

Feast of Faith

Gathering

When Pope Benedict XVI visited the United States in 2008, tens of thousands gathered in Yankee Stadium to celebrate the Eucharist with him. What made them different from all the other excited crowds who have assembled there through the years? When they began to sing together, to listen together, to pray together, they ceased to be a crowd, and became a liturgical assembly. It was not where they were but what they did that set them apart.

The Gospels speak of many instances when Jesus prayed alone to his Father. But Jesus also put a special value on communal prayer. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," he told his disciples, "there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Jesus gave his own mission to his followers, sending them forth to do everything he did: to heal, to teach, to proclaim the kingdom. Jesus wants us to meet God in and through each other. So the Christian community continues to gather, Sunday after Sunday. When we get up on Sunday morning and come to Mass, we respond to Jesus' invitation, and we express our trust in his promise that whenever we come together, he comes, too.

—Corinna Laughlin, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



The Eternal God

King David wished that the ark of God might have a more permanent home. David may have envisioned something like the cedar palace where he resided. God had in mind something more: a throne where David's descendants would rule for ever, a kingdom where Jews and Gentiles alike would be welcome.

Mary's prayerful nature led to an even more disturbing message. She would conceive and bear a Son though she was not yet married. "How can this come about?" Mary wondered. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you," she was told (Luke 1:35).

Mary's acceptance of this difficult challenge ushered in this, the final age of God's reign. What was once a secret known only by chosen people like King David and his descendants must now be made clear to all so that, as Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, we can be brought to the "obedience of faith" "according to the command of the eternal God" (Romans 16:26).

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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Sg 2:8-14 or Zep 3:14-18a; Ps 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; Lk 1:39-45
Tuesday:	1 Sm 1:24-28; 1 Sm 2:1, 4-8abcd; Lk 1:46-56
Wednesday:	Mal 3:1-4, 23-34; Ps 25:4-5ab, 8-10, 14; Lk 1:57-66
Thursday:	2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29; Lk 1:67-79
Friday:	Vigil: Is 62:1-5; Ps 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Mt 1:1-25 [18-25] Night: Is 9:1-6; Ps 96:1-3, 11-13; Ti 2:11-14; Lk 2:1-14 Dawn: Is 62:11-12; Ps 97:1, 6, 11-12; Ti 3:4-7; Lk 2:15-20 Day: Is 52:7-10; Ps 98:1-6; Heb 1:1-6; Jn 1:1-18 [1-5, 9-14]
Saturday:	Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Ps 31:3cd-4, 6, 8ab, 16bc, 17; Mt 10:17-22
Sunday:	Sir 3:2-6, 12-14 or Gn 15:1-6; 21:1-3; Ps 128:1-5 or Ps 105:1-6, 8-9; Col 3:12-21 [12-17] or Hb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Lk 2:22-40 [22, 39-40]

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Fourth Sunday of Advent
Monday:	Winter begins
Wednesday:	St. John of Kanty
Thursday:	The Vigil of Christmas
Friday:	The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)
Saturday:	St. Stephen; First Day of Kwanzaa

Christmas In the Heart

Christmas! 'Tis the season for kindling the fire of hospitality in the hall, the genial fire of charity in the heart.

—Washington Irving

Today's Readings

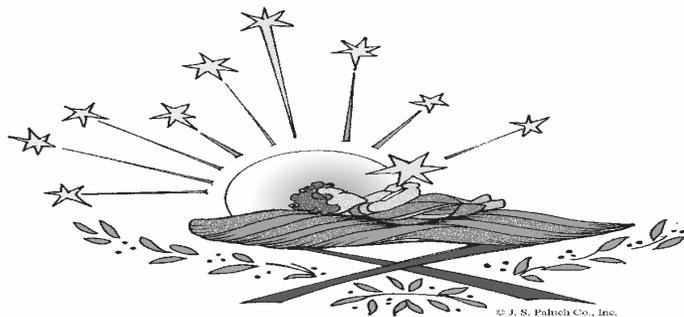
First Reading — I will fix a place for my people. (2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16).

Psalm — For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord (Psalm 89).

Second Reading — To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory forever and ever (Romans 16:25-27).

Gospel — Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word (Luke 1:26-38).

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Fourth Sunday of Advent December 20, 2020

**The child to be born will be called holy,
the Son of God.**

—Luke 1:35

Treasures From Our Tradition

How many languages do you know? Most Americans might say they have a primary language, can follow the basics of another encountered in school or in the workplace, and maybe know the barest elements of a third. Yet nearly everyone is fluent in languages of symbol and ritual, languages that transcend the spoken word and may perhaps communicate more clearly. A dance, the delights of the table, the thrill of sport, the power of a painting, a shared silence on a surf-washed beach or under a desert sky, a burst of delighted applause, all communicate without a single word. Sacrament empowers fluency in these languages. A little girl returning from Mass where a baby had been baptized was asked to summarize her day thus far. "I went to church, and some little baby became my brother." That's far more accurate than the adult's remark, "There was a baptism at Mass today." When we celebrate sacrament, Christ is always calling us into deeper fluency with the languages beyond speech. Sacraments open our senses to the presence of God precisely so we can respond to the depth of that love more fully.

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Fourth Sunday of Advent Pray Before You Speak

Have you ever been told to "think before you speak"? Nathan seems to have spoken too soon when he told David to do whatever he wanted about building a house for the LORD. He was being respectful to his king, and it sounded like a good idea. But later that night the Lord gave him a message for David: the LORD did not need anyone to build him a house; God would make David's house (in the sense of family or descendants) last forever.

As a prophet Nathan was expected to speak for the LORD. When he finally listened to the LORD, he got the message right. And that can be a lesson to us. Instead of just thinking before we speak, it could be a good idea to pray before we speak.

How many times have we said something in anger--or selfishness, fear, any strong feeling--that we wished we could take back? If we just think before we speak, we might just rationalize what we wanted to say in the first place. But if we take a little more time to bring our feelings to

God, ask for guidance and listen for what God would have us say, things might turn out a lot better.

God can also surprise us if given the chance. The kingdom ("house") God was promising was not a political one, but a universal one. Jesus fulfills this promise as the Son of God who came to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Jesus himself prayed to the Father often in his life.

We can do the same. We pray before meals; why not pray before going to work? We can pray before making decisions about our family, getting engaged, taking a new job, buying a new house/car/HD-TV, etc. When a friend or relative needs someone to talk to, we can pray that we listen well and say what God wants our friend to hear. When we are sorry for hurting someone, we can pray for forgiveness and even listen to God to learn what we might do to make it up to them. If we have enough faith to let God guide our lives, let's take the time in prayer to listen for that guidance.

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Fourth SUNDAY of Advent



December 20, 2020

The angel Gabriel said to Mary,
"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall name him Jesus."

Luke 1:30-31

GOD IS PRESENT

"Where does God dwell?" is a question on the minds of many as we continue to adjust to the pandemic. David wanted to build an ornate dwelling for the Ark of the Covenant, but God said, "No, that's not what I had in mind!" The reading from Romans teaches us that God is present in the Word, and in Luke's Gospel passage today, Jesus is residing in the womb of Mary. We know that Jesus is present in the assembly gathered, the Koinonia, as well as within the Eucharistic species. But no matter how one experiences the presence of Jesus, these days are challenging. In many places, only limited numbers continue to be allowed in church, while others are only able to worship via live stream. None of the pat answers to where God dwells really fit. We need to try and answer this with new eyes and ears and heart.

A CLASSIC IMAGE

When we think of today's Gospel, the image of this meeting between the Angel Gabriel and Mary by Fra Angelico (1440-1445) likely comes to mind. In this fresco, Gabriel and Mary are outside sitting among the columns, and Gabriel, with his big wings and hands crossed, gazes upon Mary and gestures towards her. She is well dressed in a traditional blue garment, and though her face shows shock, her folded hands model submission and humility. This work of art is so beautifully executed that we can miss some of its finer details. Similarly, because the Gospel scene is so familiar, we can forget to take in its small details. A few years ago, this author found a children's book called "The Nativity" illustrated by Julie Vivas. Because her drawings were so fresh and charming and simple, she invited new perspective on the story.

LOOKING AGAIN

Luke says that Mary "was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be." She asks, "How can this be?" These questions don't fit with how Fra Angelico positioned Gabriel and Mary. In the Vivas illustrations, the Angel Gabriel sits down with battered wings and a balding head and has a cup of coffee with Mary as the two of them try to figure it out together. The text is the same, but the message conveyed is different. There is a different degree of comfort and familiarity to these illustrations.

This "having a cup of coffee" is something we need to learn to do with the scriptures and with our lives. After this event, pregnant Mary traveled into the hill country to be with Elizabeth; an older, wiser, mentor—a mother figure. She spent three months there reflecting and preparing for the birth of her child. In this final week of Advent, take a few moments to find a Gabriel/Mary or an Elizabeth/Mary moment and read the Christmas readings again to see what you might have overlooked, and to find a new way for Christ to dwell in you.

TODAY'S READINGS

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16
Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

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Prayer of the Faithful

Let us bring our prayers for the needs of the world to the One who can strengthen us and who is faithful without fail.

For God's holy Church as we continue to bear God's Word to every corner of the world in the face of hardship and persecution, let us pray to the Lord.

For corporations, manufacturers, advertisers, and all who profit from Christmas marketing, that they may acknowledge the true source of their wealth and treat their workers justly, let us pray to the Lord.

For the safety of those who travel during this holiday season, and for good health for those families that are gathering, and for blessings on all families unable to gather this year, let us pray to the Lord.

For those who are struggling to make the Christmas holidays a joyful occasion for their families, let us pray to the Lord.

For those who are discerning their vocations, that, like Mary, they will be able to hear and respond to God's invitation to them, let us pray to the Lord.

For all those who are sick, for all who suffer from COVID-19, and for all who have died, especially N., N., and N., let us pray to the Lord.

For all the prayers that we hold in the silence of our hearts; for all our intentions spoken and unspoken, let us pray to the Lord.

**Faithful and loving God,
you keep your promises from of old.
Graciously hear these our prayers
and grant them according to your will,
through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
whose coming we await, and whose day is near.**

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