

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2019

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

Beginning the new church year with the season of Advent, the Gospel calls us to stand ready. Ready for what, we might ask! Perhaps we know the answer in our hearts. Amid the many distractions that jostle for our attention, the quiet room in our heart is the place where God shall make much known to us. He has created each of us in his image and likeness, and blessed us with many gifts and talents. Part of our life's mission is to make the most of what God has given us. Amidst the busy-ness of life today, we seek to keep in touch with that quiet room within. These weeks of Advent are a fine example of that. Advent - a time for waiting. We believers wait, in a world all around us that constantly races ahead, to the next great thing. Let us witness to the Lord and to our faith, by savouring this holy season. In these days we prepare the quiet room of our hearts for the birth of the Word becoming flesh. Amidst the often messy nature of life, we find the Lord who takes delight in his people. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

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.

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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

The opening three words of today's gospel invite us to pause, "In due course" or another translation "In those days". This phrase carries Biblical weight, it is a "description regularly used to introduce a new departure, a significant event or a birth...the narrator goes on to say that John the Baptist comes/appears...(Michael Mullins). He appears in the wilderness of Judea. Even though he was a son of Zachariah, a priest, his ministry did not take place in the Temple but in the wilderness. The wilderness has no walls and is open to everyone. John's voice "cries in the wilderness" – this is not a whimper but a cry to all, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand". "Jerusalem...all Judaea...the whole of Jordan" responded to him. Even the Pharisees and Sadducees came! The concrete expression of repentance was seen as producing "appropriate fruit" and "good fruit". In Advent, we begin again the slow intentional work of bearing fruit depending on our calling in life. Fruit takes time to grow and mature. Every fruitful act to bring about the kingdom of heaven in preparation for the coming of Jesus, who embodies the kingdom, is worth it.

Silence

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

Sharing

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Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 28 of Advent booklet

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

From the depths of his uncertainty and confinement, John the Baptist asks our Jesus, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus' answer reveals him to be both empathetic and eager for John to know the fruits of his ministry. He also casts a spotlight on the importance of faith when he says 'and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me'.

Many of us have the consolation of our faith. We know, love and serve Jesus ... but how often do we ponder how He sees us? Might there be a clue in His extraordinary claim that 'a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

I hope I don't offend you in suggesting that 'least in the kingdom' encompasses us! We are greater than John, not by virtue of our own strengths and capabilities, but because we have been baptised into Christ, because we receive Him in word and sacrament as frequently as we permit, and because we share intimately in the mission of liberation and communion that's so dear to His heart. Put simply (or profoundly!) it is our great privilege to eternally be 'in Christ' (1 Cor 3:23).

Silence

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

Sharing

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Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

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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

Joseph has central place in Matthew's story of the birth of Jesus.

His role offers us food for reflection.

Two particular characteristics come to mind:

1. Both in the passage we have just read and, later on, in the aftermath of the visit of the Magi, Joseph has an experience of God 'in a dream'. In both cases Joseph does exactly what God asks him to do.

Pope Francis has a great love of St Joseph. He has a statue of the 'St Joseph Sleeping' (see picture). Under this statue he places notes about the many problems that he faces, and entrusts them to Joseph.

As Joseph came to clarity as to what to do in trustful sleep, Francis finds the same. What a lovely Advent blessing, there for us all and our families.

2. Despite his great role in the narrative of the birth of Jesus, we have no recorded word from Joseph. He is the one who does the will of God, not the one who talks about doing it. He acts silently, lovingly, faithfully and with courage in God's name. Would that we were like him!!

May Joseph's gentle presence be with us all during these sacred and blessed days.

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.

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