

**Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel which means "God is with us."**  
Matthew 1

## Third Week of Advent: Dec. 16-22, 2007

### The Third Week of Advent

The **Third Sunday of Advent** repeats an Isaiah reading from earlier in the week, filled with promise, healing and a hope for our longing: "Then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.... They will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee." In **Luke's Gospel** we read the story of the paralyzed man whose friends want him healed, so they lower him from the roof into the crowded room where Jesus is speaking. He causes a stir when he says, "Your sins are forgiven." Then he tells the man, "I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home."

As the last eight days of Advent begin on Monday, the focus of the weekday readings returns to the gospels with stories from Jesus' family in the time before he was born. In **Matthew's gospel**, Joseph decides to divorce the pregnant Mary until an angel appears to him in a dream, saying, "It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her." The rest of the week we have nearly all of the first chapter of **Luke's gospel**. Elizabeth and Zechariah, struggling with their inability to have a child, are told they will have a child named John who will be filled with the Holy Spirit. When Zechariah doubts, he is struck speechless. Wednesday's gospel is the beloved story from Luke's gospel of the Annunciation with Mary's humble response, "May it be done to me according to your word." Mary sets out to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb" and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary's response to Elizabeth: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior for he has looked upon his lowly servant...From this day all generations will call me blessed." Zechariah's mute silence ends when he writes on a tablet that his child will be named John. "Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God."

On the **Fourth Sunday of Advent**, we read in Matthew's Gospel about Joseph and his decision to divorce the pregnant Mary. An angel comes to Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take

### 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 my 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

Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."

forgives us deeply desires to heal us and give us his peace.