



Here's a text if you've only got a minute ...

Let the clouds rain down the Just One, and the earth bring forth a Saviour. *Entrance Antiphon*

The Lord's is the earth and its fullness. *Psalm 23*

Let the Lord enter! He is the King of Glory! *Psalm Response*

To you all then, who are God's beloved ... called to be saints, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace. *Second Reading*

From the withered tree, a flower blooms. *Shoyo Roku*

Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name will be called Emmanuel. *Communion Antiphon*

Let us pray, as Advent draws to a close, that Christ will truly come into our hearts. *Old Opening Prayer*

REFLECTIONS

What does the week hold for me, and how do I feel God may be calling me? And ... what do I want to ask of God for myself or others?



AMDG
4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
YEAR A,
18 DECEMBER 2016



Let the earth bring forth a Saviour!

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray as Advent draws to a close for the faith that opens our lives to the Spirit of God.

Father, all powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan.

Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces his glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for his coming.

During these latter days of Advent, with the whole Church I wait 'in watchful hope'. I let the hopes and longings that are deep in my heart rise to the surface and I bring them to God in prayer, along with the hopes and longings of all humanity.

I find a quiet space, free from the hustle and bustle, to be silent and still, and to ponder God's amazing love for our world, revealed in the coming of Jesus.

As I read the prayer again I reflect on how Mary 'placed her life at the service of [God's] plan'. I may want to ask for the grace to do the same.

With Mary, in the silence and stillness, I make ready to receive the gift of God in Jesus.

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 7: 10–14

The Lord spoke to Ahaz and said, ‘Ask the Lord your God for a sign for yourself, coming either from the depths of Sheol or from the heights above.’ ‘No,’ Ahaz answered, ‘I will not put the Lord to the test.’ Then Isaiah said:

‘Listen now, house of David:
are you not satisfied with trying the patience of men
without trying the patience of my God, too?
The Lord himself, therefore, will give you a sign.
It is this: the maiden is with child
and will soon give birth to a son
whom she will call Emmanuel,
a name which means “God is with us.”’

During the reign of Ahaz, King of Judah 735–715BC the kings of Israel and Syria entered into an alliance and marched on Jerusalem. Isaiah’s message to Ahaz is one of comfort: God will intervene. Isaiah tells Ahaz to ask for a sign to authenticate the promise from God but Ahaz refuses.

God offers King Ahaz a sign that will prove his love and fidelity. Does God offer me such signs? I pray that I may recognise and respond to the signs of God’s loving presence in our world, especially in these days leading to Christmas.

God’s greatest sign, the supreme expression of his love, comes in human form: a child who is ‘God with us’. With us in the chaos and messiness, the joy and the sadness of our lives. I ponder this amazing truth and express to God what I am thinking and feeling.

I may wish to spend time with Mary whose ‘Yes’ enabled the events foretold here to take place. I speak to her about the child she is bringing to birth, a child whose coming will change everything.

With the whole Christian community I pray: ‘Come, Lord Jesus’.

THE GOSPEL: MATTHEW 1: 18–25

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother 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.

As I reflect on this event, I am aware that Joseph, like Mary, is asked to play a key role in God’s plan. Is Joseph someone I admire, someone I want to imitate in his deep faith and courage?

God speaks to Joseph in a dream. Perhaps God speaks to me through dreams, or through my encounters with others, or through my own inner feelings. I reflect on this and ask for the grace to recognise God’s voice in the circumstances of my life and, like Joseph, to respond generously.

Mary, central to the scene, does not say a word – I may wish to ask her about all that is taking place in and through her.

I end my prayer by speaking with God or Jesus or Mary about all that is in my mind and heart.

In the stillness, I listen to whatever God has to say to me.