



# Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Advent | December 3, 2017

## Getting Ready for Christ

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**W**hen my mother became pregnant with my youngest sister, I was old enough to be involved with the preparations for her birth. We added a crib to the room she would share, and we gathered clothes and toys suitable for an infant. I wasn't sure we'd get everything ready in time, and it seemed like forever before she arrived.

We didn't know exactly when Mom would go into labor, but when she did, we each had a job to do at home while my father took her to the hospital. I was overjoyed when my mother brought my sister home just before Christmas.

### Sunday Readings

**Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7**

We are the clay and you our potter: we are all the work of your hand.

**1 Corinthians 1:3–9**

God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son.

**Mark 13:33–37**

[Jesus said,] "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come."

Advent is the Church's time to prepare for new birth. My family had nine months to get ready for my sister. The Church calendar gives us only four short weeks to make our hearts ready to receive Christ. How do we do that? The Scriptures help us by recalling both the promise of his coming and the exhortation to stay awake because we don't know when it will happen.

How odd, we might think. Christmas is always on December 25—of course we know when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. What we have to remember is that while Christmas honors Jesus' birth at a particular time and place more than two thousand years ago, it also reminds us that Christ is alive today, waiting for us to open our hearts to him. It reminds us that Christ is coming again and that we don't want to be caught napping when he does.

We also prepare by taking extra time to pray, to practice kindness and service, and to remember those in need.

Where will Christ be born in you this Christmas? Will you be ready? +

*Christmas is  
a celebration  
and a reminder.*

## A Word From Pope Francis

The Lord comes...into our life as a liberator; he comes to free us from all forms of interior and exterior slavery. It is he who shows us the path of faithfulness, of patience and of perseverance because, upon his return, our joy will be overflowing. Christmas is near,...[and] outward signs invite us to welcome the Lord who always comes and knocks at our door, knocks at our heart, in order to draw near to us.

—Angelus,  
December 11, 2016



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I believe there is a limited time to my life on earth?
- Since I do not know when Jesus will come again, isn't peaceful awareness of his eventual return the smartest attitude?



# Living the Liturgical Year

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

**O**ur Catholic identity is shaped by the way we read the Bible. And we read the Bible in a special way: It's called the liturgical year, with today being the first Sunday of that new year.

This annual cycle of feasts and seasons is not primarily about decorations (when to bring out the poinsettias and when to display the lilies). Nor is it simply a way to add variety to the Mass so that it isn't repetitive (some days the priest wears green, other days, purple). The liturgical year is about much more all-inclusive issues. The liturgical year enable us to celebrate the whole mystery of Christ.

The Bible is our living contact with the mystery of Christ. The way we Catholics officially read Scripture creates our liturgical year. For example, the day on which we read the resurrection account becomes Easter; the day on which we proclaim Christ's birth becomes Christmas Day.

The original, most important Catholic feast day is Sunday—the Lord's day. Jews find identity in Sabbath rest; Muslims, in Jumuah, the Friday prayer. We Catholics find identity in the Sunday eucharistic assembly. The Bible emphasizes the bond between the Lord's day and the Lord's Supper. While our contemporary understanding of Sunday has incorporated elements of Sabbath rest, Sunday retains its original meaning as

a day of assembly. On the Lord's day we gather with fellow Catholics and celebrate his paschal victory, the Eucharist.

## Rich Biblical Tradition

At Mass on Sundays and holy days, during a three-year cycle the Church proclaims some 500 passages of the Bible, from each book of the Old and New Testaments. The Church year enables us to hear from all of Scripture.

There are two ways in which the Church decides which passages of the Bible to proclaim. Imagine one of your favorite novels, books of poetry, or inspirational essays. You might read from beginning to end. Or, especially after you are familiar with the book, you might pick out certain passages that correspond to a situation you are experiencing.

The Church reads the Bible in both of these ways. On some Sundays the Church selects the passages based on their theme. This manner of selection creates the liturgical seasons of Easter and Christmas. On the other Sundays the Church reads various books of the Bible from beginning to end in a continuous fashion.

The liturgy enables us to pass from our past-present-future time frame to enter into God's time of salvation so that the grace and mystery proclaimed in the Scripture readings are made present. An

old spiritual asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Yes, I was there! Or, more accurately, I am there now! At the Easter Vigil we sing, "This is the night when Jesus Christ rose triumphant from the grave." We don't sing, "We remember the night long ago when...." We sing, "This is the night!"

## Jesus: Alive Again

We Catholics today are not disappointed because all the wonderful events of Christ's life happened long ago. The liturgical year enables us to be present to those events now. The liturgical year makes the mysteries of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection present in a mysterious way so that Christians of every generation can come into contact with them and be enriched by their graces.

The mystery of Christ is so rich that no single celebration can do it justice. The liturgical year enables us to experience the events of Christ in a more Catholic, all-embracing way so that we can enter into these mysteries and be enriched by God's saving love. +



Lord, I have become distracted by the things of this world. Guide my steps and lead me safely back home to you. Help me to respond to the needs of others.

*From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas,*

Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 4-9

Mon. Advent Weekday:  
Is 2:1-5 / Mt 8:5-11  
Tue. Advent Weekday:  
Is 11:1-10 / Lk 10:21-24  
Wed. Advent Weekday:  
Is 25:6-10a / Mt 15:29-37

Thu. St. Ambrose: Is 26:1-6 / Mt 7:21, 24-27  
Fri. Immaculate Conception of Mary:  
Gn 3:9-15, 20 / Eph 1:3-6, 11-12 / Lk 1:26-38  
Sat. Advent Weekday: Is 30:19-21, 23-26 / Mt 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8



# Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Advent | December 10, 2017

## Putting Our House in Order

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**I**n the weeks before Christmas, preparations for the holiday seem all-consuming. We cook, we shop, we clean; we buy or make presents for our families and friends. Sometimes we break into song, and often we give more generously than at other times. We'll probably have guests, and we'll want to do a little extra to make ready for them.

Today's readings turn our gaze to a more significant kind of preparation for Christmas and remind us that Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem more

than two thousand years ago, waits to come again in the fullness of time. More to the point, he waits for us to open our hearts and our lives to him. What does that take exactly?

Think about the way we clean house for special guests. Not content with simple wiping and dusting, we get out the polish, clean the top of the refrigerator, and even check for dust bunnies that have wandered to the corner under the bed. That's a fine metaphor for what we need to do with our souls.

Advent is the time to check the dark recesses for thoughts and actions that indicate we're less than ready to meet Christ face to face. Advent is the time to sweep away the cobwebs and put our inner house in order, knowing that Christ is on his way.

Maybe in the midst of cooking and cleaning the house we live in, we can find the time for prayer and reconciliation so that when he comes, we can stand before him with doors open wide in welcome. +

*Advent is the time to put our inner house in order.*

## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs.

### 2 Peter 3:8-14

The Lord...is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish.

### Mark 1:1-8

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way."

## A Word From Pope Francis

Isaiah's invitation must resound in our hearts: "Comfort, comfort my people" (40:1) and this must lead to mission. We must find the Lord who consoles us, and go to console the people of God....People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord, which... rekindles hope, and attracts people toward the good.

—Mass with seminarians, novices, and those discerning their vocation, July 7, 2013



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What distractions am I setting aside to make this Advent time like my little wedding preparation?
- The Church invites me to a special time of repentance, fasting, and almsgiving. How is it going?



# The Christian Consumer— a Contradiction?

By Jim and Susan Vogt

**B**ottled water, home computers, and cell phones. Today, most of us take these items for granted, and they can make life easier. However, with more choices and conveniences also come complexities and moral dilemmas. How can things so helpful be bad, we ask?

Bottled water was once a traveler's safeguard against impure water or sometimes a lifesaver in areas where the tap water is not safe. But tap water in U.S. municipalities generally meets higher standards and eliminates the waste of throwaways. Sure, water is an improvement over soda to quench a thirst, but is it so difficult to put safe tap water into a reusable container?

Home computers—love them when they work, curse them when they crash or introduce a virus. And that doesn't include separating beneficial content from pornography or marketing scams that computers bring into our homes.

Yes, a cell phone is a wonderful safety device when the car breaks down. Yes, it helps family members keep in touch. And yes, it causes auto accidents, distracts from face-to-face conversations, and annoys bystanders.

How did we function without technological conveniences? In some ways better and in others worse. Certainly a lot of paper was used on snail mail, and before cell phones parents

couldn't always find their teenagers. The point is not that we should discard all conveniences, but that we should use modern technology wisely and not buy just because we can.

## Guard Against Greed

These are subjective, thorny lifestyle decisions. Although Jesus isn't posted at the checkout lane prompting us on the morality of our purchases, he does speak to us through Scripture. He said, "Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26). And remember that disturbing passage about the rich man whom Jesus told, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor" (Matthew 19:21).

How do we take these challenges? To say they are only metaphors that are unrealistic for today seems intellectually dishonest. Likewise, to quit our jobs, sell our possessions, and move to Haiti seems irresponsible. After all, we might have a family to support, a job that benefits society, and people who depend on us.

## Living Simply

We propose focusing on the spirit of Jesus' words and keeping close enough to the poor to let them check our conscience for rationalization.

- Travel light through life. Free your household of unnecessary possessions. We asked ourselves whether we really needed cable TV, two cars, three cell phones, and four computers. We didn't. It's good for our souls, psyches, and pocketbooks to live with less.
- Evaluate the impact of purchases on God's creation. How much of the earth's resources are used in overpackaging? A hybrid car may cost more, but it puts less stress on the earth's resources. Driving less is even better, and walking makes gym memberships less necessary.
- Resist advertising. Realize that the goal of marketing is to persuade us to spend our way to happiness. Remember the birds in the sky? True happiness comes from the contentment of a life well-lived in harmony with God's design, not by accumulating goods.
- Recover values like frugality. It comes naturally to some but not others. To paraphrase Jesus' words to the rich man, consider that what we own is probably more than we need. Take steps to let go.

We should go beyond thinking our worth is measured by how much we consume and make our lifestyle consistent with the spirit of the Gospels. +



Lord, you are the compassion of God in the world. You never forget any of your people. Give me the courage to be the compassion of God for others.

*From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney*

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 11-16

- Mon. Advent Weekday:  
Is 35:1-10 / Lk 5:17-26
- Tue. Our Lady of Guadalupe: Zec 2:14-17  
or Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab /  
Lk 1:26-38 or Lk 1:39-47
- Wed. St. Lucy: Is 40:25-31 / Mt 11:28-30

- Thu. St. John of the Cross:  
Is 41:13-20 / Mt 11:11-15
- Fri. Advent Weekday:  
Is 48:17-19 / Mt 11:16-19
- Sat. Advent Weekday:  
Sir 48:1-4, 9-11 / Mt 17:9a, 10-13



# Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Advent | December 17, 2017

## Proclaiming Our Joy

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**T**oday is **Gaudete** (GOW de tay) Sunday. The name comes from the Latin word that begins the introit (opening antiphon) of the day's liturgy. It means, simply, "rejoice." When I think about the many times I've rejoiced, I'm usually very moved. When I graduated college and graduate school, when my husband and I married, when our daughters were born, and when they married—all of these were periods of great rejoicing marked by parties, congratulations, and the sweet feeling that something wonderful had taken place and that our lives were richer for it.

### Sunday Readings

#### Isaiah 61:11–2a, 10–11

He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son.

#### John 1:6–8, 19–28

[Jesus said,] "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'"

This third Sunday of Advent is our liturgical reminder that we have much to rejoice about. God didn't become incarnate just for the people who lived a long time ago. The Word became flesh in Jesus Christ for all of us living today and for all the generations to come. He came for sinners and saints and for those who haven't yet had an opportunity to know him.

Why do we rejoice? Because what Scripture said is true: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Something wonderful has taken place for everyone, and we join St. Paul, the prophet Isaiah, the psalmist, and John in proclaiming our joy. It's a good day to look up from what we're doing and rejoice at the great gift of faith we've been given, even while we continue our own prayer and preparation. +

*We rejoice because  
of the truth of the  
holy Scriptures.*

## A Word From Pope Francis

To celebrate Christmas in a fruitful manner, we are called to pause in "places" of astonishment....The first place is *the other*, in whom we recognize a brother or sister, because since the birth of Jesus occurred, every face is marked with a semblance to the Son of God. Above all when it is the face of the poor, because God entered the world poor, and it was to the poor, in the first place, that he allowed himself to draw near.

—Angelus,  
December 20, 2015



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What makes you joyful? Would those same things make Jesus joyful, too?
- Do I point people toward the true source of joy with my words and example?



# Home for the Holidays

By Alice Camille

I always get the creeps from Currier and Ives. It's not that I don't have my sentimental streak. I save old Christmas cards and the caps from champagne bottles. And my heart quivers at the sight of Rudolph being spurned by the other reindeer.

But I find myself in resistance mode about this time, when the Currier-and-Ives-style holiday seems jammed down my throat. Sleigh scenes and chubby Santas aside, not every Christmastime has been a memory of roaring fires, hot chocolate, and close-knit family. Some Christmases in my memory were three-alarm disasters that can awaken me in a cold sweat.

Paradoxically, part of the trouble with the holidays is that it's homecoming season. Traveling can be a bear, but it's not only navigating airports and highways in bad weather that bugs me. It's what I might have to navigate when I reach my destination that's the real worry.

My family is fairly well behaved. We have no serial killers or deviants, and much of the time we can be counted on to be normal about festive gatherings, their religious and cultural significance.

But we do have prodigal members, those who have gone certifiably astray by the usual markers and whose presence or absence at every holiday is an issue.

I don't know which I mind more: the years when a disruptive arrival leads to shouting and tears, or the times when a quiet boycott makes us retell the old stories about what went wrong and why someone is unwelcome. I anticipate those conflicts with dread.

## Universal Message

This story is common and probably why Jesus included a prodigal parable in his repertoire. A son turns out to be a disappointment to his father and a source of shame to his brother. The son who does everything wrong disappears for years. The son who plays it by the book remains at home, working in the family business. Then one day, guess who returns? And guess what the anxious parent and furious stay-at-home sibling do next?

The point of the parable—variously called the parable of the Prodigal Son or the story of the forgiving father—is aimed at neither the son who was lost, nor the father who finds it in his heart to embrace him again. It's the third party in this tale, the obedient brother, who receives the moral lesson. Jesus, remember, is addressing the Pharisees, who can be self-righteous about how obedient they are, like the older brother in the story. The parable affirms that sinners will sin and that God, who is

absolute mercy, will forgive. That much is unquestioned.

But how do average Christians react to this news? Does understanding God's mercy comfort or offend us?

## God's Justice

Most of us are not villains, but law-abiding people with a few peccadilloes. Our wrongdoing is minor and run-of-the-mill—the kind of thing easily swept under the rug of our conscience. And because we toe the line, we greatly appreciate it if others do, too. If they don't, we would prefer that they pay the consequences. But what if God lets them off scot-free? Where's the justice in that?

Divine compassion often offends our sense of justice. After all, people shouldn't be able to do anything they want! That's certainly true—but God's mercy doesn't imply that they can. Sin is still a bad idea that leads to heartache. But God chooses to respond to the wayward child with open arms and not a door slammed in the face. If we're part of this family, we'd better make room for that notion. +



Lord, you are the source of my strength, peace, and joy. Send your Spirit to renew my trust and hope in you and give me peace.

From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 18-23

Mon. Advent Weekday:  
Jer 23:5-8 / Mt 1:18-25  
Tue. Advent Weekday:  
Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a / Luke 1:5-25  
Wed. Advent Weekday:  
Is 7:10-14 / Lk 1:26-38

Thu. Advent Weekday:  
Sg 2:8-14 / Lk 1:39-45  
Fri. Advent Weekday:  
1 Sm 1:24-28 / 1 Lk 1:46-56  
Sat. Advent Weekday:  
Mal 3:1-4, 23-24 / Lk 1:57-66



# Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Advent | December 24, 2017

## Welcoming Our Lord

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**I**n the whole of the New Testament, Mary appears only a handful of times. She is, of course, present at the birth of Jesus and at his death. She comes looking for her son in the Temple when he's twelve and again when he's preaching. She lets him know that the time has come for his first miracle when he's in Cana.

She has more to say in this story of the annunciation than in any of the others, and in this one story we get more than a glimpse of the woman she would become in our memory—called on by

millions, revered by all—an example of unparalleled obedience and openness to the movement of God in her life.

It strikes me that, along with being the Mother of God (the Orthodox Church uses the word *theotokos*, which means “God-bearer”), Mary is our example of the best response to the presence of God. We let him in; we show God hospitality in our very being; we allow God to change our lives in ways we cannot even imagine yet.

The reality for most of us, though, is that in many times and places we have had the chance to welcome God in. Instead, we've shut God out because we thought something else was more important. Maybe it was power or wealth. Perhaps God was challenging us to move on a particular path, and we didn't want to.

Maybe our question for the week is, *what would happen if I do as God asks?*

On this Christmas Eve, let us practice saying yes to God—for in doing this, we honor the mother of us all. +

*By being open to Jesus,  
we honor our Mother.*

## A Word From Pope Francis

[Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem]...were alone, in a strange land, just the three of them. Then...people began to appear: shepherds, people just like them who had to leave their homes to find better opportunities for their families...When they heard that Jesus had been born, they went to see him. They became neighbors....a family to Mary and Joseph, the family of Jesus. This is what happens when Jesus comes into our lives....He makes us neighbors.

—Address in Bañado Norte, a Paraguay slum, July 12, 2015



## Sunday Readings

**2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16**

“I was with you wherever you went, and I cut down all your enemies before you.”

**Romans 16:25–27**

To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Luke 1:26–38**

“Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.’”

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Is giving myself to God in prayer a way to let him accomplish his dreams in me?
- How can I offer hospitality in my heart, my home, my work, and my Church so that others can encounter God's love?



# Elected By God

By Richard Rohr, OFM

**G**od is always selecting people in the Bible, but in disconcerting ways. There seems to be no previous preparation or proven holiness—often not even willingness among those specially chosen.

Biblical chosenness does not seem to mean that we are anything special; instead, it reminds us of the specialness all creatures share. It is seldom saying we are especially good; it is always saying God is good. It is never saying that we are inherently qualified for chosenness, but says that God wants to give us an experience of unearned chosenness or “beloved” status. That way we can know what chosenness really feels like, and can better communicate that experience to others.

Starting with the Chosen People themselves, beloved status prepares them to communicate it to the whole world. God chose the Jews not because he loved them better than anybody, but to lead them through a forty-year training exercise so they could be a transformative template that would challenge all religion in every age.

Yet the history of religion is that most of us refuse to go on the full journey and, instead, stay deadlocked at early-stage superiority. We somehow believe that we are chosen, right, saved. But often, this belief does not progress into a generative

journey for others—a sympathy for others’ journeys or belief in the beauty of other religions.

Biblical election is an inclusive chosenness because it is dealing with an infinite God in whom all things cohere. Egocentric chosenness is always exclusive and arrogant, as if there wasn’t enough to go around.

## Mary: Archetype of Chosenness

All the chosen figures I know from the Bible—Moses, Jacob, Joseph, Esther, Judith, Peter, Paul—are flawed individuals unprepared for God’s call. They are chosen in their lowliness. There is only one case where the pattern is seemingly different, although it is not really different as much as distilled, concise, and utterly clear.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is the archetype of chosenness. The Greek word that is used when Gabriel visits Mary (Luke 1:29) is a rare verb form that could be translated: “Hail, Chosenness Itself!” Favor says much more about the one doing the favoring than the one receiving the favor. All we can do is receive chosenness. All we can do is accept that we are accepted, which is harder than we think! This becomes the central biblical theme of grace.

## Ideal Vessel

Until Mary, most of the central chosen

Bible figures were men. In Mary we have the ideal vessel, who personifies the state of perfectly received favor from God. There is nothing in the biblical text that says she was worthy, prepared, or had earned this favor. It is given by God, and her glory is that she accepts being used as a “handmaid.”

Mary knows her Jewish tradition, and knows how God works. She knows how Yahweh, the God of Israel, consistently chooses an enslaved race, forgotten sons, barren women, and unprepared laypeople so they can revel in their totally gratuitous election. And God gets all the glory! Mary knows that it is always a statement of God’s goodness, not ours. As some later mystics put it, it is almost as if God was waiting for a perfectly receptive bride—and God found her in Mary of Nazareth. She receives the Divine Kiss, and swoons in gratitude and fertility: Jesus. That is all. That is everything.

“The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49) becomes her motto. Mary looked at God’s goodness and refused to be preoccupied with her own. +

## PRAYER

Lord, you have called us to be your instruments of peace and reconciliation in the world. Give me the courage to make peace with those who have hurt me and caused me pain.

From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,


Rev. Warren J. Savage and  
Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 25-30

Mon. Christmas: Is 52:7–10 /  
Heb 1:1–6 / Jn 1:1–18 or 1:1–5, 9–14  
Tue. St. Stephen: Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59 /  
Mt 10:17–22  
Wed. St. John: 1 Jn 1:1–4 / Jn 20:1a, 2–8

Thu. The Holy Innocents:  
1 Jn 1:5–2:2 / Mt 2:13–18  
Fri. Octave of Christmas:  
1 Jn 2:3–11 / Lk 2:22–35  
Sat. Octave of Christmas:  
1 Jn 2:12–17 / Lk 2:36–40

Bringing Home  
the Word   
December 24, 2017

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# Bringing Home the Word

Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph | December 31, 2017

## Love, Patience, Forgiveness, Gratitude

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**W**hen we were married, my husband and I gradually grew in our relationship. Four of the characteristics St. Paul mentions in today's reading from Colossians were particularly helpful for us: patience, forgiveness, love, and gratitude. They helped us overcome the challenges of building a life together, and each of our children gave us ample opportunity to practice them over and over again.

By God's grace and with hard work, we've been together more than thirty

## Sunday Readings

**Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14 or  
Genesis 15:1–6; 21:1–3**

My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives.

**Colossians 3:12–21,  
Colossians 3:12–17, or  
Hebrews 11:8, 11–12, 17–19**

In word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

**Lk 2:22–40 or Lk 2:22, 39–40**

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.

years. Sometimes I think, "How did we do it?" We did it together, and we did it with God, and I'm so grateful for my husband and for two wonderful daughters who come back home at Christmas and call just to say hello.

So it makes sense that we dedicate one Sunday to the Holy Family. We don't know a lot about Jesus' childhood, but today's Gospel tells us that, as unusual as the circumstances were, Mary and Joseph worked with each other and with God to do the right thing for Jesus. They followed the prescribed law, they listened carefully to the prophecies and rejoicing of Anna and Simeon, and they raised God's Son to adulthood—when he showed the world who he was.

Even after that, Mary was with him, loving and grieving for him even at the end. What parent would have done less? The Holy Family undoubtedly practiced love, patience, forgiveness, and gratitude with one another, even as the Lord taught us to do. We honor them by doing the same. +

*A day to honor  
a special family*

## A Word From Pope Francis

It is necessary to reaffirm the conviction that every family is the principal setting for the growth of each individual, since it is through the family that human beings become open to life and the natural need for relationships with others. Over and over again we see that family bonds are essential for the stability of relationships in society, for the work of education, and for integral human development, for they are inspired by love, responsible intergenerational solidarity and mutual trust.

—Address, Food  
and Agricultural  
Organization,  
June 20, 2013



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Does my family know how to encounter trying times gracefully?
- What attitudes or actions allowed the Holy Family to have peace amidst the crosses?



# Honoring Our Parents

By Kathy Coffey

*"Honor your father and your mother..." (Exodus 20:12).*

**W**hat nugget of wisdom does the Fourth Commandment teach us? Today some parents and children are estranged; others wish their parents were alive to honor them. But the following story shows how delightfully some children still honor their parents.

Jan celebrated her sixtieth birthday with friends, far from her children living in five different states. "No gifts," she had told her kids. "All I need are memories of you." Then the postal service delivered a special box. Within it were sixty slips of paper on which Jan's children had written sixty special memories. She read and cherished each one, mixing laughter and tears.

Why honor our parents? In the world of the Bible and in good homes today, parents provide images of trust, hope, and serenity that enable the young to face formidable obstacles. To their children they convey the message, spoken or unspoken, "You are loved. You are wonderful."

All humans are constantly making the passage from the known to the unknown. Parents who have endured disappointment, even tragedy, can help their offspring travel that passage with dignity. "We've made mistakes," they say. "We've lost jobs, health, or our dearest loves. But it didn't kill us. Something in people endures, continues to trust, and moves forward in confidence."

## Related Roles

Furthermore, parents are memory keepers. When their children hit snags, they remind them what glorious people they are. And if humor, perspective, or care packages from home can lighten the load, they contribute those, too.

The wisest parents honor their children in turn. They count on their children's good sense to pilot them through difficulties, so they restrain the "free advice." They clarify the boundaries of their role: providing safe harbors, but holding the ropes loosely. They encourage children to explore God's beautiful world, not burdening them with unnecessary anxiety. They recognize the arenas where the young have more expertise, inviting them to shine there.

Many parents struggle with handing on their faith to a generation that seems unenthusiastic at best. There, too, honor comes in. Realizing that the gift of faith, no matter how important, cannot be coerced or controlled, parents can follow the advice of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Agonizing over her sons' shenanigans, she once said, "What's a mother to do but pray and dote, pray and dote?"

If the roles of parent and child seem too idealized, we need only look to Jesus and his mother for role models. (Unfortunately, Scripture records little of Jesus' relationship with Joseph.)

## Learning From Jesus and Mary

The wedding at Cana provides the perfect example of their honoring each other. Mary wisely tells Jesus of the need: "They have no wine." Then she backs off. She trusts his instincts to resolve the crisis.

Despite his reservations ("My hour has not yet come"), Jesus in turn honors his mother. Whether he was responding to her, or to the couple's dire need, we may never know. Despite the exhaustion and pain of his passion, Jesus continues to honor Mary, making sure even from the cross that his beloved disciple would continue to care for her (John 19:26-27).

In Jesus' day, women with no son or husband for protection often became desperate beggars. Knowing that sad reality, Jesus makes sure that John will take her into his own home. St. Ignatius imagined that the first appearance of Jesus after the Resurrection, although not recorded in Scripture, must surely have been to Mary.

As parents and children who follow Jesus, we are called to do likewise. +

## PRAYER

Lord, Mary and Joseph helped you to grow in love and wisdom.

Surround me with loving and caring people to help me to be a wise, loving, and caring person.

*From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas,*

Rev. Warren J. Savage and  
Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

January 1-6

Mon. Solemnity of Mary:  
Nm 6:22-27 / Gal 4:4-7 / Lk 2:16-21

Tue. Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory  
Nazianzen: 1 Jn 2:22-28 / Jn 1:19-28

Wed. Christmas Weekday:  
1 Jn 2:29-3:6 / Jn 1:29-34

Thu. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton:  
1 Jn 3:7-10 / Jn 1:35-42

Fri. St. John Neumann:  
1 Jn 3:11-21 / Jn 1:43-51

Sat. Christmas Weekday: 1 Jn 5:5-13 /  
Mk 1:7-11 or Lk 3:23-38  
or Lk 3:23, 31-34, 36, 38