

"For today in the city of David
a savior has been born for you who is Christ and
Lord.
And this will be a sign for you:
you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes
and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:11-12

The Fourth Sunday of Advent & Christmas Week

The **Fourth Sunday of Advent** is the only day in this last week of Advent. The reading from Micah reminds us that from the seemingly unimportant town of Bethlehem, "from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel." Luke's gospel offers again the story of Mary's going to visit her cousin. Elizabeth understands immediately Mary's situation and praises God saying, "How does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy."

This week is filled with special celebrations of the Church year. Monday is Christmas Day, the celebration of **The Nativity of the Lord**. Tuesday is the **Feast of Saint Stephen, the first martyr**. Wednesday is the **Feast of Saint John, Apostle and evangelist**. Thursday is the moving **Feast of the Holy Innocents**.

On **Christmas Day**, whether we celebrate at midnight or early in the morning or later in the morning, we read the stories of the birth of Jesus. Then, the church celebrates three very important feasts. The first honor is given to the first martyr, Stephen, the first public witness who gave his life for his faith. The second feast honored to follow Christmas so closely is the feast remembering the disciple Jesus loved. The third great feast honors the infant martyrs of Herod's jealous rage, The Holy Innocents. The readings for those feasts renew their stories for us. **Friday** is the fifth day in our eight days of celebrating Christmas - first from the **First Letter of John's** powerful letter about God's love for us and our love for others, and from the beginning of **Luke's Gospel** with the picture of the scene when Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the temple and encounter Simeon and his prophecies about the child and about Mary. On **Saturday**, we meet Anna and witness her faithful waiting and her enthusiastic sharing of the good news.

This Sunday is the seventh day in the eight days of celebrating Christmas and the celebration of the **Holy Family**. There are wonderful readings from the **Book of Sirach**, the **First Book of Samuel**, Paul's letter to the **Colossians** or the **First Letter of John**. The gospel is the story of the teen aged Jesus teaching in the temple while his parents could not find him. Jesus goes back home with his family. "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to

Fourth Sunday of Advent & Christmas Week: Dec. 24 - 30

Daily Prayer This Week

This may be one of the most difficult weeks to be reflective throughout each day. This weekend may be quite full for many of us. Others of us may be alone. apart from the faith community we will join on Sunday and Monday, perhaps daily this week. While some of us have had guests staying with us and a house to clean this week, others of us will be reviewing memories and struggling, even a little, with being alone.

Whether this week is full or slow, it is a treasure filled opportunity for reflection. Using the same means we've been using, we can let the richness of this weeks' readings and feasts fill the background of each day. Even on Christmas eve or Christmas day we can wake up, surrendering anxiety by letting the anxiety of these days take us to the scene of our Lord's birth. We can imagine the anxiety that filled the experience of Mary and Joseph. We can keep in our consciousness their trust in God. The Christmas music on the radio or at our church services and liturgies can bring the faith of these hymns and songs into our hearts. And, once it is there, these songs of faith will remain in the background all day long. When we are tempted to worry or complain, to be hurt or angry, to be frustrated or exhausted, the hymns will draw our hearts to rejoicing and gratitude.

Thinking about Stephen the Martyr or John, the apostle of love. or the martyrdom of the innocents, with a little desire and focus, can guide our hearts to reflect on the meaning of Christmas - the gift of self-giving love. We can ask ourselves, what generosity can come from from the gratitude I have in my heart after celebrating the gift of redemption? Who in my world needs more love? What happens in me when I think about the people in the world who need my support? Who is being martyred today? Who is witnessing our world's rejection?

All of us can imagine Jesus, Mary and Joseph going home. We can imagine their daily life. We can ask for the grace to live in God's presence, just as they must have done, and for the grace to be sensitive to each other and care for each other as they must have. We can ask that we might imitate their busy lives, trusting and dependant on God. Looking on their hidden life together, we can grow in a desire to be more humble, in a peace with greater simplicity, in a courage to let God take care of us. Whether we experience the poverty of that holy stable or the

them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man."

ordinary simplicity of daily routine, we can enjoy this week as a special opportunity to be drawn to a greater closeness with Jesus.

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