

Something Different for Advent 2018

Fourth Sunday of Advent ~ 23rd December

... when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy

Our theme for our last week of Advent is 'Waiting with Joy'.



Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing.

You are now on our final few days of our Advent Retreat, Christmas is nearly here. Well done! How did you find get on last week? Did you notice the many shapes God's love for you takes throughout each day? Any surprises? Did you find out more about the events, ministries in your parish? Hopefully your piece of string/ribbon is not too ragged by now, remember to say a small prayer of thanks each time you hold it. Are you remembering your prayer companion? How is your prayer space looking; what have you added to it over the weeks?

This week's **task** is to complete a simple **Action** each day – This is usually one of the busiest weeks of the year but make a conscious decision to do one simple thing for someone else each day for these days to Christmas. Maybe do something special for your prayer companion. Suggestions could be *Light a candle and say a prayer for a loved one far away; to take a special treat to a neighbour; Make a card for a loved one and send it in the mail; Recycle some toys to share with others; Read a Christmas book to your child; Make a small stocking and drop it off on someone's door as a surprise; Write a Thank You letter to someone; Take food to a local food bank; Write a list of 10 things you are thankful for this year and share it with a loved one...*

If you find it easier make a list of things that you would like to do in your journal, put it in your prayer space and tick them off and bring them to prayer as you do them. Bring that joy to others. Be creative!

Listen with your heart Visit a sick friend
Clean a neighbor's walk Offer a hug
Give an unexpected gift Make a new friend
Pick up litter Say "hello" Open a door
Plant a tree Help carry a load Share a snack
Cheer up a friend Thank a teacher or mentor
Read to a young child Lend a hand Do a kind act daily
Leave a thank you note Offer your seat
Cycle courteously BE TOLERANT Let another go first
Bake cookies to share Give a compliment
Help a student make friends Donate your gently used items
Give a balloon away Lend a pencil Respect others

Prayer suggestions for the week

- Breathing exercise:** Hopefully by this stage you have worked up to 5 minutes or maybe 10 minutes with the breathing exercise. Continue this week to take some time each day to be still.
 - Take three deep slow breaths and then focus on your normal breathing. This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift. When you breathe in you are bringing energy and life to your body. When you breathe out, you are giving a gift to the world, feeding the plants and the trees, playing your part in nature. Stay with these thoughts as you breathe.
 - Repeat "*Come, Lord Jesus, my Joy rests in you*", for as long as you are comfortable and be aware of God who is with you and loves you always.
- Read **Sunday's Gospel**, two or three times (**Lk1:38-44**). It's one we know very well. Read it a few times – come back to it again over the next few days. ***Is there something about the story that maybe you never noticed before? Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you? In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Stay with this for a few moments and let its meaning sink into your heart.***

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Think of things you are thankful for

- Blessed are you* – YOU ARE BLESSED! Do you let yourself believe this, really feel this?
- In what ways has the Lord visited you, your family, and your community? How are you asked to be the 'Christ-bearer' to others?
- What is this gospel challenging you to do, to be?

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Consider this

Twentieth Century industrialist W. J. Cameron once said "there has been only one Christmas. The rest are anniversaries." It's a time for keeping the memory of God's greatest gift alive in our hearts... In recent years many people have expressed concern that Christmas has drifted far from its religious roots. We have also witnessed an attack on religious displays in public places while watching the corporate world hijack the Christmas celebration as an excuse to sell their latest wares. Massive traffic jams, packed shopping malls, and lines stretching around the block have become hallmarks of today's Christmas activities. Ad campaigns for holiday sales can lead to pandemonium as shoppers are knocked down and trampled in their frantic efforts to buy the latest gadget. However, I suggest this is a good time to reflect upon the distinction between what we want and what we need or what we give instead of what we get.

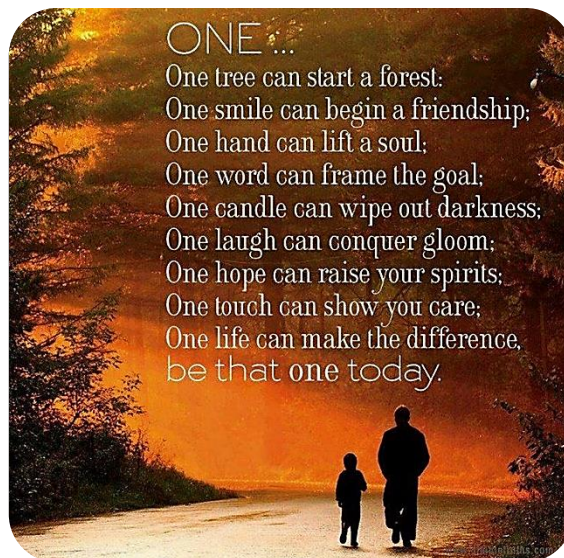
The true value of a gift isn't necessarily measured by its price tag. In fact some of the most precious gifts cost nothing at all... and can be life changing. Many people simply need to be loved, listened to, or appreciated. Some gifts, such as taking time to listen to someone who is hurting emotionally or giving a word of encouragement, can make a tremendous difference in a person's life and bring joy to the giver. This holiday season consider how our community would be affected if everyone looked for opportunities to give someone a life-changing gift for Christmas. As Helen Steiner Rice wrote; "Bless us Lord, this Christmas, with quietness of mind; teach us to be patient and always to be kind." May we receive this most precious of gifts ourselves and be that gift for others!

(Adapted from: Christmas; *A Time for Joy, Reflection, Reverence and Tradition* by D. GARY DAVIS)

A Reflection - The Power of One

Mary – her yes, our yes

One song can spark a moment,
One flower can wake the dream.
One tree can start a forest,
One bird can herald spring.
One smile begins a friendship,
One handclasp lifts a soul.
One star can guide a ship at sea,
One word can frame the goal.
One vote can change a nation,
One sunbeam lights a room.



One candle wipes out darkness,
One laugh will conquer gloom.
One step must start each journey,
One word must start each prayer.
One hope will raise our spirits,
One touch can show you care.
One voice can speak with wisdom,
One heart can know what's true,
One life can make the difference,
You see, it's up to you.

A few thoughts going forward – Hopefully you have found this simple Advent retreat helpful, enjoyable and useful. After the busyness of Christmas is over **Gift** yourself a New Year's resolution to continue or carry on at least one aspect of this into your future. It may be the 10 mins reflecting on each day & bringing it to prayer, carrying a reminder in your pocket, spending time with the Sunday Gospel, continuing to write in and come back to your prayer journal, getting involved in your parish, consciously carrying out *Random acts of Kindness* ... be aware of God who is with you and loves you always!

Prayer for the next few Days

Lord, this Christmas, let my heart be touched by your gift of love
and my life be your witness.

With joy and confidence I pray, 'Come Lord Jesus Come.' *Amen.*



Merry Christmas



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