

“Though you are barren and have had no children,
yet you will conceive and bear a son.
... This boy is to be consecrated to God from the womb.
- Judges 13

Third Sunday of Advent: Dec. 14-20, 2008

The Third Sunday of Advent

The **Third Sunday of Advent** offers us more of the promise. The words used by the **prophet Isaiah** to describe God's vindication are the ones Jesus points to as describing his own mission: "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God."

We still focus on the first reading on Monday and Tuesday with readings from **Numbers** and **Zephaniah**. But on Wednesday, as we do every year on December 17, we move to the second part of Advent. In these last days before Christmas, the focal point is the gospel, an array of stories from **Matthew** and **Luke** with the details of Jesus' family history. From Matthew, the genealogy and the story of Joseph's struggle with the news of Mary's pregnancy. From Luke, we read the story of Zechariah, Elizabeth and her unexpected pregnancy. That is followed by the Annunciation story and Mary's pregnancy, where she is told, "The child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."

On the **Fourth Sunday of Advent**, we repeat **Luke's Gospel** from Saturday, and the Annunciation, the moment when a troubled Mary is told she has found favor with God and she will conceive and bear a son. She questions: "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" and accepts.

*"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word."*

Daily Prayer This Week

This third week of Advent, our daily prayer continues to allow us to become much more concrete about naming our desires and preparing the way for the Lord. We begin this week with joy, knowing that our celebration of all the ways our Lord comes to us is near.

For some of us, the great grace will be to ask that expectant hope - and the joy that this can bring - will fill our hearts and replace whatever is heavy or dark or sad there. We can only let our Lord bring good news to us who are poor, if we acknowledge our poverty. He can only proclaim liberty and release to us if we can admit that we are captives and prisoners to so many habits and patterns that inhibit joy.

A week of recognizing ourselves, and recognizing our need for a Savior is a wonderful way to prepare. We can only turn to our God and trust in the safety we find accepting our God as the only god of our lives if we first can name the place in which we are in danger, with the choices we are making. We can surrender our fear of being put to shame by humbly coming face to face with who we can sometimes be. The depths of gratitude and joy come when we can experience the tenderness with which our Lord keeps taking us back.

This is a wonderful week to examine our consciences as we let our daily, prayer-filled background moments interact with some of the places in our daily lives in which we discover the need for mercy and peace. Wherever we encounter some experience of darkness or fear, some struggle with faith or hope, some discouragement about our own generosity or freedom, it is there that we have an opportunity to pause, in the briefest way and pray, "Come, Lord Jesus; come and visit me here, in this place." Preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, individually or in common, can be a powerful Advent religious experience. And the one who forgives us deeply desires to heal us and give us his peace.

