

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

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Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2016.

## WEEK 1

**Reader 1:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt. 24:37-44)

Jesus said to his disciples, 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

**Everyone:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel ....

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

The expression "Happy New Year" tends to be reserved for the Calendar Year. This is not surprising when one considers the treble call to vigilance that marks this Gospel passage.

Here Christ puts Noah before us, Noah, a man who was aware and prepared for a devastating flood whereas his contemporaries were not and carried on their daily lives regardless. Secondly, he speaks of two men and two women being together and one of each being taken without advance warning! I am reminded of the dreadful fright that often accompanies sudden death. Thirdly, he presents us with the striking image of a home being robbed while the occupier sleeps!

Clearly the tone of this Gospel passage, the first of the new liturgical year, differs radically from the sentiment normally expressed at the beginning of the Calendar Year. And come Sunday you and I will greet this passage with the phrase "Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ".

Are we nuts? In the eyes of others perhaps we are, but in this moment, let us pray for the grace to imitate Noah and Our Lord Jesus Christ in seeking to be attentive to our Heavenly Father and in being obedient to his will, irrespective of other peoples' opinions, mutterings or courses of action.

**Silence**

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

**Sharing**

**Leader:** Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

*Group returns to page 20 of Advent booklet*

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2016.

WEEK 2

**Reader 1:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt. 3:1-12)

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

*A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.*

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

**Everyone:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel ....

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

Clearly John was not a man to mince his words or seek a politically correct formula of expression in the face of injustice or spiritual lethargy. Clearly too he was passionate about challenging those who came to him to truly love God and their neighbour.

Is his challenge confined to history, or has it relevance for your heart and mine? In my case, I confess a certain spiritual smugness. You see I have a tendency to tick mental boxes – been to Mass, said my prayers, did an honest day's work, expressed sympathy to the grieving etc. etc..

Today, however, I am seriously challenged by something I never noticed before. John said "But if you are repentant (present tense), produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume ....". Am I correct in thinking God wants us to live a spirit of repentance that finds expression in our thinking and everyday action even to the point of being vulnerable for the sake of the Gospel? Unlike those who went to hear John you and I have been baptised with the Holy Spirit. Wonderful gifts, e.g. right judgment, courage and reverence have been given to us. Do we exercise our freedom in their favour? I have a bit to do. How about you?

**Silence**

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

**Sharing**

**Leader:** Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

*Group returns to page 28 of Advent booklet*

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2016.

## WEEK 3

**Reader 1:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt. 11:2-11)

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says:

'Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you.

'I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.' The Gospel of the Lord.

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

**Everyone:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel ....

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

The older I get the more I realise the many forms imprisonment takes and that its early stages can be profoundly challenging. To go, for example, from being active to being confined, to living independently to being cared for, to having enough to meet one's needs to being dependent again marks a major life event. In reality it eventually comes to most of us and in this context I wonder if every believer, like John the Baptist, arrives at a point of questioning Jesus' identity, mission and timing.

One of the things that strikes me about Jesus' response to John in his engagement of John's disciples. It is they, in the power of His word, whom he calls to witness and to offer testimony to John by communicating what they hear and see.

And what about you and I and those we know to be prisoners? Are we communicating with them what we hear and see or are we leaving them at the mercy of the tv and radio and to long hours without companionship or to being loved only by their carer(s)? Is there someone we could visit, ring, email or send a card to and in the process, witness to God's work in our world?

**Silence**

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

**Sharing**

**Leader:** Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

*Group returns to page 35 of Advent booklet*

# Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2016.

## WEEK 4

**Reader 1:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt. 1:18-24)

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel,  
a name which means 'God-is-with-us.'*

When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home. The Gospel of the Lord.

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

**Everyone:** A Reading from the Holy Gospel ....

**Silence**

**Leader:** Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

**Reader 2:** Reflection on the Gospel

Do things work out when we place our lives at the service of God's plan? The passage we have just pondered suggests they did for Mary and Joseph ... but not instantly. Their relationship was seriously challenged by Mary's pregnancy and we see how Joseph's initial response, whilst guided by charity, was also conditioned by prevailing cultural and religious norms.

If living in intimate relationships has been part of our lived experience, we can probably empathise with Mary and Joseph. Difficulties, when they arise have a way of testing us that far exceeds difficulties we face together. And much as we would like God to come and sort them out for us, we know he doesn't, choosing instead to reverence the freedom he has gifted us. We remain the key agents of our destinies.

But he does send his angels, his messengers. Can you recall a time when he sent one your way, with a word that generated an *Emmanuel* moment pertinent to your prevailing difficulty? Perhaps it was in a dream, or perhaps it was a relation, friend, counsellor, beggar or stranger who spoke the word your heart needed to hear.

Perhaps too it was only later that you realised God's handiwork for, as George Elliot noted, *The golden moments in the stream of life rush past us and we see nothing but sand; the angels come to visit us, and we only know them when they are gone.*

**Silence**

**Leader:** I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

**Sharing**

**Leader:** Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

*Group returns to page 44 of Advent booklet*