

# THE THIRD WEEK IN ADVENT

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**Sunday**    **The Third Sunday of Advent**  
**Dec. 11**   **Learning to Hope for Christ's Kingdom**  
A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

**Mon**        **The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe**  
**12**         **Our Lady of Guadalupe's Message**  
A reflection by an anonymous author

**Tues**       **Memorial of St. Lucy**  
**13**         **Living as a Light in Christ**  
A reflection inspired by Butler's Lives of the Saints

**Wed**        **Memorial of St. John of the Cross**  
**14**         **The Fullness that is Christ**  
A reflection by St. John of the Cross

**Thurs**      **Thursday of the Third Week of Advent**  
**15**         **The Importance of What We Long For**  
A reflection by Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO

## MONASTIC DESERT DAY

**Fri**         **Friday of the Third Week of Advent**  
**16**         **What Fulfills Your Longing?**  
A reflection by Bishop Thomas of Villanova

**Sat**         **"O Wisdom" begins the "O" Antiphons**  
**17**         **Saturday of the Third Week of Advent**  
**The Wisdom that Is Christ**  
A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

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# **Learning to Hope for Christ's Kingdom**

**A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant**

The Advent message is one preached first by John the Baptist and then by Our Lord, Jesus Christ. "Change your way of thinking! God's Kingdom is at hand!" How many of those who heard John, and then Jesus, really did believe this message? How many of us really believe it? Prophecy is about what can be hoped for. What do we hope for? Are our hopes centered on anything that can be identified with what Jesus meant when he spoke of the "Kingdom of God"? We can't hope for the Kingdom if we haven't any good idea of what it is, and we can't hope in Our Lord's words if we don't know what he intended to tell us. Advent is not about what we want but what God has planned to give us.

In the middle of every Advent the Church calls upon us to face this question because it is clear from our behavior that our hope is a weak thing and needs revitalization. So we are reminded of what John preached and of what Jesus preached and of the seeming discrepancy between John's message of judgment and Jesus message of divine love. John's disciples are presented as asking Jesus, Are you the fulfillment of John's hope? Jesus doesn't answer directly, but reminds them of Isaiah's prophecy, the hope this great prophet proclaimed, and points out that he is fulfilling it.

John seemingly thought he was proclaiming "eschatological" hope; i.e., the hope for a wholly transformed world from which all evil doers would have been eliminated and in which there would be no backsliding. Jesus proclaims that eschatological hope is realized gradually. He is proclaiming hope to those who never had hope of anything better—the poor. No matter who ruled the poor were always oppressed and allowed to just survive, so they could raise the food all needed. Otherwise nothing every changed for them. Jesus proclaims hope for a change just for these hopeless people. But how does he show them what he means? He gives them health and shows them how to draw close to God. And this applies to everyone. No wonder he calls us to be poor, in spirit and in reality. We don't put our hope in getting more of the things of this world but of "God's world", the Kingdom, and we do it beginning right now and in the present corrupted, oppressive and dehumanizing world order. That is what we are to hope for. Does it seem to you to be "enough"? Or are you waiting from someone other than Jesus Christ, with a message other than his?

# **Our Lady of Guadalupe's Message**

Reflection by an Anonymous Author

When the Spanish come to Middle America they encountered a people preoccupied with keeping life as they knew it going. They believed there was only so much life energy in existence and that it had to be constantly recycled, so they sacrificed human beings at a rate of about 20,000 a year with this in mind. All are called to give their lives to keep life going. Men dying in battle for their community and women dying in child-birth were treated as martyrs.

This context enables us to understand the message our Lady gave to the man whose Spanish name was Juan Diego and who was an Eagle Knight; i.e., a person who had killed and sacrificed an enemy to preserve the life of the Aztec community. Literally translated from the Nahuatl language, that of the Aztecs, she said, *"I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the True God, who has created life and keeps it in existence"*. The "true God" doesn't need to continually sacrifice self, as Aztecs believed their gods had to, to keep life going. God has endless life and the only sacrifice needed was that of Jesus, the Son of the Virgin Mary. She was telling the people of Middle America, who all shared the same beliefs as the Aztecs; they didn't need to sacrifice each other. The True God had taken care of that once and for all.

How many people today struggle and sacrifice to preserve a way of life which they think is too important to be allowed to perish. How many sacrifice their lives, for example by working themselves to death, so that they and their children can have a certain kind of life? Our Lady of Guadalupe tells us that we need to leave all such preoccupations in God's hands. Our task is to help others understand that God's love will ensure that all come to a life much richer and better than anything they could imagine, let alone create for themselves or others.

She said to Juan Diego, *"My dear little son, I love you and I want you to know who I am;"* she is our mother and has our well-being very close to her heart and in this way shows us our God's heart. We are to learn to care for one another even as she cares for us. That is how the True God cares for all of us.

Juan Diego, who is now recognized as a saint, not only believed this message but dedicated his life to caring for the little church built where Mary had spoken to him and explaining the meaning of the *tilma* on which she had imprinted a picture of herself as the mother of life. You see she appeared clothed in the garments proper to the personage the Aztec thought of as the divine mother of all living beings. That was also the meaning of the flowers she gave Juan Diego to take to the bishop of Mexico City. In Aztec picture writing a flower symbolizes a word, a message. She, as mother of the life we have in Christ, is God's message. The picture on the *tilma* spelled the message out for all the peoples of America. Hundreds of thousands of Native Americans were converted to Christ by this message. Are we too ready to put our lives and futures into God's hands? That is what Our Lady asks each of us.

# **Living as a Light in Christ**

A reflection inspired by Butler's Lives of the Saints

The name Lucy means “light” and “live-bearing”. St. Lucy lived in a way that made her life a light showing the wonder offered to all in Christ. Even though she wanted to remain a virgin she was engaged to a pagan who sought to marry her primarily to get possession of her inherited money. She obtained permission from her guardian to give that money to the poor. When he discovered this the man to whom she was engaged denounced her as a Christian.

Christ teaches us that those who are poor, not just in fact but in spirit, are blessed by God. Those who joyfully and willingly live poverty for the sake of Christ show the meaning of this beatitude. In Lucy's case she lived such poverty for the sake of purity of heart—in order to fix all her hopes and longings on God. Her love for God led her to love the poor as herself, and even more than herself. Her love of God made her an example of the way in which faith in God as taught us by Jesus can transform individuals and the whole of society. It showed how love for God frees us to love one another not matter what the cost of such love may be. Lucy gave up her life in this world but received everlasting life with God. This made her a light to many people in her own day and a light to all the generations that have come after her. She is patron of the island of Sicily and a light which many Sicilians have needed to lead them away from putting wealth ahead of all else. A Christian who genuinely lives Christ's Gospel is a light that never goes out.

This is why St. Lucy is remembered during Advent. It is a period of time when all seek to fix their minds and hearts on Christ and his revelation of God's answer to human needs and dissatisfactions. All believe that this is the case but many do not know how to show that in their own lives and ways of dealing with others. St. Lucy was eminently practical about her faith and cast a light which the darkness tried to destroy. But even death can't destroy the light that faith causes to shine out from a genuine Christian, any more than it could smother the light of Christ Himself. Advent is meant to be a time during which we all reflect on how we can make the light that is Christ shine out through our lives and action. Perhaps we need to begin in very small, almost unnoticeable ways, and let the Spirit guide us to what God has in mind as the witness of our lives to our time and place. Love for one another is usually shown in small things. God makes what is small great in its impact on the salvation of others.

# **The Fullness that Is Christ**

A reflection by St. John of the Cross

The Letter to the Hebrews says God spoke in various ways and manners of old but now has spoken in the Son. God has, so to speak, struck himself dumb because there is no more to say. When we accept the gift of the Son we receive everything! So if we ask God to reveal or teach some particular thing are we offending God? Only if our eyes and hearts and minds aren't fixed on Christ but we want more than Christ.

God might reply, "If I have said everything to you in my Word, my Son, then I can have no other word and so I can't reveal to you anything more than I have in my Son or anything greater than what I revealed to you already." We are to set our eyes on the Son alone. In him God has spoken to us in a way that reveals all. One contemplating the Son finds more than could be asked for. Maybe you want to hear words from Jesus and maybe you want him to reveal what is to come. But these things are nothing in comparison to what we are given. His words are all the words of God that anyone needs to hear. In Jesus we see all that anyone needs to see. In Jesus Christ all is revealed that anyone needs to have revealed. God has spoken to us, answered our prayers, declared and revealed all that is needful for our salvation and everlasting life with God. Jesus has been given to us as brother and companion and master and ransom and reward.

Since the day on which the Spirit descended on Jesus, and since the day that God revealed himself on Mount Tabor, we have known the truth, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased! Listen to Him!" God has left off teaching and answering prayers as God did with the prophets of old and has entrusted everything to the Son. If we hear him rightly then there is nothing more that could be revealed to our faith. When God spoke in former times it was to promise Christ. If people enquired of God these enquiries were answered with the promise of Christ's coming.

It is in Christ that we find every good thing and much of this is found in the teachings of the Evangelists and apostles. To ask that this be repeated is to show a lack of faith in what has already been revealed and given. Would we want to ask that the Son become incarnate for a second time and pass through his life and death? Surely, you wouldn't ask such a thing! So you really have nothing to ask or desire that has not been given. We find all we can desire and all that would could ask to have done for us in Christ.

# **The Importance of What We Long For**

A reflection by Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO

*“Now John in prison had heard what Christ was doing and sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come or do we have to wait for someone else?” Christ’s answer to the disciples of John was the answer of newness and of life. “Go tell John what you have seen: the blind see, the lame walk, and the poor have Good News preached to them”. Here are two kinds of eschatological signs that penetrate one another. They are all signs of life proceeding from love.*

Evil ends and gives place to good in a physical and visible way—blindness ends and sight begins, sickness ends and health begins, death ends and life begins. All these are signs of an inexhaustible power of life that bursts into time and reverses the work of time, but Jesus’ work is not something reversible—as are the signs just listed.

More important than all the other signs, is last one listed: The Good News is preached to the poor. This means that the fulfillment of the prophetic message of salvation, the fulfillment of all the divine promises, is now formally announced to the poor, especially the poor in spirit. These are people who have hungered and thirsted for the Kingdom because they had no other genuine hope. Their only hope was the Lord. But in announcing this Jesus announced that the “last days” have come. The fulfillment which the earth and time and human efforts could not bring about has come.

This fulfillment has begun because now Christ has appeared in the midst of the poor. Christ is one of the poor. Christ has taken them to himself so that they are, in a most special and real way, Christ himself. What happens to them happens to Christ. Recall his picture of the Day of Judgment. What we do to the least we do to Christ. Yet even more important is the fact that we are called to belong among those who have no hope but the Lord. Think! The Last Days have come because these poor “are” Christ! They have become signs of the last days. They it is by whom others are “judged”; you look at them and then at yourself and see whether you “are” Christ because you too put all your hope in God? The answer is your judgment and your condemnation or glorification. Come, blessed by my Heavenly Father, take possession of what you hope for above and before everything else.

# **What Fulfills Your Longings?**

A reflection by Bishop Thomas of Villanova

The Gospel narrative tells us of a question that John the Baptist, who was in prison, put to the Lord through his disciples. “Are you the one who is to come or are we to look for someone else?” John himself was in no doubt as to the answer. Even from his mother’s womb he had recognized Jesus. At the Jordan he had born testimony to Jesus. But He sent this embassy for two other reasons.

In the first place, John wanted to teach his disciples. He knew that his own death was close at hand. Like the good teacher and leader he was he was providing for his disciples by ensuring they would have a teacher and protector after his death. He wanted to see them safe under Christ’s wing and in Christ’s care.

In the second place, John wanted more than anything else to draw attention to Christ. He knew that he had been sent to bear witness to Christ. Although he had given his testimony at the Jordan few had heard it and fewer had accepted it. Knowing now that his death was near he had devised a useful and very prudent plan. He would put his question to Jesus publically and thus help to bring Jesus into the limelight. In replying to the question, Jesus would, at the same time, bear witness about himself. John wanted Jesus to reveal himself to the people at large.

John was sure that Jesus’ response would be very fruitful, and events proved him right. John’s disciples approached Jesus and in front of a crowd put to him the same question the Jewish authorities had put to John. All eagerly awaited Jesus’ response for there was already a rumor that Jesus was the Messiah. The Lord gave no immediate response but delayed a little and in the messengers’ presence worked mighty wonders. Then he said, “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard; the blind are receiving their sight, the lame are walking, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear.. and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor”. The works that he was doing would be his witness.

Isaiah had prophesied about Christ: “Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unsealed and the lame will leap like a deer.” He added: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me .. to announce good news to the poor”. But Isaiah also said, “He will be a stumbling block”. All these were now fulfilled. How are they fulfilled in you? Blessed those who find no offense in Christ but find they long for nothing more than to imitate Christ in all they do, especially for the poor.

# **The Wisdom that is Christ**

**A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller**

The seven days before the Vigil of Christmas are marked liturgically by a special antiphon at Vespers each evening. These are called the “O” antiphons—“O Wisdom”, “O Lord”, “O Root of Jesse” and so on until “O Emmanuel”. This focuses attention on key aspects of the gifts we will celebrate. Today’s antiphon is “O Wisdom from on High”.

Christ embodies the wisdom communicated by the Hebrew Scriptures, and this wisdom it was that formed his first disciples, including the Twelve and the apostles. St. Paul provides an especially effective example of this. God led him to use his Jewish learning to become the outstanding evangelist of the Gospel of Christ. It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus studied the wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures very carefully and intensively. The lesson was put into words by St. Jerome: Ignorance of Hebrew Scripture is ignorance of Christ. During Advent we study all that can help us understand the Gospel of Christ and share it with others. We are called to learn continually about the heritage of Judaism as found in the bible.

Christ, moreover, showed us how God would have us complete and complement the wisdom of Hebrew Scripture. He does this, for example, in his interpretation of the Great Commandments of love for God and for neighbor. You shall love the Lord our God with all your heart and soul and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus had been taught that no one can love self rightly except by learning to love God rightly and so we can’t love neighbor rightly without loving God rightly. Jesus shows us this love and, in St. John’s Gospel, gives us his one “new commandment”—to love each other as he has loved us. Out of this grows Christian wisdom.

Meditating on these matters is essential to preparing well for Christ’s coming, and so for Christmas. To rightly live Christ’s Good News we have to understand his message rightly, and this requires not only the study of wisdom but the living of it day by day. Living the two Great Commandments is the beginning of following Jesus, both in his practical love for others and in his prayer and study of Scripture. O Lord Jesus, Wisdom from on high, open our hearts and minds and our entire selves to the light that streams from you as you heal and teach and love. Blessed are those who seek wisdom for they will find all that can bring them, and us, closer and closer to their and our God.