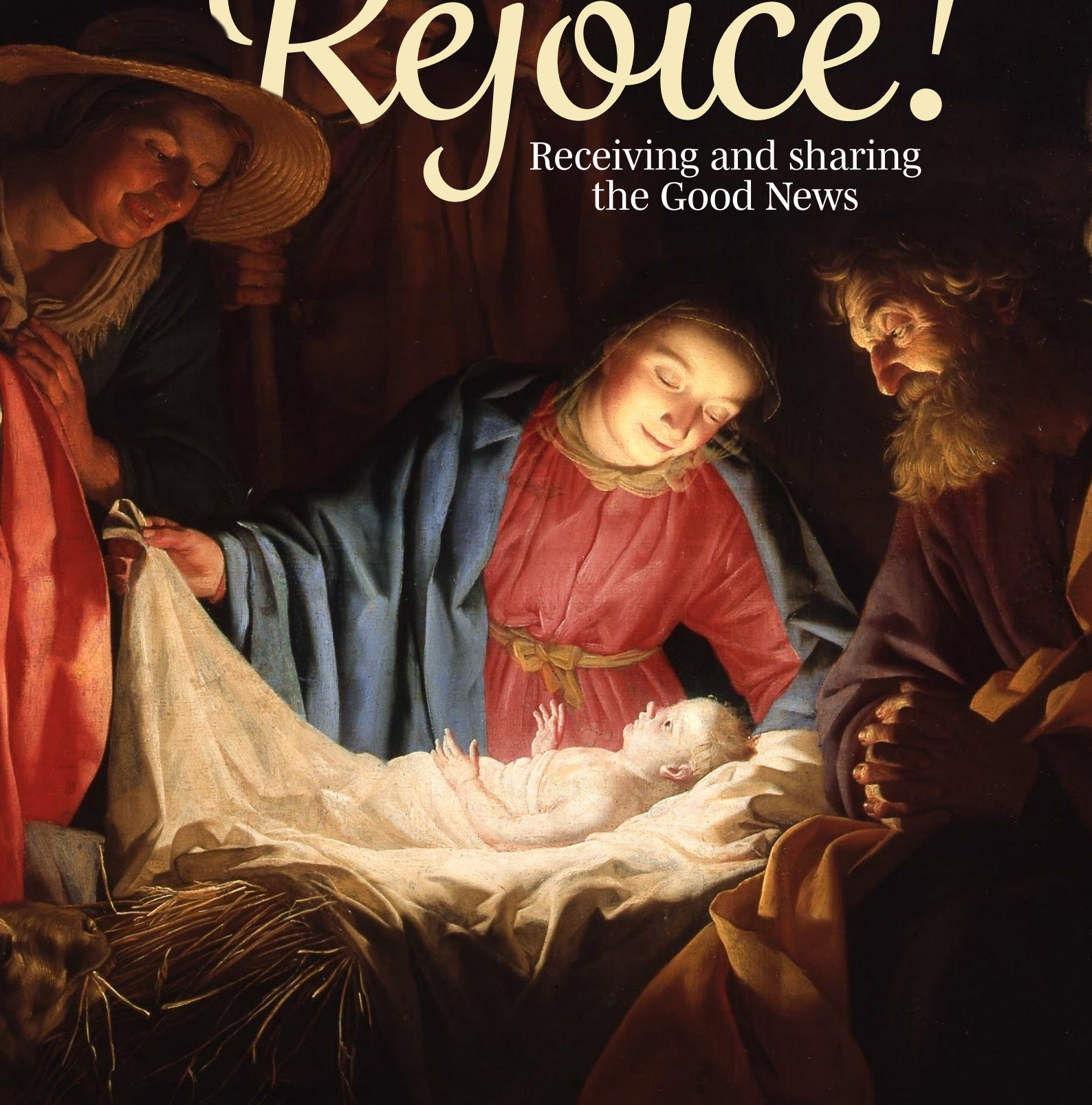


Rejoice!

Receiving and sharing
the Good News



An Advent Companion
for Parishes

Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney

**GO MAKE
DISCIPLES**

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of Might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law,
In cloud, and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things, far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.



Introduction by Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP

Our word 'Advent' comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning 'coming' or 'arrival', and indicating a season of waiting, which is why we sing hymns of longing like *Come, O come, Emmanuel*. Yet the word *adventus* is in fact in the past tense, as if the One we await has already arrived.

In fact, Advent points not to one but *three* comings of Christ. One coming is in the *past*, when Christ came two thousand years ago as a helpless Babe. One coming is in the *future*, when Christ will return in glory. And one coming is in the *present* when Christ is here amongst us in word and sacrament, in minister and community, in creation and redemption.

The purpose of this Advent Companion – *Rejoice! Receiving and Sharing the Gift of the Good News* – is to help our parish communities prayerfully contemplate that third coming, the receiving and sharing of the gift of the good news in the present.

The fostering of gratitude in our hearts for the great gift of Christ's great gift of Himself at Christmas is essential to our growth as disciples of that God-Made-Baby. It is the source of our participation in the evangelising mission of the Church as we seek to share the news of that great coming with others.

As we prepare to gather for Christmas, it's my hope we will have many parish Advent groups meeting together – whether in person or online – to build a manger in our hearts and listen closely to how Our Lord is asking us to be radiant witnesses of that great triple coming of Christ to the people of Sydney.

Anthony Fisher, OP

Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney

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How to use this Advent Companion

This is a suggestion for how individuals and small groups could use this Companion. Put aside time in the week leading to each Sunday or on the day itself (the same in relation to Christmas Day).

1. Begin with the Opening Prayer in which you entrust the time to God and ask for His grace. COVID-19 regulations permitting, you may also choose to sing the hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, which is on page 2.
2. Prayerfully read the Gospel passage. An ancient method of doing this is *lectio divina* (divine reading), which is outlined briefly on this page. You may find it helpful to read the passage more than once.
3. Read the Gospel reflection.
4. Take some time to pray, using the reflection questions as a guide to considering more deeply the Gospel passage and the reflection. You may find it helpful to use a journal to write down your thoughts. Groups may choose to discuss the responses to the questions together.
5. Finish with the Closing Prayer.

Additional Material

Examination of Conscience

Advent is a fitting time to receive God's mercy and grace in the Sacrament of Penance (also called 'Confession' or 'Reconciliation'). In order to prepare well, you may find it helpful to use the Examination of Conscience on pages 15 - 16.

Sermon on the Nativity

The "Fathers of the Church" preached extensively on the Incarnation. We have provided excerpts from St Augustine's numerous homilies on the Nativity of Jesus, to aid your prayer and preparation for Christmas.

Come, Let us Adore Him

Christmas is a wonderful occasion to reach out as a parish, and to invite and welcome others in. Using the suggestions provided on pages 18 - 19, consider what you can do in your parish to bring the Good News to the local community.

Lectio Divina

Lectio (reading)

Begin by reading the passage slowly and gently either aloud or silently. It is helpful to savour each portion, constantly listening for a word or a phrase which speaks to your heart. It is helpful sometimes to read the passage again, going back to certain words, repeating them, memorising them and allowing them to sink in more deeply.

Meditatio (meditation)

Ponder more deeply on the words or images which speak to you, allowing the words to move from the head to the heart. Continue to sit with these words, ruminating on them, engaging your mind, and reflect on what God might be saying to you through them. Give this to God and allow the light of the Word to shed new levels of meaning on them.

Oratio (prayer)

Speak to God in response to the Word or the thoughts which arose during meditation. This dialogue or prayer can take many forms – thoughts, ideas, writing, images or simply sitting in deep silent awareness of God's presence. The important thing is to speak to God just as we would with someone who knows and loves us.

Contemplatio (contemplation)

In this step, our words and thoughts subside and give way to silent presence where we rest in God's embrace. This experience may last for only a short time, or for a longer period, depending on the individual and the grace of God. Here we allow God to take over and we simply let go and receive.



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to receive the graces that you want to bestow upon us this Advent. By the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to stay awake and be ready to accept your promise of liberation made possible through the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Gospel of St Luke

(21:25-28; 34-36)

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.’

‘Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.’

Gospel Reflection By Sr Susanna Edmunds OP

“Your liberation is near at hand.” This good news has new meaning after two years of lockdown! We have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure that our churches, families, businesses and schools are eligible for liberation.

What lengths will we go to this Advent to ensure we can receive the liberation that Jesus wants to bring us at Christmas? He describes three groups who struggle to receive His gift of freedom: those who are afraid of the future, distracted by pleasure, or anxious about their needs.

When even the powers of heaven seem to be shaken, we are tempted to indulge in fearful speculation about what lies ahead. If this becomes overwhelming, we take the edge off with comfort and pleasure. And through it all, we cling tightly to our reputations, our routines, our securities, defending to the death that which we thought we couldn't live without.

Jesus comes to set us free from these slave-masters: fear, distraction and anxiety. All He asks of us is to stay awake, and through

prayer, come to realise that the signs which seem foreboding to us – the clamour and waves of the modern oceans of politics, economics, travel plans, and Christmas shopping – are actually birth-pangs of a new Creation.

In the Old Testament (Hag 2), the Lord promises that He will shake heaven and earth for two reasons: to conquer his enemies (and in this, we can include our own – insecurity, pride, guilt, regret) and to gather all the world's gold and silver and glory into his House – which we know to be the Temple of his Body, the Church. In the New Testament, this same shaking causes all that is unstable to fall away, so we can realise that “we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb 12:28).

This is good news. May Advent teach us to “stand with confidence before the Son of Man,” so our hearts can begin the journey of healing from fear, distraction and anxiety. And along the way, let us joyfully share His promise of liberation with each person we encounter.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel and the spiritual reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. From which struggle do I need Jesus to liberate me? What act of faith can I make this Advent to prepare my heart to receive this gift?
3. In what ways has Jesus liberated me in the past? How can I give witness to this Good News to others?

Closing Prayer

Loving Jesus, thank you for this beautiful season of Advent, in which you prepare our souls to welcome you at Christmas. May we, like Mary, say ‘yes’ to you with all our hearts. Grant us the grace to grow in love and mercy, and to be a witness of the Good News to each person we encounter. Amen.

Image on Page 5:
The Adoration of the Shepherds
by Matthias Stomer, Seventeenth
century. Photo: Gérard Blot/Agence
photographique de la Réunion des
Musées/Public Domain



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to yearn for the coming of the Messiah this Advent. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we repent of our sins and so be ready to receive the joy that comes with the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Gospel of St Luke

(3:1-6)

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley will be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low,
winding ways will be straightened
and rough roads made smooth.
And all mankind shall see
the salvation of God.

Gospel Reflection By Fr Anthony Robbie

Out of the desert strides the majestic figure of John the Baptist, last and greatest of the prophets. The Jewish people are waiting as they have waited for so many centuries. They yearn for their promised Messiah, not least because they have fallen so low from their former pride. Once they gloried in the unique favour of God, but now they are the remote province of a pagan empire. Now their minds turn ever more to the words of the prophets, which convey God's promise of a Messiah. Who will he be and what will he do?

"There was a man sent by God. His name was John" (Jn 1:6).

The Gospels record his dramatic and ethereal appearance. A figure of austerity in an age of indulgence and of compelling vision in an age of doubt. Like Jesus he has left the inhabitations of men to seek the face of God in the wilderness. Locusts and wild honey nourish him and a coarse garment of camel hair covers him. Not for him the comforts of this world. His heart is set on another.

All of faithful Israel is summed up in his extraordinary person. Two long lines have converged in him - the priestly and the kingly offices combined. From his father he inherits the priestly character and from his mother, daughter of the House of David like her cousin Our Lady, he bears the royal dignity. John the Baptist is Israel at her most noble, her most faithful, her most glorious. Is it any wonder that people wonder if he is the Messiah himself?

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel and the spiritual reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. Do I repent and seek the mercy of God? What can I do to purify my heart to receive the gift of God's presence among us at Christmas?
3. John the Baptist came to prepare a way for the Lord. How can I prepare the way for Jesus to enter the lives of those who do not know Him?

Closing Prayer

Loving Jesus, thank you for this beautiful season of Advent, in which you prepare our souls to welcome you at Christmas. May we, like Mary, say 'yes' to you with all our hearts. Grant us the grace to grow in love and mercy, and to be a witness of the Good News to each person we encounter. Amen.

But for all that he is merely a precursor. He tells people that he is a voice crying in the wilderness "prepare the way of the Lord!" (Mt 3:3). Over and over again he manifests his humility and speaks of "another". Countless faces turn in wonder as the great prophet announces after so many centuries "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!" (Jn 1:29). Those words, heard with delight and cherished ever since, even to the point of being incorporated into the holy rite of the Mass itself and repeated endlessly with never-diminishing reverence, bring joy to our own hearts also.

If only we could feel some part of the yearning of faithful Israel for her Messiah. He comes to us at Christmas and yet He is familiar. We live in intimacy with Him. How can we possibly know what it was to have only the promise and the hope? At least at Advent we can imitate the faithful of Israel who heard the announcement and heard also the admonition to "repent for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mt 3:2). And so they humbly made their way to the Jordan in great numbers, for they were a faithful people and received a baptism of repentance. By repenting of our own sins, we follow them to the Jordan and prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. The more we prepare for Him with hearts made pure, the more joy those hearts will feel as they are filled with light and love at our most beloved Feast.

Image on Page 7:
Adoration of the Shepherds by
Giovanni Paolo Panini, circa.
1755. Photo: Brooklyn Museum,
Public Domain



THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we draw upon the graces that we received from you at Baptism to purify our hearts anew this Advent. By the power of the Holy Spirit, give us the desire to share with others the gift of love and mercy that we experience at the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Gospel of St Luke

(3:10-18)

When all the people asked John, 'What must we do, then?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same'. There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate'. Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!'

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

Gospel Reflection By Elizabeth Arblaster

One of the most delightful episodes in Evelyn Waugh's classic novel *Brideshead Revisited* involves the protagonist Charles Ryder expressing incredulity at his friend Sebastian's belief in Christmas.

"But, my dear Sebastian, you can't seriously believe it all."

"Can't I?"

"I mean about Christmas and the star and the three kings and the ox and the ass."

"Oh yes, I believe that. It's a lovely idea."

"But you can't believe things because they're a lovely idea."

"But I do. That's how I believe."

At Christmas, beauty is a powerful mediator of the Good News. As we contemplate the image of the tiny Christ-child lying in the manger, one cannot help but be struck with awe and delight as the wise men were by what God has done. It inflames our hearts, fills us with joy and gives us hope. At such times some of the loveliest phrases of Scripture come to mind: "He has visited His people and redeemed them" (Lk 1:68), "God so loved the world He gave His only Son" (Jn 3:16), "the loving-kindness of the heart of our God who visits us like the dawn from on high" (Lk1:78).

The love and mercy of God made manifest in the Incarnation is a gift of incomparable good news.

As we grow in maturity, Christian disciples come to know that the gift of love and mercy given by God is not only for ourselves: it is a gift that God asks us to share with others. This call to share the love and mercy we have received from God is good news, but it is also a serious business for, as Dostoevsky says, love in action "is a harsh and dreadful thing." John the Baptist addresses this in this week's Gospel. In speaking of the Good News, John points out that being a true disciple of the Christ means expressing a love which requires self-sacrifice: giving to others what we have been given, being just in our dealings with others, never using our power as a form of violence against others. Living this true discipleship requires a death to self and a carrying of one's cross in imitation of the One we follow. For those who desire to live this way, the good news is that Jesus comes to change our hearts, baptising us with the Holy Spirit and with fire. It is this power of God working in us which St Paul says "can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20).

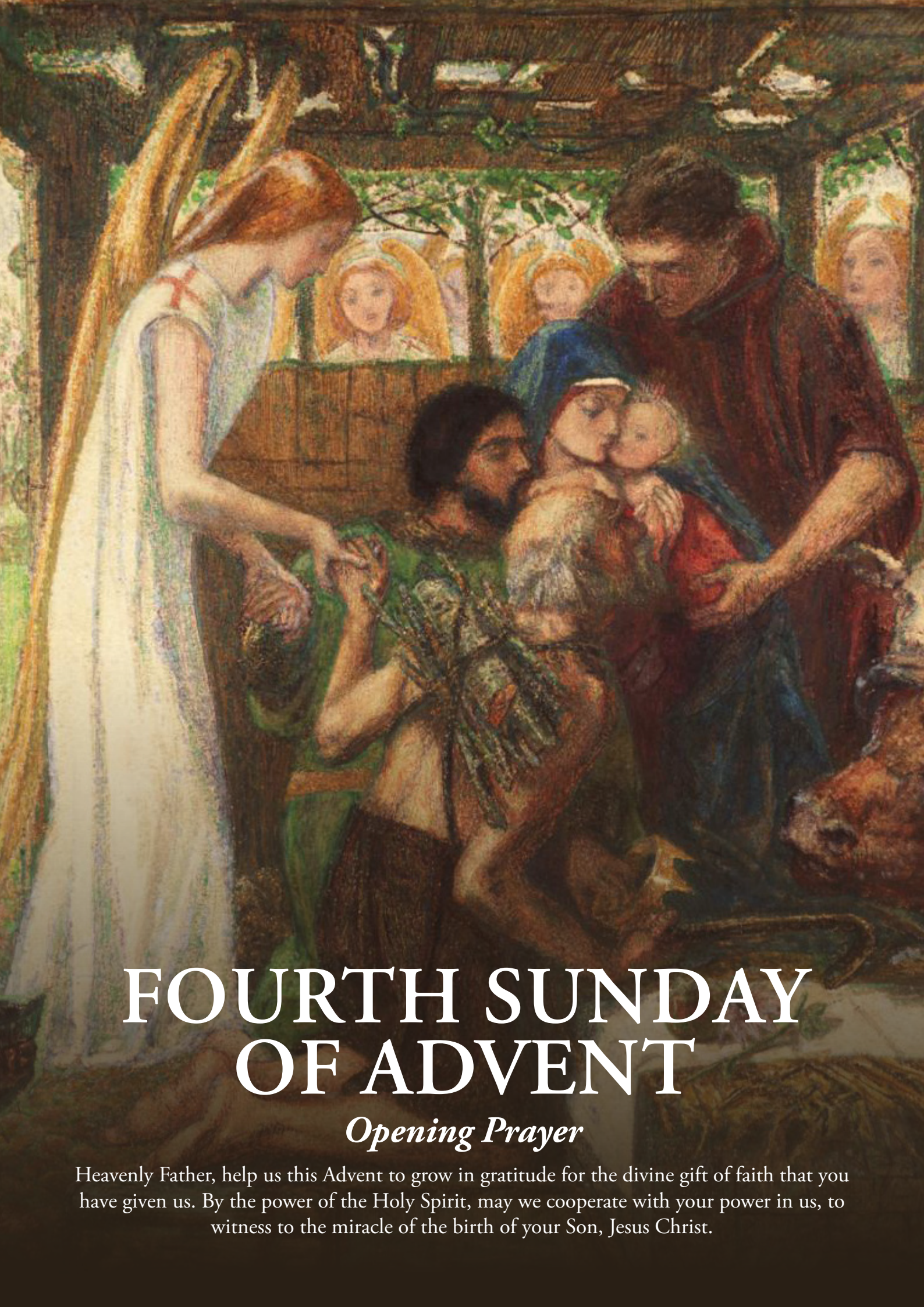
Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel and the spiritual reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. Where are the crosses in my life? Where are the places where I am called to sacrifice for others? I take a moment to ask God to help me with these aspects of my life.
3. How and when do I share the Good News to others?

Closing Prayer

Loving Jesus, thank you for this beautiful season of Advent, in which you prepare our souls to welcome you at Christmas. May we, like Mary, say 'yes' to you with all our hearts. Grant us the grace to grow in love and mercy, and to be a witness of the Good News to each person we encounter. Amen.

Image on Page 9:
The Adoration of the Shepherds
by James Tissot, circa. 1886-
1894. Photo: Brooklyn Museum,
Public Domain



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us this Advent to grow in gratitude for the divine gift of faith that you have given us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we cooperate with your power in us, to witness to the miracle of the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Gospel of St Luke

(1:39-45)

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

Gospel Reflection By Prof. Tracey Rowland

This passage of scripture is our historical account of what has become known through the Christian centuries as "the Visitation".

One woman, a virgin, says Yes to the Incarnation, a proposal put to her by an angel who tells her that her cousin Elizabeth, believed to be beyond child-bearing years, is also now with child.

Here we have two miraculous conceptions in the wombs of two women who are cousins.

The one who carries the Christ-child, the Messiah, does not stay at her own home reflecting on her own situation but goes to visit her cousin. There is something very beautiful and delightfully human about this. One imagines the two women both sharing their thoughts and feelings about what has happened to them with the only other woman who could possibly empathise, who could possibly understand how the other feels.

We may transpose this situation

to that of the Christian in the 21st century who has received the gift of faith. To have the gift of faith in the 21st century seems to many as something akin to a miracle – not quite the miracle of a virginal conception – but still a miracle – not in the sense of something contrary to nature, but in the sense of an unexpected divine gift.

One of the problems with the contemporary culture is that it is very skeptical about miracles. Those who have the faith therefore sometimes feel as though they will not be believed or will sound completely stupid if they try to explain to others the miracle they have experienced with the gift of faith.

Perhaps we have to be like Our Lady and St Elizabeth and simply trust that if we do our best, however inadequate we may feel, the Holy Spirit will take control of the situation and do the rest for us. He simply needs our co-operation and our trust.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel and the spiritual reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. What miracles have taken place in my life (big or small) that have helped to strengthen my faith?
3. Who is Jesus asking me to reach out to this week, so that I may bring His presence to someone in need of His strength, love, mercy or joy?

Closing Prayer

Loving Jesus, thank you for this beautiful season of Advent, in which you prepare our souls to welcome you at Christmas. May we, like Mary, say 'yes' to you with all our hearts. Grant us the grace to grow in love and mercy, and to be a witness of the Good News to each person we encounter. Amen.



CHRISTMAS DAY

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we never become complacent, and always remain ready and watchful. By the power of the Holy Spirit, give us hearts so full of love and joy that they cannot contain the Good News of the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Gospel of St Luke (2:15-20)

Now when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us'. So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told.

Image on Page 13:
*The Adoration of the
Shepherds* by Jean
Baptiste Marie Pierre,
1745. Photo: www.dia.org/
Public Domain

Gospel Reflection By Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP

Your Apple-watch is also a phone,
your smart-watch also a fitness tracker.
Your dumb watch that just tells the time.
But why's it a 'watch'?

"There were shepherds abiding in the fields,
keeping watch over their flock by night."
We all should do that:
stay awake, be vigilant, be ready.

Watchful guards, they were alert to wolves,
robbers, strays.
They took turns watching for three
hours each.
Observing the stars, they knew when their
watch was up
and they'd wake the next watchman.

One eye on the earth, the other on
the heavens.
They knew the God of time and space,
of earth and heaven.
And they knew He was close.

They weren't resigned, as too many are today,
to God's remoteness,
living as practical agnostics,
as if God had no purchase on their lives.

To such watchful eyes
a vision of angels might come,
to such watchful ears
the sound of Gloria.

To such watchful minds,
news of great joy could be proclaimed:

that a Saviour had been born
in the city of David the shepherd-king.

In such watchful hearts,
faith could be planted:
that the Babe would be the Good Shepherd,
the king of shepherds.

From such watchful imaginations,
a journey could be induced:
the journey to God,
God-in-a-manger.

Anti-climax, the rest of their lives?
No: "the shepherds returned,
glorifying and praising God
for all they had heard and seen."

After Advent watching
came Christmas carolling.
New men and women,
they had a mission.

Faith is a call to go out to all the world
and tell the Good News,
like a star-struck lover
shouting their love from the rooftops.

Today's your turn to watch and carol.
To see a vision of angels and meet
God-made-man.
To return to home, school or workplace,
glorifying God and telling what you have seen.

Your turn
to go make disciples.

Questions

1. Which word or phrase of the Gospel and the spiritual reflection spoke to me, and what might God be saying to me?
2. What practice could I adopt to grow in my capacity to "stay awake, be vigilant, be ready" to notice how God is present in my life. Could I commit to regular prayer, a retreat, or some other spiritual practice?
3. Everyone was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. To whom can I share the gift of the Good News that the Lord has revealed to me?

Closing Prayer

Loving Jesus, thank you for this beautiful season of Advent, in which you prepare our souls to welcome you at Christmas. May we, like Mary, say 'yes' to you with all our hearts. Grant us the grace to grow in love and mercy, and to be a witness of the Good News to each person we encounter. Amen.

AN AID TO YOUR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

BY ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP

I I am the Lord your God: you shall not put other gods before me.

Positive value: Reverence for God.

- What are my priorities in life? Do I put God first and love Him with all my heart or do I put something or someone before God? • Do I pray daily? • Do I receive the teachings of Christ and His Church with an open heart and profess them openly? Or have I resisted less convenient teachings or denied them so as to get along? • Do I receive Holy Communion often (at least annually in Eastertide), and prepare well for this? Or have I gone to Communion thoughtlessly, ungratefully or without first confessing grave sins? • Do I go to Confession whenever I have committed a serious sin and am I honest when I go to Confession? • Have I engaged in any occult, satanic or superstitious practices? • Have I avoided activities that I know can be occasions of sin for me?

II You shall not take God's name in vain.

Positive value: Respect for the things of God.

- Do I give due honour to God, His holy name, sacred ministers and sacred things? • Have I used the name of the Lord (God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit...) disrespectfully, or the names of Mary or the saints? • Have I deliberately harboured hatred or resentment towards God? • Have I cursed or wished evil on another person? • Have I lied under oath or violated a vow?

III Keep the Lord's Day holy.

Positive value: Worship of God.

- Do I make worship of God a priority in my life? • Is Sunday my day of rest, prayer and dedication to my family, avoiding unnecessary work and shopping? • Have I missed Mass on Sunday without a serious reason? Or on a Holy Day of Obligation (in Australia: 25 December and 15 August)? • Do I try to be there for all of Mass and try to be engaged with God, His Word and the sacred actions while I am there? • Do I fast and do penance at the proper times (Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, other Fridays)? Do I fast for an hour before receiving Holy Communion?

IV Honour your father and mother.


Positive value: Reverence for family.

- Do I love, honour and respect my parents, other older people, and those in authority? • Have I shown appropriate care for my spouse, children, siblings, other family? • Have I neglected the aged, sick or lonely? • Have I tried to ensure that my children receive the sacraments, are given good religious instruction and practice their faith?

V You shall not kill.

Positive value: Reverence for life.

- Do I uphold the dignity of every person? • Do I love others appropriately and forgive those who hurt me? Or do I harbour hatred, grudges or prejudices? • Have I deliberately harmed someone, physically, emotionally, or in reputation? • Do I care for my own physical, emotional, and spiritual health? • Have I abused alcohol or drugs or driven 'under the influence'? Do I act recklessly? • Have I had an abortion or helped someone else to have one?



VI You shall not commit adultery.

Positive value: Reverence for sex and the body.

- Do I reverence my own body and have I been faithful to my state in life (married, vowed, single)?
- Am I a flirt? Have I engaged in immodest or sexually inappropriate behaviour?
- Do I honour my own marriage / family and support others in their family life?
- Have I committed sexual acts outside of marriage?
- Have I used bad language or told impure jokes?
- Have I used or encouraged others to use contraception or sterilisation?
- Have I viewed pornographic magazines, film or websites?

VII You shall not steal.

Positive value: Reverence for earthly goods.

- Do I honour the goods of the earth and of other people and try to contribute to the improvement of this world?
- Do I share with those in need, giving generously to charities and contributing to the material needs of the Church?
- Have I stolen, pirated or damaged other people's property?
- Have I cheated someone or failed to make just restitution?
- Do I gamble excessively or spend wastefully?
- Do I act justly with respect to my employer, employees and in my tax affairs?

VIII You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

Positive value: Reverence for truth.

- Do I always seek to know and speak and live by the truth? Or have I lied, exaggerated or sworn falsely?
- Do I gossip or reveal confidences without good reason?
- Have I damaged someone's good name or failed to defend those unjustly criticised?
- Have I plagiarized or been academically dishonest?

IX You shall not covet your neighbour's wife or people.

Positive value: Reverence for persons.

- Do I reverence other people's bodies and state in life?
- Do I guard my senses, imagination and memory? Or have I wilfully lusted after another person or entertained impure thoughts?
- Am I envious of the abilities, talents, beauty, friendships or success of others?
- Do I ridicule, humiliate or manipulate others?
- Do I encourage others to live good lives? Or have encouraged them to engage in a sin or wrongly assisted them in doing so?

X You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

Positive value: Reverence for higher things.

- Do I put the higher things first in my life or am I materialistic and part of the consumer culture?
- Am I excessively attached to material goods or envious of what others have?
- Do I show respect for the earth? Or do I unnecessarily damage the ecology?
- Have I desired or planned to steal, destroy or damage the property of another?
- Do I trust God to provide or fail to be grateful when He does?

"Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger, abounding in mercy." (Ps 103:8)

ST AUGUSTINE ON THE NATIVITY

The great convert to the faith and doctor of the Church, St Augustine, invites us to rejoice at the birth of Jesus Christ.

“Exult, you who are just; it is the birthday of the Justifier.
Exult, you who are weak and ill; it is the birthday of the Saviour.
Exult, you who are captives; it is the birthday of the Redeemer.
Exult, you who are slaves; it is the birthday of the Ruler.
Exult, you who are free; it is the birthday of the Liberator.
Exult, all Christians; it is the birthday of Christ.”

(From Sermon 184)

“He was born so that we might be born again.
Christ was born; let no one hesitate to be reborn.
He was generated with no need of regeneration, for who has experienced the need of rebirth except the one whose birth was blameworthy?
Let His compassion, then, be born in our hearts.
His Mother carried Him in her womb; let us carry Him in our hearts.
The Virgin was heavy with the incarnate Christ; may our hearts be heavily freighted with belief in Christ.
The Virgin brought forth the Saviour; may our souls bring forth salvation; may we bring forth praise also.
Let us not be sterile; let our souls be full of fruitfulness in the Lord...
Through Him may we come to Him so that we may rejoice forever with the Child who was born today.”

(From Sermon 189)

Saint Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 38)*, trans. Sister Mary Sarah Muldowney R.S.R., Catholic University of America Press, 1959.

Virgin and Child Between Saints Nicolas and Augustine by Girolamo Romanino.
Photo: Brooklyn Museum



COME, LET US ADORE HIM

PRACTICAL WAYS FOR PARISHES TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

While our relationship with God is personal, it is not individual, for Our Lord calls us to live the Christian life in community and to welcome others into that community. As a parish, consider how you might not only celebrate Jesus' birth but also welcome your local community to share in these joyful events. Here are some ideas:

1. Christmas cards

Gather a team of parishioners to write Christmas cards for people in the local community. Greetings can be very simple, for example: "Merry Christmas from the parish of [name]. We are praying for you, and all of your needs. May you and your loved-ones receive the peace and joy of the newborn Jesus as we celebrate His birth at Christmas."

2. Letterbox drop or Doorknock

Coordinate teams of parishioners to deliver Christmas cards to every home and business within your parish, either in the form of a letterbox drop or a personal visit door-to-door. This outreach can also incorporate a 'prayer walk' as described in *Go Make Disciples* Mission Plan, page 58.

3. Christmas Invitation leaflet

Create a flyer inviting all to your church this Christmas; include Mass times, Confession times, and events or activities open to the community. You might include them in activity 2.

4. Reflection Night – take time out from the busyness of life

Organise a reflection night in the Church where all are welcome to attend. This could be a Holy Hour with simple prayers, reflective music and moments of silence. You can provide an opportunity for people to write their prayer intentions and place them in a crib in front of the altar, and then offer these intentions at the Christmas Eve Mass. It is also a wonderful occasion to offer the Sacrament of Penance, and prayer teams for those who need the support of intercessory prayer.

5. Create a Gift Tree

Each year some families struggle to buy Christmas presents for their children. The parish can help with a Gift Tree in the church; this is a Christmas tree covered with ornaments (decorative cards

in the shape of a star or a bell), each representing a child in need, with a descriptor such as “7 year old girl” on it. Parishioners who would like to help simply take a decoration from the tree, purchase a gift for that child, and deliver it to the parish. You may like to contact your local Vinnies Support Centre to assist with coordinating this activity.

6. Christmas Hampers

Consider organising food hampers for those in your local community who are in need. This year in particular, many people - individuals, couples and families - will struggle to buy enough food to celebrate the great feast of the birth of our Saviour. You may like to contact your local Vinnies Support Centre to assist with coordinating this activity.

7. Christmas carols

Seek permission to host your parish Christmas carols in a public park, shopping centre or public square. Bring copies of the songs for those who want to join in. Invite people to write down a prayer intention and place it in a box to be offered at the Christmas Masses. Hand out leaflets (see activity 3) and invite people to Mass.

8. Christmas BBQ

Why not throw a Christmas party or BBQ, and invite the whole neighbourhood? This is a great way for the parish family to enjoy each other's company after months of lockdown. It is also a wonderful way to welcome those who have no connection with the church. We know that many people are thirsting to know God, and to be part of a community, but they may not be ready to come to a liturgy or any event held inside the church. A parish party is a great way of getting to know the locals, and of showing true Christian hospitality.



A Prayer for Renewal



lessed are you, Father,
who, in your infinite love
sent us your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
that we may have life, and have it in abundance.

By the power of the Holy Spirit,
renew our Eucharistic communities.

May they be places of encounter
with the living Christ,
centres of evangelisation and outreach
to our community in love and mercy.

Grant us the gifts of faith, hope and love
to be faithful disciples of Jesus and
radiant witnesses to the people of Sydney.

Our Lady, Help of Christians. *Pray for us!*

Our Lady of Guadalupe,
Star of the New Evangelisation. *Pray for us!*

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop. *Pray for us!*



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