. Anne Catholic Community in Barrington, Illinois.

I live in the Chicago suburbs, and it's generally around the end of October that we experience a serious meteorological reality check. Warm, moist air flows northward from the Gulf of Mexico, as if saying, "Ha ha! We're still sunbathing down here, and playing baseball in short sleeves!" Simultaneously, Arctic winds start to rage out of Canada in Alberta clippers, hissing "This will make you forget summer!" When they slam together just west of our zip code and move eastward, thunder, lightning, sleet, wind, rain, and occasionally snow remind us that, as much fun as we've had since April, it's pretty much over for the next five months.

In the northern hemisphere, at least, that's what the liturgies of November are: a reality check. Like winter and summer (for most of us), the cross and the resurrection are aspects of a single reality: the paschal mystery of God, the way things *really* are, as revealed in Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

It's good to think about final things. So as the liturgical year plays itself out over the next four weeks, we celebrate Halloween and the feast of All Saints, and, on November 2, All Souls' Day, to remember the unnamed hundreds of millions who have gone before us, many of whose names are forgotten. We bring them to mind, pray for them, and ask for their prayer as well. The Sunday readings during the last two or three Sundays of Ordinary Time also turn to final things, the *parousia* and the end of earth and its empires all become part of the patchwork of images at the liturgical year's end.

Today, I'm looking specifically at the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed. One frequently used reading from the Jewish Scriptures on this day is a passage from Wisdom ("The souls of the just are in the hand of God...") which dates from the second-first century BC, the period following the abominations of the Seleucid emperor Antiochus Epiphanes IV. This marvelous passage is one of the few in the Hebrew Scriptures to allude to the possibility of the bodily resurrection of the dead, a tenet of our Nicene creed. As in the books of Daniel and Job, the Jewish author poses the possibility of resurrection as a necessary outcome of divine justice. Since the Jewish martyrs, such as the Maccabees and thousands of others, were cut down in the prime of their physical life, with so much possibility still within them, it must behoove a just God, they reasoned, to restore their bodies to them at some future time. Interestingly, it is from this kind of spiritual awakening that the belief started to rise that life might go on beyond the grave. Belief in the resurrection of the body preceded belief in the resurrection, or for that matter, in the existence, of a soul distinct from the body.

The Book of Revelation celebrates those who made their choice for the reign of God against the rallied forces of Caesar and died for their allegiance. Like the Wisdom reading, it promises a new world where death's power will be reversed, where there will be no more tears and mourning. The forces of death even today wrap

themselves in the symbols of a god, and use language describing death-dealing in terms of good and evil. Revelation helps us remember that it is ever so. All death, not just the death of martyrs, seems like a defeat. Revelation assures us that a reversal is coming; life is changed, not ended.

Romans 6, the epistle for the Easter Vigil, makes a wonderful New Testament reading on All Souls. I never get tired of these words, and I wish that I would hear more confident and solid preaching on their hopeful and faith-sustaining meaning. Saint Paul assures us that in baptism our “old self” dies, and we are made a new creation. New. From scratch. We look the same, just like the Eucharist looks like bread and wine, but it, and we, are ontologically different. Once, we were no people. Now, we are God’s people. Once, we were dead to sin; now, given the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, we come up from the water reborn in the very image of Christ. Infused with the paschal mystery, our genetic code is rewritten by the Spirit of God. Once I lived for myself, now Christ lives in me. Death has no more power.

A priest with whom I once worked used to call attention to this aspect of baptismal faith at every funeral he celebrated: the Christian died on the day of baptism, and rose again in Christ. “Death no longer has power” over the Christian, because in baptism we understand that we are immersed in the very source of life, in the One who has nothing to do with death. In the end, Christ draws us into the intimacy that he shares with Abba. The amazing part is that “the way” to this shared intimacy is available to us here and now, when we choose to live for Christ.

We often sleep right through that proclamation on Sunday, every “weekly Easter,” when it is prayed in the eucharistic prayers of the Mass and elsewhere. We can just stay dead, and keep living in the false promises of a culture that maintains itself by violence and threats, addictions to money, physical beauty, and possessions, all denials of inevitable death. Or, by celebrating the mystery of All Souls’ day, maybe we can waken to life, and become who we are.

I hope it seems obvious that the music for All Souls should be music our parishes use most often for funeral liturgies, certainly influenced by paschal repertoire (Easter-themed music) as well. At our parish, the main parish liturgy on All Souls evening is one to which personal invitations are sent to all who lost loved ones during the past year and celebrated the funeral in our parish, so there is a lot of grief still being processed. Music that witnesses to Christian hope and consolation is most important: what we have to contribute to the grieving process is less about memories than promise. Our Gospel is not that remembering the dead will keep them alive; it’s that they are already alive in God, and that

we all share in that same life together. God remembers—that is what keeps the dead and the living together in life.

One way our parish acknowledges this “community of saints” is by gathering with the John Becker “Litany of the Saints” (BB/MI 727). After each stanza is sung (ending with the refrain, “All you holy men and women, pray for us,” or one of the other final lines) we play an instrumental verse, during which the names of the deceased from our church are read aloud. When the name is read, a candle is lit in the sanctuary for that person by a relative, friend, or one of our bereavement ministers. It takes a while, but it is a significant ritual that helps us gather into the presence of Christ all the saints including the deceased and the community.

At all the funerals at my parish, we always sing the alleluia from “O Sons and Daughters” for the Gospel acclamation. This ancient piece from the Easter repertoire immediately calls to mind the whole nexus of resurrection stories, so it makes a perfect Gospel acclamation for All Souls as well as a ritual piece for funerals.

Maybe it’s a little ironic to think of this late-autumn reality check as a “wake-up” call, when it is a reminder of death. Still, it may be even more helpful to remember that the waking up isn’t simply or even primarily about waking up in the future, but rising now, enlivened by the Gospel, to live as the children of God for the abundant life of the world, making peace, hungry for justice, and joyfully announcing mercy.

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#### Other titles you might find helpful:

**Be Not Afraid** | Dufford | BB/MI 427  
**Eye Has Not Seen** | Haugen | BB/MI 457  
**Here I Am, Lord** | Schutte | BB/MI 378  
**How Great Thou Art** | trad. | BB/MI 420  
**I Am the Bread of Life** | Toolan | BB/MI 349  
**I Shall Live in the House, (Psalm 23)** | Cooney | GP3 125  
**I, the Lord** | Kendzia | BB/MI 688  
**Keep in Mind** | Deiss | BB/MI 679  
**Path of Life** | Balhoff/Daigle/Ducote | GP3 116  
**Shelter Me, O God** | Hurd | BB/MI 468  
**Shepherd Me, O God, (Psalm 23)** | Haugen | BB/MI 464  
**Sing with All the Saints in Glory** | trad. | BB/MI 617  
**Stand by Me** | Kendzia | BB/MI 639  
**These Alone Are Enough** | Schutte | BB/MI 393  
**Thy Kingdom Come** | Cooney | GP3 763  
**We Shall Rise Again** | Young | GIA  
**We Will Want No More** | Kendzia | [ocp.org/products/20478](http://ocp.org/products/20478)  
**With the Lord, There Is Mercy (Psalm 130)** | Modlin | J3 108  
**You Are Mine** | Haas | BB/MI 454

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*Staff spiritual formation*

# The Three Advents of Christ

By Owen F. Cummings

“Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and the heart to await Christ’s second coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation” (General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar 39).

## THE MEANING OF ADVENT

Most Catholics have some awareness of the liturgical year, but what may not be so obvious is that the liturgical year is not about archaeology or history. It’s not just a matter of remembering things that happened long ago. Rather, the liturgical year is about our Lord Jesus Christ, and so it is also about us! The most common description of the Church is probably “the body of Christ.” If the liturgical year is about Jesus Christ, and we are his body, the liturgical year is also about us and the meaning of our lives in Christ as Christians.

Advent, then, is about watching and waiting for Christ in joyful expectation. Since the word “advent” is the Latin for “coming,” we might say with our medieval forebears in the faith that there are three advents of Christ, or three comings of Christ, and the holy season of Advent is about all three: the advent of Christ in the Incarnation—the past; the advent of Christ in word and Eucharist—the present; the advent of Christ at the second coming or, to use the New Testament term, the Parousia—the future. Each one of these advents or comings of Christ is paralleled by our coming to Christ. Remember, there is no Christ, Head of the body, without his members!

### The First Advent

The first advent (*past*) is this: Christ came in the Incarnation // We come to “incarnation” in Christ. Christ first came to us in the Incarnation, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The purpose of the Incarnation, however, is to bring about, through grace, what we might call our incarnation in Christ. Think of the words of the thirteenth-century Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart: “The Incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth long ago is of no interest and importance unless that same Word becomes incarnate in us today” (Sermon 22). The Word becomes incarnate in us through baptism, or you might say we come to “incarnation” in Christ through baptism. This would be more intelligible if we recall another word for baptism, “Christening,” which means “being put into Christ.”

### The Second Advent

The second advent (*present*) is this: Christ comes in word and Eucharist // We come through word and Eucharist to Christ. Having been put into Christ through baptism, we are further shaped as Christ, we are “christified,” as it were, through word and Eucharist. All the

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sacraments are related to the Eucharist, as to their center. In the Eucharist, Christ, sacramentally and substantially, becomes available to us as food, “advents” in us, and we become what we eat. If this sounds strange, think of the words of the Lord in St. Augustine’s experience in the Confessions: “I will not be changed into you, like the food your body eats. You will be changed into me.”

### **The Third Advent**

The third advent (*future*) is this: Christ will come at the Parousia // We will come to Parousia in Christ. The New Testament and tradition is clear that we do not know the date or the details of Christ’s coming in glory. Nor do we know the date or details of our final coming to Christ in and through the portal of death. So we ought to be vigilant and alert, watching and waiting, but in joy not fear.

To illustrate this further, think of the Dutch Jewish woman Etty Hillesum. She left a diary and letters of the months she spent in a transit camp before she was sent to Auschwitz, where she died. This is what she wrote: “People here fritter their energy away on the thousand irksome details that grind us down every day; they lose themselves in detail and drown. That’s why they get driven off course and find existence pointless. The few big things that matter in life are what we have to keep in mind; the rest can be quietly abandoned. And you can find those few big things anywhere, you have to keep rediscovering them in yourself so that you can be renewed. And in spite of everything you always end with the same conviction: life is good after all.... And that’s what stays with me, even now, when I’m about to be packed off to Poland with my whole family” (Etty Hillesum, cited by David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living*, London: HarperCollins, 1997, 39).

Etty Hillesum’s perspective liberated her from the countless trivial pursuits that take up so much of life, even life in a transit camp destined for Holocaust. She was liberated to love life, and loving life is loving the Author of all life. It’s loving God through all the different aspects of one’s life, through all the gifts one has been given by God through our families and communities. It’s about developing a gift-like approach to life, and an upbeat habit of deep gratitude. That’s living in real relationship to this third advent of Christ, when we come through death to our final advent in him.

## **THE ADVENT READINGS**

The readings for the four Sundays of Advent form a choreography around these three advents of the Lord.

### **First Sunday of Advent**

The Gospel today comes from the apocalyptic genre speaking of the end times and the necessity of being alert and ready. In mentioning the four hours of the night watch, we are given a foreshadowing of the passion narrative trial which will take place on the same timetable. Mark has no elaborate last judgment scene like Matthew, so this passage

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advises the disciples and by extension the Christian community hearing this proclaimed to always be alert and ready. If Mark was written for a community under persecution, this passage is all the more pointed in telling them to be ready to give witness and testify to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God.

The passage from Isaiah is almost like a psalm. It recalls God's saving deeds in the past, recognizes the sin of Israel and ends with a plea for mercy. The prophet Isaiah in despair pleads, "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down..." Israel's experience of difficulty is interpreted by the prophet as evidence of God's anger at a sinful people. The final words are prescient in asking God to work with the people as a potter forms clay. Psalm 80 is a hymn of lament calling upon God's power to save the people of Israel. The passage from First Corinthians speaks of the steadfastness of faith with which God will keep his people.

### **Second Sunday of Advent**

Mark's Gospel is composed using a course style of Greek. The evangelist tends to use an economy of words. Some scholars have caricatured Mark's Gospel as a passion narrative with an extended introduction. During the course of our reading of Mark's Gospel throughout Year B of the lectionary cycle, we will be confronted numerous times with foreshadowing of the Passion and crucifixion of Jesus.

Today's Scripture plunges us into the story of Jesus by presenting the itinerant preaching of John the Baptist. In Mark's Gospel, John has the sole function of pointing to Jesus as the one "mightier than I." John's clothes and food recalls the Jewish Scriptures' story of Elijah sent by God to "prepare the way of the Lord."

Throughout Mark's Gospel, the disciples are presented as deaf and blind at times to the reality of who Jesus is and the import of Jesus' ministry and preaching. John however, is presented as a faithful disciple who recognizes and points to the person of Jesus who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

The passage of Isaiah proclaimed today and immortalized in Handel's Messiah, sets the stage for how we are to hear the story of John the Baptist in the Gospel. The Lord comes with power, rules with strength and shall be like a shepherd who cares for his flock. The hieratic language of a "mighty God" is tempered with the gentle image of a shepherd and sheep.

The selection from Second Peter hearkens to the end times that the Christians expected without delay. The image of the "day of the Lord" coming like a thief and the whole world passing away, model the eschatological themes presented in last Sunday's Scriptures. The three readings this Sunday proclaim a message of watchfulness and preparedness that needs to be part of our lives as we ready our hearts to celebrate the nativity of the Lord.



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### Third Sunday of Advent

In the first passage from Isaiah, we have the text which is quoted in Luke's Gospel at the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry. The speaker in the passage is empowered and commissioned by God to authorize such good news to the poor and downtrodden. In the Old Testament milieu, these words would have only been spoken by a king, for only a king would have been authorized to declare a year of jubilee. Hearing this passage alongside today's Gospel passage from John, highlights the thematic emphasis that Jesus is King and rules with authority. This is a theme which John works with throughout his Gospel up to and including the crucifixion scene where Jesus "reigns" from the tree of the cross.

John's Gospel today highlights the life and ministry of John in relation to Jesus who is the "Christ", the anointed one of God. John's importance to the narrative of Jesus' life is that of the "announcer" who points to the dynamic intervention of God in human history in the life and ministry of Jesus. In art history, John is always pointing away from himself to Jesus or a representation of the "light of the world". John "announces" the public ministry of Jesus.

The first letter to the Thessalonians is the earliest writing of Paul and speaks of the end times expectation that God will bring to fulfillment the work begun in the life of Jesus. Admonitions are given to the community to rejoice, pray and give thanks. If we are to understand the life of the fledgling Christian Church, it is under the banner of a community at prayer and giving thanks. Further, the community is charged to let the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit flourish in the Church.

As the community approaches Christmas, these passages highlight the uniqueness of God's breaking into the world in the life and ministry of Jesus who announced not just a year of favor from the Lord, but an entirely new existence of life in the Spirit.

### Fourth Sunday of Advent

With the Scripture selections for this Sunday, the Gospel focuses our attention on the events immediately preceding the birth of Jesus. Because Mark does not have any infancy narrative, we are presented with the annunciation of the angel Gabriel from Luke's Gospel. This well known story, and subject of much art work in the major periods of art history, plays out like a beautiful tableau. The scene has three steps: the angel's greeting and Mary's confusion; the annunciation itself; and the explanation of how this would happen. Mary's response is to accept the message and assent to God's plan. The passage links Jesus to the promises made to King David which we hear in the first reading from II Samuel.

King David proposes to build a temple for the ark of God, however, through the prophet Nathan, the Lord promises David a house and kingdom that will endure forever, and a throne that shall stand firm forever. The fulfillment of that promise becomes definitive with the birth of Jesus who will be given the throne of David his father. The power in the words of the angel situate the birth of Jesus in the broad history of salvation and provide a setting for us to understand the future life and ministry of Jesus. The passage from Romans are the concluding verses of that epistle, and provide a doxology with which to honor Christ.



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# **CELEBRATION SUMMARIES and REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

# SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS

November 1, 2023

## SCRIPTURE SUMMARY

**First Reading**                      *Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14*

The author of the Book of Revelation had a vision that reaffirmed the belief that all who remain faithful to the Lamb of God receive fulfillment and glory after their trial.

**Responsorial Psalm**    *Psalms 24:1bc-2, 3-4ab, 5-6*

Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

**Second Reading**            1 John 3:1-3

John exhorted his brothers and sisters, God's children in the faith, to place their hope in the light of the world and in that way to keep themselves pure.

**Gospel**                              *Matthew 5:1-12a*

Jesus offered the beatitudes as the charter of the heavenly reign. The poor in spirit, the sorrowing, the lowly, the peacemakers – all these receive God's love.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- The psalmist reminds the Lord that, "this is the people that longs to see your face." In what ways do you give witness to this longing?
- Because of the Father's love "we may be called the children of God." As a beloved child and disciple, how do you radiate God's love to your family, friends, and co-workers?
- In the Beatitudes Jesus gives us a blueprint for discipleship. How will you live out these "be-attitudes" this week so that all will know that you are a disciple of Jesus?

# COMMEMORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

November 2, 2023

## SCRIPTURE SUMMARY

**First Reading**                      *Wisdom 3:1-9*

The souls of those who have died are with God. God has mercy, and each of us has "hope full of immortality."

**Responsorial Psalm**    *Psalms 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6*

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. – **or** – Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

**Second Reading**          Romans 6:3–9

The Christian lives in union with the risen Christ, a union that finds its term when the Christian will one day be “with Christ” in glory.

**Gospel**                      *John 6:37–40*

Jesus rejects no one who comes to him. Everyone who believes in the Son will have eternal life and be raised up on the last day.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How does the promise of an eternal “dwelling place” with God comfort you in times of sorrow? In what ways do you seek this dwelling place in your own life? Do you invite others to share it with you?
- What challenges in our society would separate you from the love of Christ? In what ways do you cling to faith in Christ in the face of these challenges?
- As a disciple, how do you share your joy in the saving love of God? How does your daily living profess to others your faith in eternal life with Christ?
- Share a memory of a loved one who has died. How has this person influenced your life?

# THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 5, 2023

## SCRIPTURE SUMMARY

**First Reading**          *Malachi 1:14b–2:2b, 8–10*

In the name of the Lord of hosts the prophet asked, “Have we not all the one father? Has not the one God created us? Why then do we break faith with one another, violating the covenant of our fathers?”

**Responsorial Psalm**    *Psalms 131:1, 2, 3*

In you, Lord, I have found my peace.

**Second Reading**      1 Thessalonians 2:7b–9, 13

Paul gave thanks to God and praised the Thessalonians for receiving the gospel as God’s word at work in all who believe. He said, “We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children.”

**Gospel**                      *Matthew 23:1–12*

Jesus warned the crowds and disciples not to show off but to practice the faith humbly before God: “The greatest among you must be your servant.”

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- The Gospel calls us to servant leadership. What are some of the characteristics of persons who model servant leadership and encourage me on my journey as a disciple?
- Humility calls us to accept and develop our gifts, putting them at the service of others. As a follower of the one Teacher, how do I develop my gifts and use them to serve others?
- In places where I am a leader – at home, at work, in my community – how will I remove unnecessary burdens and lead by example rather than power?

# THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 12, 2023

## SCRIPTURE SUMMARY

**First Reading**                      *Wisdom 6:12–16*

Wisdom is there for those who love and seek her: resplendent, unfading, responsive, eager, patient, perfect, gracious, and caring.

**Responsorial Psalm**      *Psalm 63:2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8*

My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

**Second Reading**              1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 or 4:13–14

Those who have died in Christ will rise first. Believers will be with Christ forever. Christians can comfort one another with this knowledge.

**Gospel**                                      *Matthew 25:1–13*

Jesus told the disciples the parable of the bridesmaids, emphasizing the urgency of keeping alert to the coming of God's reign: "Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- The king of the world will raise us up to live again forever. How does Jesus' power over death give me hope and encouragement despite the suffering and pain that is part of my earthly journey?
- As a disciple of Christ, how can I bring this hope and encouragement to the marginalized of our society, particularly those we encounter in our faith community?
- Scripture tells us that God is not God of the dead, but of the living. How, then, can this truth help us dispel the fear that many have of death and prepare us for a joyful reunion with God and the communion of saints?

# THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 19, 2023

## SCRIPTURE SUMMARY

**First Reading**                    *Proverbs 31:10–13, 19–20, 30–31*

A worthy wife has value far beyond pearls. She deserves payment for her labor and praise for her work: “Let her works praise her at the city gates.”

**Responsorial Psalm**    *Psalms 128:1–2, 3, 4–5*

Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

**Second Reading**            1 Thessalonians 5:1–6

According to Paul, Christians are children of light. They belong not to dark nor to night but, rather, to day and light. They should be awake, sober, and alert.

**Gospel**                            *Matthew 25:14–30 or 25:14–15, 19–21*

Jesus told the parable about a man who went on a journey and gave his servants money. On his return, he said to the one who made the greatest profit, “Well done...I will give you great responsibilities.”

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Our first reading speaks of the love and hard work needed to create a fruitful relationship with wisdom. As a disciple, how are you called to extend this beyond your hearth to the needy, the poor and the marginalized?
- Paul affirms his community, calling them children of the light. How can I be a light in my community, affirming others and inviting them to walk in God’s light?
- The Gospel calls us to be faithful as disciples in both large and little things. IN what ways can faithfulness to your daily routine be a witness to others, your parish, and society?

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# SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

November 26, 2023

## SCRIPTURE SUMMARY

**First Reading**                    *Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17*

The Lord God said, "I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock...I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy or dark." I will pasture them, give them rest, bring back the strays, and heal the sick.

**Responsorial Psalm**    *Psalm 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6*

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

**Second Reading**            1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life." Christ must reign until the last enemy, death, is destroyed, "so that God may be all in all."

**Gospel**                            *Matthew 25:31-46*

As a shepherd separates sheep from goats, so will the Son of Man come in glory to separate those who fed the hungry from those who did not: "Whatever you did for one of the least...you did for me."

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- God is truly among the scattered sheep, as a disciple I must be willing to work at gathering God's faithful flock. Where in my life will God be "pasturing" the most? What will I do as a disciple?
- What are the powers and gifts in my life that need to be subjected to the kingship of Christ to better serve the community?
- Our eternal union with God is determined by the attention and devotion we give to those suffering around us. In light of this truth, how will I serve God in others?



# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 3, 2023

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19</i>
Second Reading	1 Corinthians 1:3–9
Gospel	<i>Mark 13:33–37</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Advent begins with abrupt words from Jesus: “Be watchful! Be alert!” Coming as it does amid the hustle of the secular “holiday season,” Jesus’ urgency may be just what we need to jolt us into Advent reflection.

The liturgy draws our attention first to the hope of Christ’s return in glory. We look forward to the time when “gathered at his right hand, they [we] may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom” (collect).

Yet our celebration does not direct us only heavenward, and so we pray after Communion that “you teach us...to love the things of heaven...” As if acknowledging that we are yet unready to assume our full citizenship in the heavenly realm, we hear in the first reading that “all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags.” Still, we find assurance in God “the potter,” who can remake us once more in the divine image. Indeed, Paul reminds us in the second reading that we are “not lacking in any spiritual gift” as we await “the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

While Advent does not have the full penitential character of Lent, it does call for simplicity both in church and at home. Take time – in silence after the readings, as the gifts are prepared, and after Communion – to reflect on those things that prevent Christ’s full revelation among us. Then, indeed, we will be ready “to run forth to meet...Christ” (collect) on the day of glory.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- In the Gospel, Jesus told his disciples, “Be constantly on the watch! Stay awake!” As you wait for the Lord during Advent, what needs to be awakened in you as a disciple to see the awesome deeds of God?
- Who have you awakened or alerted to the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- How have you invited others to move away from their ‘isms’ of life and culture to satisfy their deepest longings for life in God?

# SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

December 8, 2023 (Friday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Genesis 3:9–15, 20</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 98:1, 2–3, 3–4</i>
Second Reading	<i>Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12</i>
Gospel	<i>Luke 1:26–38</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Though we honor Mary today with a special celebration, our festivity is still colored with Advent’s themes. After all, along with John the Baptist, Mary is a wonderful “patron” of Advent, for during this season we keep vigil for her son’s coming, as she herself awaited his birth in history.

The Gospel holds the core of the celebration’s meaning, for in it we learn why we honor Mary as the “Immaculate Conception.” The angel’s address to Mary as “full of grace” highlights God’s special gift to Mary: the grace of openness to her role in God’s plan of salvation. We, too, benefit from the marvelous gift, and pray in the collect to God that “we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your [God’s] presence.” Like all God’s gifts, Mary’s graced life is a gift to all who follow in her son’s footsteps.

Homilists and liturgy preparers would do well to remember that a celebration in honor of Mary must always point us to her son, as the Gospel passage does today. While Marian hymns may satisfy the piety of some, the assembly’s prayer might be better served by sticking with the musical and liturgical choices for Advent, from penitential act to service music to Eucharistic Prayer. With Mary, we await the fullness of Christ’s presence, and so today we pray with her that we might behold at last “the Son of the Most High” (Gospel).

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” How grateful are you for the favors you find in God? As a disciple, how can you enthusiastically share your favors with others?
- “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you.” The angel recognized the presence of God in Mary. As a disciple, how can you be prompt to recognize God’s presence in others?
- “May it be done to me according to your will.” If Mary’s “yes” changed the world forever, in what practical ways can your “yes” change our world today?

# SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 10, 2023

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Isaiah 4:1-5, 9-11</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14</i>
Second Reading	2 Peter 3:8-14
Gospel	<i>Mark 1:1-8</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

A scant eight days into Advent the liturgy brims with hope: “Comfort, give comfort to my people,” cries the prophet Isaiah. “Here comes the power of the Lord God” (first reading). As Isaiah’s prophecy continues we hear the familiar Advent call: “In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!”

Still, the liturgy doesn’t yet allow us to look toward Bethlehem; Advent still resists our culture’s quick transition from Thanksgiving to Christmas. On the contrary, the Gospel reading points us not to Mary’s newborn but to the adult Christ through his messenger, John the Baptist. In John we see the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the one who will prepare God’s way, and in John’s baptism of repentance we are reminded of our own baptism and, perhaps, our failure to live it fully. Yet we also remember the power of our baptism to make us ready for the Holy Spirit Christ brings.

The second reading, however, directs us to the end of time once more, and we are faced with a classic Christian dilemma: How are we to live today as we await the “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (second reading)? Wisdom and discernment are key, responds the liturgy, as we pray after Communion to “judge widely the things of earth and to hold firm to the things of heaven,” and in the collect “may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste” to meet Christ.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- John the Baptist made ready the way of the Lord by urging people to live holy lives. Who are the John the Baptists in your life that encourage you to conduct yourself in holiness?
- Like John the Baptist, how are you a messenger of conversion, nurturing your discipleship and the discipleship of others by announcing God’s reign?
- When have you listened to another’s longings and expectations, and encouraged movement beyond Bethlehem to engage our world in truth and acts of justice?

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# FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

December 12, 2023 (Tuesday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading                      *Revelation 11:19a; 12:1–6a, 10ab*

Responsorial Psalm      *Judith 13:18bcde, 19*

Gospel                                      *Luke 1:39–47*

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Today's feast celebrates the appearance of the Virgin Mary to Cuauhtlatoatzin (Juan Diego) a Native American peasant in Spanish-occupied Mexico, in the 1500s...The Guadalupe story itself highlights Mary's identification with the oppressed Native Americans: she appeared as an Aztec princess with a sash around her abdomen indicating pregnancy. Guadalupe is, then, a powerful Advent sign of the justice Mary's son brings.

The celebration of the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe is seen in the readings as a time of great expectation. The end times are now, and the coming Lord is here to make things new. That is the message no matter which first reading is chosen. The psalm that follows extols the place of Mary in the hierarchy of heaven and earth.

The story of the visitation to Elizabeth not only extols Mary's role in the history of our salvation it also presents to us the image of Mary as one who travels to care for the needs of others. We probably should be less surprised that the Virgin who visited Elizabeth likewise came to Mexico, to visit Juan Diego and his people. Just as Mary offered comfort to Elizabeth in what must have been a most confusing time, the Madonna comes to Mexico, and she comes to us whenever we are in need.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Elizabeth asked, "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" How have you experienced God coming to you in other people?
- Our Lady of Guadalupe is proclaimed "The Star of the New Evangelization." In what practical ways can you imitate her as you proclaim the message of salvation today?
- Two races at the verge of destruction were saved by Guadalupe and became one. As a disciple to the one America, what can you learn from Guadalupe and do in order to nurture the richness of ethnic diversity in our Church and society?

# THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 17, 2023

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54</i>
Second Reading	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
Gospel	<i>John 1:6-8, 19-28</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

On this Gaudete Sunday, we are encouraged to “rejoice” no less than four times. The entrance antiphon from Paul’s letter to the Philippians encourages us to “rejoice” because of the nearness of the Lord, a sentiment echoed in the second reading. In the first reading the prophet exclaims, “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in God is the joy of my soul.” Not to be outdone, the responsorial psalm completes the medley with an excerpt from Mary’s Magnificat: “My soul rejoices in my God.”

Why rejoice? The beginning of the first reading gives a hint: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me...he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor...to announce a year of favor from the Lord.” According to Luke’s Gospel (4:16-21) Jesus began his public ministry with this as the passage, which he announced was fulfilled in him – surely a cause for joy. The use of this passage today, along with the Gospel’s focus on the ministry of John the Baptist, remind us that Advent is as much about preparing to receive Christ the preacher, wonderworker, and suffering Messiah, as it is about his birth.

Still, both the collect and the prayer after Communion begin to point us to Christ’s birth, and so we can be forgiven if our preparations for that festival begin to occupy us.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- “Rejoice always and in all ways,” recognizing the light of Christ in others. Reflect upon and name the light(s) in your life.
- John was sent to prepare the way for Christ’s light to shine and be received in the lives of others. As a disciple, how and where are you proclaiming glad tidings to the poor?
- “Wrapped in a mantle of justice” – where have you as a disciple experienced and participated in the healing of the brokenhearted? Liberty to captives? And release of prisoners? In words, actions and policies?

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 24, 2023

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 89:2–3, 4–5, 27, 29</i>
Second Reading	Romans 16:25–27
Gospel	<i>Luke 1:26–38</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

The simple if surprising story of the annunciation lies at the heart of today's liturgy, yet it can be easy to get stuck in there, as if the exchange between God's messenger and Mary is just a historical detail to be remembered. But as important as Mary's unique role is in the history of salvation, we too are called to let God's Word take its place in our hearts today.

This is, perhaps, not an easy message to hear; the annunciation is a little "safer" when it means just Mary! Can't we just ride her coattails? Even more, how can we be worthy of such an honor?

It helps to remember that we, like Mary, have done nothing to merit our ministry as Christ-bearers. Just as Mary was "full of grace" – full of God's "gift" – we too have been filled with God's good gifts in baptism. And we can take comfort that God didn't just come up with this yesterday; as Paul writes to the Romans, this good news is "the revelation of a mystery kept secret through long ages," now announced for all to hear.

That "mystery," however, refers not only to Christ's birth but to his whole work of salvation. If we wish to enter the Christmas mystery, we must embrace the mystery of the cross as well, and so even as we make final preparations for a joyous Christmas, we pray that we may "be brought to the glory of his Resurrection" (collect).

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Mary, when visited by Gabriel, offered herself as the "maidservant of the Lord." Like Mary recognizing and responding to God's initiative, what is God accomplishing in and through you?
- We are told to "go" and "tell" of God's forgiveness and love. To whom should you, in your role as a disciple, call, invite, encourage and empower to exercise their baptismal call to respond to God's initiative?
- When you or others are troubled by events in your life, how do you keep from being afraid?

# SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

December 24, 2023 – *THE VIGIL MASS* (Sunday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Isaiah 62:1–5</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 89:4–5, 16–17, 27, 29</i>
Second Reading	<i>Acts 13:16–17, 22–25</i>
Gospel	<i>Matthew 1:1–25</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Family – it’s all about family. The readings for the Vigil of Christmas make this one point clear, and we need to take it to heart. It sounds odd, almost invasive, but the first reading tells us that God has married us; we, as a people, are the bride of God. The covenant between God and us is an intimate one, for as Christians we believe that God knows us as well as our spouse. We are known by God in all our imperfections, God knows us and loves us as we are when our guard is down, as we are when we feel slighted or hurt or happy and filled with joy. And that is not all; God knows us this way because that is how God has always known us. The long genealogy of Christ is the proof that God has married into the entire family of humanity. God knows our ancestors, has been true to generation after generation of our family. It is important, then, that once a year we remind ourselves of the lineage we claim, for as brothers and sisters of Christ (so Paul tells us in the second reading) we have David and Abraham and Zadok and Achim and Eliud as our ancestors too. This is the covenant of the psalm, and so we shall sing forever of God’s goodness, God’s nearness, God’s love for us.

At last Advent’s expectation comes to culmination. If we’ve kept the season well, we will be ready to proclaim with the angels: “Glory to God in the highest!” Indeed, with so great a gift as the Christ child, we can do nothing but give thanks and praise.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- The Grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all people.” How do you live justly, love tenderly, and experience again the rebirth of Jesus in your heart and your discipleship?
- The lowly shepherds tending their flocks heard the Good News and ran in haste to tell all. To whom will you run in haste to spread the Good News of the Christmas message?
- How will you as a disciple resolve to bring abundant joy and great rejoicing to our brothers and sisters so as to transform our society?

# SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

December 25, 2023 – *MASS DURING THE NIGHT* (Monday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Isaiah 9:1–6</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 96:1–2, 2–3, 11–12, 13</i>
Second Reading	Titus 2:11–14
Gospel	<i>Luke 2:10–11</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Themes of darkness and light resound in both the readings and prayers, from Isaiah’s announcement of the “great light” shining “upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom” to Luke’s recounting of the “glory of the Lord” shining around the announcing angels. The collect praises the God who makes “this sacred night radiant with the splendor of the true light.” The solemn blessing prays that God may “illumine [our] hearts with the light of virtue.” Indeed, though our world is often covered in a shadow of fear, anxiety and uncertainty, our midnight proclamation resounds with bright hope.

Fulfilled in your hearing – what Jesus says about the prophecy in Isaiah concerning the year of God’s favor – is likewise behind what we read tonight. Lovers of classical music can almost hear the music playing when we hear the first reading, “For, unto us a child is born...” and that is fine, for the readings and psalm tell us that this is a day for singing. The waiting of Advent is not definitively over (the second reading keeps us grounded), that will only come with the return of Christ in glory, but it is over for now, and we celebrate how Christ is really with us in the Eucharist and in our lives of service to God and neighbor.

The Gospel presents us with Christ in the manger and shepherds in the fields, images for all times, but it also presents us with the census and Caesar Augustus, again to remind us that this is a real moment in history.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- The Grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all people.” How do you live justly, love tenderly, and experience again the rebirth of Jesus in your heart and your discipleship?
- The lowly shepherds tending their flocks heard the Good News and ran in haste to tell all. To whom will you run in haste to spread the Good News of the Christmas message?
- How will you as a disciple resolve to bring abundant joy and great rejoicing to our brothers and sisters so as to transform our society?



# SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

December 25, 2023 – MASS AT DAWN (Monday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Isaiah 62:11-12</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 97:1, 6, 11-12</i>
Second Reading	<i>Titus 3:4-7</i>
Gospel	<i>Luke 2:15-20</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

The dawn Mass for Christmas takes the morning sunrise as its cue, proclaiming the light bestowed as “the new radiance of your incarnate word” (collect). The entrance antiphon echoes the first reading from Midnight Mass: “A light will shine upon us.” Bathed in such light, we are practically compelled by the Communion antiphon to respond in joy: “Daughter Zion; lift up praise, Daughter Jerusalem.”

The Gospel of this celebration commemorates the visit of the shepherds to the manger. Shepherds were not the richest members of the society, and so their pilgrimage to the manger shows us that even from the beginning of his life on earth, Christ comes to and is welcomed by the poor and the lowly. Mary also figures prominently, as the first witness to all these things that God has done in bringing Christ to us.

The second reading of this celebration reminds us again, that the greatest gift of Christmas is what the Father did in giving us Jesus as our salvation. The first reading and psalm both accent this notion – that God is giving us a gift, that something new is happening at God’s command. And we are the ones who benefit from this great act of God; we are the ones who will live because Christ came for our salvation.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- The Grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all people.” How do you live justly, love tenderly, and experience again the rebirth of Jesus in your heart and your discipleship?
- The lowly shepherds tending their flocks heard the Good News and ran in haste to tell all. To whom will you run in haste to spread the Good News of the Christmas message?
- How will you as a disciple resolve to bring abundant joy and great rejoicing to our brothers and sisters so as to transform our society?

# SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

December 25, 2023 – MASS DURING THE DAY (Monday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Isaiah 52:7–10</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 98:1, 2–3, 3–4, 5–6</i>
Second Reading	Hebrews 1:1–6
Gospel	<i>John 1:1–18</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

After the rich imagery of the previous three Christmas liturgies – with prophetic shouts and joyful prayers – this last celebration seems a little more sober, even a tad “theological” in the academic sense. Make no mistake, this is still a day of great rejoicing – the psalm makes sure we remember that – but this is the Mass that focuses on the Word of God made flesh.

The first reading blesses the feet of those who bring the good news, the second reading reminds us that it is Christ who is the one who speaks to us in these last days of creation, but above all it is the great hymn that is the Gospel, a reading so beautiful that for centuries it was read at every Mass, the wonderful beginning of John’s Gospel which speaks of the word which was there in the beginning and which became flesh and an object of wonder for us. Just as in the prayers the theology of this moment takes precedence, here in this last Mass of Christmas there is no reference to Bethlehem at all.

At the end of the day, it seems, we need to see the images of the birth of Jesus as icons of the last theology – the word preached to the lowly, angels, in fact all of the heavens living solely for God’s praise, Mary, icon of the church keeping all these things in her heart for us.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- The Grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all people.” How do you live justly, love tenderly, and experience again the rebirth of Jesus in your heart and your discipleship?
- The lowly shepherds tending their flocks heard the Good News and ran in haste to tell all. To whom will you run in haste to spread the Good News of the Christmas message?
- How will you as a disciple resolve to bring abundant joy and great rejoicing to our brothers and sisters so as to transform our society?

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# FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, and JOSEPH

December 31, 2023 (Sunday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 128:1–2, 3, 4–5</i>
Second Reading	Colossians 3:12–21 or 3...12–17
Gospel	<i>Luke 2:22–40 or 2:22, 39–40</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Today's feast of the Holy Family is about God's promise; for God promised Abraham and Sarah many descendants ("numerous as the sands on the sea shore") despite Sarah's laugh. The promise is fulfilled; Jesus is born into the household of Joseph and Mary. Jesus the light of all nations, presented to Simeon and Anna and the glory for all peoples. The prayers from the feast remind us that "Jesus came and lived as a real human being, part of a real family." The Eastern Church calls this day the "feast of Encounter" and the psalm proclaims "He remembers forever his covenant which he made binding for a thousand generations which he entered into with Abraham by his oath to Isaac" (105:8–9).

The main purpose of the feast is to present the Holy Family as the model for all Christian families, and for domestic life in general. Our family life becomes sanctified when we live the life of the Church within our homes. This is called the "domestic church" or the "church in miniature." St. John Chrysostom urged all Christians to make each home a "family church," and in doing so, we sanctify the family unit.

Why is that so difficult for us to embrace the call to Christian holiness? May the texts of today's liturgy wash over us so that we may follow the call to holiness as described in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*); "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fulness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (40.2). In God's time, not ours, will the promise of salvation be fulfilled.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- In celebrating the feast of the Holy Family we experience life, love, and an opportunity to nurture ourselves as disciples. How can you celebrate religious feasts in your family?
- The family is often called the "domestic church." How can faith draw your family closer together as a "holy" family within the many ecumenical families within the Church?
- The family is where we first experience the values of faith and life. How can your family be a source of strength so that you can be filled with wisdom as a disciple?

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# SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

January 1, 2024 (Monday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Numbers 6:22–27</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 67:2–3, 5, 6, 8</i>
Second Reading	<i>Galatians 4:4–7</i>
Gospel	<i>Luke 2:16–21</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Today is the “octave” (eighth day) of Christmas, on which we honor Mary in a special way as “Mother of God.” The alternative opening prayer speaks eloquently of Mary’s ministry to us, as it asks that “her prayer, the gift of a mother’s love, be [our] joy through all the ages.”

Of course, the fact that today is New Year’s Day will be no less on the minds of those gathered. The first reading’s words of blessing from the book of Numbers cry out for the peace we never seem to achieve: “The Lord look kindly on you and give you peace!” Let that prayer ring out as we celebrate the Prince of Peace today, designated by Pope Paul VI as the World Day of Prayer for Peace.

Why should we contemplate the Blessed Virgin Mary in her role as the Mother of God, the Theotokos? If we understand the Christmas story, the answer is clear. At the start of this year we see Mary in her role as witness, “keeping” all the things that were happening around her and “reflecting” upon her life as evidence of all that God has done. For all our interest in New Year’s resolutions and the like, what we really need to do is recognize the work of God in our lives, keep these things in our hearts, and live them out to the full.

With a Gospel reading that is identical to that for the dawn Mass of Christmas, today should ring out with Christmas joy. Fill today’s Eucharist with effort and joy worthy of both our Christmas feast and the faithful woman we honor today.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- We do not find God. God makes the first move. God looks for us. As a disciple, can you recall, and share, some times when you experienced God coming to you?
- “God sent God’s son, born of a woman.” Mary is the Mother of God. How can you, through devotion to Mary, help to bring greater unity to our world?
- “May the Lord bless you and give you peace.” As the New Year begins, can you think of some ways that you can help to spread peace and harmony through your discipleship?

# SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

January 7, 2024 (Sunday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading	<i>Isaiah 60:1–6</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<i>Psalm 72:1–2, 7–8, 10–11, 12–13</i>
Second Reading	<i>Ephesians 3:2–3a, 5–6</i>
Gospel	<i>Matthew 2:1–12</i>

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Although the theme of light dominates the Christmas season, Epiphany is a kind of climax; the solemn blessing alone speaks of God’s “wonderful light” and of Christ “as a light shining in darkness” and “Light from Light,” as we pray that Christ make of the baptized “a light for your brothers and sisters.” As if that wasn’t enough, the theme of light appears in the first and Gospel readings, and in almost every prayer and antiphon.

Of course, there is more to Epiphany than light, for the light reveals the Word-made-flesh, today to the Magi, which is but one of three “manifestations” we celebrate today; the other two are the Lord’s baptism and the wedding feast of Cana. Liturgy preparers, then, have much to keep in mind as they make choices for today, next Sunday and even the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. Each liturgical movement unfolds further the full identity of the Christ child.

After the exertions of the secular “holiday season,” the assembly may be getting tired of Christmas; many may have already packed up Christmas décor and settled in for the long winter in the northern hemisphere. Help the assembly – which hopefully held back a bit during Advent – maintain its stamina.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Isaiah invites us to walk in the light of the Lord proclaiming God’s praises. In what ways can you express your faith within conversations?
- Like the Magi, we must search our hearts to recognize the gifts God has given us. How are you using your gifts in work or in your parish and fulfilling your call to discipleship by sharing the Good News with others?
- Today’s readings tell us to walk, follow and unite. How do you encourage Christian unity and love in your home, church and community? How do you recognize Christ in others?

# FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

January 8, 2024 (Monday)

## SCRIPTURE CITATION

First Reading            *Isaiah 42:1–4, 6–7* (for other options, see the Lectionary)

Responsorial Psalm    *Psalms 29:1–2, 3–4, 3, 9–10*

Gospel                    *Mark 1:7–11*

## CELEBRATION SUMMARY

Today's feast, which concludes the Christmas season, is a fitting climax to the Advent season of hope and the manifestation of Christ as light to all the nations on Epiphany. The feast serves as a hinge between the birth and the public ministry of Christ which is played out in the Sundays of Ordinary Time. As we complete the Christmas season, the goodness of God cries out and the waters come to life with saving grace.

The baptism of Jesus and the reference to the river Jordan is found in several texts from today's liturgy. We are also invited by the Church to reflect on our own baptism, and are invited to enter more deeply into the performance of our own baptism. When we recall our baptism we are stirring up water that was our own womb of entrance into the life of Christ. The word of God will quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger. As the late Jesuit Father Walter Burghardt said of today's feast, "My own baptism reveals my identity, tells the world who I am. I am, like Jesus, a servant sent to suffer for justice."

The antiphon for the Gospel canticle from the Liturgy of the Hours for the feast of the Epiphany proclaims "today the Bridegroom claims his bride, the Church, since Christ has washed her sins away in Jordan's waters; the Magi hasten with their gifts to the royal wedding; and the wedding guests rejoice, for Christ has changed water into wine, alleluia." Let the Church sing Alleluia for we have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Justice and righteousness ring out in today's Scripture readings. In the present time, what do you see as our greatest challenge as a nation, a community, a society? What is the greatest personal challenge you face?
- Recall a baptism you witnessed. How can you help others to experience the Sacrament of Baptism to the fullest? How can this challenge strengthen you as a disciple?
- In taking personal initiative to assist your parish to reverence the Word, name five ways you could initiate a process or procedure and identify the one you would most like to act upon as a disciple.

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# NOTES and REMINDERS

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