

## A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

December 18 - December 24

#### FOURTH SUNDAY OF



#### Year A-Advent

This week's readings invite us to embrace the powerful simplicity of God's life-giving promise. Amid our constant grasping and pretensions to power, one of the primary journeys from Advent through Pentecost is learning that genuine life—teeming, flourishing, abundant life—has little to do with our own capacity and everything to do with God's generosity.

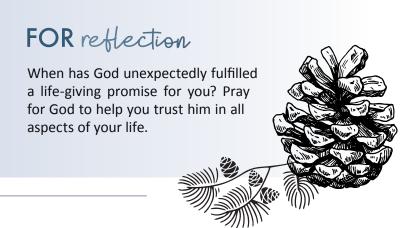
On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the distinctive sign of God's life-giving promise is the repeated use of David's name. Isaiah declares, "Hear now, you house of **David**! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?" (Is 7:13). In Romans, Paul introduces the Gospel "regarding [God's] Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of **David**, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:3-4). In Matthew, "an angel of the Lord appeared ... in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of **David**, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit'" (Mt 1:20).

In each reading, David's name is the unmistakable sign of God's life-giving promise, because a thousand years before Jesus, God promised that David's throne would last forever (2 Sam 7:16). The question for every succeeding generation was whether they would trust the powerful simplicity of God's life-giving promise.

In Isaiah, David's royal descendant, Ahaz, is under threat and his faith is wavering. The prophet implores Ahaz to hold fast. He even offers a sign to strengthen the king's faith: the birth of a child. This child, Immanuel (God with us) symbolizes the powerful simplicity of God's life-giving promise because, before he is fully grown, the current crisis will be a distant memory. Ahaz only needs to trust.

The Gospel plunges Joseph and Mary into an equally urgent crisis of faith. In the face of an alarming emergency (Mary's unplanned pregnancy), the question is whether Joseph will trust the powerful simplicity of God's lifegiving promise or try to control the situation by his own strength. Joseph, too, is a descendant of David. Joseph, too, is an heir of God's promise. Joseph, too, must decide whether he will embrace the powerful simplicity of God's assurance.

As we await God's promise on the cusp of Christmas, Joseph the carpenter, not Ahaz the king, becomes our model and guide. Joseph the carpenter, not Ahaz the king, reliably embraces God's promise. As he does, he not only grows in his affection for God, he also grows in his resemblance to God by lovingly bearing shame and hostility. If we follow his lead, we may even, from time to time, stand back and marvel at God's life-giving work through us.





# **SCRIPTURE**

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

**Thursday** 

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Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Galatians 3:23-29

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:18-22; Galatians 4:1-7

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:23-29; John 3:31-36

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Isaiah 7:10-16; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 1:46b-55; Isaiah 33:17-22; Revelation 22:6-7, 18-20

Luke 1:46b-55; 2 Samuel 7:18, 23-29; Galatians 3:6-14

Psalm 96; Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

## Why do the daily readings begin on Thursday?

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday.

# The Morning Liturgy

### **Opening Scripture**

Watch ye, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at evening, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

Mark 13:35, 36

#### **Opening Prayer** (based on Psalm 51)

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

Amen.

Scripture Reading (read Psalm and Gospel text here)

Period of Silence

Confessing Our Faith (Apostles' Creed)

The Lord's Prayer

#### The Collect

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

# A Midday Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles, "Peace I give to you; my own peace I leave with you." Regard not our sins, but the faith of your Church, and give to us the peace and unity of that heavenly City, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, now and forever.

Amen.

# An Early Evening Prayer

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love.

Amen.

# A Bedtime Confession and Prayer

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name.

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

