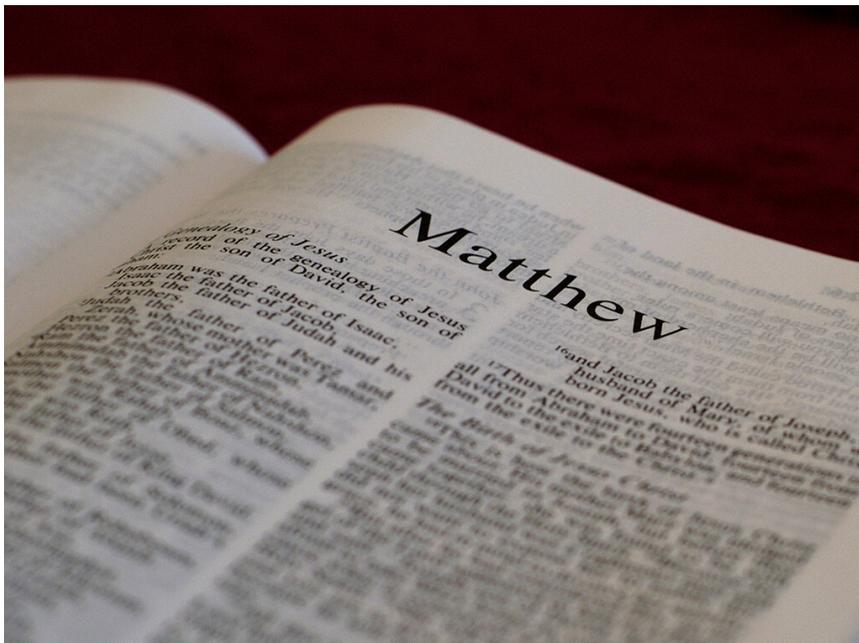




GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

A Journey Through Advent...

The Year of the Word (*The God Who Speaks*) is here and this Advent we invite you to spend time preparing for Christmas with the Gospel readings for each day. We would like to thank our 25 contributors who are from all over the Diocese of Leeds. These include members of the youth leadership team, The Twelve, as well as clergy, young people and adults from parishes and schools.

In this booklet you will find the Gospel passage for each day of Advent and a short reflection on it. You may find the method outlined below useful to help you to engage with the scripture.

Lectio Divina

1. What does the passage say? (Lectio)

Words: What is the passage about?

The Encounter: Who is involved?

The Place: Where are they?

The Emotions: What are they feeling?

2. Thinking about the Scripture (Meditatio)

What does the passage say to me?

A word that stands out for me.

A feeling that touches me.

3. Prayer (Oratio)

What do I now want to say to God?

Ask for His help – for yourself and for those close to you

Thank Him

Praise Him

Be still and adore Him

4. Reflection (Contemplatio)

Be still

Listen to God

What will I do now?

How will I change?

GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Sunday 1st December 2019

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

Matthew 24:37-44

Happy New Year! We start the new Church's year with the beginning of Advent. Like in January, we can make new year's resolutions. The whole of Advent prepares us for the coming of Jesus. It's not a guessing game – we're not wondering if Jesus will be born or not. This has already happened. But, just like any big event, it's important to prepare well so that the celebration can go well. This is the same with Christmas. We use Advent to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. And, at the same time, we prepare for when Jesus will return again. We don't know when this will be. So we must always be ready! It's never easy to wait for something exciting. But if we prepare well, the celebration is much more worthwhile. This Advent, let's train ourselves to remove any obstacles that might stop us from being ready. Then we can say that we're prepared to meet Jesus at any time. What will your new year's resolution be?

Fr Marc Homsey
Director of the Youth Service/ Chaplain to Leeds Universities and LTU



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Monday 2nd December 2019

When Jesus went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said 'my servant is lying at home paralysed, and in great pain.' 'I will come myself and cure him' said Jesus. The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself, and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man: Go, and he goes; to another: Come here, and he comes; to my servant: Do this, and he does it.' When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you solemnly, nowhere in Israel have I found faith like this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west to take their places with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven.'

Matthew 8:5-11

This text reminds us of the importance of faith. The centurion shows us that as long as we have faith and trust in God, and truly believe that His power and love can help us, then anything is possible. Although the centurion knew that he was important within the local community he understood that God was above him and that he is a servant to him, just like his own servant was. Jesus' reaction shows that those who have true faith will be rewarded with the gift of heaven as the centurion truly believed that Jesus had the ability to heal his servant.

I think that this passage reminds us to keep our faith strong, as God will always be ready to help us throughout our lives. Our mission for Advent this year is to put our faith and trust in God first.

Julia
Member of The Twelve
St Walburga's Parish, Shipley



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Tuesday 3rd December 2019

Filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, Jesus said:

'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

Then turning to his disciples he spoke to them in private, 'Happy the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.'

Luke 10:21-24:1

Believing and having faith can sometimes be difficult; this passage is encouraging us to believe like children. Our childlike faith opens the door to the knowledge of God and eternal life. This prayer of Jesus tells us of the relationship He treasured with His father through the Holy Spirit. It is his prayer of thanksgiving for the successful mission of His disciples whom He had sent out to preach. Jesus then tells the disciples that they are indeed blessed to have accepted the good news and to be building their lives on their relationship with God.

Advent is a time for us to pray in thanksgiving for our own family and friends, and our relationship we have with God. It is also a time of recognising our blessings and helping to bring the good news to those around us.

Hannah Hancock
Mother of Unfailing Help Parish



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Wednesday 4th December 2019

Jesus reached the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and he went up into the hills. He sat there, and large crowds came to him bringing the lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others; these they put down at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were astonished to see the dumb speaking, the cripples whole again, the lame walking and the blind with their sight, and they praised the God of Israel.

But Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them off hungry, they might collapse on the way.' The disciples said to him, 'Where could we get enough bread in this deserted place to feed such a crowd?' Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves have you?' 'Seven' they said 'and a few small fish.' Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves and the fish, and he gave thanks and broke them and handed them to the disciples, who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected what was left of the scraps, seven baskets full.

Matthew 15:29-37

In this Gospel we hear how Jesus went up the 'mountain' region. The 'mountain' draws the mind back to Mount Sinai, where we, the people of God, first received our vocation. Jesus curing all the people who came to Him refers to Him curing us so that we can live up to our Catholic vocation. The feeding of the crowd refers back to the journey of the people of God in the desert from Mount Sinai to the promised land. We need the food of the Eucharist for our journey to our promised land of heaven.

Jesus understands our needs! He cares about us! He can and wants to give us more than we need as seen in this passage.

During this period of renewal and waiting, we need to consider the circumstances of those desperately in need and do what we need to do to come to their aid. At every Mass, Jesus comes to us whole and entirely filled with the same desire and power to heal, that moved Him two thousand years ago. That's why it is so important to go to Mass.

Carmen

St Jeanne Jugan Parish

GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Thursday 5th December 2019

Jesus said to his disciples: 'It is not those who say to me, "Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had!'

Matthew 7:21,24-27

Don't we all want to enter the kingdom of heaven? Jesus explains to us that this is possible by being active in our faith and doing the will of God rather than sitting back and not acting on the instructions we are given by Jesus. It is not enough for us to simply worship and praise God and share the Gospel through our words, but we must be actively living our faith and getting involved as Jesus did otherwise we become like the man who built his house on the sand.

I think that this passage can teach us to be more active during this Advent season as we not only wait, but we prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Ryan Wilkinson
Diocese of Leeds Youth Officer



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Friday 6th December 2019

As Jesus went on his way two blind men followed him shouting, 'Take pity on us, Son of David.' And when Jesus reached the house the blind men came up with him and he said to them, 'Do you believe I can do this?' They said, 'Sir, we do.' Then he touched their eyes saying, 'Your faith deserves it, so let this be done for you.' And their sight returned. Then Jesus sternly warned them, 'Take care that no one learns about this.' But when they had gone, they talked about him all over the countryside.

Matthew 9:27-31

What a powerful passage about faith. Jesus teaches us that if we just believe in Him, He can work miracles through us and save us. We need to be open to Him and let Him in. The blind men didn't keep it a secret that Jesus had healed them, they talked about it all over the country side. When Jesus has worked through us in whatever way, we want to shout about it! Look what Jesus did!

I think that this passage is teaching us to be more open to Jesus during this season of Advent, increasing our trust in Him, increasing our faith in Him, increasing our love for Him.

Danielle Roman
LTU Chaplaincy Administrator
St Joseph's Parish, Bradford



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Saturday 7th December 2019

Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.' He summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.'

Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5-8

Jesus' heart is moved with pity for those He sees that are struggling. He desires joy for all and so sends His disciples out with the mission to bring joy through proclaiming the good news, through healing and cleansing. This too is His message for us today; Jesus wants to bring us joy too! Let us open our hearts anew to our compassionate king. How? Simply by trusting that His love is working through all the situations of our lives. If we can say everyday "Jesus I trust in you," and thank Him for all that the day brings, then we are taking concrete steps towards true healing, wholeness and joy.

Sr Faustina
Franciscan Sister of the Renewal



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Sunday 8th December 2019

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

Matthew 3:1-12

The proclamation of John the Baptist is saying to us that we need to 'repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near'. This passage can teach us that in Advent we need to prepare and be ready for the coming of Jesus. To prepare for this we need to turn away from sin just as John the Baptist instructs us to, so that we are prepared for the coming of the one who will 'baptise us with the Holy Spirit.'

This can therefore help us prepare for Christmas because John's proclamation calls us to repentance, to a renewed life of prayer and to reception of the sacraments which helps us prepare for the birth of Jesus.

Rhiannon Matthews
LTU Catholic Society President

GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Monday 9th December 2019

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Luke 1:26-38

This passage tells us that Mary was specially chosen by God to bear His son, Jesus Christ. It teaches us that it is okay to be surprised and a little frightened by what God might ask of us. Mary's faith can inspire confidence in God's word: although what is asked of us might also seem impossible, nothing is impossible to God. At Christmas we celebrate the fact that God came into the world, just as we did, as a small and vulnerable baby. God needs our cooperation too to realise His mission of salvation.

Breda Theakston
Diocese of Leeds Parenting Co-ordinator



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Tuesday 10th December 2019

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? I tell you solemnly, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.'

Matthew 18:12-14

This parable is one of the few which gives an obvious insight into God's love for us. Matthew explains God's nature to us. He emphasises God's love for each of us and the importance each one of us has to Him. Christmas is a time where people who may not be close to God return to Him. Therefore it is extremely relevant to us as Catholics at this time of year. It emphasises our importance to God whether we are thinking of Him or not and how even when we may be at our lowest and loneliest point, His hand is always reaching for us. It is just up to us whether we take it or not.

Roisin
St Mary and St Monica's Parish, Cottingley



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Wednesday 11th December 2019

Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

Matthew 11:28-30

In saying, 'come to me all you who labour and are overburdened,' Jesus addresses every single one of us, because we face struggles and stresses in all of our lives, and this can be especially true during Christmas time. We can learn, though, that rather than feeling anxious or worried about providing expensive presents or extravagant food, we should turn to Jesus so that He can take the weight of these responsibilities away from us, for He doesn't demand any of these material things. This passage teaches us that by putting our trust in Jesus we can find comfort, and celebrate His birth joyfully during Christmas time.

Lucy
Member of The Twelve
Mary Mother of God Parish



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Thursday 12th December 2019

Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is. Since John the Baptist came, up to this present time, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it by storm. Because it was towards John that all the prophecies of the prophets and of the Law were leading; and he, if you will believe me, is the Elijah who was to return. If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen!'

Matthew 11:11-15

Jesus is revealing that John the Baptist was the last of the prophets from the Old Testament and that something new has come. Everything that came before, all the Law and prophets, is leading to the arrival of the Messiah – Jesus Christ. So let us open our ears, listen and believe because the kingdom of heaven is here. God is with us! Jesus is not only the hope of people back then but our hope today. In Advent, we celebrate God's great love for us that He would come and save us.

Let us ask for the grace of a deeper gratitude and hope in Jesus, our Saviour.

Sr Antonia
Franciscan Sister of the Renewal



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Friday 13th December 2019

Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'What description can I find for this generation? It is like children shouting to each other as they sit in the market place:

"We played the pipes for you,
and you wouldn't dance;
we sang dirges,

and you wouldn't be mourners."

'For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He is possessed." The Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Yet wisdom has been proved right by her actions.'

Matthew 11:16-19

Christmas is a special time for family and friends to celebrate Jesus and hope for humanity. Looking over the past year there are friends I have drifted from or passed judgement on and taken offence by their actions. As humans we often judge people and twist the context for what best suits our judgement. Our verdict can often be swayed unfairly due to our emotions. I for one have found myself bitter and cynical like the people in the passage. This passage reminds me not to pass judgement so swiftly.

Perhaps this Advent, work on a relationship in your life that needs forgiveness. Remember, God is in all of us and you never know when He may show His face to you. Live your day with warmth and kindness to all those you meet. The second chance you give people might mean so much to them.

Emmanuelle Godinho

Leeds Universities Catholic Society President



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Saturday 14th December 2019

As they came down from the mountain the disciples put this question to Jesus, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah has to come first?' True; he replied 'Elijah is to come to see that everything is once more as it should be; however, I tell you that Elijah has come already and they did not recognise him but treated him as they pleased; and the Son of Man will suffer similarly at their hands.' The disciples understood then that he had been speaking of John the Baptist.

Matthew 17:10-13

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reveals to the disciples that Elijah has already come but nobody recognised the importance of his message. He also tells them of His own death because, just like Elijah, no one will recognise Him even though He is the Son of Man.

Advent is a time for preparation, but it is also a time to think about whether we are truly ready to welcome Jesus at Christmas. By reflecting on what Jesus tells the disciples we realise that the true message of Christmas can be lost or not fully recognised in how commercial and secular society is becoming, so we must be like Elijah and prepare the way for the Messiah even if we too face challenging situations.

Rachael
Member of The Twelve
Ss Peter and Paul's Parish, Wakefield



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Sunday 15th December 2019

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says:

'Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you.

'I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

Matthew 11:2-11

We can almost sense Jesus' excitement in this passage when He said to His disciples 'Go back and tell John...the blind see again, the lame walk, the deaf hear...' In this passage, we are reminded of God's goodness and all of His promises. His promise to us is that anything is possible.

'Happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.' John the Baptist kept his eyes on the Lord; he did not lose faith, even in prison. What a wonderful reminder that God is always on our side. Whatever happens in our lives, good or bad, we do not face it alone. God is always with us.

Emma Nicholson

Vicariate for Education Administrator
Our Lady and All Saints Parish, Otley



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Monday 16th December 2019

Jesus had gone into the Temple and was teaching, when the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him and said, 'What authority have you for acting like this? And who gave you this authority?' 'And I' replied Jesus 'will ask you a question, only one; if you tell me the answer to it, I will then tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism: where did it come from: heaven or man?' And they argued it out this way among themselves, 'If we say from heaven, he will retort, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?"; but if we say from man, we have the people to fear, for they all hold that John was a prophet.' So their reply to Jesus was, 'We do not know.' And he retorted, 'Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this.'

Matthew 21:23-27

Jesus is pretty smart in how He responds to the Temple big guns. They were trying to catch Him out, but instead He catches them out. The issue is authority. The priests and elders were basically saying to Jesus, "You came from nowhere, you have no qualifications, you have no right to behave like you do." But what they refuse to recognise is that Jesus, like John the Baptist, embodies truth. Truth is more important than reputation and qualifications. Truth is where real authority lies. The Christmas story shows us that truth can be found in unlikely people and places: a baby in a stable, shepherds, foreign kings. Do I focus too much on external credentials, or am I prepared to meet people and situations as they really are?

Deacon Henry Longbottom
St John Henry Newman Parish



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Tuesday 17th December 2019

A genealogy of
Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:
Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, Tamar being their mother,
Perez was the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
Ram was the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
Salmon was the father of Boaz, Rahab being his mother,
Boaz was the father of Obed, Ruth being his mother,
Obed was the father of Jesse;
and Jesse was the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,
Solomon was the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa,
Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Joram,
Joram the father of Azariah,
Azariah was the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah;



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and Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers.

Then the deportation to Babylon took place.

After the deportation to Babylon:

Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud,

Abiud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

Azor was the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Achim,

Achim the father of Eliud,

Eliud was the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob;

and Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary;

of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.

The sum of generations is therefore: fourteen from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Babylonian deportation; and fourteen from the Babylonian deportation to Christ.

Matthew 1:1-17

Wow! That's a lot of names! With this huge list of names, Matthew is explaining to us where Jesus fits amongst the chosen people of God. Often in Advent we hear prophecies from the Old Testament that tell us about the long-awaited Messiah, a descendant of King David. In this account of Jesus' family tree, it is revealed that Jesus is born of Mary, whose husband is Joseph of the House of David – as promised, He is the Messiah! I think this passage can teach us to trust and be patient. For generations, God's chosen people were waiting for their Messiah, waiting to be saved and they are! We are saved!

Jessica Wilkinson
Diocese of Leeds Youth Co-ordinator



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Wednesday 18th December 2019

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son
and they will call him Emmanuel,

a name which means 'God-is-with-us.' When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Matthew 1:18-24

We read that when Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married their lives took an unexpected turn! It reminds me that perhaps there is no such thing as an 'ordinary family'. Life is full of twists and turns. Yet, the Holy Family of Nazareth can teach us that amidst the ordinary complications of our life, when we say 'yes' to God, He will do extraordinary things with and for us! Perhaps as we prepare for Christmas, we can invite Emmanuel, (God-with-us) to be with us in the ordinary circumstances of our families so that they might become extraordinary through His blessings.

Anna Bailey

Lay Chaplain

Corpus Christi Catholic College



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Thursday 19th December 2019

In the days of King Herod of Judaea there lived a priest called Zechariah who belonged to the Abijah section of the priesthood, and he had a wife, Elizabeth by name, who was a descendant of Aaron. Both were worthy in the sight of God, and scrupulously observed all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless: Elizabeth was barren and they were both getting on in years.

Now it was the turn of Zechariah's section to serve, and he was exercising his priestly office before God when it fell to him by lot, as the ritual custom was, to enter the Lord's sanctuary and burn incense there. And at the hour of incense the whole congregation was outside, praying.

Then there appeared to him the angel of the Lord, standing on the right of the altar of incense. The sight disturbed Zechariah and he was overcome with fear. But the angel said to him, 'Zechariah, do not be afraid, your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you must name him John. He will be your joy and delight and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord; he must drink no wine, no strong drink. Even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the disobedient back to the wisdom that the virtuous have, preparing for the Lord a people fit for him.' Zechariah said to the angel, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years.'



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel who stand in God's presence, and I have been sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. Listen! Since you have not believed my words, which will come true at their appointed time, you will be silenced and have no power of speech until this has happened.' Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he stayed in the sanctuary so long. When he came out he could not speak to them, and they realised that he had received a vision in the sanctuary. But he could only make signs to them, and remained dumb. When his time of service came to an end he returned home. Some time later his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept to herself. 'The Lord has done this for me' she said 'now that it has pleased him to take away the humiliation I suffered among men.'

Luke 1:5-25

When reading this passage, I often feel sympathy for Zechariah and fully understand his reaction to the message the angel Gabriel brings to him. After all, scepticism is a very natural response to the extraordinary. However, in this extract, Luke is trying to show us that nothing is impossible to God and that we, especially in this time of Advent, must open our hearts and minds to the grace and power of God and all His goodness. Therefore, in preparation for Christmas, we should remember never to doubt or lose faith in God's abilities but instead to embrace the gifts that He showers upon us, including the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save us all. For God truly loves each and every one of us! Hallelujah!

Ronan
Member of The Twelve
Mother of Unfailing Help Parish



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Friday 20th December 2019

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Luke 1:26-38

This passage is evidence for one of the greatest choices in history. Have any of us ever made a choice this great? The choice to bear the living flesh of God. I can't even make the choice between Hobnobs or Digestives let alone being the first human home, teacher and domestic church for the Son of God. Mary is a prime example of pure bravery taking on a great choice. In life we are given barrels of choices but in many occasions we are too scared to take that first leap. If Mary hadn't said yes, would we be here now? Choice doesn't stop with age or gender but it starts with saying yes.

This passage teaches us to say yes, yes to new opportunities and yes to our God given talents. God has a plan for us and it may just start with that one yes. Mary is the spark and may we continue to set all our 'hearts on fire'.

Alyssa

Member of The Twelve
St Martin de Porres Parish



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Saturday 21st December 2019

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

Luke 1:39-45

In this passage of the Gospel, Luke is telling us about one of the many acts of kindness that Mary did, in this case for Elizabeth, her cousin. Although she was pregnant herself she decided to help her cousin and do God's will. In this little thing, we can see the self-denial of Mary. From this simple visit, we can learn about the kindness, humility and self-denial that Mary had inside her heart. We can also learn the trust that Mary had towards God as she did not know what would happen to her on the way. We can get prepared for Christmas by praying the Rosary as this passage – the Visitation – is the second mystery of the Joyful Mysteries. We can also put this Gospel into practice by doing little acts of kindness with great love.

Rosa
St Jeanne Jugan Parish



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Sunday 22nd December 2019

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us.' When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Matthew 1:18-24

At Christmas, it's easy to get distracted by family drama, and the "scandalous" circumstances surrounding Christ's birth might draw our attention. But St Matthew explains his central message: Christ is called "Jesus" because He completes God's mission to rescue His people. He is also called "Emmanuel". In Him, God draws even closer to humanity than through His Presence in the Temple.

How are these two names for Christ connected; what does Easter have to do with Christmas? Perhaps, one way in which God saves us is just by being with us in Christ. When someone takes time to be with us, we turn to them as someone to trust, and our response to them bears significance. We know that Jesus is always with us. We can always trust Him and love Him, particularly by being there for those in need. But if we experience own family difficulties this Christmas, we can remember that through grace, being with others can bring healing.

Gregory Stacey

Co-ordinator of Catechesis (Adult Formation and Research)

Mother of Unfailing Help Parish



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Monday 23rd December 2019

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had shown her so great a kindness, they shared her joy.

Now on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family has that name', and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him.

Luke 1:57-66

It is a beautiful scene: the family and all the neighbourhood come to share in the joy of Elizabeth and Zechariah at the birth of their child. Then comes the time to decide on a name and they call the child John, a name which means something like "The Lord has been gracious". The Lord has indeed been gracious in providing this child, for He has been sent to prepare hearts and minds to welcome Christ who became flesh like us so that we may share in the joy and wonder of life with God.

This Advent let us thank God for the gracious gift of John the Baptist and prepare our hearts to welcome Christ at Christmas and when He comes again in glory.

Fr Timothy Swinglehurst
Episcopal Vicar for Education



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Tuesday 24th December 2019

John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel
for he has visited his people, he has come to their rescue
and he has raised up for us a power for salvation
in the House of his servant David,
even as he proclaimed,
by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times,
that he would save us from our enemies
and from the hands of all who hate us.
Thus he shows mercy to our ancestors,
thus he remembers his holy covenant
the oath he swore
to our father Abraham
that he would grant us, free from fear,
to be delivered from the hands of our enemies,
to serve him in holiness and virtue
in his presence, all our days.
And you, little child,
you shall be called Prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord
to prepare the way for him,



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

to give his people knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins;
this by the tender mercy of our God
who from on high will bring the rising Sun to visit us,
to give light to those who live
in darkness and the shadow of death
and to guide our feet
into the way of peace.'

Luke 1:67-79

In today's Gospel we find Zechariah, the Father of John the Baptist who has just been born, singing a hymn of praise to God. In this hymn, Zechariah, who has not been able to speak for months, uses his first words to praise God. I'm sure he's thanking God for the safe arrival of his son, as any father would, but he knows that his son is to prepare the way for Jesus. Zechariah tells us that God is always faithful to His promises and Jesus is the fulfilment of those promises. Can we think of a way that God has been faithful to us and give thanks for His faithfulness?

Fr Sean Crawley
Bishop's Secretary
Mother of Unfailing Help Parish



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

Wednesday 25th December 2019

Christmas Day!

In the beginning was the Word:
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came to be,
not one thing had its being but through him.
All that came to be had life in him
and that life was the light of men,
a light that shines in the dark,
a light that darkness could not overpower.
The Word was the true light
that enlightens all men;
and he was coming into the world.
He was in the world
that had its being through him,
and the world did not know him.
He came to his own domain
and his own people did not accept him.
But to all who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God,
to all who believe in the name of him
who was born not out of human stock



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT

not of the flesh
nor of the will of man
but of God himself.
The Word was made flesh,
and he lived among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father,
full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5,9-14

As we celebrate Christmas, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, many people will be returning to their family home. Our homes should be places where we experience the love and care of those closest to us. Today we remember that the Son of God chose to make His home amongst us, here, in this world. Jesus chose to be close to us, to be born for us, so that we could see how much God loves us. Let us open our hearts today and make a home within our lives for the Lord Jesus so that we can experience the depth of His love.

Bishop Marcus Stock



GOD SPEAKS IN ADVENT



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