



# Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Advent (C)  
December 5, 2021

## The Time Is Right

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Saint Luke loves to be precise in his Gospel, so he documents the exact time and place of the appearance of John the Baptist, the precursor to Jesus. Tiberius was the second emperor of Rome, and the fifteenth year of his reign corresponds to AD 27. Pontius Pilate was prefect from the years 26 to 36. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruled in Galilee until his death in the year 39 and is the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded. On the Jewish side, Caiaphas was high priest, and his influential father-in-law Annas was considered a leader of Jewish religious life.

These historical dates align with Luke’s explanation, as well as other events described in his Gospel. Ours is a faith based on real people and events. No doubt there is a great appreciation for the supernatural in our faith, but it is never *against* nature, just *beyond* it.

Jesus praised John the Baptist (see Matthew 11:2–9) for his strong will and dedication. Humility, austerity, courage, and a spirit of prayer are also a large part of the testimony John left us. In the Vatican painting, *Virgin and Child Surrounded by Saints*, the artist Marco Palmezzano dresses John the Baptist in the martyr’s red and camel skin to accent his supreme virtue. So dedicated and heroic was he in his fulfillment of the mission entrusted to him, Jesus acclaimed “among those born of women there has been none greater” (Matthew 11:11). “He was a burning and shining lamp” (John 5:35) to illuminate the path toward the true light who was coming into the world. Once that divine light arrived, John receded into the shadows. +

*There’s an appreciation for the supernatural in our faith, but it is never against nature, just beyond it.*

### A Word from Pope Francis

To prepare the way of the Lord’s coming, it is necessary to take note of the requirements of conversion to which the Baptist invites us....First of all we are called to fill the “valleys” caused by coldness and indifference, opening ourselves to others with the same sentiments as Jesus, that is, with affection and fraternal attention.

Second Sunday of Advent,  
December 9, 2018



## Sunday Readings

### Baruch 5:1–9

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on forever the splendor of glory from God.

### Philippians 1:4–6, 8–11

Discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

### Luke 3:1–6

He went throughout [the] whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do I lead people to Jesus through my dedicated testimony?
- Do I speak easily and naturally of Jesus with family and friends?

# Keeping Christ in Christianity

By Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR

If only Christmas came when all the stores were less crowded! 'Tis the season for banners, billboards, and bumper stickers to remind us to avoid commercialism and “Keep Christ in Christmas.” What if there was also a perennial campaign to keep Christ in Christianity? Is Christ’s gospel message easily recognizable all year long in those of us who call ourselves

Christian?

In Flannery O’Connor’s novel *Wise Blood*, a street evangelist preaches his own gospel from his so-called Church Without Christ. But is truth stranger than O’Connor’s fiction when Christian televangelists preach a “prosperity” gospel that claims God rewards true believers with material wealth? How does one reconcile such a gospel with Christ’s humble birth in a stable?

Moreover, how is such a gospel consistent with the heart of Christ’s preaching—the Beatitudes? “The Beatitudes confront us with decisive choices concerning earthly goods; they purify our hearts in order to teach us to love God above all things” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1728).

“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,” Jesus says concerning the poor in spirit and the pure of heart; the meek, merciful, and mournful; the righteous and those persecuted for their righteousness; the peacemakers and those who are reviled because of their belief in him (see Matthew 5:3–12).



“The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude” (CCC 1719). This beatitude “teaches us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement...but in God alone” (1723). According to John Henry Cardinal Newman, “All bow down before wealth. Wealth is that to which [most] men pay an instinctive homage....resulting from a profound faith...that with wealth he may do all things.”

Because of Christ’s total obedience to the Father, our reward is everlasting, unlike material wealth: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in

him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16). “The beatitude of eternal life is a gratuitous gift of God” (CCC 1727). For this treasure, all bow down and. Pay instinctive homage! The reward for true believers is not earthly prosperity but heavenly posterity!

Mark Twain said, “If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man.” Feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and imprisoned, assisting the poor—and expecting no reward—together comprise the fundamental difference between keeping Christ in Christianity and belonging to a Church Without Christ. +

*“The Beatitudes confront us with decisive choices concerning earthly goods.”*

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1728*

**PRAYER**

*Lord, you are always patient with me and do great things for me. Teach me to be more patient in life and grateful for all that has been given to me.*

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 6–11

**Monday**, Advent Weekday:

Is 35:1–10 / Lk 5:17–26

**Tuesday**, St. Ambrose:

Is 40:1–11 / Mt 18:12–14

**Wednesday**, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Gn 3:9–15, 20 / Eph 1:3–6, 11–12 / Lk 1:26–38

**Thursday**, Advent Weekday:

Is 41:13–20 / Mt 11:11–15

**Friday**, Advent Weekday:

Is 48:17–19 / Mt 11:16–19

**Saturday**, Advent Weekday:

Sir 48:1–4, 9–11 / Mt 17:9a, 10–13

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# Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Advent (C)  
December 12, 2021

## Fear and Intimacy

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The bronze sculpture in the Vatican Museum by Francesco Messina, *The Young St. John the Baptist*, shows him pointing as if responding to a question or pointing the way. There was anxious anticipation amongst the Jews about the coming Messiah. Yet, we have no reason for anxiety.

Anxiety comes from fear of the unknown. When we're unsure of how things will turn out, we get anxious. When we lack control or can't plan for our security, we get anxious.

Fear and anxiety are the enemies of intimacy and love. Fear makes us run

far enough away so we feel removed from danger, safe from the aggressor. Or it drives us to hold someone, seeking strength in attachment. But fear doesn't create space for true intimacy. It either creates excessive distance or suffocating closeness.

John didn't want to create fear or caution of God. Rather, he wanted to open hearts to receive God in love. Ours is not a God of fear, but of love.

In Jesus' Incarnation, he shows just how much he wants to be with us. He comes to make his home among us, while waiting for us to accept him and make room for him. He doesn't force but comes with patience and love.

Knowing that he loves and wants the best for us, we merely need to make ourselves known to him by revealing our deepest needs to him with prayer.

John the Baptist came to prepare the path for the Messiah, and many responded by asking, "What should we do to prepare?" Put aside anxiety and fear, simply prepare a home for him, and then let him in. +

## Sunday Readings

### Zephaniah 3:14-18a

The LORD, your God, is in your midst... Who will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love.

### Philippians 4:4-7

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.

### Luke 3:10-18

Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah.

*John didn't want to create fear or caution of God. Rather, he wanted to open hearts to receive God in love.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

Many Christians have that face...from a funeral wake, a face of sadness. But Christ is risen! Christ loves you! And you have no joy? Let us think a bit about this and let us ask: "Do I have joy because the Lord is close to me, because the Lord loves me, because the Lord has redeemed me?"

Gaudete Sunday, December 13, 2020



REFLECTION  
QUESTIONS  
QUESTIONS  
REFLECTION

- What causes me fear or anxiety?
- Can I give my anxiety to Jesus and ask him to bring me a greater sense of peace this Christmas?

# The Days Hasten On

By Kathleen M. Basi

I'm not a fan of archaic language in religion—*thee* and *thou*, *ye* and *art*. So, my first Christmas as a liturgy director, when I really examined the words to all those beloved Christmas carols I'd been singing my whole life, I was appalled to realize how much work it took to understand them.

That is, until Unitarian Rev. Edmund Hamilton Sears' exquisite text to "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" turned my world upside down.

Christmas carols, at least the first verse or two, are so familiar that we often rattle off the words without really thinking about what we're singing. This carol from 1849 reflects the song of peace on earth that the angels sang the night of Christ's birth. It asks us to consider that the heavenly song, far from being a message for that one time and place, has been sung continuously while "two thousand years of wrong" have passed. And yet...

*...man, at war with man, hears not  
The love song which they bring.*

Every day, people and the headlines prove that "warring humankind" rages on, piling violence upon violence: wars, police brutality, human trafficking, terrorism, hate speech, graphically violent entertainment, 140-character assaults on human dignity.

We may consider ourselves outside the problem, but we're all susceptible to clickbait, and we most likely consume



the violence and sex that Hollywood doles out without question. We probably have been guilty of belittling strangers via social media, or at least in private among our family and friends, despite knowing how it feels to be on the other side. Humanity is every bit as broken as it was when that holy infant was born in a stable to teach us to pursue a kingdom built on justice and peace.

For me, "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" serves as an annual reminder that the days are hastening on. I can't afford to be complacent, thinking that whole Second Coming thing was just a figure of speech. E.H. Sears' verses underscore that even in this season of shopping, parties, and decorating, there is a bigger picture than my own commitments, a

larger responsibility I must undertake as a follower of Jesus. My life has an expiration date, and I need to be ready when it arrives.

Most of all, Pastor Sears reminds me—and all of us—that his song, a call to peace, still resounds in the world, and we can hear it, if only we will...

*...hush the noise, [we] men of strife  
And hear the angels sing. +*

*I can't afford to be  
complacent, thinking  
that whole Second  
Coming thing was just  
a figure of speech.*

## PRAYER

*Lord, you are generous  
and kind to all your people.*

*Instill within me a  
compassionate and generous  
heart that I may respond to  
my poor sisters and brothers  
near and far away.*

From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day  
of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 13–18

**Monday**, St. Lucy:  
Nm 24:2–7, 15–17a / Mt 21:23–27

**Tuesday**, St. John of the Cross:  
Zep 3:1–2, 9–13 / Mt 21:28–32

**Wednesday**, Advent Weekday:  
Is 45:6b–8, 18, 21c–25 / Lk 7:18b–23

**Thursday**, Advent Weekday:  
Is 54:1–10 / Lk 7:24–30

**Friday**, Advent Weekday:  
Gn 49:2, 8–10 / Mt 1:1–17

**Saturday**, Advent Weekday:  
Jer 23:5–8 / Mt 1:18–25



# Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Advent (C)  
December 19, 2021

## True Love Means Sacrifice

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

God is often present in the little, hidden things of life. Take for example the small town of Bethlehem. This place barely appeared on the maps of the time. Yet in this dull town, overlooked by all, God wished to be born. God isn't into bling.

Look at the Vatican painting *Annunciation* by Gentile da Fabriano. A ray of light in the painting shines from the upper left window directly down onto Mary's womb. She carries in her the Light of the World, but it happened in a way unbeknownst to anyone. He is

the Light of the World, shining to catch our attention, but he does so in silence, humility, and intimacy.

There is a second aspect of the Incarnation to learn here. Christmas was about a real sacrifice. Mary and Jesus offered their very selves. Hebrews says it wasn't an animal or a wheat offering but Jesus' very body and blood. The same for Mary, as it was her life, her virginity, her very intimacy, that she was opening to God when she agreed to be the mother of the Lord. It's easy to be generous when it doesn't touch too close to home.

So, try not to look for glitz and externals this Christmas but for God's hidden presence. And imitate Jesus and Mary by giving of your very self. It's not about a fast, a donation, or extra prayers—as good as those Advent practices are. But all of this prepares us to give our very selves to him in trust through the hidden acts of love of every day. +

***Try not to look for glitz and externals this Christmas but for God's hidden presence.***

## Sunday Readings

### Micah 5:1–4a

But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah /  
least among the clans of Judah, /  
From you shall come forth for me /  
one who is to be ruler in Israel.

### Hebrews 10:5–10

We have been consecrated through  
the offering of the body of Jesus  
Christ once for all.

### Luke 1:39–45

[Elizabeth] cried out in a loud voice  
and said, "Most blessed are you  
among women, and blessed is the  
fruit of your womb."

## A Word from Pope Francis

[Jesus] did not wait until we were good before he loved us, but gave himself freely to us. May we not wait for our neighbors to be good before we do good to them, for the Church to be perfect before we love her, for others to respect us before we serve them.

Christmas Midnight Mass,  
December 24, 2019



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What hidden acts of love can you offer during this upcoming Christmas?
- Are there ways you can point out to your children God's presence in the little things?

# Let Us Kneel

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSSR

We were all packed onto a busy East Harlem street corner when a Puerto Rican man rushed into traffic, catching the attention of all who were waiting to cross. When he reached the other side of a sea of trucks and cars, he knelt down right there in the street at the feet of an old woman pushing a grocery cart. Leaning on her cart, she stood over him and made the sign of the cross on his forehead, shoulders, and chest. Then, holding her crossed fingers up reverently, the man kissed them. He knelt for a blessing from his godmother in the street, a common gesture for children and young people in Latin American countries, but a grand expression for a grown man.

The part of the Good Friday service most people dread is the Universal Prayer. As we pray for everyone in ten different petitions, the deacon or cantor calls out, “Let us kneel....Let us stand.” It’s tedious and painful for some knees, and tiring to many, so some priests invite people to either remain standing or be seated. Maybe it’s because sinking to our knees is too awkward or strange. Some don’t like to kneel. I’ve visited churches where the kneelers have been removed. What might that mean? In prayer, kneeling is an act of adoration and supplication, but it’s also a sign of powerlessness and defeat; it can be seen as a way to show humility in a physical way.



A woman told me her mother used to make her kneel on uncooked rice as a form of punishment for backtalking, disobedience, or lying. A common sight in the oft-crowded Mexican sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe is the procession of pilgrims walking on their knees in penance for themselves or loved ones. Remember the horrific scenes of people positioned on their knees before ISIS executioners just moments before they met an untimely death? There’s a lot that can bring us to our knees—penance, prayer, punishment, and protest. Kneeling is a powerful statement. It took the publicized kneeling of a pro football player to get us to notice.

Many are offended by those who kneel during the national anthem. Why? Is it to admit that our nation has been brought to its knees by terrorism and a pandemic; by racism and police brutality; by Harvey, Irma, and Maria; by a killer in Las Vegas; by a broken immigration system; by bipartisan paralysis and self-serving politicians? Much has proven to be beyond our power and ability to change. We’ve been humbled and humiliated, and the icon of our powerlessness is represented by an NFL player kneeling on the field of play.

When you kneel in church next time, pray that America can rise above the hate. The rhetoric. The prejudice. Let us kneel. +

***Many are offended by those who kneel during the national anthem. Why?***

**PRAYER**

*Lord, your Word gives me life,  
joy, hope, and peace.  
May your Word find a home  
in me and inspire me to live a life  
rooted in gospel values.*

*From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent  
and the 12 Days of Christmas, Rev. Warren J.  
Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney*

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 20–25, 2021

**Monday, Advent Weekday:**  
Is 7:10–14 / Lk 1:26–38


**Tuesday, Advent Weekday:**  
Sg 2:8–14 or Zep 3:14–18a / Lk 1:39–45

**Wednesday, Advent Weekday:**  
1 Sm 1:24–28 / Lk 1:46–56

**Thursday, Advent Weekday:**  
Mal 3:1–4, 23–24 / Lk 1:57–66

**Friday, Advent Weekday:**  
2 Sm 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16 / Lk 1:67–79

**Saturday, Nativity of the Lord (Christmas):**  
Is 52:7–10 / Heb 1:1–6 / Jn 1:1–18 or 1:1–5,  
9–14

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# Bringing Home the Word

*Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (C)*  
December 26, 2021

## The Joyful Family

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

In Francesco Mancini's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, he paints the realistic details that make this scene as ordinary as any family playing with their child in a park. Mary has a bowl of water in her hand, perhaps ready to offer a drink to Jesus after he tastes the strawberry or to clean his stained fingers. A silver bowl of food for the baby rests on a white baby blanket. Perhaps it was just placed there by Joseph, for Jesus has finished his vegetables and now Dad

offers dessert! A traveling basket sits in front of a water jug. These instruments show that they are a pilgrim family, and the Egyptian obelisk in the background indicates their destination.

The circumstances are precarious yet joyful, even playful, in their following of God's path. This was just one of the trying times for the Holy Family, which would eventually include losing the Child Jesus in the Temple. As their whole focus in this painting is on Jesus, imagine their fear when they can no longer find the heart of their family.

This is a fantastic image of the joys and challenges of family life. There is joy in having Jesus in our midst, and no sacrifice is too great when he is present. But when he is lost from the center, fears and anxieties enter.

The words of Colossians sum up this attitude, making one think that Paul had a good idea of what virtues family life require! Let's work in our families to have Jesus at the center, and once he is there, to "put on" all the virtues that his presence inspires. +

*There is joy in having Jesus  
in our midst,  
and no sacrifice is too great  
when he is present.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

The works of mercy reawaken in us the need, and the ability, to make the faith alive and active with charity. I am convinced that, through these simple, daily actions, we can achieve a true cultural revolution....If every one of us, every day, does one of these, this will be a revolution in the world!

General audience, October 12, 2016



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Does one of the virtues mentioned by St. Paul catch my attention?
- Should I pray for and practice that virtue a little more?

## Sunday Readings

**Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 or  
1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28**

My son, be steadfast in honoring your father; do not grieve him as long as he lives.

**Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17 or  
1 John 3:1-2, 21-24**

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

**Luke 2:41-52**

And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

# God's Opinion

By Kathleen M. Basi

When my first child was born, my mother sent me a card that read, "Babies are God's opinion that the world should go on."

I doubt I'm the only one reading these words who spends a lot of time gnashing my teeth over everything that's wrong with the world: questionable leadership, out-of-whack priorities in our communities, poor choices made by those I love. Not to mention the endless hordes of refugees no one wants to shelter, the suicide bombers, and regimes lusting for more power.

Sometimes being a Christian feels like running around trying to plug holes in a sinking ship.

Yet there's one situation in which all that disappears: when a child is born. New life awakens us to the essential goodness of humanity, the potential for good that each of us is born with. In the presence of babies, we lower our voices. We slow down and breathe in the scent of innocence. We shower families with gifts and meals in recognition of the beautiful thing that has just occurred.

Christmas signifies the most important birth of all. The celebration of Jesus' Nativity is an annual reminder that no matter what terrible things are happening at this moment, we still inhabit a beautiful world, filled with goodness and hope, joy and light.

This season brings out the best in us. Yes, there are fights in the store over door busters—but there are also people



ringing bells for those who need a hand, churches gathering gifts for the needy, choirs caroling at nursing homes, and meals being prepared for and served to those with nowhere else to go.

In this season, we see the works of mercy in action.

Come January, everyone will be worn out. Societal attention will return to football, and then basketball and baseball, and once again we'll have to brainstorm ways to mobilize the masses to make time for the things that really matter.

For now, though, we are collectively tuned in and aware of the world in a way that sensitizes us to the needs of others. This December let's hit "pause" on real life and take a moment to look

around and recognize the power of what is possible in these busy weeks—the great good that humanity is capable of when we put our minds to it. Let's take time to reflect with awe and joy upon the magnitude of the gift given to us by God in the Incarnation, and the way one person can change the world.

The birth of this particular baby is a powerful sign that God most assuredly thinks that the world should go on. +

*Let's pause and think  
to ourselves:  
what a wonderful world.*

## PRAYER

*Lord, through your Word we  
receive the knowledge and  
wisdom of God. May your Spirit  
lead me to your sacred Word  
and guide me in my search for  
knowledge and truth.*

*From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent  
and the 12 Days of Christmas, Rev. Warren J.  
Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney*

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 27–  
January 1, 2021

**Monday, St. John:**

1 Jn 1:1–4 / Jn 20:1a, 2–8

**Tuesday, The Holy Innocents:**

1 Jn 1:5—2:2 / Mt 2:13–18

**Wednesday, Christmas Weekday:**

1 Jn 2:3–11 / Lk 2:22–35

**Thursday, Christmas Weekday:**


1 Jn 2:12–17 / Lk 2:36–40

**Friday, Christmas Weekday:**

1 Jn 2:18–21 / Jn 1:1–18

**Saturday, Blessed Virgin Mary:**

Nm 6:22–27 / Gal 4:4–7 / Lk 2:16–21

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