

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

December 25 - December 31

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER

CHRISTMAS

Year A-Christmas

In the liturgical calendar, the Christmas season is the middle space of time between Advent and Epiphany. In the monthly calendar, it is in the middle space of time between Christmas Eve (December 24) and the celebration of Jesus' baptism (January 11). While many put away presents and ornaments, the Church reads over the Scriptures that cover the middle space of time between Jesus' birth and baptism before he began his public ministry.

On the first Sunday of the Christmas season, our attention is drawn to a hero of the faith who was obedient with the little things of life. Matthew 2:13-23 reveals how Joseph was God's agent of protection over "the child." Three times God gave directions to Joseph through dreams; three times Joseph obeyed. In his obedience with "the child," we are reminded that the tiniest among us matter to God.

Interestingly, the name of Jesus is not given in our Gospel reading, but the one time that he is named in the New Testament reading it says, "Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters" (Heb 2:11). The "pioneer of their salvation" did not do his work from a distance, but submitted himself to the precariousness of human life, even becoming a refugee in Egypt because of the tyrannical rage of King Herod. Jesus became "like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17).

One of the biggest temptations is to outrun God, to get ahead of him and take charge instead of letting him lead at his pace. Herod's rage is an example of giving into that temptation. It led to the destruction of innocent children and the hollow grief of their loved ones. Sadly, we have all experienced the suffering that comes from rage; even so, it is likely that we ourselves have caused pain in others from our own attempts to keep control.



The truth of Hebrews is a powerful thing to keep in mind as we leave 2025. Perhaps you made a grave mistake or developed a pattern of sin. Hebrews 2:10-18 shows us that through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Jesus provided the defeat of the devil, atonement for our sins, freedom from fear, and strength in our temptations. "He is able to help those who are being tested" (Heb 2:18). Because "he is able," we are enabled to overcome.

The story of Joseph is a beautiful example to keep in mind as we enter 2026. He knew "the child" was not his own, yet he provided protection and care for baby Jesus in obedience to God. In a similar way, each of us have been entrusted with this brief life we have. It is not us but God "for whom and through whom all things exist" (Heb 2:10). We exist because of God. These days are not our own. While we may not receive dreams like Joseph did, we are each invited to be obedient with what has been revealed, to do what God has instructed.

FOR reflection

This middle space of time provides a natural break to slow down and join with the prophet Isaiah who said, "I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord" (Is 63:7). As you read and pray during this week, make a list and "recount" the ways you have seen God at work in 2025.



SCRIPTURE

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Thursday

Psalm 97; Isaiah 62:6-12; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20

Friday

Psalm 148; Wisdom 4:7-15; Acts 7:59-8:8

Saturday

Psalm 148; Proverbs 8:22-31; 1 John 5:1-12

Sunday

Psalm 148; Isaiah 63:7-9; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23

Monday

Psalm 20; Jeremiah 31:15-22; Luke 19:41-44

Tuesday

Psalm 20; Isaiah 26:1-9; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Wednesday

Psalm 20; 1 Kings 3:5-14; John 8:12-19

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

Behold, I bring you good tidings of a great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10, 11

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

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A Midday Prayer

Blessed Savior, at this hour you hung upon the cross, stretching out your loving arms. Grant that all the peoples of the earth may look to you and be saved; for your mercies' sake. *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

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name.

Amen.

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.

