

# **THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT & CHRISTMAS**

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**Sun.**      **The Fourth Sunday of Advent, Late Advent: “O Key of David”**  
**Dec. 20**    **RUNNING TO MEET OUR KING**  
A reflection by Blessed Gueric of Igny

**Mon.**      **Late Advent Weekday: “O Rising Dawn”**  
**21**        **CHRIST IS BORN IN US**  
A reflection from a sermon by Martin Luther

**Tues.**     **Late Advent Weekday: “O King of Nations”**  
**22**        **JOY**  
from Reflections for Advent by Fr William Maestri

**Wed.**      **Late Advent Weekday: “O Emmanuel”**  
**23**        **CLOSENESS AND WATCHFULNESS DURING ADVENT**  
from a homily by Pope Francis

**Thurs.**    **THE VIGIL OF CHRISTMAS**  
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Pope St Leo the Great

**Fri.**        **THE SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD**  
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A reflection from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

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A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa

*Sunday*

## **RUNNING TO MEET OUR KING**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny**

Our king and savior is coming! Let's run to meet him! Good news coming from a far country is like cold water to a thirsty person! One who announces the coming of our Savior and the reconciliation of the world, together with all the good things of the life to come, indeed brings good news. Such a messenger bears refreshment for all who thirst for God. We have joyfully been offered water from the springs of salvation. "Why is this granted to me, that my Lord should come to me?"

So let's arise with joy and run in spirit to meet our Savior. Hailing him from afar, let's worship him and say: "We have waited for you, Lord, be our stronghold, our salvation in time of trouble!" We must look forward to the day of Christ's birth. Scripture itself insists that joy must fill us as we strain forward for his coming, impatient of delay to see what the future holds in store. As we believe that our bodies will rise up rejoicing at his second coming so our hearts must run forward to greet his first.

Between these two comings the Lord frequently visits us individually, in accordance with our desires and our merits. He forms us to the likeness of his first coming in the flesh and so prepares us for his return at the end of time. He comes to us now to make sure that we don't lose the fruits of his first coming nor incur wrath at his second. Christ's purpose now is to convert our pride into the humility which he showed when he first came. We are to let ourselves be refashioned in our lowliness into the likeness of the glory shown in his glorified body. This he will manifest when he comes again.

My brothers and sisters, though we haven't yet experienced the wonderful consolation of his comings we are encouraged by firm faith and a conscience made pure to wait patiently for the Lord to come again. With joy and confidence, we can say with St. Paul: "I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until That Day what has been entrusted to me". He will do this until "the appearing of the glory of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Monday

## **CHRIST IS BORN IN US!**

**A reflection from a sermon by Martin Luther**

The Gospel teaches that Christ was born, that he died and suffered every thing on our behalf. In these words, you clearly see that He is born for us. The angel didn't simply say, "Christ is born" but that "to you" Christ is born. He brings you glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ but was to be for all the People. Christ has a pure, innocent and holy birth. We all had an unclean and sinful birth, as David says in Psalm 51. For this purpose, Christ willed to be born, that through him we might be born anew.

This is the great joy of which the angel spoke. It is part of the comfort and exceeding goodness of God that if anyone believes that person can boast of Mary as true mother, of Christ as true brother, and of God is true father. These things actually happened but we must believe they are true. This is the principal treasure in the Gospel. Christ must above all things become our own and we must become Christ's.

Therefore, see to it that you don't treat the Gospel as only history, for that is passing and is not to be valued apart from faith. Rather, see to it that you make this birth your own and that Christ be born in you. This will be the case if you believe. Then you will rest in the lap of the Virgin Mary and be her dear child. But while you live you must exercise faith and pray. You can't establish faith too firmly. The Gospel doesn't merely teach about the history of Christ. It enables all who believe to receive it as their own history. That is how the Gospel operates.

If Christ has indeed become your own, and you by faith have been cleansed, it follows that you will do good works by doing to your neighbor as Christ has done to you. You have no other commandment than to serve Christ and render obedience to him. Direct your works that they may benefit your neighbor. Jesus said at the Last Supper, "*This is my commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you.*" Christ helps us, so we in return help our neighbor. Christ has given you an example to follow. The shepherds dwelt under the canopy of heaven and didn't hold fast to temporal things. Besides they were despised and unknown; they represent the lowly and despised and unnoticed and eagerly desire the Gospel. Like them we are to tell it to others and be shepherds to others.

Let everyone do a self-examination in the light of the Gospel. Look to see how far you are from Christ. Don't denounce the people of Bethlehem who received Christ unkindly but look around you and see how many of your fellows need help. Don't you ignore them! Who is there who has no poor or miserable or sick or erring people to help? Why don't you do for them as Christ has done for you? Then Christ will be born in you.

*Tuesday*

## **JOY**

**from Reflections for Advent by Fr William Maestri**

Among the many criticisms directed against religion, the charge of joylessness is the most serious. The charge comes from friend and foe alike. St Teresa prayed to be delivered from “gloomy saints”. Teresa knew it is not enough to follow the letter of the law. It is the spirit that gives life. Holiness needs to be humanly attractive, by being part of a fully alive human being. Jesus reminds his disciples that when fasting, one should look as if one is not fasting. The atheistic philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was the son of a Lutheran minister. After services he used to ask his sisters “Why don’t you Christians look more redeemed?”.

The question is essential as we celebrate the final days of Advent, on the cusp of Christmas, the feast of joy. Why do Christians, who are called to be experts at joyful play, have so much trouble giving up gloom and doom? Jesus reminds the disciples that there can be no mourning when the bridegroom is with them. He even compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet. The good red wine will flow. Celebration is the order of the day.

Yet having said all that the question of Nietzsche persists: Why do we have so much trouble with joy and celebration? Why do we seem too often afraid to smile? The Christian needs to be aware of the hurts and pains of so many in the world. That is certain. Without denying the needs of the poor, the Christian is called to tackle these problems with a joyful heart. One of our weapons against pain and suffering is the indispensable ingredient of joy.

The joy of which I speak is something internal. We don’t acquire joy through the accumulation of material things. WE might bet pleasure but pleasure lacks the dept of joy.

Joy is a gift that must be given. The surest way to destroy it is to keep it as a possession. Joy becomes real and enhanced when we share it with others. We also share in the joy of others, and rejoice with those who rejoice. Love and joy fill one to be with the beloved. That is surely what Christmas is about.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives the gift of joy and liberates us from the fear which drives out love. In these final Advent days, it is the Spirit who enables us to shout and sing for joy and celebrate the Lord’s birth with festivity. So, there is no time for self-pity and gloom. There is too much to do and be. The birth of Jesus is a reminder that life is stronger than death. Be joyful then in these last days of Advent

*Wednesday*

## **CLOSENESS AND WATCHFULNESS DURING ADVENT**

**from a homily by Pope Francis**

During the Advent season leading up to Christmas, there are two key words which will help us to prepare our hearts: closeness and watchfulness.

Advent is the season for remembering a close God who came to dwell in our midst. The first step of faith is that we need God to be close to us. God does indeed want to draw close to us, but he will not impose himself; it is up to us to keep saying to him: Come. Advent reminds us that Jesus came among us and will come again at the end of time. Yet, we can ask what those two comings mean, if he does not also come into our lives today? So, let us invite him in. Let us make our own the traditional Advent prayer: "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus". The Book of Revelation ends with this prayer. We can say that prayer at the beginning and end of each day and repeat it frequently, before our meetings, our work, before making decisions, in important or difficult moments of our lives: Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus. It is a little prayer but one which comes from the heart. Let us say it this Advent. Let us repeat it often: Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus.

If we ask Jesus to come close to us, we will train ourselves to become watchful. Caught up in our daily concerns we can be distracted by many things and we can risk losing sight of what is essential. Having to be watchful means that in some ways it is now night. We are not living in broad daylight, but awaiting the dawn, amid a great deal of darkness and weariness. Let us not lose heart, the light of day will come, the shadows of light will be dispelled, and the Lord will come. Being watchful in expectation of his coming means not letting ourselves be overcome with discouragement. It is to live in hope. Why should we spend time complaining about the night of our world when the light awaits us?

The risk is that instead of being watchful we fall asleep. There is a dangerous kind of sleep: it is the slumber of mediocrity. It comes when we grow satisfied with indifference, concerned only for an untroubled existence. Faith is not a tranquilizer for people under stress, it is a love story for people in love. Jesus detests lukewarmness.

How do we rouse ourselves from the slumber of mediocrity? With vigilance of prayer. Prayer rouses us from our tepidity and lifts our gaze to higher things. We need Christians who keep awake and watch for those who are slumbering. Many of us spend our time complaining, we start to feel victimized and end up brooding. The solution is to open our hearts to the needs of others.

So, sisters and brothers: Be watchful! Pray! Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!

*Thursday*

## **A CHRISTMAS EVE SERMON**

### **Pope St Leo the Great**

Tomorrow is the day our Savior is born: what a joy for us, my beloved. This is no season for sadness, this, the birthday of life- the life which annihilates the fear of death, and engenders joy, promising, as it does, immortality.

Nobody is an outsider to this happiness. The same cause for joy is common to all, for as Our Lord found nobody free from guilt when he came to bring an end to death and sin, so he came with redemption for all. Let the saints rejoice for they hasten towards their crown; let the sinner be filled with joy, for pardon is freely offered; let the Gentiles be emboldened, for they are called to life.

When the designated time had come, which God in his deep and impenetrable plan had fixed upon, God's Son took human nature in order to reconcile us to our Creator. Thus, would the devil, the father of death, be himself overcome by that self-same human nature which he had overcome.

Tomorrow we see the angels exult at the birth of the Lord: they sing "Glory to God in high heaven"; they announce peace for all men and women. How greatly should we rejoice at this mysterious undertaking of divine love, when the angels on high thrill so much at it!

My beloved, let us offer thanks to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit. In the great mercy with which he loved us, he had pity on us, and gave us life, so that we would be a new creation, a new work of his hands.

Let us then quit of the old self and the habits that went with it. Sharers now in the birth of Christ, let us break with the deeds of the flesh.

O Christian, be aware of your nobility- it is God's own nature that you share: do not then, by an ignoble life, fall into your former baseness. Think of the Head, think of the Body of which you are a member. Recall that you have been rescued from the power of darkness, and have been transferred to the light of God. Rejoice! Celebrate!

Friday

## HOW WE MUST RECEIVE THE LORD

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

*“Today the Savior of the world is born for us: Christ the Lord, in the city of David!”* That city is Bethlehem and we must run there, as the shepherds did when they heard of these things. We must put into action the words we chant traditionally at Christmas, *“They sang of God’s glory; they hurried to Bethlehem”*.

*“And this shall be a sign for you; you will find the child wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a manger.”* Now this is what I say: You must love! You fear the Lord of Angels, but I say, love the tiny babe. You fear the Lord of Majesty, but I say, love the infant wrapped in swaddling bands. You fear the one who reigns in heaven, but I say, love the one who lies in the manger. What sort of sign were the shepherds given? *“You will find the child lying in a manger.”*

This is how they were to recognize their Savior and Lord! But is there any-thing great about being wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a stable? Yet this is a great sign, if we only understand it correctly. We will understand if the message of love is not restricted to our hearing but if our hearts too are illuminated by the light which accompanies the appearance of the angels. It teaches us that only those whose minds are spiritually enlightened can hear what the angels who first proclaimed the good new are saying.

Bethlehem as a name means “house of bread”. It is Holy Church. In it is administered the Body of Christ, the true bread. The manger at Bethlehem is the altar of our church; it is there that Christ’s creatures are fed. This is the table of which it is written, *“You have prepared a banquet for me”*. In this manger is Jesus wrapped in the swaddling bands which are the outward form of the sacrament. Here in this manger, under the appearances of bread and wine, is the true body and blood of Christ.

We believe that Christ himself is here, but he is wrapped in swaddling bands; in other words, he is invisibly contained in these sacraments. We have no greater or clearer proof of Christ’s birth than our daily reception of his body and blood at the holy altar, and the sight of him who was once born for us from a Virgin is daily offered in sacrifice for us. So let us hasten to the manger of the Lord. But we must prepare ourselves as well as we can with the help of God’s grace. Then, in the company of the angels, with pure hearts, good consciences and unfeigned faith, we will sing to the Lord in all that we do throughout the entirety of our lives: *“Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to all of good will”*. Let us do this through our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with the love we give to one another and to all who are in need.

Saturday

## **THE SORT OF PERSON STEPHEN IS**

### **A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa**

Christ came into the world to save it. Immediately the Church began to bear fruit. The deacon Stephen shown out as a witness to the truth. In his company all those who witnessed to God's great plan of salvation shown out brightly. He was a disciple who followed the Master by walking in the footsteps of Jesus. After Christ there came Christ bearers. After the Sun of Justice there came human luminaries. The first to come to this full flowering was Stephen. His name means "crown", but not one of precious stones but a garland of many flowers. He was a crown and garland woven, not from the thorns placed on Jesus' head, but of the many virtues which are the first fruits offered by the Church to the Lord of the harvest.

As the first votive offering of the Church, the first produce of its husbandry, the laborers in the field of Gospel truth brought the holy Stephen to their Master. They treated him as a real garland of flowers because of the many virtues which were intertwined in his good works.

This exemplary Christian had been entrusted with the care of the widows. The community had attested to his trustworthiness as a person full of faith and the Holy Spirit. He was approved by the community and that choice was approved by the Apostles. Indeed, he was approved by the spiritual wisdom that he showed in deed and word.

Stephen's inspired words had already borne vivid testimony to the message that he was proclaiming. His preaching was accompanied by signs of divine power. Stephen, it is written, "*was filled with grace and power, and did great wonders and signs*". In fact, he didn't look upon the ministry he was assigned toward Greek-speaking widows as a hindrance to his preaching. He undertook this labor without abandoning the ministry of the word.

Think of the admiration this aroused. His was a labor-loving spirit. The care of the widows was simply another form of the care of souls. Both were of equal concern to Stephen. He distributed bread to the widows and God's word to those who had not yet believed in Christ. He provided material food as well as spiritual nourishment.

These are the signs that point to a good person of true faith. He was indeed filled with the Holy Spirit. He not only fulfilled the task of serving the poor with integrity but reduced the enemies of the Gospel to silence by his powerful words. He practiced a true boldness of speech through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him.

Whatever tasks you may have been given within the community of faith, approach them as Stephen did. You too will witness to the Gospel and its truth, both by words and by the deeds of love. That is the sign of God dwelling and working within you. Do not let any opportunity slip by. Look for the needs of others and discover ways to help them.