



CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY

A Journey of
hope



Advent Program 2024
Year C

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Introduction

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

As we embark together on this holy Season of Advent – a time of preparation, anticipation, and hope at the coming birth of the child Jesus – we are reminded of the immense joy that awaits us.



This season of the Church offers us a space to pray, to listen to and dialogue with God, who loved us so much that He sent His only Son into the world so that we may come to know Him and the depth of His love for us.

This First Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of a new liturgical year - a year of particular significance, with the commencement of the Jubilee 2025, Pilgrims of Hope. In proclaiming this year, the Holy Father, Pope Francis reminds us that we are all pilgrims on this earth, united in our Mission to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

As a people of Hope, we welcome the Holy Family into our homes with joy, and wonder, at the humility of an all-powerful God, coming to us in a form so vulnerable, so innocent, and so absent of pomp and grandeur. May the humility of Christ, born in the stable, help to orient each of us on the road to holiness through our expressions of prayer, acts of service to our family, friends, and communities, and renew in us a desire to be Pilgrims of Hope in the world.

I commend this 2024 Advent Program to you as a resource for renewal and revitalisation in your own preparations. As Pilgrims of Hope, may your accompaniment of our Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem bring you abundant grace and peace in the Lord.

Please be assured of my prayers for each of you throughout this Season of Advent.

+ Anthony Randazzo

Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL
Bishop of Broken Bay



How to use this booklet

This booklet invites you to reflect prayerfully on the Sunday Gospel readings in Advent. It can be used individually or as part of a group. The notes below are provided for use in a small group context.

For each of the four weeks of Advent, this resource includes a reading of the Gospel text, a reflection on the text; and a personal testimony, along with reflection questions to guide discussion.

It is suggested that you allocate 1 ½ hours to complete each session, and the following process is recommended:



1 Opening Prayer (10 min)

An Opening Prayer is offered, which may be read together by participants. Music suggestions are given for each week which you may wish to consider using as part of the gathering prayer time for the group.



2 Gospel Reading (15 min)

Optional: To allow participants to prepare themselves well to hear God speak through the Sacred Scriptures, you may wish to pray the Prayer of Saint John Chrysostom prior to reading the Gospel text.

Listen to the Gospel Reading by inviting a participant from the group to read the text. Pause for silent reflection for a few moments. Invite people to share one insight into what they are hearing through the text. This is not a time for discussion, but only an invitation to offer a short comment. The group listens attentively to each person but does not respond.

3

Reflection & Guided Questions (35 Min)

A reflection is offered on the Scripture text, drawing out the themes of the Gospel. Invite participants to read the text, one paragraph each. They may wish to underline phrases that they particularly notice. Discuss the Scripture text and reflection, inviting conversation about what people are hearing, and their insights or comments. Invite conversation using the guided questions offered at the end of the session.

4

Personal Story

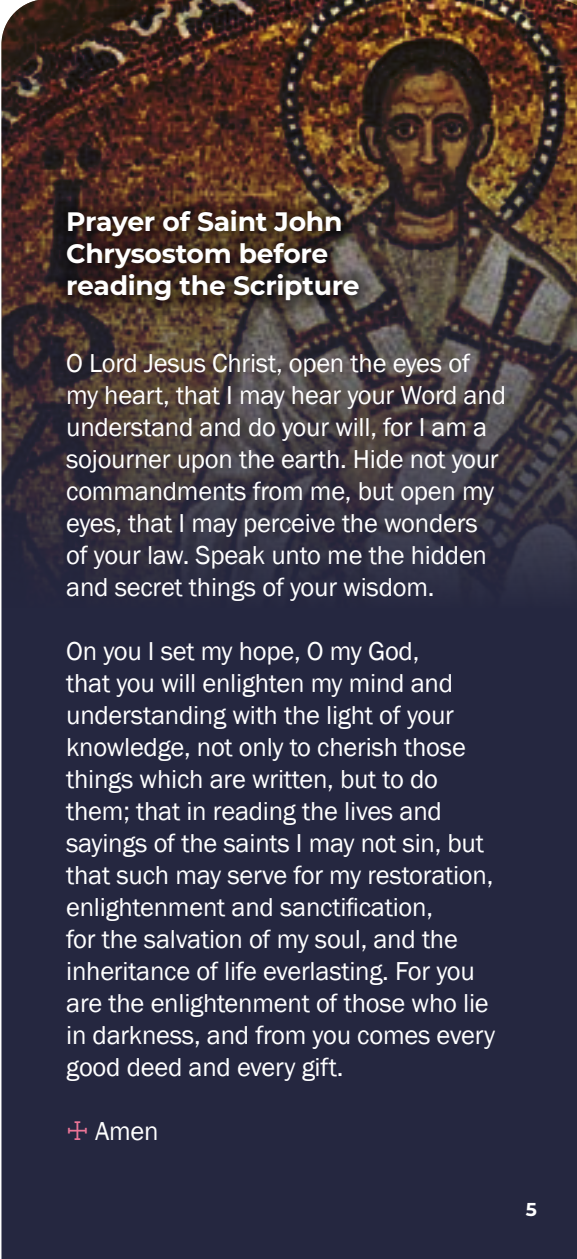
A personal testimony is offered on the text. It is suggested that this could be read quietly by participants, whilst underlining phrases that stand out for them.

Discuss the Personal Story, asking: What aspects of the testimony spoke to you most deeply? How is this story encouraging you in your faith journey? To conclude the session, invite participants to respond to what they have heard and discussed during the whole session. How are they being called to respond? What action might they take? They may wish to write down one or two personal actions that they could take into their week in the space provided. There is no obligation to share these; only do so if appropriate to the group.

5

Closing Prayer


To conclude, pray the Closing Prayer together.


Prayer of Saint John Chrysostom before reading the Scripture

O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear your Word and understand and do your will, for I am a sojourner upon the earth. Hide not your commandments from me, but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your law. Speak unto me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.

On you I set my hope, O my God, that you will enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge, not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them; that in reading the lives and sayings of the saints I may not sin, but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting. For you are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness, and from you comes every good deed and every gift.

✙ Amen



1 December 2024

First Sunday

of Advent

Loving and gracious God,
you call us to be a people of Hope in Broken Bay. As
we enter into this holy Season of Advent, send down
your Spirit upon us. May our hearts be illuminated
with the light of love, made incarnate. Grace us with
patience, forgiveness, and love as we place all our
trust in you. Give us the courage to stand up and
raise our heads as we look to you as our guide and
companion on the journey.

✝ Amen.

Gospel Reading

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 (NRSV)

The Coming of the Son of Man

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near...

Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Gospel Reflection

Very Rev Brian Moloney

Parish Priest
The Entrance Parish
Dean, Central Coast



Going to a family, school, or work reunion is an opportunity to remember the past, to enjoy reminiscing about our shared experiences, to learn what is happening in our lives today, and to wish each other well as we face the future. God willing, we may be able to meet up again.

The Advent Season is our yearly sacred remembering of our faith history, our journey of faith, and, above all, the history of salvation throughout the ages leading to the coming of Jesus in the Incarnation. Secondly, it is a celebration of the present as we prepare for Christmas with all its spiritual and family celebrations. Lastly, and very importantly, it is a celebration of looking to the future as we begin a new spiritual year, praying that God will continue to hold pride of place in our lives over the coming twelve months.

The Gospel today features some rather scary apocalyptic language, but at its heart, stands the promise that Jesus is



1. Come, Lord! Maranatha - Ricky Manalo CSP
2. Coming Glory - Vineyard Anaheim

Gospel Reflection continued.

close at hand, always in our world and our lives. The Gospel text goes on to caution each of us on how we live and commands us in our spiritual selves to stay awake to help us endure whatever may come our way.

Some people make the conscious decision to no longer practise their faith, while for others, it is a gradual fading away from faith with other priorities getting in the way and causing their faith to simply fall asleep.

So, the call to stay awake is a call, as we begin this new spiritual year, for us to find ways to ensure that our faith is nourished and remains fully awake and vital.

As we begin this new Church year and look to our spiritual lives, we can be filled with hope when we remember that we never journey alone, and that Jesus is always with us. We also know that we have the community of the Church to strengthen us sacramentally, particularly in our Sunday gatherings.

Saint Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, offers us hope-filled words of encouragement today to make more progress in the kind of life that we are meant to live. May this new year be an opportunity for each of us to grow stronger in our faith and to find whatever opportunities may be available to continue to grow and develop in our God-given faith.

GUIDED REFLECTION

1. As we journey along a new liturgical year, what are our hopes that we might, with God's grace, make more progress in our spiritual lives so that we may have a fully awake faith?

2. As we face the personal and collective struggles of life, what are the signs to us of the continual presence and support of Jesus in our lives?

Personal Story



Deacon Rosan Mathew

Deacon
The Entrance Parish

The passage from Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 speaks of the coming of the Son of Man, a time of great upheaval in creation, where “there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars,” and people will be filled with fear over what is to come. Jesus encourages his disciples to remain vigilant, to “stand erect and raise

your heads because your redemption is drawing near.” He cautions them to avoid the distractions of life—dissipation, drunkenness, and anxieties—that can weigh down the heart and cause us to miss the signs of God’s presence.

Life is a journey marked by both joy and hardship. For me, the path has not always been smooth; it has been filled with challenges that have tested my resilience, faith, and determination. I was born and raised in Kerala, India, where my early years were shaped by a close-knit community and strong cultural traditions. Moving to Australia, I eventually became part of the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay. Adapting to a new country, balancing responsibilities, and pursuing spiritual growth demanded a level of resilience I had never imagined. Yet, through these difficult times, I have learned invaluable lessons about standing firm and staying alert to the deeper realities of life.

One particular period stands out for me: the process of discerning my call to serve the Church more deeply. I was preparing for my ordination as a deacon, a significant milestone in my spiritual journey. However, along the way, I encountered moments of uncertainty, where the weight of my responsibilities felt all too heavy. There were doubts about my worthiness, fears of inadequacy, and questions about whether I could truly serve in this capacity.

During this time, I leaned into my faith and drew strength from prayer, Scripture,

and the support of my community. The passage from Luke 21:34-36 became a guiding light for me. Jesus spoke to me of the importance of staying awake and alert, guarding my heart against the anxieties and distractions of the world.

This passage invites me to slow down, reflect on my priorities, and ask myself: How can I remain alert to the presence of God amid my concerns? How can I avoid being caught up in the distractions around me?

Looking back, I see that every struggle, and every difficult moment, strengthens me for the next stage of my journey. The Word of God assures me that I am never alone. Just as a tree remains rooted despite withstanding a harsh storm, I, too, stand firmly planted in my trust of God’s providence, my belief in God’s purpose for me, and trusting always that redemption is near, just as the Gospel promises us.

GUIDED REFLECTION

1. How does the Word of God reveal itself in your life?
2. Where might Jesus be calling you to meet Him on the journey?
3. How can we express the joy of expectation and hope to those we meet this week?


Closing Prayer

Jesus, source of all hope,
we give thanks for your Word today. By your grace and
blessing, may we always know that we are never alone,
particularly in the face of adversity or challenge. May we
always remember that during times of hardship, you surround
us with your never-ending merciful love.

Bless our Advent journey with hope as we await the birth of
your Son whom you sent into the world to bring light to the
darkness. In these coming weeks, may we remain awakened
to your great glory and share with others,
the Good News of the Gospel.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,
✝ Amen.





8 December 2024

Second Sunday

of Advent

Loving and gracious God,
you call us to be a people of Hope in Broken Bay.
To bear witness to faith and truth so that we may
prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord.
Open our eyes to your creation, our ears to your
Word, and draw us more fully into the wilderness so
that we may emerge into the true light
of Christ's presence.

✙ Amen.

Gospel Reading

Luke 3:1-6 (NRSV)

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Gospel Reflection

Rev Marek Woldan

Assistant Priest
Manly-Freshwater Parish



Someone asked a woman if she could be born again, would she live her life differently? Without much thought, she replied “No”. But after some further reflection, she said: “If I could live my life again, I would talk less and listen more. I would invite my friends to dinner even if the carpet is a little stained and the couch cover is faded. I would spend time listening to my grandfather’s stories from his youth. I would bring out the rose-shaped candle, left in the cupboard, and light it often. I would happily lie down in the meadow with my children without fear that my dress would get stained. I would watch less TV and enjoy watching life. Instead of wishing for an end to nine months of pregnancy, I would savour each moment, knowing that every day, God is creating the miracle of life.

I would enjoy my son’s affection rather than telling him, ‘Enough, go wash up for dinner.’ I would say ‘I love you more often and perhaps I’m sorry a little less.’”

Is there anything that I would change in my past if I knew I could be born again? If I had one more chance? How many such things are there? We know we cannot change the past, but our power can lie in the future.



1. A Voice Cries Out - Michael Joncas
2. Ready the Way - Curtis Stephan

Gospel Reflection continued.

We can try to live our faith now, so that in the future we will be happy with our present choices. That is what John the Baptist is calling us to do – to live our lives in a way we will have no regrets. His call for repentance is a call for conversion.

Some might ask: “Do we really need conversion? After all, we are the ones who come to church regularly, so it must be the others who need conversion.” The truth is – we all need conversion. No one will ever be as good as God.

We might think, “Maybe I have already made many changes in my life in my own conversion. Perhaps I wasn’t coming to Mass at all, and now I attend Mass every Sunday”. That is good - but God says, “Please do not stop there. Try not only to come to Mass but come with a heart filled with the great love you hold for Me.”

Maybe I have found past difficulties in listening to all that my family members or friends want to tell me. Perhaps now I am attempting to listen more – that is good - but God asks us to go further - to try to listen with our hearts for unspoken words.

There might be a thousand things we do right. That is good – but what if God calls us to improve on everything we do?

May Advent be a time for us to recall the things we have not done right. Let us call upon the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Together let us do everything we can so that, hopefully, in the future, we all can say; “From now on, there is nothing I would change in my life if I were to be born again.”

GUIDED REFLECTION

1. If I could be born again, would I live my life differently?
2. In what areas in my life is God calling me to conversion?
3. When was the last time I appreciated the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Personal Story



Libby McManus
Executive Assistant
Mission Broken Bay

In Sunday’s Gospel Reading, we will hear that the Word of God came to John in the wilderness.

The cries of “Prepare the way of the Lord” are always associated with the image I hold of Saint John the Baptist in his earthly mission to bring people into discipleship with the Lord. As I reflect more deeply, Saint John the Baptist has consistently and gently weaved this call, in, around, and throughout my life. Baptised in St John the Baptist

Church in the Parish of Woy Woy, my beloved spiritual home, and educated at St John the Baptist School, I am intrinsically aware of the intercession of this great Evangeliser in drawing me closer to the heart of the Lord. My faith life, my education, and my greatest joys and celebrations have all been within a parish dedicated to John's ministry.

Additionally, I have sought solace, refuge, consolation, and comfort during my deepest experiences of grief and loss. Saint John the Baptist has been a gentle companion for me throughout the mysteries of my Catholic faith life and relentless in preparing ways for me to encounter Jesus Christ.

As I sit with the words of today's Gospel stirring within my heart, I am quietly transported back to the stunning landscapes of Spain, The Camino, The Way of Saint James. My journey to Santiago de Compostela began on 6 June in the beautiful city of Leon. Amongst the group of five Catholic Mission el Peregrino's, included my beautiful friend Annie. Incredibly, and unbeknownst to each other, we had both embarked on the same pilgrimage; two girls from the same parish and school of St John the Baptist Woy Woy.

I quickly learned that every pilgrim is called to walk The Way for individual reasons, experiences, and spiritual intentions. For me, my Camino was a sacred journey of healing. A calling to meet the Lord exactly where I have landed in life, amidst my personal accomplishments and within my challenges.

My Camino was a prayer of thanksgiving for God's richness and grace, which

has been so abundantly bestowed upon me throughout my life. Over two weeks, I walked 315 kilometres across Spain, in the footsteps of Saint James and countless pilgrims across the ages. Drawn by the sacred whispers of ancestral and spiritual winds and guided by the Holy Spirit, I encountered the Lord through a lens of awe and wonder. I breathed in gratitude, and I exhaled joy. With the sun at my back, I trekked through wilderness and valleys, along rocky paths, and uphill mountains. I embraced each step. Each moment. Each encounter with the Lord. God's goodness and grace paved every step of My Way.

Like my recent pilgrimage to the steps of the Catedral Basílica de Santiago de Compostela, today's Gospel Reading speaks clearly to me of faith, hope, and love in Jesus Christ. Through my baptism, I am joyfully called to make way for a deepening encounter with Jesus in my own life and to boldly share it with others. In this holy Season of Advent, may we all heed John's cries and open our hearts fully to prepare ourselves for the birth of Our Lord this Christmas.

GUIDED REFLECTION

1. How does the Word of God reveal itself in your life?
2. Where might Jesus be calling you to meet Him on the journey?
3. How can we express the joy of expectation and hope to those we meet this week?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, source of all hope,


we give thanks for your Word today. By your abundant grace and blessing, may we always seek to make steady the paths that we take. May we open our hearts to others with generosity and loving kindness to prepare the way for the Lord.

Bless our Advent journey with peace so that we may encounter the face of Jesus in all whom we meet. May the fruits of the Holy Spirit be with us as we patiently await the coming of your Son.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

✝ Amen





15 December 2024

Third Sunday

of Advent

Loving and gracious God,
you call us to be a people of Hope in Broken
Bay. Unite us together so that we bring a spirit
of solidarity to our families, our friends, and
our communities. May we fulfil our promises
in Baptism to live our Christian lives with
integrity, truth, and justice.

✙ Amen.

Gospel Reading

Luke 3:10-18 (NRSV)

And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptised, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptise you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the Good News to the people.

Gospel Reflection

Very Rev Brian Moloney

Parish Priest
The Entrance Parish
Dean, Central Coast



If I had \$5 for every parishioner over the years who has said to me, you look pretty in pink Father, on the Third Sunday of Advent and in mid-Lent as I wear the Rose Vestments, I would be a very wealthy man.

These vestments are only worn on these two occasions each year: on this Gaudete Sunday and in Lent on Laetare Sunday.

Gaudete is Latin for 'Rejoice,' and it comes from the Entrance Antiphon (only recited at Masses that are not sung) for today's celebration.

It is a remnant, in a way, from the days when Advent was somewhat penitential, like Lent, and it marks the halfway point on the Advent journey.

Today's Second Reading takes up this theme, I want you to be happy always, happy in the Lord. Happiness, for most of us, is a passing thing, and so I believe a more helpful translation would be to rejoice in the Lord always.



1. Come Thou Long Expected Jesus - Novum Collective
2. Come and Set Us Free - Trevor Thomson

Therefore, this Reading challenges us to always celebrate our faith no matter the season. It maybe when things are going well, or when life is hard, and all the spaces in between.

God's grace enables us to be a people of thanksgiving, a people who take the time to always celebrate our faith no matter what is going on in our lives.

Our regular coming to celebrate the Eucharist each week, or more regularly, is an important way that we live out this message of Saint Paul in our spiritual lives.

We are called to be a Eucharistic people, a people who always give thanks to God in the community of the church, who always rejoice in the Lord.

Our Gospel tells us that the people had a feeling of expectancy that the Messiah would appear shortly.

That feeling of expectancy is upon us as we prepare to celebrate the great feast of Christmas.

This season is a time of celebration of family and friends, but for us as Christians, it is so much more. It is a season of Hope that Jesus, who came into our world some 2000 years ago, is still present with us today and will renew and strengthen us this Christmas.

Like the joy on the faces of little children each Christmas, may our Christmas celebration be a time of joy-filled grace, helping us to move forward with the hope that Jesus continues to live in our lives and the lives of all our loved ones.

GUIDED REFLECTION

- 1.** As we begin this new liturgical year, how can we ensure that, no matter what is happening in our lives, that we can always take the time to rejoice in our Christian faith?
- 2.** As we wait and prepare expectantly for the great celebration of Christmas, how can we ensure in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones, that Christmas might be a spiritual celebration of the incarnation?

Personal Story



Rev Joey Frez
Assistant Priest
Chatswood Parish

As we enter into the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, I am reminded of Jubilee Year 2000. It was a special year, not only as it was the turn of the century but also because it was the time when I decided to go on my first ever pilgrimage in Europe to seek confirmation of my plan to pursue a vocation to the priesthood.

I was born in the Philippines, and after I finished College, it was always my dream to work abroad, especially in the USA.

For most Filipinos, the American dream is the ultimate goal to achieve a better and more comfortable life. After working in the United States as a computer programmer for around seven years, the thought of leaving everything behind to enter religious life or the seminary was a hard decision to make. I embarked on that pilgrimage because I was asking the same question as the disciples of John the Baptist were asking; “What should I do?”

After achieving my dream of going to the United States, the question I was asking myself was, “What should I do with my life?” Despite my success in my job, there was still something missing.

Asking that question is difficult because we do not know what comes next. We are afraid of the unknown. While I was discerning my vocation, the Vocation Office in the Diocese of Salt Lake reminded me that I would never know if the Lord was calling me to be a priest unless I made the first step. It was suggested that perhaps I just needed to jump into the water, and let the flow of the current take me into a great adventure in life!

When the Lord charged Peter to feed His sheep three times, He said to him, “Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” (John 21:18).

I found these words to be so true before, and more so now, in my priestly vocation and ministry. Yes, the fear of

the unknown is still there and will always be, but the big difference is that in my walking with the Lord, I have learned to trust and hope in Him.

Trust and hope are what we have as believers because of the victory of the Resurrection which conquered death. Trust and hope in God will guide and strengthen us on our journey through life.

Every year I still ask myself, “What should I do?” or more specifically “What should I do in my spiritual life?”

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, the Lord invites us to open the door of our hearts and to ask, “What should I do?” Surely this question will lead us to journey toward God and to journey with Him in hope and trust.

GUIDED REFLECTION

1. How does the Word of God reveal itself in your life?
2. Where might Jesus be calling you to meet Him on the journey?
3. How can we express the joy of expectation and hope to those we meet this week?


Closing Prayer

Jesus, source of all hope,
we give thanks for your Word today. By your grace and
blessing, may we be filled with the fruits of the Holy Spirit to
live a life of generosity to those less fortunate than ourselves.

Bless our Advent journey with hope so that we become
welcoming communities in your vineyard. Help us to reach out
to all who are seeking to see your face, Jesus.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,
✝ Amen





22 December 2024

Fourth Sunday

of Advent

Loving and gracious God,
you call us to be a people of Hope in Broken
Bay. In giving us your divine Son, you gifted
us with the perfect example of Love. Draw us
more deeply into the joy and salvation that
awaits us. May we embrace the fullness of our
Christian faith throughout our daily lives.

✝ Amen.

Gospel Reading

Luke 1:39-45 (NRSV)

Mary Visits Elizabeth

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."



1. Hail Mary: Gentle Woman - The Cathedral Singers, Richard Proulx
2. Magnificat - Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty

Gospel Reflection

Rev Marek Woldan

Assistant Priest
Manly-Freshwater Parish



Have you ever had very important and exciting news that you were not able to share with anyone? If so, you might have some understanding and insight as to how Mary might have been feeling after the Annunciation. Mary had just learned that the Messiah, the awaited One, the One who would bring new hope for Israel, was indeed coming; furthermore, she was called to be His Mother. Perhaps one of the first thoughts to cross Mary's mind, was to share this Good News with others. But who would believe it? This was an unprecedented event. She may have been afraid that people would think she was not of sound mind or hiding misgivings if she announced that she had conceived by the Holy Spirit.

I personally think Mary must have felt very lonely at that time – she had the greatest news ever to share, yet she was not able to tell even her closest ones. What did Mary do? She did the best thing anyone could do. She went to help someone else - her cousin Elizabeth - who was facing a challenging time being with child herself at her advanced age.

Mary travelled for a few days before arriving at the house of Elizabeth. During this time, she would have had a lot of time to think – should she tell Elizabeth?

Gospel Reflection continued.

How would she tell her? Would Elizabeth understand? Would she believe Mary? Mary may have feared repercussions if she told Elizabeth her joyous news. As we know, Mary did not tell Elizabeth. She did not need to.

When Mary greeted her and Elizabeth exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?” Such a beautiful encounter! Now Mary has someone with whom to share her greatest joy. But how did Elizabeth know? The answer lies within: “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit...”

This story is not merely about two women or their two unborn babies. It also reveals just how greatly the Holy Spirit was present in preparing for the first Christmas, and bears witness to the Truth every Christmas thereafter. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus was conceived and became Man. The Holy Spirit led Mary and Elizabeth to great joy. We need the Holy Spirit at Christmas time too. The Holy Spirit brings the child Jesus to our families. Christmas simply cannot happen without Him, no matter how beautifully decorated our homes. Remember Jesus was born in a stable.

We need to prepare a home for Jesus in our hearts.

May the Holy Spirit prepare each of us for Christmas, and may the Holy Spirit reveal to us the Truth of Jesus Christ. May we encounter the Mercy of Jesus

through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. May our families experience the peace of forgiveness, and the joy that Mary and Elizabeth shared; a profound joy that only Jesus can give.

GUIDED REFLECTION

1. What is my greatest joy and why?
2. When was the last time I shared it with someone?
3. How may I allow the Holy Spirit to guide me to Christmas?

Personal Story



Jo Spek

Learning Partner – Parent Formation & Engagement Evangelisation & Catechesis
Catholic Schools Broken Bay

What captured my heart when I read how Mary made haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth, upon hearing that she too was pregnant, was that she had a deep desire to share her joy, her excitement, and the fear of the unknown with another woman in the same situation.

There is an unspoken connection and understanding when two pregnant women share their lives and navigate the uncertainty of motherhood. There is a recognition that this new life will bring an end to the old way of life.

It was during my third pregnancy that I had a chance conversation, a phone call from a parent at my local preschool named Kate. Kate was also pregnant, but with her fourth child; on hearing this, she immediately gained my admiration.

The reason for her call was about the doughnut drive I had organised for our local preschool where our children attended. We spoke for over an hour, not about doughnuts, but about our children and our current pregnancy. There was an instant connection during the conversation, a shared excitement, and a recognition that one has with another expectant mother.

At that same time, I was caring for my mother who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. I told Kate about my situation, and I vividly remember how caring and compassionate she was to my circumstances. She made me aware that this new baby was a gift from God and would bring such a sense of joy. I was trying to make sense of the painful sadness of my mother's daily decline whilst preparing for a new life. My new friend Kate was a faithful and wise companion; I felt she was sent by God to help me through, to light my path, and to reassure me that all would be well.

The passage from Luke 1:39-45, when Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, describes the profound exchange of joy between the two expectant mothers as the baby moves inside Elizabeth. I felt a similar recognition that comes with the unique bond of pregnancy alongside a friend. In this moment of shared joy, we also see the importance of our shared Catholic faith, community, and support among mothers. Elizabeth's exclamation, "Blessed are you among women,"

highlights the beauty of recognising and affirming one another's journeys.

I sometimes wonder if my mother, too sick to be on hand for me during this pregnancy, was praying for me and was glad to know that I had found a wonderful woman to be there when she could no longer. This passage confirms the central role of women of faith, carrying the Gospel message, and recognising the Spirit in daily life. Kate and I were able to lean on each other, laugh together, express our fears, and walk with each other. We shared another pregnancy the following year, bringing our collective family to nine. Over our 25-year friendship, we have experienced family holidays, birthdays, weddings, funerals, and much more. Kate will always hold a special place in my heart. We know each other and understand, like Elizabeth and Mary, the responsibility of guiding our children to adulthood and recognising that we are never alone.

GUIDED REFLECTION

1. How does the Word of God reveal itself in your life?
2. Where might Jesus be calling you to meet Him on the journey?
3. How can we express the joy of expectation and hope to those we meet this week?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, source of all hope,
we give thanks for your Word today. By your grace and
blessing, we approach the commemoration of your joyous
birth. May we join the choirs of angels
in pronouncing that you are Lord.

Bless our Advent journey with hope so we may be a rich
source of goodness in the world and bring others to your
heart. May we be faithful witnesses of truth, love, and sacrifice
in spreading the joy of the Good News by our thoughts,
words, and actions.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,
✝ Amen



As we journey towards the Holy Year,
as Pilgrims of Hope, we pray;

The Jubilee Prayer

Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within both humanity
and the whole cosmos in the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.

May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth. To you our God, eternally
blessed, be glory and praise for ever.

✝ Amen.

Franciscus



Image: Pilgrims in Rome, view of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme from the churchyard of S. Giovanni in Laterano, by Arthur John Strutt (1848)



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