

*Winter's Wisdom*

*Advent 2025*

## INTRODUCTION

### ADVENT 2025

The Gospel of Matthew is held in high esteem by church leaders and biblical scholars. Matthew presents a) the historical Jesus, b) the demands of Christian discipleship, c) the breaking in of the new and final age through the ministry, and the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Sunday Gospel readings are from Matthew's Gospel. Look for these themes in the readings.

**Nov 30 Mt 24: 37- 44** We don't need to imagine Noah's flood. We have seen the destruction and tragic loss of life that resulted from the flood in central Texas last July. Texas is taking multiple steps to be more prepared for the next flood. In the Gospel reading for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent it is our hearts that are Matthew's concern. Be vigilant, be ready, the kingdom of heaven, the new and final age is at hand. What do I need to do to "ready" my heart?

**Dec 7 Mt 3: 1-12** John the Baptist calls us to "prepare the way" because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Preparing the way requires a change of heart so that I might recognize the rule of God over God's people, which includes the triumph over physical evils and death. What does the rule of God mean to me?

**Dec 14 Mt 11: 2-11** John himself had doubts; Jesus was not what John expected. Jesus was not shouting fiery judgments on Israel's leaders like prophets of old. Instead, Jesus asked John's disciples: "What do you see?" The lame walk, the blind see, the poor have the good news preached to them – these examples are taken from Isaiah's description of the time of salvation.

(Is 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5-6, 61:1) How might I identify a prophet today?

**Dec 21 Mt 1: 18-24** Though Mary becomes pregnant during the time of betrothal, Joseph does not want to shame her, but he is conflicted about what to do. As often happens in Scripture (and perhaps in our lives, too) wisdom comes to Joseph in a dream. This child is the one to whom the prophecies of Israel were pointing. Name him Joshua (God is with us). Is your heart ready?

*Marianne Race, CSJ  
Brookfield, IL*

**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
NOVEMBER 30**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is. 2: 1-5

Ps 122: 1-9

Rom 13: 11-14

Mt 24: 37-44

*“Come, let us climb the Lord’s Mountain...”*

*“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.”*

*“...walk in the light of the Lord” Is 2: 3- 5*

I find hiking a relaxing activity, walking an ambling path, admiring flora and fauna alike. I love to take in the fresh air and enjoy immersing myself in God’s creation...until I face a mountain or even a large hill. My sense of ambling stops. I am on full alert, surveying the scene, taking a deep breath, and calculating my endurance. I had to get myself ready to conquer the mountain. I needed to overcome and dominate! I continued walking, fearful and anxious, and my pleasant relaxing hike became a burden.

A few years ago I learned not to conquer, but to befriend the mountain; not to dominate it but to become one with it; not to overcome but to enter in. It was a more peaceful way to continue, and climbing the mountain became less difficult. I was able to enjoy the view!

This season of Advent, let us befriend the mountains we are asked to climb, the barriers, hardships, and challenges of our lives. Wisdom awaits us, inviting us to be people of peace, walking in the light of God.

**PRAYER**

God of Wisdom and Peace, as I climb the mountain of the Lord, help me to befriend the challenges and hardships that face me and our world. Help me to live in gentleness, peace, and joy, trusting your presence so that your love and light may be born anew. Amen

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

As you journey through Advent, what are you being asked to befriend in yourself, others, our world?

*Kathy Brazda, CSJ  
Westchester, IL*

**MONDAY – FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 1**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is. 4: 2-6

Ps 122: 1-9

Mt. 8: 5-11

**REFLECTION**

*“For the sake of the house of God,  
God, I’ll do my very best for you.”*

*Ps. 122: vs. 9*

Today is the first day of a new month and the first day of a new week and the last month of the year. First and last, last and first ... so much to connect with and to reflect on and to pray about.

The deep meaning of December for centuries has been the beginning and the end, closure and fresh start. As the old year departs, a new year waits on tip toe. As darkness envelopes the world, the significance of light takes on new intensity. Candles in December, in Advent symbolize hope, faith, and the light within each of us. Studies show that candlelight can enhance our mental state by fostering peace and mindfulness. The plants of December: evergreens symbolize unwavering resilience, our capacity to flourish even in the most challenging times and environments. Think of holly and mistletoe, embodying love, tranquility and restoration.

The Winter Solstice, taking place around December 21, represents the harmony between light and dark, the duality between light and dark. This darkest day of the year serves as a reminder that light will eventually return, bringing with it hope and renewal. These December realities bring us strong symbols of renewal in the midst of the sometimes chaos that we experience daily. So God’s gifts: candles, evergreens, holly, mistletoe, each other on this first day and month of December are living symbols of living in the arms of Creator God as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, Christ-with-us, in a hopeful, tangible, life-giving-to-others way.

**PRAYER**

For the sake of the house of God, God, I’ll do my very best for you.

Please be with me and those I love during this time of Advent.

May I be a light bearer in the sometimes very dark world. Amen

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

I will light a candle of peace each day when I pray, knowing that the Christ light, which the candle represents will bring consolation and life.

*Carol Crepeau, CSJ  
Burr Ridge, IL*

**TUESDAY – FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 2**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is 11:1-10

Ps 72:1-2,7-8,12-13,17

Lk 10:21-14

**REFLECTION**

*“Then a shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse from Jesse’s roots,  
a branch will blossom.”*

*Is. 11:1*

*“May the name of your anointed one endure forever and continue as  
long as the sun.” Ps 72:17*

*“Everything has been entrusted to me by you. No one knows me except  
through you, and no one knows you except through me – and those to  
whom I choose to reveal you.” Luke 10:22*

Our readings begin with Isaiah prophesying the coming of a peacemaker who will bring peace and justice to the world, Jesse’s root. Psalm 72 describes in detail and prays for an anointed one who will bring peace. Luke tells of Jesus’ commissioning seventy-two disciples to bring the gospel mission to the people and the rejoicing in their faith. Each of these speaks to me as I reflect on our world today.

When I committed, as a CSJ Associate, to the CSJ mission I was commissioned to care for “our dear neighbor.” How might I work to bring peace and justice to our world today? I am reminded of the “No Kings” march taking place in 2500 U.S. cities this upcoming October Saturday. These marches are in peaceful protest towards the injustices to our immigrant neighbors, the loss of services to our economically challenged, and inclusion for all people. This, along with writing letters, sending postcards during elections, and engaging with those who have different views are all some of the ways I can be one of the “72” disciples paving the way for the gospel mission to live in our world today.

**PRAYER**

God of Great Love, fill me with the wisdom to know what is needed today, what I am called to do to be one of the chosen disciples.

Give me the sight to see what you see and the courage and strength to carry on, fulfilling my CSJ commitment to caring for “our dear neighbor.”

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

What is needed in my small piece of the world and how can I pave the way for the gospel mission? How can my life be the sprout of Jesse’s root?

*Kate Theriot, CSJ Associate  
Houma, LA*

## **WEDNESDAY – FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT**

**DECEMBER 3**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Is 25: 6-10a

Ps 23: 1-6

Mt 15: 29-37

### **REFLECTION**

*“On this mountain, the Lord will provide for all people.” Is 25: 6  
“Fresh and green are the pastures where you give me repose.” Ps 23: 2  
“They all ate and were satisfied”. Mt 15: 37*

One of my favorite questions to ask friends or to listen for in conversations is: How are you experiencing God these days? The conversation is rich and insightful, and I picture God delighting that we are sharing with great curiosity and interest. If someone were to ask me that question today, after I've been praying with these Advent readings, I'd reply that God is generous, reassuring, compassionate, trustworthy, resourceful, present and extravagantly loving. You may have other traits to add to the list based on your reflection on these Scriptures.

So how does God invite us today to deepen our relationship with a God with the above qualities when the world seems to be unraveling? Maybe part of the answer lies in the settings for these readings, knowing that we are already one with God in nature and in community... in the mountains, in the fresh and green pastures, and among a community of believers.

### **PRAYER**

God of this Advent season, inspire us to be people of generosity, compassion, creativity, and extravagant love for the people and all creation in our corners of the world as the Scriptures invite us to be.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

To spend more time in nature and in community during these challenging times, and experience our God who reassures, is fully present, and loves us extravagantly.

*Mary Jo Hazard, CSJ Associate  
Naperville, IL*

**THURSDAY – FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 4**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is 26: 1-6

Ps 118: 1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27

Mt 7: 24-27

**REFLECTION**

*“The Lord humbles those in high places,  
and the lofty city he brings down...*

*It is trampled underfoot by the needy, by the footsteps of the poor.”*

*Is 26: 5-6*

It's ironic that in our world today there is so much rhetoric from “those in high places,” who are trying to self-vindicate their acts of violence, destruction, and displacement by placing the suspicion and blame for these actions on the very people that they oppress. The bombing of Ukraine, starvation and deaths in Gaza, and militarized deportation raids in our own country are all symptomatic of “might makes right,” but we must try to understand the mind and heart of God in the face of such tragedies. Isaiah's words remind us of God's justice and the humbling of those who rely on their own strength, power, and wealth rather than seeing through the eyes of the needy and walking in the footsteps of the poor. This is a call to humility and trust. It's a warning against pride, self-sufficiency, and building “lofty” places in our own lives that exclude God. It reminds us to trust that God sees and hears the cry of the poor and calls us all to reflect on our own responsibility to respond to this cry with action and solidarity.

**PRAYER**

Merciful and gracious God, You humble the proud and lift up the lowly. Thank you for being our sure strength and touchstone of justice. Teach us to walk humbly before you, trusting that you will guide our steps and strengthen our resolve to hear with our/Your heart and respond with compassion. Amen.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Is there a “lofty city” in my life that needs to be surrendered?  
How can I walk in the “footsteps of the poor” and stand in solidarity with someone who is needy or oppressed?

*Jim Boyd, CSJ Associate  
Chicago, IL*

## FRIDAY – FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 5

### SCRIPTURE

Is 29: 17-24

Ps 27: 1, 4, 13-14

Mt 9: 27-31

### REFLECTION

*“And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see.*

*The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD...*

*For the tyrant will be no more...*

*All alert to do evil will be cut off.” Is 29:18b-20*

I admit that sometimes I just want God to come and fix the mess. Just do it.

Spending time with these scriptures felt like praying with Mary’s *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55). Yes, we rely on and praise God as the One who comes to reverse the ruthless injustices inflicted on the lowly. In such times of *gloom and darkness*, what does it mean that *each of us* is a *theotokos*, a “God-bearer?” Each of us is a “house” in which God dwells.

In this season of pondering the mystery of the Incarnation, may our faithful listening to the Word *encourage* us to participate in the prophetic actions of opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. Let’s be “alert to do *good*.”

### PRAYER

One thing I ask of the LORD, this I seek:

To dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.

Wait for the LORD with courage, be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD. Ps 27

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

See yourself as one of the blind persons following Jesus and asking to be healed.

Jesus says to you, “Tell me about your blindness.

How do you want to see?”

Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ  
Chicago, IL

**SATURDAY – FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 6**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is 30: 19-21, 23-26

Ps.147: 1-6

Mt 9: 35-10: 1, 5a, 6-8

**REFLECTION**

*“Cry for help and you’ll find it’s grace and more grace. The moment God hears, God answers.” Is. 30:19.*

*“God heals the brokenhearted; binds up their wounds. “ Ps. 147: 5.*

As I look out our kitchen window, I see rain. Our parched earth is in need of it, so I cannot complain that the day isn’t sunny and bright. This dreary weather could bring my soul down into the gloom of the daily news that tries to extinguish my Light, but I know better. We know better.

Each day the news gives me the opportunity to look for the Light in the darkness, if only I allow myself to be present to it. How do I do that? I try to give myself the time to be present.

Today, Isaiah reminds me that when I “cry for help and I’ll find its grace, and more grace.

The moment God hears, God answers. “Do I ask? Am I aware of the graces right now?

I’ll take a few moments and list a few. I encourage you to do the same.

**PRAYER**

Oh my Jesus, in your darkness on the cross, you were present to the light in the Other (on a cross) asking for forgiveness. Help me see the light in others like you did.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Look for the Light! God is here.

*Kathy Jeffers, CSJ Associate  
Beaver, PA*

**SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 7**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is: 11: 1-10

Ps: 72: 1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

Rm: 15: 4-9

Mt: 3: 1-12

**REFLECTION**

*"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant  
You to think in harmony with one another ..."* Rm. 15: 5

**God of Endurance...**

In a world that requires so much of so many. A world where each day asks people to bear more pain. More hardship. Many reaching out with hands that need another hand to grab on to.

The world of selfish "me first" mentality where we are continually watching rights and freedoms stripped away. Many more hands reaching out in an attempt to reach those who they hope will help.

Our world of hunger and poverty that grows larger each day. Hands reach out for food and jobs.

For the world where we hold a beautiful flower. Watch a bird or butterfly. Sit in the shade of a tree and ready out to hand on to what may not be here tomorrow.

God of Endurance...are you asking our hands to hold such pain?

**God of Encouragement...**

Place our hands in those who reach for us to help ease their pain or hardship.

Put the needed materials in our hands to make signs, sign petitions, write postcards to those we need to help us. Give us hands that reach for food to purchase and hands to stock the shelves of food pantries. Perhaps our hands could type resumes or help with job searches. Use our hands to plant gardens, bushes, and trees. And then to help nurture them. Hands to help the animals.

Hands that open outwardly to help. Hold another hand when needed. Fold together in prayer.

**PRAYER**

God of our comings and goings, help us learn to endure so we are able  
to reach out our hands in encouragement whenever  
and wherever they are needed.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Be encouragement for the world.

*Linda Matonich, CSJ Associate  
Hodgkins, IL*

## **MONDAY - SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT**

**DECEMBER 8**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Genesis 3: 9-15, 20

Psalm 98: 1, 2-3, 3-4

Ephesians 1: 3-6, 11-12

Luke 1: 26-38

### **REFLECTION**

*“God chose us before the world began to be holy  
and blameless and full of love.”*

*Ephesians 1:4*

When visiting the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth in Israel, I would pray with the people of our group gathered in a circle with open hands. I would place an olive wood rosary across their hands and say: Hail \_\_\_\_\_,

Full of grace, the Lord is with you. Mary is a model of reception of God’s grace, and we are also called to bear the Christ into our world.

The Immaculate Conception is an honorary title attributed to Mary’s being born “without sin” and thus proclaiming her suitability to give birth to the Christ. The history of this feast began in the 7th Century in the Eastern Church, honoring Mary’s conception in the womb of St. Ann. This devotion to Mary evolved until Pope Pius IX proclaimed it in 1854, and it is based in the tradition of the Church. It’s an “honorary title” attributed to Mary.

Although we are, all of us, capable of sin, we are also graced by God to bring Christ to birth in our lives, in our world. As we realize this truth, we certainly give honor to Mary, Mother of God.

### **PRAYER**

God of all creation, may we, like Mary, receive your call to welcome the Christ into our hearts and, in turn, to bring Christ into our world. This is our desire. May it be so.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Be attentive to the angels in our lives who speak to us of God’s call and desire for us. And may we respond with open hearts and minds, trusting the Holy Spirit to bring our Christ to birth.

*Sallie Latkovich, CSJ  
Ft. Myers, FL*

## **TUESDAY- SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT**

**DECEMBER 9**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Is 40: 1-11

Ps 96: 1-3 and 10-13

MT 18: 12-14

### **REFLECTION**

*“If a man has a hundred sheep, and one goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine and go and search for the one that is lost? And when he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that have not gone astray.” Mt. 12-13*

I have heard the parable of the lost sheep over and over again and because of this do I sometimes tune out and say, “I know, God is the good shepherd, and every individual is precious to God and God’s love is accessible to all?” But as I reflected on this parable once again, I was reminded that we are called to imitate the behavior of the shepherd which calls for Jesus’ followers to join in this work of mercy and outreach, seek out and help those who feel lost, and lead them to the love of God, reminding them that they are not forgotten.

I ask myself, who in our society is feeling lost, who is feeling social isolation, who is feeling misunderstood? The list could go on and on. When the good shepherd finds the lost sheep, he picks it up and carries it to safety. How do I respond when I hear the anguished cries of the sheep?

### **PRAYER**

God of abundant love, help me to imitate You, the good shepherd. Give me a generous heart that allows me to lift others up in love, reminding them that they are precious and loved.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Today I will reach out to someone who may be feeling lost, isolated or misunderstood.

*Tami Schab, CSJ  
Kalamazoo, MI*

**WEDNESDAY – SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 10**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is 40: 25-31

Ps 103: 1-4, 8, 10

Mt 11: 28-30

**REFLECTION**

*“Come to me all who are burdened and I will give you rest. . .  
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Mt 11:28-30*

Isaiah offers encouragement to trust in the strength of the Lord. Matthew writes that we should not become overwhelmed by the religious laws and practices of that time. Today, I don't feel so much overwhelmed by religious law, but I do feel overwhelmed by the shock waves that are reverberating through our Country and through the world. I'm writing this reflection at the end of September as the days get shorter and as our democratic norms are eroding – nothing feels easy or light! The burdens of our life seem heavier each day and the challenges more daunting.

How do I continue to nurture and mature my faith? How do I work and live to do my part to ease the burdens for my family, my circles, and my community? For me, being of service has been the easier part. I find building community and helping others to be incredibly and personally fulfilling. And yet, there is always something more that can be done and should be done – how do I balance my personal prayer and faith journey with this growing call for action? There is no one answer. But, for me, I believe that my journey of faith is enriched and strengthened through community. Engaging with people, including strangers, and with the natural world brings me closer to God and refreshes my spirit.

**PRAYER**

Loving God, you are my source of strength and compassion.  
Help me to become more aware of your presence  
in my life each day.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Help me to find God's love and compassion more frequently  
in my personal interactions each day.

*Bill Stauffer, CSJ Associate  
Palos Heights, IL*

**THURSDAY – SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 11**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is 41: 13-20

Ps 145: 1 and 9-13

Mt 11: 11-15

**REFLECTION**

*“Don’t be afraid, I will help you. Is 41:13*

*“I will extol you, my God, and I will bless your name forever.” Ps 145: 1*

I pulled the marigolds from their home today. I hope I wasn't too harsh or alarming for them. I didn't like doing it, but it's time. They are brown and shriveled, no longer bright and beautiful. The leaves, too, showering down blanketing the earth, worn and tired. But it is the season of "letting go!" And Advent has cycled around once again, with its invitation to "prepare." The turning over time is here. A new season in nature and the Church year.

I am looking at the bird bath that houses the marigolds...it's empty and barren. I already miss the flowers, birds, and pieces of summer that were teeming with life and warmth. The turning over time beckons with emptiness, darkness, a stillness as the letting go begins and we await the Holy.

These days feel heavy and a bit scary. We are being challenged to trust the mystery of what comes next. We are urged to practice ways of emptying ourselves of what gets in the way of loving. Darkness and light are always present. Our work is to release the light.

**PRAYER**

Holy One, you are good to all and compassionate  
toward all your creatures.

We come this day with open hands and hearts.

Fill us with a longing for Emmanuel.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

To let go of all I hope might fill me so that  
all that is finally left is God.

*(Mark Burrows)*

*Jackie Schmitz, CSJ  
Burr Ridge, IL*

**FRIDAY – SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 12  
OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE**

**SCRIPTURE**

Zech 2: 14-17

Judith 13: 18-19

LK 1: 26-38

**REFLECTION**

*“Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they shall be his people, and he shall dwell among them.” Zech. 2:11a*

Both the Annunciation to Mary in today’s Gospel and the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe point to God’s decision to dwell among the “many nations” of Earth. By God’s choice of a young Galilean woman, no less than by Our Lady’s appearance to a Mexican peasant, we see examples of how God “lifts up the lowly” (Luke 1:52), not by changing them but by choosing to dwell with them. Juan Diego would have occupied one of the lowest places in the hierarchical society of colonial Mexico, where indigenous language, culture, and customs were considered inferior (and even demonic) by the Spanish Catholic elites. By her appearance to Juan Diego, Our Lady of Guadalupe lifts up the dignity of all people and calls us to see how interculturality—that is, mutual respect and dialogue between cultures—has always been God’s will, even if the term itself is recent. God’s love is not just for a few, but for the many.

**PRAYER**

Loving God, you have made yourself known to all people. Give us eyes to see your presence in other cultures and courage to stand in solidarity with those who are different from us, particularly in those who are held in low esteem or who we are tempted to dismiss.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Try to learn more about the seasonal customs and traditions of your neighbors of other cultural backgrounds, especially through conversation and community events, and think about how you can stand in solidarity with “the lowly.”

*Jessica Wroblewski, CSJ Associate  
Cleveland, OH*

**SATURDAY – SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 13**

**SCRIPTURE**

Sirach 48: 1–4, 9–11

Psalm 80: 2ac and 3b, 15-16, 18-19

Matthew 17: 9a, 10–13

**REFLECTION**

*“Elijah is destined to calm, to turn hearts, to restore...” Sirach 48 :10,11*

*“Restore us, O God, let your face shine on us that we may be saved.”*

*Ps. 80:19*

*“Disciples question Jesus about the return of Elijah.”*

*Matthew 17:10-13*

Elijah is described as a great prophet who was destined to put an end to wrath before the day of the Lord. In the New Revised Standard readings he is called to calm God’s wrath, to turn our hearts to one another, and to restore right relationships. I’m attracted to the tone of the words “to calm, to turn hearts and to restore.” Isn’t this just what we need in our world today? If we are to be “carriers” of this vision we need to stay close to the Lord, that is, to “Let God’s face shine on us” that we may receive the strength we need to bring God’s light in the world around us. In the Message Bible, God is implored to “Throw beams of light so we that we can see where we are going!” Yes, Lord, care for the “vine” you have planted and bring us new life.

In the Gospel, the disciples are confused about the return of Elijah and Jesus clarifies that Elijah has already returned in the person of John the Baptist. Both John and Elijah carried out their ministries in the wilderness, relying on God and signaling a time of judgment and new beginnings.

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to turn to You, show me your Face.

Throw beams of light so I can see where I am going.

Care for the vine you have planted and bring me new life that I may be your messenger in our world.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Today I will look for ways “to calm rough edges, to turn my heart toward love and to restore a broken relationship.”

*Bernadette Dean, CSJ  
Kalamazoo, MI*

**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT – REJOICE SUNDAY  
DECEMBER 14**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is 35: 1-6, 10

Ps 146: 6-10

James 5: 7-10

MT 11: 2-11

**REFLECTION**

*“...rejoice and bloom... rejoice with joyful song...” Is. 35:*

*“Alleluia!” Ps 146*

*“...bring glad tidings...” Is 61:1*

*“...and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” Mt. 11:5b*

Beloved,

“Yes!” I said as I opened Jackie’s invitation. “Yes, Rejoice Sunday!”

My New’s Year’s resolution was that this was to be a “YEAR OF JOY.” Where upon, I looked in the nooks and crannies and found depictions of the word JOY, what some would consider *cachivache*, and displayed them around my living room, to help me remember.

It works, helps me remember Sisters Pat and Maxine leading a bunch of high schoolers in “All you Peoples, Clap your Hands and Shout for Joy,” (and wondering if we would clap). If the desert and parched land could *rejoice with joyful song*, so, too, could a group of high schoolers. Remember Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy:” *Joyful, joyful, we adore you, God of Glory, Lord of Love...”joining people hand in hand.* Remember Zachariah 2:10, “*Sing and rejoice... see I am coming to dwell among you!*” Remember, Mary’s Magnificat. *And remember you have been anointed to bring glad tidings to the poor, “He comes/came to save!”*

P.S. The little bird on my balcony frequently joins in joyful praise!

**PRAYER**

Promised One, You who put the song of joy in our hearts,

Strengthen hands and knees that are weak,

Open our eyes and ears

Free our voices to truth and beauty

as we joyfully sing of your praise, we dance and clap our hands.

ALLELUIA!

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

As we complete this Advent Season and celebrate Christmas,  
how will you bring glad tidings to the poor?  
How will you share God’s joy? Give God joy?

**MONDAY – THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 15**

**SCRIPTURE**

Num 24: 2-7, 15-17

Ps 25: 4-9

MT 21: 23-27

**REFLECTION**

*“The chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” Mt. 21:23*

I was once part of a delegation with an elected official. To open, he asked where we grew up and how long we lived in his district. After everyone answered, he said he spent his entire life here, unlike us, and therefore knew best what policies he should or should not support.

His “gotcha” questions, as I call them, were used for his hidden agenda. These types of questions were also used by the chief priests in today’s Gospel. They had no intention of gaining new insight or world view.

I wonder how often I use “gotcha” questions to achieve a certain objective in my own life. In our polarized society, I fear we have lost a willingness to have our minds and hearts opened by a new conversation or experience. But this passage challenges us to do just that. What a world it would be if we used this practice with all our neighbors, without distinction.

**PRAYER**

Gracious God, give me a heart that listens as you do. Help me to set aside my own agenda, assumptions, and distractions so I can be fully present to those with whom I interact, especially those with whom I disagree.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Today, have a conversation with someone you disagree with and be attentive to their responses. See how they may alter your world view.

*Luke Sullivan, CSJ Associate  
Brookfield, IL*

**TUESDAY – THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 16**

**SCRIPTURE**

Zeph 3: 1-2, 9-13  
Ps 34: 2-3, 6-7,17-18, 19, 23  
Mt 21: 28-32

**REFLECTION**

*"I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people  
humble and lowly..." Zeph 3:12*  
*"God redeems the lives of those who serve God;  
who take refuge in God." Ps 34: 23*  
*"...even when you saw that, you did not later change  
your minds and believe..." Mt 21: 32*

"Change our hearts this time...Your word says it can be. Change our minds this time...Your life will set us free." This song by Rory Cooney sings itself in me as I reflect on the scripture passages for today. Each line in our scripture passages speak of a life given to God or the opposite, a life lived in an arrogant manner. Self-indictment could come easily as the concerns of our world are so great and MY actions seem so small...slow...or, at times, nonexistent. Judging others for their behaviors could be another easy step. Yet this is not God's call. Back to "change our hearts." Once again, we are called to align our vision with God's. Then, united with God, WE can act for restoration of all God's creation. Each line in our passages shows us the way: live in union with God, be responsive in listening, turn toward loving action that restores, be humble of heart, acknowledging the Giver of grace and mission who inspires and calls us to just action. Listen and respond. Change course when needed.

**PRAYER**

Giver of grace and mission, help me to listen and respond,  
changing course when needed.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

As I turn in for the night, I consider the efforts of my day.  
How have I listened and responded to God's mission  
with humble and just action?

*Karen Salsbery, CSJ  
Wichita, KS*

## **WEDNESDAY – THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT**

**DECEMBER 17**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Gen 49: 2, 8-10

Ps 72: 1-4, 7-8, 17

Mt 1: 1-17

### **REFLECTION**

*“Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace.” Ps 72: 7*

*“Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.*

*Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.” Mt 1:16*

The Psalms lure us with their raw humanity. Today the psalmist prays: endow the king with judgement, bless him with a balance of compassion and justice. Confidently, the prayer continues: the afflicted will be cared for, the children of the poor will be safe, the vulnerable will be protected, and all will know peace. In this season of hope, we think of our country and pray to find justice, compassion, and peace. In the meantime, we are called to bring hope into our world with whatever blessings we have been endowed. If my gift is praying, or being present, or writing letters, or listening with tenderness, I can bless God’s name by lovingly and generously tending my relationships with this gift. Hope and relationships are echoed again in the list of the Christ’s lineage, with its underlying stories of struggle and promise. History feeds our hope as we ponder the ways justice survives intolerance and peace prevails beyond chaos.

### **PRAYER**

Most loving God, strengthen our hope and energize our courage  
to bring your compassion into our world  
as we meet you in our dear neighbors today.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Recognizing the dignity of each person,  
I will be fully present to the people I encounter today.

*Terry Middendorf, CSJ  
Brookfield, IL*

**THURSDAY – THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 18**

**SCRIPTURE**

Jer 23: 5-8

Ps 72: 1-2, 12-13, 18, 19

MT 1: 18-25

**REFLECTION**

*“This is the name to be given him: ‘The Lord our justice.’” Jer 23: 5-8*

*“God’s glorious name is to be blessed forever.” Ps 72: 19*

*“She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” MT 1: 21*

What’s in a name? As I sit here in Le Puy-en-Velay and reflect on the name given to our community 375 years ago, I wonder what we can learn from St Joseph, our namesake, about living our charism of Unifying Love.

In the Gospel, Matthew tells us that Joseph is a “righteous man.” He had his plan about how to do the “right” thing in the situation he faced. How often do we think we know what the right thing to do is when faced with a crisis? And yet Joseph, contemplative and attentive, hears God’s message in his dream and chooses to follow it, abandoning his plan for God’s. He not only names Jesus, but lets God’s dream guide his actions as he marries Mary and raises Jesus as his earthly father. St. Joseph teaches us to be attentive to God’s dream for us, especially in crisis, and to allow that dream to guide us in all we do.

**PRAYER**

Loving God, help us, like St. Joseph, to listen more deeply to your dream for us, trust more freely in that dream, and allow that dream to guide how we live more fully in love and service, united with our dear neighbor without distinction.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

How do you hear God’s plan and act on it?

How do you “fix your heart on God’s dream? Let it guide everything.” Maxim 16

*Brenda Leroux Babin, CSJ Associate  
Houma, LA*

**FRIDAY – THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 19**

**SCRIPTURE**

Judges 13: 2-7, 24-25

Ps 71: 3-6, 16-17

Lk 1: 5-25

**REFLECTION**

*“How shall I know this?” Lk 1:18*

*“...now you will be speechless and unable to talk...” Lk 1:21*

“How shall I know this?” is Zechariah’s response to the visit by a messenger of God who delivers the astonishing news that Zechariah’s prayer has been heard; a son will be born to him and his wife Elizabeth, and “you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.” What gift could be more amazing and wonderful and marvelous?

Yet Zechariah, rather than hailing the magnificent events to come, has a first impulse to push back against Gabriel in doubt or suspicion or mistrust with a self-important, egoic need to “know” for himself. He apparently received the gift intellectually, cerebrally, so injects analytics and logistics into the discourse with the angel. In other words, Zechariah comes at this glorious news through his head space. And so it would seem that even way, way back, “In the days of Herod, King of Judea...,” there existed a version of “cancel culture” because Zechariah is admonished then muted—cancelled—by the angel Gabriel.

Or maybe that’s merely how it first appears since Zechariah’s muting is really only temporary. What if Gabriel has instead offered Zechariah another gift, a different gift? What if the muting is actually a period of prepartum confinement during which Zechariah can learn to recognize and approach Numinous Presence and Divine Activity not from head space but from heart space? And what if during that confinement Zechariah learned to be astonished and amazed, to wonder and marvel? Well then, wouldn’t that have made him just the kind of awesome dad his rather quirky, eccentric son needed?

**PRAYER**

Radical Inclusiveness, open human hearts to the awareness that Numinous Presence indwells everything everywhere and that Divine Activity courses through all creation.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Remember that it’s okay to just stand silently in awe before Outpouring Love.

*Barbara Foreman, CSJ Associate  
La Grange, IL*

**SATURDAY – THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 20**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is 7: 10-14

Ps 24: 1-6

LK 1: 26-38

**REFLECTION**

*“Good morning!*

*You’re beautiful with God’s beauty,  
Beautiful inside and out!*

*God be with you.” Lk. 1:28 (The Message)*

Sometimes when I am praying with a scripture passage that is as familiar as Gabriel’s greeting to Mary, I find myself turning to the Message. I often find that its plain language helps me to digest a new message waiting for me in a particular passage. So, it is today.

Gabriel’s greeting speaks of the divine favor and grace bestowed upon Mary, the presence of God with her, and her exalted status as the mother of Jesus. “Highly favored one, blessed are you among women!” As I pray with the Message interpretation, I am awed to hear God say to me, “Good morning, Judith! I see myself in you, and we are beautiful, inside and out. I am with you, completely.”

As I sit with the lusciousness of this God-greeting, I remember that I, too, am called to birth Jesus into the world. Not physically, of course, but we are all called to give birth to Jesus spiritually in our hearts and through our lives. The question is, am I deeply listening for the ways God invites me to birth Jesus into these challenging times? And when God asks me to be a co-creator of Love, will my response to God be yes?

John Freund, CM said, “Christmas isn’t automatic, it can’t be taken for granted. It began with Mary, but each of us is asked to make our own contribution to giving flesh to Love in the world.”

**PRAYER**

You have chosen me, God, and I am grateful.  
Help me to live a life that reflects your unifying love  
and to share it with the world.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Will you give birth to Christ today? How?

*Judith Minear, CSJ  
Cleveland, OH*

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 21**

**SCRIPTURE**

Is 7: 10-14

Ps 24: 1-6

Rom 1: 1-7

Mt 1: 18-24

**REFLECTION:**

*“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.” Matthew 1:18*

This is how God came among us.

An angel appeared to a young girl named Mary and told her she would bear a son through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary did not understand, but she said yes.

*This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. Matthew 1:18*

This is how God came among us.

Mary told Joseph what had happened, and then went off to visit her cousin Elizabeth, leaving Joseph to consider what she told him. He had decided to divorce her quietly, when an angel appeared to him in a dream, telling him, “Have no fear about taking Mary as your wife. It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child.”

Joseph did not understand, but he did what the angel told him.

*This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. Matthew 1:18*

This is how God came among us.

Each of us is a presence of God in the world. Angels come and go.

Sometimes we hear their message, sometimes we don’t,  
but always we try to say YES.

This is how God comes among us.

**PRAYER**

Emmanuel—God with us—help us to see with your eyes,  
hear with your ears.

Help us to love like you. Help us to be your presence in the world.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Walk the world with Christ.

*Jeanne Cmolik, CSI  
Cleveland, OH*

## MONDAY – FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 22

### SCRIPTURE

1 Sam 1: 24-28

1 Sam 2: 1, 4-8

LK 1: 46-56

### REFLECTION

*“My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God.”*

*1 Sam 2:1*

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*

*Lk 1:46–47*

The season of Advent is a time of waiting and preparing for the coming of God among us. What better way to prepare than by remembering days gone by and drawing parallels to our lives today? What was Christmas like as a child? What did we look forward to most? What memories remain most dear? Scripture, too, helps us bridge the past and present, reminding us that God’s faithfulness endures through every generation.

In today’s readings, Hannah, after years of prayer, offers her long-awaited son, Samuel, back to the Lord in gratitude and trust. Centuries later, Mary lifts her voice in the Magnificat, praising the same God who “lifts up the lowly” and “fills the hungry with good things.” Both women surrender what they love most to God’s greater plan, finding joy not in possession, but in praise.

Across generations their voices speak of trust and joy. Both proclaim the faithfulness of God.

As we near Christmas we are invited into that same spirit of surrender and gratitude. How does our past connect to our present? How are we dedicating our own lives in service to the Lord, proclaiming with all our hearts: “And holy is His name.” How do Mary and Hannah inspire me to notice God’s mercy in my life? In what concrete way(s) can I lift up the lowly or hungry?

### PRAYER

Faithful God, as Hannah and Mary proclaimed your goodness, teach my heart to do the same. May my soul magnify you in gratitude, and my spirit rejoice in your saving love.

Help me to trust, to give, and to glorify You in all I do. Amen.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Find one way to echo Mary’s Magnificat this week—offer quiet service, give to someone in need, or pray in thanksgiving.

*Anna Marie Troiani, CSJ Associate  
Wheeling, WV*

**TUESDAY – FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 23**

**SCRIPTURE**

Malachi 3: 1-4, 23-24  
Ps 25: 4-5,8-10 and 14  
Lk 1: 57-66

**REFLECTION**

*“What, then, will this child be?  
For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.”  
Lk 1: 66*

Wonders surrounding the birth of Elizabeth’s son, whom she insisted be named John (God is Gracious) made others see this child, not just as a miraculous birth to a previously barren couple, but as someone of unknown importance in his own right, a mystery to unfold over time.

Can’t this very same sentiment apply to the birth of each and every child? Parents gaze at their newborns and wonder, “What, then, will this child be?” They echo the words of the Gospel when they acknowledge each infant a gift from a gracious God. The hand of the Lord is with each child whose life will unfold over time to reveal their unique place in the story of God’s Creation. Their lives are a mystery, but we are called to shower our love and devotion on all of them, no matter the circumstances of their birth or where in the world they are born. They are all born in God’s love!

**PRAYER**

Gracious God, you hold the children of the world in your loving hand. Help me to be of service to your young ones, loving them and celebrating the unfolding of their unique gifts from you.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

My challenge is to be aware of the unfolding lives of the children, especially in immigrant communities, and to actively seek ways to show them God’s love and care.

*Tess Bezouska, CSJ Associate  
La Grange, IL*

**WEDNESDAY – FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 24**

**SCRIPTURE**

2 Sam 7: 1-5, 8-12, 14-16

Ps 89: 2-5, 27, 29

Lk 1: 67-79

**REFLECTION**

*“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free. In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us... to guide our feet in the way of peace.”*

*Lk 1: 76-77*

Today’s gospel is an expression of faith restored, promises fulfilled, and hope renewed. After months of silence, Zechariah’s first words are of praise. His heart overflows, recognizing God’s mercy and faithfulness. Like Zechariah, we are often asked to trust what seems impossible. Sometimes we wait a long time for God’s promises to take shape. And sometimes, the waiting feels like silence. But even in that silence, God is at work. When the light begins to rise, our calling is to recognize it and join it – to speak words of blessing, to prepare the way for peace, to carry the light into places of fear and doubt.

**PRAYER**

God of mercy and light, open our lips as you opened Zechariah’s,  
that we may bless you with joy.

Open our eyes that we may see your dawn breaking upon us.

Open our hearts to carry your peace into the world you love.

Amen.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Today, notice where the dawn is breaking...a kind word, a moment of forgiveness, a new beginning you didn’t expect.

Bless God for remembering you, visiting you,  
for bringing light into your world again.

*Bea Boyd, CSJ Associate  
Chicago, IL*

## **CHRISTMAS VIGIL MASS**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Is 62: 1-5

Ps 89: 4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

Acts 13: 16-17, 22-25

MT 1: 1-25

### **REFLECTION**

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son  
and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.”*

*Is.7:14*

Matthew’s genealogy works hard to link the birth of Jesus to Joseph and the proud Davidic patriarchal lineage from which every good Jew knew the Messiah would come. There is one problem with this. Jesus is the son of Mary, not Joseph. So to help explain Mary’s irregular pregnancy, he includes four “bad girls of the bible”—Tamar, Ruth, Bathsheba and Rahab-- who were instrumental in saving the Hebrew people. Matthew holds up four women as examples of how an unpredictable God used female initiative and courage in unexpected ways to affect the lineage of the future Messiah. What could better witness the power of an unpredictable God than to raise up a long-awaited Messiah from the least powerful of humans — a child born of an unwed mother? What better witness than a son with no apparent biological father, and therefore no claim to patriarchal privilege? Mary’s pregnancy could have led to rejection. She could have been stoned. Yet Joseph refused to uphold patriarchal privilege and received Mary and her child as his own. And the rest, as they say, is history. The message here? God’s ways are not ours. The deep and wide love of God often confounds even the most deeply entrenched of human expectations.

### **PRAYER**

We praise you God. You lift up the lowly.  
You bring salvation from unexpected places.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

This Christmas, how will you witness to our unpredictable God in a patriarchal world so deeply in need of transforming grace?

*Christine Schenk, CSJ  
Cleveland, OH*

## **CHRISTMAS MORNING – DECEMBER 25**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Is 52: 7-10

Ps 98: 1-6

Heb 1: 1-6

JN 1: 1-5, 9-14

### **REFLECTION**

*“How beautiful on the mountains / are the feet of those who bring good news, / who proclaim peace, / who bring good tidings, / who proclaim salvation...” Is 52:7*

*“In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God...the Word was God...All things were created by the Word, nothing was made without the Word. In the Word there was life, and that life was the light of all people. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it.” JN 1: 1-5*

One of the better things about aging is that as years accumulate, the desire to accumulate “things” decreases. In aging we, hopefully, become less interested in giving and receiving presents (though it’s still fun to give or unwrap a gift) and more desirous of giving and receiving presence. That’s what our readings are all about every Christmas morning as we celebrate the gift of the greatest present ever in the incarnation of God’s presence; first in the human person of Jesus the Christ, and then in every one of us. Once we’ve received, unwrapped, and accepted that “present” deep into our lives, (as we’re given the chance to do over and over each December 25th), what more could we possibly desire other than to give away that “present” every day and in every circumstance of our lives. Doing this, we become the beautiful feet (and hands and hearts) bringing the good news, proclaiming peace, and being light that shines in every darkness through our very presence.

### **PRAYER**

Holy One, as we receive the present of Your light and love in the incarnation again this Christmas, grant us the strength and courage to be Your presence in all our being and doing today and every day.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

How, and with whom, can I be a presence of good tidings and light today and again tomorrow?

*Christine Parks, CSJ  
Kalamazoo, MI*

## FRIDAY – DECEMBER 26

### SCRIPTURE

Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59

Ps 31: 3-4,6-8,16-17

MT10: 17-22

### REFLECTION

*“For you are my rock, my fortress ...guide me, lead me. You are my refuge.” “Pull me out of the net they have spread for me” Ps 31:3-4*

*“I put my trust in Yahweh; You have seen my wretchedness...the miseries of my soul, and have not handed me over to the enemy...”*

*Ps 31:6-8*

The day after Christmas, the culmination of Advent, the long awaited birth of our Savior, we are given this Psalm to reflect on which, in some ways, brings us quickly back to earth, to our daily lives and tribulations. Written by King David during a time of deep personal suffering, it is a plea for help, and then an expression of trust in God’s mercy. In contemporary language it shows us how to “let go and let God” in.

Yesterday we celebrated the love and hope in this tiny baby; today I am acknowledging His powerful protection and justice in times of my distress (post-holiday stress, disappointment?). When feeling overwhelmed, I can trust in God to “pull me out of the net spread for me.” Ps 31: 4 I can find some relief, some refuge in God “for you are my rock, my refuge” Ps 31: 3 The grace from God can strengthen me - if I put my trust in God.

### PRAYER

Powerful, loving God - hear my calls for help - strengthen me with hope and persistence in knowing you will be looking out for me.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Pay attention today and see where, or through whom,  
God is gracing me with love and protection.

*Sue Biskup, CSJ Associate  
La Grange, IL*

## **SATURDAY – DECEMBER 27**

### **SCRIPTURE**

1 John 1: 1-4

Ps 97: 1-2, 5-6, 11-12

Jn 20: 1a and 2-8

### **REFLECTION**

*“and these things we write to you, that you may rejoice,  
and your joy may be full” 1 John:4*

*“Light is risen to the just, and joy to the right of heart” Ps 97:11*

*“and the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen  
cloths, but apart, wrapped up onto one place” John 20: 7*

REJOICE! We have celebrated, just two days ago, the great feast of the Incarnation. Now, John tells us to “rejoice, and your joy may be full, giving us an insight into the fulfillment of the Incarnation, namely the Resurrection. The psalmist invites us to rejoice because the “light is risen to the just.” BUT the insight is the simple phrase in John 20 that says that the linen cloth that covered the Lord’s head was separate/apart. His face was no longer hidden, His eyes could see! The transition from the eyes of the baby has grown into the eyes of one who returned from The Creator to invite us to see New Life. Now we see clearly that Incarnation and Resurrection complete each other. Today we pause and reflect that our sin torn world needs to remove the “linen cloth” from their heads and see hope, peace, equality, openness, and care for our Common Home. We rejoice that the Lord gave us the example of growing from a human baby into a Resurrected Lord. For this we can rejoice. We need to remove the linen from our “head” and see, hear, smell, and taste the goodness of the Lord. REJOICE!

### **PRAYER**

Lord, let me feel your touch and warm embrace as I face our world and help me to see your Vision of Hope and Peace.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

How have I seen the Dear Neighbor today?  
How have I seen and served the poor today?

*Robert Labadie Funaro, CSJ Associate  
Grand Rapids, MI*

**SUNDAY – DECEMBER 28**  
**FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY**

**SCRIPTURE**

Sirach 3: 2-6, 12-14

Ps. 128: 1-5

Col 3: 12-21

Matt. 2: 13-15,19-23

**REFLECTION**

*“And over all these, put on love.” Col. 3: 15.*

My large family celebrated the births of five new babies in the last two years. (a sixth is due in a few weeks). New life, new hope, strengthened family bonds, shared joy; these wee folks gift us with all the above.

While I marvel at the miracle and promise each of these children represent, I am also keenly aware of children born into families who are painfully separated because of the immigration crisis, children orphaned by wars in Gaza and Ukraine, children living in the poorest countries in the world who are starving because of dramatic cutbacks in essential aid.

On this Holy Family Sunday I think about the disparity that exists for children in our world and am reminded of the lyrics from Kathy Sherman’s beautiful song, “Faces of the Children;” “Who will keep their dreams alive and see that they come true; Tell me is it you, is it I, and when will we?”

Today’s reading from St. Paul challenges us: “Put on then heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience...” Sounds like a hopeful way to bring our sisters and brothers around the world together as family.

**PRAYER**

God of Great Promise, please open the eyes and soften the hearts of those who hold the power to change the world. Let them see the faces of the children and realize the opportunity they have to create a space where no child is hungry or lives in fear.

Let their legacy be one of kindness and compassion for generations to come.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

I will try to be a stronger advocate for justice for children by being better informed and by writing to those who oppose programs that deny a brighter future for God’s children.

*Jean McGrath, CSJ*  
*Chicago, IL*

## MONDAY – DECEMBER 29

### SCRIPTURE

1 John 2: 3-11  
Ps. 96: 1-3, 5-6  
LK 2: 22-35

### REFLECTION

*“We can be sure that we are in God only when the one who claims to be living in God is living the same kind of life as Christ lived.” 1 John 5-6*  
*“Anyone who loves their brother or sister is living in the light and need not be afraid of stumbling.” 1 John 9-10*

Every day we are awakened with chaos and uncertainty that is part of a new world order. Like you, I am still surprised and stunned by the daily announcements and saddened when hearing stories of innocent people being arrested/deported. In witnessing the impact of gun violence in our schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, anxiety and fear seek a dwelling place in our hearts. The everyday challenge is to stay awake and grounded in our CSJ mission of unity and charism of inclusive love. The world in which we dwell needs people like you, who choose to live with your eyes and hearts focused on being God’s light amidst darkness. Christmas invited us to remember and celebrate how in recalling the birth of the Christ our hearts receive seeds of love, light, and hope. This hope, grounded in God’s light, gives birth within us to a renewed capacity to live with courage, speak truth, and love unconditionally, as we choose to become one with the dear neighbors in our midst, becoming Christ-light amid the darkness.

### PRAYER

God of Courage, fill us with zeal to work tirelessly for unity amidst so many divisions in our world, country, neighborhoods, and families. God of Love, teach us the way of non-violence as we seek to become more Christ-like in all relationships. God of Truth and Light, be with us as we learn to trust that our charism of inclusive love makes a difference as we become Christ’s light.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

How will you choose to be Christ’s transforming light in the world?

*Linda Bronersky, CSJ Associate  
Bollingbrook, IL*

## **TUESDAY – DECEMBER 30**

### **SCRIPTURE**

1 John 2: 12-17

Ps 96: 7-10

Lk 2: 36-40

### **REFLECTION**

*“There was a prophetess too, Anna ...” Lk 2: 36-38*

Given the amount of information Luke provides us about a woman whom we never hear from again, we need to reflect on how she may be important for our lives. Being a widow in those times very often meant having to fend for oneself. Is this why she went to the Temple – to grieve and to survive? She did not become a prophetess overnight! She learned how to pray “night and day” (spiritual formation). She interacted with pilgrims coming to the Temple (ministry) and, perhaps, shared her insights from prayer (State of the Heart). Over time insights into her own life experiences enabled her to offer hope to those who had lost hope. All this formed Anna’s identity as a prophetess. Her life prepared her to give praise the moment she encountered Jesus and led her to speak to others of the fulfillment of the promise of hope.

### **PRAYER**

God, grant me a spirit of wisdom and understanding of what you wish me to know, that amidst the complexities of this world and of my life I may discern how to live with hope and confidence in you.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Decide each day which role of a prophetess you will embrace: praying for hope; offering encouragement; engaging in ministry; sharing an insight from your prayer.

*Ginny Yeager CSJ  
Charleston, WV*

## **WEDNESDAY – DECEMBER 31**

### **SCRIPTURE**

1 Jn 2: 18-21

Ps 96: 1-2, 11-3

JN 1: 1-18

### **REFLECTION**

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and we have seen his glory: the glory of an only Son coming from the Father filled with enduring love.” John 1: 14*

During this past year I made my dwelling the Nazareth Center. It has been a blessing along with challenges. My constant prayer is “My life is in your hands.” Handing over some controls and accepting some of the limitations of aging is painful, but I pray to live it all in peace and even joy. We see one another’s moments of frustration and also brave acceptance. We have the freedom to choose how to be in difficult circumstances. I want to live it all with awareness and gratitude. But I also need to be honest. I turn in moments of fearful loss to the God of my heart and ask for quiet peace and acceptance. As we live here together, we watch for ways to respond to the needs around us and try to support one another. The “watching” can be helpful or annoying. I don’t like having my less than stellar moments out there and visible. But on the other hand, I also appreciate the quiet warmth of a friendly smile. When we dare to “share our hearts” the gift is recognition that we are all very human and we need one another.

### **PRAYER**

Loving God of my heart, I come as I am with my desires and fears.  
Help me to live this day with acceptance and even joy!

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

To live life with attention.

*Marie Benzing, CSJ  
Kalamazoo, MI*

**THURSDAY – JANUARY 1**  
**SOLEMNITY OF MARY**

**SCRIPTURE**

Num 6:22-27

Ps 67: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8

Gal 4: 4-7

Lk 2:16-21

**REFLECTION**

*“The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!” Num 6: 24-26*

*“And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” Lk 2:19*

On New Year’s Day the Church weaves colorful threads into a tapestry placing Mary “Mother of God” front and center. Mary’s unequivocal “Yes” empowered Jesus, the Word, to become flesh. How often Mary must have reflected on this in her heart! Elizabeth gave voice to Mary’s discipleship, crying out, “Blessed are you who believed what was spoken to you by the Lord was fulfilled.”

Today marks the end of the Christmas octave, the 8th day, also presaging the entire life of Christ and his Resurrection symbolically referred to as the 8th day. We join the universal Church praying for world peace, invoking Mary’s intercession as Queen of Peace.

Pope Francis, in his homily on January 1, 2025, entrusting the New Year to Mary, invited us “like her, to discover God’s greatness in the little things of life...to cherish life, to care for wounded lives...to restore dignity to the lives of everyone ‘born of woman,’ for this is the basis for building a culture of peace.”

**PRAYER**

May we come together as one family, to labor for your peace—  
a shalom where all your people may dwell in safety  
and rest in quiet peace.

(adapted from the 2025 Season of Creation Prayer)

**PERSONAL CHALLENGE**

Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this  
planet never take away the joy of our hope.

(adapted from Laudato Si)

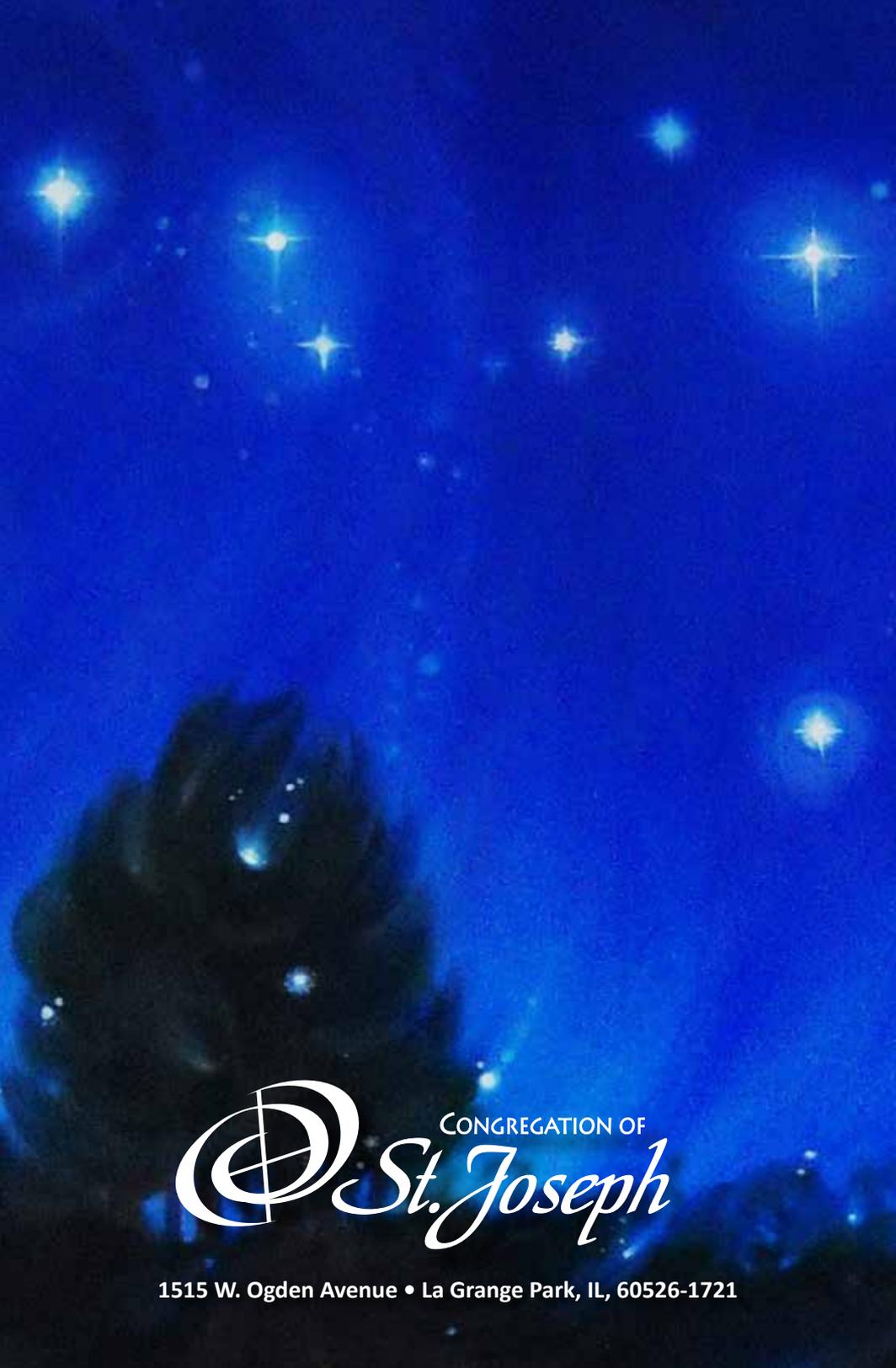
I will use these words for an occasional Examen.

*Cynthia Sabathier, CSJ*  
*Baton Rouge, LA*









CONGREGATION OF  
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