

Advent 2021

A Camino through Advent



An excellent accompaniment to this virtual Camino is 'AN ADVENT JOURNEY' by Michael T Winstanley sdb-available from Don Bosco Publications, Bolton BL1 6PQ

Gerry O'Shaughnessy sdb
Don Bosco Publications
Advent 2021



Most of us are well acquainted with the concept of a 'pilgrimage'; many of us will have been to Rome, Lourdes or the Holy Land on pilgrimage. We go for more than just a holiday; we journey with others to a Holy Place. In the Middle Ages, the tomb of St James in the Spanish town of Compostela was a popular pilgrimage centre. With no modern transport links, the pilgrims would have to reach their destination on foot, often taking weeks to get there. However, it is in the journeying that the real spirit of pilgrimage is found; pilgrims would take off from various locations across Europe and follow the ancient way or CAMINO. As we journey towards Christmas 2021, we invite you to join us on the Advent Camino: each day we will offer a short reflection and prayer. We have learnt a lot about our families, friends and ourselves over the time of lockdown and challenge. We have had to re-imagine what it is to be Church and community and, while it has not always been easy, we can continue to make a difference in the lives of others. As we make this Advent Camino together, let us continue to pray for each other, and please contact us if you want special intentions mentioned. In this Camino, more than ever before in modern times, we are walking towards the loving embrace of God, the true light who comes to us at Christmas in the form of a child with trust and wonder. Share that trust, share that wonder as we share this Advent Way together.

28th November 2021--First Sunday of Advent Year C.



Today we begin a new Church year, and we move from the gospel of Mark and put our focus onto Luke. He is a key figure in the early Christian family: he was Greek, probably coming from Antioch. The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are attributed to him, so he is a key figure in the canon of sacred scripture, with some seeing him as one of the seventy-two sent out on Mission (Lk 10:1). In writing of the terrors brought about by the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, we hear in today's gospel:

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. (Lk 21:25-26)

The past twenty-two months have been hard and, while we may not have witnessed these signs and wonders in our own personal lives, there are millions in our world who have faced heartache and real suffering. During this time, all have us have had draw on our reservoirs of hope. As we enter another Advent, Luke is asking us to share the hope of that early lockdown Church in Jerusalem. It has been very hard and I am sure, that like me, there were times when you gave up—life became hopeless. I pray that you have been able to signals of hope to those who felt lost and alone. I pray that you **‘will have the strength to go safely’** (Lk 21:36) through the difficulties and issues of the coming week.

The danger is that we can walk this advent way and it makes no difference at all; we can be so caught up in our own worries and fears that our goal is fixed only on December 25th 2021 and the respite it might offer us. Jesus is offering us a real challenge today: to find hope in TODAY!

What brings you hope this First Sunday of Advent?

Watch and reflect: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISSWcxjS0_0

Prayer (as you light the first candle):

**“Let nothing disturb you,
nothing frighten you,
all things are passing,
God is unchanging.
Patience gains all;
nothing is lacking to those who have God:
God alone is sufficient.”**
(St. Teresa of Ávila)

29th November 2021-Monday

Today we are offered the deep faith of the Roman Centurion. The Roman Army of Occupation were hardly the most popular group in first century Palestine—their reputation for ruthless cruelty and control was the stuff of legend. Yet today we are presented with a man sick with worry—the mask of control and power is removed, as his only concern is for his dying servant at home. With typical generosity, Jesus agrees to go to his home, but the Centurion, filled with faith and real hope utters those words that have become synonymous with approaching the altar in order to receive the Eucharist:

I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just say the word and my servant will be healed. (Mt 8:8)

We pray today to have something of that man’s deep and unshakable faith. Society and the media has told us that supermarket shelves will be empty this year—we cannot have everything we want! However, as Christians we know that real and lasting happiness does not lie in having the latest gadget or type of brandy butter to go with our mince pies. As we start this Camino of faith, may we always be aware of the presence of God in our lives. May we always be aware of the presence of those who look out for us and who really do care.

Today: can you welcome someone into your home—if that is not possible, then can you welcome them into your prayer?

We pray with the Holy Father: This is the real journey: to walk with the Lord always, even at moments of weakness, even in our sins. (Pope Francis 13/10/2015)

30th November 2021--Feast of St Andrew

It is wonderful to begin this Camino with a feast day; please celebrate feasts: get an ice cream or glass of something that cheers you. Feast days can distract us from the mundane or that which drags us down. As we reflect on the fisherman Andrew, we remember his hard work and his dedication to Jesus. He is the first disciple mentioned by John in his Gospel and he was the one to introduce his brother, Simon to Jesus-- a chance meeting that was to change the history of humanity.

He saw two brothers, Simon and Peter...follow me (Mt 4: 18-19)

We remember that, just like the others, he was asleep when Jesus needed him and that he ran and hid when Jesus suffered death and pain. Filled with hope in the Resurrection and strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, it seems he went on to a preaching ministry, probably in modern Syria. Tradition has it that Scottish pilgrims brought bones of Andrew back with them and buried them in the place where the town of St Andrews now stands.



TODAY: can you be that person to introduce another to Jesus by what you do or say?

We pray for the people of Scotland on this their national feast day:



TODAY: make a virtual pilgrimage to the beautiful Scottish island of Iona:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gQoOYBRNj8>

1st December 2021--Wednesday

In the Gospel of Matthew today, we are given a masterclass in how Jesus cares for those on the margins: he goes up into the hills and the crowds bring their **'lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others'** (Matt 15: 30). Jesus makes them whole again: he offers hope and healing because he has compassion and **'feels sorry for them'** (Matt 15: 32). However, in the Second Miracle of the Loaves, we see the wonderful and deep concern that he has for them all: they need to eat. Just as in the Feeding of the Five Thousand, Jesus takes the small offering from the disciples and transforms the gifts so that all are fed-- they had as much as they wanted and seven baskets of scraps are taken up. The evangelist tells us that four thousand men were fed **'to say nothing of the women and children'** (Mt 15: 38). In your dealings with people today on our shared Camino, make sure you do INCLUDE everyone; Jesus gives us this example of Gospel inclusion for us to follow

TODAY: donate something to your local foodbank.

We can pray:

Loving God, you reach all in our community; in your tender love, reach to those who are hungry this day. Those who are hungry because they have no food; those who are hungry of real care and attention. Help us to appreciate all those we meet today; help us, as we share our Advent Camino, to express our need for the support and love of others in our life. AMEN

Reflect and pray: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=you+needed+me

2nd December 2021--Thursday

In the gospel today, Jesus offers wise advice: make sure you have strong foundations! Whether we are building a house, or building up relationships, we need a strong basis of love and trust. I know, in my life, I have been far too trusting and accepted people at face value. Sadly events have proved that I could not always trust them and I have allowed myself to be damaged. The Lord wants wholeness, not damage. We need to do all we can to build up solid relationships that will endure difficulties, rows and global pandemic. Today we are called to build up greater trust and belief in each other

Today: re-start a conversation with a friend who has fallen off your radar

A Prayer of Gratitude

Lord Jesus,
You loved your friends and demonstrated acceptance, encouragement, and intimacy. Thank you for the friends you have given me. For the rest found in knowing acceptance. For the blessing found in being encouraged. And for the heavenly touch of intimacy that comes through the rich inheritance found in you.
Thank you. Amen.

3rd December 2021--Feast of St Francis Xavier

Francis was a friend of Ignatius of Loyola, as they studied together in Paris. Together they founded the great Jesuit order, and it is fitting today that we pray for the ministry of Jesuits throughout the world, not forgetting a special prayer for the first Jesuit Pope, Francis. After his ordination in 1537, Francis was sent to establish a mission in Goa--his missionary zeal took him to Japan and China and died on the island of Shangchuan. He was noted for his practical care of all and his stand for justice for native people, especially in the face of European domination. The Gospel today tells the parable of those wise people who build their homes on solid foundations and not the sand--their home will stand during any storm. As we move forward to the light of Christmas, we need that faith of Francis Xavier: we need to base our lives firmly with Jesus.



TODAY: pray for the Church in China

We can pray:

O my Lord Jesus!

Teach me to be generous;

teach me to serve You as you deserve;

to give, and not to count the cost;

to fight and not to heed the wounds;

to toil and not to ask for rest;

to labour, seeking no reward,

save that of knowing that I do your will. AMEN.

4th December 2020--Saturday of the first week

I honestly think that one of the outstanding qualities needed in leadership today is empathy; we need to feel that we are understood and cared for. When we do not experience that care, understanding and compassion, our lives feel empty. During these last few months, we have come to rely on those family members or friends who have shown that compassion and we have very quickly realised those who have not shown it. Compassion is, I feel, a gift: just as we receive it from others, we are called to share it with others too. Our example comes from Jesus who sees the crowd mentioned in today's Gospel and he ***'felt sorry for them because they harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd'*** (Matt 9: 36) Our Christian God understands where we are coming from because God has shared our lot. Our Christmas celebration shows empathy at its best. It is in this context of true compassion that Jesus chooses the twelve apostles, who are going to share his outreach and remind us that ***'the kingdom of heaven is close at hand'*** (Matt 10:7) and we will see this as they ***'cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers'*** (Matt 10:8). True compassion is infectious, and we need it more than ever in these times-can you offer your compassion today?

Today: as parents, grandparents, children, teachers, youth leaders, pastors, and friends can you do *one small act* that shows that you care for another?

Pause and reflect:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jr8tffNHJno>

I will always love you, no matter what!

We can pray:

Loving Father, you call us by name.

As we journey through life help us to be confident in our own unique identity and to find opportunities to develop our own gifts and passions.

We pray that the Holy Spirit will pour on us wisdom and guidance to help us realise and follow our dreams, discerning your plan for our lives.

Bless your Church by raising up dedicated and generous people from our families and friends who will serve as Priests, Deacons, Sisters and Brothers.

May we support one another in response to God's call.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

WEEK TWO



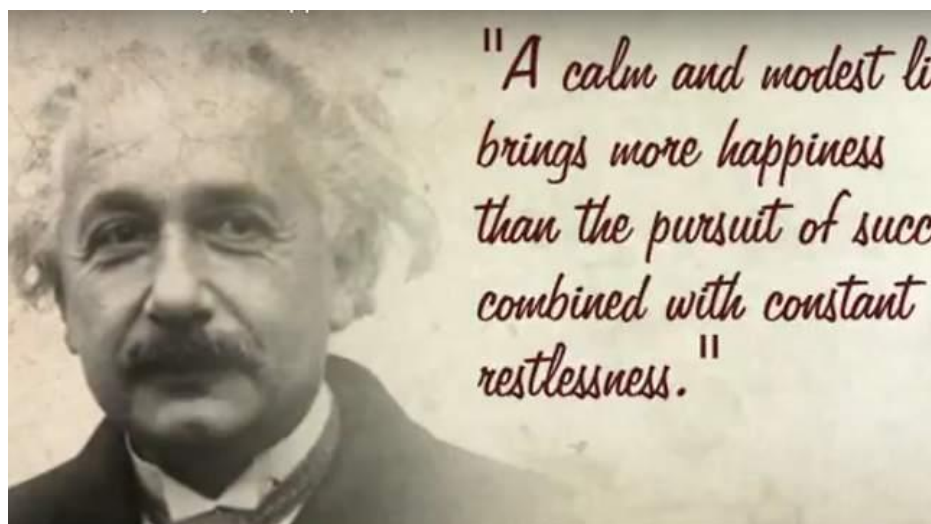
5th December 2021--Second Sunday of Advent

As we enter the second week of Advent, we are presented with the exciting and prophetic voice of John the Baptist; he stands in that strong line of Jewish prophets who are **'a voice (that) cries in the wilderness'** (Lk 3:5). Time and time again, God chose these men and women to act as mirrors to human society: they offered a vision that many found difficult to follow. Isaiah offers us an amazing vision, taken up by Mark and the reconciliation ministry of John: the Messiah will make **'a straight highway for our God across the desert. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low...then the glory of God will be revealed, and all shall see it.'** (Isa 40 4-5). It has not been an easy path for all of us in these past few months: we have experienced all kinds of woes and problems, but John is given to us today as the enabler. He comes full of empathy and compassion to help us all move forward; Mark presents the crowds coming to him in the River Jordan for baptism: using water as a symbol of cleansing. Through this ritual the crowds found acceptance and were valued: **'He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'** (Lk 3:3). God wants to make things easy for us by making sure the paths are straight and I find it ironic that we, as Church, can make people jump through hoops and can make their path, their Camino so difficult. Albert Einstein used to say, when he was told that the Declaration of Independence in America was **"Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,"** he used to say the pursuit of happiness is for idiots. That seems a rather sweeping statement and I am sure that he did not want to disrespect the US Constitution, but what is it that makes fully happy? The experience of Covid-19 has taught us that our health is so important so that Einstein could say with confidence

"You should pursue truth. You should pursue beauty. Not running around trying to be happy, happy, happy, buying things, doing things that will make you happy, happy, happy. Because they are never going to make you happy."

Today John points to the one who will make you truly and fully happy. Like all good disciples, John points to a truth beyond himself; as those roads are straightened out and the valleys filled in, we have an easy access to a God who loves us unconditionally and will be our source of happiness and joy. Why not light that second candle, and bask in the gift of peace you have been given? You can take stock of your life and point to the areas that bring you happiness-name those areas and show your gratitude.

Today: with Albert Einstein, reflect on what makes you happy



We can pray as we light the second candle:

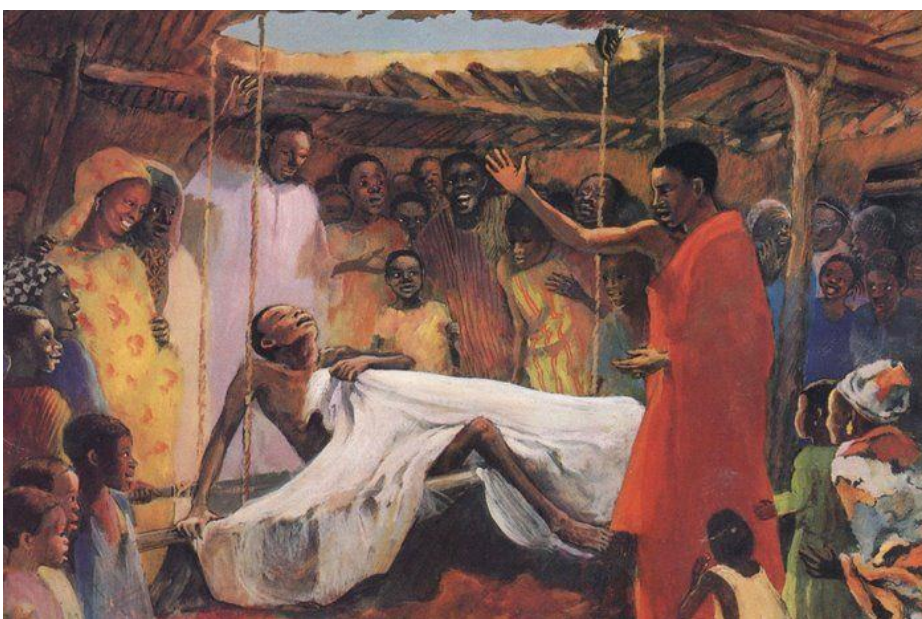
If you can listen to the musical adaptation of today's first reading from Isaiah, put to music by Handel, 'Come Ye/Every Valley' by Gramophone Chorus, Ghana

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83jCTO8N0K4>

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help me to hear your voice.
Touch me once again.
Give me the courage to be your beloved.
Give me courage to choose joy.
I need you now this Christmas.
Be born in me again. Today.
In Jesus' name, Amen.
(Bonnie Gray)

6th December 2020-Monday of Second Week

Jesus was not fazed by difficulties, nor were those who NEEDED to see him. In today's Gospel, Luke recounts the men carrying their crippled friend on a stretcher; ***'but as the crowd made it impossible to find a way of getting him in, they went up onto the flat roof and lowered him and his stretcher down.'*** (Lk 5:19). These friends do everything they can to make sure that their troubled friend can meet Jesus and find healing—they do not care what it takes. They say that necessity is the mother of invention and we have certainly had to be inventive during these pandemic days: our patience has been tried and tested and we have found ways of getting close to Jesus and others, even if SOCIAL DISTANCING is in play. Of course we need guidelines, rules, and regulations, but like the friends of the sick man, we will sometimes have to put protocol to one side for the greater good--thank God for that little bit of 'rebel' that is in you.



Today: thank God for those friends who do anything to support us; those friends we can ring at 2.00am and not get shouted out; those friends who tell us the truth, especially when we do not want to hear it; those friends who will walk a Camino with us come rain, hail, snow or sunshine. Thank God for real friends!

We can pray:
You have blessed us, O God, with the gift of friendship,
the bonding of people in a circle of love.
We thank you for such a blessing:
for friends who love us,
who share our sorrows,
who laugh with us in celebration,
who bear our pain,
who need us as we need them,
who cry as we cry,
who hold us when we need them,
and who give us the freedom to be ourselves.
Bless our friends with health and love. AMEN.



7th December 2021-the feast of Ambrose Barlow

Although today is the feast of St Ambrose of Milan, I would like to concentrate on the readings of Advent. Ambrose is a remarkable saint from the early Church: a member of the civil service of the Roman Empire, he found himself appointed the Bishop of Milan, even though he was not an ordained priest-in fact, he was not baptised! Within a week he was baptised, ordained priest, and then ordained Bishop on this day in 374. In these times when we need creativity and 'out of the box' thinking, perhaps St Ambrose could be our patron as we move the Church forward?

The reading from Matthew is perfect for our times, as it tells the tale of the lost sheep: ninety-nine are fine, grazing contentedly, but one goes missing. While the economic shepherd might take this an acceptable loss and look after the safe ninety-nine, the true pastoral shepherd will risk all in the search for those who are lost. One could argue that this parable makes no real sense to the majority of those who

live good and faithful lives—however, if you are that ‘lost one’, the story tells us all we need to know about a God who offers unconditional love for each one of us. As a Church is far easier to stay with those who are regular and faithful. The challenge comes with those on the margins—those who ignore us or make our lives difficult. Jesus and Ambrose were prepared to think creatively and differently because that is what true prophets do.

Today: be prepared to reach out to those who have become lost—offer a hand of friendship. Show them that they are not alone.

The Good Shepherd searches for the lost.



We can pray:

10 WAYS TO PRAY FOR THE LOST

- For God to draw them to Himself in true faith and repentance. (John 6:44)
- For God to destroy any false ideas about salvation through Jesus Christ. (Prov. 14:12)
- Pray that they will hear a clear presentation of the Gospel. (Rom. 10:14-15)
- For God to lift the veil from their hearts so that they might understand spiritual truth. (2 Cor. 3:14-16)
- That God's love would be understood and embraced. (John 3:16)
- That they would see God in creation. (Rom. 1:20)
- That they would take root and grow in Christ. (Col. 2:6-7)
- That Satan could not "steal" the seed of the Gospel. (Matt. 13:3-8)
- That they will have sorrow over their sin that will lead them to repentance. (2 Cor. 7:10)
- That their life be transformed by the Gospel. (2 Cor. 5:17)

8th December 2021-the Feast of Immaculate Conception

Today we celebrate Mary of Nazareth, one of the central characters in the infancy narratives; the meaning of INCARNATION and Christmas is that God chose to be born fully and as a real, not pretend, human being. Thus, central to the story is Mary, but we must go back into her story and to her conception to find the origins of today's feast. Mary is that sinless one, yet she is as human as you or I. This is seen in today's Gospel that concentrates on the angel coming to announce the birth of the Messiah. Gabriel, is that messenger chosen to bring good news to the obscure village of Nazareth and meet '**a virgin betrothed to man names Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary**' (Lk 1: 27). I think that it is very interesting that Luke chooses to tell us where this virgin is from and who she is engaged to, before we discover her name. Our name identifies WHO we are, and we do well to remember God's voice to us, "**I have called you by name, you are mine!**" (Isa 40:3). Through Gabriel, God tells Mary that she must not be afraid even though he is asking the impossible: she, the virgin, is '**to conceive and bare a son...Jesus. He will be called Son of the Most High**' (Lk 1: 31 7 33).

If we conquer fear, just as Mary did, great joy can be the result; in these difficult times, millions have feared the virus and what it might bring us. Recently some of my family were able to get away to the Mountains for a break and their teenage son freely admitted that the joy, space, and freedom that he found outside the inner-city took away so many of his fears. He was able to be a young person again and not have to worry. Far too many of our children and young people have had pressure put on them in these days; through the intercession of Mary of Nazareth, I ask God's blessing on these wonderful young people. Like Mary may they have a future that is fearless and hope-filled; like Mary may they be generous and loving; like Mary may they see the possible in the impossible. May we, as adults, have the courage to listen to what our young people are saying to us; as individual families and the great family of the Church, we need to really listen to their wisdom, especially in these times. Only in this way can we join with the young Mary and pray with her, '**let what you have said be done to me**' (Lk 1: 38)



Today: really listen to what your younger family members or friends are saying, what wisdom will you learn from the young today?

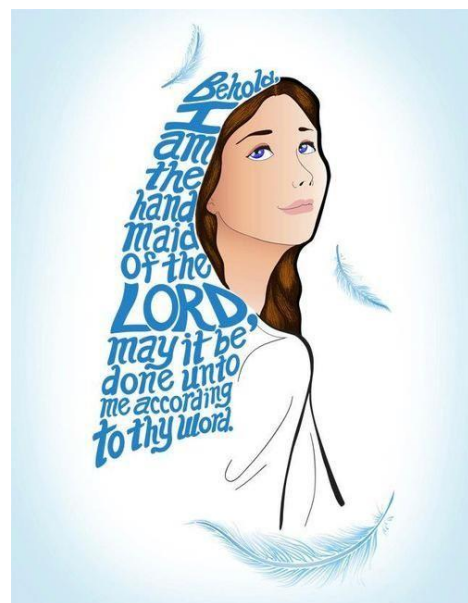
We can pray

Watch the Annunciation scene from Zeffirelli's TV series, 'Jesus of Nazareth' and reflect both on Mary's fear and her ultimate trust in God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAXUk093ZK0>

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him. (Nahum 1:7)

Don't forget today is a feast day, please, please please, CELEBRATE



9th December 2021-Thursday

A central Advent figure features in the Gospel today as Jesus proclaims: ***'of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen'*** (Mt 11: 11) John is seen as the great prophet whose job is not tell the future like some biblical 'Mystic Meg; the prophet has much harder and meaningful task than to suggest what the lottery number might be next week! The prophets are sent by God to see how the people of Israel were LIVING the Covenant; God promises that he will be true to his chosen ones, but they must remain true to him. Time and time again, these chosen ones went their own selfish way and ignored the Covenant, but God remained faithful. Prophets, like John, did not have an easy life as they had to constantly remind people to be true and faithful to God. Many of them never got to enjoy retirement or to use their 'bus pass' because, like John, their message was uncomfortable, and the establishment got rid of them. We remember the gift of John the Baptist and his ministry of reconciliation; he is the one who points to that total love that Jesus has for you today and always:

I will take you to be my people and I will be your God (Ex. 6: 7)



(*'Baptism of Jesus by John'* by John Nava)

Today: try to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation; if it is impossible, then give yourself time to be open to the loving, unconditional forgiveness of God in your life

We can pray:

Today I look for your loving forgiveness

I regret my selfishness and my lack of thought

Help me to do better and to try again

May I do, today, something that will make the world a better and kinder place. AMEN

10th December 2021-Friday

I think many of us can identify with the frustration that Jesus expresses in the gospel today: we are damned if we do and damned if we don't! The children, in Jesus's word picture, cry out: ***'we played the pipes for you and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't be mourners.'*** (Mat 11: 17).

You just cannot please some people and that is dangerous, especially as we attempt to come to a sense of a new normality in our Covid-19 world. We could have a feeling that we had better not do anything in case we upset someone: change is not easy and some cope with it better than others. However, as the pandemic has shown us, we need to cope with change in all aspects of our life from work and schooling to sport and relaxation-life in December 2020 has changed from our experience of Advent in 2019. We need to ensure that we all have a proper work-life balance and that the rest times, that Jesus called for, are put into our busy schedules: we are not **'possessed'** (Mt 11: 18), nor are we **'gluttons'** or **'drunkards'** (Mt 11: 19). All of us involved in pastoral ministry will know that we are not going to please all of the people all of the time, but we must not let the fear of making a mistake put us off. What do you do to encourage and build up? Do you pour cold water on any new initiative? Are you so selfish that you cannot open your heart to change and a different approach? Let us pray today for balance and a spirit of acceptance-it will go such a long way in these changing times.

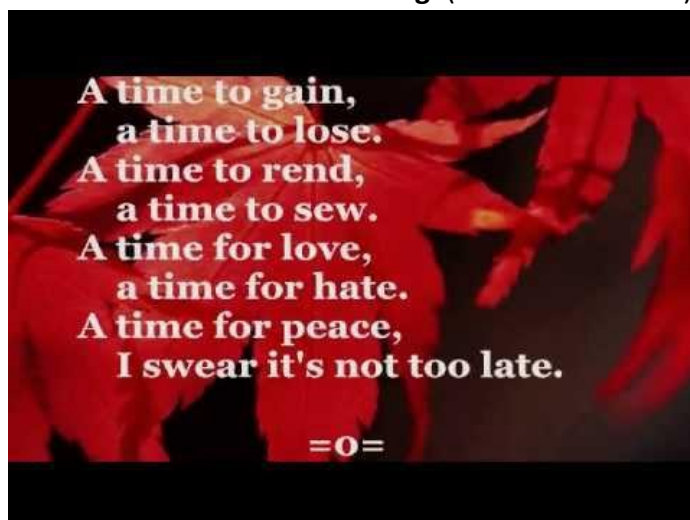
Today: take time to realise how you can make a difference in the lives of others, as there is a 'time for every purpose under heaven' (Pete Seeger's 'Turn Turn, Turn')

Reflect on the song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4983sAoLdM>

We can pray:

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted..... A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance..... a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. (see Ecclesiastes 3)



11th December 2021-Saturday

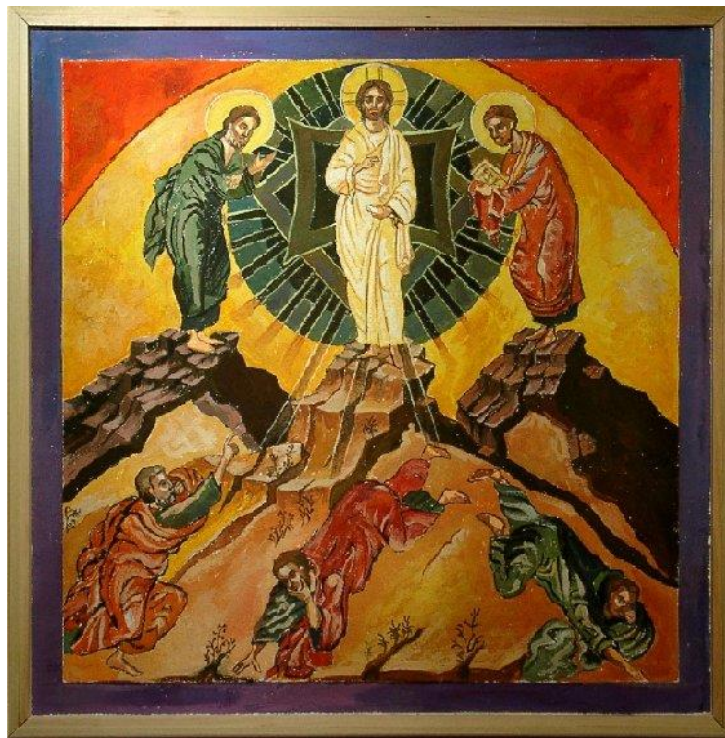
In the gospel today, Jesus is bringing his three friends, Peter, James and John down from the mountain of Transfiguration. They had just witnessed his glory with Moses and Elijah—the symbols of Law and Prophecy respectively. You will remember that Peter saw so full of joy that he wanted to stay up there, but Jesus has to bring them down so they are back in the reality of everyday living. It is in this return to normality, that the friends ask, **'why do the scribes say that Elijah has to come first?'** (Matt 17:10). They are probably thinking of the Hebrew scripture that states:

See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents. (Mal 4:5-6)

The link is being made between John the Baptist and Elijah as ones who will bring healing and reconciliation before the great Coming of the Lord. The dialogue between Jesus and his friends is interesting, and points to the problems of being a true prophet. John brought a challenging message that so many were open to. However, the leaders of the people, the very ones who should have listened to John, had him thrown into jail and executed. True prophets are not popular because they give a message that many of us would rather not hear. Jesus see the need to recognise the strength of prophetic witness; the prophets like John the Baptist and Elijah are faithful witnesses to God, often in the face of extreme opposition and death. The birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem is beautiful, and we can make it nice and cosy-however, the baby of the manger grows up to challenge and make demands of us. The true prophets of God know pain and hurt, and Jesus can see that the 'Son of Man will suffer similarly' (Mt 17: 12).

Today: do something small that could really transform another's life

We can pray: look at this icon of Transfiguration and ask God to help you make the smallest of difference in the lives of others. Pray that you are a force for good



(The Transfiguration ... a Romanian copy of an icon in Stavronikita Monastery in Mount Athos)

We can pray:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.

The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

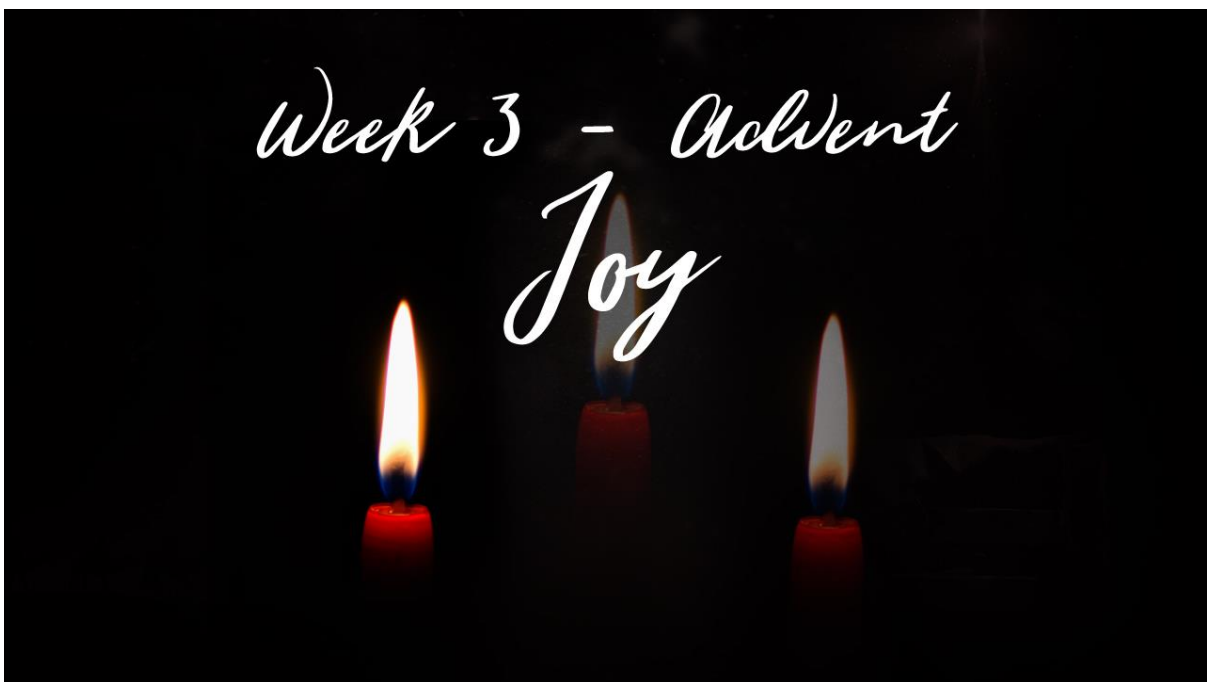
We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own
(‘The Romero Prayer’ from the ‘Romero Trust’)

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT



12th December 2021-Third Sunday of Advent

Well we are over halfway through our Camino, and the danger is that we can get so caught up with ‘25th December’ that we could miss out on the beauty that these next couple of weeks will bring us. Yes, there is shopping to be done, cards to be sent and gifts to be wrapped, but our Advent Camino is that chance to give something back to the Lord and to each other. Remember to send in prayer requests and they will be included in our daily mass here in Bolton. If you have a spare moment, please remember the Salesian Family in your own prayers and ask that others may follow in the footsteps of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello—we certainly need that generosity. In the Gospel today, once again John the Baptist is front and centre but, as always, he is pointing beyond himself to the person of Jesus.

In our gospel today we are presented with the image of John greeting the crowds and responding to their simple question: ‘**what must we do?**’ (Lk 3:10). John does not offer some prayer of goodwill—he tells them straight. He encourages them to share what little they have: tax collectors must not extort, while soldiers must not bully or intimidate. The path of John is very simple and easy to follow. However, he makes it

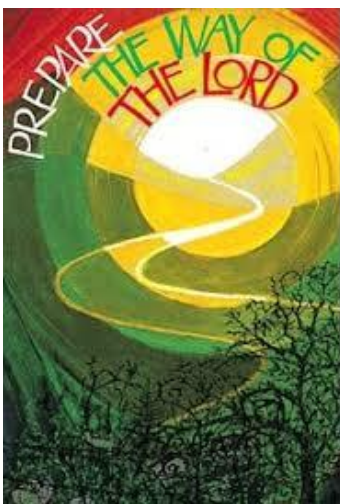
totally clear that he is not Messiah because, as he tells them, **'I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals.'** (Lk 3:16) In John's great 'Prologue' we see a wonderful piece of poetry that echoes the beauty of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. John presents the Messiah as the LIGHT, **'a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower'** (Jn 1: 5). In these dark, cold nights, the Christmas tree lights are a welcome distraction and should point to a deeper reality of faith: the light of Christ will make a difference, the light of Christ will see us through these times of hardship. A global pandemic brought a universal darkness as we experienced, lockdown, shielding, unemployment, failure, pain and death. However, this painful experience also highlighted the light of the NHS, the care and consideration of family and friends and the lengths that some people have gone to keep in touch. Social distancing does not mean we have to be distant; we need not ignore each other or use it as an excuse to erase people from our lives.

John is the messenger we need more than ever in these days--we all those need people in our lives who can cut through the drama and the problems and give us clear and straight guidance. The faith leader want to create problems where there are none: John is using water merely as a symbol of repentance, a ritual cleansing. The Messiah, the one John is preparing the way for, has the power and strength of the Holy Spirit to move us all forward.

As we reflect today, we can think of those we have met who pointed us towards Jesus; I think of my parents and family, I give thanks for those fellow Salesians who have given me an unselfish example of real care for the young. I praise God for the countless young people I've met over the years who have helped me to come closer to God. I am grateful to those families who have accepted me as another hungry guest at their home table; I appreciate those friends who have become part of our extended Salesian family and continue that inspirational mission and outreach to the young.

God will come to you in the most unexpected ways this week; unexpected people, young or old, will help you to discover God's will for you. As a Salesian of Don Bosco, I thank those young people who pointed the way—and still do. Be alert this week to see, hear and fully experience the wonder that God is calling you to share.

Today: listen to the voice of the children and young people in your life-- they have a wisdom beyond their years.



(The Benedictine Sisters of Turvey Abbey)

This may help you to reflect as you 'Prepare a Way for the Lord':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1SiaCV26aQ>

We can pray, as we light the third candle:

**Thanks be to you, my lord, Jesus Christ,
For all the benefits that you have given me;
For all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
O, most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
May I know you more clearly;
Love you more dearly;
And follow you more nearly day by day.**

(St Richard of Chichester)

13th December 2021—feast of St Lucy

In the gospel today, Jesus is both challenged and challenging as he tries to move people on. The leaders of the community should be encouraging and supportive, instead they are manipulative and insincere. The challenge of the Gospel today is that we do not get caught into this trap of controlling others: we are given a freedom as daughters and sons of a loving God. No one has the right to take that joy from you even if they are a partner, a friend, or a boss! You have a dignity that is God's gift to you alone—cherish it and celebrate it. For those experiencing darkness today, please look to the Christmas lights, remember the good times and celebrate the gift you are.



Today's feast honours Lucy of Syracuse who was martyred in the third century persecutions of Diocletian. Tradition has it that she came from a wealthy family and, on her conversion to Christianity, she wanted to distribute her inheritance to the poor. Rather than being forced into a marriage that she did not want, she was executed when she was twenty-one years old. Probably due to her young age, Lucy became a popular role model in the early Church, and she is one of the few women mentioned by name in the Roman Canon. She became increasingly popular in Northern Europe—prior to the Reformation in England, today was work free. In Scandinavia, noted for its long, dark winters, Lucy became a symbol of hope: her feast once coincided with the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year, before calendar reforms, so her feast day has become a festival of light. To this day, it is common for girls to dress in white, with a red sash to symbolise martyrdom. Remembering to be very careful, they would carry a wreath of candles on their heads to show that light will be there even in the darkest of times.

Lucy stands as one who follows her conscience, no matter how hard that might be: her inspiration offers light to those who can only feel gloom and darkness. In Sweden, it is traditional for children take cakes and pastries around their neighbourhood to begin the Christmas festivities.

Today: could you make or buy a cake or cookies for someone who is housebound?

We can pray:

Saint Lucy, whose beautiful name signifies 'LIGHT',
by the light of faith which God bestowed upon you
increase and preserve His light in my soul
so that I may avoid evil,

be zealous in the performance of good works
and abhor nothing so much as the blindness and
the darkness of evil and sin.

Obtain for me, by your intercession with God
Perfect vision for my bodily eyes
and the grace to use them for God's greater honour and glory
and the salvation of souls.

St. Lucy, virgin and martyr, pray for us.

14th December 2021--Feast of St John of the Cross

Today the Church gives us a sixteenth century Spanish Carmelite friar to reflect on; in this time of Advent we are given another 'prophet' to think about. St. Teresa of Avila persuaded him to work with her on the REFORM of the Carmelites: together they wanted to return to a stricter way of life, envisaged by their founders, with a return to regulated prayer times, fasting and style of the religious habit. As with all change, some can adapt and cope, while others fight it—the Carmelites had their own 'civil war' with John being eventually imprisoned by his fellow friars. During his time of 'lockdown' he composed some of his most amazing works, as he experienced 'the dark night of the soul'. For John this was the journey of the soul from its bodily home to union with God. It happens during the "dark", which represents the hardships and difficulties that we all must face so that we can reach the light of the union with the Creator. Without a doubt these past years have been a 'dark night' for many of us as we were without the support and the human touch of loved ones who could not be included in our 'social bubble' due to distance or the need to shield. The pandemic has made us scared and suspicious: can we meet up? Who do I include in my group? Should we go out? As that wartime poster famously reminded us, "is your journey REALLY necessary?" Hopefully we have moved on from this, but the effects of Covid-19 are still with us, as we try to limp forward from this global trauma.

We will all have to face problems, crises and hurt during life—sometimes, just like John, the problems come from those we live with, those we are close to and those who know us best. I feel that it was this betrayal that hurt John the most: to be let down by family and friends is so difficult to come to terms with. In this Camino we are striving to achieve a peace and unity that Christ offers us, but please be conscious of those for whom Christmas will only drag up painful memories. For some Christmas Day is the loneliest day of the year. It can be so difficult to enter the festive mood when you are wounded and broken; as we experience the darkness, let us look to the light—a pot that is cracked can let the light in!

**In an obscure night
Fevered with love's anxiety
(O hapless, happy plight!)
I went, none seeing me
Forth from my house, where all things quiet be
(‘Dark Night of the Soul’)**

Today: if you know of a family member or friend experiencing problems and going through a 'dark night' reach out to them in friendship and warmth.



(Loving Them Quotes 2012)

We can pray:

We do not need to be 'socially distanced.' In your heart and mind, reach out to those hurting today and pray with them so that they might soon experience light

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clihblOPxrU>

Lord, in these days help me to reach out to those in need.

Help me to listen, help me to use the right words in speaking to them.

As we face the problems of life together, may this time of Advent

keep us open to your light, strength, hope and love.

May we walk this Advent Camino together in your peace and understanding. AMEN

15th December 2020--Wednesday of the third week

Today's Gospel from Luke shows how our history of salvation is rooted in the ordinary and the human. John the Baptist, now a prisoner of Herod, sees himself preparing the road for the Messiah, but who is this Messiah, this Saviour? He sends two friends to Jesus to ask, **"are you the one who is to come our must we wait for someone else?"** (Lk 7: 19). After our experience yesterday, you could expect a simple 'Yes' or 'No' from Jesus; Jesus rather points to what is going on-he points to his actions. What do you expect a Messiah or Saviour to be? If it is leading an army of rebellion against the Roman, then the answer is a firm 'NO'! if you are looking for a wise detached academic at home with his library of books, then again the answer is 'NO'! However, if you are looking for healing and restoration, then there is light at the end of your search, there is a 'YES' for **"the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the Good News is proclaimed to the poor"** (Lk 7: 22). Jesus is living out the 'mission statement' that he proclaimed back home in Nazareth when used Isaiah (see Isa 61:1-2) to kick-start his ministry: **"he has sent me to bring Good News to the poor"** (Lk 4: 18). John's disciples can see with their own eyes what Jesus has done; they can experience that inclusive ministry of care for themselves. As we see in the great parable of Last Judgement (Matt 25: 31-46), Christianity is a call to be active and involved and not sitting around on the side-lines. John is searching for a Messiah and Jesus wants to present a Messiah who is not distant and out of reach. We are called to experience God in the ordinary of life today; it is wonderful to get to a Church or Cathedral to pray, but today we can pray on the top deck of the bus, in the car, on the way to school and even in the chaos of the school run. God always walks with us; can you walk with God this day?

Today: what Good News can you share at home, work or school?

We can pray:

Lord, make me responsive to the needs of others.

May I be source of GOOD NEWS today and not fake news!

May we share your light as we become more involved in our world this day. AMEN

16th December 2021-Thursday

In our gospel today, Jesus reflects on the ministry of John the Baptist: **‘I tell you of all the children born of women, there is none greater than John!’** (Lk 7:28) Jesus reminds his own disciples that they will have to go to palaces if they are looking for refinement and wealth. John is the prophet who points the way’ he is the messenger who helps us all to see the future. The observation of Jesus is interesting that even the tax collectors, who were seen as the greatest of sinners, were accepting the message, while the religious leaders rejected it. In fact these same leaders were doing all in their power to silence him.

We might not go to John for fashion tips, but we can look to him for an understanding of what it means to be a Christian—even in today’s complicated society. The message he offers is so simple: turn away from anything that harms your relationship with God. Make a commitment to love God, and your neighbour, as yourself. It is really that easy.

Today: renew again your commitment to God and to each other



(‘Jesus, the Light’—Mickey McGrath OSFS)

We can pray: Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (she) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he (she) keep the flame of faith alive in his (her) heart. When the Lord comes, may he (she) go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom. AMEN (Prayer from the Rite of Baptism, as the Baptismal Candle is offered to the family of the newly baptised.)

Christmas Novena 2021



We are now invited to enter into a very solemn part of our Camino through Advent; it is a time to get ready, with minds and hearts open to the impending message. However, if you are like me, these last few days, leading up to December 25th are hectic: school carol services, parties to go to, shopping to get, cards to send and gifts to wrap and churches to get ready. In these strange times, perhaps there is not the same intensity and we might be able to focus a little more closely on the meaning of Christmas. In a strange way, the pandemic may have given us the gift of ‘time and reflection.’ I urge you to use it wisely and well! I invite you to join us as we pray the Christmas Novena over these next nine days; the Novena is a traditional Catholic prayer. Those who practice recite a series of prayers for nine days with a purpose – or for a particular request – in the common thought of praising God.

Christmas novena: the prayers

The first day is dedicated to the invocation of Baby Jesus. The whole New Testament is based on the expectation of Christ that we continue to wait every year as if it were the first. The first prayer is “Come, Baby Jesus “.

On the second day, the heart rejoices because God announces the future salvation to people. This announcement is a cause of great joy because it means that after death, reconciliation and communion with Jesus will be possible. The prayer of the second day is “Jesus, hear us“.

On the third day of Novena, we prepare the ways for the Lord. The reference prayer is “Send your Spirit, O Lord“.

The fourth day is dedicated to bearing witness to Christ. At the time it was the mission of John the Baptist and he accomplished it in truth and in humility, exhorting to conversion and pointing to Jesus as the Saviour. The prayers are accompanied by “Listen to us, O Lord“.

The fifth day is dedicated to God's plan of salvation which meets the will and collaboration of Joseph and Mary. Even the fifth day prayers are guided by "Listen to us, oh Lord".

The sixth day is addressed to the handmaid of the Lord. After the announcement to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel, God begins to give life to the ancient promises about the coming of the Messiah. The prayer is "We thank you, O Jesus".

On the seventh day a sign of salvation appears, the miraculous birth of Emmanuel, the son of a virgin. In this event the Evangelist reconnects the prophecy of the birth of Jesus: now God is really with us. By becoming a man, he came to live among us and continues to remain among us today, in the church and in the Eucharist. The prayer is "Honour and glory to You, Lord Jesus".

The eighth day the emphasis is placed on the saving power of love. This love is good, tenderness, mercy and presents itself despite the sins and weakness of men. The prayer is "Show us, Lord, your Mercy".

Finally, the ninth day is that of Christmas Eve and is dedicated to the journey into darkness until the reach of God. On the ninth day the prayers are guided by "Listen, oh Lord".



17th December 2021--Friday



Without a doubt one of the most popular programmes on British TV is “Who do You Think You are?": it is a very simple format where a celebrity delves into their family history and discovers all kinds of interesting, sometime salacious, material on their ancestors. Through Church and civic records, they can go right back and discover their origins and genealogy. My cousin, John Healy has done my own family a great service by recording our history and he discovered a great, great, great uncle recorded in the 1901 census as an ‘imbecile’; he may have been a little different but we have no memories or other records of this hidden ‘Uncle Patrick’--not even a record of his death. Matthew today present the genealogy of Jesus; conscious of his Jewish audience, he begins with Abraham and ends with Jesus, while a more inclusive Luke begins his family tree with Jesus and traces him back to “...son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God” (Lk 3:38). Our Gospel today is taken from the very beginning of Matthew’s account: he is proclaiming who Jesus is. **‘Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham’** (Matt 1: 1). I must be honest, I was always praying that Deacon Michael or Deacon Fidelis would be able to proclaim the gospel on 17th December as some of the Hebrew names are real tongue twisters! However, more importantly this opening chapter grounds Jesus in a human reality. Unusually, Mathew mentions five women in the lineage—some of whom were involved in irregular relationships, as were many of the men in the list. We are not called to judge, rather we embrace the good and bad that gave us the gift of Jesus, our Wisdom; Jesus was part of a family that embraced the very good and also those we would rather hide away and forget. When you read the stories of the first four women—and of the men on the list—we do not focus on their sin, but on the grace of God. The hero of this story is God. His grace shines through the darkest of human sin as he chooses flawed men and women and places them in Jesus’ family tree.

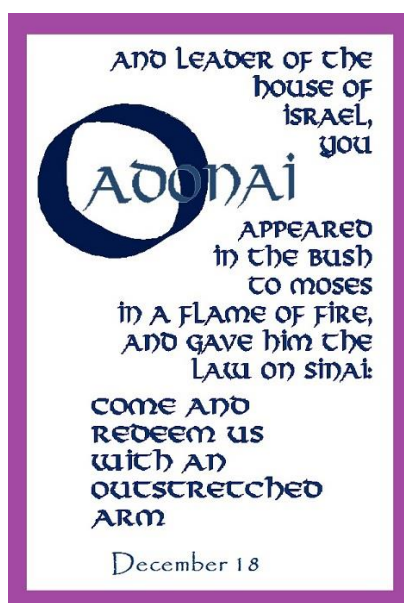
Today: tell a story from your childhood to a younger family member or friend

We can pray:

Lord I thank you for my heritage and my family history. Bless all my family, living and dead; may I play my full part and never discredit my family name. Today, Lord, bless us especially with your wisdom.

AMEN

18th December 2021--Saturday



The human reality and tragedy that was the conception of Jesus comes to light today with a needed focus on Joseph, the husband of Mary. He discovers that Mary is pregnant, and Matthew makes it clear that Joseph has no knowledge of the event. Rather than forcing her to endure public humiliation and punishment, ***‘being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, he decided to divorce her informally’*** (Matt 1: 19). As a Salesian I love dreams, as they feature so much in the life of our founder, Don Bosco; thus Matthew’s use of the ‘dream’ is very significant: the messenger of God, the angel consoles him in his darkest hour, ***“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife....she will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus because he is the one to save his people from their sins”*** (Matt 1: 20-21). This is how the naming and birth of Jesus is announced in Matthew-it is all quite abrupt and we need to look to Luke’s infancy narrative for more detail.

The prophecy of the Isaiah is fulfilled as *'Emmanuel'* (Isa 7: 14) is born and Joseph is central to the account because *'he did what the angel of the Lord had told him'* (Matt 1: 24). Through the gift of Christmas 'God-is-with-us' (Matt 1: 24) in a real and tangible way; in the gift of Jesus Christ we can experience God on our own terms.

Today: thank God for all those parents who accept the gift of children into their lives, even though circumstances may be difficult

We can pray:

May we as parents be slow to anger, quick to hear, and eager to accept our children and grandchildren for the precious treasures they are. Right now, they need our assurance of love and comfort more than ever in these days of pandemic. Thank You for blessing us with the responsibility and privilege of parenting and grandparenting. At times we feel so weak, but You are strong. You will make a way through this. Our trust is in You always. AMEN

19th December 2020—Fourth Sunday of Advent



On this final Sunday of our Camino through Advent, we are presented with the Visitation account from Somehow, the reading today is much more immediate as we are just days away from

Christmas. We read of her journey to visit Elizabeth—no visits to the Nazareth branch of 'Mothercare' for Mary or getting the Nazareth nursery ready: her faith is practical and simple. Like her, it is in those ordinary and simple things that we can find salvation. There is a lovely story told of the teenage saint Dominic Savio: he took to Don Bosco's exhortation that his pupils could become saints; Dominic started to follow the example of the aesthetic saints he had read about. He filled his bed with stones so that he could not sleep properly and took to fasting for long period; with lack of food and sleep, his health deteriorated badly, and Don Bosco was deeply concerned. When Dominic told his mentor what he was doing to achieve sanctity, Bosco reminded him that we become saints not by doing the extraordinary but by doing the ordinary extraordinarily well. In that simple act of visitation, Elizabeth can recount that **'the child in my womb leapt for joy'** (Lk 1:44). A simple act brings such gladness and support.

Last year another fifteen year old, Carlo Acutis was beatified; he can rightly be called the saint of Facebook and Twitter. He is a modern saint who, while dressed in jeans and a tracksuit top, pointed to the need for the Eucharist in our lives. A modern saint who was at home with the internet and recognised its power in our lives; his mother Antonia spoke to reporters prior to the ceremony, **"I must say that the internet is incredible. It's a gift. Of course, the internet has a dark side" when misused for pornography, bullying and selling drugs, but Carlo showed the good side of internet. And we know that the light is stronger than the darkness.**" Obviously she is biased but she sees her eldest child, a victim of leukaemia, as a prophet for our times: **"because, of course, a saint is somebody who goes a little bit against the mainstream, the mentality of most people."** Don Bosco, Dominic Savio and Carlo could be seen as 'rebels' as they offer values that sometimes we would like to hide. Blessed Carlo spoke of the cult of the superstar that is all too obvious in our society today, as a quick look into any tabloid newspaper will show; he would comment:

You see queues in front of a football match or an actor or rock singer, but you don't see a queue for the tabernacle where there is the real presence of God, God that lives among us



(Blessed Carlo Acutis 1991-2006)

Personally, I am drawn to Carlo's wisdom when he said, **"we are all born original, but many die as photocopies."** Today we see God blessing the original gift to the world that is Mary; Blessed Carlo wants each of us to make our own contribution to the life of the world, it is a contribution that only YOU can make. While Carlo was strongly attached to the Eucharist, his prayer life, and working in his local soup kitchen, he enjoyed physical activity, playing with his many friends and living the life of a normal teenager. Others sought him out when they had problems, and he was a real friend to those in need. Carlo's friendly face was a common sight in his neighbourhood. He befriended everybody, including the gatekeepers, janitors, and other domestic servants that worked around his area. These workers were often non-Europeans with Muslim and Hindu backgrounds. Carlo told everybody about his love for Christ, and people could not help but listen and share in his joy. Another recent saint, Cardinal Newman powerfully reminds us of our uniqueness. I pray that today you do not follow the crowd, but that you are prepared to make a difference:

God has created me to do him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission; I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.

(St John Henry Newman)

Mary had found that level of sanctity and was chosen to be the 'SHEKINAH' or place of encounter with God. God's Shekinah is assuming flesh and blood in the womb of history, within the womb of a Davidic descendent, Mary, is blessed because **'she believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'** (Lk 1: 45). It is Mary's faith that makes the incarnation possible. It is our faith that makes the incarnation possible in our own world. It brings new meaning to our families, to grow with us, to be with us. And it is through the goodness of our own faith, one with him, that the love of God is to be radiated out into the whole world. Mary and Elizabeth are those faithful disciples who hear and keep God's word; not only do they 'talk the talk', which is relatively easy to do, they 'walk the walk'-much harder to achieve but

the sign of a true disciple. Like Mary, you will be carrying Jesus with you today; how you respond to situations and people will define your very being today. Be kind, listen and give praise and thanks who help you along the Camino today: may your day move from grey to gold. Today we can follow the example of Mary and see great things happen with just a little love, mixed with a little faith; Christmas is not something that happened to other people many, many centuries ago. Christmas can happen every day when we bring our faith together and say to God, "Take my life. Be it done to you and be it done to me according to Your word."

Today: follow the example of Blessed Carlo and use the internet to bring goodness-even a positive tweet could help someone

We can pray as we light the fourth candle:

Lord, we thank you for the gift of Mary in the life of our Church-may we follow her example of faith, hope, service and love. Like her may we see God's hand in all we do and say today.

We thank you for the gift of Elizabeth and her elder wisdom

We thank you for the gifts of Dominic Savio and Carlo Acutis; they are role model for our young as the remind us that we can all be happy and have good times following the Gospel.

As adults, may we always give good example and be open to learning from our young people: they can teach us so much if our ears and hearts are open to them.

As we light this fourth candle and complete a circle of light, may we share that light with those we meet this week; may that light guide us through the hectic few days ahead and may we enjoy the eternal light of Jesus on Christmas Day itself. AMEN



(from Aleteia website)

20th December 2021--Monday



O dawn of the east, brightness of light eternal, and sun of justice: come, and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

One of the things I love about Mary of Nazareth is her decisive action; in reality she does not appear much in the Gospels, but she is always seen as helping and supportive from Bethlehem to Cana to Calvary to the early Christian lockdown in the Upper Room. This mission of service begins, as Luke reminds us today, in her act of unconditional trust which we read in the Annunciation. Once again we are given with the Annunciation account from Luke that we read, as our Gospel, back on the Feast the Immaculate Conception (8th December). Somehow, however, the reading today is much more immediate as we are just days away from Christmas. As our backdrop today we are aware of Mary's fear and wonder, but we recognise her deep trust and faith. Her simple life in the outback of Galilee had **'won God's favour'** (Lk 1: 30).

Unlike the father of John, Zechariah, Mary actually does believe in miracles—the impossible can happen. Zechariah, the Temple official who is, literally, working next to the 'Holy of Holies' in the centre of the Jewish faith cannot comprehend the gift being offered to him and is speechless. Mary, in an obscure village, miles away from the sophistication and deep theological teaching of the Temple, can say with total trust, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me' (Lk 1:38). She shared the faith of her ancestors, slaves in Egypt, that Moses would liberate them. Miracles will happen if we believe. As the chosen people discovered, it could take a long time, but it will happen. Sometimes we need to go through generational change for real movement to take place. What we cannot do, no matter how comforting or easy it might be, is to look back, and live in a past that we deem be 'golden'. Like Mary, we will be called to take risks and meet the challenges that Covid-19 has brought to our Church. We are invited to move forward, sharing a mutual trust and hope in our future—time and time again, the Angel of the Lord tells us, **'do not be afraid'** (Lk 1:30). We can never let fear traumatise us, or not help us to move on. We need not fear because 'the Lord is with you!' (Lk 1:28). Remember that the Lord walks with you today and always—enjoy his company.

Today: Show the world that you walk with the living Lord of light. Smile more-share a joke and laugh heartily (just like a six year old)

(‘Swahili Annunciation’ Mickey McGrath OSFS)

Watch and reflect:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NieC8KA0Evl&t=12s>

We can pray:

May you find a gift this morning

Laid out for you in the sky.

A beautiful reminder

That sets your hope in flight.

May you notice birds above you

That soar and ride the winds.

And know that as you lift your prayer

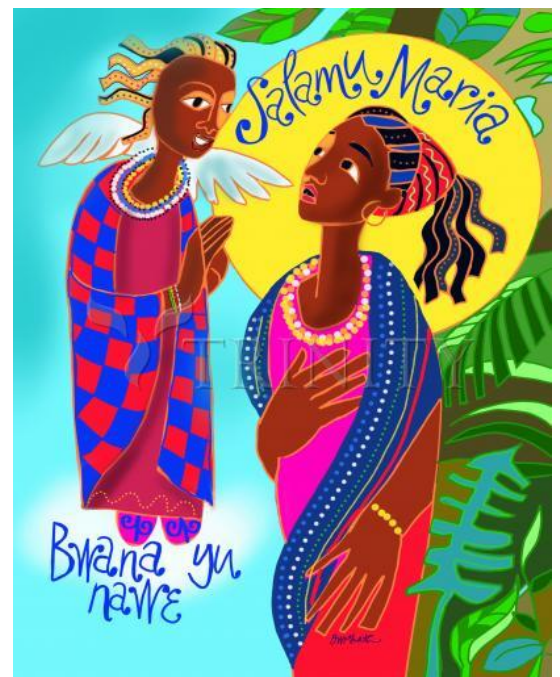
God lifts your heart and sings.

May you hear the sweet birds chirping

May you smell the fresh cool air

And know that God's love is all around, Holding you so dear.

21st December 2021-Tuesday



Today we might feel a real sense of déjà vu, as we once again re-tell last Sunday’s gospel account of the Visitation. Perhaps the Church is trying to re-enforce the message that being a follower of Jesus, involves going out of our comfort zones. Scripture tells us clearly that humanity is made in the image of God (see **Gen 1:27**); being made in that divine image means that we do not play at being good. We are called to reach beyond ourselves and make an impact on the lives of others. Mary made an impact on the lives of Elizabeth, Zachariah and their whole household—she made a difference. Perhaps today is the day to look back on those who have made a difference in your life: those who have been there for you, held your hand and dried your tears. Without these angels without wings, our lives would have been a lot worse. Perhaps they are still with you, perhaps they are a memory—a faded picture. Your children might ask you who that person is—the one in your picture. You can tell them that with this individual you had some of the best days of your life. Your children might never be able to meet them, but they can share your deep respect and love for them. Be grateful for all those visits you were able to take with those who loved you—if anything, the lockdown experience and physical distancing taught us so much about our need for each other. We can bring so much joy and laughter into the lives of others—I pray that you can reconnect

Today: try to reconnect with a friend you have not seen for such a long time—if you can visit them, it will mean so much. If not try a telephone call, social media or a letter.

We can pray:

**O blessed Lord,
 you have commanded us to love one another.
 Just as we have received your undeserved blessings,
 may we love everyone in you and for you.
 We ask your kindness for all,
 but especially for the friends
 whom your love has given to us.
 Love them, O fountain of love,
 and move them to love you with all their heart,
 that they may will, and speak, and do only those things
 which are pleasing to you.**

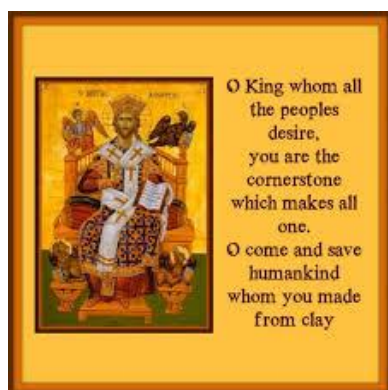
Bless especially those friends who are a distant memory:

We thank you for their support and care. Lord, be with our friends always. AMEN.



‘The Visitation’ at the Basilica of the Visitation, Ein Karim

22nd December 2021-Wednesday



In the Gospel today, we have Mary’s response to Elizabeth’s greeting—a response that we have come to love in the Magnificat prayer. It is a prayer rooted in the Hebrew hymn of praise tradition and it something we could perhaps use as a guide for our own prayer today.

Mary gives a reason for her praise **“because has looked upon on his lowly handmaid”** (Lk 1: 47); she joins with women such as Hannah and Leah in offering fulsome praise of God: **“What happiness! Women will call me happy!”** (Gen 30: 13). In full charismatic flow, Mary proclaims God to be:

The mighty one-God saves the people; for the Hebrew people this is centred on Exodus, their freedom from slavery and commemorated annually at Passover.

- **The holy one**-Mary carries the holy one who will show the world what it means to be truly HOLY. It does not involve ‘chewing down the altar rails’ as the wise women of St James Parish in Bootle would often remind me!
- **The merciful one**-time and time again, God has offered his people yet another chance. God continues that quality in the ministry of both John and Jesus; we need to continue that quality in our forgiving and caring relationships.

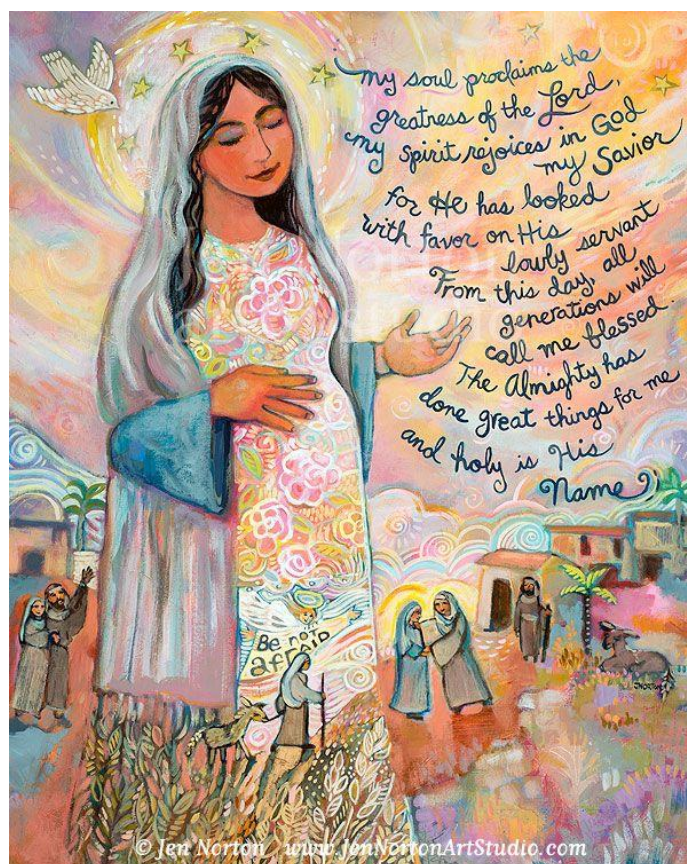
As the prayer progresses, we see Mary echo Jesus’ concern for those on the margins; the reign of God is for all, not just the lucky few. Please never limit the grace of God to a special group that happen to go to your Church or who think just like you or pray just like you. We belong to a very broad Church as Mary reminds us, **“he has routed the proud of heart, he has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has fed with good things, the rich sent empty away.”** (Lk 1: 52-53). Gospel values are not always what society wants and this time of pandemic and enforced lockdown has forced many to look at their lives and see where priorities should lie. As the prayer ends Mary reminds us of the covenant bond that God has with all of us. **“mindful of his mercy—according to the promise he made to our ancestors—of his mercy to Abraham and his descendants for ever”** (Lk 1: 54-55). Unlike many of us, God makes a promise that will never be abandoned or conveniently forgotten; Mary is all too aware of the personal promise that God made to her at the Annunciation. In staying with Elizabeth for **‘about three months’** (Lk 1: 56), Mary honours that promise in her care for Elizabeth: we cannot say we are close to God and ignore our neighbour in need. The letter of John puts it very well, **‘If we say we love God, but hate others, we are liars. For we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen.’** (1 Jn 4:12)

Today: offer help without having to be asked

We can pray:

Today we pray with Mary and offer our full praise and thanks to God; concentrate on the good that you have received and offer those bad memories and experiences to a God who is walking with you today

(Jen Norton)





O EMMANUEL, God with us, our King and Lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their Saviour: come to save us, O Lord our God

Today the focus of our Gospel is once again John the Baptist: friends and family gather with Elizabeth to *'share her joy'* (Lk 1: 58) in the birth of this unexpected son. At his naming ceremony they assume that he will be named after his father, Zechariah who made it quite explicit as he wrote *'his name is John'* (Lk 1: 63)-this very fitting as the name means 'God's gracious gift.' In that simple act of submission to the will of God, the pride and arrogance of Zachariah is freed, and he is able to talk again. In regaining the gift of speech *'he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judea'* (L 1: 64-65). When we NAME somebody the relationship becomes very special: I will always remember the time when a friend called me 'Gerry' for the first time instead of using my title, 'Father'; it may seem a little thing, but it was so special and made me realise that we were now friends and could dispense with anything that could get in the way of that true relationship. In our Gospel today, Zachariah realises his lack of faith and trust in God, while Elizabeth simply lives it; their tiny infant will grow up to challenge and to prepare the world for the Emmanuel, to help us to realise that God is indeed with us. As you walk this Advent Camino today, with Christmas Day just around the corner, I pray that your faith and trust be like that of Elizabeth: you CAN do great things today because the *'hand of God'* (Lk 1: 66) is with you too.

Today: bring your family and friends before God and NAME each one of them-perhaps you can light a candle for them

We can pray:

Lord, thank you for the goodness in my life and for giving me my name. When I wake each morning, I praise Your name! You have given me life that is filled with beauty, and the breath in my lungs is a gift from You. I pray that You will fill my day with love and sustenance. And may I remember at the end of each of my days, to thank you for all that has been placed in my life

24th December 2021-Christmas Eve

Our Camino is nearly at an end-there is something so special about Christmas Eve: the shops are shut and if you have not got that 'must have gift', then you will have to wait until the January sales and save yourself a fortune. I remember, with great affection, the traditions of other families that I have been privileged to share: one Christmas Eve I joined a family from eastern Europe as we shared the traditional carp; due to commitments in the parish I could not stay to enjoy the whole twelve courses (in honour of the twelve Apostles of Jesus),



but I did feel well and truly blessed. The Gospel of our day mass echoes that sensation as Zachariah, now free and a father for the first time, can pray his own prayer of blessing, what we now know as the 'Benedictus' As the Hebrew people could give thanks to a saving God after the Exodus event, so praise now fills the mouth of the once silent Zechariah, ***"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel for he has visited his people, he has come to their rescue."*** (Lk 1: 68). In a few short hours we will celebrate that saving God who comes to visit us in the form of a child, innocent and full of wonder. We are saved by a God who first comes to us as a child! In his adult ministry Jesus saw the important of children, as he welcomed and encouraged them. We are called, as a Church, to ensure that our children are always safe and well; like Jesus we are invited to learn from them. In the prayer, the father blesses his child, John who will grow up to be the Baptist ***'to go before the Lord, to prepare a way for him, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sin.'*** (Lk 1: 76-77). As the night draws in tonight, we are buoyed up by the lights of our Christmas Trees and the simple carols that we sing together that give us hope. I hope that this Advent Camino has brought you light in these dark pandemic times. I urge to go to Midnight Mass if you can but remember it will be on your television screens later this evening-even the BBC and ITV acknowledge the sacred in these secular times. On this most sacred of nights, we remember that the Risen Lord will ***'visit us to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace'*** (Lk 1: 79). Please send in any prayer requests that will be placed in the crib here tonight; I hope that Christmas 2020 will be remembered for the right reasons. I hope that you have a wonderful family Christmas, surrounded by those you love and who love you. Keep safe and well; may you have a very happy and blessed Christmas. While our Advent Camino, might end tonight I pray that we might be able to walk together again during Lent. As the great parable of Final Judgement tells us we do not go to the Lord on our own-our actions and attitude towards others go with us. Jesus reminds us. ***"as long as you did it for the least of these my sisters or brothers, you did it for me."*** (Matt 25: 40).

Today: see if anyone needs help in the kitchen; if you are in the kitchen then don't be afraid to ask for help! Enjoy your feast.

We pray as you light the Christmas Candle - May the Lord bless you and keep you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzqrWae5IK4>

**Let us be still in the darkness of our sacred space,
And listen to the quiet around us.
For even in the quiet, there is the gentle being with others.
Let us feel the warmth of our community,
Knowing we are not alone.
For in the quiet shadow is the glow of life within all.**

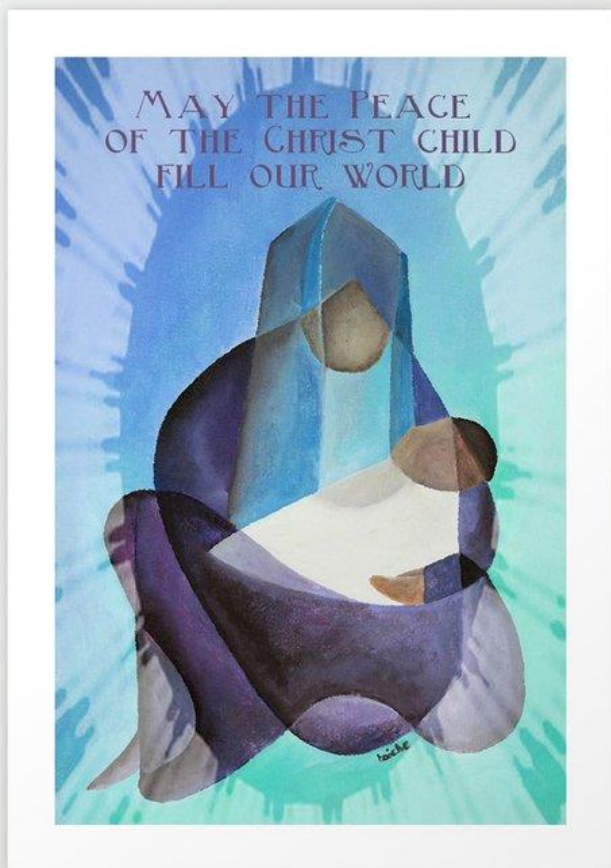
**Let us know in the darkness the gift each candle bears,
A small flame, a diminutive light—
Yet the wondrous gift to kindle another's glow.
Let us be in awe at this moment as we each take up the flame
And the light envelopes this room,
As hope for peace and goodwill fill this night.**

So may it be.

(by Lisa Rubin)

25th December 2021--Christmas Day

As you open your gifts and cards today, remember just how much you are loved and respected; love your family and friends who are with you, think of those loved ones unable to share this day. Our virtual Camino has joined us together over these past four weeks and we are closer than ever today. May you have a truly blessed and wonderful Christmas.



(by Taiche)

**Today: be with your loved ones
We pray:
Fill our world with your peace. AMEN**