

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Fill Our Darkness with Your Light

Ever-living God, source of all life and
all goodness,
you who dwell within all creation,
who draw us closer:
fill the darkness of lives with the light
of your presence.
As we await your coming,
inspire us in our waking and our sleeping,
and quiet our anxious minds

so that we will be ready for you,
God-with-us.
May we realize your promise fulfilled
in our hearts,
our homes, and our lives.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

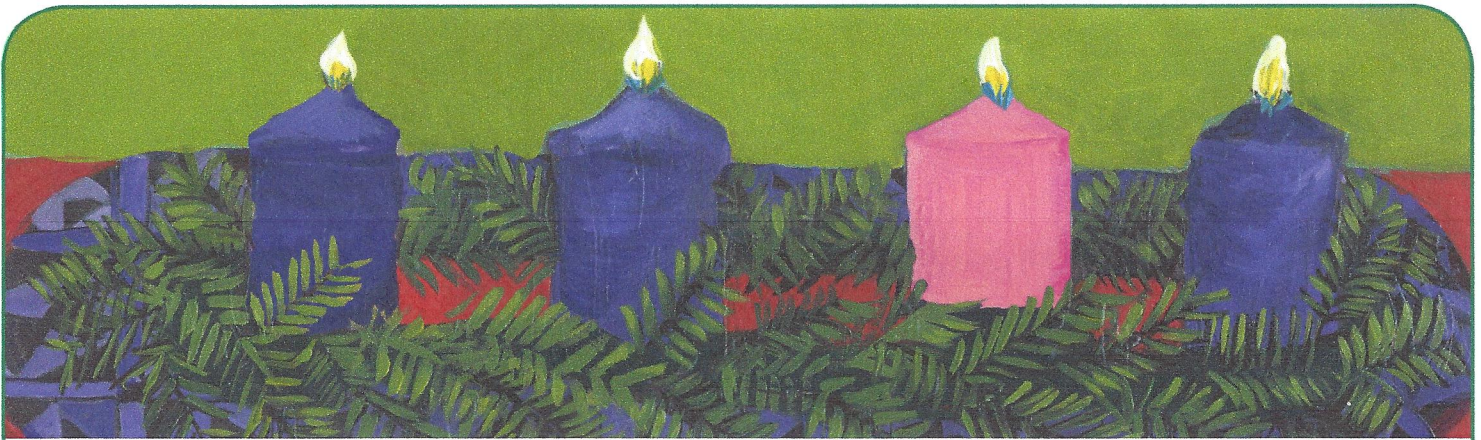
Sunday, December 18, 2016 His Name Will Be Emmanuel

Today's Readings: Isaiah 7:10–14; Psalm 24:1–2, 3–4, 5–6; Romans 1:1–7; Matthew 1:18–24. God speaks to Joseph during a dream. Joseph was unsure of how to respond to the news that Mary was with child. He was considering how to react, for he did not want to have her disgraced publicly. And so he slept on it. Imagine the anguish of falling asleep with that on your mind!

It is apparent that Joseph was faithful to God, in love with Mary, and quietly obedient. When an angel appears to him in a dream, he does not waver in his faith, for he is reminded of the ancient prophecies. When he is told to name the child Jesus, he carries that into his waking world as

Mary treasures prophecies in her heart. Together, they bring the messages of the prophets into the world with their son.

The challenge today is to discover the same kind of clarity of heart as did Joseph. His quiet understanding of God's plan came through a dream. As we near the end of the Advent season, can we say our hearts are ready? Have we stripped away the unnecessary distractions of our lives so that God can enter? Are we prepared to act according to God's plan? With Joseph, let us not judge too quickly, but turn our hearts and minds to God, so that we may have a quiet understanding of God coming to us. His name will be Emmanuel; that is, God with us.



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, December 19

Come to Save Us

The readings today are of unlikely pregnancies and the births of Samson and John the Baptist. Both men were signs of God's love and were born to older, seemingly barren women. Scripture continues to proclaim God's spirit in our lives in unlikely ways and through unlikely people. Are you ready to see God's love in unlikely people and places? *Today's Readings: Judges 13:2–7, 24–25a; Psalm 71:3–4a, 5–6ab, 16–17; Luke 1:5–25.*

Tuesday, December 20

Free the Prisoners of Darkness

In these shortest, darkest days of the year, we are invited to break through barriers of darkness that bind us and hold us back. The Lord tells Ahaz, in the First Reading, to look for a sign, and to look everywhere. As we approach Christmas in this final week of Advent, reach out beyond your normal boundaries to discover Christ, the Light, by helping those who are prisoners to work, to poverty, or to loneliness. *Today's Readings: Isaiah 7:10–14; Psalm 24:1–2, 3–4ab, 5–6; Luke 1:26–38.*

Wednesday, December 21

Las Posadas: Visits of Love

Today's Gospel is the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. Both women are pregnant, and yet both reach out to the other in joy and concern. In many Mexican communities, *Las Posadas* are celebrated each of the nine days before Christmas. During the joyful, musical processions in these observances, participants go from house to house looking for the home or inn where the Christ Child can be found. Consider your holiday visits as a joyful time rediscovering where Christ is found in each home. *Today's Readings: Song of Songs 2:8–14; Psalm 33:2–3, 11–12, 20–21; Luke 1:39–45.*

Thursday, December 22

Dedicating Children to God

Hannah and Mary were both granted children by God, and in turn focused their prayer on their children. In these final days of the Advent season, when toys and presents to be received often overtake our lives, be sure to cherish the gift that children are to each family. Today, invite each child to say a prayer with the lighting of the Advent candles. *Today's Readings: 1 Samuel 1:24–28; Psalm 1 Samuel 2:1, 4–5, 6–7, 8abcd; Luke 1:46–56.*

Friday, December 23

Joy in the Name

The surprise of the name “John” for the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah shows the significance of name choices. Our birth and baptismal names have connections for those who named us. Find time today to discuss the name of each family member as well as what it means to call someone a demeaning name. The integrity and joy that comes with a name may surface links to ancestors, closeness to culture, and appreciation for the meaning a name holds. O Come, Emmanuel, God with us. *Today's Readings: Malachi 3:1–4, 23–24; Psalm 25:4–5ab, 8–9, 10, 14; Luke 1:57–66.*

Saturday, December 24

Prophecies Fulfilled

On this eve of Christmas, the readings are a last reminder that the season of Advent has been leading us to the fulfillment of so many prophecies. The Messiah will proclaim and initiate a new Kingdom. Take time today to focus on the spiritual meaning of the season, even as other last-minute preparations are taking place. Find joy in pausing to take a breath, and pray with Zechariah, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel!” *Today's Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2–3, 4–5, 27, 29; Luke 1:67–79.*

