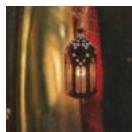




The
Light

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS
DAILY REFLECTIONS 2024

CONTENTS



1st week of Advent

1 DECEMBER–7 DECEMBER 2024

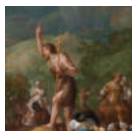
4



2nd week of Advent

8 DECEMBER–14 DECEMBER 2024

15



3rd week of Advent

15 DECEMBER–21 DECEMBER 2024

26



4th week of Advent

22 DECEMBER 2024–24 DECEMBER 2024

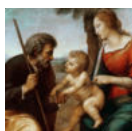
38



Christmas

25 DECEMBER–28 DECEMBER 2024

45



The Holy Family

29 DECEMBER 2024–4 JANUARY 2025

53



The Epiphany

5 JANUARY 2025–11 JANUARY 2025

64



The Baptism of the Lord

12 JANUARY 2025

75



THE Holy —
Family



Holy Family with a Palm Tree

RAFFAELLO SANTI, RAFFAELLO DE URBINO, RAFAEL SANZIO DE URBINO (AKA RAPHAEL) (1483–1520)

The Holy Family With a Palm Tree (c. 1506-1507). Oil and gold on canvas, transferred from panel, diameter 101.5cm. National Galleries Scotland. Public Domain.

Never plant a tree on its own in an exposed space. It will be at the mercy of every adverse wind and may end up twisted or stunted. If you wish your tree to grow to its full potential, plant it in a more sheltered place—and never on its own. You must plant some other trees with it.

Importantly, you must get the space between the trees right—not too close that they might stifle each other, but close enough to provide protection for each other.

Just as it is not good for a tree to be alone, it is not good for us to be alone. For our mental health, we need ties of friendship with others. God made us for community—as he is community: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can never be complete in ourselves.

This is where the family is so important. There we learn to form relationships with others. There

we learn to use the word “we” for the first time. Inability to relate to others is a great handicap in life. We are at the mercy of the cold winds of loneliness. In the family, we learn to share and become responsible for each other.

Being so close has its own risks, of course. We have the possibility of hurting each other or healing each other. Sadly, some people are outside angels and inside devils.

Harmony in the family can only come about by the practice of the virtues. St Paul spells them out: compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness (Col 3:12–13). But they are not easy to practise with consistency.

In today’s society, the family is under a lot of pressure. It’s not that we no longer value the family, the problem is we lack the discipline to make it work. The family must be built on commitment and self-sacrifice. What we often have, instead, is adults acting like children who are sensual, lazy, and unforgiving. Many cannot accept they may need counselling. They may be scarring their children for life.

It was by living in a small community of love that Jesus matured. He grew up with parents who both listened to God. When Jesus spoke of God as Father, it was Joseph he was thinking of. Jesus’ enlightened attitude to women reflected the way he saw Joseph interact with Mary.

In the community of the family, we find our place, we have an identity, we cement bonds. If the family undergoes hardships, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Trees that grow on hard ground have firmer roots and are better equipped to face the inevitable

continued on next page ►

storm. “And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men” (Lk 2:52).

The tondo (a circular painting) was popular in Renaissance Florence for private homes. But it meant the artist had to carefully plan its composition. *The Holy Family with a Palm Tree* (1506–1507) is one of several versions Raphael painted on this theme. The palm tree is often associated with Egypt, yet in this artwork, it could be symbolising victory, triumph, and martyrdom. Raphael’s depiction may subtly suggest Christ’s triumph over sin and death.

In the religious world, St Joseph was growing in importance (cf. the influence of Teresa of Avila in the decades after Raphael’s death.) Here, Joseph is depicted not as an old man, but as the protector of the Madonna and Child. He carries his pilgrim’s staff, symbolising his readiness to obey God’s call to change course, and is adorned in regal purple and gold attire. The Child is listening to him in rapt attention, having offered him some flowers he has picked up; Mary is sitting at a well. The Family have found some respite. Raphael has certainly captured the bond between the Holy Family.

Raffaello Santi was born in Urbino, Italy, in 1483. At the renowned Ducal Court, he would have been exposed to a cultured lifestyle. In 1508, Pope Julius II summoned him to Rome, where he would spend his final 12 years embellishing the papal residences and the Sistine Chapel, and assuming the role of architect for St Peter’s Basilica, changing the plans of the basilica from a Greek to a Latin cross. On his 37th birthday, he passed away, with the entire Papal Court present at his funeral, where Pope Leo X openly shed tears.

MSGR GRAHAM SCHMITZER

9 DECEMBER 2024

*The Immaculate Conception
of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

Genesis 3:9–15, 20
Psalm 97(98):1–4
Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12
Luke 1:26–38

“Let what you have said be done to me.” LK 1:38

I was once directing a man on retreat. I gave him this passage with which to pray. When he returned the next day, he recounted to me that he had asked Mary to explain the Annunciation to him. He clearly heard the words echoing within him, “It was my entrance point into your life.” Then my friend began to look at all Mary had brought with her into his life—she did not come unaccompanied. He saw that she had brought the Light in the person of Jesus Christ. Actually, Mary has done the same for each of us, and it all started with Mary’s agreement to do whatever God wanted of her, because life without God was unimaginable.

Still there is more: Mary’s Annunciation is a prototype—it seems to me—of our own annunciations. Our living of God’s way can be an entrance point for the Light as well. When we act as God would have us act, when we live in kindness, light breaks across the heart of someone else and shines the road to peace. When we live in forgiveness, new life breaks across a broken back of shame in another and reveals a future of hope.

Mary’s Annunciation, like God’s eternal creation, goes on through you and me, and Light always comes into the world.

Here is a little prayer to pray:

*Let your light come upon us and we shall live (Ps 43:3).
Amen.*

MOTHER HILDA SCOTT OSB

Those who follow you, Lord, will have the light of life. PSALM RESPONSE

In Advent, we often speak of light, and today we find ourselves commemorating St Lucy whose name means *light*. There is something attractive—even beautiful—about natural light. At this time of year, many of us are looking forward to a few weeks spent in the light: camping, swimming, barbecues and picnics amid the longer and warmer days of Summer.

And in God's providence, in the middle of all this is the great celebration of the birth of Jesus. Further, the arrival of Jesus, the Light of the World, almost coincides with the (southern hemisphere's) longest day of the year. What might God be revealing through this providential guidance of the natural and supernatural realms?

The Scriptures speak of light in relation to goodness, clarity, understanding, purity and truth, whereas darkness is related to evil, deception and hiddenness. More than that, Jesus is *Light* itself. He reveals things as they really are, without any shadow. He has shown us who God really is; and in doing that, he shows me who I am, my purpose, and the meaning of all things. He does that not to crush us with a one-sided truth that only reveals our failings, nor a misleadingly complacent view of God's goodness, but to show the fullness of truth: that we are loved amid our limitations and invited to go beyond them through that loving power.

Jesus, bring your warmth and light into my life; help me to see who you really are, and to know myself in you. Amen.

SR ANASTASIA REEVES OP

18 DECEMBER 2024

18 December

Jeremiah 23:5–8
Psalm 71(72):1–2, 12–13, 18–19
Matthew 1:18–24

When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home. MT 1:24

Have you ever had to make a significant decision in your life as a follower of Jesus? Maybe it was a choice to give up a favourite habit or beloved pastime you knew wasn't leading you to goodness. Maybe it was taking an unpopular stand about something that then brought humiliation to you. Maybe it was taking a leap of faith in an area of your life where it's difficult to trust God—with finances, relationships, family or career.

Today's Gospel shows St Joseph making the biggest decision of his life: the choice to take Mary, who was carrying the Son of God, to be his wife. This meant trusting her word and the dreams he had as God's true message. It meant trusting that God could do the impossible. It meant, with Mary, saying "yes" to all the uncertainty that lay ahead.

And because Joseph did this, he received front row seats to the biggest moment of human history: seeing the Messiah being born. In cooperating with God's will, Joseph played his part in the entry of Emmanuel, God-with-us, coming to save the people from their sins.

Have you ever pondered the life-changing effect your decisions have on those around you? Let's pray with St Joseph today to choose wisely and courageously.

Lord, may we attune our will with yours. St Joseph, pray for us. Amen.

BERNADETTE TOOHEY MGL

Our soul is waiting for the Lord. In him do our hearts find joy. PS 33:20

Advent is a time of waiting, and most of us are not good at that. Time is precious, and we want quick answers and instant results. But God is outside time. To him “a day can mean a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day” (2 Pt 3:8).

The time of “Advent waiting” for the Lord’s coming into our hearts is a gift to prepare ourselves spiritually for the joyful day of his birth when Jesus entered the world to redeem us. It is also the time that foreshadows the fulfilment of this joy-filled event in his Second Coming, and our longer-term spiritual preparation for it when he calls us home to himself.

Christmas is just a few days away, and perhaps you are feeling you have not prepared well enough. All the time spent on practical preparations have perhaps left little time for spiritual preparation. Don’t lose heart. Remember Peter’s words: God can do in a day what can take us four weeks to achieve! It’s never too late with the Lord, and that’s a great consolation. Like the beloved in today’s first reading, he bounds over the mountainous obstacles to claim us for his very own, and nothing—not even ourselves—can stop him.

So, in these last days, be open to God and his grace. Stop to remember what Christmas is really about. May Mary, his Mother, help us to ponder in our heart the Mystery we celebrate.

Jesus, as my soul waits for you, help me to be open to your grace. In you does my heart find joy. Amen.

FR CHRISTOPHER G. SARKIS

Today a great light has shone down upon the earth. cf. IS 9:1

Today's Gospel for the *Mass During the Day* is John's Prologue: "In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). But you may not hear it at Mass. Many priests exercise their prerogative, "for pastoral reasons", to instead use the *Midnight Mass* readings. John's Prologue is beautiful, but compared to Luke's story of shepherds and angels, it isn't very "Christmassy".

Some Christians are wary of the so-called Christmassy. They fear it romanticises the cold realities of the Nativity and diminishes the significance of the Incarnation. But attraction to the Christmassy is well explained by today's Gospel Acclamation: "A hallowed day has dawned upon us. Come, you nations, worship the Lord, for today a great light has shone down upon the earth."

Doesn't this verse, which echoes Isaiah, also echo something in our hearts? Don't we long for people everywhere to treat Jesus well? We want the whole world to welcome him with the same affection as Mary and Joseph. We gild the cold indifference of those who do not know him, who do not love him, with carols and trees and lights and everything else Christmassy. This is not a naïve denial of the dark and cold; it is an affirmation of something greater: divine light and warmth.

Lord Jesus, you are a light that shines in the dark. Make us bearers of your light and warmth. Amen.

FR JOHN CORRIGAN

God is light. 1 JN 1:5

No analogy is adequate, but in his letter, *On the Opinion of Dionysius* (par 15 and 16), St Athanasius of Alexandria referred to an analogy used to explain the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In the analogy, brightness is compared to a light. Though distinct, the two realities cannot be separated from one another. As long as a light exists, brightness will always shine out from it. If the light is eternal, the brightness is also eternal. The analogy seeks to explain that if God the Father has always existed, then God the Son has also always existed. If one is eternal, the other must be eternal. If one is God, the other must be God.

St Athanasius referred to the sun in the sky, saying that as long as the sun exists, light will always shine out from it. If I may add, as long as the sun exists, warmth will also always radiate out from it.

Scripture tells us that humans are created in God's image and likeness (Gn 1:26–27), but our Creator is also reflected in creation (Rm 1:20). The artist is reflected in their artwork. The sun, with its light and warmth, is a reflection of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The sun representing the Father, who “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tm 6:16). The light shining out represents the Son, Jesus Christ, “The light of the world” (Jn 8:12). The warmth radiating out represents the love of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts (Rm 5:5).

May we see the reflection of God in the beauty of creation. Amen.

FR ANTONY JUKES OFM

7 JANUARY 2025

Tuesday after Epiphany Sunday

1 John 4:7–10
Psalm 71(72):1–4, 7–8
Mark 6:34–44

They all ate as much as they wanted. MK 6:42

There are many ways to interpret our Gospel passage today. One that is increasingly popular is that this was a “miracle of sharing” amongst the faithful. After all, we are the Church, and as loving Christians, we must share with one another. Sure, the God who transcends existence *could* in fact perform the miracle, temporarily suspend the laws of nature, and multiply the loaves and fishes presented, but he doesn’t *need* to because we’ve got it covered.

Real miracles are uncomfortable and challenging because their existence implies their possibility. When we are faced with the Church letting us down, we are hurt and disappointed. But humans fail, we know this. We’re often selfish or self-motivated. We get it wrong; we make mistakes. God, on the other hand, if he *can* answer our needs miraculously, and *has* done so before in the Scriptures, but doesn’t *now*? That’s hard to comprehend. Depending on the need that goes unanswered, it can be devastating. Isn’t it better, then, to just take miracles off the table?

I’ve heard it said, never lower your expectations to match your experience, especially with God. If we don’t ask God for what we need, then the answer is automatically “no”. Faithfulness to God then isn’t refusing to ask for what we need, to spare him “failure”, but to keep asking in faith, trusting that he loves us.

Lord, give me enough faith to move mountains and believe in your miracles. Amen

PETER GILMORE